

Chapter 18

Friday, April 3, 1964 Sokroshera Island

Friday dawned with a light haze but clear skies above. It had been one week since the great quake and tidal wave. The three or four times an hour mini-quakes that had given all of them fits had gradually decreased, with only a few little bumps a day, and most of the hillside residents managed to ignore them. It was to be another busy morning for the Sokroshera Cove residents in exile on the hill. Mr. Lindseth, Mr. Hansen, and Mr. Bazaroff were going to be putting the finishing touches on the mess hall "school" today, including getting as many of the old picnic tables as possible in good enough condition to press into service as student desks.

Howie kept his jeep nearby, to help run Laura down the hill for the radio schedule, or to run up to the cliffside fort if that were necessary. Taking a cue from his good idea in the cave, Howie filled multiple buckets with coarse gravel from east beach, and all the able-bodied workers that were handy spent an hour or so shoring up the soggiest parts of the east beach low spot. They had tossed the now broken planks that they'd tried to use earlier. It was exhausting work, but the new gravel seemed to help; the boom truck now could pass through without immediate worry. Unfortunately, they'd have to keep doing that gravel thing often, and Howie stashed all the empty buckets by the side of the road to be ready when needed.

Danny and Gail, insisting they would be working the whole time, were going to spend the morning collecting whatever else might be useful from the debris field that used to be the village, and they'd be using Jake's boom truck for the purpose. When Danny had retrieved his stove, he also had stumbled upon their hand-operated oil pump hiding under a piece of what might have been the retort building, and he latched onto it as if it were the Holy Grail. Now it would be considerably easier to make use of the oil and gas that were in the fifty-five gallon drums they'd recovered. All the barrels they found across the meadow or lodged in the trees on the far side of the "Lake" Stephanie lagoon, or floating in it, were now safely stored in their little barrel farm near the road to east beach. Danny laid his precious oil pump on the ground between a couple of the barrels, out of sight, when he wasn't using it. Luckily, Howie always kept his bung wrench in his jeep, and so they all still had that. Without it, they probably would have had to comb the whole meadow looking for another one. Tiny little details, like how to get the oil out of the barrels and into whatever machine needed it, were now suddenly and exponentially more difficult. And to find any of the tools they'd taken for granted even a few days ago was treated as a minor miracle, and accompanied by genuine thanksgiving.

The team of Marty and Billy Jr. borrowed Danny's truck and scoured the flatland around the old village site, assisted by the "Holy Terrors," and soon had a sizeable stack of plywood scraps and pieces of lumber that could be made into crates to house the artwork they were recovering. Billy Jr. had run out of whatever nails Howie had in his toolbox, so he stepped carefully into his shattered home and found

a couple of coffee cans full of nails of various sizes, still mostly upright in what used to be his back porch.

He shook his head when he noticed that his house had come to rest next to a small wall of carefully mortared black slate stones hiding under some dry weeds near where his twins liked to make mud pies. Now he knew the importance of the little wall. Old Stepan Selivanov had probably used it as inspiration for his masterpiece in the cave. "Well, I'll be damned," said Marty, in awe, when Billy Jr. pointed that out to him. Billy Jr. just said, "You know, before, I never gave that garden wall a second thought." Now that Billy Jr. had enough nails for the crates, the men drove as close as they could get to the superintendent's house. They sent the "Holy Terrors" across the creek to collect Brother Toma, who had been studying some more of the old cannery documents by the window in Mr. Hansen's office. The "Holy Terrors" soon ran off to play; their lumber search at the village had been too much like work.

On their way back up the hill, Billy Jr. and Marty stopped by the field kitchen for their bag of grub. Betty had completely run out of freezer bread, and handed them four one-pound cans of Dinty Moore stew, a can opener, a handful of spoons, and a stack of thick white porcelain bowls recently retrieved from the cannery's mess hall. Then she handed them a few of the thick mugs to use for water, admonishing them to bring back all the dishes, "And we'll wash 'em for ya." Betty was cheerful and encouraging, and as chief caretaker of the village food supply, was now the resident who needed the most faith. They had all been provided for so far, and she believed they'd get more food from somewhere before anyone actually went hungry. The men thanked her sincerely, and after collecting Judson, Herman, and Marla, who piled into the back and perched precariously on the stack of assorted boards, they headed up the hill. Billy Jr. remembered to bring a five-gallon can of gas for the light plant, and Brother Toma had brought an old fan from the office, to help remove the smell of deteriorating old sealskin and burlap.

Billy Jr. parked the Ford pickup near the blast door entrance at the cliffside fort. He turned it around until it was facing slightly downhill, and stuck a rock under a tire to keep it from rolling. After getting the generator fueled and started, the crew stashed their bag of lunch goodies just inside the blast door of the cliffside bunker's lower hallway. Herman set the bowls and can opener on a small side table they'd moved from the radio room in the floor above. The lights had automatically come on as soon as the generator started up, so they all stepped into the bunker's mess hall and got back to work. Brother Toma carefully placed the fan on a table, facing away from their work area, and plugged it in. Things would go faster today, for Billy Jr. and Marla were measuring the items before Marty and Brother Toma even unwrapped them, and were building the crates outside, where they wouldn't have to cart the lumber so far, and the sound of their hammering and sawing wouldn't disturb anyone. Marla had collected some of the more unfortunate clothing items from the donated stash to use as padding for the Ikons, which would undoubtedly make dress-up time harder for the little kids, but they were running out of old blankets they could spare, and they had few options.

The next package didn't contain an Ikon, but a rather thick, old-looking book. The pages were brown and brittle, but the binding was firm, and Brother Toma was able to carefully open the volume and turn the pages without apparent damage. "This is a Gospel, or more precisely, a copy of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. I was expecting this to show up. You can't have an Orthodox worship service without the Gospel." Judson laughed, causing Brother Toma to look at him quizzically. "Well, *nobody* should have a church service without the Gospel! Don't you think?" Brother Toma caught his drift and laughed, too. But it was a serious question.

The first Ikon that was unwrapped on this morning was what Brother Toma told them was the "Christ the Redeemer" copy mentioned in the letter. Even the copy was very old, and the paint was peeled and faded in spots. A quick check of the packing material confirmed that it had arrived that way and hadn't suffered any apparent further deterioration in the cave. The face of Christ peered out from a deep ochre background, his eyes seeming to stare right through you. If most Ikons weren't particularly warm and pleasant to look at, they certainly conveyed the holiness and spiritual authority of their subjects. Judson remarked on this, and Brother Toma reminded him that Ikons were not like family portraits. They were ways to make mental and emotional contact with spiritual realities, and they were intended to bring the observer closer to the transcendent, distant holiness of God Himself. A mere painting was being used to make the infinite and omnipotent more comprehensible. "Well, they do a pretty good job of that!" Herman admitted. "I can't imagine *not* taking one of these Ikons *seriously*." Brother Toma had merely nodded.

Once the father-daughter Selivanoff team had placed the "Christ the Redeemer" Ikon in its crate and carefully stashed it with the rest under the tarp, Billy Jr. measured the next one. This Ikon was considerably larger than any of the others. Judson thought it was the one he'd been holding when he accidentally brought down the pile of sea otter pelts in the cave. Marla and her dad measured and headed outside to make a crate, while Marty and Brother Toma began the delicate work of removing the Ikon from its packing. When he finally had the Ikon unwrapped, it was Brother Toma who let out a low whistle this time.

The others crowded around, and Herman adjusted one of the searchlights. It was another *oklad* Ikon, the largest they had yet seen. It measured more than two feet wide and nearly three feet tall. Brother Toma stood staring at it for a long minute. "I think... I... this is, this is a *Hodigitria* as well as being an *oklad*," stammered Brother Toma, amazed at the Ikon's beauty. He pointed to the hammered silver body of Mary, her slender fingers pointing to the Christ Child on her lap. Her face, the part that they could see through the silver, was looking down at her Son with a tender and serene gaze. "The word *Hodigitria* means 'Pointer of the Way,' and you'll notice how..." But Brother Toma could not continue. He looked up with moist eyes, cleared his throat, and said after some moments, "It is the honor of a lifetime to be here and to have a part in the recovery of these lost treasures of the Church."

He lifted off the silver covering, with a bit of careful help from Marty, and below was a marvel of color and light. All the rays seemed to be emanating from the Child. Moreover, the eyes of the Mother and the angle of her hand both pointed perfectly to her Son. Even Judson, with exactly two days' experience with Ikons, could see that this one was a masterpiece of spiritual art. "We'll put this here until Billy Jr. and Marla build a crate..." Brother Toma was saying, and had just returned the silver covering and placed the Ikon on a nearby table when a deep rumbling beneath their feet, familiar now, but very strong, caused all their hearts to jump.

The shaking of the ground was almost immediate—the epicenter of this aftershock (preliminary magnitude of 7.0) was less than thirty miles away out in Chiniak Bay. The whole mountain felt to Judson like a school bus that has just dipped into a large series of potholes. To long-time residents, it seemed as if the island were suddenly being turned into a pile driver. In the old bunker's mess hall, the lights abruptly went out, and there were two metallic crashes, as though at least one of the light stands had fallen over. It was a far more abruptly violent quake than the big one of a week before, but thankfully, it was over in a few seconds. When the shaking stopped, there was a second rumble, an even louder roar, and a quick vibration in the floor. The hallway outside was suddenly filled with dust, although in the dark, no one could see that. At first, Judson couldn't see anything, but at least the motion had stopped. He was vaguely aware that the noise had also stopped, but it was hard to tell, because his heart was pounding rapidly and insistently in his ears. Finally, his eyes adjusted a bit to the feeble light filtering in from the open blast door down the hall and to the right. He couldn't even see the door to the outer hallway, which was partly closed. What he did see was a ray of light shining through the dust, and the glow of silver from the Ikon that had been placed on the table ahead of him. Strange.

Just then, the lights came back on, and moments later, in rushed Billy Jr. and Marla, waving their arms to clear the dust. Herman picked up the light stand that had fallen over, and sure enough, one of the floodlights had broken. The other crash had been their fan, now lying in a tangle on the floor. Herman also retrieved a flashlight that had lain, unneeded, on one of the tables, and had managed not to bounce off in the quake. Herman had been incapable of locating it while the lights were off, and everyone was having breathing trouble that could only partly be blamed on the dust in the air. Billy Jr. spoke first, his voice insistent though shaky. "You... guys... better come with us!"

Billy Jr. had his own big flashlight with him, and shone it down the inner hallway toward the foyer and the open door to the cistern. They could barely see a huge mound of rocks and pieces of concrete through the dust, and it was a good guess that the pump room and everything beyond it had collapsed when hit by the weight of the granite slab above. The cistern was now filled with rubble and huge sections of the former ceiling of granite. "Uh... Looks like nobody will get into that cave again," said Marty. "That must have been the second rumble we heard," remarked Brother Toma as calmly as he could, "When the... uh, roof to the cave collapsed."

"I ...think it's *bigger* than that," Billy Jr. said, his voice none too stable, and motioned for them to follow into the outer hallway. Dust was pouring from the opposite end, from the entrance to the tunnel that led to the ladder room. "Looks like this half of the mountain collapsed in on itself," said Herman, a bit shakily, and I'll bet the crack in the guardhouse up there finished what it started." "Oh, there's more!" said Marla, her voice now nearly as high pitched as Anya's could be. "Come look at the road."

They stepped outside, shielding their eyes from the brilliant noontime sky. Billy Jr. cut in, a little less shaky now. "While we get used to the light, lemme explain why my generator cut out. During the quake, the damn thing hopped about ten feet down the road. It kept upright somehow. I waited until I was sure the shaking stopped, and then Marla and I dragged it back over to the extension cord, and plugged it back in. Damndest thing you ever saw! It was still running the whole time, and it even acted like it was running... *away!*" That'll be funny someday, thought Judson, his heart rate still pretty much through the roof since the quake hit.

Marla disagreed about what was the damndest thing. "I dunno, Dad, I think this over here might be..." Marla's voice faded away. She pointed, and finally continued. "Uh, look at where the spring used to be!" Marla was standing rather tentatively a few feet from the edge of the road. Below her, a two-foot wide, ten-foot long section of the roadbed was now missing. Herman and Judson peered over and almost threw up. It was a straight shot of freshly broken rock all the way down to the surf of Cape Unuak, far below. The little meadow, where ages ago they had eaten lunch beside the spring, was *completely* gone. The waves below were now partly obscured by the dust of the collapsing cliff face and roadbed. "Do you... Is there... uh... *sorry!*" He coughed, collected himself, and finally spit it out. "Got enough room to get the truck out of here?" asked Judson finally, his voice a bit shaky, as though someone had just played "Saved your Life!" with him at the edge of the Grand Canyon.

Everyone else was having the same difficulties, and Brother Toma just put a hand on Judson's shoulder. It helped. Billy Jr. nodded at Judson's question, thoughtful for a moment, and quickly took stock of the situation. "We don't know if there will be more quakes, and what they might do. We should load the truck with everything, *right away*. We can park it down the road where there's a patch of bedrock, 'n hike outta here. That way... we can check out the road on the way down—hike around it if some of it's ...uh, *missing*. If we drove the truck, we might have a sad surprise." Marla scrunched up her face and said, "*Ecch!*" and Judson shuddered, but Brother Toma insisted, suddenly, "He's right. We mustn't lose any of these treasures. Let's pack up, *quickly!*" They walked briskly into the bunker, none of them wanting to spend any extra time in there.

Back in the bunker's dusty mess hall, Marla and Judson removed the tarp from the Ikon crates, and satisfied that nothing looked damaged, took the tarp outside to line the truck bed. The tarp looked big enough to wrap all the way over the treasure in case there was any rain. Judson glanced up as he was tossing out the last of the

lumber that had been stashed in the bed. Only a few clouds. Well, that's a blessing. He was distracted for a moment by the sound of a Grumman Goose taking off in the cove far below. "Hopefully they were in the air when the quake hit," said Judson. Marla just whispered, "That would 'a been lucky. Wish we'd...." Judson, who had just been deep in a hillside in a major quake, nodded. His heart rate, which had slowly subsided, spiked up again at the memory of what they'd just been through, and he stepped nervously back into the bunker, spikes of tension dancing again in his chest. He'd feel better if they got back to work.

Marla and her dad quickly made a crate for the *Hodigitria* Ikon while the others loaded the truck. In short order, the crates of Ikons, the box with the silver items, the six remaining unwrapped sealskin packages, and one more unopened wooden box, rested as carefully and securely as possible in the bed of Danny's Ford pickup. The copy of the Gospels was slipped back into its sealskin packaging and braced to keep it from slipping out. Then the tarp was draped over the top of the treasures, and held down on all four sides by some of the lumber they'd tossed aside earlier. The treasures would be reasonably protected while they scouted the mountain road, but they'd need to find a secure storage spot soon. Brother Toma and Marty made one more sweep of the inside rooms to be sure they hadn't forgotten anything. As Marty emerged, he had the bag of lunch with him, his voice suddenly in the singsong cadence of old Anicia. "Oooh! Betty gonna be *mad* 'cause we broke three of her good bowls!" That elicited the first weak laughter they'd been able to muster since the aftershock. "Four of the mugs hit the floor, too, but nothin' short of an A-bomb would crack *them!*"

Billy Jr. shut off the little generator, and left the gas can next to it on the roadbed. No way he'd put a loose can of gasoline in with all those precious Ikons! Judson noted that there'd been a sudden revival of common sense in both of these men once the alcohol and self-centeredness were removed from the decision-making process. Billy Jr. eased the truck down the hill to a spot past the little gully, where bedrock showed through the gravel and the road was at a slight uphill incline. He blocked the front tires with a couple of small boulders to keep the truck from moving. He had chosen a spot where the truck would be nowhere near the cliff if it somehow happened to roll. Then he left the key in the ignition so that anyone could move the truck should a quick move be necessary. Since the quake, every vehicle had been left keys-in for convenience, and the drivers used whichever vehicle was best for the task at hand.

The group began a nerve-wracking hike back down the hill, afraid of what they might find along the way. There were a couple of places where the road looped around close to the cliff face. Thankfully, the hikers found no damage there or anywhere else between the cliffside fort and their campsite. Herman reminded them that all the damage they'd seen in the aftershock had been visible before. "You know that little grassy spot where we had our lunch that day? It was probably a part of the cliff that had started to slip years ago. The quake this morning just helped it on its way." Jay-Jay shuddered. But he was thoroughly relieved that there were no gaping holes to hike around on the way down to the campsite.

Marty marched right into the field kitchen tent and reported the broken dishes to Betty Lindseth, handing her the bag with all the pieces. She just pounded him on the back, glanced in the bag, and said, "We had a few broken dishes here, too. So I take it you didn't eat lunch yet?" And within a few minutes, she had them all seated at the outdoor tables, eating steaming Dinty Moore canned beef stew. That, apparently, is what everyone at the campsite had also eaten. They drank cool water from the upper lake, and slowly calmed down. "Just glad you all made it back safe and sound," said Betty when told that the treasure was safe for the moment.

As they were finishing, Howie and his jeep and trailer roared into view. He had passengers; Judson squinted in the alternating sunlight and shadow as the jeep drove up the old road through the forest. Finally, the jeep ground to a halt near the outdoor fire pit. A short someone with dark red hair and a big white cast... Sandy Ann is back! Helping her out of the jeep was her uncle Jakob Pedersen. Then hopping out of the far side of the trailer was a thin and wiry older gentleman... Mr. Faltrip! How had *he* made it back into town? Judson shook his head in admiration. The man had some kind of connections with who knows how many people, built up over all these years, so not a surprise to see him here at all. Owen was helping the last passenger out of the trailer, a man in a dark, flowing robe. Another Priest? Judson shot a quick glance at Brother Toma, who had a slight frown on his face, and seemed tense for the first time since they'd met. This man in the black robe is nobody that Brother Toma knows.

There were a multitude of hugs, and even Mr. Faltrip accepted a few. Judson went shyly over to Sandy Ann, and delicately gave her a sideways hug from her non-cast side. She seemed none the worse for wear, and acted as though she wanted to talk about something. "So spill it," said Judson. "In a minute," she hissed. In a softer voice, she said, "Somewhere *else*." The mysterious man in the black robe was speaking with Brother Toma, who was listening politely. Marty and Billy Jr. were giving Mr. Faltrip a quick synopsis of their progress in discovering the hidden room, unwrapping the packages from the cave, and what happened to them in the aftershock.

Sandy Ann just said, "So sorry I missed that!" She was vigorously shaking her head as she said it. Marla snorted and said, "You really lucked out, girl! It was *awful!*" When Jakob heard about the cave collapse, he also shook his head, and almost with the same expression as his namesake little Jake might have had, said, "*Whooftie!* Got everything out just in time."

"Where is it now? Where did you put what you found?" asked Owen. Marty gave a quick description of the section of bedrock and how the treasure was safe under a tarp in the back of Danny's truck. Was Judson wrong in thinking he saw the stranger turn his head slightly at this? Owen just nodded. It was good to see Billy Jr. and Marty talking to Mr. Faltrip like a person and not an adversary; things were different somehow, and there was obviously a lot of story that Owen needed to hear!

Betty Lindseth stepped out of the field kitchen with two cups of tea, which she presented to the two black-robed men. She turned and saw that Sandy Ann was standing close to Judson, nodded with satisfaction, gave her a quick kiss on the forehead, and then went back in to get tea for Jakob and Owen. At a lull in the conversation, the stranger turned and addressed the rest of them. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Dr. Delacueva, and I am the Ecumenical Liaison for Religious Objects of Byzantine Antiquity. I have been sent here to assist any church that has been damaged in your terrible recent tidal wave. My specialty is religious art, and I feel that God has sent me, at this moment, to help the churches to replace those precious, sacred things that they may have lost in this horrible tragedy." To Judson, it seemed that the stranger spoke with the mellifluous tones of one used to addressing gathering of highly educated people. Or like a professor narrating a television program.

The man turned toward a picnic table, pulled out a card and a pen, and began writing something down. Then he handed the card to Brother Toma, who nodded and placed it in a pocket somewhere in his black robe without reading it. Judson was having a hard time getting a fix on the man's accent. But somehow, he also felt that he was listening to a well-rehearsed script. Maybe it's because he doesn't usually speak English, Judson thought. And yet... something about those names puzzled him. Whom does he work for again? He resolved to borrow that card from Brother Toma as soon as he could casually do so.

"There's no church here, never has been," said Billy Jr., addressing Dr. Delacueva. This time, he was merely stating a fact, rather than bragging as he once had done. "We are planning on correcting that as soon as we all get places to live," he added, and Owen turned rather abruptly toward Billy Jr. with a slight frown of puzzlement. Billy Jr. noticed this, and continued with an amused look on his face, "But believe me, Doctor, we don't need any more sacred things right now." There was a low chuckle from the group.

Owen Faltrip suddenly turned toward the impressive-sounding Dr. Delacueva. "It appears there's nothing you can help us with at this point. You're welcome to stay with us until the next plane arrives, Dr. Delacueva, but as you can see, we have little in the way of facilities, and our ability to see to your comfort will therefore be very limited. I'm sorry that you came all this way." Dr. Delacueva smiled broadly, placed his teacup delicately on the picnic table, and spread his hands. "I also am sorry that I was ill-informed, and I wish you good people all the best. I have left my card with Brother Toma," here he bowed slightly in his direction, "and will enjoy this lovely day and the beautiful scenery of your island until, as you say, I can catch another plane. Thank you for your kind hospitality in such trying circumstances." With that, he retrieved his teacup and raised it as an informal toast.

Windy Bazaroff and his nephew Ward joined the circle at this instant, interrupting whatever else the black-robed guest was about to say. Windy announced, "A landing barge just entered the cove, and is getting ready to unload some of our supplies or something. Can't tell yet what it's got. Maybe they will need some help. We should all go take a look!" There was a general murmur of excitement at this

news, and several people fanned out towards the sleeping quarters to bring the others. Mr. Faltrip just smiled. Herman, Sandy Ann, and Judson all traipsed along behind the others, after Sandy Ann assured them there was nothing wrong with her legs and feet. Judson stayed close by, nonetheless. The "Holy Terrors" and Rinny soon joined them. Anya and Carla stayed behind with the youngest ones, deciding that this would be a perfect time to repeat Anya's bathing games. And Alice and her four-girl team had some clothes to pull off the line and fold. The way Alice ran things, this would be more fun for the girls than looking at some old barge.

Judson looked over his shoulder as they rounded the bend away from the fire pit, and noticed that Dr. Delacueva was walking slowly up the road in the opposite direction, a small camera in his hand. He stopped occasionally to snap a photo of the stunning views of the Marmot Bay that occasionally peeked through the spruce forest. Judson turned and caught up with Brother Toma. "Could I borrow that card?" Brother Toma didn't seem surprised, and fished in his robe and retrieved it without reading it. Judson was about to examine it further when Sandy Ann scooted even closer to him and they began wondering what would happen to their village, and speculating about which buildings could be repaired and which could not. "I'm afraid our pretty little house is just firewood now," said Sandy Ann, sadly. In the excitement, neither of them remembered the urgent message that she had planned to deliver. The card went in Judson's pocket as Herman and Rinny joined them, and the excited speculations continued.

As they passed the road above the big bunker, little Jake suddenly started jumping up and down. "I don't wanna go see a lot of old broken houses and get put to work *no more!* Let's go to 'skip rock beach' and have a contest, like you promised me! Remember, Jay-Jay? You *promised!*" He looked at Judson, expectantly. "He has a point," said Judson. "I could use a break after being in that damn collapsing mountain, and that beach's on the other side of the island from anything that looks like *work*, too!" Judson was surprised at the relief he felt at the idea of just playing around for a while, like a kid. Eagle blurted, "But I'm not going *anywhere* without a snack. Let's see if Sandy Ann's mom has something for us." His voice was just a bit whiny now: "We should *probably* tell the moms where we're going, too." Herman observed, "We can take the trail that goes past the rec hall, and I can show Jay-Jay the cool stuff on the cliff before we go down to the beach."

This seemed, to all of them, like a wonderful break from the serious, adult things they'd all been doing. Back at the kitchen tent, Mrs. Lindseth saw their excitement, and remarked somewhat sadly, "When have you kids had a chance to be kids recently? Get on with you, and have a great time!" This was only after Sandy Ann promised her the moon and stars that she wouldn't do anything to hurt herself. "I got her," Judson said, taking her by the good arm. "And I got you," whispered Rinny into Herman's ear, taking his arm. He looked uncomfortable. "Looks like you'll have to break his arm first," said Sandy Ann, dryly. Betty emerged from the little pantry in the old Army mess hall with a tall "know nothing" can. "Thanks to our experiments earlier, I promise this is 'Boston brown bread.' In fact, it's our last can. I'll open it for you, and lend you a kitchen knife, which you will *bring back*. Cut slices for your snack when you get hungry at the beach." She recycled the shopping

bag that had held the broken dishes from the bunker, putting the opened can and the kitchen knife inside. "Here, Rinny, this will keep you busy." Betty handed the bag to Rinny, who let go of Herman's arm. Herman shot a look of infinite gratitude at Betty, who just winked at him.

The kids started off past the ruined rec hall and abruptly came to the end of the jeep trail, but a cow path kept going through the dense, mossy forest. Occasionally, the way was partially blocked by devil's club, a spindly, long-stalked plant with stickers on all sides. Another local flora to avoid, thought Judson, negotiating his way easily around the tall, prickly plants. This was a real cow trail through the damp forest, and not a former road, so it was single file for the kids as they walked. Everyone except the "Holy Terrors" seemed to be able to observe this. It was also steep, and a bit slippery in spots. Judson had to hold tightly to Sandy Ann's arm with both hands as she walked ahead of him, and she started to slip on several occasions. "It's harder to balance when you can only move one arm," she noted, and Judson added, "And when that arm is in Jay-Jay's death grip!" But at least twice, Sandy Ann helped Judson regain his footing on the slippery trail.

The path was a series of steep dips and rises, and it was obvious why the Army had been forced to put their road around the lower lake and along the beach to reach the cliffs. After the second steep hill, there was a brief level spot beneath an impressive stand of old growth spruce trees. The "Holy Terrors" suddenly fell behind them. Herman looked back and saw them wrapped up in a frenzied "*sheeshkie war*," an active game as vigorous as any paintball contest, involving wet, fresh spruce cones, which when thrown with enough spin, could fly far and sting considerably. Sandy Ann asked the older kids to stay out of the war, since she was in no position to throw anything. The exasperation in her voice convinced them to comply. So Herman got the "Holy Terrors" to pause their world war long enough to tell them the rest of them would be continuing on down the trail. Jake made the older kids promise not to start skipping rocks until they arrived at the beach. Fine. They walked on.

They negotiated a couple more steep inclines before the kids suddenly broke out of the trees into the bright sunshine. They had reached a small grassy area, high above Unuak Channel, with a clear view of half the island. They were on the jeep trail that ascended from the beach below, which was still out of sight behind some young spruce trees growing on the cliff. Directly in front of them, near the cliff face, was a circular column of concrete about eight feet high and fifteen feet across. They clambered up into it, and Herman introduced it as an anti-aircraft gun site. "Don't think they ever got so far as to put a gun up here, but you can see that you can protect a whole lot of sky from right here. There's another one on the far side of the island, above Teplov Point. It's hidden in alder brush now." He hopped down and turned to their right.

A square concrete object about three feet high, with open spaces front and rear, rose out of a grassy ledge in front of them. "Air vent," said Herman. "Follow me." They climbed down a short incline and stood facing two open spaces flanked by concrete retaining walls. The spaces looked like, and were only a bit wider and

taller than, a couple of two-car garages, side by side. "These spaces held big searchlights and heavy machine guns. If they saw something in the water, night or day, they could open fire and be fairly protected." Herman just loves this stuff, thought Judson. But he was learning to love it, too. The garage-like spaces were each flanked by huge double steel doors of the type in the entrance to the big ammo bunker. Herman continued, waving his arm in the direction of his descriptions. "There are more of these on the cliffs, one near the south gun circles and another down the cliff a ways from the north gun circles. Oh, and there's one of these at Sentry Point, the north side of the cove entrance. That's how the point got its name. That searchlight bunker used to have a fake cabin built over it because it was so close to the village. I bet the fake cabin got wiped away by the waves." Judson nodded, and then he shuddered. How he wished that was all they had lost in the waves!

As they climbed back up to the jeep trail and began their descent to the beach, the four became involved in an animated conversation of the "where were you when it hit?" variety. They were all naturally attempting to process the events that had shaken their world. They all seemed to need the time to talk to each other, far from the pressures of mere survival back at their campsite. However, in the back of Judson's mind, he kept thinking, what was the deal with that man and the name of his organization? Why was Brother Toma acting so strangely? They came out from behind a row of spruce trees where the road curved inland away from the cliff a bit and angled more steeply downward. Now they had a full view of the beach end of the lake where they had once held their ice-skating party. Like the other lakes on the island, the great quake had littered its shoreline with huge sections of lake ice, still nearly a foot thick, which had broken like the shards of a gigantic shattered window. As they descended the steep road, it curved around yet again, bringing the entire "skip rock beach" into view.

Suddenly Herman held up his hand. Then his finger went to his lips. In a low whisper he asked, "Isn't that Danny's truck?" It was. What was it doing here? Who drove it down? They all scooted over to the relative shelter of the small spruces that grew along the cliff edge. As they snuck down closer to the beach, the kids noticed that the tailgate was down and someone had pulled the tarp back, revealing the crates and the remaining unopened sealskin packages. The kids carefully edged along the steep road and down as close as they dared, then ducked behind the last small spruce tree on the edge of the cliff, whose limbs reached almost to the ground. Each of them maneuvered a bit so that they could get a clear view of the beach and still duck back if they needed to. Rinny jostled the snack bag, and the knife made a slight clink against the open can inside. Herman turned toward her and whispered, patiently but firmly, "Put the knife in your back pocket so we won't make noise!" Rinny nodded, wide-eyed, and slipped the knife into her pocket. They were now only about thirty feet away from the men on the beach, and struggling to stay quiet and out of view.

There on the beach was a man dressed as though he were a tourist about to go bear hunting. A large, sturdy skiff was pulled up behind him on the round, flat rocks of the beach. He was in an animated conversation with... Dr. Delacueva. Sandy Ann

was suddenly poking Judson violently in the ribs and hissing in his ear. "This is what I wanted to tell you about. I accidentally told him about the 'Russian things' we found. When I was in Kodiak. And now he's here. I saw that other guy too." Herman just looked at Judson and whispered, "Jay-Jay, can you understand what he's saying?" Judson suddenly realized that the man's name was probably Spanish. He also guessed that the man was from Spain or maybe somewhere in South America, rather than Mexico like most of the Spanish speakers he knew in Arizona, which is why the accent was so different. "I'll try," Judson said quietly, and strained to hear.

Only snatches of conversation could be audible through the light surf and slight onshore breeze, but that actually helped Judson hear better for a few moments at a time. He cupped his ear, concentrating hard, and translated in his head, trying to make sense of it all. However, he could already tell that something seriously wrong was going on here. So much for not finding more work today. But what could *they* do? The men spoke as though they were sure they were alone. With the landing barge keeping most of the adults busy in the Cove, the two men had what they thought was perfect cover for whatever they were up to.

The two men were saying things like, "*no saben nada* (they don't know anything)... *nadie entendió la broma sobre mi nombre* (nobody understood the joke about my name)... *¡qué fácil!* (so easy!)... *Tenemos todos los iconos* (now we have all the Ikons) ... *Creo que ellos son más valiosos de lo que pensamos* (I believe they are worth a lot more than we thought)." The fake bear hunter waved his arm around and for a heart-stopping moment, actually looked up at them, but saw nothing. Rinny gasped, but not loud enough to be heard all the way down on the beach. Herman glanced at her with concern, but kept quiet. The fake bear hunter was saying, *¿Estamos seguros que estamos solos?* (Are you really sure that we're alone?)

As if in answer to the question, Billy Jr.'s voice softly called out from the jeep trail behind them. He nodded toward the beach. "What the hell's going on down there? Who's got that truck?" Judson, seeing both Billy Jr. and Marty carrying rifles, pointed down at the beach, and hissed, "Get them, Mr. Selivanoff. They are about to steal the Ikons!" The men brought their rifles from their casual position over their shoulders to their waists, gripping them tightly with both hands. In spite of being a bit out of breath from the strenuous hike (Billy Jr.'s foot must be killing him, thought Judson) they quickly led the kids down to the beach.

The fake bear hunter made a move toward the skiff, but Marty waved him away with the tip of his rifle. The 'bear hunter' then made a move to unzip his jacket, and Marty growled and waved that away, too. "Dr. Delacueva" noticed what had happened with his companion, and suddenly took on a saintly pose, launching into a sincere-sounding speech in English about how important this task was, and how honored he was to assist the elders of the village in preserving their priceless treasures. Would they all like to help him load the boat? You could almost hear the angels sing, the way the man launched into his spiel.

The whole scene suddenly made Judson feel very angry. He and the other kids had now positioned themselves between the truck and the two strangers, but well out of the line of sight of the two rifles. After listening to another mellifluous sentence or two, he'd finally had enough. He leaned back against Danny's truck, as if for moral support, and waved his hand at the fake "Dr. Delacueva" to get him to stop talking. In his limited Spanish, he said, as carefully as he could, "*¡Callate, ladrón maldito! ¡Entiendo todo! Qué bueno que mis amigos en mi hogar de antes se hablan tú idioma.*" ("Shut up, you damn thief. I understand everything." —at this point Judson's Spanish somewhat fell apart— "That good that my friends in my hearth of earlier speak to themselves thy language.") Limited though his Spanish was, he deliberately used the personal verb forms. Judson knew that to a non-family adult from a child, that comes out as an insult. He was *not* in a polite mood!

In spite of the scramble of his last sentence, the men looked up in obvious surprise and complete comprehension, with that 'caught in the cookie jar' look that told them their game was up. Judson, surprised at the fire of his anger, just took a deep breath, then turned to look first at Billy Jr. and then at Marty. "What's everybody saying? *Jay-Jay?*" said Marty, impatiently, never taking his eyes off the 'bear hunter.' "Well," Judson began, "This pretend Priest here has been playing us for fools. It took me awhile, but I finally figured out his little joke. Didn't get it all— wasn't *sure*—until I saw the truck here." Judson pounded on the open tailgate as if for emphasis.

Judson felt some of the same fury he had felt when Billy Jr. had insulted Laura, but this time he managed to control it and stay focused. He took a deep breath and pulled out the card he'd borrowed from Brother Toma, looking it over carefully. The side facing him had formal-looking preprinted letters: "The Talon Group," followed by a complicated-looking street address, Madrid, España. So he is from Spain, or claims to be, thought Judson. Then he flipped the card over to the handwritten side. He looked at the words for a second, his head nodding as he read them to himself. Then he addressed the men in English, after a quick glance to see that Marty and Billy Jr.'s guns were still on them. "You are the...(he paused a bit trying to read the important-sounding words, and stumbled over most of them, especially *liaison* and *Byzantine*) "...uh, the Ec...Ecumenical ...Lie, Lay...uh Liaison for Religious Objects of ...Buh ...um... Byzantine ...Antiquity. These initials spell out E-L-R-O-B-A. That's *él ...roba*—and that means 'he robs, he steals' in Spanish. How *cute* of you. And your name... *Delacueva*? That's... uh... Spanish for 'From the Cave,' isn't it. Very clever. Wonder what your *real* name is? How did you know so much about what was going on here—what we were doing? Sandy Ann told you nothing at all really, just something about 'Russian things' in a cave. Oh, and if you're here on *Church* business, then *I'm* the Queen of France! You're not here much more than an hour, and already trying to rob us!" Judson's voice had slowly risen in volume and pitch, and even the rocks on the beach could have been able to tell that he was furious.

Judson took a deep breath, genuinely angry, but inwardly surprised at his sudden cheekiness. He stood up even straighter, and practically shouted at them, "Better tell us what's going on, or our good friends here're going to leave your bodies on the rocks for the eagles to eat." Judson almost laughed at himself, amused at his

sudden channeling of Zane Grey in that last sentence. *Jes come along now real easy like, 'n leave yer hands whur I'kn seeyum!* came the voice of Zane Grey in his head. He shook it off. This was real.

The former "Dr. Delacueva" said nothing, but Judson thought he saw his shoulders sag a little. Billy Jr. instructed them to come up the beach and away from both the truck and the skiff, but waved the rifle at them when they tried to angle closer to each other. Then Billy Jr. called out, "Boys! ... Eagle, Jake, can you come out now?" Judson looked around, and noticed that a ways up the jeep trail, the "Holy Terrors" were peeking out from behind another small spruce tree. The "Holy Terrors" trotted up, but stayed well behind Marty and Billy Jr. "Can you guys handle a skiff? Please take this one around the point and tie it to the float down in the Cove. If you get there before we do, tell Mr. Faltrip or somebody what's going on, and to get their asses up here *right away*. It seems we have a couple of robbers here!"

For once, the two boys were quiet. Both nodded, a bit wide-eyed as they took in the sight of two robbers held at rifle-point. They quickly launched the boat with a hefty lift and a push, hopped in, and with a minimum of effort, roared away down the island toward the cove entrance. The fake bear hunter uttered an involuntary sigh of disappointment at the departure of the skiff, and then glanced nervously up at Marty and his rifle. Billy Jr. smiled, noticing Eagle handling the "kicker." Judson noticed little Jake in front, occasionally calling back to Eagle, who was standing, but still far too short to see clearly over the bow. They were a natural team. Billy Jr. turned toward Herman briefly, still keeping the rifle barrel aimed in the general direction of the two men.



The boys raced toward the cove

"Now: Herman, can you drive Danny's truck?" asked Billy Jr., and quickly turned back toward the two robbers. "I can drive this one ok I guess, but not Jake's," said Herman. "Danny taught me last summer." "Ok, then, try to remember what's in the back, and take the truck slow and easy back up to the fire pit. Try to park someplace that's level, and don't forget to put rocks under the tires when you park it." As Herman headed toward the truck, the fake "Dr. Delacueva" let out an exasperated grunt, and then stated flatly, "You will find that we left the ignition key on the seat, young man," averting his eyes in feigned disinterest. Herman made sure the tailgate was securely closed, then jumped up into the cab of Danny's bright red 1958 Ford F-100 and began backing it around to leave. But not before

Rinny had piled into the passenger seat. Awww...thought Judson, in spite of himself. Herman ground the gears a bit in first, but was soon on his way. Did Rinny just slide over next to him?

"Now, Jay-Jay, Sandy Ann, we need you both to walk along behind us and report back anything these guys say. We get to take them nice and slow to a place I've already got picked out *just* for them! Judson, empty their pockets, and stay out of the way as you do it." Billy Jr. could do Zane Grey pretty well himself, Judson thought. Within moments, Judson had emptied the men's pockets. The men didn't seem to have any wallets or other identification, beyond a couple of copies of the preprinted business card Judson had in his pocket. Billy Jr. was probably relieved that one of them hadn't pocketed the truck keys. But the rest of their personal effects were very interesting.

Lacking any easy way of carrying what Judson had removed, Billy Jr. and Marty told Judson just to leave everything piled on a nearby flat rock for the time being, and send someone back later. In addition to the small camera Judson had seen earlier, there was a handgun in the man's left pocket, invisible under the impressive black robe. There was also a folded piece of paper, written in Russian, that Judson guessed could be another copy of the one Brother Toma had, the monastery's letter listing the missing Ikons. Marty asked the "bear hunter" to slowly remove his hunting jacket and toss it to the side. Judson examined it, moving farther away from the line of fire. The "bear hunter" also had a firearm, a smaller, concealable pistol in an inside pocket of his jacket, plus what turned out to be a handwritten map of Sokroshera Island, with an arrow pointing toward the location of this beach. Some maps since the cannery days showed the military roads; theirs did, and it clearly showed the road access to this beach.

The robbers had been counting on privacy, and normally would have gotten it. How fortunate that little Jake had suggested that they come to this beach! Judson made a mental note to give him a rain check on the rock-skipping contest. The bag with the can of 'Boston Brown Bread' was beside Sandy Ann; Judson grabbed it and put it next to the flat rock, noting that Rinny had slipped the knife out of her back pocket and into the bag before she took off with Herman. Smart of her, and way better for ol' Danny's upholstery that way! He was startled when he saw that the truck had been parked almost on top of a large circle of soot-darkened rocks—the site of their skating party bonfire. Got a new memory for this place now!

Billy Jr. informed the rest of them that they were going to walk toward the big bunker at the base of the hill, which was the closest one, and not being used by the villagers either. Marty now made a request. "Jay-Jay, can you go down on the beach and look for any scraps of rope you can find? I don't want these guys playing patty-cake anytime soon." Not a bad Zane Grey imitator either, thought Judson as he jogged along the tide line, the most likely spot to find rope, which generally floats. About fifty feet away from where the skiff had been pulled up, he found a small white marker buoy attached to fifteen feet or so of polypropylene line. He dragged it over to Marty in a jiffy.

Marty laid down his rifle, well out of reach of anyone else, pulled out his famous filleting knife, and cut the buoy off the line. Then he measured about half of the line, and cut it there. Then he measured one of the halves and cut that into two roughly equal pieces. This took about as long as it took for Judson to walk back behind Billy Jr. to where the truck had been, and stand beside Sandy Ann. Marty took two of the three sections he'd cut and walked over to the men, instructing them to put their hands behind their backs. Soon they had nice snug knots around their wrists, with the remaining line tied to each knot and then acting as a tight belt around their waists. Never bet on whether a fisherman knows his knots! "Sandy Ann, your job is to watch their wrists all the way in, and make sure they aren't trying to wriggle out of anything," said Marty, and she nodded. With her right arm in a cast, she had felt mostly useless up to this point.

They were ready to march. Marty took the lead, two or three paces ahead of Judson, who kept about that far ahead of the miscreants. Sandy Ann hovered close behind the two, watching their wrists like a hawk. And Billy Jr. brought up the rear, a couple of paces behind, first to the left of Sandy Ann, and then to the right. For some reason, *da - da - baduptup - da - baduptup - da - teeda - dum* (the march from the part in "Peter and the Wolf" where they parade the captured wolf into town) popped into his head. Why in the world would his brain think of music from a story record he'd gotten from his grandma when he was little? He pushed those thoughts aside, almost annoyed at his strange mental processes.

After a few minutes, Judson realized that even though they seemed to have the situation well in hand, they still had to hike almost the entire width of the island, which at this point was just shy of two miles. He needn't have worried. Before they were even abreast of the upper lake, the Lindseth jeep roared into view. Out jumped Howie, Brother Toma, Danny, and Mr. Faltrip. They left Jakob, Jeffrey, Gail and Windy at the beach to finish unloading the landing barge. "What's this cockamamie story my Jake just told me? And who's letting those two little bozos loose with a skiff anyway?" Howie couldn't help smiling with pride as he said this.

Before anyone could answer, up ran the two boys in question, out of breath. "That's... that's them!" said Eagle, gasping for air and pointing to the two men. "The robber guys," added Jake, even before Eagle had finished. "Got that figured out, young William, young Jakob," said Mr. Faltrip, not unkindly. He continued. "Figured you might be needing these," he said, pulling a pair of handcuffs out of his back pocket. As if to answer the question nobody had the chance to voice, he said, "You don't think with all those years of running the cannery I never had an opportunity to make a citizens' arrest after somebody's celebration got outta hand, now do ya? Snagged these from a drawer in my home office when Howie told me what was going on."

Soon, the *ladrones* (thieves) had their ropes removed, then they were handcuffed together (accompanied by Owen's sincere-sounding protestations that he wasn't *quite* sure where the key was). Then they were placed unceremoniously in the bed of Howie's old Ford trailer, and Marty tied their feet together (just for fun, he had said). Meanwhile, Judson told Mr. Lindseth about the pile of what had been in their

pockets they'd left near the beach, so he unhooked the trailer, and didn't bother to ease the tongue to the ground, eliciting a low groan from at least one of the guests lying in the trailer. Then taking Judson along, he and the jeep zipped down the road to retrieve the evidence. A few minutes later they were back, the contents cradled safely in Judson's lap, the bag on the floor beside him. Judson handed the evidence to Mr. Faltrip, and left the bag in the jeep.

Billy Jr. explained his plan to leave the men in the big bunker, and everyone concurred. Looking down into the trailer, Mr. Faltrip added, "Gentlemen, when I flew into the Kodiak airport on one of the first flights since the disaster, I found downtown Kodiak to be under martial law. They're under orders to *shoot* looters. Those National Guard boys and the Marines from the Base are not gonna take kindly to the fact that you two were trying to steal from the Church, and right under our noses, too." He handed the folded letter to Brother Toma, who confirmed Judson's suspicions that it was a copy of the monastery's 1842 query as to the whereabouts of the Ikons they had sent. "For dealers and stealers like these two, that letter just served as a catalogue. They expected to get hundreds of thousands of dollars from those pieces," said Brother Toma.

"You knew?" cut in Sandy Ann. Brother Toma nodded and continued, "Well, I wasn't sure that this fellow was him, because I was told in the last letter from my Bishop that there were two men hot on my trail. They had managed to get information from the archives of the monastery back in Russia, traced the letters to the collection at the Joy of All Who Sorrow Cathedral, and were heading toward Kodiak when the quake struck. I wasn't sure this man was one of them, because the letter mentioned *two* men. But thirty seconds' conversation with him up by the tables was enough to tell me that he had no real love for Christ or His Church. Besides, he pretty well confirmed that a second later when somebody mentioned what was in Danny's truck, but I didn't think about that at the time. Jay-Jay, I think you noticed too how he perked up at the mention of the treasure. I'm sorry I didn't just follow him, but I got caught up in the excitement of helping to unload the landing barge. Now, I wasn't *sure* he was up to no good; I thought if he wandered around awhile until we could find him a plane, then no harm done. And I guess I didn't catch the fact that the Monk's treasure was right out on the road, in plain view in the back of the truck." Brother Toma sighed, and his voice betrayed great irritation. "Otherwise, I never would have let him out of my sight!" Was Brother Toma on the verge of his own Zane Grey moment?

Judson cut in, "Aw Brother Toma, don't be hard on yourself. We didn't have a clue until we saw the truck at the beach, and we almost didn't go down there in the first place. We were headed to the barge, same as you. We all *almost* let them get away. But we got 'em now." Brother Toma gave Judson an embarrassed smile, but nodded. Judson turned toward Mr. Faltrip. "Oh, I should give you guys this, too," he said, suddenly remembering the business card, which he retrieved from his pocket. He flipped it over to the handwritten part. Then Judson explained the ELROBA and "Delacueva" deceptions, and the group let out what sounded like a collective growl. "I got a little mad at them when I *finally* figured it out," Judson admitted. "They thought they were pretty slick, and they almost pulled it off." At this, Judson

grunted in disgust, and shook his head. He still felt a bit of the rage he'd experienced earlier. Nobody likes to be played for fools, and this ruse had come within minutes of working. At this, Mr. Faltrip just stared at Judson for a few seconds, with a look that could have indicated amazement, amusement, or both.

While Howie and Marty reconnected the trailer to the jeep, Billy Jr. explained how they had figured out there was trouble. "We really *were* going out to bag a cow for dinner," both he and Marty laughed, "and we were up in the woods, when Marty suggested we look in on the truck, just for the hell of it, so we cut across to the road. When we rounded the corner and saw the pickup was missing, we checked in at the camp to see if anyone saw it or heard it go by. Anya and Carla saw it headed down the hill, and didn't think anything of it, thinking maybe one of us was taking the treasure stuff to town when the landing barge left. Well, we knew *that* wasn't the plan! We knew those two wouldn't take the truck down to where everybody was working, and there was only one other place to look. That lake road is the only other one that goes to a beach. Betty told us to follow you on the cow trail, hoping to catch up with the kids. *Whooftie*, it was a hard hike, especially with my sore foot. Well, on the way, we interrupted a *sheeshkie* war, and the boys told us the rest of the kids were already at the beach. Marty 'n I were plenty worried about them walking right into trouble,"—at this, Marty interjected a hearty, "Damn right we were!"—"...or maybe getting tricked into letting these bastards leave. You heard how that guy talks! So we snuck down as fast as we could, and the boys held back to go get help if we needed it. And when we showed up, well Jay-Jay here, he translated *all* the stuff they were up to. He'd already almost figured it out before he *even* saw the truck." Billy Jr. shook his head in amazement. He emphasizes odd words in his sentences just like Sandy Ann does, thought Judson, over the top of his embarrassment at all the sudden attention. Mr. Selivanoff looked at Judson and without changing his expression, deadpanned, "Where'd Mr. Hansen *get* this guy anyway?" Sandy Ann was beaming at this, and Mr. Faltrip just said, "Who the hell knows? Just glad you're here, you nosy little brat!" Sandy Ann stifled a giggle.

Little Jake, standing next to his dad, suddenly interrupted them. "There are two big square things in the skiff..." He had no chance to finish, because Eagle, jumping up and down, said, "...and there's a rifle down low where we didn't see it at first." Then almost simultaneously, they looked at each other and said, "We helped catch the bad guys!" This was accompanied by more jumping up and down. There were a few more chuckles at the "Holy Terrors" and their trademark alternating speaking style. However, Mr. Faltrip was not amused. "Ahh. Well. This goes worse for the culprits here. They had already begun to steal the treasure, and were prepared to kill if they had to. And who knows how they got this skiff? That's gonna make them plenty unpopular with the judge in town." A short groan emerged from the trailer.

Mr. Faltrip walked over to the pitiful lumps of humanity still tied up in the trailer, and said, "You might 'a noticed, boys, that just about everybody here knows enough *on their own* to put you away for a long time. I'm suggesting a few hours of contemplation for you in our biggest brig,"—the rest of them had to chuckle—"and then Billy Jr. here, Mr. Hansen, and myself are going to help you with your autobiography. I'm going down to the cannery office now, or what's left of it in my

apartment, and call to get the Troopers out here for a little joyride. I'll also come back with plenty of secretarial materials. Jay-Jay, I want you along when we question them, in case they decide to go all Spanish on us. Pretend it's my birthday, gentlemen, and I want a nice, long, well-written present by the end of the day. *¿Entiendes, mensos?*"

Now Jay-Jay laughed out loud. "Fat Lip just called 'em dummies," he translated, through spasms of laughter, glad to release all his pent-up tension. "Be glad to help, sir," said Judson, collecting himself and saluting Mr. Faltrip. "And sir, when did *you* turn into Zane Grey?" Faltrip chuckled, "Who do you suppose donated all those books to the school library?" said Mr. Faltrip, and Judson suddenly remembered the library he'd seen in the old bunkhouse before it floated away, and the one on the walls of Mr. Faltrip's home office. "Guess we'll have to start a new collection," muttered Owen to himself, but Judson heard him and nodded appreciatively. Brother Toma said something softly in Mr. Faltrip's ear, and Owen just spread his hands in protest and said, "Whaaat?" as though he'd just been warned by a teacher to stop throwing sand at recess. Nevertheless, he looked at Brother Toma and nodded. "Don't worry *too* much about it," said Owen sweetly.

"Awright, as fun as this might be, let's get this over with!" Marty was suddenly all business. The jeep roared away with Billy Jr. riding in the front seat, Owen and Marty in what passed for the jeep's back seat, where Marty, rifle in hand, was aiming strategically at whatever head in the trailer was closest, and Howie at the wheel. "I'll be back to take you down the hill," said Howie to Brother Toma as he left, but he indicated he was going up to the campsite instead, and Howie nodded. After the jeep roared away, Brother Toma, Sandy Ann and Judson walked quietly down the old jeep trail toward the main road into the fort.

It was nice to walk in the cool of the woods, and Judson was surprised to realize he'd been sweating. In spite of the sudden enjoyment of silence, Judson had to ask. "So what was Dr. uh... what was that guy planning on doing, anyway?" Brother Toma paused a moment and said, "About the same time you were catching him, Laura Rezoff and I were attempting to get information about him. He just didn't seem right. I gave the card to you in case you could discover something. The guys at the airlines didn't know any more than that he was a Dr. Delacueva, here on what he called 'Church business.' We were trying to find out more when Mr. Faltrip burst in, grabbed his handcuffs, and asked me to follow him. He had Laura call the troopers right then. What I know is what I learned in that letter I got from the Cathedral. I'm fairly certain that the man we caught is... well, his real name is Juan Halcón de Cervantes, or at least that's how the authorities know him. He's known as 'The Falcon,' partly because that's what his name, *Halcón*, means in Spanish, but mostly because he swoops down and snatches irreplaceable treasures from unsuspecting little churches and monasteries and orphanages in out of the way places. He also claims to be descended from the famous Cervantes who wrote *Don Quixote*, but that claim, like everything else about him, is highly doubtful."

Brother Toma sighed, as if he preferred not to dwell on all the negative details. In a few moments he continued, "This man comes in with a smooth song and dance

about a sizeable donation to this church or that orphanage, all for this faded old painting, and gets away with priceless artifacts. However, his donations either never materialize or are much smaller than the already small amount he dangled in front of them. The tearful letters from Abbots and Priests across Eastern Europe and Russia would break your heart. In spite of so many blatant robberies, he's never been caught before. He apparently has powerful clients who pull strings. And he must be in the habit of paying off a lot of customs officials at a lot of border crossings to be able to get in and out of the East like he does." Brother Toma sighed, his irritation gradually replaced by his usual confident tone. "Well, there are no strings for him to pull in the Kodiak area, what with the disaster and martial law, so here's hoping he gets some justice now. He put on a very special show for all of us; thank God, you kids were at the right place and at the right time. Again." The kids were silent for a moment. "It's a *small* island," said Sandy Ann finally, by way of explanation, and got a hearty laugh out of the previously somber Brother Toma.

Sandy Ann had a question of her own, and after a minute or two of silence, wrinkling her nose in trademark Sandy Ann fashion, she was ready to express it. "But how could someone steal pictures of Mary and Jesus and all that Bible stuff? Wouldn't that... *automatically* seem wrong to somebody?" Brother Toma frowned, "To most people, yes. But to men like 'The Falcon' it's only paint and metal and wood and canvas... and a paycheck. We look at the Ikon we found yesterday—oh, my goodness, it was only *this morning!*—the one with Blessed Mary pointing and looking tenderly at Christ, and *our* attention is drawn to Christ. Someone like 'The Falcon,' when he sees an Ikon like that, no matter what it's trying to tell him, well, he starts thinking of which collector is likely to give him the best price."

At this, Brother Toma groaned, more in sadness than disgust, and then quoted, "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world but lose his own soul?" He turned and looked at each of them in turn. "I want justice. But even more, I want people like 'The Falcon' to learn to see what we see, and hear what we hear. Like Billy Jr. and Marty are doing now." There were tears in Brother Toma's eyes. Sandy Ann nodded vigorously, and her nose wrinkle was gone.

There was no more chance for reflection, for by now they were in sight of the junction with the main road up the hill. Standing in the sunshine, in the roadway, stood Herman and Rinny, holding hands. The couple trotted over to meet them, hands suddenly to themselves. "Things 'r *heat-in' up* on old Soak-row-SHARE-uh Island," said Judson, slowly, to maximize the tease. Herman had a parry at the ready, "Aw, get over yourself. As if you two don't hold hands every time there's a little aftershock." Here he did a spot-on imitation of Sandy Ann's voice: "Oh, my heart hurts. Can I give it to *you?*" said Herman, but couldn't hide his own blush. Neither could Sandy Ann; both teases had struck their respective targets.

"It's nice to have wonderful friends—*really* nice," interrupted Judson, giving voice to that thought for the first time, and ending the battle. Brother Toma nodded with approval at how the exchange had ended. "I actually like the way you all get along. You couldn't have uncovered any of these mysteries if you all hated each other." Herman jumped at the change of topic, "I suppose you're right," admitted Herman,

and added, "Do you know that Mom and Betty and Alice and Anya and all of them are up there oohing and aahing at all the things we found?" He turned toward Rinny. "See, I *told* you what we found was somethin' special!" She smiled sweetly and cooed softly near Herman's ear, "Yes, it is!" And Herman's sudden sunburn returned.

Brother Toma ignored all of this, except to glance briefly at Rinny. Then he nodded and said, "Yes, Herman, you did help find something special, and I'm going to speak to Mr. Faltrip when I get a chance about quickly getting some temporary quarters for the treasure until a suitable church can be built. Unfortunately, even in the Church there are people like 'The Falcon.' I would greatly prefer if these things never left the island. If they ever leave, there's a good chance you'd never get them back." Rinny had calmed down, and nodded in assent with the rest of them.

Later that afternoon, with the prisoners safely stashed away, they heard a shot. Herman turned to Judson and explained, "Beef!" Sure enough, Marty and Billy Jr. had bagged their promised beef by suppertime. Marty was exuberant. "It just *wandered* across our path when we started out again, so we dropped it and got Howie to help us haul it out. I feel so good about being able to shoot *something* today!" There was a round of giggles at that! "It's hanging out there beyond the old mess hall, whatever we didn't carve up already!" His skills with a fillet knife were once again in evidence, and Betty and Gail soon had a huge platter of freshly fried steaks. "It's winter beef," warned Billy Jr., "and the poor beast's been eating cobwebs and snowdrifts for months, so who knows what we're in for," he noted, and laughed a bit as he stabbed a steak onto his plate.

Actually, the cattle had been surviving on cardboard boxes from people's back yards, kelp, and even spruce boughs when the dried grass was covered with snow. When Judson took a bite of his, he could definitely tell that this wasn't Arizona range beef. And it was tougher than a belt to chew. The ladies had found a spice rack somewhere, and a stash of rice hiding in a corner of the Hansens' old pantry, and it all made for a pretty good meal nonetheless. But his molars protested as though he'd eaten a bowl of rubber tires afterwards.

Around the tables, the topic soon turned to the Adventure at Skip Rock Beach. The story of the robbers who tried to steal the once-stolen treasure was already outlandish enough, so the participants' retelling around the tables didn't need much embellishment. Still, some exaggeration crept in; it was the nature of village narration to choose the most colorful way of saying something. Dreading the constant attention, Judson deflected it. He told about how Jake had happened to suggest going to "Skip Rock Beach," how Jake and Eagle had run the skiff, how Billy Jr. and Marty had arrived just in the nick of time, how Herman had carefully driven the truck up to the campsite, and generally tried to spread the credit as best he could. But Mr. Hansen beamed proudly at Judson when Billy Jr. recounted again how Judson had suspected the fake Priest, then translated what the robbers were saying, and then helped him and Marty bag the criminals. It came out bigger than it actually was, and Judson finally had to ask them to stop.

"Well, I still have the same question I had before, or maybe it was you, Billy," said Mr. Faltrip. "Jeffrey, where the hell did you get this boy?" Laura, sitting next to Marla at the next table, was smiling ear to ear, and nodding in agreement. Judson ducked his head, genuinely uncomfortable now. "C'mon now, Jay-Jay," Marty said, "when you told us what those... uh... buggers were saying, and when you found the pistols in their pockets, no, you saved the day, young man." Judson waved his hands as if trying to flag down a train. "Oh, come on," protested Judson in genuine frustration. "The only reason I emptied their pockets is because you both were busy training guns on 'em." Here he switched, on purpose this time, to Zane Grey mode. Slowly, and in as extreme a fake Arizona drawl as he could muster, he pulled his shoulders back and said, "*Rekon itz hard not t' get uh mite c'wopertive when yer starin' down the raffle barruls uh the two best cat-ull russlers in awl uhv Sock a Sheriff Island!*" At this Sandy Ann and Herman, and Laura and Marla sitting at the next table listening in, and most folks on the island generally, had a great deal of difficulty remaining seated on their picnic benches. Or so I heard tell.

After dinner, it was time to give the prisoners in the world's largest jail cell their writing assignment. A bit earlier, before everyone sat down to eat, Betty made her husband and the Truck Brothers take a suitable meal down to the men. The prisoners got steak, cut up nicely by Marty's expert fillet knife (*they're next*, he'd said) and a cup of rice, all served on paper plates with plastic spoons, washed down by lake water in the last of Betty's picnic stash of Dixie cups. They knew better than to give the men anything they could possibly use as a weapon. The men in the bunker ate hungrily and didn't complain, but Betty wondered if they knew that the rest of the people on the island were eating the exact same thing. Two more mouths to feed, plus the fact that the whole village population was now on the island for the first time since the disaster, would dwindle their supplies that much faster.

Laura had gotten ahold of the State Troopers, and they indicated that "somebody" would be over to take the robbers into custody sometime tomorrow, probably in the morning. The citizens of Sokroshera Cove had no way of knowing at the time that their little robbery in progress escapade was by far the most exciting and serious law-enforcement problem to materialize in this disaster. National Guard or no, everyone seemed to be behaving themselves, or even being extra helpful, except for this robbery and a couple of lovesick Kodiak teenagers who broke curfew and needed an armed escort to find their way home, much to the chagrin of their parents.

So into the Sokroshera Cove Municipal Holding Cell, which had once rang so magnificently to little Jake's firecracker, came Mr. Faltrip, Mr. Hansen, Billy Selivanoff Jr., still holding his rifle, and Judson. The lower ammo bunker was a huge arched room in the hillside, big enough to fit the entire superintendent's house or the old cannery mess hall with room to spare. The men already inside, waiting on a bench, seemed tiny, like altar boys in a cathedral. Mr. Faltrip carried with him an impressive brown leather valise, which he opened with a flourish. "Thanks to Mr. Lindseth and Windy and Ward for scrounging these spare benches from the fort's old mess hall. We'll need 'em for students in our school come

Monday, right Mr. Hansen?" This was news to Judson. But Mr. Faltrip was just making small talk as he laid out papers, three legal pads, and several pens, collected in a quick dig through a drawer in his kitchen. Judson thought the legal pads were a nice touch. Mr. Faltrip was somehow enjoying this.

At dinner, it had been determined, accurately enough, as it turned out, that the other man with 'The Falcon' was likely his personal bodyguard. Mr. Faltrip addressed both 'The Falcon' and the bodyguard, his voice reverberating impressively in the huge room. "Now what I want to do, is to have you tell me, out loud and in English if you can, the story I want to hear for my birthday—" Fat Lip was still on that kick "—nice and slow, so my friend Mr. Hansen here can write it down. Then we'll all sign it as witnesses to the fact that you said it and we heard it. *Then* you get to write it all down, in whatever language you've been using to call for your mommy since we caught you, and we'll give both copies to the *federales* when they arrive for you tomorrow. Good?"

There was no response. But when Mr. Faltrip explained that the men had eaten the exact same dinner as everyone else, and that even Jay-Jay had been sleeping in a bunker since the tidal wave, they seemed to relax. "We're confining you to quarters for obvious reasons, *señores*, but you haven't been mistreated. Yet." Owen was a force of nature, and should have been a prosecutor. Or one of those interrogators in the spy movies. No, Owen was from New Jersey. Judson remembered something Mr. Hansen had said on the boat, the day they found the Monk's bones. A mob knuckle-breaker, that was it. No wonder he'd been such a good boxer!

After a minimum of effort, mostly for Mr. Hansen to ask for repeats, since both men's accents were considerable, and it was hard, hard, hard to hear over the natural echo of the bunker, he declared he had it all down as they had said it. Just once, in the middle of confessing something, 'The Falcon' had launched automatically into one of his windy speeches about the sacred duty to preserve the past and the beauty of sacred art that was tragically on the verge of being lost to humanity, or some such rot. Mr. Faltrip had just pounded his fist into his palm, rather slowly, and asked if their guest would please try that again, because all of a sudden, there had been far too much noise to hear it clearly, and of course, he was sure that *both* men wanted to do a good job for his birthday.

Billy Jr. had suddenly added, looking this time only at the bodyguard, "You know, down on the beach, I was having a hard time with my gun." Here, he balanced his rifle in one hand as though about to lose hold of it. "I nearly shot you once, when you moved for the skiff, and that's too bad, because I'm such a bad shot—it probably would have taken me two bullets to finish you off, and how could I claim it was just an accident *then*? We're doing the best we can here, but... things could happen." That last phrase came out almost like a tune. Judson had no doubt that at least part of what Billy Jr. said almost happened, did indeed *almost* happen. And remembering the bullets through the window at his party of a couple of weeks ago, it probably *would* have happened then, and without a second thought. Owen, likely thinking similar thoughts, gave a wry smile at the new, improved, but still very feisty Mr. Selivanoff. 'The Falcon'—the alleged Mr. Cervantes—seemed to be paying

attention; the man's second try at an autobiography was considerably clearer for some reason! It was all the Hansen men could do to keep from laughing outright at all of this, but thanks to the fact that they had their backs to the door, the only light source, they were in shade, and that helped keep them apparently innocent.

Mr. Faltrip would also have been a good high school dean of discipline. He had the perps sit on opposite ends of their long bench, facing away from each other, and gave each a legal pad and a pen. Owen miraculously still had the key after all. When he unlocked the handcuffs, he said, "Now if I unlock you guys, that just means you'll give me a better present for my birthday, right boys?" He didn't expect any response, and didn't get an answer. The men dutifully turned and straddled the bench, back to back, separated by at least three feet of bench, and started writing. If they communicated, it would have to have been by telepathy. However, none of the villagers present discounted what the two may have discussed before their interrogators arrived.

Suddenly, Judson realized that there was enormous pressure on him to read their letters correctly. His Spanish was mostly whatever he'd picked up from friends, and from the general introductory classes he'd taken in school. He considered his Spanish barely conversational. Even though that still put him ahead of anyone else on the island, he knew it would be a struggle. Finally, the men were finished. Judson took the letter from 'The Falcon' and quickly looked it over. The writing was beautiful, cultured, even ornate. When had this guy gone off the rails? After a sentence or two, Judson stopped, and spoke to the others in the room. "He says here that he is guilty of taking an image without permission. First of all, we caught him in the act of stealing, but the way he worded it, it could mean that he just took a photo of something without asking first. I say let him start over." Judson took the paper and shredded it into little pieces. Both Mr. Faltrip and his father were trying to look shocked, but Billy Jr. just smiled. Judson laid into the alleged Mr. Cervantes. "To begin sir, the word for rob is *robar*, not *sacar*. Please don't get cute with us. And *imagen* is not the right word for an Ikon. Now, either of you, what is the word, the Spanish word, for *Ikon*?" Judson was channeling a substantial former career of being on the receiving end of various principals' harangues. The men sat stone faced. There was no reply. The men were giving no attention whatsoever to a mere boy; perhaps they saw this as their only chance, since he was also the only translator.

Billy Jr. quickly recognized their body language as disrespect. At their silence, Mr. Selivanoff stood up, lifted, and cocked the rifle he had been holding in his lap. "Things are going to go VERY LOUD for one of you in here, and the other one will have a very, very long, cold silence. Give Jay-Jay the damn word!" Two voices at once said "*icono*"—but it was echoing pretty badly in there. Judson swore he could still hear Billy Jr.'s last shout. So Judson pointed at 'The Falcon' and said, "*iRepítalo ahorita!*—repeat it right now!" The man spoke again, slowly, spelling it in Spanish, in the manner of an elementary school student with a teacher, which sounded like "ee - say - oh - ennay - oh, *icono*". Judson recognized, and not just from his ton of voice, that the man was belittling him, attempting to pay him back for his spelling out "ELROBA" earlier.

Judson was through screwing around; this was serious business. Yet when Judson spoke next, his voice was gentler, almost quiet. He waited until all the echoes had died out, took a deep breath, and said, "Listen sir, I have no wish to be impolite. But don't you think it will go *easier* for you with the guys that have been told to shoot looters on sight—and I don't mean Mr. Selivanoff here, but the Marines in town—won't it go easier if you *confess*? Let's let it end here, *please!*" The sound of such a young voice and such a clear, sensible course of action were too much at last. 'The Falcon' started all over, and the bodyguard put a big 'X' through the first thing he'd written and began a corrected version at the bottom. He wrote for even longer than his boss did.

Judson finally got to read the finished products. But before he handed the young man his confession, 'The Falcon' took his right thumb and pressed it into the upper right hand corner of his letter, as though being fingerprinted at a booking. Then he glared at Judson and said, "*¡Todos vosotros sois la gente más insana en el mundo!*" Judson translated, with a laugh, "He says all us precious folks—we are the craziest people in the world." Mr. Faltrip broke into a slow smile. "Thank you, thank you very much, *señor,*" said Owen sincerely.

Judson was satisfied that the man had written enough, plus the dictation his father had written down earlier, plus all the other testimony available against him, that the State Troopers or Marines or whoever would certainly have enough to hold him and charge him. But he thought of one more thing. He went over to his dad, motioned him outside, and spoke softly. "We need to be sure that they *don't* get back their personal effects! All of their stuff, including what's in that camera, could help incriminate them." "Do I have to graduate you right now? *Personal effects; incriminate*—for goodness sakes, Jud!" Jeffrey Hansen, father and teacher, was beaming. "Still, you're right, Jud. I'll have Owen take them. I think he may have a safe in his apartment." They returned to the bunker, and Mr. Hansen started whistling the "Perry Mason" TV theme. Only Judson, and surprisingly, the bodyguard, laughed. Still laughing, the bodyguard said, "You going to be *un abogado, joven.*" "Says I'm gonna be a lawyer," muttered Judson. Mr. Faltrip laughed heartily and said, "Not on your life. Jay-Jay is aiming for *presidente!*"

Before they left, Judson checked the bodyguard's letter. Sure enough, the crossed-off part said he was only an *empleado* – employee, with a series of excuses about not being in on the decision-making, not knowing what they were planning, etc. The second, corrected part said that he knew it was wrong to do what they were planning, that he had gotten the map, stolen the skiff, and even had a cargo outfit standing by in Homer awaiting his word to send a plane. Then he wrote something that gave Judson a strange feeling, as though he'd heard it before somewhere, but of course, that was impossible. The bodyguard quoted his boss as saying, "If you can't steal from a king, at least steal from the Church." Then the man personally wrote that he was sorry, that he could guess how much those Ikons meant to the people here and that if the roles had been reversed, he would certainly have pulled the trigger. Judson mentally vowed to bring that part up if he was ever asked to testify at their trial.

Judson was suddenly tired and hungry; he wondered where the can of "Boston Brown Bread" had ended up. He was about to leave when Danny and Jakob arrived in the boom truck. Soon they hauled in two cots and two sleeping bags. "These are our own beds, so don't feel tortured, boys," said Danny. "The only torture is gonna be whoever gets my bag, 'cause my feet stink!" A giggle revealed Gail outside, doubled up with laughter. "I'm in for it now, aren't I," she said, and doubled up again. Jakob's voice cut the silence. "Apparently the authorities are arriving tomorrow morning, according to Laura. So this will be your only night in our penitentiary. We're gonna take turns outside standing guard. Oh, and yes, *everybody* in Alaska owns a *hundred* guns, so don't try anything. If you cause any trouble, I brought a sledgehammer, and I'll just pound on one of these doors a few times to get your attention. He grabbed the hammer from Gail, who had retrieved it from the truck. He hit one of the old metal blast doors just once, and it was nearly as painful as when his namesake Jake had thrown the firecracker in that same bunker back in August. "Oh, almost forgot," said Owen, and locked the handcuffs, opposite side this time. "The family that has to pee together ain't gonna flee together!" The only person laughing at that one was Owen himself.

In point of fact, Jakob's boast about the "hundred guns" was a huge exaggeration. If it weren't for the two confiscated hunting rifles that Owen had stored in his apartment, the village at present would have had zero guns. Each of the families had once had their own supply of guns and ammo, but now all of the other guns were missing or damaged, scattered along with the homes they came from across the meadow and the broad expanse of Marmot Bay. So each of the guards that night took turns cradling Billy Jr.'s rifle. Meanwhile, Marty's rifle was on a shelf in the fort's mess hall pantry, within easy adult reach. By now, the adults felt a heightened sense of tension, sensing that almost anything could happen next. The three discoverers had been in that mental state since they first met Brother Toma. But no one felt disappointed when instead they all had a calm night.

Saturday, April 4: At the "Jailhouse Bunker" in old Fort Sheplen

Howie, WD-40, and a hammer had done a good job of getting the ancient latches to shut when they first put the robbers in the bunker, and Jakob added a six-foot length of chain he had in the back of his boom truck, wrapped around the two massive door levers. Danny had brought some fire makings from a box beside his stove in the fort's old mess hall, and soon had a fine blaze going outside the bunker's doors. At about midnight, he and Gail went off to their beds, and Windy Bazaroff joined Jakob. A couple of hours later, Jakob went up to bed, and Howie came down. And so it went, all through the night. The only excitement was around two or three in the morning, when a timid knock from the inside revealed two men who desperately needed to use the facilities, which of course turned out to be the nearest tree. Once that was taken care of, all was quiet and peaceful until about nine in the morning.

Billy Jr. and Marty were standing guard when two of the Military Police from the Navy Base hiked up the road to meet them. The MPs found the two villagers, rifles

on their laps, chatting calmly with two men who sat handcuffed together on a bench in front of the open doors of an old military bunker. The rest of the principal witnesses, including the kids, soon joined them around the now-dead campfire. The man who seemed to be the superior officer was tall and pale, with an accent that might be from southern Missouri or maybe Oklahoma. The other, shorter man was a bit more soft-spoken, but all business.

The men announced that they had jurisdiction of this case because of the martial law that had been declared in Kodiak. All law enforcement branches were cooperating at this point, the Troopers had lost their launch in the Tidal Wave, so the Navy found one that was seaworthy. Their MPs arranged to come out and handle this interesting situation. Once most of the villagers had collected by the bunker, the storytelling began in earnest. The entertaining and flamboyant village narrative style, designed so well to fill long winter nights, was not very effective here. It took a bit of explaining and repetition, but finally the MPs were able to grasp how important the treasure was to the village, and how awful it would have been to lose it.

In typical authoritarian fashion, the MPs wanted at first to subpoena the entire treasure as evidence. Judson stood up and said, "I'm sure, sirs, that won't be necessary. You *will* need to examine their personal effects. I think you'll find that 'The Falcon'..." (he pointed to the man still wearing a long black robe) "...took plenty of photos of the objects he was about to steal. Am I right, sir?" With this, he looked at 'The Falcon,' who shrugged in resignation. "And you'll find a map of the island, a list of some of the rare Ikons from the cave, and two pistols. They weren't here to pick berries!" Then Judson added, "We also got signed statements from both of them, plus a transcript of an interview, which my father—he's the schoolteacher here—wrote down, in which they accept guilt. Sirs, at least one of these people is wanted in several countries for stealing old Church stuff. Oh, one more thing. Almost forgot. The kids that removed their skiff from the beach said these men had already placed two packages in the skiff, and I believe you'll find their rifle there, too. The skiff's tied up at our temporary float in the cove. It was probably stolen in town."

At all of this, the MPs just stared at Judson as though he were some species of Martian. Noting their disbelief, Brother Toma stepped forward and said, "Sirs, Judson is right. These men have traveled the world pilfering sacred treasures from churches and orphanages and monasteries. It is good that we have their confessions; it may go better for their souls, if not their sentences. They nearly got away with stealing these people's most precious legacy, a trove of religious objects that date back to a legendary Monk from the 1830s. Naturally, all of it should stay here with the village." He said that last sentence as reasonably as he could, knowing that the authorities could well decide to confiscate the entire find.

Mr. Faltrip cleared his throat and stared each MP down. He'd met these types before, and they didn't faze him. Give 'em the facts often and slow enough and they'll get the general idea. "I would be happy to conduct you to the safe in my home office to retrieve their effects and confessions, and I would be happy to

accompany you to Kodiak, if you would like. I helped to procure their confessions..." 'The Falcon' snorted at this, but nobody noticed, because Billy Jr. and Mr. Hansen suddenly had coughing fits. Owen ignored them and continued. "...and I was present when they were taken into custody." If the MPs were listening, they gave little indication. Instead, both of them looked at Judson.

The shorter of the MPs turned and addressed Judson. "So you *personally* were also present when the confessions were procured?" Judson just nodded. He suddenly felt as though he'd said enough. "Did you conduct the interviews, too, young man? You seem to know *so much!*" the MP wasn't taking this seriously. "No, sir, I only helped to translate. They speak Spanish, sir." "So why do *you* speak Spanish?" "I used to be from Arizona," said Judson. His father nodded. It was the right way to express it. The MP with the Midwestern accent spoke up, satisfied that all was in order, and suddenly all business. "Alright. Thank you, young man. We will take these two men into custody, and I want you..." here he pointed to Mr. Faltrip "...to retrieve their personal effects and alleged confessions they wrote, deliver them to our person, and accompany us to Kodiak. Please get your gear." So they *had* been listening.

Then the MP turned and looked at Brother Toma. "I also want you to accompany us. If I am to understand correctly, you have the most complete knowledge of the provenance of the alleged treasure, and of the motivations of these apprehended persons. Please collect your gear as well." He turned toward Judson and said, "And we will examine that skiff before we leave. If we have received accurate information, we may decide to confiscate it and its contents..." at Brother Toma's look of alarm, shared by Judson and even Billy Jr., he added, "ah... *for* the time being; that should provide enough material evidence." They agreed to meet at the superintendent's house in fifteen minutes. Judson was sure that Brother Toma would move heaven and earth to get those two Ikon packages back safely to the island as soon as the wheels of justice allowed.

The MP in charge approached Mr. Hansen. "Sir, I understand you're the schoolteacher? What is your appraisal of how these gentlemen were treated since taken into custody?" Mr. Hansen was about to speak when the bodyguard stood up, naturally dragging 'The Falcon' along with him. The MP went over, looked at the model number of the handcuff, procured a key, unlocked them, and then used the cuffs on 'The Falcon.' He motioned to the shorter MP to cuff the bodyguard. Undeterred, the bodyguard remained standing and spoke, in occasionally scrambled English. "These people, they give us their same food, and their own beds." 'The Falcon,' who had again sat down on the bench, gave a begrudging nod at this. "They sleep in these place now, too." He pointed back to the bunker, with the army cots and bags inside. "*Por razón de la onda...* for cause of... of the... wave. When we were take the *iconos* I had the rifle" (he pronounced it *ree-fly*) "in the little boat." At this point, the bodyguard's emotion overtook his grammar. "I was try to shoot them but they stop me. They could to shoot me but they no do. I think they pretty good *gente* that *solamente protegen su tierra... y su tesoro... ayudame, joven.*"

He ended, frustrated, and looked at Judson. So Judson came over and said, "He says we're good people that were only protecting our territory – uh, land, and our... treasure." The Midwestern MP, who had been poised to interrogate Mr. Hansen, now simply nodded in the direction of the bodyguard. The shorter MP, the one that had given Judson some grief earlier, now quietly took him aside and said softly, "You did good, *mijo*. I understand these guys. I'm from El Monte, L.A.—Originally T.J., but don't tell nobody. Glad you could help with the *idioma*. We got it from here." He slapped Judson's hand in the *Chicano* handshake style, which Judson finished appropriately with a quick fist bump, causing the MP to chuckle. For a brief moment, Judson was back in the Arizona heat with his *brazero* friends. Sandy Ann and Herman looked on, puzzled at this window into Judson's old world. Moments later, the MPs herded the two handcuffed men down the old army road and were out of sight around the bend, walking toward east beach and the ruined village beyond.

His father slid over beside him, relieved beyond measure that he had not been required to describe the interrogation. He let out a long sigh, put his hand on Judson's shoulder, and then said, "Thank you, Jud. I was ...uh ...*reluctant* to explain our questioning methods, to say the least. You *do* know that our little interrogation session was right on the edge?" "Right on the edge of hilarious you mean," said Judson. His voice took on a tone of whiny protestation: "Nobody hit nobody, no chairs got knocked over, nothin'! No blood nowhere, boss!" said Judson, spreading his hands in innocence, imitating some hoodlum in a TV show. He smiled at his dad and attempted to absolve him, adding, "I think it was worse because of the echo in there that made everybody seem bigger than we were. In the bunkers, even little Jake acts like a president."

His dad nodded, but wasn't done. "So Jud, why do you seem to have most of the best lines and best parts in this movie?" "I'm just *absorbed* in this place, Dad. I dunno... it just gets to me. And if back there..." he meant Arizona, and his dad nodded "...if back *then* I would have thought something, I could never have *actually* said it or done it. Here, I think, and I do, in one—well, it's like a dance move that you've mastered. I'm just ...usually ...*better* somehow out here." His dad smiled slightly, and merely replied, "I know what you mean, Jud, I really do. And a lot of folks here are genuinely glad for all of that!"

Judson was still serious when he said, "I don't want to lose these people. There is *family* here." Jeffrey glanced at Sandy Ann, Herman, and the others still hovering near the bunker, but said nothing. Then he nodded. Suddenly the surreal, implausible, uncomfortable grand adventure of their situation overcame them. They looked around at the bunker with its folding cots, the campfire, and the grass-covered road, and spontaneously began rattling off a list of all the things that made this place special: the quakes, the destruction, the "know nothing" cans for dinner, the last time they took a bath, what they all had to do just to get through the day, how the interrogation of the robbers in the bunker had gone down... on and on. What a place, all right. Suddenly they both started laughing. They tried to stop. They found it surprisingly difficult.