

fin Rock Redux

43

It was his heart, they said. Two days after they had taken him, someone called and tersely announced that the old man had died at the indigent clinic a few hours after his arrest. "Sorry," the faceless voice had muttered. Thomas had wept at the funeral, but it was only in later years that he had come to understand the greatest tragedy of that day – that the old man had died alone, knowing that his own grandson had betrayed him.

That grandson was Thomas Adams, and he was now too old to cry but in the growing light of the cold mountain dawn, he did anyway.

Thomas was certain that his father's de-certification six months later was due to the debacle in the forest. As much as anyone did these days, they had "owned" their home, but the Certification Board would still have evicted them except for the intervention of Cousin Lou, who worked for the State Supervisor. As it was, they lost all privileges and, when his father came down with pneumonia the next autumn, medical treatment was denied. He had died three days after the first anniversary of Grandpa's death.

Thomas had been sure that he would be turned down at the University, but once again his cousin had intervened and a slot had "opened" for him. But now that's finished, he reflected. He would be unable to obtain any certification other than

manual laborer. "Why didn't I keep my mouth shut?" he asked the morning stillness. In a tree behind him, a mockingbird began to sing its ageless song, and as if in answer, the forest below began to twitter and chirp with the voices of other birds, greeting the new day.

No, what he had said had been the truth and nothing could change that. The State was wrong. It was evil. It was unnatural for men to be slaves of their government, always skulking, always holding their tongues lest they anger The State. But there is no "State," Thomas considered. There are only evil men, holding power over other men. And anyone who speaks out, who dares to challenge that power, is crushed.

If only there was a way to fight back!

Thomas shifted on the stone, hanging his feet off the downhill side. His feet had almost touched the grass that day, but now, although his legs were certainly longer, it was at least 10 inches to the scarred rock surface below. As he kicked his heels back and forth, he could almost hear his grandfather speaking to him from long ago:

"One day, America will come to her senses. Our men will need those guns and they'll be ready. We cleaned them and sealed them up good, they'll last for years. Maybe it won't be in your lifetime, Thomas. Maybe one day you'll be sitting here with your son or grandson. Tell him

about me, boy. Tell him about the way I said America used to be.

"You see the way this stone points," the old man was saying. "You follow that line 100 feet..." Thomas' heels were suddenly still. For many minutes he did not move, playing those words over and over in his mind. "Follow that line..."

What hidden place in his brain had concealed those words all of these years? How could the threats have failed to dislodge it? He stood upon shaky legs and climbed down from Coffin Rock. In his mind's eye, he could see the old man pointing and he walked down the hill and through a clinging briar patch, counting off the paces. The round stone did seem solidly buried, but he scratched around near the base and found that the rock ended just an inch or so beneath the surface. "One man with a good bar can lift it," Grandfather had said. Thomas forced his fingers beneath the stone and, with all the strength in his 21-year-old body, he lifted. The stone came up, and he slid it off to one side. Cool air drifted up from the dark opening in the mountain. Thomas looked to the right where the scars of the State's frustration ended, only 15 or 20 feet away. They had been that close.

He squatted and stared into the darkness and then remembered his flashlight. In a moment, he

**"Freedom is never granted,
it is won."**

was back with it, probing into the darkness

with the yellow beam. There was a small patch of moisture just inside, but then the tunnel climbed upwards toward the ridge. On hands and knees, he entered.

It was uncomfortably close for the first 20 feet or so, then the cavern opened up around him. The men who had built this place, he saw, had taken a natural crevice in the granite rock, sealed it with masses of poured concrete, and then covered it with earth. The main chamber was bigger than the living room of a house, and they had left an opening up near the peak of the vaulted roof where fresh air and a faint, filtered light entered.

Wooden boxes and crates were stacked everywhere on concrete blocks, up off of the floor, stenciled with legends like RIFLE, CAL. 30 M1, 9MM PARA, M193 BALL, 7.62 x 39MM, and 5.56 x 45MM. He pushed between them and crawled to the wall where he found cardboard boxes wrapped with plastic sheeting. They were imprinted with strange names like CCI, OLIN, WW748, BULLSEYE, and RL 550B.

He did not know what the crates and boxes contained, and was afraid to break the seals, but near the center of the room he found a plastic-wrapped carton labeled "OPEN THIS FIRST." With his penknife, he slit the heavy plastic wrapping.

It contained books, he saw with some disap-

...continued on Page 49