

## **Chapter 8**

### **Friday, September 6, 1963: Sokroshera Cove, Pacific Endeavor Seafoods' mess hall**

To the delight of his new friends in Sokroshera Cove, Judson returned by Wednesday that week. Judson had first-degree burns to the cheeks, nose, and forehead, and second-degree burns to both sides of his hands from trying to get close with the extinguisher and from his first efforts to smother the flames on Ward's clothing. Funny how he really hadn't felt any of that as it happened. He only remembered coughing and passing out. It had probably gone easier for him because he had still been wearing wet clothes from falling in the lake. By far the most serious medical concern was that he had breathed in a lot of smoke and hot gasses from close proximity to the fire.

After carefully observing him, Dr. Johnson at Griffin Memorial Hospital said it looked like he wasn't in danger of pneumonia, and that his lungs had done a good job of clearing themselves. Judson could vouch for that. He never wanted to cough up soot like that ever again. "Better not take up smoking, then," the doctor had said with a smile, and sent him home with a supply of ointments, gauze, eye drops, and cough medicine. When the Kodiak Airways Widgeon taxied up onto Stepan's Beach and turned around, there had been a small welcoming committee waiting for the Hansens, and his new friends on the beach mustered a loud cheer. The Lindseth's jeep ferried them to the superintendent's house, followed by excited kids the whole way. Judson felt a little embarrassed by it all. Mr. Faltrip met them there, as he had weeks earlier at the school, and informed them that the superintendent's residence was theirs until the school was repaired.

Judson had been released after just a couple of days, but it would take two or three weeks, with careful monitoring by Truck Brother Jake, before all of his bandages could come off. Mr. Pedersen nodded appreciatively at the stash of medicines provided by Dr. Johnson, who understood well what a village would and would not have available. He told Mr. Hansen to keep the bottle of cough medicine handy should Judson have any renewed trouble with his breathing.

Several of the parents in the town realized that it would take a few more days to organize a place to hold classes, and Mr. Hansen might need more than a day or two to help take care of his son. On Friday night, in a meeting in the mess hall over Mrs. Lindseth's wonderful coffee and cookies, they agreed to delay the start of school a week. The cannery would not be ready for processing crab for at least a month; therefore, Mr. Hansen could hold classes here in the mess hall, suggested Mr. Faltrip. They'd come up with something creative for coffee breaks once the cannery started operations, so that classes could be impacted as little as possible.

As for the Hansens, they were already residents of the superintendent's house at Mr. Faltrip's insistence. The three-bedroom apartment would give Mr. Hansen a proper office, since his desk was a smoky, soggy mess back at the school. Ouzinkie

Grade School sent over boxes of leftover books, and Mrs. Smith was able to provide crayons, pencils, erasers, some Big Chief writing tablets, and even a pencil sharpener from supplies that people had donated to the Mission. Mr. Faltrip, noticing that their "school" would lack a proper blackboard, built a plywood frame with a nifty set of clips at the top, and provided a roll of butcher paper and markers from his unusual beef operation, that would work for tasks requiring a large writing surface. Mr. Hansen felt frankly overwhelmed by how fast the people of Sokroshera Cove could rally and focus their energies when required. It was one indication of how deeply grateful many in the village were to have a schoolteacher this year.

The original school building was a major concern, at least in the long run. The fire had gutted the outer hallway and the closet of the first bedroom of the apartment, where it had rendered most of Mr. Hansen's clothes unusable. And the entire classroom that had been so carefully cleaned up and prepared was now soot-covered and water-soaked, with fire damage all around the hall door. All of the books on the shelves in the classroom had been damaged beyond repair by the water that had saved the building, a testament to the vaunted potency of Mr. Faltrip's fire truck. However, the school reading library, which Mr. Hansen had set up in the unused front classroom, had escaped damage, except for a heavy smoke odor. Whatever else had happened to be stored there and not in the main classroom had survived as well, including some of the art supplies like construction paper, glue, scissors, some spiral notebooks, and the paper cutter. Young Jake the movie narrator would be pleased to learn that the school's movie projector, screen, and even a few old movies that Mr. Hansen had brought down earlier from a box in the attic were undamaged in a closet in the front room.

The folks at the meeting hoped that demolition and renovation could begin immediately. But Mr. Hansen reminded them that the financial responsibility for the school rested on the Federal Government, since the school was still under the authority of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the State of Alaska. He thought that this might be the perfect time to press for a new school facility, since the cannery would soon be in operation and the village was no longer in immediate danger of disappearing. He described a layout he had seen in the Hopi Nation in Arizona, one with classrooms and a gym / multipurpose room. Mr. Hansen asked permission to write letters to explore that possibility, and the folks in the meeting were enthusiastic. "No harm in trying. If they don't come through, then we'll start repairing the old one," said Wendell "Windy" Bazaroff, eager to help, who had already been working with Mr. Lindseth and Will to clear out some of the debris from the fire.

The worst problem of all was a legal and moral dilemma: what to do about Ward. He had clearly set the fire. He had admitted exactly what he had done when he spoke to Truck Brother Jake, who flew into town the following morning to be with him in the hospital. Ward explained that on the day of the picnic he was still furious with Judson for their previous altercations. So he had broken the lock to the school's fuel shed and poured about half a cup of Blazo into a bean can he'd found in the trash. A village kid like him should have known how Blazo had gotten its name, but he had operated out of blind rage. He poured the Blazo on the floor

around the door to the apartment, and when he stepped back to light it, his clothes caught on fire as the fuel exploded in the small hallway. Designed to be flammable vapor, the Blazo had worked perfectly in the confined space. Ward had reflexively put up his arms to cover his face, and that was the only thing that saved it from being badly burned, but his hands and upper arms would likely have permanent scarring, and his fingers would probably require surgery to regain usefulness. "I saw the fire truck driving around, and thought I'd only scare the teacher and his kid," he had sobbed. "Now look at me!"

Now the adults around the long table in the mess hall had to decide his fate. If they reported it just as it came down, Ward would be crippled *and* have to go to court, face a trial, and serve some kind of sentence. Several ideas were tossed about to try to adjust the story so that Ward would not face charges. But Laura, and Danny and Mr. Hansen all expressed concerns with proposing an outright lie. The rest seemed to realize that this was not a good time to get ethically ambiguous, when so many townspeople were firsthand witnesses to what had actually happened. In the end, they all decided to state that Ward had been involved in an accident involving pressure appliance fuel, and that was true enough. They also mentioned that the village was having a cookout at the time, implying that young Ward had merely been trying to start a portable cook stove, but nobody mentioned why he would have done so in the hallway of the school. By concentrating on the heroic efforts of the men who arrived at almost the same time, and Judson, who had risked his own safety to drag Ward out of harm's way, they hoped to deflect attention long enough for the authorities to move on to other difficulties elsewhere.

Their cover story worked. The State Troopers often took their cues from the community, and in this instance, no one was pushing for a prosecution. Besides, in every rural community, there were stories of folks from kids to grandmas who had been injured, some seriously, others even fatally, by the explosive effects of various fuels. And since the school did indeed have an apartment where cooking regularly took place, a fire in the school was apparently less suspicious. But another factor in Ward's favor was a shooting at a cannery on the South End the day after the fire, which looked to the State Troopers like attempted murder. Their attention was thus diverted from a simple purported accident at a school.

The Troopers eventually just sent a form letter for Mr. Hansen to fill out. With the guidance of Laura and Danny, he phrased his responses in a way that satisfied the Troopers and their own desire to stay within the truth. And that was the end of it. Ward likely faced months of painful rehabilitation, and that was bound to be punishment enough. The only real objection to this path of forgiveness came from Billy Selivanoff Jr., who demanded a harsher punishment for his young deckhand. Laura, Danny, and Will talked him down off that cliff by reminding him that his own daughter might never forgive him if young Ward didn't get to come home.

For some time after the others had left, the Rezoffs, the Lindseths, and Mr. Hansen sat at the long table and contemplated even longer thoughts. Laura was the first to say what was on their minds. "I know you can't stop some people from doing evil things, but look at how much worse it could have been!" Jeffrey Hansen said softly,

"It's a mercy... that my boy is back with us." He had tears in his eyes, and both Will, sitting beside him, and Laura, sitting across from him, laid their hands on his arms, and nodded. He put his head down for a few seconds, and nobody minded.

Laura pondered a moment when all the comments had died down. "I wonder what Norm Smith would say about this?" Howie stated quickly, "He'd probably say we were damn lucky!" and broke out in a laugh. "Not even close, Howie! He wouldn't say those words, or even have that thought," retorted Betty Lindseth. Laura added quietly, "He'd say something about 'God working out all things for the good,' or however the saying goes." Betty added, "That's what happened here, at least so far," added Betty. Howie Lindseth shook his head, still arguing with his suddenly devout-sounding wife. "Well if you want to bring God into this, I say, if He was really involved, he would 'a stopped Ward from doing anything in the first place." Betty waved her hand, as though trying to get his attention, then cleared her throat. "*What* are you talking about?" she said with a little smile creeping across her face, "God won't even make you agree with *me*, even when I'm right!"

"Alright, you two. Very cute. But time out. There *are* some good things that may come of this." Will looked at Mr. Lindseth and continued, "I *think* our new foreman Jakob Pedersen is about to fess up to being Ward's real dad, and that could help Ward lots, 'specially if now he spends some time with his kid." Laura broke in, by way of explanation, "Jakob and Anya were talking at the bedroom door while we were waiting for the Coast Guard, and you know how quickly everything spreads around here. I guess the suspicions were true."

"It was always for *him* to say," said Betty Lindseth, "But as his sister, I practically knew. I feel sorry for Anya..." she held up her hand to stop any contrary comments for the moment, "...*because*, when she got pregnant, he put on the famous 'big man blame little woman' act and questioned whether the baby was even his. I know for a fact she'd never been with anyone else at that point, and when he rejected her, she went a little crazy. And that makes for other stories to tell, such as why her boy Eagle is really named William, and why when Mrs. Selivanoff found out she was pregnant shortly after William was born, she stayed drunk for months and her twins were born a little... uh... *different* 'cause of it."

"Betty!" Laura was genuinely shocked. "We shouldn't pass on every rumor we've ever heard, you know." Mrs. Lindseth nodded, "Oh, I agree, but Mrs. Selivanoff admitted as much to me when the twins were younger and were starting to have trouble in school. I wonder when the wheels of justice will start turning for the likes of Billy Jr." Laura didn't argue. "Well, I just keep thinking that some good will come out of all of this, like Mr. Smith says," stated Laura firmly. It was high time to change the mood after such a serious philosophical discussion. So Will interjected, "So... anybody care to talk about the weather?" He smiled as he spoke, poking Laura playfully in the ribs, and the meeting broke up to the sound of laughter.

When Mr. Hansen came into Judson's room later that evening to check on him, he found him quietly reading, using the eraser end of a pencil to help him turn the pages, his hands more than a little clumsy in their bandages. "The meeting tonight

was impressive, Jud. All those folks were trying to make sure that Ward didn't get his life any more messed up. It showed me what a real community can do when they agree on something. Oh, and I found out tonight that Truck Brother Jake is the father of Ward Bazaroff," he said.

He was about to say how he found out, when Judson said with a yawn, "I figured that out already." "How?" asked his father, incredulous at his son's assertion. "Oh, from something he said in the mess hall after the meeting when the cannery work was announced—and from a song," he said. "From a *song*? I'm hardly surprised by anything you come up with anymore," said Mr. Hansen, shaking his head. Judson had put his book down and settled into the pillow. Even though he was back from the hospital, he still felt amazingly tired. "I'll get the light, Jud. See you in the morning. Glad to have you home. Really glad!"

### **Third week of October 1963, one month after the school term began at Sokroshera Cove**

Mr. Hansen rang the large hand bell he had retrieved from the wrecked classroom, and stood by the door of the cannery mess hall. Within moments, the doorway was filled with jostling students, and he stepped out of the way with a laugh. Once they all got settled, they would start with English, then the older kids would do History and the younger ones would do an art project. Then after recess, they would do Arithmetic, and after lunch, there would be library time for the older kids, and printing and handwriting drills for the younger ones. Twice a week, the older students would get Science instead of library time. Jeffrey Hansen was getting used to the dizzying routine of multiple activities at once.

Even with only eleven students, Mr. Hansen had all grades except fifth, and a wide range of abilities to juggle, from Jake the tornado to the serious Barbara, from the fiercely independent Sandy Ann to the almost totally dependent twins. There was no way to "cookie cutter" the curriculum, and lessons could rarely encompass the entire spectrum. As with all multi-grade classrooms, other grades got to listen in on the lessons of the others, and one group got a lesson while the others supposedly worked independently. Since there was no fifth grade, the class was easier to divide between "elementary" and "middle" grades, so that was in Mr. Hansen's favor. It was a system that sometimes worked, and sometimes (in spite of his best efforts) descended into near chaos.

Jeffrey Hansen, trained as he was in lesson planning for a single grade and subject at a time, had to invent ways of coping with a continent-wide range of emotional and ability levels. One strategy he quickly latched onto was using the older ones to help with the younger ones. It was a good "methodology," to use a teacher term. The older kids could model good student behavior while introducing and reinforcing skills they themselves had perhaps only recently learned. However, it was very dependent on the aforementioned "good student behavior," and that could never be guaranteed with his cast of characters. When everything was running smoothly, the classroom was a wonder to behold. Mr. Hansen divided the long, picnic-style tables

by grades, but each student had a bit of space on one side or the other so that he or she could work with a buddy from a different grade. On the best days, the younger students could depend on help from older kids and the teacher whenever they needed it, and the older students would get time with the teacher to discuss the more mature topics that came out of their textbooks.

The accommodations for recess were a display of village ingenuity, from young and old. The Truck Brothers and Mr. Lindseth managed to convert the storage yard that was behind the mess hall on the landward side into a makeshift playground. Within a few days, they had moved the stacks of retort racks, which had once held boiling hot cans of salmon, to the far edge of what was now a level, gravel-covered play area. The official schoolyard, with its wide grassy field featuring one tetherball pole and two pairs of makeshift goal posts set at a distance that matched no particular sport, was now too far away from the temporary classroom for daily use, so the kids were grateful for a play spot right beside their makeshift classroom. The adults had provided a space for the kids to play, and the children immediately began to use it in imaginative and frequently dangerous ways.

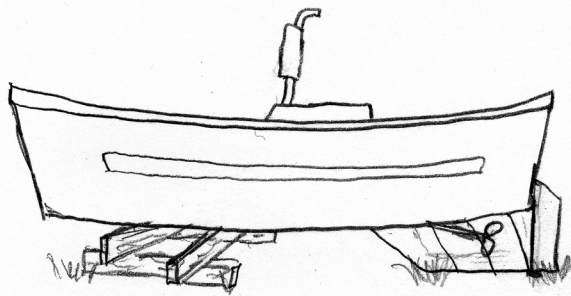
Using a fifty-five gallon drum, cut open, filled with rocks, and laid on its side in a small depression, the Truck Brothers and Mr. Lindseth made a spectacularly popular teeter-totter. They bolted together three thick planks, of the type used for dock repair, two end to end, and one in the middle to brace the joint. Then they placed the planks across the middle of the oil barrel, and instantly created a thrill ride for all ages. The twins on one side of the teeter-totter and April and Barbara on the other made for a perfect balance, and the four girls would probably be content to play on it all recess, bouncing first down to the ground and then up in the air. But soon, the older kids found ways of making the darn thing dangerous, and at recess from then on, the four girls could only hope that the big kids were distracted by some other activity. Standing on the wooden contraption and trying to balance always resulted in spectacular spills for one end or the other. Sit down on it facing away from the middle, while someone heavier runs up the board until the balance produces an upward bounce, and you could fly a good six or eight feet. Those planks clattering to the ground after someone spilled off created a substantial risk to anyone who wasn't fast at getting his toes out of harm's way. As soon as the older kids expressed interest in it, in that pushy way that only upperclassmen can possess, the four girls would run to the edge of the play yard and make mud pies until Mr. Hansen caught them and made them clean up.

Mr. Hansen had retrieved some kick balls from the school, and the kids not lucky enough to be on the teeter-totter made up games with the squishy red orbs, including bouncing them against the wall of the mess hall until some adult told them to "watch the windows for goodness sakes!" By the next day, Mr. Lindseth had covered the windows with wooden frames wrapped in chicken wire, and both windows and games were saved.

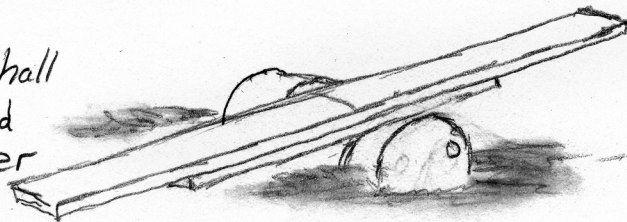
Not content to try daredevil stunts on the teeter-totter, the "Holy Terrors" invented a new way to get into danger. They went to the edge of the playing area and soon had constructed a fort out of the large metal retort racks. Their construction skills

still considerably lacking, they abandoned their fort when the one rack they had managed to heft up as a makeshift roof shifted, came plunging down, and missed young Eagle's noggin by inches. Mr. Hansen happened to witness Eagle's close shave, and promptly declared the retort racks off limits. Within a day or two, Mr. Lindseth and Mr. Rezoff had moved all the racks to a safer, more distant corner of the cannery grounds.

As a splendid substitute, the parents pulled an old *jitney* out of the grass at the edge of the beach. Herman described to Judson the purpose of the stubby and short open boat with high sides, and with an engine in the center. But Judson just said that he'd probably have to witness one in operation to understand how it could be "used to help pull the nets toward a seiner," as Herman had patiently tried to explain. The men of the village propped the *jitney* up on planks right where the retort racks had been. The metal cage protecting the propeller from the nets left the boat high above the gravel of the playground, so a makeshift ladder allowed the smaller kids to crawl up the high sides and into the boat. From that vantage point, the *jitney* felt almost like a seiner in the ocean. Island children, supplied with a boat to play in, could come up with dozens of realistic roles to take on. The older kids were less enthusiastic, because whoever was the latest instigator of trouble would be out there after school busily using a bailing can, emptying the *jitney* of snow or rainwater.



The "toys" of the mess hall  
School: the "jitney" and  
an oil barrel teeter-totter



Judson and Marla both worked well with the younger kids, and Mr. Hansen quickly capitalized on their strengths. While the youngest students were doing more self-directed tasks like drawing and letter shape exercises, and third and fourth got handwriting drills, Mr. Hansen would read and discuss the history lessons and literature selections with the older students. But while most Junior High students elsewhere would have time to do essays and answer chapter questions, Judson and Marla would be busy instead helping various younger ones with their Arithmetic, or

reading and discussing their Literature selections. Marla was surprisingly good with the "Holy Terrors," Eagle and Jake. Judson had a real talent for helping Barbara and the twins, Sonya and Paris, who were all in third grade. It was a challenge to try to explain most things to the twins, but the upside was that they were invariably cheerful. This was a blessing, because there were days when April was moody, or Barbara was lost in her own thoughts. April (the only second grader) was a quick learner, and frequently helped explain things to Barbara and the twins, even though they were older.

Another happy discovery for Mr. Hansen was that Sandy Ann got along well with little Alexander, the lone first grader. She found him to be very bright and quick to learn, so she often brought him over to her corner of the table and read him her literature story. He would sit on her lap, and she would elaborate a bit on the story to make up for her Basal Reader's dearth of pictures. Herman was dependable and patient as a tutor, except with the "Holy Terrors," who could get under his skin. At recess time, he was frequently the one who managed to get all the grades involved in games and various sports, and contests that the kids would invent. Through it all, Mr. Hansen directed, taught short lessons that the tutors could repeat and expand upon, and spent as much time as possible giving the older kids individual attention so that their own classwork would not suffer.

Judson was gradually coming back into his own after the trauma of fire, hospitalization, and recuperation. The bandages were off. But visions of familiar faces screaming at him through walls of flame still wrenched him awake. On one awful night, it had been his mother's face in the flames. In this dream, try as he might, he could not grab hold of her to drag her to safety. He awoke sobbing and coughing. His father had sat by his bedside and listened as he related the details. Jeffrey Hansen admitted that he sometimes saw Kayah's face in his dreams, too. His dad assured him that his mother was now safe and healthy and that nothing would ever harm her again. Mr. Hansen told his son to say to himself, "I did a good thing. I am ok. *Everyone* is ok. It will be alright." Maybe it wasn't what an expensive therapist might suggest, but it was good advice nonetheless. And Judson deeply appreciated this closeness with his father, which they had lacked for so long.

The night Judson had that dream, Jeffrey Hansen fetched a bottle of cough medicine the doctor had given his son, gave him a tablespoonful, and said a few more encouraging words. Judson had slept until the morning. It tore Jeffrey Hansen's heart out to think that his son was suffering inside from something he had done that was so brave and good. He prayed for an emotional change in the weather for his son.

Then like an athlete returning to the field after being on injured reserve, Judson began to feel the part of him that once had resulted in frequent trips to the principal's office beginning to reassert itself. Judson was developing an especially strong aversion to the wretched *Arithmetic We Need* textbooks sent over from Ouzinkie. The books seemed filled with nothing but story problems, and it annoyed Judson no end that half the stories involved objects and situations completely alien to the students of Sokroshera Cove. After his father had struggled to explain a



particularly urban-centered question involving streetlights and speed limits to the fourth graders, and had finally moved on to a different problem, the old Judson jumped to the fore. He duplicated the story problems' random and largely irrelevant subject matter, but as though written for the village. "What we need is *Arithmetic We Understand*," he declared. Then, in a spot-on teacher voice, he intoned, "If you have fifty pounds of halibut in your freezer, and your dog is six years old, how long has it been raining?"

Sandy Ann, Marla, and Herman began to laugh, not so secretly agreeing with Judson's assessment of the math books. Mr. Hansen turned toward his son with great interest, but made no comment. But even Mr. Hansen himself had to laugh when Barbara, in all seriousness (as usual) asked, "How do you know that it is fifty pounds of halibut you have?" Mr. Hansen walked over to Barbara, put his arm around her, and said, "Judson was just being silly. We all need to get back to work now." He grabbed a battered turquoise and red book titled *The New Fun With Dick and Jane* and began to regale the younger grades with the adventures of Dick, Jane, Sally, Spot, Puff, and Tim the Teddy Bear.

The next appearance of Jud the Troublemaker was when they took a "field trip" one day right after lunch to the spare room of the old school to pick out library books. The room smelled of smoke, and so did the books. But they were only going to pick out a few, then take them back to the mess hall and read them there. While the little kids sat on the floor beside the oversized picture books, picking out titles to carry back with them, Judson scoured the higher shelves for something he might be interested in. He picked a Zane Grey title. Years before, someone had been quite a fan, for there were over a dozen titles in the school's miniscule older reader section. Judson had read *Thunder Mountain* last year, and had found the plotline exciting, but also found the supposed cowboy dialogue to be hokey in the extreme. He picked out one he hadn't read: *Arizona Ames*—this ought to be rich, Judson thought, remembering well his own experiences in the real Arizona that had been his home until just a couple of months before. He sat on a chair near the bare windows, since the power had been shut off after the fire, and silently read a few paragraphs here and there. As he did so, a plan hatched in his head.

Quickly absorbing again the style and the vocabulary of the prolific but often fantastically inaccurate author, 'Arizona Jud, legendary cowboy of the Jay-Jay Ranch,' began to "narrate" his own Zane Grey novel. He stood, opened his book, and proceeded to "read" with a flourish and energy that he had not been able to muster since last school year (destination: principal's office).

"Ol ah know iz ah wuz fixin ta hed sauth afore yeh shot me. Reckon ah'll hafta drop m' saddle hyah 'ntil ah git on th' mend, 'n by thet time ah'll likely'z not be 'n love wit' yeh," said Rattlesnake Rick with a look of consternation on his windblown face. "Aw, git on wit' yeh," hollered Cow Pie Cora, "'Tain't no way ah'z gonna go sweet on no crusted ol' cowpoke like yew!" With this, she shook her red hair so violently that she was forced to bend down and retrieve her hat. "So git awn wit' ye!" "But ah luv yeh alreddy, Cowra," Rattlesnake ejaculated.

At this point in his performance, Judson shifted out of fake cowboy mode and into Saturday morning children's story time mode, sounding now like the sweet-voiced story lady on a Phoenix TV station that he remembered from his childhood.

He abruptly sat down, with the book open, and peered around at the now mesmerized Sokroshera Cove student body. Out came Judson's approximation of a soft, simpering, and talking-down-to-the-little-ones lady's voice: "*Eee-Jack-You-Late-Ed*. Yes, boys and girls, that was the *very* word that Zane Grey used in his wonderful story. And wasn't that a *wonderful* story, boys and girls?" With that, he closed the book, nodded his head, and smiled sweetly.

Two things happened simultaneously at the end of the dramatic reading by 'Arizona Jud, legendary cowboy of the Jay-Jay Ranch': Mr. Hansen made a beeline toward his son, and the "Holy Terrors" requested, nay, *demand*ed to read every Zane Grey novel on the shelf immediately (they couldn't reach them). Several other things happened slightly later: Marla and Herman were laughing so hard that they had to sit down rather rapidly on the floor next to the bookshelves, and Sandy Ann had turned beet red and was suddenly very interested in looking at something in the far corner of the room. Mr. Hansen, for his part, had never, ever had such intense interest in literary pursuits in any of his previous classes, and sent up a silent prayer along the lines of, "Lord, I know I prayed for Jud to regain some of his vitality, but could you dial it back just a bit?"

Mr. Hansen, the professional teacher that he was, mentally threw in the towel on the rest of the day's lesson. He instructed Jud and Herman to carry the movie projector, Sandy Ann and Marla to carry the folding screen, and got Jake and Eagle to carry the five short movies the school seemed to have inherited. With the older kids in the lead, Mr. Hansen brought up the rear with the youngest ones, occasionally carrying young Alexander piggyback while the twins babbled happily on about why they liked movies, and Barbara walked calmly beside him, silently wondering why this Cowra woman had been so mean to Mr. Rattlesnake.

Back at the mess hall, the prospect of seeing movies completely overshadowed any thought of Judson's previous comedy performance. Marla went to a closet and retrieved a stack of dark gray army-issue blankets, yet another of Faltrip's mysterious wartime oversights, no doubt. Then she showed the older boys how to hang them on hooks that Judson had never noticed before. "Mr. Faltrip lets us show movies sometimes. He gets them from some place that gets movies for the Navy ships," said Marla. She also knew where the lights were. Thus, Mr. Hansen's Highly Unusual Afternoon was back in his control. He showed a short film about the circus, and the little kids were especially impressed with the human cannonball and the lion tamer.

While he rewound the 16mm film, Mr. Hansen introduced the second film and explained that with this he would stop, producing great sighs of disappointment. It was in the largest can of any of the movies, and the kids knew that meant it was longer. "The movie is called *The River*, and it was made in the 1930s to talk about farms and floods in the Mississippi River Basin. It's going to show a lot of cotton

farming and riverboats. It also shows what floods do to houses and to towns. But please pay attention to the music. A man named Virgil Thomson wrote the soundtrack...ahh, the music, which became more famous than the movie. You can even buy records of just this music. Let me know what you think of the movie and its music when we finish."

Mr. Hansen turned on the projector again, and soon the brass chorus, joined by the orchestra, began the movie with a snatch of a hymn Judson recognized from visits to his mother's childhood church. Judson found himself missing his mother; he also realized that he had made his dad's life a lot more difficult today. He resolved to work it out with his dad as soon as possible. He also decided that he should write his grandmother on his dad's side to tell her all about the recent events, and maybe ask her to send him a record of the score from *The River*.

Eleven students and one relieved teacher watched the sometimes jumpy, fuzzy-sounding movie with great attention. The narrator of the movie seemed to love rattling off lists of names of rivers, then lists of names of cities, then lists of names of types of trees, all while scenes that fit his words flashed across the screen. He spoke of building the levee system along the river as though he were describing a war: "Man and mules, mules and mud!" he repeated. Then there were scenes of barren landscapes and abandoned farms. It bothered Judson that everyone used up the land and then moved on, leaving the soil to flow downstream as mud. The environmental damage was horrifying. Next, there were many scenes of poor people trying to make a living off the worn-out land. During a scene showing a family of dirty young kids in a shack with hardly any food, Judson thought of saying, "Eagle, is that your place?" and then mentally slapped himself for what would have been a hurtful comment. A little kid played with empty tin cans in a yard, and Jake blurted, "Hey, I like to do that!" And during a seemingly endless segment involving scene after scene of bales of cotton being loaded and unloaded into various industrial buildings, Barbara asked, "Mr. Hansen, is that a cannery for cotton?"

After the movie, Mr. Hansen was clearly amazed that the entertainment-starved students had all absorbed something they could discuss. The twins could repeat whole sequences of events, and said a lot of "Did you see when..." Sandy Ann noticed how the music changed when the pictures became more sad or serious, and changed back when the movie showed happier things. She also thought that the 1938 narration sounded like a funeral or something very serious. Little Alexander was especially impressed with the steamboats, which he called the "big seiners with the black smoke." Marla asked why they used such important-sounding music for a movie about farms and boats and dams and lumber and factories with no real story. She rattled off the list of things the movie had shown in a spot-on imitation of the narrator, adding them up on her fingers as she went, and Judson caught a bit of her satirical humor. Mr. Hansen just smiled—nothing to be concerned about here. It took April a little while to understand that it was a river, and not the ocean, that had been sweeping all the houses away. The power of the water to destroy whole towns was disconcerting to most of the older students; their village was on a low meadow very close to the ocean.

Finally, Mr. Hansen pointed out that in their own town, it was the creek and the lake that had nearly cut the airstrip in half years before. All the kids had played up at the lake, and knew what that gaping hole in the old runway looked like. It was a fun little discussion, and Mr. Hansen answered each question with words that were well suited to each student's level of understanding. The kids' responses helped Mr. Hansen to gauge how much of his lessons were being absorbed, and how each student was learning in his or her own way. Moreover, none of the kids seemed to remember his wayward son and the cowboy comedy performance, another success on his part. They were so absorbed in the discussion that Mr. Hansen almost let the class out late. Mrs. Selivanoff was already outside the mess hall to walk Alexander and the twins home when Mr. Hansen dismissed them.

Marla stayed behind to help take down the blanket curtains and return them to the closet, which seemed to be nearly full of blankets. Since the fire in the school, and its unfortunate cause, she seemed more than willing to be a student instead of a rebel. Wonder how long *that* lasts, thought Judson, and caught himself. Waiting until Mr. Hansen was in a conversation in the mess hall kitchen with Mrs. Lindseth, Marla came up to Judson and said quietly, "After that cowboy story in the old library I have to ask you something. Were you just trying to be funny that day you threw all of Ward's swear words back in his face?" Judson nodded almost solemnly, speechless for a moment. He had wished he could apologize for some time now. She waited calmly for him to reply.

Finally, he said quietly, "Yes, just trying to be funny. But my smart mouth has gotten me in trouble a lot of times—I don't learn real fast, I'm afraid. And I'm... sorry. Even if it seems funny, it's not worth it if it'll hurt people. I'm *real* bad at knowing when that is." Marla thought for a moment and said, "Well, that discussion of bad words was one of those times—Ward thought you were making fun of him. But that cowboy story was... the funniest thing I've heard in ages. Maybe it's because you weren't putting anybody down." She giggled once more at the thought of Rattlesnake Rick and Cow Pie Cora. She put her hand on his arm and said, "I know you a little better now. I know you're not mean." Judson nodded, and then went home grateful that Marla had enjoyed his Zane Grey imitation, but smarting at how hurtful some of his earlier exchanges had turned out to be.

That evening at home, Judson was determined to clear the air, but as soon as he mentioned the Zane Grey incident, his father burst out laughing. Between fits of laughter, his father said, "I always wished... that somebody... would do that... to good ol' Zane Grey!" When his father collected himself, Judson said, "I know what you are going to say. I should have saved stuff like that for after school and for around the older kids. I'm sorry." His father gave him a sideways hug and said, "You're right, but it *did* work out ok. Don't want these kids to think school is boring, do we? Just... just think *ahead* a little, ok? I missed the lively Jud while you were recuperating, but enough is enough." So Judson told his dad about his conversation with Marla, and his dad just nodded and gave him another hug. Seconds later, Jeffrey Hansen was chuckling again at Rattlesnake Rick and Cow Pie Cora of 'Arizona.'

## **Saturday, October 19, 1963: Fort Sheplen, Sokroshera Island**

On a bright and sunny Saturday after several days of drizzle, Judson got his dad, Herman, Barbara, and Sandy Ann to hike up to old Fort Sheplen. He wanted to show his dad the exciting parts, especially the magnificent view from the far entrance to the fort. Young Jake was not in attendance, due to an unfortunate incident involving a firecracker and Mrs. Selivanoff's old gray cat. Betty Lindseth had a whole list of chores for the imaginative "Holy Terror" to do for her as a result. As they all walked up the winding roads, stopping at most of the major features of the fort, Judson was happy to let Herman reprise his performance as tour guide, and didn't spoil any surprises. Judson was surprised at how much he remembered of the previous narration.

This time into the fort, with Mr. Hansen asking the questions, Herman provided interesting tidbits of information for his teacher that Judson hadn't heard on his first visit. Herman showed Mr. Hansen the low spot where the water pipe was gradually leaking and forming a swamp. Then he stopped and pointed out places where villagers had removed buildings, and sometimes could even identify whose house or shed now benefited from the free lumber.

Judson came up to walk on the left side of his dad, Herman and Barbara on his dad's right, as they started up the hill again. Deep in thought, he didn't notice Sandy Ann trotting up from the rear. She whispered something into Herman's ear, and dropped a handful of bright red berries into his hand. Herman nodded, and suppressed a smile. Suddenly he stopped. "Judson, Sandy Ann has just found a *kalina* bush, and the berries get ripe right around now. So we want you to taste one of our favorite things. Everybody around here loves *kalinas*." He handed Judson three or four berries, sometimes called "high bush cranberries." Judson looked at them with interest. They were slightly soft, and had a lovely red color. He hefted the handful to his mouth and bit through the outer skin. There was a soft inner pulp surrounding a seedy center. Almost immediately, Judson's mouth puckered with an intense flavor that seemed both bitter and sour. He didn't dare spit out the berries, but his face registered the shock. As he chewed and swallowed as quickly as he could, Sandy Ann sidled up to him and cooed, "We *love kalina jelly*. Did Herman forget to tell you that part? Nobody eats 'em raw. You gotta cook 'em and strain 'em, with lots a sugar. So, next time you're at the house, you can try some jelly!" His mouth slowly recovering, Judson glared at Herman, who was giggling silently. "What shall we feed you next?" asked Herman, mid-giggle. Judson spat out a kalina seed. "I'll feed you a fist sandwich!" But he joined in the laughter. Mr. Hansen shook his head and smiled, but said nothing.

On the walk up to the top of Mount Sokroshera, Sandy Ann suddenly wanted to discuss the issue of Ward. Where is he, how is he doing, when is he coming home, is he going to school? The questions poured out of her. Sandy Ann wasn't minimizing what Ward had done. Judson realized that in a small and frequently interrelated community, a lost sheep in the family is still part of the flock. Mr. Hansen shared what he knew. Ward was at the Alaska Native Services hospital in

Anchorage. "Ward's injuries were serious, but not as bad as we had feared. He may get most of his movement back in his hands and fingers. I hear the ANS has doctors that specialize in burns. Unfortunately, the scarring on his fingers and upper arms has made the muscles very tight, and he's having trouble grasping things and stretching out his arms. He'll need a few more weeks of recovery, and then they'll teach him how to exercise to increase his flexibility. At that point he can come home."

Sandy Ann had scrunched up her nose. Another thought was coming. Mr. Hansen waited. "But how about school? Isn't he behind by now?" Sandy Ann finally asked. Mr. Hansen nodded. "Yes, he is, and I've already talked to Miss Bazaroff about getting him into a correspondence course. The University of Nebraska runs a wonderful extension high school for home studies. She thought he could do it, and I've already enrolled him. He can send in his assignments and hear back from the teachers by mail. I've agreed to help him keep up." Sandy Ann abruptly switched from defense to prosecution, and spoke the obvious, "But after everything he did to try to hurt you and Jay-Jay, are you still going to help him? I mean, he treated you guys like *shit!*" Her teacher nodded. "Yes, I am," replied Mr. Hansen, ignoring the colorful language. "I came here to teach, not to develop grudges. I'm game to try it if Ward is willing. He might be in the mood now to pull out of this hole he's dug for himself." Herman looked silently at Mr. Hansen for a long moment, his face revealing no clues to his thoughts. "You're a teacher, and he's a student," said Barbara, and gave one short nod, as if to settle the matter. Mr. Hansen patted her lightly on the back, told her she was right, and then they walked side by side up the hill.

At the level vista on the southwest-facing side of the summit, Mr. Hansen was just as impressed with the outstanding view as Judson had been on his first visit. He listened eagerly, nodding as Herman named the places that they could see from the spectacular vantage point. Herman explained why that place had been so special to his grandmother Pariscovia Rezoff, and to her mystery man. When Herman had finished, Mr. Hansen had tears in his eyes. Barbara patted Mr. Hansen's hand, looked around for several minutes, and said softly, "This is where Grandma is, then." Mr. Hansen tried to explain that her grandma wasn't really on the mountain, and Barbara gave him a look that seemed to say, "I know that!" but was unable to explain what she *did* mean. Judson watched as Mr. Hansen put his arm around Barbara as if to say he understood, and she calmly leaned her head against him. Herman agreed without elaboration, "Yes, this is where Grandma is for us." He grasped Barbara's other hand and took another long look across the island and the bay to the mountains beyond. They all stood silently, absorbing the moment. This view alone would have been worth the hike. But there was more, so Herman walked them past the gun circles to the tunnel entrance.

Unwilling to repeat the uncomfortable incident of their last visit, Herman led them into the mountain, but walked quickly past the ladder room. Judson felt nervous, as though he were passing a sleeping lion, and fully expected some teasing. Thankfully, neither Sandy Ann nor Herman commented on his earlier troubles on that ladder. Herman quickly stepped into the tunnel that led to the main bunker

below them. Herman went a few yards down the tunnel before he spoke. "It gets weirder down here," said Herman, his voice hollow in the small passageway. After a short section of concrete, the walls suddenly switched to bare rock: granite, Mr. Hansen asserted. The pocked and pitted surfaces of the grayish stone reminded Judson of mineshafts and train tunnels he had seen throughout the mining country of Arizona. He heard his dad talking to Herman ahead of him. "The granite is a tougher rock than the slate, I think, and when they hit it, they saved time by not lining the tunnel with concrete." There were places where the rock was only three feet wide, and other spots where Mr. Hansen had to duck. This was unfinished and incomplete work—a sign that the builders had left in a hurry.

Herman remarked that the summit of the mountain seemed to be of the same gray rock, and that places across the bay between Camel's Rock and Whale Pass showed many outcroppings of granite, interspersed with sections of the more common black slate. They were passing steeply downward again. Suddenly the floor leveled off at a short concrete landing, with a stairwell of concrete directly ahead. The landing was covered by about two inches of water, judging from the water level at the first step, and it was more than their shoes could wade through without getting wet. It took some effort to jump across the low spot to the stairs. Herman had on waterproof hiking boots, and carried Barbara across. This water probably feeds into the spring we saw below the fort, thought Judson, wondering if it originally came from the summit lake.

At the top of the stairs was a landing and a sharp left turn. Dead ahead, before the turn, was a low wall with a space behind. A concrete lip angled from the wall up to the ceiling, leaving only a narrow viewing slit, covered by a wire mesh large enough to stick a gun muzzle through, but small enough to repel a grenade. "This looks designed to catch any intruders off guard," said Mr. Hansen. "Anyone coming up the stairs would be totally exposed to whoever was behind that low wall—the angle makes it almost impossible to lob a grenade. Look, it would likely bounce off the angled lip here and roll back down the stairs!" Judson shuddered, remembering little Jake's firecrackers, and imagining what a firefight in these tunnels would sound like. What, if anything, could they do against a poison gas attack? It was a simple and ingenious, although not impenetrable, defense system. The entrance to the guard shack was around the corner, after the tunnel turned right again. They entered and found that they were in a square concrete room about twelve feet on each side. Wooden gun racks were bolted to one wall. At right angles to the racks were metal lockers that looked a little like they came from a gym, their doors all hanging open.

Suddenly Mr. Hansen pointed at something they hadn't seen anywhere else: a large crack that extended from one wall to the other, in the far corner of the room. The crack was about an inch wide, and created a strange triangle shape in the floor, with jagged lines up the walls. He let out a low whistle, which reverberated in the concrete walls. "This is unusual. They must have run into some major trouble with the rock on the other side of this wall." Herman countered, "Maybe it's over the cistern." When Mr. Hansen asked what he meant, Herman just led them further down the tunnel. It sloped upward for a short distance through rough-cut gray rock,

and then turned steeply downward again with concrete walls. The tunnel ended in the lower hallway of the two-story cliffside bunker, right where Judson had noticed it on their last visit.

"That was certainly design overkill, that tunnel and inner guard room," remarked Mr. Hansen when they paused for a moment in the lower hallway. Herman just said, "Dad thinks some of it was because this was the last fort built, with leftover materials, and the construction crews felt free to improvise. Also, the whole fort up here was built against a stealth attack. He says some Army engineer probably thinks of this as his masterpiece." "I can see why," Mr. Hansen stated. Fort Shepley had obviously impressed him, too. "It almost makes you wish they had to use the fort—I mean, that there had been an attack," said Judson, and Herman nodded. However, Mr. Hansen, with an adult's logic, put on his teacher hat and said, "It would have been horrible for America if the enemy had gotten this far. It might have taken years to get Alaska back, and thousands of lives. I understand that the Aleutian battles claimed ten thousand casualties, and as horrible as that is, it's only barely mentioned in the history books. —But I agree with you; it's fun in a way to play 'what if' in a splendid fort like this!"

Herman bypassed all the other rooms, and within moments was standing before the welded blast door with the strange warning beside it. Mr. Hansen began shining his flashlight all around it. "It's obvious the military didn't want anyone in here. But my guess is because it's full of water and in the dark. Still, I'd love to see what's behind that door. Maybe we could get a generator up here to run a grinder, and cut through these welded spots." The kids realized that they could never attempt such a project without adult help. Just hearing a sane adult suggest the opening of the door made the kids excited. "Well, we're in no position to worry about this now," said Mr. Hansen, bringing their imaginations back down to earth. "I'll talk to Sandy Ann's dad and Mr. Faltrip about it and see what they think. You know, we don't need to play 'what if' when we've got a real puzzle right here!"

Although Mr. Hansen did find the unfinished radar room interesting, they took a quick, almost anticlimactic tour of the rest of the bunker and walked back down the hill on the old road. Mr. Hansen thanked Herman and the others for a splendid adventure, and remarked that there were a lot more questions than answers about the strange door in the mountain. Mr. Hansen seemed genuinely eager to make good on his desire to see what was behind the welded door. When Mr. Hansen wasn't looking, Herman gave Judson a 'thumbs up,' and what, for Herman, was a big grin. With a responsible adult also taking an interest in the cistern door, it suddenly seemed all the more likely that they would eventually get to open it and explore.

### **Saturday Evening, the Superintendent's House**

After leaving their companions at their homes on the other side of the creek, Mr. Hansen and Judson climbed up the steps to their temporary quarters in the superintendent's house, slightly out of breath from climbing up the steep driveway. As they walked in the door, Judson gave a little whistle of surprise. There on a side



table in the large front room, plugged in and ready to go, was his Voice of Music stereo. A little note propped up on the tall silver record changer spindle said, "Jay-Jay, I found this in a closet while working on the fire damage. I had to rewire a couple of things, but it works now. Your records will play just fine, but all the cardboard covers have a little mold on them thanks to the fire truck! – Will Rezoff. PS, you got a package." Below the Voice of Music, propped against a leg of the side table, was a heavy box about a foot square and two inches thick. The return address showed it was from Grandma Hansen. She had sent more records!

Mr. Hansen knew to leave his son alone at a time like this, and went to the kitchen to start dinner. He was glad that his son had made the transition to life without television. But in the evenings, he could frequently hear the portable battery radio Mr. Faltrip had left for them, as Judson searched for signals from distant radio stations. Judson was obviously happy to get his prized stereo back, and overjoyed to get a box of new records. Mr. Hansen made a mental note to thank his mom for being so thoughtful. Judson was likewise planning to thank Will Rezoff for the careful repair of his prized stereo.

Out in the living room, Judson was oohing and aahing over a shipment of eight records. Eight! Grandma must realize that without a television, the stereo was serving as Judson's principal entertainment. Grandma had sent *Moving*, by Peter, Paul and Mary. The song about that silly magical dragon had already outstayed its welcome, but the other songs might be nice. Behind it was *Surfin' USA*, by the Beach Boys—he shook his head, bemused at the thought of his grandma buying a Beach Boys record!—*College Concert* by the Kingston Trio, the album with the "when will they ever learn" song that was on the radio a lot—his dad would like this one.

The next LP in the stack was *Swingin' Sweet Trumpet: Francis Bay Salutes Harry James*. That one disappointed him a little, until he noticed the designation: "Omega, the World's Finest Stereophonic Record" across the top. Then he saw the sticker on the shrink-wrap: "\$1.97 Sale! Bertram's Drug and Discount Store." His heart sank again; Grandma had bought him some no-name knockoff Swing music at a drug store. Old Big Band songs just didn't sound as good on LPs as they did on Mr. Faltrip's jukebox. The next two LPs were also Francis Bay, one a tribute to Benny Goodman, and another a tribute to Artie Shaw. Well, his dad would like those, and he might, too. Very tentatively, Judson placed the Benny Goodman knockoff on the turntable and cranked up one of Faltrip's favorites, "And the Angels Sing." He was shocked when the band belted out an even more energetic and swinging version than the jukebox original. It was minus the lady vocal, but Judson didn't mind that. He tried the Harry James "tribute" LP and was likewise surprised. Most were as good as the originals, with slight variations to keep them interesting, and the Omega recordings were in impressive stereo, too. Grandma had sent him some good stuff after all!

The next LP had a note taped to the shrink-wrap. "I heard this music on the radio, and it sounded to me like it fit the wilderness of Alaska. Hope you like it – Grandma." The disc was Dvorak's *New World Symphony* played by Karl Ancerl and

the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, in stereo. He ignored the "\$1.97 Bertram's" sticker. Grandma was paying attention to his polite demand for real stereo records! Having enjoyed the orchestra music of *The River*, even through the garbled and jumpy sound of the projector, Judson decided to give the *New World Symphony* a try. It would soon become his favorite album, and he put it on the turntable whenever he needed a good think. It did seem like the soundtrack to a grand Alaskan adventure.

The last album in the box made him laugh out loud, because *obviously* this one was for his dad, not him: *Greatest Hits Volume Two*, by Connie Francis. He could already hear his dad singing along but with the wrong words like he always did: "Everybody's somebody's foo—ool; everybody's somebody's bay—beeee!" He laughed again, and took the disc in to show his dad. Dinner was ready.