

Chapter 2

Friday, August 16, 1963: Sokroshera Cove

Judson awoke from a sound sleep, feeling as though he had overslept, and was shocked that his bedside clock registered only 6:00 a.m. He was still obviously on Arizona time, where it was mid-morning. It took a few seconds for his groggy mind to register where he was, in the teacher's apartment of the schoolhouse in a small village in Alaska. The light switch didn't work; he suddenly remembered that the power wouldn't come on for another hour. He padded out to the kitchen, where his father sat looking out the window. The classrooms blocked most of the cannery from view, but Judson could clearly see the southeastern edge of the village and most of Mount Sokroshera from the seat he chose to the right of his father.

Judson was happy to find that the oil stove was not at the mercy of the city power, and was fiercely radiating heat into the small kitchen. He stood for a moment beside the stove until his bones and brain had warmed up. The elder Hansen spoke first, between sips of hot tea. "So, Jud, what do you think of our adventure so far?" Judson hated such a general question, since it gave no clue to his father's train of thought. So he mentioned general things like what an experience the Kodiak Airways water landing had been, how he was interested in walking around that big old cannery, and how small the town seemed to be.

Mr. Hansen zeroed in on the people they'd met. "What did you think of the Lindseths last night?" Judson suddenly remembered the comfort and warmth of the village home, the splendid food, the long stories, and the cast of Lindseth characters. "I think the young one... uh, Jake, will keep you busy come school!" His dad laughed quietly and nodded. "Jud, did you notice that Serafina, the one they call Sandy Ann, almost started to cry when you talked about... about your mom? I think she has accepted you already."

Judson hoped that was true, and told his dad that he would enjoy being here a lot more if he could make some friends. "If I don't make some good friends, this little place is gonna be like a jail." His dad didn't seem worried, and told him to give it time. Then almost under his breath, his dad looked back down the dirt road toward the village and said, "You can learn to appreciate almost anyone if you give them half a chance!" Judson wasn't quite in the mood for a lecture this early in the morning, so he hopped up to make himself some cocoa from their stash of Nestlé's Quick they'd brought. As he was stirring, it occurred to Judson that his father's words were aimed at himself. This is a strange adventure for him, too, Judson realized with surprise.

He was halfway through his breakfast of hot cocoa and the peanut butter and apricot jam sandwich he'd made when the refrigerator rattled to life and the light over the sink suddenly blinked on. This was the new rhythm of their daily life. Must be close to seven, Judson thought. He and his father cleaned up the breakfast dishes, his father walked down the hall to look over textbooks in the classroom, and

Judson went and slipped on some clothes. It was a sunny day, and there was only a slight breeze, so he opted for a sweatshirt instead of his heavy new winter coat.

Judson stepped lightly down the stairs to the dirt road, and walked briskly toward the cannery. He came out from behind the classrooms of the school and could see the whole meadow, the mountain, and a bit of the cove. To his right and back over his shoulder, the superintendent's duplex sat atop a small hill, guarded by its row of cottonwood trees. A few moments later, Judson passed a side road to his left that headed across the meadow in the direction of the old airfield. A bit past that, a couple of houses hugged the western bank of the creek, and the lake and foothills of the old fort stretched beyond them. Within moments, he was within sight of the wooden bridge that spanned the creek, and took the road to his right that drew him toward the dock and the old cannery. He'd look at the houses of the village across the creek later.

In spite of the bright morning sunshine and the very light breeze, the air had plenty of bite to it at this hour, especially for a young man just transplanted from the Arizona desert. Judson zipped up his sweatshirt as he walked down the long dock that slanted out from the shoreline dock leftward at a sixty-degree angle. To his right he spied a large natural mound of rock, upon which someone had built a rickety warning marker. The dock angled to the left to miss that, Judson guessed. Out at the face of the long dock, a wide section faced the mouth of the cove. Judson noticed that the corners were padded with a thick webbing of old hemp tie-up lines and that at regular intervals, big old truck tires had been fastened to the face of the dock. Farther out in the cove, clusters of pilings (called "dolphins" he later learned) to the left and right lined up perfectly with the front edge of the dock. Huge, rusting cleats were fastened to the dock at regular intervals. A true landlubber, Judson nevertheless guessed correctly that all of this had something to do with big barges and freighters tying up here. How long had it been since that had happened here in the Cove?

Judson, still very much acclimated to Arizona, suddenly had his fill of the chilly open air. He shuddered, and headed back toward the cannery and the village. The huge old cannery buildings to the left and right of the main dock had a charming shabbiness about them, painted a faded and chipping dark red with off-white window trim. Rust stains graced many of the unpainted panels of corrugated metal roofing. The old cannery would greatly satisfy some artist or photographer's interest. The buildings stood cold and vacant now. Off to his right, Judson saw the main part of the village, with charming old houses hugging the shoreline, just beyond the beach grass along the cove. But many of these structures were not cold and vacant; wisps of smoke from their stovepipes spoke of other families enjoying a leisurely August breakfast as Judson and his father had done.

The section of dock that led to the main road took him past the store, which was part of the cannery. This building was very much full of life. Judson saw a heavy-set man enter, and followed him inside shortly afterward. Judson glanced around the store with great interest. He had just been transported back in time to the days of the neighborhood market, as far removed in spirit as it was in miles from the local

supermarkets he knew so well back in Arizona. Having done quite a bit of shopping with his dad, Judson had some experience in sale prices and bulk discounts, S&H Green Stamps, and coupon price reductions—all the tricks of the supermarket trade. As he walked up and down the narrow aisles, he realized with a shock that none of those marketing techniques was in play here. This store's idea of a sale was simply to have the item available.

Mrs. Rezoff nodded briefly in his direction as he rounded the corner to go down another aisle. Mrs. Rezoff ran the post office, which was at the far end of a long counter where the store transactions also took place. The post office did the most business for a few hours every morning, and for a couple of hours after a mail plane arrived if weather had caused a delay. Judson would soon discover that weather delays happened once or twice a week in the unpredictable Gulf of Alaska. Mrs. Rezoff was also in charge of the radio room in the office behind the postal shelves, handling business and personal traffic between the village and the outside world. Of course, since those tasks were both in the store building, she ran the store most of the time, especially if Mr. Faltrip had to step away to fix something in the cannery during store hours. A square pass-through window allowed her to listen to the marine radio with one ear while running the counter. Most people in town had only one job to do, or no job at all, but Mrs. Rezoff seemed to be doing three.

When Mr. Faltrip told her she could keep the job even though the cannery wasn't running, it was just enough of an incentive to keep their family in the village. Her husband Will Rezoff was the town's best mechanic, but had almost run out of work since the cannery had closed down. At the same time as his offer to Laura Rezoff, Mr. Faltrip had also told her that his job was safe for as long as he wanted. So they stayed in the village. Judson already recognized them as the couple that had thus guaranteed his father's teaching position from the way his dad had greeted her yesterday. Mr. Faltrip was getting his money's worth with Will and Laura; the couple were as honest and reliable as they come, as long as Mr. Rezoff stayed clear of the bottle.

Judson's explorations had brought him to the far left wall, where a row of three chest freezers contained hamburger, chicken, a limited supply of frozen vegetables, and an even smaller selection of ice cream. One freezer seemed entirely devoted to bread, and Judson noted only two varieties, rectangular "Pullman" loaves of white and wheat from Kodiak's own Naughton's Bakery. To the left of the row of freezers, one large refrigerator had a card taped to it, written in angular block printing, which said simply, "Eggs." Apparently, no one even bothered with fresh milk. Next to one of the freezers, a slanted wooden shelf with four compartments was for fresh vegetables, but at present had one variety of apples (Washington Gravenstein), still in their shipping box, one box of oranges, and bags of potatoes, carrots, and onions. That was it. The shelves were filled mostly with canned goods, with tall cartons of powdered milk, bags of flour, sugar, rice, and dry beans in one small section. Another shelf held crackers and cookies of questionable freshness. Judson recognized Oreos, Saltines and Triscuits, and noted that the item in shortest supply was something called "Pilot Bread," which seemed to be large round pale crackers.

But mostly there was canned everything, it seemed. Judson soon shuddered as he passed the meat section. Among the canned Spam, Dennison meat balls, sardines, tuna, Rath pork sausage links, roast beef chunks in broth and the like was a whole collection of strange Scandinavian delicacies in transparent glass jars, things with strange names like "fiskeboller," doughy balls made of fish meal and flour served in brine. They looked like a mad scientist's experiment, and he shuddered and moved on. He hoped he didn't have to eat any of those anytime soon. Then he spied the "Tunies," which were canned hot dogs (strange enough to his Stateside sensibilities) but made out of tuna. *Tuna!* Judson judged correctly that the store must have purchased these in some sort of specially priced closeout deal, and decided he would pass on those as well.

He was gratified to find that the candy aisle and shelves of soda cans were well stocked, although some of the brands were unfamiliar to him. Most of the items on the shelves were at least things he had seen before, and things that he would expect to see in a place with limited access to fresh food. But the prices shocked him. Some of the larger, bulk items seemed to cost an extra buck, and everything, including candy bars and soda, cost at least a quarter more than he was used to. Was the store gouging its captive clientele?

Judson wasn't the only one to wonder about the prices. The heavy-set man he'd seen walk in was now standing at the counter by the cash register, and had dumped his purchases on the countertop. He was barking at Mrs. Rezoff. She was smiling serenely, if not directly at, her irate customer. "Just look at these hiked up prices, Laura! What th' hell! Faltrip can't make any money with the cannery, so he has to try to become a millionaire selling Spam? *Bastard Faltrip!*"

Laura Rezoff let him steam on. After she had taken his money, made change, and bagged his items, she finally replied. "He's never made money on this store. It's expensive to keep all this stuff in stock, and there's not a lot of business lately. If he decided to close the store, what would we do then?" The plump man snorted and waved his hand dismissively. But Mrs. Rezoff continued. "Can you imagine having to make a special run into town just for bread and soup? Or chartering a plane either? It's actually cheaper to buy things here unless you bring in a whole boatload of stuff. And *some* people in this village don't even have work. You know all this. You shouldn't complain!" All of this was said cheerfully, and ended in a sincere smile. Judson got the feeling that she was not playing the cannery's apologist, but just someone who was naturally, habitually on the level. The man said something unintelligible, with another dismissive wave of his hand, and stalked out. Mrs. Rezoff picked up a stack of letters and began stuffing them into the cubbyholes in the wall behind her, each of which had a little handwritten label on a piece of masking tape below the opening. Judson put a can of soda and a candy bar on the counter.

Mrs. Rezoff turned back at the sound and spoke to Judson for the first time since his exploration began. "Met you yesterday at the school. You're the one Sandy Ann calls Jay-Jay, right? I guess you just got introduced to our own Billy Selivanoff, Jr." She cleared her throat and looked away. "Most of us aren't like that," she said.

Judson felt sorry that anyone could be so rude to what seemed like such a nice person as Mrs. Rezoff. So he also looked away. He noticed an aisle filled with all sorts of home goods, tools, and hardware. Mrs. Rezoff followed his gaze and answered his unspoken question. "We're a long way from town here, Jay-Jay. If someone needs nails, or a handsaw, or some tar for a leaky roof, or batteries, or even a flashlight—whatever they might need, well, we try to have it. But some of these things might sit for years before anybody buys them, so Mr. Faltrip will never get rich this way!" She gave a nervous laugh, thinking of Owen Faltrip's offer to her family, and knowing more than anyone how close the village had come to closing down.

Judson smiled at her. "I understand why the prices have to be higher out here. It's very thoughtful of you to have all of this available in case anyone might need something. I actually saw some places like this when my Dad and I went exploring on Route 66 in Arizona and New Mexico a couple of summers ago. The further out of town, the higher the price. Dad explained it to me the way you just did." Mrs. Rezoff looked a bit surprised at first at his way of talking, but she was visibly pleased that he did not start up his own version of Billy Jr.'s tirade. She was easy to talk to, and seemed to have accepted him already, which pleased him more than he expected. Laura looked at him as though expecting him to continue the conversation.

He changed the subject, pointing to several large galvanized steel tubs that hung at the far end of the aisle. Laura Rezoff explained, "Well, some people use those as bathtubs, and also as washing machines. Look, there are the washboards, too." She paused for only a moment before adding, almost defensively, "But you'll find that almost everybody here is clean and has clean clothes, no matter how they have to do it!" Judson nodded; he had not thought otherwise. He added, "I know this sounds weird, but it's like I get to grow up back in my grandmother's time for a while." He felt pleased and expectant rather than shocked at the prospect.

Mrs. Rezoff half smiled at him, then laughed outright. "Oh, we live this way on *purpose*." She pointed to a small, hand-printed sign over the pass-through window to the store's office. "We Don't Give a Damn How They Do It OUTSIDE!" said the sign, written with just enough swirls and flourishes to make Judson think Mrs. Rezoff may have written it herself. He studied it with a puzzled look on his face, and Mrs. Rezoff explained: "*Outside* is our word for the 'lower 48' or Stateside. Alaskans just don't take much stock in what folks somewhere else might do. We blaze our own trails around here!" Judson was in the process of nodding when a call on the marine radio demanded Mrs. Rezoff's attention. "Oh, by the way, you can call me Laura. Everyone else does." All of this came out, not as a lecture, but as if Laura were showing Judson around her house.

They parted company with a quick wave, and Judson headed out the door and back to the main road. These people live here, and in this way, because they actually prefer it. Like some crusty old prospector up in the Arizona hills, who hates to come into town, thought Judson. Except for maybe those two older kids, Marla and Ward. He guessed that they would try to make their escape from the village at the earliest

opportunity. The memory of Marla's garish attempt at looking modern made him wonder just how well they would do in his old world, much less in a big city.

Monday, August 19, 1963: Sokroshera Cove

It was still two weeks before school was scheduled to start. For the adults, the only bright piece of news in the village was that there would actually be a school and a teacher this year. The cannery sat idle for the second season in a row. The proud colors of gold and blue that once dominated the fishing grounds of Marmot Bay and beyond now seemed about to fade away forever. The idle fishermen sometimes got cannery jobs elsewhere, processing someone else's fish for far less money. This meant that they had to move away for the summer to be close to canneries such as Ouzinkie Packing Company or to Kadiak Fisheries' facility at Port Bailey. But Ouzinkie Packing Company also sat idle this summer, and only Mr. Selivanoff had found work contracting his own large seiner, the *Marla S.*, as a salmon "tender" to Kadiak Fisheries. As a tender, the *Marla S* could carry several seiners' worth of salmon back for processing, leaving the smaller seiners out on the "fishing grounds" to catch more. Petey Kurtashkin owned his *Kolodka II* outright, and had for many years, but he was now too old to go purse seining day and night during salmon season. His boat probably couldn't take the punishment anymore either.

The other seiners still moored in Sokroshera Cove were owned by Pacific Endeavor Seafoods. Now they spent most of their time at anchor. Two of the seiners, the little *PES-4* and the cannery tender *PES-7*, so identified by Pacific Endeavor Seafoods when they were new, were now out on their moorings with no crew whatsoever. They had been unused since the cannery went on hiatus, and Mr. Faltrip claimed it was cheaper to leave them at anchor than to pay another cannery to put them in dry dock. But in reality, if they left the harbor, for whatever reason, they would be an unspoken symbol of the impending permanent demise of the cannery, something Mr. Faltrip was resisting as hard as he could. And if those seiners were actually sold, even Mr. Faltrip would have a hard time convincing anyone that the Pacific Endeavor cannery would operate again. Therefore, he included regular maintenance of the unused boats as part of Will Rezoff's duties. Will pulled them up on the beach every spring and gave them fresh coats of paint: royal blue for the hulls, goldenrod for the superstructures, and rust or bright teal-colored copper bottom paint below the waterline. And so they shone like new out in the sparkling waters of Sokroshera Cove, to preserve an illusion of reality for Mr. Faltrip's fading dream.

Mr. Faltrip still requested annual lease payments from those who ran his seiners. In addition, almost every family was in debt to the company store after a winter of purchases on credit. Thus, various people of the town resented Mr. Faltrip and the company he stood for. The adults were growing impatient. They were eager to work, but ready to move on to better opportunities if the situation did not change, and soon. Yet unbeknownst to the villagers, Mr. Faltrip was also facing enormous pressure from his own backers Stateside. He worried nights that the company he had invested so much of his life in was about to go belly up. He had flown in to

Kodiak once or twice a month since the cannery shutdown, sometimes spending a day or two in town, making phone calls, mailing letters, and calling on old friends, trying to keep his dream alive. His detractors just said he was off vacationing while the village was slowly wasting away.

Naturally, the children of Sokroshera Cove, who had two weeks of summer left before school, only vaguely comprehended these adult struggles. Besides, there was a new kid in town, who was already making his mark. Judson was quickly figuring out the "pecking order" of the small town. The Selivanoffs, the only family in the village to have a normal income from the fishing season, regularly reminded the other residents of their financial status, intentionally or otherwise. But they did feel that they held some special position because of their heritage as one of the original families. They were the heirs of the original Stepan Selivanov, Evgeni Teplov's right hand man, in the 1830s, and lived in Teplov's original home. The current patriarch of the family, the rotund and frequently inebriated Billy Jr., couldn't make a trip to the cannery store without strutting. Judson had seen that first-hand on his first morning in the village.

This sense of family prominence had definitely rubbed off on Marla Selivanoff. Judson had heard her casually mentioning their important family and her father's fishing successes almost as often as she complained that she wanted to escape "this boring, dead place." And she casually showed off a new bracelet, or blouse, or whatever while Judson was around, as though there were some kind of impression to be made. Thankfully, she spent most of her time with her boyfriend Ward. Not that Marla's projection of local power and status impressed Judson in the slightest, for his father was a college-educated professional, and his former home was in suburban Arizona, replete with cars, color TVs, home phones, and all the comforts of 1960s civilization. Judson had been required to leave all of that behind, but he found the 'big fish in a small pond' attitude exhibited by Billy Selivanoff, Jr. and his daughter Marla to be annoying and unattractive.

Although used to all the suburban conveniences, the sole luxury Judson had brought from his old home was a portable Voice of Music stereo phonograph that he had received on his birthday the year his mother died. Judson was fascinated with the recent phenomenon of stereo, a development in home music that was gradually becoming more popular. His VM phonograph was a tube model that had a record changer and two large detachable speakers, and it folded up into a hard shell suitcase. Being a tube model turned out to be fortunate; the voltage through the cannery's power system was just any old number between 95 and 110 for anyone served by the aging power lines. And the voltage would invariably hover at the lower end when the lines were wet from the rain. Newer transistor sets soon fried their circuits when the voltage dipped, but tube models like Judson's VM just started sounding fuzzy and kept right on working.

Judson had brought along some records to go with his phonograph, a carefully chosen library of a dozen or so albums plus a few that his dad had selected, and almost all of the LPs were in stereo. Thus far, he had only showed Sandy Ann his collection, and asked her to keep quiet about it. And to her credit, she had. He had

no inclination to brag about anything from his old life, which had been so difficult as to render the modern conveniences he'd had at his disposal inconsequential. He had found the most comfort in his music and his little stereo, and so it had made the journey with him. He missed none of the stuff he'd left behind.

Judson realized that his task now was to fit in as well as he could, or at least not stick out like a sore thumb. He promised himself he would try. In spite of all that was new here, this task seemed, at least so far, to be much simpler than trying to survive the living hell his old life had become. For her part, Sandy Ann had decided almost immediately, somewhere between the beach and the bridge on the first day, to accept Judson. About mid-morning on this sunny Monday, Sandy Ann collected Judson at the school apartment, and walked him rather rapidly to her house. When he questioned their haste, she told him in her breathless way that her mom had something for them. Back in the comfortable, slightly too hot Lindseth kitchen, they watched with interest as Mrs. Lindseth brought out a platter of still-warm peanut butter cookies, and fetched a pitcher of cold formerly powdered milk. Judson didn't think he was hungry, but after Sandy Ann shyly informed him that she had helped her mom bake the cookies, he decided to take a polite bite or two. Four cookies and a tall glass of milk later, he finally reflexively pushed his plate away and sighed. Both mother and daughter beamed with satisfaction. Judson already knew better than to barge for the door; there was bound to be something interesting to talk about. Betty Lindseth did not disappoint.

From Mrs. Elizabeth Lindseth he learned that she'd originally been a Pedersen, and like her husband and seemed like everyone else in the villages, was part Native. Her brothers had moved to Sokroshera Cove from Ouzinkie when the cannery here started up in 1950, and were still among the first to be hired whenever any work came in. Jakob was the source of the Lindseth boy's name, and like him was usually called Jake. Three years older and quieter than his brother, the elder Jake had dark wavy hair and a very successful almost-black beard. Here was a man who appreciated the uncomplicated life of Sokroshera Cove after his wife divorced him and moved to Anchorage with some airline mechanic. He had been a corpsman in the military, and served as the unofficial but much-appreciated medic for the village. Sandy Ann had dubbed him the "bandage man."

Danny was just a year older than his sister, and was a sunny, friendly soul with unmanageable dark blond hair and green eyes that seemed to seek laughter at every opportunity. He had experienced a string of failed relationships, and had given up in disgust, joining his brother in Sokroshera Cove shortly after Jake had settled in. Their kid sister (everyone called her Betty) had come over with them to work salmon on the line the first summer that Pacific Endeavor was operating, and had fallen quickly for the outgoing and honest Mr. Howell Lindseth. Betty and Howie, a natural pair, had easily chosen Sokroshera Cove as the place to raise their family. Both had once held important jobs with the cannery and like the other adults, hoped for better times.

"Uncle Danny and Uncle Jake—they're called the 'Truck Brothers' around here," said Sandy Ann, glancing at her father, who had just emerged from the kellydoor. "You'll

see! I think Dad's jealous that they have big trucks and he's only got a jeep." Howie, dressed in overalls for some repairs he was working on, said with a laugh, "Serafina, I think I'll go buy a dump truck so I can dispose of some of your crazy ideas!" The collective expressions in the room told Judson that this kind of give and take was normal in their household, like the scoldings Howie had received on their first night there, when Mrs. Lindseth took exception to his more flamboyant and gossipy village tales. Mr. Lindseth retrieved a wrench from a drawer, grabbed a couple of cookies from the platter, gave his wife a hug with his hands full, and left again.

Judson was done eating for the next century or two, and both he and Sandy Ann decided to head out and do some more of the grand tour. He politely thanked Mrs. Lindseth, and praised Sandy Ann for her part in creating the splendid cookies. She turned away shyly at this, and he heard her say, "Mom, Jay-Jay *complimented* us! Our cookies were *satisfactory*." "Shush, child. I'm not deaf!" And just a bit quieter: "Don't show off, Serafina!" This made Sandy Ann a bit pinker around the edges, but she recovered quickly, told her mom what they'd be doing, and abruptly headed out the door with Judson at her heels. She seemed to enjoy throwing out the big vocabulary words now and then, her own verbal idiosyncrasy, that and getting so wound up in a story that she forgot to breathe. Judson decided not to comment. He turned back and gave a quick wave. Betty Lindseth stared at the two of them as they left, with a smile and a nod. He had clearly made a good impression on Sandy Ann's mom. Judson often elicited such reactions in adults.

Today, Sandy Ann was taking him to the far side of Lake Stephanie, to a grove of old cottonwood trees where, she explained, many of the kids had grown up enacting their pretend dramas. When Judson first got to backside of the lake, he noticed a stack of shabby and damaged wooden containers that were in use as a pretend pantry. An old washtub with a hole in it was set up as a pretend sink. Judson would soon learn that these wooden containers were called "Blazo boxes," and that they showed up practically everywhere in the village as modular shelving units. A wooden rope spool, about three feet high when lying on its side, served as a pretend kitchen table. A pretend desk made up of two Blazo boxes with a plank stretched between them barely supported a heavy old 'ship to shore' radio someone had saved from destruction and carted over. This menagerie of castoff materials made the cottonwoods the place for the village children to stretch their imaginations and take on as many roles as their fertile minds could devise.

Sandy Ann was now standing on the wooden spool and explaining the creative collection of junk. She waved her arm in the direction of the pretend furniture. "Pretty cool stuff over here, *haw?*" Judson noticed her and many others in the village saying "haw" instead of "huh" or "eh" and guessed that it was a local variation. But it served the purpose of drawing the listener into the speaker's thoughts in a way that implied, even demanded, a response of some kind—it underscored the closeness of a small town. He tried to remember to nod or signal an acknowledgement in some way whenever he heard that word.

She continued her explanation. "Every time the cannery or somebody wants to throw something *interesting* away, we kids grab it and bring it here. I got about a hundred cork floats that the cannery dumped out in the cove—they switched to those brown foam floats for their nets—an' I stuck most 'a them in boxes in the attic wall by my bedroom, but I brought some here, too. We use 'em for pretend food, or for pretend rocks—all sorts of stuff! See, they look like big donuts. They make good candle holders, too." With this, Sandy Ann jumped down off the spool, sprinted over to one of the 'pantry' boxes, and threw a cork at Judson. He ducked, but it still bounced off his arm. Seeing that it didn't hurt, he found his own stash of old corks, and they had a mock battle before moving on, all smiles, to see something else.

As he spent more time with her, Judson found Sandy Ann to be fiercely competitive, but able to shut that off like a light switch once the situation changed. Still, he learned quickly that he had best try whatever she was trying, or he'd never hear the end of it. Back in Arizona, he had escaped his troubles by being a near-constant television viewer; here he was free from the tyranny of watching someone else's adventures. In place of mere programming, he found to his surprise that the simpler, real-life adventures were by far more satisfying. Judson immediately liked the playground beneath the cottonwoods across the lake. His mind began to fill with creative things to do there, even though play-acting was supposedly a little long in the tooth for someone going into seventh grade!

As Judson continued to observe Sandy Ann, he also began to realize that for all of her talkative exterior, she had a deep, quiet, even solitary soul when she wanted. Today she confided that she often slipped away to various private vantage points and hiding places to be alone. And she eventually felt safe in showing Judson her "Thought Spots," as her mom had christened them. However, at this moment, stomach full of cookies notwithstanding, she was in the mood for the adventurous places. She told him that one of the best ones was hidden in one of the Pacific Endeavor cannery's oldest buildings. They walked past the generator and boiler building, its two tall stacks and multiple smaller ones dominating the local skyline.

The building turned like a backwards letter "L" toward the cove. Both roof and walls were of corrugated steel plates, and the walls were painted a fading and peeling dark red. The window casings were all done in a dirty off-white. Midway along the end that jutted out into waterfront its smudged and filthy windows revealed the long rows of huge retorts, which were gigantic cylindrical steam ovens where cans of salmon had once been sealed and cooked. "I'd like to open one of those," Judson remarked, pointing to the huge helm-like wheels on the silver-painted round hatches. Sandy groaned, shook her head, and said sharply, "Never play in the retorts," repeating a warning given to generations of kids in the cannery towns. "If the doors ever shut we would never find you!" No chance of that, Judson thought to himself, and suppressed a shudder. Dark, enclosed spaces usually gave him the creeps. Further toward the bay in the long building was the whole processing line from unloading the fish to sealing the cans. The machinery, conveyor belts, electric motors, hoses, tanks, and tubs of various sizes lay idle on bone-dry concrete floors.

Judson could only imagine the hubbub, heat, sounds, and smells that would emanate from this place while it was in use. It wasn't *his* family's livelihood that hung in the balance. Nevertheless, he could feel the village's collective depression at the continued inactivity of the cannery just by looking at the unused equipment. "This place is no fun all closed down like this," explained Sandy Ann. "You should see it when there's a whole slew of people working!" She lapsed into silence. Judson was beginning to see that the effect of the vacant cannery on the village verged on a kind of collective grief.

The two turned toward the other buildings and down a wider section of the dock, which ran parallel to the shoreline. The cannery store was built completely on the shore, and the dock ended just past the landward end of the building. Beach grass grew in a small field to the west of the building, and the land was vacant except for several stacks of retort racks and a pile of rusting equipment that Judson couldn't identify. Judson had already visited the store several times, but his attention now was on a building that stood between the store and the face of the dock, a one story structure that lay parallel to the grassy field. Sandy Ann turned them in that direction. The building was a long, low structure with lots of windows on both sides, painted gray and not the usual dark red, with white trim. Unlike the cannery store, this building was constructed right on the shoreline, and the section called the "front dock" extended past one of the long sides, and out into the bay. The building must have been built over a bluff, because only about thirty feet straight out, the seiners could tie up and unload their fish.

Sandy Ann introduced the gray and white structure as if it were an old friend. "This is the mess hall. Cannery workers got their meals here. Look, all the plates and pans and stuff's still in there!" They both looked in through a grubby window. She continued, her voice slightly muffled at first by her face against the glass. "When I was little, Dad would take me in there for 'mug up' - I guess you'd call it a coffee break." She turned toward Judson. "I don't remember much else, but I remember the cookies! Mrs. Novikoff, she's the Rezoff kids' great grandmother, did the cooking for years, even back to the herring days, but now my Mom does it, or will if the cannery ever starts up again." By now, Sandy Ann was facing Judson and looking very serious. "It's just wrong somehow, to see all that cooking stuff just sitting there! Sad, haw?" It was sad, and in response to this, Judson mused, "Dad took me once to an abandoned mining town back in Arizona, and the place was set up like a museum. The old mine had a kitchen like this, just sitting there waiting for people. It does seem kind of sad. I want to go in, sit down, and eat something, but it's all cold and dead in there!"

The kids were in no mood for any of that emotion, and so they kept walking down the dock. "If your mom is the cook for the cannery, then that explains her wonderful cookies!" Judson added, partly as a way of lightening the mood, as they moved away from the mess hall. This dock had once been swarming with forklifts and dollies and carts. The planks rattled a little under their feet, as though some of the nails had worked loose.

Past the end of the mess hall, heading west, Sandy Ann arrived at another large building, almost as big as the one with the retorts, which hugged the far side of the angled part of the dock. On his first morning in the village, he had passed it as he walked out to the end of the dock. This building was old and shabby-looking, with what was left of the dark red cannery paint so common all over the islands, and peeling white trim on all the windows and doorframes. It looked to Judson as if it was perhaps the oldest building, or had been neglected the longest. Looking in the windows, Judson could see long sections of metal rollers interspersed with various large machines, metal tables, and stacks of wooden pallets. "Can labeling and casing," explained Sandy Ann. She led them past several large sliding doors, and near the bay end of the building suddenly darted inside a normal-sized door.

Judson literally stumbled in after her, not noticing a coil of rope on the floor just inside. She had already dashed to the right and up a steep, ship-style set of ladder steps built of thick planks. The darkened room had a strong smell of some kind of oil or chemical, and it made Judson want to sneeze. He was a bit out of breath when he rounded the stairs to the large, dim, empty second floor room and saw Sandy Ann disappear! He rushed to the edge of a large open hole with a long wooden roller across most of its length. He peered cautiously over the roller and saw Sandy Ann, laughing, spread out on a dark, rounded object below. "These are nets," she said, a bit out of breath herself. "We call 'em seines, too. Big piles of nets used to catch salmon. Usually they are on some fishing boat, but they store 'em here. They use that roller up there to pull the nets up to that room and fix 'em. See the brown things attached to the ropes? Those are the new floats. I hit you with the old cork ones back at the cottonwoods. Look, you can jump and it won't hurt you! Come on!"

Once again, Sandy Ann's speech had poured out from her as though she had not taken a breath. But that wasn't what occupied Judson's mind at that moment. His other big uncomfortable creepy situation besides the sense of being trapped in a confined space was feeling like he might fall. He had never enjoyed the Grand Canyon nearly as much as his Minnesota relatives did when they used to come to Arizona. But he was not about to let this girl get the better of him, wagering that if he backed out, she would never let him hear the end of it. He had the feeling that calling him "handsome" instead of Hansen was the mildest of her teasing capabilities. And what were the chances of her keeping quiet if he chickened out? So he jumped.

And then he landed. His right foot slid off a foam cork, and his other knee caught him in the solar plexus. He doubled up on the huge pile of nets, gasping for air. The pile he landed on was on a pallet, with another pile right next to it, and he rolled unceremoniously into the gap between them. The oil used to preserve the nets was starting to nauseate him. But as his lungs recovered from getting the wind knocked out of them, he pulled himself out onto the broad plank floor of the old building and looked up at the hole he had just jumped through. He felt a little proud of what he had done. Sandy Ann, satisfied that her new friend was going to be fine, was already rushing up the ladder stairs for another go. He took inventory of his joints,

found them all functional, thought about how to land next time, and followed her upstairs and across the wide, unpainted planks in the dim room.

After several more successful landings, the two emerged from the doorway and stepped out onto the dock. They were both a little out of breath and a bit bruised in spots. "Fun, haw?" said Sandy Ann, but was already turning toward their next destination. They walked past the rest of the building, across the width of the dock to the last structure, a long shack of clapboard and corrugated tin. Like many of the other smaller buildings, it was painted a fading gray and white. Sandy Ann called it the oil shed, and pipes of various sizes protruded at both ends of the structure. There was a little walkway at the end of the building, no more than three feet wide, which had no railing, the product of building the oil shed slightly shorter than its platform foundation.

With their backs to the rough, weather-beaten clapboard, they were just a step away from the edge and the waters of the cove below. The view faced out toward the mouth of the cove to the left. To the right they could look across the planks towards the rockpile that had necessitated the odd angle of the dock, its warning pilings rising slightly askew above the large black stones covered with white bird droppings and gray lichen. From this vantage point by the oil shed, you could watch boats come and go with no one to bother you unless they just happened to pass close to the shed on their way to the face of the dock. From Sandy Ann's silence, Judson guessed that this was one of her special spots, and he waited for her to tell him about it if she chose to.

Sandy Ann waxed philosophical: "I come here when my Mom or Jake start to get on my nerves," she said. "I call this 'The Place' because I'm the only one who seems to come here, and I sometimes really need to. One time Fat Lip caught me here and said he'd get me in trouble, but I know I wasn't doing anything wrong, so I keep coming back. He said I could fall in or some baloney." Sandy Ann's voice took on the cross, sassy tone of someone who would have no trouble giving her teacher fits. Judson half expected her to stomp her foot or put her hands on her hips. "I been comin' out on this dock since I could *even* walk! He's so mean sometimes. What does old Fat Lip know?" "Not enough, apparently," said Mr. Faltrip from behind them, dryly. "Come with me, both of you."

Even knowing that his dad was right up the road sorting through textbooks, Judson was more than a little nervous as they followed Mr. Faltrip. Judson realized that he and his new friend had been doing things that adults, being adults, might find dangerous. Mr. Faltrip was in charge of the cannery, almost everybody owed him money, and the kids had just been caught trespassing. Getting excited about kids doing possibly dangerous things was a favorite adult hobby, Judson realized angrily, his mind racing. At this moment Judson didn't exactly feel guilty; in fact, the closer he got to the cannery store, trudging behind the wiry Mr. Faltrip, the angrier he became. Judson had experienced nothing but good times since he got here, and he just *knew* it had been too good to last. He suddenly started to miss his mother. That just made him angrier at being reminded that the world is a cold and complicated place. Judson had developed a strong disdain for adult authority, which

had been on display last year in multiple visits to the principal's office. Now Judson felt the pinpricks of anger dance across his chest, and knew he needed to calm down. But he couldn't seem to.

Once inside the store, Mr. Faltrip finally spoke. "I'm going to have to talk to your parents, you know..." He was mid-sentence when Judson, with a sudden anger that had little to do with the situation, blurted, "Listen, Fat Lip, we didn't do anything wrong. We didn't hurt anything when we went into your net place, either. Leave us alone!" Sandy Ann looked at him with a shocked face. She seemed to be signaling him that he was on the verge of being in *real* trouble. Judson recognized too late that he had called Mr. Faltrip by the name the kids had given him, that the man had perhaps not even been aware of their jumping game in the net loft, and that the words that spilled out of him were making him look rebellious and rude. In the back of his mind, he knew that blowing up like that wasn't going to impress his new friend. But he had been unable to stop his outburst.

Shocked at himself and struggling for control, he summoned up his better nature and was midway through a stammered but sincere apology when Mr. Faltrip, looking at him very intently, cut him off. "As I was *saying*," he continued, a bit louder this time, "I am going to ask if you can both come down to the store for a couple of days and help me out, especially... ah, in the light of all the shenanigans you have apparently pulled in my cannery buildings." They were about to protest when he motioned them to follow, and headed down the store's center aisle. They passed all the plywood shelves loaded with canned goods, housewares, and supplies, past the counter where Mrs. Rezoff minded the store and the post office and listened for radio calls whenever Mr. Faltrip made his rounds. If Mrs. Rezoff had seen them come in with him, she made no sign. She, the most observant of adults, was obviously staying out of this. Mr. Faltrip opened a heavy, dark stained oak door with a window in it and entered the office.

The windowpanes built into the top half of the door rattled as the door thumped closed behind them. "I want you to help me sort all of these papers!" He pointed at a large wooden filing cabinet. "This is the history of the Pacific Endeavor cannery, and some other important papers, and I think someone should go through it just for posterity's sake. I don't have the time, and you owe me some time. So... would you be willing to try?" Somewhere in the course of this conversation, Mr. Faltrip had shifted from demanding their labor to asking for their help. Who knows, he might have asked them in the first place if catching them wandering around hadn't given him an easy excuse. Judson heaved an internal sigh of relief.

No parents were going to be reported to. He cast a sideways glance at Sandy Ann and she actually looked interested in what was in the old cabinet. She was probably thinking that pretty soon she'd be telling her dad the old stories, instead of the other way around. "Sure," Judson said. "I'm not clear on what I... *we'll* be looking for, but..." Sandy Ann was glancing around the normally off-limits cannery office for the first time, and suddenly returned to her old self. Interrupting and pointing, she indicated a framed photo on the wall over a very messy desk. "That looks like a picture of that Glenn Miller jazz guy, like you have on your record album!" She had

remembered his collection, and the LP of old Swing that Judson had gotten from his grandma, "In case you might like it," Grandma had said. He sort of did like it.

Faltrip looked at Judson in genuine surprise. "I thought you'd be one of those rock and rollers, being from Stateside and all." He made a slight grimace of displeasure. "I have to endure that stuff while I'm waiting for the news on Kodiak's Navy radio station." "AFRTS radio. That stands for 'Always Fart Right Through Shorts!'" said Sandy Ann triumphantly. "Now *really*," began Mr. Faltrip, but being unused to giving young people lectures, Sandy Ann was way ahead of him, and cut him off before he had a chance to correctly explain the "Armed Forces Radio and Television Service" acronym.

She was already looking back at the picture. "Who is that guy dressed like a boxer next to Glenn Miller?" Judson turned and stared, and suddenly recognized the lean and wiry frame and something about the eyes. "Why, that's you!" he explained in shock. "You were a boxer?" Mr. Faltrip's shoulders went back slightly and he nodded, "Bantamweight. Won a lot of bouts in my division before the Army got me. Mr. Miller saw me fight in 1940, and I got someone to snap a picture after I uh... K.O.'d my opponent. Second round! *That* one made the local papers!" His face registered just the hint of a smile.

Judson laughed out loud. "So Sandy Ann was right all along about the name she gave you, but she just didn't know Fat Lip was what you usually gave the *other* guy!" Mr. Faltrip looked shocked, but not at the laughter. "Young man, you talk like a grownup sometimes." If so, then it's because I really am the son of my mother, thought Judson. His grandma said that when she first met the woman her son was planning to marry, she got the impression that Kayah was born an adult. Not a spoilsport or a wet blanket, just an adult in outlook and attitude, and, she had added emphatically, one hundred per-cent lady. And grandma sometimes commented about Judson acting adult in much the same way. Grandma doesn't see me at school with my classmates, Judson had thought. Or getting in trouble in canneries. After looking at Judson quizzically for a few seconds, Mr. Faltrip, the former bantamweight champ, abruptly walked to a side door and opened it. "So you like old music? Come look at this."

In the dimly lit storage room with wide cannery-style plank floors and open beams, Mr. Faltrip walked past a few cluttered wooden shelves and over to an object covered by a gray canvas tarp, which he carefully pulled away. Underneath was a genuine Wurlitzer jukebox. Inside, the inner workings of a 78-rpm phonograph sat poised to play. "This is my baby," he said. "It's a 1939 Wurlitzer 500, with push button selector and rotating cylinders that change colors. I persuaded the cannery to let me store it here after the base closed down, if 'persuaded' is the right word. We left in a bit of a hurry after the units that were stationed here were moved to the South Pacific, and this thing was almost thrown out with the rest of the junk." He shuddered at the thought.

Mr. Faltrip reached behind the machine, flicked a switch, and soon the glowing vertical cylinders of the old Wurlitzer lit the dim room, giving off a yellow, then a

red glow, accompanied by the low hum of a vintage tube amplifier. He retrieved a nickel out of his pocket and pushed a button. "Carnival of Venice... Harry James, 1941." Mr. Faltrip's voice had suddenly taken on the intonation of a disc jockey, but his face revealed that it was probably not on purpose. Fat Lip took his music, and this machine, very seriously. Judson realized that they were being treated to a rare personal glimpse into the man's inner workings.

But Judson was suddenly distracted, brought up short by a word the man had just used. Mr. Faltrip had said "We" when he mentioned closing down the base. There was more to this man every second. Judson's thoughts were swept aside yet again by the sharp but sweet tones of Harry James' trumpet coming through the huge Wurlitzer speaker. "That's the old 'three corners has my hat' song that kids sing at Boy Scout camp," Judson remarked. "Yes, but watch what Harry and his band do with it," stated their host, giving him that "You talk like an adult" look again. Suddenly the music burst forth all around the simple melody, with a swing band galloping along at full tilt and Harry James' trumpet soaring above it like something possessed. Judson felt like he should be out of breath just hearing it. "Wow," he said. "That's what my grandma calls *hot playing!*" Mr. Faltrip gave Judson a slow nod of the head. "It is indeed, young man." Mr. Faltrip paused. He found another coin and pushed another button. "Sleepy Lagoon. Same guy. Harry James, 1942."

As the sweet trumpet and soft strings filled the storage room with sound, Judson remarked, "It's like floating over the mountains in a balloon." Sandy Ann emphatically shook her head, and waved her hand dismissively, "Nah, it's like taking a rowboat out on Lake Stephanie in the moonlight." Sandy Ann was a puzzle a minute, and was waxing downright poetic at that moment. "You're full of surprises, you two. But you'd best be on your way. Maybe your folks are looking for you, and I've got work to do."

Judson came back to that little word that had stuck in his mind earlier. "Sir, you said 'we' when you talked about the Army closing the base during the war. Were you here then?" No reply. The old, stern Mr. Faltrip was back suddenly. "I will expect you both back here tomorrow to begin helping me out with that cabinet." His face softened and he almost smiled as he added, "And you can keep calling me Fat Lip, now that you know my secret. They used to call me that in my fighting days. 'Old Second-Round Fat Lip!' Anyway, tomorrow." He showed them the door, and they were silent until they reached the road beyond the dock.

"Weird," said Sandy Ann, suddenly short of vocabulary. "You got that right," Judson agreed, turning to face her. "So tomorrow then?" Sandy Ann nodded, "Wouldn't miss it. Most interesting trouble I've ever been in!" Judson almost doubted that. She waved, crossed the one-lane wooden bridge that spanned the creek, and they went their separate ways.

He headed left toward the school, past his new neighborhood. He was already starting to like his neighbors. Besides all the cannery buildings, there were only a couple of houses on the west side of the creek, in addition to the school and the superintendent's house on the knoll. One was a mint green house built of army

clapboard, with army windows, their small rectangles staring out between emerald trim. A fence of skinned spruce poles draped with old salmon seines surrounded the most impressive garden in all of Sokroshera Cove, filled in late August with tall rhubarb, plump turnips, a few radish plants, stalks of plants Judson didn't recognize, and five or six rows of potato plants.

Along the far side of the fence, a large imported patch of raspberry bushes had already yielded several buckets of the fuzzy red delicacy. The local, wild fare was salmonberries. Along the east side of the house, with no fence needed to protect them, an impressive uncultivated patch of both red and yellow salmonberries grew in abundance, stretching all the way to the creek. A small foot trail bisected the patch and cut along the top ridge of the bank heading upstream. Just outside the fence on the northern side of this pleasant home was a small tarpaper shed, from which a perpetual smoke emitted. A screened space between the top of the walls and the slanted roof served as the only chimney for this smokehouse. Outside the shed was a stack of wood with a light gray-colored bark, and on the other side were wooden racks and a large flat stump with various knives and a hatchet strewn across it. An old five-gallon oilcan with the lid cut out, sitting beside the stump, had a persistent cloud of flies in spite of the nearby smoke.

The residents of this cozy village home were Pyotr and Dorofei Kurtashkin. Local shorthand and the tendency to call people nicknames had resulted in being permanently christened by their neighbors as Petey and Dottie Kurt. Pyotr was old Anicia Novikoff's younger brother, although the couple looked to be already well into their 70s themselves. Petey Kurt was a plump, short fellow, but with gnarled hands and a grip that bespoke years of industrious activity. He could be spotted a mile away in his beat up old gray-green fedora hat. Dorofei was nearly as round as she was tall, had eyes permanently squinted into a smile, and giggled a lot when she spoke, with long gray hair tied behind in a ponytail. Her spotless home, filled with plants hanging or perched on every available space, and walls filled with cheery framed photos of her children and grandchildren, told every visitor that Dottie was as hard-working as her husband.

Their claim to fame among the local children was mostly culinary (but only the youngest kids failed to recognize Petey as the perennial school Santa when he wore the costume he kept stored away). Petey was by all admission the best purveyor of *baleek* in the village. The thick red-orange slices of salted and smoked salmon, skin on, with the occasional stray bone, were the most tender and flavorful of any in town. Pyotr's "secret" was the stash of cottonwood branches he collected every season. Sandy Ann had shown Judson the proper *baleek* technique when she took him by the Kurtashkin home on their way to his first Sandy Ann-guided tour of the store. Grab the *baleek*, skin down, and peel off the red-orange flesh with your top teeth. Then chew and enjoy, and Judson had. From that point on, he had been able to identify a happy village child by his or her smell. The unique, smoky odor on most kids all summer was the *eau de cologne* of delicious smoked salmon.

That day, Petey Kurt had explained his *baleek* technique, and even demonstrated how he cut and salted the fish before they went into the smokehouse. The five-

gallon bucket, recipient of the fish heads and guts, was Petey's prime source of fertilizer for his almost as famous vegetable garden. He still went out, usually with a couple of the local young men, and caught all his own salmon, and his favorite spot was near Kolodka Point on the northwest corner of the island, just off the kelp beds. His boat, the *Kolodka II*, the namesake of the fishing spot, was the oldest seiner still operating. It had been launched during the early years of the original herring plant. With its tall, narrow windows, unnaturally high pilothouse, and straight angled bow, the boat sported an unmistakably old-fashioned look. *Kolodka*, a Russian word meaning "a little wood block" (or occasionally, "an old wooden shoe") was an appropriate name for the aging, well-used, and odd-looking seiner. To watch Petey at the helm was to observe living history.

Inside the little green home, the cheerful Dottie loaded down Judson and Sandy Ann with thick homemade bread, fancy canned Darigold butter—the only way to get real butter in the village—and her own salmonberry and raspberry jams. Judson had merely taken a polite helping of everything, yet found himself barely able to move for some time thereafter. Sandy Ann pointed out that every Easter (*Pascha*) season, Dottie Kurt made the best northern Kodiak Island-style *kulich*, or Russian Easter Bread, made with lemon and golden raisins. Sandy Ann had also informed him that Joyce Smith from Ouzinkie made some of the best southern Kodiak Island-style *kulich*, with cardamom, vanilla, citron, and dark raisins, adapted from when they lived for years down at Larsen Bay. Dottie had just nodded; there was no competition involved here.

Betty Lindseth, Sandy Ann's mom, usually used her own variations on Joyce's recipe, but the family liked both styles. No matter what the recipe, everybody always baked *kulich* in coffee cans to produce the round tops resembling Russian Church domes. And everybody always coated the *kulich* with white, sprinkled frosting. Sandy Ann told him, "I like it best when it's a little dry and old. I butter it and toast it in the oven on a cookie sheet so you don't lose all the frosting. All crunchy and sweet!" In spite of the ample and delicious food Dottie had shoved his way, he almost felt hungry at that. Finally pushing away from the oilcloth-covered table, Judson found "Petey and Dottie Kurt" to be far younger than their years, with a youthful and eternally optimistic outlook on life. But he was not fooled by the cheery exterior into thinking there was anything superficial here, having seen Elders with similar personalities among the Hopi and Navajo back in Arizona. These two were rich in wisdom and experience, and the children of the town, at least if Sandy Ann was any indication, treated them with open affection and deep respect. Judson followed suit.

On their last visit, and in a near-coma from the wonderful cooking, Judson had commented on Dottie's family photos. The old woman had explained a bit sadly that one daughter lived in Seattle and had for many years, but that their son Peter Jr., his wife, and four kids had moved away when their eldest daughter had reached high school age. With the cannery shut down, and facing the prospect of their daughter leaving for school, they had packed up and moved to Anchorage. The *PES-4* had been their son's boat to run, and now sat idle in the harbor. Only the bravest and most stubbornly optimistic families had opted to stay in Sokroshera

Cove when the cannery closed. The village needed hope, and needed a plan. It had been a surprisingly somber conversation with this normally cheery lady.

Up the creek from the Kurtashkin house was another village curiosity, a place that caught Judson's imagination the instant he laid eyes on it. The footpath that cut through the salmonberry bushes along the west side of the creek beyond the Kurt's place led to one of the oddest homes in Sokroshera Cove, and indeed, it was one of the most recent. It was also the one farthest up the stream toward the old runway. Covered in tarpaper, with a barely slanting roof, the three-room shack had only a couple of windows, and sported two similarly-built outbuildings, an old-style *banya* (steam bath) and one of the few *nooshnicks* (outhouses) still in daily use on the island. The home was built far from the aging but functioning water and sewer system that the herring plant had started and the military had finished. But as a symbol of eternal hope, a few yards off from the shack, angled to have the best view of the mountain and the rest of the village, a much larger four-bedroom home stood partially finished on strong pilings. The roof and large dormer were complete, to protect the rest of the building from the rain, but only a couple of the outer walls of the main story had been enclosed, and the inner walls were just a jumble of studs. It gave the appearance of a very slow work in progress.

The family in possession of these odd dwellings was Wendell "Windy" Bazaroff, his wife Carla, and little Jimmy and Maria, four and two and a half. Almost any day you could see and hear Jimmy and Maria playing happily in the creek below their shack, or stacking empty tin cans in the yard, or playing fetch with their black and white mutt dog. Wendell was a fellow whose industry and luck had never met. Definitely not lazy, and not given to drink like his sister Anya either, he just had never been able to scrounge enough money to make their lives more comfortable. He ran a gill net site down the bay, and owned a very small seiner. The boat had an enclosed cabin, but without so much as a pilothouse. Windy named it the *Lil' Carla* and kept it painted a cheery yellow and black, his wife's favorite colors. Anytime he got some money, another wall or two would go up in his future home. But this season, a fine picture window was cut into the tarpaper walls of their shack. Wendell lived in the hope of getting hired on a larger vessel, or landing a well-paying job, should the cannery ever resume operation.

These two households were Judson's nearest neighbors, and he liked them already, after only a few days in the village. And every time Judson settled in at the apartment after a day's adventures, he got the sneaking suspicion that he had somehow landed alive in the pages of a *National Geographic* article about an Alaskan village. The images he'd seen were already collecting on the walls of his memory like framed masterpieces, with Technicolor detail. It sometimes seemed too much to absorb.

As Judson approached the schoolyard on the day of his run-in with Mr. Faltrip, he saw a clump of salmonberry bushes beyond some large leafy plants beside the road. He decided to pick some of the dark red berries he saw hanging in the shade of the bushes. He reached for the berries and nearly tripped on what turned out to be a very conventional-shaped fire hydrant, painted a dull green that made it

invisible beneath the big leaves of the plants that stood between him and the berries. His attempts at keeping his balance had flattened several stalks of the large-leafed plant, and they emitted a slightly skunk-y odor as he backed away.

As he turned, Judson noticed he wasn't alone. "Hello. You're Jay-Jay, right? Lucky for you the *pushki* is late in the season, or you might have broken out all over," said Will Rezoff, toolbox in one hand, and his son Herman carrying a small bucket filled with various pipes and fittings. "Aw, Dad, *pushki* never hurt anybody!" "That's because you know to leave it alone!" Will turned toward Judson, pointing toward the squashed stalks and trampled leaves. "It's ok to just walk through it, kid. But if you squash it like you did, you sometimes get an ugly rash." Judson just nodded, and thanked them.

The Rezoff guys had been making sure the oil-fired space heaters in the school would work once classes started. Judson noted as they left that Will had said *PUSH-key* and Herman had said *POOTCH-key*. The younger generation was busy scrambling up their parents' language, something he'd seen with his bilingual friends compared with their Spanish-speaking parents. Still, it was a horticultural lesson, not a language lesson, and Judson resolved to be careful around the distinctive plant. And he decided to ask Mr. Faltrip about the fire hydrant, feeling he might know why it was there, and painted that ugly color.

Later that evening, after the kids' cannery adventure, both sets of parents got told of the day's events. And both sets of parents were fine with the children helping out Mr. Faltrip, as long as "You don't keep giving that man heart attacks jumping around in his buildings and trying to fall off the dock!" Mrs. Lindseth remarked, but she was smiling at the time. Mr. Lindseth just said, "Well, he's the only one with money right now, so maybe he'll pay you something." This got a reproachful "Howie!" from Betty Lindseth. Back in the school's apartment, Mr. Hansen seemed especially interested to hear about the old jukebox, and wondered what other things might be hiding in dusty corners in those old cannery buildings. He told Judson to report back if he saw anything else of interest, and told him "Use some common sense, Jud. It's probably not a good idea to go jumping around in those buildings." Judson took that as more than a suggestion. But he was relieved that his father had not actually prohibited visiting Sandy Ann's "Thought Spot" out on the dock.

Mr. Hansen took some time that evening acquainting Judson with the two types of lamps the apartment used when the power went off, which was every night in the Cove. "You'll have to do this if I'm ever too busy or away for some reason," his dad explained. The kerosene lamps were squat, onion-shaped spheres on a wide base, and had short, tapered glass "chimneys" which focused the light and sent the fumes up rather than out. Kerosene was fairly safe as fuels go, and not explosive or dangerous if the human nearby had any kind of sense. But the second type of lamp used pressure appliance fuel, something the locals called Blazo after the most common brand name. The pressure appliance fuel called Blazo was aptly named, and his father handled it as if it were an unexploded German bomb in some English pasture. The considerably tamer kerosene was called Pearl Oil, according to the

marketers at Chevron Oil. Mr. Hansen stated that Blazo pressure appliance fuel was the most flammable liquid he'd ever seen. Safely outside, they poured it gingerly through a small funnel into the green fuel tank of a Coleman lantern, its ash wick ready to glow like a fluorescent tube when the little pressure pump in the tank had been vigorously and repeatedly depressed. A 'pressure appliance,' Judson realized. They returned the can of fuel to the small shed behind the apartment. Mr. Hansen locked the door with a padlock Mr. Faltrip had left for him, and pocketed the key. Judson noticed this; not even the apartment or the classrooms ever seemed to be locked.

On those occasions when the Hansen men were "burning the midnight oil," an expression that suddenly made perfect sense to Judson, Mr. Hansen hung the lantern from a hook in the kitchen ceiling that he had personally checked first for strength. The kerosene lamps, short and made of clear glass, with chimneys that resembled chubby Coke bottles, made a dull orange glow that was barely strong enough to read by. But the Coleman's aggressive illumination was like staring into a truck's headlight, and it hissed like a boiling teakettle. In spite of the dim light, Judson already preferred the warm and quiet (if smelly) glow of the kerosene lamps. All this was now a part of a necessary skill set in the new home they had chosen.

Both Blazo and Pearl Oil came in square five-gallon cans, packed in pairs in sturdy wooden boxes. Judson had already made his acquaintance with "Blazo boxes" at the fort across the lake. The empty boxes served all the remote villages and fish camps as makeshift furniture. They could serve as stools or side tables if stood on end, as sawhorses and stepstools if placed upside down, and as handy-sized modular shelving if stacked on their sides. It was even common in the villages, Judson later learned, to lay dead bodies out on low, makeshift biers made of Blazo boxes covered with a white sheet whenever there was a wake. Judson kept noticing how the folks in the village seemed to use rather than dispose of things that elsewhere would have been carted off by the trash truck. When Judson remarked on the humble Blazo box's myriad uses, his father had explained that it was a symptom of being poor and resourceful in a remote area. Judson had noticed the school's stash of Blazo boxes in the narrow hallway of an attic upstairs above the classrooms, where they were filled with old textbooks and poorly labeled cardboard containers that would need sorting by the time school started.

Tuesday, August 20, 1963: Sokroshera Cove

The following morning, before heading down to the cannery store, Judson walked through town towards the Rezoff house to see what Will the *pagook* had collected from around the old fort. Soon after he crossed the bridge over the creek, he passed the largest house in the village, perhaps almost as large as the cannery superintendent's house that stood on the hill behind the school. Paris and Sonya, the Selivanoff twins, were making mud pies in a puddle in the yard, beside a low wall of slate stones. But these stones had been mortared, and the cement that bound them together was almost exactly the same color as the stone. It was the first example of this kind of construction that he'd seen in the village. So this is

where the Selivanoff's house is, he thought to himself. It's the largest home, their dad is the only one with steady fishing income, and they might be the oldest family in town. Hence their bragging rights.

Sandy Ann had remarked about some of the older homes in the village. A couple of them had log construction, with clearly visible joints cut at the corners of their gray-brown timbers. The Selivanoff house had log outer walls, too. But the exterior of their home was encased in clapboard painted a fading yellow, with wide white boards framing the deep-set windows. Who knows how old it was? This could possibly be one of the original buildings from when the village was founded. The steeply peaked, shingled roof with its dormer that faced the east side of the cove reminded him of the big old house he passed on the way to the Donnelley and Acheson store on the dock in the Kodiak channel before he caught the plane to Sokroshera Cove. The Selivanoff home was smaller, but still seemed like a mansion compared to the modest homes that surrounded it.

The three homes on his left seemed abandoned, or at least vacant. They seemed to be variations of the Lindseth's home: peaked roof, attic rooms, and a 'kellydoor' porch. Judson couldn't tell without inspecting them, but at least one was probably log construction with siding, like the Selivanoff house. One had the kellydoor as a large enclosed porch on the peaked end of the house rather than along the side. Now that Judson knew what a kellydoor was, he could instantly pick out houses that had them. A fourth and fifth home beyond were already starting to sag, and would soon turn into piles of unrecognizable debris. Once the inhabitants departed and the stoves were left cold, it didn't take long for nature to take its course. It was apparently unusual to tear down old houses unless you needed the land for new ones.

Unfortunately, the vacant houses spoke to the gradual exodus that had been stayed temporarily by the decision of the Rezoffs to remain in the village. All the students who had been in attendance five years earlier had come from families that had lived somewhere, and this was probably where. He wondered if any of the Kurtashkins' children and grandchildren had lived there, or if people like Mr. Lindseth had any brothers or sisters with children. With just a couple more families, this village could need two teachers, just as the loss of one family would have closed the school entirely. Cannery work, and indeed the entire fishing industry, seemed to be feast or famine, and it was hard to maintain a small village under such circumstances. Hard times could turn any cannery-dependent community into a ghost town when families departed to look for work. Judson shook off those thoughts as too complicated for a kid enjoying his summer break.

As Judson neared the end of the rambling string of houses, he happened to look down at the soft ridges of the dirt road. There right in the middle was a fresh dark gray-green cow pie, replete with large flies apparently swimming in it. What else lives on this island? Well obviously, there are cattle here in addition to the collection of dogs and cats, he thought. And no wonder bears were not welcome; with cattle on the island, any bears that swam across from Afognak Island would have to be hunted down in a hurry! The half-dozen or so cats and two or three dogs that folks

here kept as pets seemed to roam freely, as though they had collective owners, friendly toward everyone. When you don't put a dog behind a fence, and there's no place else he could escape to, he just sort of hangs out with everyone, and rarely has reason to become annoying. Sokroshera Island was a great place to be a dog. He'd have to ask Mr. Faltrip or Mr. Lindseth about the cows, because he'd never heard anyone mention them, and the green splat before him was his first clue to their presence.

The Rezoff home was almost the last one on a small dirt road that was at the opposite end of the village from the cannery and the school. The main road curved northward to its left, and it sat off of a road that also went to the Truck Brothers' place. The Rezoff place seemed to have been built in several stages, with siding of different shapes and sizes in each section. Both ends looked like recycled World War II lumber, because the windows and the siding were the same as the military buildings Judson had seen on the drive to Kodiak from the airport, and the same as the Kurtashkin house and the cannery's oil shed, among others, here in the Cove. But the middle section was clearly older, and seemed to sag a little in the middle, as though the foundation was about to give up. All the siding was painted a pale cream color, and the trim was fire engine red. A picket fence made mostly of leftover pieces of wood surrounded a crowded yard that was very overgrown with weeds and salmonberry bushes. The outside of the fence was painted in the same cream color as the house, but the other side was left unpainted. Near the front door were several five-gallon oilcans, the round kind that once held oil for machinery, with the tops cut out. The wispy-looking plants had once sprouted flowers. By this late August date, everything was near the end of the Alaskan growing season. Beside the gate was a sprawling elderberry bush that obscured most of the yard from the road until you passed it.

Judson had just begun to peer through the weeds at the various metal objects that had come from the fort, when the door slammed open and Herman backed out onto the porch, followed by Mr. Rezoff. Herman looked like he was on the verge of crying. Suddenly he raised his arm to shield his face. Mr. Rezoff let loose with a stream of curses and swung at Herman, hitting him on the shoulder and spinning him almost completely around. Mr. Rezoff seemed a bit unsteady on his feet, unusual for so early in the morning. "Will, let him be... please," came Laura Rezoff's voice from the doorway. "I'm sure he'll finish doing the yard by this afternoon, won't you, Herman?" Their son's answer was muffled, but he nodded.

By this time, Judson had politely ducked behind the elderberry bush, hoping his observations had gone unnoticed. Mr. Rezoff stormed around the side of the house toward the tarpaper shed in the back, and Judson could hear the sound of bottles being kicked about or tripped over. Soon Will Rezoff wandered off down a trail that led past the Pedersen brothers' plain plywood house to the beach, never looking back. Mrs. Rezoff put her hand on Herman's shoulder, but he jerked away, hiding his face as he kicked a clump of grass. She said something too soft for Judson to hear, and went back in the house. Herman headed toward the shed, and emerged seconds later with a large scythe, which he began to use on the weed-covered yard. His face was set in a cold, determined stare. Mrs. Rezoff, late for her job at the

store and post office, reemerged from the house, brushing her hair back from her face as she headed toward the gate and the spot where Judson was hiding.

Judson saw that he would never be able to avoid being seen, so he just stood by the elderberry bush. Mrs. Rezoff already seemed to know he was there. As she passed through the gate, she moved toward him and out of sight of her son. "I—I'm sorry you had to see that, Jay-Jay. I saw you from the window as you came down the road, just before..." She didn't finish, but looked at him with those soft, kind eyes, then turned to leave. Judson said the first words that he could think of. "Could I stick around and help Herman?" "I don't think he wants to talk now, but I'll ask him. It will go hard for him today if he's not finished by the time..." Mrs. Rezoff was having trouble finishing her sentences. Suddenly she rallied, and turned and called to her son. "Herman, Jay-Jay is here to help you with the yard." Herman looked up with that same impassive face Judson had seen when they first met, but he didn't say no. Judson got the impression that nothing Herman's mother did surprised him, and that it was perfectly normal for his mom to want to get Herman some company at a time like this. By the time Mrs. Rezoff had made it down the road as far as the next house, Herman had brought Judson a small sickle, and they both silently attacked the clumps of weeds and brush that covered the yard.

Sometime later, Herman turned angrily to Judson and asked, "Why did you have to see that? I'll bust your face if you tell anyone. I may bust your face anyway." He took a swing at one of the remaining clumps of brush. Judson threw caution to the wind. Herman just seemed like he could be trusted, and he sure needed a friend right now. Judson looked down at his muddy shoes and spoke softly. "When my Mom died two years ago, my Dad kinda went out of control. He got drunk and threw things and swore a lot, and hit me, too. I was afraid to get him mad, so I didn't do anything and I hardly said anything for weeks. I walked around like he was a bomb about to go off. I shouldn't be telling you this..." Judson's voice was just above a whisper. Herman stood looking down the dirt road, as though the answer was about to come up the lane. But he was listening. Judson cleared his throat and continued. "We sat down one day and..." Judson was surprised that he was about to cry. "We... worked it out. We sort of decided that it was nobody's fault that Mom died. Dad and I agreed that we'd never let ourselves get that far gone again. We decided to come here, to get a fresh start." He paused, thinking. Herman waited. "I guess there's nowhere that doesn't have some bad stuff." Herman did not reply. There was no need.

It was a couple of hours later than he expected when he got to the store. Sandy Ann was nowhere to be seen, and Mr. Faltrip was off maintaining something in the cannery. Mrs. Rezoff was alone in the store, sorting some mail from the plane that had arrived while Herman and Judson were finishing trimming the yard. Within an hour, the store would be crowded with villagers awaiting their mail. They usually waited awhile for Mrs. Rezoff to finish the sorting, knowing by now that staring at her impatiently never caused a single letter to get sorted any faster. In fact, she had hung a sign on the door as soon as Judson arrived, telling folks when she'd be ready. So they were alone now. "Jay-Jay, thank you," she said simply. "Herman thinks highly of you, so I was sure he'd let you help out." She paused while hefting

a heavy package onto a low table at the end of the counter. "My husband is a good man with a terrible weight on his shoulders, and I've tried for as long as we've been together to help him get rid of it." Judson grabbed a nearby stepstool and sat on it, with his elbows on the counter, listening intently. "I guess he decided to come down to the dock and hitch a ride into town instead of coming home." She looked like she was going to cry. "I'm afraid he'll head to the bars—oh, I *know* he will." She shook her head. But she kept talking to this young man who seemed so mature for his age.

Slowly the story of Will Rezoff unfolded, a story of amazing ability hobbled by pain, a tale of sorrow's effect on the soul. And left unspoken was the wrenching, intensifying effect of alcohol, greatly compounding any problems that could surface. Mrs. Rezoff said repeatedly that she wasn't sharing anything that all the folks in the village didn't already know. Maybe that information might help Judson to understand what her children were living with. In the polite shorthand of a woman deeply in love with her husband, she sketched his story. Will had been just ready to start school when his father died. A boat called the *Sunny Seas II* had capsized in Whale Pass when they somehow misjudged and caught the tide wrong with a full hold of salmon. Will's father and two others had perished. Pariscovia Rezoff was suddenly a young widow with a son to raise. She also had weak lungs, and sometimes had to send Will to stay with relatives while she battled back from whatever it was that left her so weak.

A few years later, the war brought soldiers to the island, and during one of her seasons of recuperating, while young Will was living with a relative down in Karluk, Pariscovia had fallen for a man she described as her "gallant gentleman." But he had left without a trace, and Will never had the chance to meet him. Soon after, Will's mom discovered she was pregnant. She named the boy Karl. She, Will, and the new baby moved in to Kodiak and stayed with her aunt for a few years, since she wanted to be closer to a doctor. No brother was ever prouder than Will was of that young man. He and young Karl were frequently off having adventures together. When Will's little brother was about seven and he was about seventeen, he took him hunting out past Chiniak. Will didn't notice a spot where a stream had broken through the snow and then refroze. Karl hit the slick, uneven surface, slid down a short embankment, and broke through a patch of thin ice near the edge of the pond below. Will almost exhausted himself trying to dry his brother off and get him to safety in the closest cabin, but Karl was too far gone and died before the next morning. Will came home with his brother's body and never forgave himself, and his mom couldn't bear it either. When the flu season came, Pariscovia caught pneumonia. She took a turn for the worse. In the hours before she died, she kept talking about the day the sky turned black, and how much she wanted her soldier boy to meet her sons.

Will's life took a dramatic turn for the better when he went off to a Native boarding school in Oregon. There, besides learning diesel mechanics, he met Laura, from a village on the Alaska mainland. Laura was just the right person to bring some joy into Will's life, if anyone could. They got married after graduation, and lived in Kodiak for a while before moving to his old home town of Sokroshera Cove. Mr.

Faltrip had heard of his ability and hired him to help with maintenance. He soon became the head machinist for the Pacific Endeavor Seafoods cannery. Laura's voice was full of joy at the happy memories, at the days full of hope and promise. But when the cannery closed, Will took it very hard. Will could have stayed busy working for Mr. Faltrip, keeping the generators running and maintaining the town's water pumping station, or even by fixing the occasional outboard motor for one of his neighbors.

But it wasn't enough. Will also started to drink heavily. Soon he was neglecting what little work he had, and was spending most of his days wandering through the hills and the ruins of Fort Sheplen and odd corners of Sokroshera Island, carrying a shovel or a backpack and occasionally writing and drawing in a battered notebook. He got more strident and less convincing the more he drank. On those nights, he would spout conspiracy theories and rumors of treasure and intrigue to anyone who would listen. He was hiding his grief in the secrets of the island and the temporary comfort of the bottle. And Judson had already observed the toll that Will Rezoff's difficulties were having on the man's young family. "You gotta understand," Laura Rezoff concluded, "My husband is a *good* man. Losing most of his work seems to have somehow brought back all those memories of losing his brother and his mother. How much more can a man take?" Without planning to, Judson put a hand on the older woman's arm and said, "I lost my mother, too." He remained silent for a moment, adding, "Dad says that nobody's pain is ever the same as someone else. But maybe I'll never really be over it either."

Just then, Sandy Ann bounded in through the front door, and almost at the same time, Mr. Faltrip made his way into the store from the rear entrance. "Time to look at that history stuff," Sandy Ann said brightly. "This way, please," said Mr. Faltrip, and headed toward the overstuffed filing cabinet. Judson turned quickly to Mrs. Rezoff and said, "I'd love to talk to your husband about the fort." "Maybe soon," she said quickly, averting her eyes, and turned her attention to the folks streaming after Sandy Ann, lining up to get their mail.

Later that evening, as he drifted off to sleep, Judson realized with a shock that after he had helped Herman cut all those weeds, he hadn't even noticed the cool stuff that had been hiding beneath them. Just goes to show how quickly what you think is important can change.