

Chapter 7

Friday, August 24, 1956, Tony's or Ships Bar or the Mecca, Kodiak

Owen Faltrip was in town for a short break before heading back to Sokroshera Cove to begin the slow process of shutting down the salmon cannery for the winter. Nineteen Fifty-Six had been a good season, and he had no complaints on that end of things. Over 35,000 cases of the "Morning Mountain" brand of canned salmon had shipped this season from Pacific Endeavor Seafoods, making it one of their best seasons ever. It would mean plenty of profits for his investors in Louisiana and a substantial bonus for himself as part owner of the cannery. However, that was not what had prompted him to drink so heavily this evening.

Faltrip was not "celebrating" as the other adults in town were, but was nearly suicidal with anger, frustration, regret, and sorrow. And his self-medicating was none too effective. Walking unsteadily down one of the few sidewalks in town, he entered yet another bar, not even sure which one. But in the untamed Kodiak economy, he was still too sober to prevent the bartender from getting more of his cash. As his eyes adjusted to the dim light in the smoke-filled, reeking tavern, he spotted a table toward the back. A man was sitting there alone, facing him. For some reason Owen sauntered over and asked to join him.

Owen's companion turned out to be the most unusual bar mate he had ever met. Mr. Faltrip had met him already on numerous occasions, but never in a bar! This was Reverend Norman Smith, who ran the mission boat *Evangel* for the Baptists. What was he doing *here*? "Ginger ale," said Norm, when Owen ordered him another round. He ordered whiskey, straight up, for himself. The unusual customer was just there to see some friends, he explained. Bars are one of the few places where some people can relax, and this pastor with the strange ways seemed content to come where the action was.

Within only a few minutes, Owen was telling Norm much more than he planned to, and it wasn't all because of the libations he had consumed. Owen stopped nursing his drink, absorbed in his own story, which he was telling for the first time. The man on the other side of the table listened well and spoke little. Owen had fallen for an Alaskan girl when he served at Fort Shepley during the war. He had been writing to her steadily with no response when he got the offer to return to the Kodiak area and help manage the cannery out at Sokroshera Cove. Now he and his boss had discovered that the local man whom they'd hired to run the cannery store had stolen thousands of dollars from the cannery, and Owen had personally fired him.

"That *bastard*... Billy Selivanoff! I found all my letters tied together with string and stuffed in the back of a desk in the store's office!" spat Faltrip, "Billy didn't even bother with throwing them away—he *wanted* me to find them if I ever came back. He could 'a just blabbed my secrets to her family—'course I'd 'a killed him, and he knew it—but this is *way* worse. Such a cruel thing to do to us..." Owen's intense fury suddenly descended into tears, and his speech was halting. "She... couldn't answer me because... she never knew where I was... she probably thought I had..."

at this point, Faltrip could not go on, but buried his head in his arm on the greasy table.

Norm let the inebriated and overcome Owen collect himself. He didn't look too surprised at the mention of Billy Selivanoff. The man Owen was describing had been downright unfriendly toward the crew of the *Evangel*, on numerous occasions. He had gone out of his way to make it difficult, denying access to the front dock, pretending the boat's necessities like fresh water and fuel were unavailable, even at one point cussing Norm out for bringing his "damn white religion garbage around here." But Norm and Joyce had made too many other friends in Sokroshera Cove, and always found a welcome from everyone else there. One of these friends was Anicia Novikoff, the cook at the mess hall, who always let him use it no matter how much Billy had protested. Even Mr. Ardet, when he was in the village, had broken away to attend a service on several occasions (held in the mess hall, filled to capacity).

But now, Rev. Smith's focus was on Mr. Faltrip and his story. He wouldn't have allowed Billy Selivanoff or anyone else like him to prevent his work, and he didn't let the thought of Billy distract him from the wounded man at the table before him. In fact, the resistance of folks like Billy was nothing compared to the resistance of some of Kodiak's church folk, who, more than anyone else, *should* have understood why this quiet-spoken missionary to the fishing communities would sit down with drunk fishermen in a bar. Norm ignored the self-appointed judges and kept doing what he felt called to do.

In his own way, Norm was as scrappy as the former boxer who sat across from him. When Norm saw that Owen had begun to shake off the tears, he said softly, "May I ask what her name was?" Upon hearing the answer, he said, "*Honestly!* I have been working with her son on an adoption case I think. They've been trying to adopt his second cousins from Karluk since their parents died. If this is the same Rezoff, and I bet it is!"

Mr. Faltrip looked up, suddenly much more alert. "Pariscovia said that her son was staying with family in Karluk, and it must be the same family. How many Rezoffs are there around here?" Norm said, "Just in Karluk and Sokroshera Cove as far as I know." Owen's one burning question finally flowed out of him. "Is she... still around?" Norm shook his head. "She died soon after her youngest son passed away. She had some sort of lung ailment, they tell me."

A few questions later, and Owen was sure. He recognized the lung ailment, and the kid who died was about the right age. It had to be her, and the kid had to be his. He and Pariscovia had produced a son, the son was dead, and now she was gone, too, all without ever knowing how much he still loved her. And that knowledge had been withheld from her in the most perverse way. The injustice and cruelty and sadness of it all was almost too much to bear, and he looked like he was about to collapse.

"Listen," Norm said, his voice firm. "It's my business to know that you can see them again." His eyes were steady on him, and his voice had a confidence that Faltrip had rarely encountered. Norm let Faltrip's own knowledge kick in, rather than resorting to chapter and verse. He remained quiet for some minutes while Owen processed all of this. "I'm going to order a sandwich so they don't bother us." Norm stood up, and walked toward the bar. Owen suddenly noticed how noisy and smoky the place was. Norm spoke a few words to the bartender, and returned to the table. Owen never saw any money change hands. Wonder what that barkeep thinks of our Reverend, here, thought Faltrip, between his own thoughts of Pariscovia and their son. Two plates, one ham and cheese, and the other egg salad, both on Naughton's Bakery's signature "Pullman loaf" white bread, appeared shortly thereafter. They agreed to split them, and although Owen was sure he would have no appetite, he ate everything in short order. Between mouthfuls, Owen thought of something he could do.

When you can't repair the past, you can at least be a blessing in the present, Norm had said, although Faltrip never remembered him saying those exact words. The unusual pastor had a way of letting your own heart listen without seeming to insert much of himself into the conversation. Quietly as possible in the noisy bar, Norm told Owen what he knew of the family and their situation. Faltrip learned that the young man's name was Will Rezoff, that he was married to a lovely Alaskan woman from the Mainland, named Laura, and that they were planning on moving back to Will's family home at Sokroshera Cove if they could find work in the cannery there. Bill Stone, the superintendent of the Baptist Mission, had helped them adopt Will's young second cousins. The kids had lost both their folks within the past year. Their grandma had approved of the adoption once she saw it was Will and his wife that wanted them. Will had lived with her himself during the war while his mom was sick.

Norm thought for a moment, and said, "Herman is I think almost five, and his sister Barbara is about two. I think Will and Laura will make great parents for them." Then he added matter-of-factly, "We took them down to get their new family just a couple of days ago." Norm added, "Will's a good mechanic. He put a gasket in the *Evangel's* light plant on our trip down there, and actually *made* the gasket when the one I bought wouldn't fit right." This was the sort of thing that the versatile captain of the *Evangel* often had to do. But Will's patience, knowledge, and natural skill with all things mechanical had nonetheless impressed him.

Owen raised his head, and asked, "So they—the parents—want jobs with the cannery?" As Norm nodded, Owen actually laughed for the first time since finding the letters. "You just delivered the best recommendation speech in history, Norm." Owen suddenly looked and sounded almost sober. He nodded curtly, as though obeying some unheard military order. "I'll do whatever I can to help them." That last sentence was spoken with the conviction of a solemn oath. In spite of whatever effects alcohol was still having on Faltrip's mind, Norm believed him. "I don't want to tell them my connection to them—I might tell them someday, but not until I feel ready." The Reverend's answer was concise and direct. "Sounds good," Norm smiled, took Faltrip's hand in a firm handshake, and let it go at that. It was about

one in the morning, and the *Evangel*, with his sleeping family aboard, was waiting for him. He left, letting his approval be his goodbye.

A few moments later, Owen Faltrip went up to the bar and offered some money for their meal, but the bartender gave him an embarrassed shake of the head and waved him off, turning quickly to another customer. He began to see that there might be a reason behind all of this after all; he headed toward the doorway with newfound purpose. Owen Faltrip walked carefully out of the bar, and stepped over a passed out fisherman on the sidewalk. He had a feeling that this would be his last visit there.

Friday, August 30, 1963: Sokroshera Cove

Judson stepped up to the counter in the cannery store just as Mrs. Rezoff finished with a customer. She turned to him and smiled. "Are you here for the box from the Smiths?" she asked, and brought it to the counter without waiting for a reply. "The Bazaroff place is just past the Selivanoff's and to the right. It's a log home with red trim—actually Anicia's place." "So the Smiths... do a lot of this kind of thing?" asked Judson.

"You have no idea," said Laura Rezoff. "They helped us more than anyone can know. They helped us adopt Herman and Barbara, and even took us down to Karluk to pick them up once the paperwork came through." Judson looked shocked at finding out such a detail about the kids he'd hung out with so much lately. "Do they know?" Mrs. Rezoff looked puzzled, and asked, "Who? The Smiths?" She laughed, "Oh, you mean the kids. Well, they've been our kids since they were five and two, and when they got a little older, we told them the whole story. But we can't imagine our lives without them, and we're the only parents they really remember. Last summer, we borrowed Mr. Faltrip's boat the *Penny Earned* – it's the smallest seiner, and took it all the way down to Karluk to see what's left of their family down there. So they know. But they also know that we are Mommy and Daddy!" Mrs. Rezoff's face shone, and she said, "There I am, telling you more than I thought I would, again!"

Judson just smiled at Mrs. Rezoff, and then he laughed out loud. "I get it! Mr. Faltrip's boat is named the *Penny Earned*, because he got the money to buy it from working for old 'Penny' Ardet. Does everybody around here name their boats funny names like that?" "Ah-hookh!" said Mrs. Rezoff, resorting to village language, "Most people seem to, anyway. It's a local art form. Oh, I almost forgot. Joyce brought this for Anicia Novikoff – that's Anya Bazaroff's great aunt. She thought Anicia'd enjoy it around the house." Mrs. Rezoff handed Judson an "O. Kraft and Son" shopping bag, and he put it on top of the box of diapers and clothes Mrs. Smith had sent for Anya. But not before he'd snuck a peek inside: a bright pink, fuzzy housecoat that looked like it would keep someone nice and cozy on a cold winter evening. He hefted the box and the bag and headed toward the door.

Mrs. Rezoﬀ called him back. "Do you remember the day Will and Herman had their big argument?" Without waiting for a reply, Laura Rezoﬀ resumed, "Will took oﬀ and hitched a ride into town. He had intended just to get as drunk as he could, for as long as he could." She sighed, and then continued. "He walked into one of the bars, and there was Mr. Smith, sitting at a table. Norm walked him out of there before he could do himself any more harm. Dunno what they talked about, but when he came back home, he was in a lot better shape. I think he's pulling out of it, and this new project at the cannery has also cheered him up. Wonder what they said in that bar?" Mrs. Rezoﬀ shook her head, and so did Judson. "Why am I telling you this..." came Laura's voice as he turned toward the door again. Judson just smiled and nodded at her and left. Who ever heard of a pastor with a floating church, or a reverend that walks into a bar? It seemed like the setup for one of Grandma's jokes, except that all the punch lines seemed not to be funny, but inspiring somehow.

Judson hefted the box, crossed the creek, and turned toward his destination. Everything in this town took only a minute or two to reach. Yet Judson felt like it took forever, even while carrying a fairly light box, and easily balancing the paper shopping bag, to walk down the jeep trail to his destination. He passed the Selivanoff place and turned down a short trail that dipped slightly before rising to reach the Bazaroff house. He noticed that all the exterior walls of the home were cut and notched squared-oﬀ logs, some of which were showing rot, and that this house was one of only a few in the village to have upstairs rooms. A large dormer had a clear view of the west corner of the cove across their neighbors' back yard. It had two windows, side by side, and he could see white curtains inside. The dormer had wide siding of bare planks, which had faded to the same dark shade of brownish gray as the old logs. All the windows and sills and the front door frame of the house were outlined with flat boards painted bright red, which gave the place a more cleaned-up look.

He glanced over his shoulder to look at the Selivanoff house, bigger, with siding, and with an even larger dormer that had a commanding view of the center of the cove. Even though built on land that was several feet lower than the level of the Bazaroff house, it towered higher than its closest neighbor, and was more elegant and formal-looking with its plank siding, larger dormer, and more prominent peak. But clearly, both homes were of the same Russian design. The Bazaroffs must be connected with one of the oldest families in town to live in what must be as old a home as the one he had just passed. Perhaps the Selivanoff home had been built after Anicia's, and was built larger on purpose. He shook that thought away; here he was judging all of his neighbors again. As he approached Anicia Novikoff's weather-beaten, red-trimmed old home, he remembered that Anicia, she the future owner of a bright pink housecoat, was both Anya Bazaroff's great aunt and Will Rezoﬀ's grandmother on his mom's side. Villages give a whole new meaning to the term "small world!" thought Judson. He realized he couldn't delay any longer, and ascended the rickety steps to knock on an ancient-looking wooden door painted a cheery red.

Miss Anya met him at the door. An almost overpowering smell of ammonia greeted him—dirty diapers. Competing with the pile of filthy cloth diapers was the smell of fresh cigarette smoke and something else he couldn't identify. The woman before him was dressed in tight button-up jeans with the top button provocatively open. Anya had cut the pant legs several inches above the knee, the first time Judson had seen "shorts" since arriving in the village. Anya had on a gray tank top with the name of some school on it—Judson was trying with great effort not to look too closely—and she had pulled it tight and tied it in the back, making a circle of bare skin around her middle that young Judson was also trying hard not to notice.

The effect of her wardrobe was to over-emphasize every curve. Judson saw without meaning to that she didn't seem to be wearing a bra. Her hair was an amber shade of blonde, but she was definitely a blonde. She had wide set, large almond eyes, exotic and catlike. And her eyes were blue. Her eyes were *blue!* Jakob had mentioned sort of liking her once—and of her being in trouble when they were younger. Dammit, I don't want to know this; I don't want to solve this, he thought, shuddering involuntarily. He wished fervently that he could be somewhere else, anywhere else at that moment.

He stammered his words, faced as he was with her intense projection of femaleness, if not femininity. Finally he blurted out that the box was from the Smiths and the bag was for her aunt. His mind raced; he remembered now where he'd seen women dressed much like this, except that they would have added cowboy hats. He'd stopped with his dad and grandma in Gallup, New Mexico on a hot summer Saturday evening. Pulling into a gas station at the east end of town, their car had almost immediately been surrounded by panhandling drunks, and a couple of the cowboy hat girls had tapped on the window for his dad's attention. They were practically on empty when his dad found another gas station thirty miles down the road, one that didn't have the extra cast members. Judson remembered asking his grandma what those women were doing there, and having his dad cut her off, something he rarely did. Judson's strongest impression of the place was that it was like being in some zombie movie.

And now he looked across a dirty, cluttered kitchen into a mostly open doorway, where an elderly-looking lady sat with her back to the door, in a rocking chair that was only barely moving. He heard a slight noise, and turned back. Anya was sitting on a kitchen chair now, in front and slightly below him. This somehow increased the number of things he couldn't look at exponentially. He noticed dumbly that the shopping bag was still in his hand; what had he done with the box? Oh, she'd taken it. Good. She took the bag, too, and immediately pulled out the pink housecoat. She stood up, looking at it as though eyeing an evening gown at Macys. Then she twirled her hair, pulled the robe around her like a shaky imitation of a model with an expensive fur, and stared at Judson with slightly wider eyes.

Sheesh! I wish I could make Sandy Ann's Vomit Face right now, he thought. Sandy Ann was a cool breeze and a light rain shower on an April morning compared to this stench of a place and this wreck of a woman. "Th... that's for your aunt," Judson reminded her. "I'm... *gonna* give it to her," came Anya's voice, whiny and with a

hint of resentment. This woman knew very well what her actions were doing to him, and she was enjoying tormenting him. Just then the baby cried from the next room, and Judson thought he saw movement from another door, but wasn't sure.

At about the same moment, Anya's twirling upset a half-full gallon jug of Italian Swiss Colony Port, the village symbol of serious drinking, that had been parked on the cluttered floor. She bent down quickly to right the jug and save some of its contents, nearly falling over in the process, and he used that as the order to eject. He left as casually but as quickly as he could. As he descended the steps and filled his lungs with clean fresh air, his mind raced, trying to clear the fog that Anya had placed there. That was... *wrong*, he assured himself, and immediately began wracking his brain for anything he could possibly have done to provoke such a sickening and disturbing display. He couldn't think of a single thing, but felt guilty and dirty anyway. He shuddered, still trying to clear the fog.

He was only a few feet past the steps, less than halfway up the grassy pathway that passed the Selivanoff house, when a fist hit him in the left shoulder, from behind. He spun around to see Ward, his face contorted with rage. "Stop messin' with my Mom!" A fist with one knuckle raised, calculated to leave a bruise, hit Judson in his right arm, just above the elbow. The pain was intense, but Judson managed to stay on his feet.

He had now bypassed all his mental safeguards and high minded self-talk, and all the compliments he'd received about not being the type to hold grudges and all that. He was now simply in the mood to survive. The pain had cleared the fog Anya had imposed on him, and red-hot anger had replaced it. He was surprised at the vicious tone of his own voice. "So *that* was your *mom*? Well, maybe your mommy should stop parading around like some kind of damn Gallup hooker—and with a seventh grader, too! Could you please explain what *you* think she was doing? What the *hell*? Makes me wanna PUKE!" He practically shouted the last word.

Ward looked even more enraged, if that were possible. Ward didn't get the Gallup reference, of course, and hated it when Judson seemed to talk over his head. Judson's words had made things worse with Ward, and it wasn't the first time. Ward's eyes narrowed, as he spat back a reply, "I'll help ya puke, *asshole!*" He swung hard at Judson's stomach. Suddenly, Jud Hansen was back on a blue mat at school, with his dad standing on the sidelines watching his moves and waiting to walk him home. With speed fed by rage, and without much thought, he turned, pushed firmly downward with one hand while pulling with the other, and swept sideways with one foot. An instant later, after Judson released his twisted arm, Ward had landed nose first in the road, unable to use his other arm to slow his descent. Judson's training told him to pull back before anyone actually got hurt, but this time, he'd followed through with all the energy he could muster. Judson had let Ward hit the ground hard, rather than pulling him up as he would have done on the mat with a sparring partner. And he wouldn't have had to use quite that much force when he twisted Ward's arm, either.

It was an easy defense move, but Ward had not been expecting it, or anything at all, from this young outsider. Ward had been used to bullying and threatening, and was sure that the smaller and slighter Judson would simply back down. Judson was likewise shocked at his own violent reaction, verging on murderous rage. So much for self-control and fitting in with the neighborhood, thought Judson glumly. Now Ward lay on the ground at his feet, blood streaming from his nose, and moaning something about his arm being broken. Judson was sure it wasn't, but it might feel that way for a day or two. And Ward was probably lucky that his nose had hit a grassy pathway and not a sidewalk somewhere.

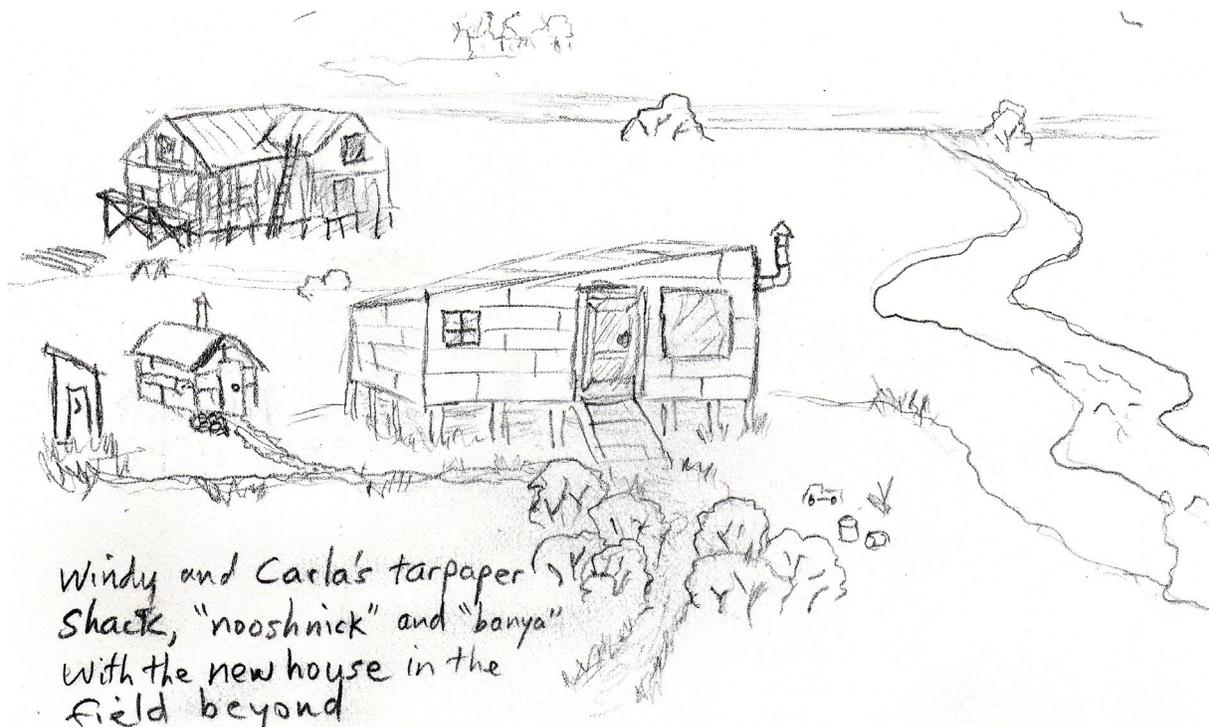
Judson suddenly remembered a joke his grandma had told him, to the consternation of his dad. He recited it over the still moaning Ward, ending in a near shout of anger. "I took you to the farm and you slapped my cow, so *I* decided to KICK YOUR ASS!" It wasn't the best joke in the world, but the punch line brought Judson momentary relief from his anger. Judson left Ward in a heap on the trail, after giving him a cold, murderous stare that dared Ward to try to follow him. He walked home in a daze, shocked at his anger, but not quite ready to disagree with it, either. Meanwhile, the tension from the conflict kept sending little stabs to the pit of his stomach and across his chest, and even interfering with his breathing. As he climbed the steps to the apartment in the school, he thought, so if I really was the big ass-kicking winner today, why do I feel so awful?

Later that afternoon, Judson had collected himself a bit, and wandered back to the store, not for any particular reason. Perhaps he hoped that hanging around peaceful, accepting people like Laura Rezoff and the Lindseths would calm his still frightfully agitated soul. Judson secretly hoped that strolling into the store was the least conspicuous way to find them. The anxious pain in his chest had faded for the most part, but he still had so much that he couldn't quite wrap his brain around. Every now and then, when he thought too deeply about what had just happened, back came the arrows and daggers across his chest and in the pit of his stomach. Then he had to mentally distract his emotions and change the subject. So now, he was back in the store, distracting himself with the already-familiar shelves and aisles. He felt lucky that the bruise on his shoulder and the bruise on his arm were hiding beneath clothing; he really didn't want to talk about this encounter, especially with the other kids. He thought that maybe Laura Rezoff would be the person to talk to, and realized he was starting to treat her more and more like an older sister, if not as a mother figure.

He had almost decided not to push his familiarity too far today. Besides, there was part of him that really wasn't interested in anyone finding out about this particular conflict. Mrs. Rezoff saved him the trouble, interrupting his internal debate with a request for another errand. "Jay-Jay, I must be losing my mind. The Smiths left another bag—this one's for Windy and Carla. Could you run it up there?" Judson's face and mood brightened; he was more than happy to go in the opposite direction, away from Ward's place, away from that whole situation. In the back of his still-whirling mind, he wondered how he was going to survive here if he'd already gotten involved in such a serious confrontation. He shoved that thought aside with some effort, hoping a trip to Windy and Carla's would be a strong enough diversion. What

might have seemed to Laura to be his cheerful eagerness was in fact enormous relief.

He peeked in this bag, which was quite a bit heavier than Anicia's housecoat had been. Inside were a collection of puzzles made of big wooden pieces for little Maria, and games like Candy Land and Chutes and Ladders for Jimmy to play with his mom. A loose collection of colorful plastic blocks filled the bottom of the bag; the Smiths had not bothered to include the packaging, but they looked unused. Joyce had likely seen the kids playing by the creek, and realized that they probably didn't have many rainy day activities. Or this was Laura's doing, with Mrs. Smith's assistance. Well, now they would have something to play with on rainy days.



When Judson climbed the slightly odd-sized stairs, he knocked on a plywood door, which was promptly opened by Mrs. Carla Bazaroff. She was wearing a plain cotton dress that looked homemade, but had a cheery butterfly and leaf pattern which merely emphasized Carla's sunny disposition. Mrs. Bazaroff's medium-brown hair was cut in a pageboy style, the product of her own mirror and scissors, Judson guessed. The hairdo framed a round face that was cheerful and eyes that were a clear light brown. When she smiled at him, "You could have toasted marshmallows from the warmth," he later told Sandy Ann, who agreed wholeheartedly with his assessment. Most people on the planet would like Carla Bazaroff.

Judson told Carla his errand and stepped into the room, thereby discovering that she was only barely taller than him. 'Lil' Carla,' thought Judson, remembering their boat, and recognizing in its name both an apt description and a husband's warm affection. Carla took the bag, and carried it to a homemade table under the new picture window. The window revealed a stunning view of the southeastern edge of

Mount Sokroshera and the whole village beyond the creek. The window was also the only illumination in the room, although on the far wall, two mirrors gave a good illusion of more windows.

The little ones, who had been eating some cold cereal at the far end of the table, squealed and clapped as the various items appeared from the bag. Carla correctly guessed their purpose. "We'll save these to play with when it's raining outside!" She let little Maria have a go at a wooden animal puzzle anyway. "Is it my buifday?" asked a slightly grubby Jimmy, clutching his mom's dress and peering shyly at Judson from a vantage point slightly behind her. Maria squealed and clapped as a bright blue elephant slipped neatly into its slot in the puzzle. "No, it's not your birthday. Mrs. Smith just wanted you to have some toys for the rainy days." "Is it wayning tomowwow?" It was a completely logical question for Jimmy to ask. His mother ruffled his hair and gave him a sideways hug. "Oh, I'm sure it probably will be," she said, as though that would be the greatest thing ever.

Meanwhile, as Carla looked down at her young son, Judson peeked around the room. Someone had given them a big overstuffed couch, which rested beneath the mirror on the far wall. Curtains made of blankets formed the doors to the other two rooms. On the table was a small wooden cutting board with a loaf of homemade bread that had already been sliced into; Carla had carefully put away the knife. Beyond the table was a cheery oil stove with a teakettle that periodically emitted a tiny wisp of steam. Judson noticed a large galvanized metal tub hanging on a hook to the left of the big window. Suitable for dishwashing, children's bath time, and even clothes washing, Judson reasoned, remembering his conversation with Laura in the store.

Taking up every available wall space, up to about five feet high, Blazo boxes placed on their sides made for fantastic storage. Oilcloth shelf liners of various cheerful color combinations were carefully folded over beneath each box, making elegant shelves out of the old fuel storage containers. Closest to the stove, the Blazo boxes contained dishes and cooking pots, but by the door where he had entered, there were books, blankets, and towels and such. He noticed some shelves had stacks of cans: Dinty Moore beef stew, canned vegetables, fruit, and Campbell's soup of various varieties, Avocet canned whole milk, rectangular Spam and trapezoidal Hormel corned beef, and boxes of pilot bread and saltine crackers. Judson noted without surprise that the pantry consisted of a near replica of the inventory list of the company store. There was a brightly decorated tin filled with animal crackers, and several cake mix boxes, items that seemed to have been procured from Kodiak. Afraid that his curiosity might be shifting to nosiness, Judson glanced down.

A handful of pull toys and stuffed animals were scattered across the plywood floor, which Windy had painted shiny light gray to help distribute the limited light from the window. The shack was, by any estimation, a humble home for people of limited means. But the whole place was reasonably neat and clean, especially considering the presence of the two little dynamos that were so enthusiastically inspecting their rainy day gifts. And it was so cozy and welcoming that Judson

began to think he'd like to build his own plywood cabin someday. He pushed aside any thought of who would be his Carla.

Judson could have bet any amount of money that the occupants of that home were simply not in the habit of complaining about their lot in life. And they were richer than Midas compared to any number of Hollywood celebrities working through their latest divorces in empty mansions. Judson prepared to leave, but not before he complimented Carla on the house being built behind their shack. "Oh, that's all Windy's work," she said proudly. "We hope he can finish it if he gets a good job at the cannery. He's on the list for several jobs." This was a hopeful place, an optimistic place. One could see why Windy hadn't taken to drink. Tarpaper shack or no, this little home was an oasis, and this lil' Carla was, besides being a doll, Wendell's own personal angel. The fact that Wendell Bazaroff was actually Anya's younger brother was almost beyond imagining.

Judson said his goodbyes, accompanied by enthusiastic waves from the two young ones, and another sunny smile from Carla. He left, mulling the stark contrasts he had witnessed that day. As he walked lightly down the salmonberry trail, he thought that Ward would do a good deal better working with Windy than with the likes of Billy Jr. While passing the Kurtashkins' home, Judson noticed a footpath through the bushes to the side of their house. A spigot and a short section of green hose peeked out from under the pilings. What would Petey and Dottie ever have to water over here in the wild salmonberry patch? Then he noticed that the trail angled toward the Bazaroff home. Their neighbors had provided a water supply for the young family.

Monday, September 2, 1963: Labor Day in Sokroshera Cove

Labor Day began with clouds and a light mist, but by mid-morning, it was partly cloudy, and by noon, it was mostly sunny. Catch it while you can, thought Judson, now more experienced in the quick changes the weather was in the habit of making. Mr. and Mrs. Lindseth, Mrs. Rezoff and Marla Selivanoff were up at the west end of the runway, past the road that went down to the old abandoned pump house and the lakeshore. There, Howell Lindseth and the kids who had already congregated had built a huge bonfire on the rusted metal plates of the airstrip. Why not, thought Judson. It's flat and far from anything dangerous, and the runway is certainly not being used for anything.

The ladies and a couple of the kids were laying out hot dog supplies on the folding tables that Mr. Hansen had found standing in a closet in the unused front classroom of the school. At twelve noon sharp, Mr. Faltrip closed the store and drove the fire truck up the road toward the airstrip. As he turned the corner from the dock to the dirt road, he flipped on the siren, and kept it on until he was down close to the stand of spruce trees where the kids had made their rope swings. Then he turned around in the driveway that went past the Rezoff's place down to the Truck Brothers' house, and headed back across the creek to the airstrip road.

The call to lunch had been made. The Truck Brothers arrived soon after in parade style, the old yellow Dodge leading the Ford, honking their horns occasionally. The boom truck had colorful flags hanging from its cables. The town was primed to have some fun. Inside the trucks and piled into the beds were almost all the inhabitants of the town, including old Anicia Novikoff and Anya Bazaroff and her baby, held at the moment by her daughter April, riding in Danny's truck. A few minutes later, the Selivanoff family arrived on foot, Paris and Sonya skipping down the road and little Alexander struggling to keep up.

Mr. Hansen and Judson arrived just before the Selivanoffs, and Jeffrey Hansen made sure to greet each future student in turn. "Tomorrow's our big day," he said to the twins and Alexander, who he'd only met once before on the day he'd arrived. He smiled and shook their hands just as he had before. Trying not to surprise or disturb the ones he doesn't know yet, Judson reasoned. Dad isn't calculating, just people-centered, and especially kid-centered, Judson noticed. He'd probably notice a lot of things like that in the future, since he'd never been a student in his father's class before.

Eagle and Jake, "the Holy Terrors" by their own admission, showed up. They were given an entirely practical task this time, one that required a bit of village maturity, and one that they were delighted to do. Around the edges of the lake, especially on the far side and down by east beach, were large clumps of alder brush, a leggy sort of shrub with sweet-smelling leaves. The alder branches made the best "weenie roasting" sticks, and the boys came back with a large armload each. The sticks were immediately pressed into service, and Mrs. Rezoff praised the boys for the nice, sharp points they'd whittled on each end.

Herman went down to the lake taking Judson with him, and together they hauled up a large washtub filled with cans of soda placed there courtesy of Mr. Faltrip the night before. They dragged the tub, which was under the water, onto the muddy beach, then poured most of the water out so they could carry it. A second tub of sodas awaited them, still submerged, so they came back for it and repeated the process. The tubs were almost too much for the boys to carry, even between them, but neither wanted to admit that. On the second run, as they were trying to tip the water out of the tub without losing soda cans, Judson slipped, and fell face first into the shallow water of the shoreline. Nothing damaged but his pride, he scrambled up, both boys laughing, and got most of the mud off his face before they carried the second tub to the party. Judson told his dad he'd change after lunch; he didn't want to miss any of the fun.

In short order, everyone had roasted their hot dogs and got plates of grub, grabbed sodas, and sat down in the tall grass on the edge of the runway. Laura Rezoff made a plate for Anicia Novikoff, while Anya got into a rather stiff-looking conversation with Mrs. Selivanoff. The baby had been passed off to Eagle, who was none too happy about it, leaving Jake the younger chomping at the bit. April made her escape, and was off playing with the twins and Barbara. When Carla arrived, she suddenly seemed to have inherited the baby along with her own Jimmy and Maria, but Carla was as cheery as ever, and Anya's baby was giggling and cooing.

"Where's Ward?" asked Anya. Billy Jr. replied, "Oh, he's probably finishing up some of the stuff I gave him to do on the boat. He should be along any minute." Sandy Ann was looking for Judson; when she found him, she burst out laughing, guessing what had just happened at the lake. "What are you now, a frog? Or maybe a cow pie? So you gonna go change?" Judson told her he wanted to go ahead and finish his lunch first.

Just as Mr. Faltrip was about to set up the fire truck for a demonstration, he remembered something. He called to Mr. Lindseth. "Hey, I need to deliver some stuff to the school for tomorrow. Better do it while I'm thinking about it. Could we use your jeep? I could use an extra set of hands." They roared off down the road in the direction of the cannery. Comfortably full of hot dogs and soda, Judson decided it was time to go change his wet and muddy clothes. He walked across the meadow toward the school, a shorter distance home than any of the others had, since the school was also at the west end of town.

As he walked up the side steps that led to the apartment, Judson heard a low *whoosh* and a scream. He rushed in, looked in the hallway toward their apartment door, and saw a wall of flame. On his back, with his arms in front of his face, and with flames rising from his clothing, was Ward Bazaroff. Suddenly Judson's world went into slow motion. The only thing he could remember from his fire safety drills at school was the word "smother." He saw his thick winter coat hanging on a hook near the classroom door, grabbed it, and threw himself on Ward. Then when he saw that the coat had stopped the flames, he slid his arms under Ward's armpits from behind and dragged him toward the door and the stairs beyond. The flames had already covered his apartment door, were racing across the ceiling, and within moments would reach the open door of the classroom. He pulled Ward out of the door and unceremoniously dragged him down the front steps. He backed straight into Mr. Faltrip.

Owen and Howell had driven to the cannery to pick up the four new fire extinguishers that Faltrip had ordered, and were still at the far end of the play yard when they saw Judson rush inside, and then the first puff of smoke. Mr. Faltrip had just started up the stairs with one of the extinguishers when Judson and Ward backed into him. "You help the kid. I'll start trying to stop this thing!" shouted Mr. Faltrip, rushing through the door with the first extinguisher, pulling the pin as he went.

Over at the airfield, Danny glanced over toward the school, and saw the smoke. He grabbed his brother Jake and started up his Ford. Danny raced the pickup across the meadow toward the school, ignoring the bone-crunching ride, eyes focused on the smoking building. He pulled to a stop with a screech a few feet from where Mr. Lindseth was bending over the moaning body of Ward Bazaroff. "Jakob, help," he shouted, seeing the other fire extinguishers in the back of the jeep and grabbing one. Mr. Lindseth, relieved of medic duty, grabbed another and bounded up the stairs to join the battle against the flames. Judson had a thought in the midst of his confusion. He grabbed the fourth extinguisher and headed into the school through the other door. He ducked into the unused classroom and through the closet

passageway, facing a room already filling with smoke. Aim low, he remembered. How do you get these things to work? But he was already taking in too much of the smoke and hot gasses. He reflexively coughed, which just caused him to inhale even more smoke. Before he could take another step, he felt the fire extinguisher clatter to the floor beside him as the world went black.

Judson opened his eyes and looked up into many faces, but almost immediately, he closed them again. His eyes burned as if he'd just poured sand into them, and he was having trouble breathing. "Did you know your clothes were steaming when they dragged you out?" It was young Jake's voice. The elder Jake said, "When I saw him take the extinguisher and head toward the other door, I knew it might go badly for him, so I left Ward with Betty and went in after him." Noticing that Judson seemed to be conscious and listening, he added, "You got guts, Jay-Jay, I'll vouch for that!"

"You've got more bravery than sense, young man," came the sound of his father's voice, but he could tell his dad was having a hard time keeping his voice under control. "Let's carefully get these young men to the superintendent's apartment—there's extra beds there. We can keep track of them until the Coast Guard Albatross arrives. Did Laura make the call?" "Yes, they gave an ETA of about an hour and fifteen minutes. We'll need to have someone meet the plane at the beach, and we'll need a skiff to transport both boys out. The Albatross probably won't try coming up on the beach." That would be Mr. Faltrip's voice and then Mr. Rezoff's voice. "Thank you for driving the fire truck up, Jeffrey and Windy. You got the hoses hooked up just as we emptied the last extinguisher." That was Faltrip again, coughing a bit himself.

Why can't I look around? Judson realized that he was wheezing and that he was right on the edge of passing out again. He couldn't move his fingers, and his hands hurt a lot. He realized they were wrapped in something soft and constricting. Truck Brother Jake's voice broke through Judson's muddled thoughts and said, "Jay-Jay, you took in a lot of smoke, so don't try to talk. Can you understand what I'm saying?" Judson nodded. A cool, damp cloth was placed on his face, over his eyes. "Help me get Ward," he heard a voice say, and in a second or two he was being lifted into the back of a truck. Danny's most likely. He could tell that the driver was being extra careful, but it also seemed that they were driving on the meadow, not on a road.

Soon they made a sharp right turn and went uphill. The superintendent's house driveway, he realized. He seemed to have been left alone as they carried Ward into the spare bedroom of the house, and he could hear them quietly giving instructions to each other: "A little higher, no, watch out for the door jamb there... Ok, we're clear." Yet he wasn't quite alone. A hand touched his shoulder, and a rather moist voice asked, "You ok, Jay-Jay?" it was Sandy Ann, who sounded like she was crying. She whispered something that sounded like "*Wóspodee*" and sobbed. He decided to nod.

Suddenly, there were voices around him again, and he felt himself being lifted and carried. He gave up trying to visualize it, and just listened. So many people helping out, so many concerned voices. He guessed he'd probably be fine, a couple of days of rest and maybe a few weeks of bandages. He wondered what his hands looked like right then. But how was Ward? He realized that he really *did* want to know, and that fact brought tears and fresh pain to his eyes; thankfully, they were under the cloth and no one would notice.

Judson listened to the voices; he guessed he was in some kind of spare bedroom with guest beds on either side, and that he was in one and Ward was in the other. "We need to keep him awake, at least until the medics get here," Truck Brother Jake was saying. "Ward, I want you to talk to me. You're going to be alright, do you understand that?" Ward had inhaled less smoke than Judson had, thanks to being dragged out almost immediately at floor level. He had a voice, and it sounded almost angry. "Yes, but I don't deserve to be. Who saved my life?" "Jay-Jay Hansen dragged you out and put out your clothes, so I guess he did," said the elder Jake, and by the sound of his voice, Judson could tell that the man had turned to look at his other patient. Ward was wracked with sobs, and "Bandage Man" Jakob did his best to calm him down. A sweet little "Shhh... there, there now..." would hardly work in this setting, so Bandage Man Jake settled on "Yes, I know, son. But we'll think about all of that later. In the meantime, all of us, and I mean *all* of us, are happy you're still with us."

"That's... for sure," said a trembling female voice that Judson didn't immediately recognize. There was a clink of glasses, and soon voices were telling both patients to sip the water that had been brought. Judson's head was gently lifted and the glass put to his lips. The unidentified female voice continued, "Ward, I know you screwed up. But don't worry about how you're gonna look, ok? Can you see this?" Judson heard a sound he couldn't quite identify, and Mrs. Lindseth's voice from the doorway, "Marla, put your shirt down, for goodness sake!" Ward just asked quietly, "How did you get all those scars?" "I pulled a pan of hot soup down on me when I was three, and it hit me right in the tummy. Pretty cute, huh?"

Ward said something that Judson couldn't hear, and Marla giggled. Then she turned toward *his* bed, because the voice got progressively louder until he could tell she was standing right beside him. "Thank you for saving Ward. Somebody else might not have tried." She paused, and Judson could tell she was getting a little misty. "You've brought a lot of excitement to this town, Jay-Jay." He managed a weak smile, but broke into coughing. Truck Brother Jake shooed everyone out. "Just rest here—we're getting you some help. You're going to town on the Coastie Limo!"

Jake the former medic stood in the doorway talking quietly to another person that Judson couldn't identify—someone female and upset. Jakob was comforting her, and Judson guessed correctly that she had buried her face in his chest and that she was sobbing. "So many mistakes... my fault... major mess of things... he'll need your help when he gets back... obviously needs some guidance... when are you gonna tell him the truth, Jakob?" - *Anya*.

Judson thought he heard the sound of an airplane in the dim fog of his consciousness; the Coast Guard's Albatross amphibian buzzed the village before landing in the cove. In what seemed like only moments, he was dimly aware of being placed on a Coast Guard stretcher, the sound of short, technical commands, the feel of a needle poked in his arm, the sting of eye drops and the soft gauze pads placed on his eyelids, and a breathing mask pulled very gently over his nose and mouth. But all went gray again by the time he and Ward were carefully ferried on Mr. Lindseth's Opheim skiff out to the huge plane floating in the bay, and the Albatross took off and headed toward the Kodiak Naval Air Station and a waiting ambulance.