

Chapter 4

Saturday, August 24, 1963: A Sunny Day, Outside the Rezoff House

"Hey, Herman," Judson called expectantly to the young man, who was coming around the side of the house slapping dirt from his hands. "Are you up for a little fort exploring?" "*Ch'Mai* and *Ah-hookh*," said Herman, and a small smile passed his lips. "That's *hello* and *yes* to you," said Sandy Ann with a suppressed giggle. "He's trying to make you into a Native." "Well," Judson said to both of them, "I am a quarter Indian, but I'm not native to *here*." "Which means you need the grand tour," said Herman, ignoring any discussion of genetics and residency status. "We'll need some flashlights, and shoes that can get muddy." It was almost the longest speech Judson had yet heard from him.

Herman retrieved a Donnelley and Acheson shopping bag, replete with sturdy loop handles, from inside the front porch. "Mom made us some peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and I know where to find good drinking water. We gotta bring back the cups." There was Herman's mom being thoughtful again! Herman held up a stack of colorful aluminum tumblers. "Aren't those called glasses where you're from?" Sandy Ann asked Judson, to which Herman replied, "Glasses are for if you can't see your homework and stuff." He placed the tumblers back into the bag. "I'll call 'em cups if you do," said Judson, eyeing Herman and then the shopping bag. He turned toward Sandy Ann, "Maybe Jay Jay should *really* just call them 'aluminums' instead of 'glasses!' Might as well be accurate, right?" Sandy Ann glared at Judson and then at Herman. "You guys gonna be like this all day?" she asked impatiently. They set off with no further nonsense, smiles all around. Judson couldn't remember when a disagreement among people his age hadn't descended into argument, hurt feelings, or even a fight. Things were different somehow around these two; not calmer, just different.

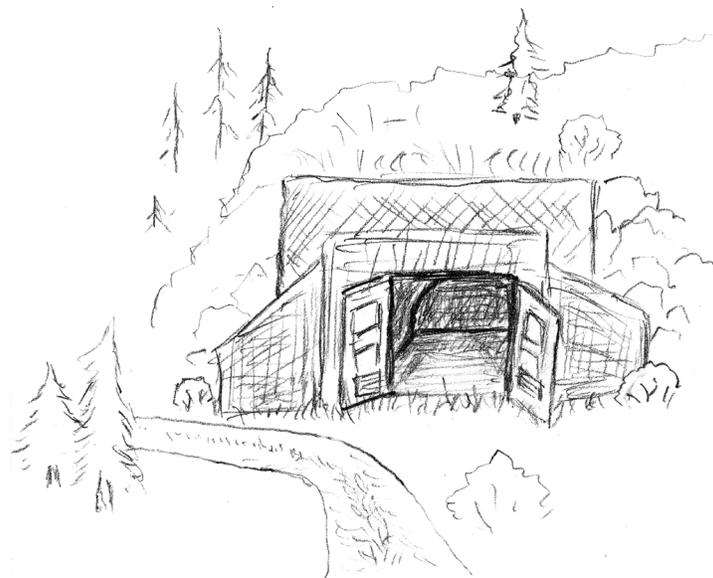
The road out of the village circled past the southeast end of the runway. They hiked across the meadow over to the runway, Herman pointing out the rusting metal interlocking panels embedded in the surface. These had minimized wear and erosion, but now lay beneath the camouflage of the resourceful grass and dandelions. Herman explained that towards the other end there had once been hangars and other military buildings, but that the town had torn them down after the war. They crossed the runway and down a small embankment to the eastern shore of Lake Stephanie, then turned right, past a marshy area, and rejoined the road above east beach. Once on the old road, they turned left and followed it past Teplov Point and into the hills of Fort Sheplen.

All of the fort's closest wooden buildings had been dismantled and used in the homes, sheds, and various cannery buildings of Sokroshera Cove, an act of prudent recycling that had saved the locals a hunk of money in the years after the war. Even some of the pudgy little space heaters in the corners of many of the homes had once lived in the Quonset huts up on the higher ridges. Thus, in its own strange way, Fort Sheplen had been good to the villagers. Sandy Ann's dad had called Herman's dad a *pagook*, but in fact, all of them were. The doors, windows, and

siding of the remaining wood structures looked *exactly* like the ones in many of the homes across the village, because they were.

The road they were on dipped a little, past the far end of the runway, the little marsh and Lake Stephanie. At its lowest point, the road was only a short, grassy bluff above east beach. The name of the beach was a description, not a title, and it hardly deserved the title of "beach" at all, in Judson's mind. This beach seemed to be a rough and uninviting little bay of boulders and sharp slate slabs where the bedrock thrust up, interspersed with gravel and pebbles. It looked to be a dangerous obstacle course compared to the nice sandy arc of Stepan's Beach near the cannery and village. "We come here whenever we need rocks to build a wall or make a... *terrace* for a garden," Sandy Ann volunteered, smiling to herself at retrieving *terrace* from her memory. "World History last year—the Incas made terrace gardens on the mountains in South America." She said this mostly to herself, but Judson noted once again her affinity and affection for interesting words.

Judson looked down the embankment of the old Army road to his left, with the alders and swampy area below him, and noticed a stretch of black wooden pipe, about a foot in diameter, wrapped in a spiral of thick wire. The pipe came out of the hillside, but in the swamp seemed to have lost its covering of dirt. "That's our water supply, and Dad says we're gonna have to replace the old pipes soon. It follows the road up to the pump house. We lose about half of the water we pump right here into this marsh. It's not the lake leaking; it's our water supply leaking." Judson remarked, "That's not a good thing!" and Herman responded with, "Well, that's what happens when you depend on an old abandoned fort for your water! I'm surprised it works at all. Oh, those wires overhead, they look old, but they're 'hot' as Dad says all the way up to the pump house. Gonna have to replace those, and the poles too, someday soon."



the gaping hole and huge rusting orange doors of the largest bunker

The road they were following suddenly rose and veered inland. It was now winding through deep spruce forest on the left, with occasional glimpses of open water on the right. It was cool on the old road, and the long shafts of sunlight reminded Judson of photos he'd seen of some cathedral in Europe. After climbing for a few hundred yards, past a section of road that had a clear view of Marmot Bay on their right, they turned a sharp left corner heading inland into the trees again. Within moments, there appeared on their right a vertical cliff made of concrete, with a gaping hole and huge, rusting orange doors hanging open. The entrance looked almost like a cave, except that all the exposed lines were rectangular, more like an enormous fireplace. "It's the largest bunker on the island," stated Herman. "They stored most of the ammo for the anti-aircraft guns and the searchlight bunker machine guns in here, and would've had bullets and bombs for the planes if the runway had ever been finished—this place had just been built when it was abandoned," he said. "There's another bunker up the hill that was supposed to hold ammo for the coastal artillery - we'll see it pretty soon." Herman was turning out to be a first class guide, and Judson marveled at his extensive military vocabulary. He and his father had not always had struggles, Judson realized. He also was gaining a hearty respect for Herman's memory, which seemed to have absorbed the information like a sponge, down to minute details. Makes you realize how people could preserve their history in the days before writing, thought Judson, remembering a passage out of his own last year's Social Studies text.

No one bothered to talk further, and they all made a beeline toward the gap between the massive, rusting blast doors. No sooner had they all stepped fully inside and turned on their flashlights when a deafening boom roared through the vaulted concrete hall. The roar continued for what seemed like ages, echoing through the spruce forest beyond. "Son of a..." said Judson before catching himself. Dad told him swearing was the sign of an undisciplined mind. Sandy Ann was under no such rule. "Dammit, Jake!" Sandy Ann wheeled around and hauled her brother out from the shadows by the arm of his jacket. "*Whooftie!*" she said, placing her hand on her chest and exhaling loudly. She's not being overdramatic in this instance, thought Judson, who was seriously considering trying out a self-defense move on his friend's idiot little brother.

"My way of sayin' *Ch'Mai*, guys. *Loud*, haw? Man o man, one little firecracker did all that! I got a whole sack full that I kept from Fourth of July," Jake said, and he did a little energetic dance as he talked. Jake's voice was nearly drowned out by the momentary ringing in their ears brought on by the explosions. "Actually I forgot I had 'em or they would've been used up already! See what happens when Mom makes you clean your room!" Sandy Ann, having let go of his jacket when he started talking, now grabbed his arm again.

"Yup, now we're in for Jake the Terrible terrifying the dogs and waking up grandmas from their naps, prob'ley, you little brat! I'm sure Herman's mom didn't make *you* a sandwich, so you get to starve. Or LEAVE!" Sandy Ann growled at Jake, older sister all over her face, but she did let go of his arm. No chance of Jake leaving, thought Judson, so he casually shone his flashlight into the shopping bag.

He wasn't surprised at all to find *four* sandwiches and the requisite number of aluminum tumblers at the bottom.

Sandy Ann the sister was by no means finished. "Warn us first, or I'm going to lock you into the next bunker and tell all the bears to come find you!" "No bears here," Jake said, in a singsong voice. "Some *bores* maybe!" "So if we bore you so much, scat!" Sandy Ann flipped the backs of her hands at him as if to shoo him away. "Alright," said Judson finally. I came here to see a fort, not watch you two fight. *iVamonos. Andale!*"

"What was *that?*" asked Herman turning to him in surprise, his first words since nearly going deaf. "Oh, I forgot. Spanish. Almost everybody knows it back in Arizona," Judson explained. "You *gotta* teach me all the cuss words!" shouted Jake, jumping up and down. "I can use them on Serafina!" He said her real name in a whiny voice. With this, he looked at his sister and stuck his tongue out. "Oh, SURE," said Judson, but shook his head firmly. "Like I said, can we go now?" The whole group shared that sentiment, and turned up the road, which curved slowly to their right. Almost immediately, they passed another road that turned left and downward with no buildings nearby, and somebody mentioned ice-skating, but Judson didn't quite hear. More things to explore later.

Through the trees to his left, Judson began to see glimpses of a pretty, blue lake, and asked Herman about it. "You've been drinkin' it," he laughed. Follow me." Within moments, they saw another driveway to their left, and this one, like the road they were walking on, showed evidence of some traffic. The road curved around the north side of the lake he'd seen, and broke out into the clear about a third of the way down the north shoreline. Judson glanced overhead and saw power lines, which terminated in a concrete hut a few feet above the water. The road seemed to end there, too. When they approached the concrete building, they could hear the whir of an electric motor. "There are two big pumps in there," said Herman, gesturing toward the padlocked door, "But the pipes that serve the north fort have been shut down since the fort was abandoned. This pump house sends water down the hill to the two big water tanks by the Pankoff house. You know, the Quonset hut at the edge of the cannery. There's also some pipes out by the runway and the dock that the Army put in. If you look under the creek bridge, you can see one of those big wooden pipes—that's how the water gets to those tanks and off to the school and airfield. Dad comes up here," he gestured to the pump house again, "a couple times a week to make sure everything's working." He turned around and headed back toward the main road.

When they turned left to continue up into the fort, Herman pointed out the power lines dangling from one of the poles, cut the day the fort closed down. The road ahead was much more overgrown as well, and in some places was like wading through a wide meadow that meandered among the trees. A footpath that cut through the foliage down almost to the gravel roadbed gave everyone a comfortable place to step. "Cow trail," said Sandy Ann, helpfully, when Judson looked down at it. "The cows make nice trails for us to follow all over the island. Except for the cow pies," she added. He remembered to look down periodically.

Occasionally as they climbed the road into the rest of the fort, they found their way blocked by a tree that had fallen across the road, a victim of various winter storms no doubt. "The Truck Brothers'll be up here soon with their chainsaws," said Herman, stepping over a fallen trunk. They trudged up a winding section of the old road past side driveways that had nothing but slowly rusting Quonset huts sitting like huge bean cans half buried in the ground.

As they turned a blind corner that bypassed an outcropping of rock, they nearly walked head on into a group of rather concerned cattle. The beasts stomped and snorted a hasty retreat into the salmonberry bushes. He noticed with a shock that they were a good deal shaggier than cattle had a right to be, but some of their ancestors had been Alaska cattle for perhaps a century or more, and seemed to have adjusted accordingly. Just running wild, like deer with owners, he thought. No need for fences, because the beaches formed a natural barrier. He wondered how they got collected come butchering time, but forgot to ask anyone about it.

To their right, at a spot where the road leveled out, they walked past a wooden warehouse, its sliding door wide open. Judson took a quick peek inside. It was a little dusty, but still dry. Someone had removed most of the floor, revealing sections of two by six tongue-in-groove planks. Now that lumber was gracing someone's home in the valley, thought Judson. The roof was covered only with tarpaper, and wouldn't hold out much longer against the wind and rain. Already the corners on the shady side were moss-covered.

Judson asked, "Anybody ever come up here to camp out? There are still dry buildings here and there, and the views of the forest and ocean and even these grassy side roads are just beautiful." It was the first time he'd really complimented the scenery since he arrived. Herman nodded. "Dad and I came up here three or four years ago, and for the heck of it we camped in the big bunker, to see what it would be like. I remember it was surprisingly noisy. Every animal walking by, and especially every birdcall and whistle, were amplified—like the place was one big speaker. I couldn't sleep very well. Then early in the morning I got up to take a..." He paused, and looked at Sandy Ann, who said indignantly, "I *have* a brother, Herman!" "Well anyway," Herman resumed, "I stepped outside and nearly walked face first into a cow. I screamed and woke my dad up, and of course, the cow was not real happy with me either. So I'd rather not camp up here, thanks just the same!"

They passed by another side road, and Herman pointed it out. "There's an old water tank up there behind those trees, above the mess hall and shower rooms. Roof's collapsed and it doesn't look too safe now, so I've never looked in it. Dad says it's just got pipes and broken wood." But he looked up the road and said, "I got some things *even better* to show you up here. Jake, don't go blabbing the end of my movie." he looked at the younger boy sternly. For the moment, Jake seemed ready to assume some form of best behavior. So far, Jake seemed like a firecracker within inches of a match. Laugh a minute, though Judson.

Near the top of the next hill, Herman took a grassy side road to an even higher ridge. Quonset huts sat at odd angles off to their left, and the road seemed to hug the ridge a bit. They were right above a very long building with multiple smoke stacks that Herman called the mess hall. About a quarter of the roof, at the end farthest from the main road, had collapsed, taking the end sections of the walls with it. "They didn't build their mess halls very well, Dad says. Snow does them in pretty easily, and the winter of '55 - '56, there was over three feet of wet snow in just one storm. That plus whatever snow fell from the trees—I think that's when this one got squashed." The partially collapsed mess hall was flanked by multiple Quonset huts, although it was a bit hard to see down the hill through the trees and brush.

Heading back up the hill road again, Herman turned their attention to a long building with many windows perched sideways along the crest of the hill. The cow trail he had already mentioned passed right behind it. Small spruce trees grew higher than the windows, which would have once had a splendid view all the way down to the lake and beyond. "Rec Hall," said Herman, as if this explained everything. Another voice interrupted: "That stands for 'recreation hall,' and it was the place to relax and served as the entertainment center for the fort," said Jake, in an official-sounding voice, then emitted a "brrrrrtttt" sound, trying hard to imitate the clattering mechanisms of old film projectors and the somber narrations of the science and history movies he'd seen at school. Judson recognized the imitation, and laughed out loud. Jake could exhibit a good vocabulary, if it resulted in the proper humorous effect. Sandy Ann seemed immune to her brother's efforts. She should be grateful any time he's not blowing up something or trying to break things, thought Judson.

The floor of the 'rec hall' creaked a bit, and the floorboards were badly warped with a hint of moss near where several of the windows were missing. The floor had a few little squares of fuzzy former ceiling tiles that had come unglued and then got wet. But it was mostly a big empty room, and a little disappointing. A small side room near the entrance had empty wooden shelves and its own window. The door still closed and the handle still turned, a bit sluggishly. Whatever had been in the building had been shipped out when the fort closed, or *pagooked* by someone who was hopefully making good use of it.

"Jay-Jay, look here!" Sandy Ann was in the far corner, pointing, and momentarily speechless. Jake and the other boys rushed over. "What?" asked Jake, impatiently. She reached down, dug around a bit, and held up a grayish-black circular object. "I just found this under a piece of ceiling tile." Judson examined it carefully, and read the title. "Decca. *Embraceable You*. Jimmy Dorsey, vocal by Helen O'Connell." Sandy Ann made the Vomit Face. "Can't read the other side, because it got too wet. Look, it's cracked. That's why it got left here."

Sandy Ann snapped out of it. She pointed again, and kicked aside a few more of the soggy ceiling tiles. Judson looked around. "There's a plug here, and look at those marks on the floor!" The other two stared without seeing, but Sandy Ann and Judson looked at each other. "The jukebox came from *right here*," he said, images

floating in his imagination of soldiers listening to Mr. Faltrip's carefully collected song list while staring out the window at the spectacular view. The jukebox, strategically placed in the corner, would have sounded spectacular, too. The soldiers might have had some good times in the middle of all their hard work and war worries, thought Judson. Sandy Ann had her wrinkle nose going, so she probably had the same thoughts.

Once outside, Herman was explaining something again. "This cow trail here," (he pointed to a narrow path of dirt in the grass heading away from them along the ridge) "goes down a pretty steep ridge to another lake and some cool stuff like one of the searchlight bunkers and an anti-aircraft gun emplacement." Jake interrupted: "It also goes down to skip rock beach. We gotta go sometime, and have a contest!" Jake danced around a little, already anticipating the next adventure, but didn't explain what he meant by a contest. "Remember that first road we passed right after the big bunker, on the way up the hill? It goes down to the beach, too. Passes by the little lake that's below our water lake. We usually ice skate there." Herman added, "That's the only other road that goes to a beach. I guess they couldn't get to their installations down that steep ridge that has the cow trail." More to see sometime, thought Judson. But he also smiled at how these young residents had grown to know and love their island, and could definitely see the reasons for their affection. Would he have been as excited to show them around his Arizona neighborhood? Definitely some of the places, thought Judson.

Herman pointed them uphill again, and brought them back to the adventure at hand. "Hey, guys, we got the best parts next! Come with me and get out the flashlights again." Herman really was a great guide, and Judson could see his father's passion for exploration in his voice and step. Too bad they don't always get along, he thought, remembering Will Rezoff's sad story. Just up the road and to the right was an angled ramp with tall concrete walls and a gravel embankment on one side. The other side seemed buried in a hill. "Walk through here," Herman said. The ramp leveled off in a long hallway with another ramp and sunshine beyond. Each end of the ramp had gray wooden doors with metal bands and massive, rusting hinges bolted into the concrete. But to their right, two sets of rusting orange blast doors hung open. Another bunker, Judson thought. "Just two rooms in the side of this hill, which they probably made to cover it all up," said Herman. The rooms were around twenty feet wide and nine feet high, extended about thirty feet into the hill, and were dry as a bone. In the second of the echoing concrete rooms, Judson found a piece of wood painted red. The peeling paint still revealed cream colored stenciling and most of the word "projectiles." Herman explained, "That means ammo I think. Well, onward and upward!"

Jake ran to the far corner of the bunker, stood with his back to the wall, and spoke in his lowest voice, "When in the course of human events it becomes necessary to dissolve the political bonds..." He was pausing between each word as though addressing some political convention, and the echo of the concrete bunker, plus the natural husky, almost croaking quality Jake's voice usually had, made his speech sound almost impressive. Sandy Ann snorted and headed out to the far ramp. "He saw a poster of the Declaration of Independence on the wall at school and took..."

it... upon... himself... to... memorize... it. He only got through the first two lines, so he'll be out soon. Poor little guy, all that did was prove to me that he *could* memorize his times tables if he wanted to." Her imitation of Jake's speechifying was pretty good, and that plus her sad semi-sincere shaking of the head and doleful expression caused Judson to burst out laughing.

He had nearly recovered when another huge boom shook the surrounding forest. "*Gaaah!* Great, maybe he'll go deaf soon. I may kill that little bug of a brother!" Sandy Ann declared. "Then I won't have to listen to you anymore, haw?" Jake declared behind them, a bit too loudly. "I threw that one and ran," he said, in answer to the unasked question of his quick arrival. "She's right about going deaf, you know," Judson said, and looked back at Jake seriously. "It's why I dislike shooting guns. I'd rather save my ears for music." "What?" said Jake, cupping one ear and walking like an old man. "You're hopeless," said Judson, mostly to himself, but joined the others in laughing.

"Like I *said*, onward and upward," Herman repeated. This road rose steadily through a thinning forest of spruce. Herman stopped at a fork in the road and pointed up and to his left with his thumb. The main grass-covered gravel road curved around a stone cliff face to their right; they took a steeper and less-inviting driveway to the left. Some of the road seemed to cross over sections of solid rock, while other sections had the familiar grass-covered gravel. The trees were getting sparser as they climbed. Within moments, they stood blinking in the bright sunlight on a plateau of bedrock and gravel. Judson gasped when he looked up, for before them to their left the view was breathtaking. They could see Sokroshera Cove and its long circular beach, the cannery along the right side of the bay, and the runway that angled across the meadow to just beyond the end of Lake Stephanie. There was the creek that meandered across the meadow. A ridge of trees hid east beach, and the growing spruce forest obscured half of the unnamed lake that the village and fort used for its water supply. But facing them, they could see most of Unuak Channel, a rock-free section of Duck Bay along the north side of Sokroshera Island. From the widest spot in the old road, they could even see a bit of the kelp beds and exposed rocks off Kolodka Point. The arc of Marmot Bay sparkled to the south and west. Spruce Island to the south, Whale and Raspberry Islands to the west, and the expanses of Kodiak and Afognak Islands stood out in sharp detail in the distance. "Damn good view," said Judson, when he thought to speak, forgetting the part about undisciplined minds and all.

"My Dad says this was his mom's favorite make out spot," said Herman, and actually giggled for the first time in Judson's memory. Sandy Ann started her Vomit Face, but gave it up when Herman continued, "I never knew Grandma. She died long before I was born. But this place is special to me because of it. I can almost sense her here, enjoying this." He gazed out at the spectacular scene and his voice was just above a whisper. More surprises today, thought Judson. Herman making a speech, and pulling back the curtain a little on his soul—Judson was careful not to interrupt any of this.

All of them were quiet for what seemed like minutes, but was only a few seconds. "So when are we going inside?" asked Jake, impatiently. "Never, if you keep telling Herman's story ahead of him, Jake," scolded Sandy Ann. "Now how far down the mountain would you roll if I *kicked your little butt*?" "It's ok," interrupted Herman, holding out a hand as if trying to stop traffic. "I'm done with the family history. I know what Jake wants. It's right around the corner."

"He's taking us in the most dramatic way," said Sandy Ann into Judson's ear. "So... Who's showing the previews *now*, eh?" said Jake (whose hearing had miraculously returned) from behind them. Judson held up his hand quickly, and Sandy Ann stayed silent. Around a slight bend of the rocky peak, they came upon a large flat place where the side of the hill had obviously been leveled. In the center of the space, which also marked the end of that road, were two large concrete circles with raised outer ridges. Inside the ridge Judson examined was a track with gear teeth in it. "The Panama-mount guns," said Herman, noticing Judson peering at the gear teeth. "The biggest guns on the island had a sort of tripod mount, and the mount rested on those gears. They could spin the guns around pretty quickly, but they were out in the open, not shielded by armor like at the other forts. These cover the channel and western Marmot Bay. There's five others, which we could get to by the road that's lower down, on the other side of the hill here. But there's another way to get there. Follow me. Again."

Herman was enjoying himself more than Judson had seen in his short time on the island, and he guessed it had been a much longer time for Herman. Judson looked up at a mostly bare outcropping of grayish rock, and guessed that they were near the summit, but could not see the actual top of the peak, obscured by the rounded ridge of granite directly above them. Their guide stopped at a channel between two thick walls of concrete buttressed by crushed rocks, which seemed to go straight into the mountain. "Flashlights ready!" said Herman. He ducked past another of those orange blast doors, this one rusted almost shut, with just enough room to squeeze through the space between it and a solid concrete doorframe built into the bedrock.

Judson found himself in a long tunnel, no more than seven feet high and a little more than five feet wide. He could almost touch the sides with both hands, and he was pretty sure that most adults could. This was only a people tunnel. Overhead were the glass covers for the lights, protected by square grates of graying aluminum, and a conduit for the power, bolted into the concrete ceiling. They still held their light bulbs. Along the ceiling at random intervals, small white stalactites were forming from the moisture in the concrete. They walked down the tunnel, deep into the bedrock of the summit, for maybe fifty feet or more, when it abruptly made a right turn, then a left again. "Protection from bomb blasts, but especially to create a death trap for anyone foolish enough to try to sneak in that way. They'd be fish in a barrel, Dad says." Herman was a virtual encyclopedia. They soon came to a larger room with two small closets to the left, and with another tunnel that angled off to the right. When Judson shined his flashlight into it, appeared to be sloping downward at an almost uncomfortable angle. Something far below us beckons, he thought.

They looked into the closets, and saw nothing but bare shelves. "Emergency supplies in case the soldiers got shut in here during a battle," Herman volunteered, and pointed back to the larger room. He asked them to turn off their flashlights for a moment. Dead center in the room was a metal ladder that rose up to a square shaft in the ceiling, and once their eyes got adjusted, they saw that a slight hint of daylight was coming down the shaft, making a ghostly square of grayish light on the floor. "Up we go," said Herman. "Check out the walls." His voice had the quality it would have if you stuck your head in a garbage can and then started a conversation (an activity that's not recommended), thanks to the close concrete walls surrounding the ladder. At various places on the way up, people had signed their names. Judging from the dates, people started writing things around 1947, but there were many missing years. This was not a place many people could find.

After climbing hard for what felt like several minutes, Judson was getting tired of the effort. He looked up and saw that Herman had already exited the shaft, and he couldn't go down anyway, since two more people followed him. He had fifteen feet or so to go. He looked quickly at a couple more of the signatures and dates, and about ten feet from the top, saw "Will and Herman Rezoff, 1959." Herman had been pretty young when he climbed the ladder for the first time, and Judson wondered if his father had needed to carry him part of the way.

Suddenly Judson felt very dizzy and out of breath, and felt his hands losing their grip. "I... I don't feel so good," he said, and the sound of his own voice sounded distant. From below Sandy Ann said brightly, "Jake and I won't let you fall!" Then after a pause, she said, "Dad says he has trouble climbing this ladder too. He called it closet-opia." Judson rallied, steadied his grip, and managed to say under his breath, "That's *claustrophobia*." He finally emerged, weak and panting, from the long shaft, and just lay there on his side in the damp dust of a floor of old concrete until his head cleared and his heart stopped pounding out of his chest. Herman, standing above him, didn't say anything for a while. Then Herman mentioned that his mom had trouble with the shaft, too. "You don't really know you have claustrophobia until it suddenly hits you," said Herman, not unkindly. "You made it, and that's quite an accomplishment. Dad says it's at least forty feet up, and mostly in the dark, too."

Judson finally felt clearheaded enough to stand up slowly. He was in a hexagonal room with wide windows only a little over a foot high, in all the walls that faced the sea. The windows were built into the walls at eyeball height for an adult, and had thick metal blast covers that were rusted half open on the outside walls. Behind Judson at the back of the small room, another of those narrow channels between concrete walls led outside to bright sunshine. To the left there were stairs leading down a few feet to another room, with windows at right angles to the one he was in. "This is what we call the tripod," said Herman. These were spotter bunkers for visual sighting of the enemy in Unuak Channel and most of Marmot Bay to the west and south. "Nothin' in 'em now but the little stands that used to hold telescopes I think. The summit blocks the view to the east, and there's another of these on the

far side of the summit. But they had another way to look. Come outside, if your eyes are ready."

They all walked outside into the glaring sunshine; the water of Marmot Bay to the south was in direct sunlight, and shone like a searchlight. Judson noticed another of the strange hexagonal structures a few yards down, pointing away from them. The lookout bunkers had a clear view in almost every direction from here. Judson turned around and looked up. Attached partly to the roof of the spotter bunker and partly to large concrete posts, a square tower rose about twenty feet above the peak of Mount Sokroshera where they now stood. Three spotter bunkers and a tower on top—a "tripod" indeed, thought Judson. The tower of galvanized steel girders had a grayish brown tinge to it. But it also looked practically new, except for the wooden platform at the very top, which had a couple of cracked and missing planks. This was the fort's radar tower, Herman explained, and it was never put into operation.

He was mid-sentence when a war whoop emanated from the tower above. Jake was hanging over the planks waving at them, with what looked like an open pocketknife clenched in his teeth. "Ehhhh, I'wa Fiwoh!" He shouted, and then repeated, "I'm a pirate!" without the knife this time. "No you're not! You're an idiot, climbing up there on those old broken boards." The only thing missing from Sandy Ann's delivery was a mother's hands on the hips. She was merely waving her hand in front of her with a broad gesture that made it look like she was trying to swat away a fly. "Get down here!" Jake the Pirate caught her tone, and said in mock contrition, "Yes, Mommy!" But he rejoined the rest of them shortly.

"We could go back down the ladder and take the tunnel to the bunker on the cliff face," Herman looked at Judson and shook his head in answer to his own idea, "*Instead*, let's just take the trail down to below the bunker. There's a spring there, and we can eat something. We could all use it, haw?" But he raised a finger like a teacher about to make a point, "*Then* we'll visit the bunker." They headed down, descending in a southeast direction. They crossed over a mound of lichen-covered rock and suddenly stood gazing at a lovely blue lake, nestled in a mountain crevasse. "It's only a little lake, almost a pond, but Dad says he thinks it's pretty deep, judging from the angles of the bedrock around the shoreline. We call it Summit Lake, and it's the first place to freeze and the last to thaw. But it's no fun ice skating up here because it's all open to the wind," Herman stated. And Judson saw that except for a rim of thin and wind-weathered spruce trees on the far side, the lake was exposed on all sides. Even at the end of summer, it was none too warm up here.

"Where's the outlet for the water? Is there a stream somewhere?" asked Judson as they hiked along the lake's southwest rim heading for the opposite side, where Herman said the trail to the spring was located. "There's no stream anywhere up here. There's a channel on the northeast bank, where there used to be one, about ten feet higher than the water is now. But it's been dry for a very long time." Judson's eyes followed Herman's pointing hand, and he nodded. Judson felt strong admiration for this young man who could remember so much, but he just smiled

and nodded. Herman continued, "Dad thinks the water flows through the rocks somehow and comes out at the spring we're headed to, and that's quite a ways down."

Once they reached the far shore of Summit Lake, they passed a double-story spotter bunker pointed east, the direction the "tripods" could not see. But Herman bypassed it and soon they re-entered the spruce forest as their trail sloped downward. Judson could occasionally see bits of the coastline through the trees as they descended, with Marmot Island visible on the horizon to the north. A low mound of rock out in the water, possibly connected to the shore, and covered like a wig with green grass, gave way to exposed reefs and breaking swells. "That's Cape Unuak," said Herman after noticing Judson's interest. "It's right below where we're going." It was about a quarter mile hike downhill, on a winding trail over meadow and open rock to get down to the spring. Sometimes he could see the cape and sometimes only small trees, stone outcroppings, and trail. Towards the end, the trail crossed another road, and he saw the edges of two other artillery rings down to his right. To his left, Herman said, were three more, below the main fort's windows. But Judson was suddenly very hungry and thirsty, and still felt weak from his body's sudden rebellion in the ladder shaft.

The explorers finally stopped to rest in a tiny meadow next to the spring Herman had mentioned. The spring ran slowly but steadily from several places on the rock face, combining to become a steady stream as it left the sheer rock of the cliff, a mere ten feet below the roadbed. The kids sat on a grassy ledge no more than forty feet wide, among blooming fireweed and the lupine that had long since finished their cycle and were only stalks of seedpods now. Judson couldn't see over the cliff, and had no wish to, but could tell that the drop-off was abrupt, because some of the plants seemed to be growing sideways as though holding on for dear life.

"Don't go near the edge, Jake. You can't fly, and I can't think of any good excuses if I don't bring you home." Sandy Ann said, and turned toward the other two boys. "I'm only a little bit afraid of heights, but the bluffs here have grass that hangs over nothing. You wouldn't know you're near the edge until you were flying off to heaven!" She shuddered, and Jake stayed put. He was a clown, but not an actual idiot. As an island boy, he was willing to go places and do things that no city kid would even contemplate. But like other youngsters who grew up unhindered in such an environment, he had an almost invisible (but enormous) common sense that knew his own limits. No matter what his sister might have said about his intelligence, Jake had no desire to visit Cape Unuak, far below, and behaved accordingly.

They were all grateful for Mrs. Rezoff's *four* sandwiches, and in only a couple of minutes, devoured them. But it took the kids a few more minutes of sipping cool spring water from their aluminum tumblers and sighing with satisfaction before any of them had the energy to climb back up to the roadbed. Up on the road again, Herman led them downhill slightly and to the left. There were two gun circles down a short driveway below them. These circles faced south and east. The ones they'd already seen faced north and west, and three more were immediately below the

fort, just north of the spring. Between the seven circles, almost the entire perimeter of the island would have had artillery cover. "Dad thinks they might have had a couple more cannons on wheels, called caissons I think, so they could reinforce whichever side was under attack," remarked Herman. "You notice there's plenty of room here and at the other circles for more artillery if they needed it."

After a longer than usual period of silence, Judson glanced at Herman, who appeared to be deep in thought. Finally Herman turned and said, half apologetically, "This fort is stuck in my brain. When I think up stories. . . you know, when my mind is wandering, the fort is always in the story, almost like a character, and somehow it save us from the monsters or whatever. I can't help it." Judson nodded. "I knew the first day, as I was flying over the old airfield, that this island was gonna have a lot of cool stuff. And except for that lovely fun-filled ladder shaft of yours, it does!" Sandy Ann, to his left, frowned and nodded. There was enough to interest her up in Fort Sheplen, too.

Herman turned and walked up to another one of those concrete channels. The passage was considerably wider, and it led to yet another partially open blast door. This one was a double, however, and Judson recognized it as the same design as on the two ammo bunker rooms. They must have had to move some big stuff into here, or perhaps they just had leftover doors. They all debated this as they entered the echoing lower hallway of the bunker, concluding that it might have been a case of using whatever was handy. The bottom floor had a long hallway that went straight for some distance in the gloom, and Herman mentioned that it would meet up with the tunnel they had started in, way on the other side of the peak. But Herman led them to the right, up a wide set of concrete stairs to an upper level.

At the top, Judson saw a long, rectangular room, and was not surprised to see the same low windows that he'd seen in the spotter bunkers. But he was startled by the black and white tiles that covered the floor. "I didn't expect to see anything that looked like decoration," said Judson, and Herman replied, "They probably used leftover tiles from some other place, maybe even from some kitchen in the main base in Kodiak," Herman was saying. "The floor in the bunker at Fort Tidball has green and reddish tiles in some places." The long, fairly wide room had the same stands that would have held spotting telescopes, but there were also makeshift tables made of two-by-fours and thick plywood. On top and in the corners behind the tables were a few sheets of moldering papers, mimeographed with grids of numbers. "They used these papers to record the test firing of the cannons," Herman explained. "Dad kept a few sheets—they're back in the house in a box I think."

He went to the rear of the long room and turned on his flashlight again. There was a rather standard looking wooden door, and the section of the wall that held it was plain plywood, painted a cream color, to the width of the walls of the inner hall, which were concrete. He and the others walked through the door. The hallway went straight back into the hillside, but not for any great distance. There were four rooms, two on either side of the hallway. The one on the immediate left was small, and had many shelves built in. Numbers were written on each of the shelves, but

no one knew what their original purpose was. The room to the right was a good twenty feet long, and had more of the homemade plotting tables. But huge coils of wires, and tall empty metal cabinets with sockets and wires in them indicated that this was where the radar room would have been if the equipment had ever been delivered. "There used to be a two-way radio antenna attached to the tower up top," said Herman. "Dad thinks the other end of the antenna came here. He knows they used a radio, because this island never had direct phone service to the other forts. The radio was probably right here." He pointed his flashlight at a coaxial cable that came out of a pipe in the wall, and a small table that stood below it.

The second door on the left was another similar closet, but the last door on the right was as big as the radar room. Dead center in the room was a panel as tall as a refrigerator and about four times as wide. "The telephone switching station for the whole fort," said Herman. "Every major building was supposed to have a phone line, and you can still find the wires strung through the trees in a few places. If the guys atop the mountain saw something, or a load of equipment from the base in Kodiak arrived, the call would be patched through here to wherever the commanding officer was at the time. This place was like a small city, or would have been if it was ever finished." "Hey," said Judson in sudden surprise, "We are deep in a bunker, but it's not echoing. We sound like we're in a closet full of clothes. Why?"

Herman pointed to the ceiling. Large panels with coarse, easily visible fibers had been glued to the ceiling. These had fallen down in a few places. "Everywhere anyone actually had to sit and work, they put these up to cut the noise. They still work pretty well—I haven't heard Jake for a long time!" This was Herman's first dig at Jake, who pretended to kick at him. Herman just smiled and stayed silent. Apparently, Jake could take it as well as give it, as long as his sister wasn't involved. She *had* to get involved. She pointed overhead to the panels. "I'm gonna *pagook* some of these and put them up around your bed. No one will hear your cries for help!" It lacked some of the spontaneous edge of her earlier pronouncements, and she would have said more, but both Herman and Judson groaned and looked annoyed, so she retracted her claws.

Herman cleared his throat and said almost ominously, "And now to this bunker's greatest mystery!" He headed back down the stairwell they had used earlier. Jake was narrating his imaginary movie again, "Deep in the heart of an abandoned fort, four youngsters discover a secret that will change their lives forever!" "I'll change your life forever if you don't *can* it, Jake!" hissed Sandy Ann. "Ooh, good one! Do you always repeat what I say?" Sandy Ann didn't take the bait, and Jake stayed silent. Good on all counts, thought Judson. One or the other of them is great. But together they seem to be a walking aspirin emergency for everyone else. He focused back on the bunker and what Herman had said.

At the bottom, near the sunny open blast doors that made them squint and look away, they turned right, down the long unlit hallway they had bypassed earlier. The hallway dead-ended with another half-open blast door, this one with a passageway that headed off at an odd angle, slanting upward. That has to be the tunnel to the ladder room and the other side of the peak, thought Judson. But to their immediate

left was another blast door and yet another short hallway, like the one above it. But not quite. There were several inner blast doors; whoever designed this fortress wanted this part protected above all.

This time, to the right they found a kitchen with the huge range still attached to a large vent, a deep sink and four long picnic style tables still laid out two and two, enough for more than thirty soldiers, if all were seated at once. A narrow, deep closet in the corner had shelves enough for many cases of food. And to the left, across the hall they found a large lavatory with several large metal-walled showers, and outlines where the urinals and toilets once stood. Behind the kitchen and lavatory, on both sides of the hallway, were bunkrooms. In one of them, they saw the remains of one bunk frame that somebody thought was too bent-up to *pagook*.

At the far end the hallway widened, and looked like a foyer. In the middle of the back wall was one final blast door. On it was stenciled "Cistern." To the right was a hand-lettered sign, painted directly on the cream-colored concrete of the bunker wall: "Danger: Open Pit. Do Not Enter!" Judson could almost bet it was Mr. Faltrip's writing. As if to underscore the warning, the blast door was welded shut. Along the left edge of the door, above and below the large handle for its latch, two foot-long weld beads declared in no uncertain terms that this was a threshold not to be crossed. A two inch high air space nearly as wide as the door, cut into the base of the metal blast door frame, yielded a musty odor and a cold draft when Judson knelt to inspect it.

What was behind that door? A last store of ammunition? Emergency food? An escape tunnel even more dangerous than the ladder shaft? The fort's original brig? Or only the bunker's emergency water supply – after all, a spring came out of the rock *below* the fort, Judson remembered. And *cistern* is a word people use for a hollowed-out natural underground water tank. "They found a dragon in there, that's what I think!" Jake said. They stared at it silently for another moment and Herman added, "My Dad doesn't know, but he has a theory. And he won't tell me what it is. But if it was something *military*, why didn't they just remove it? Why the welds and the warnings and stuff?" Sandy Ann sounded ready to leave, and speculated that since the military had left the big stove and sink behind, "Maybe it's just a big hole full of water or something dangerous like that."

The kids were involved in happy conversation all the way down the road. As they passed the bunker where Jake had initially deafened them, Sandy Ann turned to Judson, her seemingly random question reflecting something she had undoubtedly been thinking about as they walked. "You don't swear much, *haw?*" Sandy Ann didn't swear much, either. Judson shook his head. "Oh, I *think* it, believe me. You don't wanna know what I *don't* say! My mouth has got me in trouble lots of times. But Dad says swearing is the sign of an undisciplined mind, so I suppose I try not to." He spread his hands. "Dad says it also sounds uneducated, and I'm a teacher's kid, so I'm stuck being the model of good behavior. Let's see how I do." Judson laughed nervously at his chances of success.

Herman, who had been cogitating a response, said, "My Mom says the same thing as your dad, that it's undisciplined. Then she cusses and apologizes. It's kind of cute, because it's like she can't help it." Judson almost didn't believe him; up to this point, Laura Rezoff had seemed to be the model of propriety. Herman changed the subject. "You and your dad talk about weird stuff, Jay-Jay!" Judson just nodded; it was apparently true. But it made him quiet for a moment; all of that father-son closeness was very recent; in fact, just since they had moved to the island. He shook off the memory of their frequent troubles last year. They had been miles apart back then. Herman noticed his expression, and frowned but said nothing.

When the road across the meadow brought them close to the stand of spruce trees and their wooden forts and rope swings, Jake ran off, saying, "I think I see Eagle over there!" The three remaining explorers had passed Herman's place and had almost reached the Lindseth home when they met Ward Bazaroff and Marla Selivanoff walking toward them on the road. Marla stared at them with open disdain. Ward flicked away a cigarette and suddenly spat out, "Been fukkin' around up in the fort with the American kid, haw?" This he supposedly addressed to Herman and Sandy Ann. But Ward had fixed his insolent gaze squarely on Judson, who calmly replied, "Oh, nothing we were doing up there involved sexual intercourse at all. Now that's how *you* came into the world, and how *I* came into the world, but it was not our chosen activity today. Would you like me to explain the difference?" He cleared his throat, as though preparing a formal speech. "We were just walking and talking, and of course in sexual intercourse, well, the male and the female..."

There was a small noise, and Judson paused to see Marla turning pink and suddenly seeming very interested in the spruce trees where the swings were. "Who the *hell* was talking about sex... sexual..." Ward was a bit tongue-tied. Judson continued in an infuriatingly sweet and patient-sounding voice. "Why, *you* were, Ward. You said we were 'fukkin' around' up there. Do you need me to continue to explain how all of that works?" Ward growled, "You are so full of *shit*..." Judson interrupted him. "Well, actually, no. I had a very fine bowel movement this morning. And if *you're* all backed up, I suggest eating more beans for a day or so." Ward said, "You are so goddamn..." Judson interrupted again. "I sure hope *not!*" and at the same instant, he looked skyward, to the left and to the right, as if about to dodge a Divine thunderbolt. "Aw, the *hell* with it!" said Ward, grabbing Marla a bit roughly by the arm and walking her rather abruptly around the three explorers and off toward the beach trail, before Judson could provide another snappy comeback.

"Like Ward said, what the *hell* was that all about?" asked Herman, a bit crossly, once the couple was out of earshot. "You had a smartass remark ready for anything he said, and he's pissed now! You were acting like you were *trying* to talk way over his head!" Judson had expected his exchange with Ward to be regarded as disarming and funny, but it hadn't ended up that way, and he was puzzled. So he tried to explain. "My dad used to teach at a really rough school, and every time the kids would use bad language, he got them to stop by making it sound like a lesson in anatomy or biology or whatever. When he told me about it, I always thought it was hilarious, and he said the kids usually laughed and backed off. So I tried it just

now. Ward didn't back off, did he?" Sandy Ann was vigorously shaking her head. "I think you just made it *worse*," said Sandy Ann, still a bit pink herself from Judson's lecture on biological functions. "You *really* should be careful. He can dish it out, but can't take it, and you'll just make him mad."

Judson's face registered his shock. He had upset some sort of delicate balance here. Village social dynamics were still a mystery to him, apparently. "I'll try not to antagonize him," said Judson, sincerely. "Dad says it's ok to defend myself, but I should never *start* something. I'll bet Ward thinks all of that was *my* fault." "*Ah-Hookh*," said Herman, nodding solemnly. "That's how he operates. He thinks like, 'How dare you hit me back?' Of course, that makes *no* sense, but to me, Ward makes no sense most 'a the time anyway. Be careful, Jay-Jay." Judson decided he would try. They all began talking about something else.

Herman went home after dropping Sandy Ann at her place, and his last comment was not about the Ward exchange, but to again express surprise at the things Judson and his dad could discuss. After Herman left, Judson was on the verge of saying goodbye and walking across the creek bridge to the school's apartment, when Sandy Ann suddenly burst out laughing. "Still thinkin' 'bout what you said to 'ol Ward back there. I never seen anybody talk back like you did, and it *was* funny. It would' a been a lot worse if anybody had laughed, though—I was practically *biting* my tongue!" She stopped laughing and looked up at him solemnly through wisps of dark red hair. "Just be careful, 'kay?"

Judson was pleased that Sandy Ann had understood his methods and motivations, but he took the warning seriously. He had just shown his new friends a side of him that even he didn't want to acknowledge. He realized he'd always been the caustic-tongued kid with the reputation for a 'smart mouth,' and that it had caused a few of his problems in his old school. And this was a very small town, with all the residents practically sewn together, whether they wanted to be or not. Best not to make any new holes in that fabric.

That evening, Judson and his father had a long conversation about all of this. "I thought what I'd be saying would be *funny*," said Judson, still puzzled. His dad frowned. "When I talk to a student like that, they *expect* me to project my power, and it works because instead, they get a little humor and something that probably embarrasses them a bit." His dad pondered for a moment and then said, "Ward didn't expect to see evidence of your brains, or your bravery either. He strikes me as the bully type, and like many of them, he's not used to anyone standing up to him. He thought you'd be easy to control, being the kid from out of town, and he was sure you'd never respond like you did. I think you put him in shock!" His dad paused again. "But that makes him more dangerous because he may feel he has to put you in your place. I know that's ridiculous to someone like you or me, but it makes perfect sense to someone like Ward."

Judson nodded, and added, "You know, Herman told me that, and so did Sandy Ann. They're a couple of friends with good heads on their shoulders. I guess they feel close enough to be honest with me. I kind of like that, even if I don't always

like what they say!" Jeffrey Hansen nodded, looked at his son for a long minute, and said, "I wondered how Herman would react. That boy's brain is constantly whirring! And Sandy Ann frequently surprises me with what's bouncing around in her head, too. I'm glad you picked those two to hang out with. I'm gonna enjoy being their teacher... and yours." He gave his son a sideways hug. "Remember what I said about not starting anything, please, Jud. This is a small town, everybody is connected, and we *are* the outsiders, after all." Judson nodded.

Judson suddenly remembered something that Herman had brought up twice that afternoon. "Dad, Herman seemed surprised at the things you and I can talk about." Both of them were quiet for a moment, and Mr. Hansen provided the answer that both knew was coming. "Since... since losing your Mother, I tried to hide from trouble, and you know how that worked out." Judson tried not to shudder, but he didn't look at his dad at that moment either, both remembering the drunken rages that had only made things worse. "Since deciding to move up here, we've started a new pattern, and I like it. In a sense, who else do we have but each other? Son, sometimes you need to hear what I'm telling you, like any kid would, and sometimes you surprise me with your own way of looking at things, ways that I still can't always predict. Let's... uh, keep the phone lines open, alright?" His father seemed almost ready to cry at this, and at the painful reminder of their old reality. Judson took this as a cue to hug and leave. Because he felt pretty much the same way—this is good, and we need to keep it!