

A high-nosed cedar canoe, nimble as a seabird, atop a tumbling white ridge of ocean.

Carried nearer and nearer by the water's determined sweep, the craft ~~now, in this first necessary picture in your mind,~~ sleds across the curling crest of wave and begins to glide the surf toward the dark frame of ^{this} your scene, a shore of black spruce forest. On a modern chart of the long, crumbled coastline south from the Gulf of Alaska toward the Strait of Juan de Fuca this particular landfall is written in as Arisankhana Island. None of the four voyagers bobbing to its shore here in a ~~January~~ ^{February} dusk of the year 1853, however, knows anything of this name, nor would it matter to their prospect if any did.

Now the canoemen as they alight. Day and day and day, they have been together in the slender canoe, dodging from one of this coast's constant humps of forest-and-rock to the next. Each man of them ~~has been~~ afraid a number of times in ^{the} those days; brave almost as often. Here at Arisankhana they land

wetly, heft their slim but laden ^{craft} ~~ark~~ across the gravel beach into hiding within the salal and salmonberry, ~~then turn away to the~~

"Hope to Christ"--the broad man, this--"this's drier than last night's."

"Oh, aye, and God send you wine and figs too, Wennberg?"

"Ought've left him, Melander." The one named Braaf, here. "Ought've left him cooped ⁱⁿ ~~at~~ New Archangel."

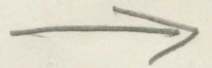
The slender ~~one~~ one of them, called Karlsson, stayed ⁵ ~~at~~ silent.

They turn away to the abrupt timber. As the trees sieve them from sight, another white wave replaces the rolling hill of water by which the four were borne to this shore where they are selecting their night's shelter, and where one of them is to die.

Their escape from New Archangel had ^{was} ~~been~~ of Melander's making. In any day's comings and goings at that far-north ~~shoreside~~ assemblage of hewn logs and Russian tenacity, ^{Melander} you would have spied ~~Melander~~ early. ^{Top of ty} Tall man with lanks of arms and high hips, so that he seemed to be all long sections and hinges. His line of jaw ran on as well, and so too his forehead; in ~~all~~ the extent of Melander, only the bright blue eyes

and stub nose and short mouth neighbored closely, a sudden alert center of face amid the jaw-and-forehead expanse as if peering in wily surprise out of the hole of a tree trunk at you.

"A strong right arm is the lever of life, these Russians say. You'd think by chance the Castle crowd might once put the lever to something other than hoisting a glass of champagne, Aye?" Early on, too, you would have come to know the jointed talk of the man, this Melander habit of interrupting himself to affirm whether he dared go on with so mesmerizing a line of conversation. All such reluctance to dazzle further notwithstanding, thirty-one



times out of thirty Melander could be counted on for continuation.

"But no, lie around up there like seals they all do, yip-yipping

down at the rest of us...Luck for them that we were born, else they'd starve to death figuring out right boot from left foot...To be Russian is to be a toothache to the world, aye?"

Born on the isle of Gotland and thinking of himself as a Swede, Melander actually numbered in the landless nationality, that of the sea. Fisher-folk beyond memory his people on Gotland ^{were} had been, generation upon generation automatically capable with ^{set} herring nets as if having happened into the world with hands shaped only for that task. So it came as a startling flex of independence when Melander, himself beginning to resemble a sizable height of pine spar, went off from his village of Slite to tall-masted vessels. Aboard ship he proved instantly apt, the type of sea/roamer of whom it was appraised that each drop of his blood was black Stockholm tar and his every hair a rope yarn. A dozen years of sailing the Baltic

and the North Sea, ^{bettering} he ~~bettered~~ his position almost voyage by voyage, and then--

"Had I ~~if I'd~~ been born with brass on my corners, you'd one day be calling me Admiral," Melander half-joked to his deckhands the day he was made first mate.

^{Just such}

~~Such~~ a billet, second in command of a schooner bearing twenty fresh seven-year men from Stockholm in the spring of 1851, was the one which shunted Melander to Alaska. ^{that world-topping wilderness} Russian America, ~~it~~ yet was, ^{its} the wholesale purchase by the United States--and consequent re-christening of New Archangel to what the coast's natives knew this

vital speck of site as, Sitka--waiting a decade and a half into the future.

Although he had no farthest thought of ~~it~~ ^{new endeavor} at the onset of that voyage, a pair of outlooks swerved Melander into staying on at New Archangel. The first ~~was~~ ^{loomed square ahead--} the eleven-month expanse of return voyage in the company of the schooner's captain, a fidgety little circle-faced Finn who was veteran in the Baltic trade but had proved to be quite literally out of his depth on the ocean. The other lay sidewise to Mister First Mate Melander's scrutiny, berthed there against a backdrop of Alaskan forest the spring morning when he reached final exasperation with his dim captain--the Russian-American Company's steamship, the Emperor Nicholas I.

In a time and place earlier, Melander would have been the fellow you wanted to set a spire on a cathedral; in a later, to oversee a fleet of mail planes. But on an April day in 1851, at one of the rim-ends of the known world, what sat at hand was this squatty wonder of self-propulsion and a proclaimed shortage of gifted seamen in these northern Pacific waters which the fur-trading Russians historically had navigated, pre-Nicholas and pre-Melander, like men lurching across ice.

no #

"If the wind were clever enough," Melander observed to the baffled Finnish skipper upon taking leave of him, "it ~~would~~ ^{ought to} snuff out these steamsnorters before they get a start, Aye?"

Melander maybe under different policy would have gone on to earn his way up the ranks of the Russian-American Company at New Archangel like a lithe boy up a schooner's rigging; become a valued promyshlennik, harvester of pelts, of the Tsar's Alaskan enterprise in the manner, ~~let us say, that elsewhere~~ ^{adjoining} along the fur frontiers of northmost North America occasional young Scotsmen of promise were let to fashion themselves into field captains of the Hudson's Bay Company by learning to lead brigades of trappers and traders, keep the native tribes cowed or in collaboration, deliver a reliable 15 per cent ^{of} profit season upon season to London and, not incidentally, to hold those far spans of map not only in the name of their corporate employers but for the British crown which underlay the company's charter terms like an ornate watermark. Finlayson, McLoughlin, Simpson, Mackenzie, Fraser, others: Caledonians who whittled system into the wilderness, names we known even yet as this continent's northern roster of men of enterprise and empire. But maybe is only maybe, and the facts enough are that on the broad map of midnineteenth-century empires Alaska lies apart from the Hudson's Bay span of Canadian dominion.

("It was but natural," the magistrate of America's frontier history, H.H. Bancroft, ^{later} would write, "in the gigantic robbery of half a world, that Russia should have a share; and had she been quicker about it, the belt might as well have been continued to Greenland and Iceland.")

That, indeed, this colossal crude crown of northwestmost wilderness is tipped sharply, as if in deliberate spurn, away from London to the direction of Siberia ^{St. Petersburg.} and ~~Moscow.~~ That within the Tsar's particular system of empire-by-proxy,

Swedes and other outlanders who signed on with the Russian-American Company's fur-gathering enterprise did so as indentured laborers, seven-year men. And that ~~our man~~ ^{the name} Melander's ~~name~~ thus is not to be discovered anywhere among the frontier baronage.

~~As~~ ^{For as} will happen, Melander after pledging to the Russian-American Company did find his life altered by the alluring new nautical machinery, ^{right enough--} ~~in the direction~~ but not ~~as~~ hoped. Only seldom the Russians fired up the Nicholas, which proved to require approximately two days of chopping by the wood crew to feed the boilers for each day of voyage--a visiting Hudson's Bay officer once amended the vessel's name to Old Nick, on the ground that it consumed fuel at about the rate you might expect of Hell--and on the occasions when its paddlewheels were set into ponderous thwacking motion, positions aboard were snatched by bored officers of the small Russian navy contingent stationed at New Archangel. Melander's service aboard the Nicholas occurred ^{only} whenever the Russian governor, Rosenberg, took his official retinue on an outing to the hot spring at Ozherskoi, an outpost south eighteen miles along the coast from Sitka Sound. In Melander's first Alaskan year this happened precisely twice, and his sea-time-under-steam totaled six days.

The rest of his workspan? A Russian overseer conferred assignment on Melander as promptly as the supply schooner vanished over the horizon on ^{the} its voyage back to Stockholm and Kronstadt. "Friend sailor," ~~we~~ ^{the overseer began, "we} are going to give you a chance to dry out your bones a bit," ~~the overseer began,~~ and Melander knew that what followed

was not going to be good. Because of his ability of handling men and, from time on the Baltic, his tongue's capability with a bit of Russian and spatter of Finnish, and his Gotland knowledge of fish, henceforth Melander was in charge of the crew which salted catches salmon and of herring and halibut for New Archangel's winter larder.

Seven-year men. "The Russians' hornless oxen," as Melander more than once grumbled it.

—————
"Deacon Step-and-a-Half is at it again."

Melander peered with interest along the card-players and ~~conversationalists~~ ~~conversationists~~ in the workmen's barracks to see where the gibe had flown from. In New Archangel, a fresh turn of tongue was all too rare ~~in New~~ ~~Archangel.~~ ~~He~~ Melander himself had just tried out his latest declaration to no one in particular: "A seven-year man is a bladeless knife without a handle, "aye?" That had attracted him the anonymous dart, not nearly the first to bounce off his seaman's hide.

These shipmates--Melander corrected himself: barrackmates--were an every-sided lot. Finns and Swedes under this roof, about all they could count in common were their seven years' indenturement and the conviction that they were sounder souls than ⁿ the Russian workforce in the several neighboring dwellings. The Scandinavians, after all, had been pulled here. Most of the Russian laborers simply were ~~had been~~ shoved; stuffed aboard ship at Okhotsk on the coast of Siberia and pitched across the North Pacific to the Tsar's Alaskan fur field. Be it said,

these Siberian vagabonds had not been encouraged onward to Russian America for habits such as nudging ducks into paddles. Thugs, thieves, hopeless sots, no few murderers, the flotsam of any vast frontier, jostled among them. ("Where," ~~a~~ ^{an appalled} governor of New Archangel once wrote home to a grandee of the Russian-American Company, "do you get such men?") But so did debtors, escaped serfs, those whose only instinct was to drift. Melander, by now no admirer of anything Russian, saved his contempt for the New Archangel officialdom. These others, the Okhotskans, simply had made humankind's usual blunder, forgot to get themselves highborn.

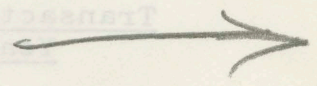
As for this crew in evening dawdle all around him, they nested here like...abruptly Melander stood up, a process like staves suddenly framing themselves together into a very large scarecrow. Amid a card game several bunks away, a shipwright from Karlskrona flicked a nervous glance his way. Melander grinned at so easy a giveaway, awarded a mocking nod to his derider, and in galumphing strides went from the barracks.

Outside held another sort of confinement, but at least airier than in. Melander as ever glanced up, the way he might have checked a topgallant sail, at the peak which thrust over all their lives at New Archangel, ungainly ~~was~~

Verstovia. Its summit a triangle of rough rock atop a vaster triangle of ^{forested} ~~firred~~ slope, Verstovia ^{presided} ~~sat~~ up there ^{broad} ~~plump~~ and becrowned, the first presence ~~in your life~~ each morning, the last at every dusk.

And farther, snowier crags attended Verstovia on both sides. A threefold Jericho, this place New Archangel, walled first by the stockade, next by these tremendous mountains, and last, the distances to anywhere else of the world.

Odd, the deceit of distance. How it was that men would brave the miles to a new place, the very total of those miles seeming to promise a higher life than the old, and then to find the work was ~~totted~~ totted up dull, the wage never quite came to what it should, the food was worse than ever--the longing to be elsewhere had pivoted straight around. Yes, that was the way for a seven-year man, distance played these tricks as if a spyglass had spun end-for-end in his hands.



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stockade, next by these tremendous mountains, and last, the distances to anywhere else of the world.

→ Melander moved off toward the central street of the settlement and here encountered one of the Company clerks, no doubt on his way to stroll in the Governor's hill garden. Many of the Castle Russians took such a constitutional at evening, any custom of home being paced through more devoutly here than in ^{MUSCOVY} Russia itself. Melander considered that the man was wasting footsteps; more than beds of pansies and fuschias were required to sweeten the soul of any Russian. ~~Nonetheless--~~ ~~Nevertheless--~~

"Drastia," the lanky Swede ^{offered} said with a civil nod, and was greeted in turn. Perhaps a Melander could not rise at New Archangel, but he at least would invest some care to stay level.

check this
This was one of the first lengthening evenings of summer of 1852, the moment of year when darkness seemed not to care to come and New Archangel's dusk took advantage to dawdle on and on.

Before the season turned, eventide would stretch

until close onto midnight. The long light copied Swedish summer, ^{which meant that} while this slow vesper of the ^{alaskan} day was the time Melander liked best, it also cast ^{all} the remindful shadows of ^{what} all that he had become absented from. His birthland. The sea. And his chosen livelihood. Triple tines of exile. Much to be prodded by.

insert NA map → Only because ^{the route} it afforded the most distance for his restless boots, Melander roved on west through the narrow shoreline crescent of bakery, joinery, warehouses, officers' quarters, smithy; settlement. Past log building after log building, if bulk of timbering were the standard of civilization, New Archangel ^S would have preened grand as Stockholm. Sea-drifter he was, Melander had never got used to this hefty clamped-into-the-wilderness feel of the port-town.

"Log barns and sawdust heads," ~~he called~~ the style of Russian America ~~was~~ summed by Melander.

In about four hundred paces from his barracks departure Melander's traipse necessarily ended, the high timbered gate of the stockade here stoppering New Archangel until morning.

And so Melander still needed motion. ~~He~~ changed course to the north. Rapidly passed the gate watchman yawning within his hut. Climbed the short knoll where the first of the stockade's blockhouses overlooked the gate. In long pulls clambered up the ladder to the catwalk beside the blockhouse. Here met the quizzing glance of the Russian sentry and muttered: "The ~~Finns~~ ^{damned} are singing in the barracks again. They sound like death arguing with the devil."

The sentry nodded in pitying savvy and returned to his watching-slot within the timbered tower. Melander was left solitary, against the dusky sky, scanning out beyond Sitka Sound and its dark-treed islands schooled like furry whales, to the threadline of horizon that is the Pacific.

A time of studying seaward. The ports of all the planet were out there. Danzig and Copenhagen, Kronstadt, Trondheim, Rotterdam, London... Men and women are hard ore, we do not ~~become~~ ^{go to} slag in ~~only~~ ^{mere} a few seasons of ~~fire~~ ^{force}: Melander ~~aland~~ ^{is} still Melander, First Mate.

A raven flapped past, pulled a glance ~~from~~ ^{the tall man} Melander. The black birds ruled the roofs of New Archangel, and their metallic ~~cries~~ ^{comment up there somehow} struck an odd humility into ~~you~~ ^{a person}.

Finally, as if at last reassured that the water portion of the world still hung in place, Melander dropped his gaze. Now ~~he~~ was

more alt
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time

peering directly down at the edge of shore subjacent to the outside end of the stockade.

Here his looking held for a good while.

Eventually, the tall man murmured something. Something so softly said that the sentry nearby in the blockhouse mistook ^{the sound} it for another mutter against twittering Finns. # It was not that, though. Just this:

"Perhaps not bladeless."

Do such things have a single first moment? If so, just here Melander begins to depart from a further half dozen years of the salting of fish.

—
"Take our tea outside the stockade, whyn't we? The farther you can ever ^{get} traipse from these Russians, the better anything tastes. Aye?"

Tin mugs in hand, Melander and Karlsson passed the sentry at the opened gateway of the stockade and sauntered to the edge of the native village which extended in a single-file march of dwellings far along the shoreline.

This

Karlsson was a part-time bear-milker. That is to say, ordinarily he worked as an axman in the ^{timber-felling} wood-cutting crew, but his ~~upbringing~~ ^{also} ~~upbringing~~ ^{himself} near the forests of Skane had sufficiently skilled him as a woodsman that he was sent with the hunting party which occasionally forayed out to help provision New Archangel; to milk the bears, as it was jested. The sort of fellow with nothing much he cared to put to voice, and of whom even less was remarked, Karlsson. It is told that

at a Scandinavian free-for-all, Danes will be the ones dancing and laughing, Norwegians endeavoring to start a fight, Finns passing bottles, and Swedes standing along the wall waiting to be introduced. Melander constituted a ^{towering} tall exception to this slander, but Karlsson, narrow bland face like that of a village parson, would have been there among the wall-props.

Sociability was ^{nothing that} not what Melander sought out of Karlsson. A time, he had noticed Karlsson canoeing ^{across} in Sitka Sound ^{here,} back from a day's hunting. Karlsson's thrifty strokes went beyond steady, ^{The regularity of a small millwheel,} tireless, in a neat-handed, workaday fashion. ^{Watching him,} Melander ^{as he watched Karlsson paddle.} had been put in mind of ~~the regularity of a millwheel.~~

Another impression of the slender untalkative man's interesting constancy also was stored away in Melander. The observation that Karlsson ~~man~~ visited more often to the women in the native village ~~outside the stockade wall~~ than did any of the merchants of wind who perpetually bragged in the barracks about their lust. Or as Melander mused it to himself, "^{The mermaids have got hold of his towrope, but he} ~~never yips~~ ^{doesn't go} ~~around yipping it.~~" ^{about it.}

What brought down Melander's decision in favor of Karlsson, however, was a feather of instant remembered from shipboard. Karlsson had been borne to Alaska on the same schooner as Melander, and Melander recalled that just before sailing when others of the indentured group, the torque of their journey-to-come tremendous in them at the moment, were ^{intending} talking large of the ^{bright} certain success ahead, ^{what adventure} ~~the excitement~~ the frontier life would furnish and how ^{swiftly} rapidly and with what staggering profit their seven years of contract with the Russians would pass,

Karlsson had listened, given a small mirthless smile and a single shake of his head, and moved off along the deck by himself. Whatever directed Karlsson to Alaska, it had not been a false ^{northern} sun over his future.

Melander ^{purposely} chose ^{this} a rainless late-June morning, gentle gray-silver overcast cupping the day's light ^{downward} to lend clarity down to the harbor's spruce islands and the sudden spearing mountains behind the settlement, the usual morning wind off the bay lazed to a breeze, to approach Karlsson before work call. His thought was that if Karlsson would ^{entertain} consider escape on ^{this} the most silken of New Archangel's days, he truly was ready as ready.

check
In front of the two Swedes now stretched Japonski, biggest of the islands schooled thick in Sitka Sound. The channel across to Japonski was just four hundred yards or so, but one of the quirks of New Archangel's spot in the world was that this moat-like side of water somehow emphasized isolation more than the open spans of the bay.

As Melander and Karlsson stood and sipped, a dozen natives emerged from one of the nearest longhouses, men and women together and all naked, and waded casually into the ^{channel} bay to bathe.

"Those canoes are longer then they look, aye?" Melander began, motioning to the natives' cedar shells in a row on the beach before them; the line of lithe craft, like sea creatures dozing side by side on the ^{white} sand, which his gaze had been drawn to when he stood atop the stockade. "We could step into one here and step out at Stockholm."

Karlsson's face, all at once not nearly so bland, suggested the standard skepticism toward talk of uncooping oneself from New Archangel. Because of the isolation so far into the North Pacific and because muskeg and sinkholes and an alpine forest so thick it

seemed to be thatched began just beyond the stockade walls, the matter of escape always narrowed instantly to the same ~~worm~~ point: where, except up to the sweet blue meadows of heaven, was there to go?

now "The world has many wheres," said Melander, *now* "We need just four of them."

Melander drained his mug in a final gulp, folded himself down to rest one knee on the dirt and with a stick began to ~~diagram~~ ^{trace.}

A first south-pointing stab of shoreline, like a broad knife blade. Baranoy ^f Island, on the oceanward side of which they squatted now.

A speckle of isles, then ^{another} a large landform, south-pointing too, like the sheath Baranoy ^f had been pulled from. The Queen Charlotte group of islands.

Another brief broken isle-chain of coast, then a long blunt slant, almost sideways to the other coastal chunks. Vancouver Island.

At last, fourth and biggest solidity in this geographical flagstone of Melander's, the American coastline ^{descending} leading to the Columbia River. ^{large.} The place where the ^{dirt-lines of} coast and the river met, Melander Xed ~~as if making~~ ^{his name mark.} Astoria, he said the mark was.

Map lesson done, Melander recited to the close-tongued Karlsson the mainframe of his plan.

That if they selected their time well and escaped by night they could work a canoe south along the coast. That there at its southern extent, down beyond the Russian territory and that of the Hudson's Bay Company, the place called Astoria was operated by the Americans as an entry

port. From there ships would come and go, ships to the docks of Europe. To, at last, Stockholm.

Six weeks' canoe journey, Melander estimated ~~it would be~~ to Astoria. If they caught luck, a month. more?

"You talk us in royal style from here to there, Melander. But this God-forgotten coast, in a canoe..."

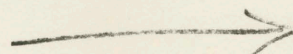
Karlsson fell silent for a time then, looking off around the island-speckled bay and up into the timbered mountains. Verstovia's skirt-forest showed every branch distinct today, almost every bristle; green lacework, it seemed.

Melander knew he was going to have a wait. There always was about this Karlsson a calm just short of chill. He was a Smalander, and that ilk were known to have in them whatever stone God had left over after He filled their fields with it. "One word, good as two"^{—~~that~~—}^{this} was the anthem of Smalanders. Right now the lean man, the man was appraising the horizon of Alaska as if someone had offered him the whole tumbled country for forty ^{dalers} kronor.

Then again, Melander noticed Karlsson's glance come back twice and linger in the vicinity of the bathing native women.

On such a New Archangel day sound carried like light, and from the blacksmith shop within the stockade began to chorus the measured clamor of hammer against anvil.

As if roused by the clangor, Karlsson turned to the taller man.



"Two of us are not enough strength for that much paddling."

"No," Melander agreed. "Our other man is Braaf."

"Braaf? That puppy?"

Melander tendered his new co-conspirator a serious smile which might have been ⁱⁿ a replica of Karlsson's own aboard the schooner in Stockholm harbor.

"We need a thief," Melander explained.

———
That is the way they became two. Disquieted shipman, musing woodman, now plotters both. Against them, and not yet knowing it, although habitually guardful as governing apparatuses have to be, stood New Archangel and its system of life. The system of all empires, when you come to ponder ^{the matter} ~~it~~. For empires exist on the principle of constellations in the night sky--pattern imposed across unimaginable expanse--and the New Archangels of the planet at the time, whether named Singapore or Santa Fe or Dakar or Astoria or Luanda or Sydney, were their specific scintillations of outline. The far pinspots representing vastly more than they themselves were.

That voyage which deposited Melander and Karlsson into their indentured situation ^{illustrates} ~~reminds~~ that here in the middle of the nineteenth century, this work of putting out the lines of star-web across the planet ~~was~~ had to be done with the slow white wakes of sailing ships. But done it was. Sealanes were extended and along them the imperial energies resolutely pulsed back and forth, capital to colony and colony

to capital. Africa, Asia: the lines of route from Europe were converging and tensing one another into place for decades to come. North America: the gray-gowned wee queen of England reigned over Ojibways and Athapascans and Bella Coolas, the United States was taking unto itself the western vastness between the Mississippi and the Pacific, merchants of Moscow and Irkutsk were being provided fortunes by bales of Alaskan furs.

Such maritime tracework seemed, in short, to be succeeding astoundingly. Yet...yet all this atlas of order rested on the fact that it requires acceptance, a faith of seeing and saying, "Ah yes, here is our Great Dipper, hung onto its nail in heaven," to make constellations real. So that what the makers of any imperial configuration always ~~had to~~ ^{needed} be most wary of was minds--such as Melander's, such as Karlsson's, such as the one Melander was calculating upon next to ally with their two--which happened not to be of stellar allegiance.

Braaf would have given the fingers of one hand to be gone from New Archangel. He had, after all, the thief's outlook that in this ~~many-cornered~~ ^{was} vast world of opportunity, an occasion would surely arrive when he could pilfer them back.

Put it simply, stealing was in Braaf like blood and breath. He ~~had been~~ ^{was} a Stockholm street boy, son of a ~~prostitute~~ ^{waterfront} and the captain of a Danish fishing ketch, and on his own in life by the age of seven. Alaska he had veered to because, after a steady growth of ~~skill~~ ^{talent} from beggary to picking pockets to thievery, the other destination

prominently beckoning to him was kastell: prison.

So Braaf ~~became~~ ^{turned up as} another in the 1851 contingent to New Archangel, ^{Circassian} and at once skinning knives and snuff boxes and twists of Kirghiz tobacco and other unattached items began to vanish from the settlement as if having sprung wings in the night. The Russians vented fury on the harborfront natives for the outbreak of vanishment, but the coterie ^{the new young Stockholmer} of Swedes and Finns rapidly made a different guess, for ~~Braaf was~~ ^{Braaf stayed} ~~among them had set up shop as~~ becoming a kind of human commissary in the barracks. Because ~~he was~~ ^{remuneration} reasonable in his prices--interested less in ~~income~~ than in chipping the monotony of Alaskan life, which he found to be a rain-walled prison in its own right--and was diplomatic enough not to forage ~~anything major~~ from his own barrackmates, nothing was said against him.

How hard it would have been, anyway, to lodge a believable case against Braaf. At twenty, he displayed the round ruddy face of a farmboy--an apple of a face--and in talking with you lofted his gaze with innocent interest just above your eyes, as if considerately measuring you for a hat.

The morning after tea was taken outside the stockade of New Archangel by a pair of ~~men~~ ^{Swedes}, it was taken by a trio.

"Me?" Braaf murmured when Melander loomed over him and Karlsson appeared at his opposite shoulder. "No, I was just about to...Sorry, I've to ~~I must~~...Maybe the noon-break, I'll..."

In his quietly ~~suggesting~~ manner, Karlsson ~~instructed~~ ^{suggested} Braaf ~~had better~~ ^{to} shove a bung in his spout and hear out Melander's proposition.

"You put it that way," Braaf ~~agreed~~ ^{concurred,} "and my ears are yours."

On the slope of shore above the ~~Kolosh~~ canoes, Braaf studied back and forth from Melander's forehead to Karlsson's as Melander once more outlined the plan.

"Austria, I've heard of that. But is it anywhere around here?"

"Astoria," Melander repeated with patience. ~~"Named for the rich American fur man Astor."~~ "It's the port for a part of this coast the Americans call Oregon."

"Imagine," said Braaf politely through a slurp of tea.

"Braaf, we need your skill of, umm, acquiring. It'll take supplies and supplies for such a journey."

"Why should I?"

"Because you're stuck here like a stump if you don't."

"That's a reason, I suppose. Why won't we drown?"

"God's bones, Braaf, these Kolosh canoes float like waterbugs. You'd need ~~to~~ be an oaf to tip one over."

"I've been in company with an oaf or two in my time."

"Braaf, listen," Karlsson broke in. "I go in these canoes all the time, and I am undrowned."

"For all I know you have gills in the cheeks of your ass, too."

"Braaf," Melander resumed as if reciting to a limited child.

"You have a choice here which comes rare in life. Join us and leave

this Russian shitpile, or stay and ~~be~~ caught one day lifting one snuff box too many. You've seen what these Russians can do with a knout. That sergeant of the sentries will sign his name up and down your back. Aye?"

"Pretty choice you paint. Rock and stony place."

"What else is the world? ~~Come~~ ^{Step} in with us, Braaf. It'll take your fast fingers to get us ~~out~~ ^{from} of here. But we can get ~~out~~ ^{from} ~~out~~ ^{from} here."

"My fingers should ever see the day they're fast as your tongue, Melander."

"Thank you, but we can race ~~some~~ ^{another} other time. ~~Are you with us?~~ ^{With us, are you, or not?"}

"You know for heaven-certain that we'll find this American fort ~~at--what's the place, Asturia?~~ ^{it, Astruria}?"

"Astoria. It is there. I have known sailors whose ships have called there. Perhaps ~~we will~~ ^{we'll} not even ~~need~~ to go that far, if we meet a merchantman or ~~supply ship~~ ^{trading or whaler} along the way. English, Spanish, Americans or the devil, ~~it~~ ^{which.} won't matter. So long as they're not Russians. Aye?"

"And the downcoast natives? Kolosh and whatever-the-hell-else they might be?"

"I already said the devil."

Only for an instant now, about the duration of a held breath, did Braaf's eyes come steady with those of Melander and Karlsson. Just before he nodded agreement to join the escape. And that is how

they became three.

———
 In the galaxy of frontier enclaves sparked into creation by imperialism, New Archangel was a mapdot unlike any other. Simultaneously a far-north backwater port and capital of a territory greater than France and Spain and England and Ireland ^{taken} together, the settlement ran on Russian capacities for hard labor and doggedness, and was kept from running any better than it did by Russian penchants for muddle and infighting. New Archangel here fifty years after its founding still stood forth in the image of its progenitor, the stumpy and tenacious Aleksandr Andreevich Baranov. Of Baranov historians exclaim that, like Napoleon, he was a little great man, for Baranov it was who as first governor of Russian America began in 1791 to stretch Russian strength from the Aleutian chain of isles down the great arc of Alaska's coast, bending or breaking

check
 the native cultures along the route one after another: Aleuts chastened into becoming the Russians' seasonal hunters of ^{fur} seals and sea otters, people of the Kenai cajoled into allegiance by Baranov's mating with the daughter of the foremost chief, stubbornly combative Tlingits-- whom the Russians dubbed Kolosh^{es}--at last in 1804 dislodged from Sitka Sound by the cannonades of one of the Tsar's gunships.

Baranov had true need of Sitka. Along virtually all of that stupendous southeast~~ern~~ Alaskan coast the mountains drop sheer to the Pacific, spruce slopes like green avalanches into the seawater. Except ^{at} Sitka, where miles of harbor indent the archipelagic shoreline.

E. J. W.
 1/2/11

~~no 4~~ Except Sitka, where the deep notch of bay is sided by a hardy shelf of shore. ~~Except Sitka, where in further grudging bequest of topography,~~

at the shore's southmost hook a knoll of rock some forty feet in elevation and four times as broad pokes up like a helmet. Amid the coastline of shoulder to shoulder mountains, this single odd ~~granite~~ ^{stone} callus ~~is~~ ^{was} the strategic bayside point: the Kolosh ^{so} employed the mound as their stronghold and Baranov would lose no time ⁱⁿ perching his own thicklogged bastion there. The Russian-American Company's frontier Gibraltar, perhaps say. So turn the issue this way, that and the other--

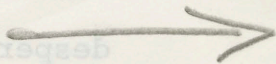
~~beyond doubt,~~ you may bet that Baranov whirled it dizzy--Sitka Sound represented the maritime ringhold into which Russian influence could be firmly knotted.

In this summer of 1852, the estimable Aleksandr Andreevich three decades dead, a double-storied governor's house still called Baranov's Castle squats ^{ted} there in the air at the mound-end of New Archangel's single street. At the opposite extent ^{rose} rises the onion dome and carrot spire of the comely little Russian Orthodox cathedral. Betwixt and around, the habitations of New Archangel amount ^{ed} to two hundred or so squared-log buildings, many painted an aspiring yellow as though ~~the~~ tint and ~~the~~ nearby shore qualifies ^d them as seaside cottages. But their rooflines ^{were} are hipped, the heavy style slanting down in all four directions from the ridgepole; and where gables ^{were} have been fashioned in, they ^{were} are windowed with small spoked semicircles of glass, like half-suns which never manage ~~to~~ either to set or to rise. A burly low-slung town, New Archangel for all its best efforts ^{was} ~~is~~, beneath the lording styles of cathedral and Castle.

22A

eccentricity.

One aspect further, and this one the true civic ~~eccentricity~~. This port
of Russian America has ^{d as} a larger ^a fleet of ships permanently aland ^{as} than
^{was} are customarily to be found in its harbor. Make-do ^{was} is the architect
here. When they no longer ^{could} can be safely



would see him sometimes when I went for the mail, off some-
where in his plodding stager. I remember that he wore
suspenders, one of the few men in town who did, and the

... and the ...

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sailed, hulks ^{were} ~~are~~ winched ^{out of Sitka Sound} onto shore and then improvised upon as needed.


("The Tsar's notion of an unsinkable squadron," ^{Melander} ~~Melander~~ of course ^{is} ~~has~~ ^{Melander's} gibed.) Of the first two, beached into usefulness in Baranov's time, one hulk had been used as a church and the other as a gun battery-- a pairing of enterprises, canon and cannon, which may have caused the Kolosh to ponder a bit about their new landlords. ^{This} ~~Its~~ habit of collecting ^{ever since has lent} hull-corpses ~~lends~~ New Archangel, as one visitor summed it, "an original, foreign, and fossilized kind of appearance."

The morning after Braaf joined the escape plan, Karlsson emerges ^{ed} from around a corner of the cathedral, on his way from the Scandinavian workmen's barracks a short span to its north, and walks ^{ed} the brief dirt street between God's domain and the Governor's. So deft with an ax that he often ^{was} ~~is~~ ^{lent} to help with the shaping of a ^{sail timber,} mainmast, Karlsson ^{was} ~~has~~ been delegated to work this day with the shipbuilding crew. ~~But before~~

¶ He very nearly could ^{have} ~~arrow~~ ^{ed} to the shipyard with his eyes bound over, ^{yet} ~~But~~ before

reaching the shipyard just beyond Baranov's Castle, ^{Karlsson} ~~he~~ ^{ed} veers west toward the stockade gate and the Kolosh village beyond. [¶] ~~steps~~ ^{ed} outside and along the wall toward the beach. [¶] ~~hunkers~~ ^{ed} and begins ^{ed} to scour the blade of his ax in the pale sand. Polishing away rust, this conscientious timberwright. [¶] ~~And~~ ^{ed} second work too, for as he squats, ^{ed} Karlsson from the corner of his eye studies ^{ed} the Kolosh canoes, prows rising in extension like the necks of fantastic horses, in their graceful rank along the beach.

All of New Archangel, stockade and cathedral and Castle and hulks
 and enterprises and dwellings, ^{sat} ~~sits~~ dwarfed this day by the Alaskan
 mountains, Verstovia and its throng of minions. Virtually atop the

town in the manner that the spire and dome crown the cathedral, the
 peaks ^{were} ~~are~~ precisely those a child would draw. Sharp tall pyramids
 of forest, occasionally a lesser summit round as a cannonball for
 comparison's sake. Topknots of snow show ^{ed} ~~ed~~ here and there, but the
 color everywhere else on these stretching peaks ^{was} ~~is~~ the black-green
 which only a northern coastal ~~fir~~ forest enmixes. 

(Handwritten scribble)

~~breathes at you~~

A kind of colossal constancy ~~hovers in~~ from form and tone of this sort, the surety that beyond such mountains, wherever you could peer there would stand only more such mountains. Except, of course, west into the ocean, where there was only more ocean.

As Karlsson begins ^a ~~hewing pine at the~~ ^{his} ~~shipyard,~~ ^{hewing,} Braaf materializes ^d at the southwestern extent of the settlement, beside the eldermost of two schooner-hulks beached there. ¶ When Braaf arrived to New Archangel and it became evident that he was not, as listed on one manifest, a shipwright, nor, as supposed on another item of record, a shoemaker, and Braaf with shy innocence denied knowing how such misunderstandings possibly could have come about, a perplexed Russian-American Company clerk assigned him to the readiest unskilled job, as a cook's helper. Daily Braaf manages ^d to use this livelihood to manufacture free time for himself, much of it spent hiding out somewhere within this maritime carcass. The hulk neighboring it yet ^{was} ~~is~~ in service as a cannon battery aimed into the Kolosh village, but dry rot has ^d made a casualty of this vessel of Braaf's. ¶ He slips ^{ped} through a gangway carpentered into the ship's hull when it became a storehouse, ^{crept} ~~creeps~~ to the forecastle, and within a particular one of the several stave-sprung barrels there ^{he made} ~~he~~ makes a deposit, a walrus-ivory snuffbox which hitherto was the possession of a Russian quarter-master. ¶ ^a Then, per Melander's instructions, Braaf begins ^a to measure by

handwidths the depth and breadth--which is to say, the cache capacity--
of other of these abandoned and forgotten receptacles.

Perpetually at combat with the massed mountains around Sitka
Sound ^{was} ~~is~~ the weather, changing even now, for New Archangel lives ^d ~~is~~ two
days of three in rain and oftener than that in cloud. "Always autumn,"
it was said of the gray climate. One minute, vapor would flow along
the bottoms of the mountains to float all the

peaks like dark icebergs. The next, the cloud layer ^{would} ~~will~~ rise and lop every
crag, leaving a broad, broad plateau of forest beneath. Or imprint of
stranger sort, clumps of wan light, warmths fallen through chinks in
the overcast, ^{will would} ~~now~~ pinto the forest flanks. Between times a silken rain
probably has ^d ~~has~~ sifted into the New Archangel air, a dew standing in drop-
lets on ~~your~~ clothing before ^{anyone} ~~you~~ quite become aware of it, and it ^{could} ~~can~~ be
~~a hundred hours~~ ^{a man} ~~four days~~ before ^{his} ~~you~~ cast your next shadow. Yet the diminutive port
within all this swirl ^{was} ~~is~~ a place of queer clarity as well, its rinsed
air somehow holding a tint of blue light which causes ^d ~~causes~~ everything to
stand forth: smallest swags of spruce limbs on mountains a mile off,
rock skirts of the timbered islands throughout the harbor. Voices and
the barking of dogs carry ^{ied} ~~carry~~ extraordinarily.

At mid-morning, Braaf reluctantly emerging ~~from the direction~~
~~of the hulk~~ toward chores for the noon meal, Melander on work-
break presents ^{ed} ~~presents~~ himself from within the saltery being constructed
on the point of shoreline southeast of the cathedral. Sitka Sound
shares amply in the ^{wide} ~~twenty-foot~~ tides of this region of Alaska, and
on the broad exposed tideflat a pig ^{was} ~~is~~ rooting up clams. His finds,

one after another, ^{were} ~~are~~ ^{snatched} from him by ^{crows} ~~ravens~~. Melander watches for a moment, then ^{ed} laughs. Other workmen ^{ed} inquire to him over their mugs of tea. Melander ^{ed} points to the raucous gulping birds: "The Castle Russians at one of their banquets."

Fully equal in complication and unlikelihood to its architecture and geography and weather ^{was} ~~is~~ New Archangel's tenantry. The settlement ^{was} ~~is~~ ruled by the Russian navy, administered by a covey of Russian-American Company clerks and other functionaries, provisioned chiefly by British ships of the rival Hudson's Bay Company, seasonally ^{ed} abounds with Aleut fur hunters, ^{ed} relies for most of its muscle work upon creoles--those born of Russian fathers and Kolosh mothers; of New Archangel's sum of about a thousand persons, this ^{ed} adds up to far the most sizable group--or upon Russian vagabonds given the push out of Okhotsk, and for its craftwork, such as carpentry and smithing, it ^{ed} imports the seven-year men from Scandinavia. Colony within a colony, the hundred and fifty or so Scandinavians mostly ^{ed} ~~are~~ Finns; ^{ed} one sift more, and the few dozen Swedes such as Melander and Braaf and Karlsson ^{ed} ~~are~~ at last accounted.

Yet not even this ^{ed} ~~social~~ ^{garish} pyramid, sharp-tipped and broad-bottomed as the triangle peaks above the little port, ^{ed} ~~takes in~~ ^{indicates} the most numerous populace on Sitka Sound. The Kolosh, the Sitka Tlingits. Their ^{es} ~~low-~~ By their own legend, People of the Frog, a ^{ed} ~~restless~~ ^{and vivid} clan who had migrated to Sitka Sound with their great-eyed carved emblem, ^{ed} ~~big~~ as a bear, in tow behind their canoe fleet. Now their low-

roofed longhouses straggle ^{ed} for nearly a mile along the beach west of New Archangel's huddle of buildings, and the stockade wall of defense

26A follows →

check

twenty-five feet high and five hundred yards long, four blockhouses built of fat logs, and a couple of dozen full-time sentries constantly expressed the colony's wariness of the natives. With cause. This very year of 1852, the Sitka Tlingits had sent word to a Stikeen clan that, at last, a years-standing quarrel might be called quit, when the Stikeen peace delegation arrived, thirty-five of them were slain quick as a butchering, ^{the few others} five managed to beg sanctuary within New Archangel. Long memories on these Sitka Tlingits, then; of amplitude to recall that when Baranov implanted his first settlement here at their bay, they obliterated it and put the Russian heads up on stakes.

Precisely this prudence toward the Kolosh, the way New Archangel each and every day ^{needed to} must set its most vigilant face toward those who might scheme to get in, it would take someone of Melander's angle of mind to count on as advantage for getting out.

#

Steam whiffed around Karlsson as he stepped into the workmen's bathhouse. Every seventh day the ~~sauna tender heated the rocks in bucketsfull then sluiced onto the hot stones ringing the vat.~~ ^{vat of water was heated to boil,} the center of this room for ten hours on a bed of charcoal, and by this far in the night, man after man of the New Archangel workforce having sought to scour weariness from his muscles, the steam densened to one great cube of saturation.

Karlsson stood within the heavy warmth for a moment, slender and very white in his nakedness, before bringing the small woven reed breathing mask to his mouth and holding it there within his cupped right hand.

"At least this cloud is a hot one. New Archangel could use a

Melander's voice, deeper for being muffled, resounded from across the room, and in three steps Karlsson could see the hazed man, his body alone in ~~its~~ long-boned angles on the bathing bench. Melander's reed respirator mask all but disappeared in the big hand palmed around it, so that he seemed to be covering a perpetual chuckle.

"Are you tasting it yet?" Melander went on. "Our venture, I mean? I find myself thinking of salt air. Ocean air. Better than ~~sniffing herring,~~ ~~fish guts,~~ I can tell you."

"Where's our pickpurse?"

"He will come. The hours of Braaf's day are not like any other man's."

"How far do you trust him?"

"Ordinarily, only a whisker's width." Melander had known Braaf's ~~clan~~ type all too well on shipboard, men with the instinct always to vanish just before a topsail needed clewing up, and of course the armies of all history have known him best, the scrounger, the dog-robber. "He'd steal the milk out of your tea, aye? But Braaf wants to shake New Archangel from his boots as badly as we do. He'll do much to ~~manage~~ ~~achieve~~ that. Much that neither of us can do, just as he can't canoe himself down this coast. The three of us are like a ~~shock~~ ~~bundle~~ of rye when your ~~Smaland~~ ~~Skane~~ fields are harvested, Karlsson. Together we lean in support of one another. Take any one away and we fall."

"And are trampled by the Russians."

"Aye, well. The answer to that is not to fall, nor ~~to~~ let each other fall."

"I need to know one matter about you, Melander. Why didn't you stay on with the schooner?"

"Yes, I can see that might be a matter to know. Promise me not to laugh. ~~. . . I stayed, I suppose,~~ ~~it'd been,~~ But I stayed ~~for a pretty sight.~~ ~~A pretty face,~~ you might understand better. But it was this. What took my eyes was the Nicholas, these islands and mountains and the northern ocean. I could see myself on that steam-whale, going places of the world here I could never have dreamed of." ~~Melander's eyes tightened above the reed~~

Up into the high north, there. Ice ~~foot~~ high as a church-eave, they tell of along those shores. And creatures. Carpenter of a ~~man-of-war's man,~~ brig I shipped on, an old ~~Swalander,~~ had been high north once on a whaler. Said whales stink like Hell's cess, but walruses were worth the trip to see. I've never forgot--'They have noble bones in their teeth,' he told me. And to sail it all by steam, just this fog around us now... So I looked on the Nicholas and saw luck, right enough." ~~Melander's eyes tightened above the reed~~

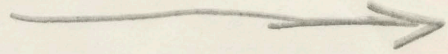
mask. "What I forgot to look at was the wormy souls of these Russians, aye?"

"And wasn't that a fall, of a sort?"

"A stumble, my friend, a stumble. The strides ~~we will~~ ^{we'll} take together along this coast ~~shall~~ ^{will} make up for it."

"A stumble, that's nothing," said a third voice. "Unless
just then."
a noose is around your neck at the time.

The steam thinned as the opened doorway sucked it away, and brought into view Braaf. With his clothes off, he looked more than ever like an outsized boy rather than a man. Both Melander and Karlsson noticed that Braaf did not even pause to accustom himself to the cumulus of heat before crossing the room to them, nor bother to put the steam-sieving mask to his mouth until he was seated, a little way from the other two.



"Our commissary officer. Welcome, Braaf. Let's have no more thoughts than necessary of nooses and the like, ~~however.~~ ^{though.} Now that all three of them were at hand, Melander was, for him, singularly businesslike. "What we need to talk ~~of~~ ^{through} is our divvy of tasks. Braaf, ~~we're~~ ~~we are~~ going to want--" and here Melander recited, in crisp fashion which would have done honor to a king's remembrancer, the list of supplies for the escape. "Any of this you can't ~~lay your hands on?~~ ^{put your fingers to?"}

Braaf contemplated the steam overhead.
 "No. Some harder, some easier, ~~but no.~~"

"Good. Tomorrow, begin your harvest."

"A thing more, Melander." Karlsson, afresh. "How is it we're to get ourselves and all this ~~truck~~ ^{plunder} out of this stockade, when the time comes?"

"Oh, aye, did I not tell you? Through the gate."

"Through the...?"

"Well that you asked," Melander's voice clarifying as he took aside the reed mouth mask to display a growing grin, "for ~~you are~~ ^{you're} the one with the lever to ~~open that gate~~ ^{work that gate open} for us." Melander instructed Karlsson with monumental joviality now. "It's there between your legs."

~~In the next days,~~ ^{New Archangel's} a gleaner drifted about ~~in New Archangel~~ ^{within its walls} like a cloudlet of steam freed from ~~the~~ bathhouse. So adept a provisioner did Braaf prove to be that, ~~Melander soon had to ration out his stealing~~ ^{rapidly} lest the Russians become suspicious about the fresh blizzard of thievery, Melander had to ration out his stealing assignments.

~~assignments, lest the Russians become suspicious about the fresh blizzard of thievery.~~

—

By the end of July, Braaf's cache for the plotters held a compass, two tins of gunpowder, one of the three-pound boxes of tea the Russians used ^{for} to trade with the natives, several fishing lines and hooks, and a coil of rope.

—

During August he added ~~to it~~ a gaff hook, three excellent Kolosh daggers, a small candle lantern, a couple of hatchets, ~~and~~ a fire flint apiece, and a leather mapcase waterproofed with birch tar.

—

September's gleanings comprised a second compass--~~Melander wanted~~ Melander wanted to be-- to be double certain about navigation, ~~a~~ a small three-legged iron kettle, a spyglass, another box of tea and a water cask.

—

Early in October, New Archangel's month of curtaining rain, the plotters convened about the matter of a canoe.

The Kolosh^{es} had them in plenty, the slim vessels lying side by side in front of the longhouses as if drawn up to the starting line of a great regatta, canoes for hunting and canoes to carry trade and canoes for fishing and canoes for families and canoes for war, a navy of all canoes.

Karlsson had eyed out a choice--a twenty-foot shell with a high bold bow, the sheer of its hull rising and sharpening into

this cutwater as a scimitar curves in search of its point. High and pointy the stern, too, as though both the ends of this canoe were on sentry against the sea. Gunwales, rounded and deftly lipped. Four strong thwarts. And encupping it all, that most beautiful stunt of wood ^{the} the way a great red cedar had been hollowed and trimmed and stretched by heated water into a sleek pouch of vessel, its wooden skin not much more than the thickness of a thumb: exaltation of design and thrift of line, ~~that~~ jugglery of art somehow perfected by this coast's canoewrights. Karlsson's tongue was not the one to say it, but if the standing cedar tree had decided to transform into the swiftest of sea creatures, this craft of alert grace would have been the result.

Too, Karlsson's candidate lay amid the beached squadron of a dozen nearest the stockade gate, convenient enough,

^{attested that he} and Karlsson had watched to insure that its possessor was scrupulous. On New Archangel's rare warm days, the native sloshed water over the cedar interior to prevent its drying out and cracking; in normal damp weather, heaped woven mats over the craft for shelter. [#] A canoe of fit ^{and fettle,} and style ^{endorsed} Karlsson.

Melander and Braaf took turns at casual glances down the shoreline to Karlsson's nominee.

True, the canoe had so sprightly a look that it seemed only to be awaiting the right word of magic before flying off upward. ~~But Melander~~ By any man's standards, ^{most} a beckoning tool, keen blade for clearance of a route of water. But Melander believed he too knew something of canoes from having paddled a number of times with Kolosh crews to the fishing grounds off the western shorefront of Sitka Sound; indeed, it can be realized now that those journeys were

him ever since some forgotten writing pursuit or another landed me into the coastal region of history where he presides, meticulous as a usurer's clerk, diarying and diarying that life of his, four generations and as many lightyears from my own.

This is the 18th day since Swell was shot and there is no offensive smell from the corpse. It may be accounted for in this manner. He was shot through the body and afterwards washed in the breakers, consequently all the blood in him must have run out. He was then rolled up tight in 2 new blankets and put into a new box, nailed up strong.

I know the beach at Crescent Bay where the life of Swell, the chieftain of the Makah tribe, was snapped off. Across on the Canadian shore of the Strait of Juan de Fuca the lights of modern Victoria now make a spread of white embers atop the burn-dark rim of coastline. But on Swell's final winter night in 1861, only a beach campfire at Crescent on our southern shore flashed bright enough to attract the eye, and Swell misread it as an encampment of traveling members of his own tribe. Instead, he stopped, flings a beam of brightness eighteen miles. On each of the faces of the great lantern, circles and louvers of magnifying prism were worked by the Paris artisans to

7. ARTICLES

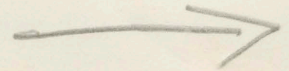
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first filaments in the spinning of his decision that seven-year-old could be fled by water. The fishing canoes were half again the length of this keen-beaked version singled out by Karlsson, and this question of size balked Melander.

Asked his opinion, Braaf mumbled that any canoe was smaller than ~~desired.~~
he preferred.

Karlsson maintained that his nominee had all the capacity they needed. What did Melander have in mind, to stuff the craft like a sausage?

Melander could not resist asking Karlsson if he was arguing that his wondrous canoe was bigger on the inside than on the out.



No, goddamn Melander's tongue, Karlsson retorted, it simply was a matter of waterworthiness, this canoe would amply carry their cache of supplies and be livelier to steer than a larger canoe and less weight to propel and...

Grinning, Melander was persuaded. Rarely did Karlsson trouble to assert himself about anything, so if he waxed passionate for this particular canoe, that was stout enough testimony. ~~indeed.~~

^{requested}
 Braaf ~~desired~~ to know what all the jibber-jabber at the front and back of the canoe was.

Bow and stern, Melander rapidly advised him before Karlsson got touched off again, and the canoe's painted designs, ^{oval outlines} ~~boxy patterns~~ with black oval centers to them, like egg-shaped eyes, likely of red and white which flowed deftly in and out of one another, were Kolosh symbols to ward off evil.

Evil whats, demanded Braaf.

Evil minnows that would leap from the sea and piss in Braaf's ear, Melander said in exasperation, how in hell's flaming name was he supposed to know what evil whats the Kolosh ^{ex} were spooked by?

Now: the three of them were of one mind for the canoe, was there any other--

Paddles, Karlsson announced, and insisted they be Haida paddles, a deft leaf-bladed type carved by a tribe somewhere downcoast and occasionally bartered north as far as New Archangel as prized items of trade, and one of them ^{further} needed be a ^{long} ~~wide~~ steering paddle of perfect balance.

Hearing this, Braaf frowned. ⁹¹ He had full reason. It took him all of the next week to accumulate a trio of Haida paddles from the natives along the harbor.

———
"Three?" said Karlsson when they met again. "What if we lose one over the side?"

Braaf cursed in his sweet voice, and went off to start the thief's siege of watching and waiting which would accrue a fourth paddle.

———
Like the single eye of some great ~~watchful~~ ^{guarding} creature, each morning at six the stockade gate near the westmost corner of New Archangel winked open, at six each evening it swung resolutely shut.

Only during those dozen hours of day were the Kolosh ^{es} allowed into the settlement, in scrutinized numbers, and the market area where they were permitted to trade was delineated directly inside the gate, so that they could be rapidly shoved out in event of commotion. Moreover, the first of the four gun-slitted blockhouses buttressing the stockade sat close above the area of market and gate on a shieldlike short slope of rock, miniature of the strong ^{uplifting} knob ~~supporting~~ Baranov's Castle. Scan ~~it~~ from inside or out, here at New Archangel's portal Russian wariness held its strongest focus.

Except. Except that, bachelor existence on a frontier being what it was, the gate sometimes peeped open in the evenings. Until dusk went into solid night, it was not unknown that a recreative stay might be made among certain bargainable women in the Kolosh village. For those dwelling within New Archangel rather than without, then, ~~the~~ ^{big gate's} second and unofficial--and by order of the governor, absolute--curfew ~~at the big gate~~ was full dark.

~~"There you are, then," Melander explained to Karlsson. "Free ride on the spotted pony, so to speak."~~

~~for him a typhoon of emotion.~~
Karlsson quirked his mouth enough to show skepticism, Melander was one who would have you believe that sideways is always true north. But Karlsson was a vane of ~~another~~ ^{stiffer} sort. He possessed a close idea of his own capabilities and could gauge himself with some dispassion as to whether he was living up to them. (That he had not much interest in people who lacked either capability or gauge, his stand-off style more than half-hinted.) What Melander was proposing, ~~in this gate enterprise,~~ Karlsson doubted he could fashion himself to.

"Right fit or not," Melander assured him, "you're the only fit."

And so Karlsson began to increase his frequency of visit to the native village, and by lingering on after the other visitants, to stretch each stay deeper into dusk. Eventually he was nudging regularly against the second curfew, much to the discomfiture of the night watchman at the gate of the stockade, Bilibin.

Bilibin was one of the longest-serving of the Russian indenturees who had been funneled out through the Siberian port of Okhotsk and

indicates
change of light
c. year 1804

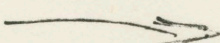
across the northern seas to New Archangel. Peg him, perhaps, somewhere amid the milder miscreants, without doubt having skinned his nose against one law or another but not the most hellbound soul you can call to mind, either. For ~~our~~ purpose here, however, which is that of Karlsson and Braaf and Melander, Bilibin's significant earmark was his longevity at New Archangel. Like many another, he had stayed on and on in the employ of the Russian-American Company because he was in debt to it deep as his eyeteeth. He also was sufficiently a scapegrace to have exasperated a generation of superiors, so that he now stood the least desirable of shifts, the gravy-eye watch, those heavy hours spanning the middle of the night. Turned about, the matter was that ~~his~~ ^{Bilibin's} superiors over the years had sufficiently knouted and berated him that ~~he~~ ^{Bilibin} took some care not to rush from under his canopy of dark into their attention.

Thus: the first time Karlsson arrived back to the gate past curfew, Bilibin blustered a threat to march him double-quick to the sergeant in charge of the sentries. ¶ "He'll knout you red, Viking. My scars ache to think of those he'll stripe on you, oh yes..."

But did nothing. Rousting out a sergeant because a Swede couldn't finish his rutting on time, well, now...

The next time, having conferred beforehand with Melander, Karlsson staggered later than ever from the Kolosh village to ~~the gate.~~ ^{Bilibin's} singing. Reedily, but singing. ~~He sang as if drunk:~~

"The fruit of the heart-tree,
do not eat,
for sorrow grows there,
black as peat."

Also, he carried 

else in the world on his mind except what somebody happened
 to ^{recite} ~~spea~~k into it, the Pioneer served as the town's hiring
 saloon. Ranch hands looking for a job would leave word with
 the bartender. Knowing this, ranchers would stride in to ask
 about a haying hand or somebody who knew how to irrigate.
 The ranch hand might have his bedroll right there along the
 back saloon wall, and minutes later be in the rancher's pickup
 on his way to the new job.

The Pioneer did its businesslike chore for the valley,

curlew, Kibbin blasted a threat to watch his double-dutch to the
 sergeant in charge of the sentries. "He'll know you red, Viking."
 My scars ache to think of those he'll stripe on you, oh yes...
 But did nothing. Howling out a sergeant because a Swede
 couldn't finish his rutting on time, well, now...
 The next time, having conferred beforehand with Melander,
 Karlsson staggered later than ever from the Koloss village to Kibbin's
 singing. Heedily, but singing.
 "The fruit of the heart-tree,
 do not eat,
 for sorrow grows there,
 black as pearl."
 Also, he carried

a jug of the native liquor called hootchina. Which without undue difficulty he persuaded Bilibin to ^{swig} ~~take~~ a reviveful ^{mouth's worth} ~~swig~~ from:

"Have fifteen drops, Pavel, it drives the snakes from one's boots..."

That his gate performances were credited by Bilibin without more than a first squint of suspicion astounded Karlsson. Was the world so bait-hungry as this? Was he, Karlsson, so deft of deceit? Well, fair must be fair: the fact here was not hunger but thirst, and the hootch deserved at least equal billing with Karlsson.

Under the New Archangel allotment of fifty cups of rum per man per year, Bilibin was a man perpetually parched.

no # "The old sirs up there in the Castle," he ^{grouched} ~~averred~~ to Karlsson between swigs, "might's well be spooning out dust to us."

check By autumn of 1852, Verstovia now in a yellow-orange bodice of ~~heather and~~ deer cabbage, Karlsson was not departing the stockade until nearly dark. # "Come along and dip your ladle in the kettle," the slim Swede would invite. # "No, no, no, I'm limber as a goose's neck, no more women for me, you can have mine as well," Bilibin would splutter back at him. # And the gate would wink open. # And wink again, far into the night, when Karlsson returned ~~with~~ with a proffer of the hootchina jug.

In mid-November, Melander ~~said~~ ^{announced} in his procedural way that the time had ~~come~~ ^{arrived} for Braaf to steal the coastal maps by which they would navigate south. # "It's the Tebenkov maps we want. Tebenkov must have been one Russian who had something other than cabbage between his ears. When he was governor here he made his captains chart all of this coastline, and there's a set aboard each ship. I ~~had a look at~~ ^{had a look at} ~~saw~~ the steamship's while Rosenberg was bathing his bottom at Ozherskoi. ~~Those~~ ^{Those} We'll take ~~those~~, they won't be missed until spring or whenever in hell's time the steamship gets fired up again. ~~Can you~~ ^{can you,} read Russian, Braaf?" # Braaf shook his head. # "No? Well, ~~no~~ ^{less} matter, we need the

ones from latitude 57 degrees as far south as 46 degrees, and you'll see they're marked like this."

NW bepera Amepuku, Melander printed carefully. NW coast of America.

The theft would be tricky, Melander cautioned, because Braaf would need to sort rapidly among all the maps in the steamship's chart room and--Melander stopped short as Braaf wagged his head again. ¶ "Aye?" Melander demanded. "What is it?"

"I can't read anything," Braaf said.

The single event certain to irk Melander was the unforeseen, and this incapacity of Braaf's he had not calculated on at all. Rarest annoyance crossed Melander's face, then he swerved to Karlsson and his disposition ~~readjusted~~ ^{righted} itself. ¶ "So. It seems to fall to you. This'll at least ~~be~~ ^{make} a change from galloping a Kolosh maiden, wouldn't you say? Now: the maps are kept--"

Karlsson was shaking his lean head in reprise of Braaf.

"I'm being sent hunting. Perhaps for as long as ten days."

Now Karlsson looked steadily into Melander's eyes and for once, so did Braaf.

Under the pressure of these gazes Melander grimaced. Scowled. Swore. "Jesu Maria. ~~Have~~ ^{Need} to become a common sneakthief next, do I? The pair of you..."

———
The pair of them met Melander with the same square glances two weeks later.

"I have them, I have them," the tall man ^{affirmed} said edgily. "But ~~narrow enough~~ a close matter it was. Christ on the cross, Braaf, how you go around like a deacon's ghost I'll never know. I needed to sort and sort, paw through every bedammed scrap of sheet. Skimpy bastards, these ~~Russians~~. Shouldn't have ^{figured} known. . ."

no #
Melander opened his mouth as if to go on, but went into thought instead. After a moment:

"Aye. Anyway, it's done and done. Let's get on with our enterprise. We'll need new sail for the canoe, can't trust the rotten cheesecloth these Kolosh use. You are able to recognize sail canvas, Braaf, aren't you?"

———
Minutes after the next morning's work-call, Braaf was making away with the sailcloth, the folded length ~~of it~~ cradled snug as Moses beneath an armload of ^{hides} skins he ostensibly was transporting toward the tannery, when a voice suggested huskily into his left ear, "Shouldn't've skinned so deep this time, Braaf. Let's talk about the bottom of your cargo, there."

there. Sent a seething letter to the newspaper in the territorial capital of Olympia . . . an Indian peaceably passing on his way home in his canoe, laden with white men's goods . . . foully murdered . . . agents of our munificent government have not the means at their disposal to defray the expenses of going to arrest the murderer. . . And at last canoed once more along the Strait to accompany Swell, still nailed up strong, for the hundred miles to burial at the Makah village of Neah Bay.

There, Swell's brother Peter came and wished me to go

Through the cold lightning of fright it did register on Braaf that the voice at least was Swedish rather than Russian. ^{Leftward,} He inched his head leftward the fraction enough to test the wide sideburn-framed face beside him. Recognition unfroze his mind... one of the blacksmiths...vain bastard he is...Wennstrom, Wennblad: 'Wennberg? ~~What...~~ "Wait, listen now..."

"No, don't ~~walk away~~ ^{stroll off} and ~~en't~~ ^{don't} put them down." Not suggestion now: orders. "We'll have a visit ~~until~~ ^{till} we see which happens." ^{planted} Wennberg ~~moved~~ himself in front of Braaf as companionably as if he had every matter in the ~~universe to discuss~~ ^{memory of the race to talk over} with him. "Whether you spill that load in front of these Russians, or your ^{long-ass} friend Melander lopes himself over here."

With a lanky swiftness which to any onlooker would seem as if he had been beckoned over to consult with the pair, Melander arrived. His dark look met Wennberg's blandness like a cloud against a cliff-

face, but he ~~said~~ ^{spoke} nothing. Nor Wennberg. Braaf was wordless with desperation. For a long moment, there the three of them clustered, pegs of quiet centered in,

the long rectangle of parade ground between Baranov's Castle and the stockade gate as if time had snagged to a stop within their little while radius, ~~around them morning life eddying,~~ ^{edded,} ~~quartermasters and overseers~~ ^{and promyshlenniki} and shipwrights and caulkers and brassworkers and sailors and Kolosh ^{es} and Castle officers, New Archangel humanity in all its start-of-day seeps and spurts of motion.

"So, Melander," Wennberg ~~broke~~ ^{snapped} their silence. "Braaf and I're ~~were just speaking of how much heavier skins've gotten this year.~~ ^{hides} ~~It~~

~~seems~~ a man can hardly hold a pood of them in his arms these days, ~~seems like.~~

"A man can carry as much as the world puts on him, ~~it is~~ ^{it's} said," Melander responded crisply, still glowering at Wennberg.

"You're always a ~~thinker~~ ^{deep one,}, Melander. Isn't he, Braaf?"

The blacksmith stepped close and pressed his elbow slowly, powerfully, into Braaf's left upper arm, drawing a strangled gasp from the laden man. ~~"A thinker, hmm?"~~ ^{"Deep as the devil's pocket, isn't he, hmm?"}

"Let's give Braaf a rest, ~~shall we?"~~ ^{shan't} Melander offered rapidly. ~~"You obviously have much to say about matters of weight."~~ ^{"Matters of weight can always be talked over."}

Wennberg hesitated, cast a glance into the thinning stream of the workshift, then ~~nodded~~ ^{nodded} as if Melander's words were the first coins down on a debt, ~~nodded.~~

Braaf lurched his way out of sight in the general direction of the tannery. The other two, Melander more toplofty than ever ~~beside the wide Wennberg,~~ ^{hefty, wide-legged} strode toward a building not far inside the stockade gate. ~~The smithing shop transected the middle of this structure~~ ^{was transected by the smithing shop,} and within its open arched doorway stood three huge forges, aligned from the outside in like stabled iron creatures. ~~of some nature.~~ ^{of these dusky fire-bins} The outermost ~~forge~~ ^{iron} was Wennberg's.

From where Wennberg stood day-long as he directed the heavy dance of hammer and ~~fire,~~ ^{iron} Melander scanned out into the parade ground.

no 91
~~The line of view took in~~ all comings and goings there, the line of view took in, and most particularly the route into Braaf's storage hulk just across the way.

41 Rueful, Melander wagged his head in rueful admission, Then and proffered ~~to the~~ blacksmith: "So?"

"You've plans to crawl out of this Russian bearpit, and I'm coming with you."

"Are you?"

"I am. Else you and Braaf and Karlsson'll be hung from the top of the stockade for the magpies to feast on."

"Tsk. On all this big island there should be plenty for the birds to feed on without going to that. Aye? What makes you think we're kissing goodbye to New Archangel?"

"Don't come clever with me, Melander. I've watched your trained packrat Braaf, these weeks."

"Braaf is his own man."

"Braaf's operated by your jabber. So's that stiff-cock Karlsson."

"Such powers I seem to have. You'll want to watch out I don't command your sidewiskers to turn into louse nests."

"You're not the high-and-mighty to command anything just now," the blacksmith rumbled. "You're down the toilet looking up, and don't forget it."

"Do you" come down with these fevers often, do you, Wennberg? Say we wanted to flee, how would we? Call ourselves Jonah and ask a whale to bunk us aboard?"

protection of that honorable emblem, the Stars and Stripes!

1918

"Don't you know the soldier looking up at you?"

"I'm a soldier, and I'm proud of it."

"I'm a soldier, and I'm proud of it."

"I'm a soldier, and I'm proud of it."

"I'm a soldier, and I'm proud of it."

"I'm a soldier, and I'm proud of it."

"I'm a soldier, and I'm proud of it."

"I'm a soldier, and I'm proud of it."

"I'm a soldier, and I'm proud of it."

"I'm a soldier, and I'm proud of it."

"I'm a soldier, and I'm proud of it."

"I'm a soldier, and I'm proud of it."

"I'm a soldier, and I'm proud of it."

"I'm a soldier, and I'm proud of it."

~~...the stars and stripes...~~

"I'm a soldier, and I'm proud of it."

"I'm a soldier, and I'm proud of it."

42

~~maiden's pee~~

"You'd yatter as long as ~~water~~ runs downhill, Melander. Time we barter. My silence for your plan."

"Silence I don't much believe in. But school me: why are you interested in notions of fleeing from here?"

"My reasons ~~come~~ ^{sleep} cousin to yours. Because I'm sick of life under these shit-beetle Russians. Because there're wider places of the world than this ~~stockade~~ ^{bedamned}." Grudgingly: "Because if anyone here is slyboots enough to escape, it's likely you."

"Flattering."

"Which doesn't mean I wouldn't laugh to see you hung high for magpie food, if that's your choice. Decide."

Melander held Wennberg's gaze in a lock with his own. Then the serious smile made its appearance.

"First you preach to poor Braaf of too much weight, now you ~~on at me about~~ keep ~~cautioning me of~~ too much height. Wennberg, I think you maybe underestimate how far a man can stretch himself if he has to. Aye? Can you handle a Haida paddle?"

— Melander spent considerable talking that night to convince Braaf and Karlsson that the ~~best~~ ^{better} choice was to ~~bring~~ ^{shepherd} Wennberg into the plan.

Braaf remained indignant about the incident on the parade ground. He volunteered to convert the blacksmith into a dead man, if someone would tell him how it ~~might~~ ^{ought} be done.

Melander ~~soothingly~~ ^{to be} agreed it ~~was~~ ^d an understandable ambition, ~~Through and through,~~ and laudable too, but no. He had thought the issue ~~through and through,~~ and the death of a valued smith such as Wennberg, especially when the killing would have to be achieved here within the fort, would breed more questions than it was worth. "Besides, he is a hill bull for strength--"

"And stupider than he is strong," Braaf put in.

"--and we can maybe make use of him," continued Melander. "Just maybe we can."

Karlsson squinted in reflection, then ~~said~~ ^{shortly} that what galled him was to be at Wennberg's mercy in any way. What if Wennberg took it into his narrow bull mind to betray them to the Russians for a reward?

Aye, Melander concurred, that was the very problem to be grappled. "We ~~shall~~ ^{all need} have to set a snare for Mister Blacksmith."

A few nights later, their first time as four.

Karlsson openly appraised Wennberg as if the blacksmith were marrying into the family. Their newcomer was both hefty and wide, like a cut of very broad plank. An unexpectedness atop his girth was the fluffy set of sideburns--light brown, as against the blondness of the other three Swedes--which framed his face all the way down to where his jaw joined his neck. Except for young dandies among the Russian officers no one else of New Archangel sported such feathery sidewhiskers, but then it ^c would be assumed that no one either was going to invoke foppery against this walking slab of brawn. A time or two Wennberg had re-edged an axe for Karlsson, but Karlsson ~~new~~ ^{knew} little more of him than those spaced hammerblows onto red metal. He ~~found it~~ ^{seemed to find it of} interesting that the man was amounting to ~~so much~~ ^{something} more than arm.

I have begun to follow Swan year by year through his diaries. They hold the second four decades of his life and at least a million and a half handwritten words. The span of three copies of War and Peace, accomplished in frontier town and Indian village and sometimes no community at all.

Out of their gray archival boxes at the University of Washington, the diaries could be the secondhand wares of an eccentric stationer. Most are the size to be held in the palm of a hand, some mere notebooks with cheap marbled covers, others with cover-and-clasp which contain themselves as neatly as a case for eyeglasses. Black, green, tan, faded maroon, the smaller volumes in common the look of time

Wennberg meanwhile tried to reciprocate as much scrutiny as he got, but was at the disadvantage of having to share it around the trio of them: fancymouth Melander, this mute ~~fox~~ ^{fox-nosed one} Karlsson, Satan's choirboy Braaf...

"We have a thing to tell you, Wennberg," Melander set in at once. "Since you're new to our midst, we can't really know whether your fondest wish is to go with us from here or to sell us to the Russians as runaways. Dance on one foot of that and then the other, a man might. So if you've had wavering, it'll be relief to you to learn we've made up your mind for you. There's no profit whatsoever for you to ~~be~~ ^{pigeon} off to the Russians."

Challenge of this raw sort was not at all what Wennberg had ~~come~~ ^{shopping for} expected. "Your ~~tongue is bigger~~ ^{tongue's fatter} than your judgment, Melander," the blacksmith flared. "It's not for you to tell me who stands where. You forget ~~I can~~ ^{I can,} walk out of here, and show the Russians the hidey-hole in that hulk where you've had Braaf ~~stashing things~~ ^{doing stash,} these months."

"But Wennberg, heart's friend, ~~there's nothing there,~~" Melander said with such politeness it seemed almost an apology, "there's nothing there."

Wennberg stared at Melander as if the lanky seaman just had changed skin color before his eyes.

"Since you've invited yourself along with us we thought we'd ought to get ourselves a new hidey-hole," Melander went on. "Braaf has the knack of ~~finding~~ ^{digging an eye to} such places, aye? ~~You'll know where the new cache~~ ^{So this new cache now, you can know where it} is when we load the canoe, and not an eyeblink before. ~~So~~ ^{So} trot to the Russians whenever you feel like it, but you'll have nothing in the hulk to show them."

Wannberg meanwhile tried to reciprocate as much as he
got, but was at the disadvantage of having to share it around the table
of them: Lancelotti Melander, this was the name of the man's chieftain.

changes of the weather...

Friday: Rain...commenced at 9:30 PM. It being a dull day I
remained in the house drawing sketch of Johnsons fish trap.

Saturday: Weather showery. Swarms of gnats were very troublesome
all night. This morning I killed quantities on the window with the
fumes of burning matches...

Sunday: No prospect of Edinso getting here so long as this gale

Wannberg stated at Melander as if the lady seemed just had
changed skin color before his eyes.
"since you've invited yourself along with us we thought we
ought to get ourselves a new hidey-hole," Melander went on. "Great has the
knack of finding such places, you'll find them all over the place.
So this new cache now, you can know where it
is when we load the canoe, and not an eyelink before. We got to
the bushes whenever you feel like it, but you'll have nothing to
the hulk to show them."

"Except mouse turds." This unexpectedly from Braaf, whose gaze now floated steadily along three foreheads instead of two. Wennberg shot him a look which all but thundered.

"Yes, except mouse turds," Melander chuckled. "And even the Russians might find it hard to believe that we've been busy storing away treasure of such sort. No, Wennberg, ~~it's~~ you against that's the pony race, the three of us, and we'll see who the Russians choose to believe. Our souls are fresh and there's spring green in our eye, so far as they know. ~~You wouldn't~~ ^{Nor'd you} be the first one here to be thought off his head, or a maker of mischief for some other reason." Melander paused, then said in his know-all fashion: "You play a hand of cards now and again, don't you, Wennberg? I suggest you have a second look up the queen's skirt before you wager."

The blacksmith began to retort hotly: "Now listen, you ~~three~~ walrus-pizzles..." But Melander beat him to speech yet again.

"~~Be~~ careful of your words, Wennberg. If you're coming with us, we have much time ahead together and don't need ~~the burden~~ ^{a sack} of bad feelings. If you're going to the Russians, you don't want your last sentiments ~~to weigh~~ ^{weighing} wrongly on your soul, do you now?"

Wennberg was boulder-still, in stare at Melander. Fury had him, but evidently something other, too, for he had clamped his mouth until his lips all but vanished. Words were having their spines snapped there, the other three could see.

Finally Wennberg broke his glower. Swung a heavy look to Braaf, at last, and longest, to the silent one, Karlsson.

"You set of squareheads may be better at this than I thought," he rumbled. "I'm with you, Christ help me. Now you've to tell me,

as if you know down from up. How do we go be pilgrims in the wilderness of water?"

#

Circle the plan as he would like a ~~cutter~~^{farmer} working at a stump, Wennberg could ~~come up with~~^{round on} only a few questions to hack at when Melander was finished.

"Why all this fuss with old Bilibin? Why'n't we just cut his stupid throat when we're ready?" [¶] This theorem shifted Karlsson forward in his seat a bit.

"Because if we kill one of his men, Rosenberg will have to have his people chase us," Melander said instructively. "If we leave Bilibin alive, Rosenberg will take it out on him."

"What of muskets? How many can Braaf ~~lay~~^{here} his ~~dainty hands~~^{fancy fingers} on?"

¶

Melander replied that they had the advantage of two ready at hand; Karlsson's long-barreled .69 calibre hunting rifle, and the military musket which would be plucked from Bilibin. Then on the night of the escape, Melander continued, Braaf would gather them a few more. "Six, to be exact."

Braaf blinked rapidly ~~at this~~ and Karlsson looked mildly surprised, but it was Wennberg who blurted:

"Great good God, Melander, eight guns altogether? We're going in a canoe, not a man-of-war!"

"~~Can you~~^{can you,} name me a better cargo, Wennberg? Do you think the ravens are going to feed us on this journey, and the bears will guard us with their kind teeth? We don't know what ~~we'll face,~~^{in Hell-all}

type to
here

To Swan now, another here-again-gone-again countenance. The
half dozen years after he began trying to ~~to~~^u the railroad to

Port Townsend are a pocket notebook era: lines jotted instead of

Scrawled small as they are, they will be day upon day of reading.
composed. I lift pages to the start of 1869 and find (qte Jan. 1);

check the final night of 1874 and learn

Dec. 31, 1874

The saloons went quicker after the Grand Central, as
if we were hurrying on from its sights and smells. The
place on the next block, the Mint, was the first new saloon

until he was

portion of the world still hung in place, Melander dropped his gaze
A time of studying seaward. Then as if reassured that the water

but I want plenty of ball and powder to face it with. Aye? If you wish to come along naked, so be it."

Wennberg grumbled, then offered that if Melander was so fanatic on muskets, he was willing to help out. A sentry's musket had been sent into the smith shop for a new buttplate. He could hold ~~it~~ ^{the gun} back by saying he hadn't got around to affixing the repair yet.

Gravely Melander congratulated him gravely on entering the spirit of their enterprise.

"There, Braaf, he's made you amends. You'll need to pluck only five firepieces when the time is ready."

Braaf said nothing.

Karlsson too stayed unspeaking, but he had begun to have a feeling about Wennberg. There was something not reckonable, opposite from usual, about this blacksmith. As when the eyelid of a wood duck watching you closes casually from the bottom up. *check*

Wennberg was not done with the topic of muskets.

"Just where's our little magnet here, Braaf, to pluck up these guns, anyway?"

"You do take three bites at every berry, don't you, Wennberg? But since you bring the matter up..." Melander turned his long head to Braaf in the manner of an indulging uncle. "Braaf, what of it? Where can the guns best be got on our night?"

"The officers' ~~lodgings,~~ ^{clubhouse,} Braaf responded with entire matter-

of-factness. "The gun room."

For the single time in all the unfolding of the plan, Melander blanched. Karlsson pulled once at his thin nose. ~~Wennberg grumped.~~ And ~~Wennberg:~~ ^{Wennberg:} "Next, Braaf, you'll want to parade up to the Castle Russians and ask ~~if we~~ ^{we} can have their underwear for warmth on our little journey."

Braaf shrugged. "Sauerkraut is in the smelliest barrels, guns are in a gun room."

Melander found voice, restrained Wennberg, chided Braaf, and the matter began to be argued out. ~~It emerged that Braaf probably had it was right.~~ ^{It} That the collection of rifles racked like fat billiard cues within the officers' gun room--on one of his invented errands which wafted him into all crannies of the settlement Braaf had spotted the weapons--and which were used for shooting parties when the governor's retinue went downcoast to Ozherskoi, this small armory was New Archangel's richest trove of firearms unguarded by sentries.

But, as Wennberg ~~suspiciously~~ ^{not without suspicion,} demanded, why unentitled...?

"Because of the padlock on the door and the chain through the triggerguards?" Braaf suggested.

This silenced even Wennberg.

Karlsson at last spoke up.

"There's a second stick to this cross. The officers and Company men coming and going. They flow in and out of that place day and

night."

"I can wink us a safe time," Melander mused. "But ~~getting~~ ^{snatching} those guns loose..."

"Wennberg," murmured Braaf.

"Mister Blacksmith!" Melander proclaimed.

"You square headed sons of whores," Wennberg said unhappily.

———

The waiting became a kind of ghost attaching itself within each of their lives, as if a man now cast two shadows and one somehow fell into his body instead of away. The outer man had to perform as ever--do his work, eat, sleep, carry on barracks gabble--while inside, this sudden new shadow-creature, the one in wait, bided the next six weeks and six days wholly in thought of the immense voyage ahead.

———

Melander as he waited studied the Tebenkov maps ever more firmly into his mind. Before long, their descending coastal chain of islands could have been recited out of him like Old Testament genealogy. New Archangel's island of Baranof would beget Kuiu Island, Kuiu beget Kosciusko, Kosciusko Heceta and Heceta Suemez, south and south and south through watery geography and explorers' mother tongues until the eventual rivermouth port called Astoria. Perhaps it was because Melander had in him the seaman's way of letting days take care of distance, the necessary nautical faith that there is more time than there is expanse of the world and so any voyage at

last will end, that these stepping-stone details predominated in his thinking about the escape. Rarely, and then never aloud to any of the other three, did Melander mull the totality of the coastal journey ahead. This made a loss to them all, for Melander alone of the four had traveled greatly enough on the planet to understand the full scope of what they would be attempting. To grasp that their intended ^{or twelve} ten hundred miles of paddling stretched--wove, rather, through the island-thick wilderness coast--as far as the distance from Stockholm down all of Europe to the sun-coasts of Italy.

Each mile of those hundreds, too, along a cold northern brink of ocean which in winter is misnamed entirely. Not pacific at all, but malign. And too, each mile maybe--or maybe not, this was the puzzle of ocean and ocean-goer--each mile maybe working away at this three-man crew of his, Braaf and Wennberg and Karlsson. Thief and oaf and clam: or acquisitionist and stallion and canoe soldier; whichever each was now, he perhaps had sea-change ahead of him. The great over-water passage between one life and another. Melander in his sailing had been at ~~the~~ an edge of the nineteenth century's immigration tides, the tens of hundreds of thousands who were the forebears of us, and so knew how voyage could tower in the mind of a first-timer. It

Doig/83

Day nineteen

In continental outline, the United States rides the map as a rudely-carentered galleon: bowsprit ascending at northernmost Maine, line of keel along the Gulf shores and the southwest borders, the long clean amidship straightness of the 49th parallel across the upper Midwest and West.

This ship of states is, by chance, prowling eastward. Or as I prefer to think of it, the figurehead and bow are awallow in the Atlantic while potent Pacific tides gather beneath our aft portion of the craft.

Trace to the last of this land vessel at the westernmost reach of the state of Washington, to the final briefest declivity of peninsula. There is Cape Flattery, where the Makahs of James G. Swan's years lived and where

little or no difference between their systems of Tomanawos and our own views as taught them. For instance, the talipus, or fox, is their emblem of the creative power; the smispee, or duck, that of wisdom.

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couldn't not. Treadle of the waves week on week, the half-coffin
berth to try to survive in, reliance for that

survival on sailors who flew in the mast trees like clothed monkeys;

a compressed existence, the voyage of a ship, like a battle or an *hand* 8

illness or a first failed time in love, lodged in the memory at an

angle not like that of any other set of days. And that was shipboard;

this would be canoe, splinter of a true vessel. The sea-change could

come all the more intense. But then, sometimes it never came at all,

or again it simply made a man more of what he was, carved the lines

of him deeper. You never knew. Not even a Melander had the how of

sea-change. Yet, in this season of wait Melander might have hinted

toward what lay in store when one went out to live on waves. His knowledge of

water enwrapping the world, the canny force of its resistance to

the intentions of man, he might have used to put a tempered edge

on the escape plan. To have said, in his silver style of saying,

"Hear me on this, heart's friends. Things beyond all imagining

may happen to us down this coast, aye? But we'll have gone free

into our fate. Besides, a man draws nearer to death wherever he

strides..."

But no, and it may be necessity for those who choose vast risk, even Melander seemed not able to confront the thought of all the miles at once. Only those from island to island to island.

———
In his waiting, Wennberg too spent long spells of calculation.

Turning and turning the question of whether there ^{could be found} was a way to betray the escape. # Certainty did not seem to be ^{anywhere} in the matter. If the Russians could be convinced and then ~~be~~ relied upon to reward him, say grant return to Sweden; but ~~it did not seem likely~~ ^{that} the Russians would forfeit a blacksmith so readily, ~~whatever they might promise.~~ ^{did not seem likely,} If he told of the plan but Melander persuaded the Russians there was nothing to it, Wennberg would never after be safe in New Archangel; Karlsson and perhaps even that stealer of milk teeth Braaf would be a steady threat to his life. If he fled with the other three, into freedom; or perhaps into the bottom of ^{that} this ocean like cats in a sack.

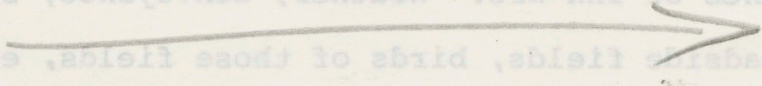
All of it strummed a man's nerves, not to say what ^{fret} discordance this place New Archangel played on you anyway. Example, ^{the} ~~that~~ morning soon after Wennberg added himself into the escape plan: he'd been on the way to begin his day of smithing when he remembered leaving his new-sewn leather apron back at the barracks. Just there near Baranov's Castle he reversed route to fetch it, and there the apparition ^{dark} reared, a Russian cross colossally thrusting out of the north slope of Verstovia. Wennberg stared a long minute at this, Calvary arrived

just then gulls on a breeze off Sitka Sound flashed across the breast
of Verstovia. White as winter creatures they glided, as if shooed in
from the other, snowier crags. Wennberg had cast them a glance--and
reared,
there the apparition ~~reader~~, a Russian cross thrusting out of the

dark north slope of Verstovia. A long minute Wennberg stared at this,

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Calvary arrived



lines of ink are. Weather, conveyance, schedule, meals,
roadside fields, birds of those fields, even Swan's morning
disposition: I was very stupid today, the sixteenth of March,
from the want of sleep last night & for the first time since
I left home I felt really homesick & would have been glad to
have been home but as soon as I walked out I felt much relieved
& hope to get my thoughts on a business train after a good
night's rest. All come on report at the tip of his pen. So
too the progress of Britain of Dicken's time. Liverpool
astounds and horrifies this Bostonian with the hurly-burly
of its streets: . . . female scavengers. . . go round with
baskets & collect all the refuse & offal in the city which
they put in heaps & offer them for sale. Their heads are
bought by the gardeners for a few pence to enrich the garden
beds--It struck me as the filthiest work I had ever seen a
woman engaged in & more especially as they use nothing but
their hands to work with. Then the proverbial fishwives,
a queer lot of beings & probably the lowest of the human
race. . . They go screaming round the streets like so many

to the top of Alaska, before he picked out ~~in the morning dark~~ that the cross was the Russian cathedral's topmost one, that ^{in the morning dark} the green-painted spire under it blended ^{invisibly} ~~in the morning dark~~ into the forest of Verstovia.

As well as anyone, Wennberg knew that if you let yourself dwell on the menace of these mountains, you would go around in terror all day every day, like a cowering dog. What jostled his frame of mind, though, was not just the surprise sky-^{planted} ~~hung~~ cross, but that in his years here he had never noticed this illusion before. Every morning now, despite ^{Wennberg} himself, he found himself stopping at the spot and casting a look back up there.

And all the rest of the day, if and perhaps. Coax at them however he would, Wennberg could make them ^{pain} do no more than somersault into perhaps and if. # This, this damned skitter of a matter... Wennberg did not at all have well-bottom faith in the prospects of Melander's plan, but neither did he see, now, any clear path out of it. What Wennberg imagined was going to be his ^{say} ~~power~~ over Melander and the other two somehow, by some coil of the escape plan, was turning out to be their ^{say} ~~power~~ over him.

Karlsson bided the time with less edginess than the others. Since he went through life anyway in the manner of a man in wait, ^{to him} the space of weeks until the escape was ~~to him~~ simply one more duration, and not ^{so} ~~as~~ long as most. Time passed, or you put it past.

...took account of my freight as it was landed--wisely: 2 sacks flour
short in my count & notified Purser Sinclair--and then went to a very
comfortable cottage in the enclosure of the HB Co...

were the earnest bearers of agriculture to damp Cape Flattery.
was more congenial, and probably more interesting to Swan. They
Luckily Maggs, and a subsequent hardworking farmer named Jones,
the Chinook jargon word for "worthless"--man I ever met with.
ever since he has been here. He is about the most perfectly cultus--
this reservation, as he has done little else than shirk work
with entire lack of regret: His services will not be missed on
disease, Hitchcock departed and Swan saw him off in the diary
the gas escaping from him.) Declaring himself leery of the
but a pole is left handy to punch it open as soon as John feels
to escape. During rain a board is slipped over the opening,
the man next to me at the cafe counter this morning at Sekiu

All in all, Karlsson showed a good deal less impatience with New

(A man built smoke-tight, as Melander has said of him. Archangel existence than any of the other three. What then held

Karlsson

him into the pattern of the escape?

Braaf too had wondered.

"Why're you?"

He and Karlsson ~~had been~~ ^{were} ~~dutied~~, this day, to the warehouse

where bundling was ~~being~~ done. Beaver pelts had been brought in by the Kolosh. Kolosh had brought in beaver pelts.

The light task Braaf took, folding each dried hide in half, fur

side in. Karlsson then stacked the bundled pelts into ^{the big} ~~a~~ screw press,

to be squeezed into bales for shipment to China. Quite why it was

that Swedes had been brought half around the world to pile together

animal skins which would then be cargoed half around the world again

to clothe Chinamen, neither Braaf nor Karlsson grasped. But here was

the habilitment of several dozen former beavers, and here were they.

"Hmm, Karlsson? Why're you?"

"Same as you, I suppose." Karlsson did not seem much disposed

their leave-taking of New Archangel,
to talk about the ~~escape~~, which of course focused Braaf onto it all the more.

"So then, why'm I?"

"To kiss goodbye to the Russians, ^{and five more years here.}"

"Goodbye kisses aren't always happy ones."

"Some truth to that."

have been considerably less than total. The avenging Makahs landed on the beach opposite the monument of Swell...and forming into a line came up the beach in single file with old Cowbetsi, their great war chief, at their head. A short distance behind him came a savage holding with both hands a bloody head that had been severed from the body of an unfortunate Elwha. Two or three Indians followed this and then another grim trophy, held in the same manner as the first.

Swan learned that the war party had come upon the unlucky pair of Elwhas hunting seals at Crescent Bay, the precise site of Swell's murder. When blood was most ready to answer blood, the two were simply the targets of opportunity. Having shot and beheaded them, the Makahs noted the alarms being shrieked by done.

In all of this Swan took greatest interest, so much so that he made the mistake of spectating too close to the song circle which had formed around the severed heads on the home sand of Neah Bay. After they had finished their war song, I heard my name called, and thinking I was in the way of some of their operations was about moving off, when I was again summoned in a manner that left no doubt in my mind but that I was wanted.