

editing draft, spring of '81, from which the typist's draft of 1st half of ms was done, and sent to Ath'm.

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 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 dusk of the year 1853, however, knows anything of this name, nor would it matter to their prospect if any did.

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

wetly, heft their slim but laden ark across the gravel beach into hiding within the salal and salmonberry, then 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.

of course
significantly,
 Their escape from New Archangel had been of Melander's making. In any day's comings and goings at that far-north shoreside assemblage of hewn logs and Russian tenacity, you would have spied Melander early. Tall man with lanks of arms and high hips, so that he seemed to be all long sections and hinges. ~~Significantly,~~ 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} ~~Russians~~ might once put the lever to something other than hoisting a glass of champagne. Aye?" ~~Even~~
 Early on, too, you would have come to ^{know} ~~recognize~~ 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,

"If the wind were clever enough," Melander observed to the baffled Finnish skipper upon taking leave of him, "it would 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 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 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 know 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 across most of what has come to be~~ ~~Canada.~~ That, indeed, this colossal crude crown of northwestmost

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than
more
than

Needless to add of such quiz, thirty-one times out of thirty Melander could be counted on ^{for continuation.} ~~all his reluctance to dazzle further notwithstanding, to continue.~~ "But no, lie around up there like seals they all do, yip-yipping down at the rest of us...To be Russian is to be a toothache to the world."

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, ^{they came into world} his people on Gotland had been, generation upon generation automatically capable with herring nets having happened into the world as if ~~born~~ 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 his every hair was a rope-yarn and each drop of his blood black Stockholm tar. In a dozen years of sailing the Baltic and ^{the} North ^{Sea} Atlantic ^{he} bettered his position almost voyage by voyage. "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. ^{Such a} That 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. Russian America, ~~was~~ it yet was, the wholesale purchase by the United States--and consequent rechristening 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.

amounted to
N. Sea
he

~~port and capital called New Archangel would be rechristened to what the coast's natives knew it as, Sitka.~~

→ # Although he had no farthest thought of it at the onset of that voyage, a pair of outlooks swerved Melander into staying on at New Archangel. The first ~~stretched ahead appallingly,~~ ^{was} the eleven-month expanse of return voyage ~~aboard~~ 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 ~~was~~ ^{lay} sidewise to Mister First Mate Melander's ~~thoughtful~~ scrutiny, berthed ~~there~~ against a backdrop of ~~extentless~~ Alaskan forest the spring morning when he reached final exasperation with his dim captain--the Russian-American Company's steamship, the Emperor Nicholas I.

^{Melander} In a time and place earlier, ~~he~~ 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.

wilderness is tipped sharply, as if in deliberate spurn, away from London to the direction of Siberia 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 Melander's name thus is not to be discovered anywhere among the frontier baronage.

As will happen, Melander after pledging to the Russian-American Company did find his life altered by the alluring new nautical machinery, 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 ~~was~~ ^{'s service} ~~permitted to steam out with the~~ ^{aboard} Nicholas ^{occurred} ~~only~~ whenever the Russian governor, Rosenberg, took his official retinue on an outing ~~a little~~ 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 its voyage back to Stockholm and Kronstadt.

"Friend sailor, 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 ~~his~~ ^{the} time on ~~Baltic~~ ^{voyages}, 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 of herring and halibut for New Archangel's winter larder.

Seven-year men. "The Russians' 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 conversationists in the workmen's barracks to see where the gibe had ~~come~~ ^{flown} from. A fresh turn of tongue was all too rare in New Archangel. He himself had just tried out his latest declaration to no one in particular: ^a "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 the Russian workforce in the several neighboring dwellings. The Scandinavians, after all, had been pulled here. Most of the Russian laborers 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, ~~were~~ ^{jostled} among them. ("Where," a governor of New Archangel once wrote home to a grandee of the Russian-American Company, "do you get such men?") But so ~~were~~ ^{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.

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 ~~at him~~ ^{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 ~~was~~ ^{held} another sort of confinement, but at least airier than in. Melander as ever ~~looked a moment, as if in calculation,~~ ^{glanced up, as if checking a topsail,} at the peak which thrust over all their lives at New Archangel, dark Verstovia. Its summit a triangle of rough rock atop a vaster triangle

of firred slope, Verstovia sat up there plump and becrowned, the first presence in your life each morning, the last at every dusk.

attending
~~Behind Verstovia~~ Verstovia was attended by ~~on both sides waited other, snowier mountains.~~ *craggs*

change
~~like attendants arrayed a few steps in back of a Tsarina.~~ this place New Archangel,
~~Archangel was a~~ threefold Jericho, ~~walled first by the stockade,~~
 next by these tremendous mountains, and last, the distances to anywhere else of the world.

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 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 ~~liked to do so~~ at evening. Melander considered that more than beds ~~refresh~~ of pansies and fuschias were required to ~~sweeten~~ *larky* the soul of any Russian. Nonetheless, "drastia," the ~~tall~~ Swede said with a civil nod, and was greeted in turn. Since Melander could not rise at New Archangel, he was taking some care to stay level.

moment of year
 This was one of the first lengthening evenings of summer of 1852, ~~moment~~ *dusk* the ~~time~~ of year when New Archangel's ~~twilight~~ began to dawdle on ~~in~~ *close onto* ~~twilight~~ *copied* ~~dusk~~ until ~~near~~ midnight. The long light was like Swedish summer, *so* but while this slow vesper of the day was the time Melander liked best, it also cast the remindful shadows *of all* that he had become absented from the three homes he had ever known. His birthland. The sea. And his chosen livelihood. Triple tines of exile. Much to be prodded by.

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 settlement. Past log building after log building; if bulk of timbering were the standard of civilization, New Archangel would have preened grand as Stockholm. ~~The counting-house which Melander was clopping past now,~~ *cut?*
~~only eight logs had been laid one atop another to build the first storey,~~
~~and that storey reached very nearly twice the height of Melander.~~ Sea-drifter he was, Melander had never got used to this hefty clamped-into-the-wilderness feel of ~~New Archangel.~~ *the port-town* "Log ~~walls~~ ^{barns} and sawdust heads," *barns*
 he called the style of Russian America.

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

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 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.

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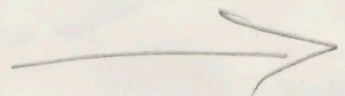
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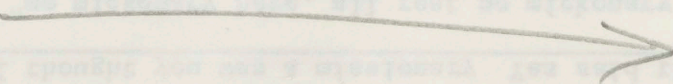
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After a moment, as if satisfied that the water portion of the world still hung in place, Melander dropped his gaze until he was peering directly down at the edge of shore ~~which intersected the~~ ^{subadjacent to} outside end of the stockade. # Here his looking held for a good while.

Eventually, and so softly that the sentry nearby in the blockhouse mistook it for another mutter against twittering Finns, the tall man murmured: "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.

#

Karlsson was a part-time bear-milker. That is to say, ~~his~~ ordinarily he worked as an axman in the wood-cutting crew, but his upbringing 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. ~~Karlsson was the sort of fellow with nothing much to say,~~ he cared to put to voice, and of whom even less was remarked, Karlsson.

~~free-for-all~~ free-for-all ~~will~~ will ~~said.~~ It is told that at a Scandinavian festival, Danes would 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 tall exception to this slander, but Karlsson, narrow bland face like that of a village parson, would have been there among the wall-props.

But sociability was not at all what Melander sought out of Karlsson. A time, he had noticed Karlsson canoeing in Sitka Sound, back from a day's hunting. Karlsson's thrifty strokes went beyond tireless, in a neat-handed, workaday fashion. steady: ~~stopless.~~ Watching him, Melander had been put in mind of the regularity of a millwheel.

Another impression of interesting constancy about Karlsson ~~Melander~~ he also had stored away. The observation that the slender untalkative 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 about it."

more
tiny?
 What brought down Melander's decision in favor of Karlsson, however, was a ~~tinier matter~~, ^{more talking} 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 talking} ~~talked~~ large of the certain success ahead, the excitement the frontier life would furnish and how 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 sun over his future.
 were talking

Melander chose a rainless late-June morning, gentle gray-silver overcast cupping the day's light downward to lend clarity to the harbor's spruce islands and the sudden ^{spearing} ~~sudden~~ 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 consider escape on the ^{most silken} ~~best~~ of New Archangel's days, he truly was ready as ready.
 x
silken
+ silken

"Take our tea outside the stockade, why don't we? The farther you get from the Russians, the better it tastes."

Tin mugs in hand, the two of them sauntered past the sentry at the opened gateway of the stockade and went to the edge of the native village which extended in a single-file march of dwellings far

along the shoreline. ⁴ 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 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 ^{canoe} 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 thin point: where, except up to the sweet blue meadows of heaven, was there go?

^{said Melander.} "The world has many wheres, ^{of} 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.

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

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

4
copper
people

cedar

✓ of

said M.

✓ f

periods
instead
of dashes

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 leading to the Columbia River. as if making his name-mark.
The place where the coast and the river met, Melander Xed Astoria.

Map ~~leason~~ done, Melander recited 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} ~~a fur-trading~~ 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} ~~had~~ luck, a month.

"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 timber-maned mountains. There always was about this Karlsson a calm just short of chill. Right now he might have been appraising Alaska as if someone had offered him the whole tumbled country for forty 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.

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.

add
N. Archangel
legend.

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 your Great Dipper, hung onto its nail in heaven," to make constellations real. So that what the makers of any imperial configuration always had to 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 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 a Stockholm street boy, son of a prostitute 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 from beggary to picking pockets to thievery, the other destination

coast the mountains drop sheer to the Pacific, spruce slopes like green avalanches into the seawater, but at Sitka the ^{deep} long notch of bay is sided by a handy shelf of shore. And a 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 callus is the strategic bayside point: the Kolosh employed the mound as their stronghold and Baranov seized the commanding perch for his own thicklogged bastion.

In this summer of 1852, the estimable Aleksandr Andreevich three decades dead, a double-storied governor's house still called Baranov's Castle squats there in the air at the mound-end of New Archangel's single street. At the opposite extent rises the onion dome and carrot spire of the comely little Russian Orthodox cathedral. [✓] ~~Elsewhere~~ ^{Between and around,} the habitations of New Archangel amount to ^{two hundred} ~~fifty~~ or so squared-log buildings, ^{many} ~~most~~ painted a pale yellow as though they were seaside cottages. Their rooflines are hipped, slanting down in all four directions from the ridgepole; where gables have been fashioned in, they are windowed with small spoked semi-circles of glass, like half-suns which never manage either to set or to rise. A burly-looking low-slung town, ^{New Archangel} ~~it is~~, beneath the lording styles of cathedral and Castle.

One aspect further, and this one the startling oddity. This port of ^{Russian America} ~~New Archangel~~ has a larger fleet of ships permanently aland than are usually to be found in its harbor. When they can no longer be safely

sailed, hulks are winched onto shore, ^{and} then improvised upon as needed.

("The Tsar's notion of an unsinkable squadron," Melander of course ^{has} ^{gibed} said.) 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} ~~surely must~~ have caused the Kolosh to ponder ^{a bit} ~~deeply~~

about their new landlords. Its habit of collecting 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 from around a corner of the cathedral, on his way from the ^{Scandinavian} workmen's barracks a short span to its north, and walks the brief dirt street between God's domain and the Governor's. ^{Scandinavian} Karlsson has been delegated

So deft with an ax that he often is lent to help with the shaping of a mainmast, Karlsson has been delegated to work this day at the shipyard. ^{with the shipbuilding crew}

But before reaching the

shipyard just beyond Baranov's Cattle, ^{however} he veers west toward the stockade gate and the Kolosh village beyond, steps outside and along the wall toward the beach, hunkers and begins to scour the blade of his ax in the pale sand. Polishing away rust, this conscientious timberwright. And second work too, for as he squats,

Karlsson from the corner of his eye studies 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, 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 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 here and there, but the color everywhere else on these stretching peaks is the black-green which only a ^{northern} coastal fir forest enmixes.

As Karlsson begins hewing pine at the shipyard, Braaf materializes at the southwesternmost 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 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 is in service as a cannon battery aimed into the Kolosh village, but dry rot has made a casualty of this vessel of Braaf's. He slips through a gangway carpentered into the ship's hull when it became a storehouse, creeps to the forecastle, and within a particular one of the several stave-sprung barrels there makes a deposit, a walrus-ivory snuffbox which hitherto ~~was~~ ^{per} ~~has been~~ ^{'s instructions,} the possession of a Russian quartermaster. Then, ~~as Melander instructed,~~ Braaf begins to measure by

twenty-five feet high and five hundred yards long, four blockhouses built of fat logs, and a couple of dozen full-time sentries constantly express the colony's wariness of the natives. With cause. The Sitka Tlingits obliterated the first settlement Baranov implanted here, and a bare three years after this summer of 1852 they will muster themselves and try, just short of success, to obliterate this one as well.

Precisely this prudence toward the Kolosh, the way New Archangel each and every day must set its most vigilant face toward those who it would take someone of Melander's angle of mind to count might scheme to get in, ~~Melander is counting~~ 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 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 few such outside, aye?"

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 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 ~~a small candle lantern,~~ Kolosh daggers, a couple of hatchets, and a fire flint apiece.

September's gleanings comprised a second compass--Melander wanted to be double certain about navigation--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.

Karlsson had eyed out a ~~choice,~~ candidate, a twenty-foot shell with a prow which angled up into a high sharp needle of nose. If a sizable cedar tree had decided to transform into a ~~sharp~~ swimming petrel, this craft of alert grace would have been the result. ~~The canoe~~

Thrift of line and exaltation of ~~style~~ design, that jugglery somehow perfected by this coast's canoewrights. ~~Karlsson's~~ ^{Karlsson's} This candidate of Karlsson's

lay amid the beached fleet of a dozen nearest the stockade gate, convenient,

No, goddam 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.

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, boxy patterns 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 were spooked by?

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

4 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.

Like the single eye of some great watchful 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.~~ ~~closed.~~ *shut*

Only during those dozen hours of day were the Kolosh 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 ~~east-stretching wall of~~ stockade sat close ^{above} by the area of market and gate on a shieldlike short slope of rock, miniature of the strong knob supporting Baranov's Castle. Scan it from inside or out, here at New Archangel's portal Russian wariness ~~showed~~ ^{held} its strongest focus. *held*

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, *then,* New Archangel rather than without, the 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."

Karlsson quirked his mouth enough to show skepticism. Melander was one who would have you believe salt for breakfast. But Karlsson

was another case. 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 hinted.) What Melander was proposing, Karlsson doubted he could tailor himself to. But "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 across the northern seas to New Archangel. *Peg him, perhaps,*

~~Bilibin might be pegged~~ somewhere amid these 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.

however, ~~But~~ for our purpose here, which is that of Karlsson and Braaf ~~his~~ at New Archangel. and Melander, Bilibin's significant earmark was ~~longevity~~ Sufficiently a scape grace to have exasperated a generation of superiors, Bilibin now stood the least desirable of watch shifts, the one spanning the middle of the night. Turned about, the matter was that ~~the~~ his superiors over the years had sufficiently knouted and berated him that Bilibin some took care not to rush 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.

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 "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...

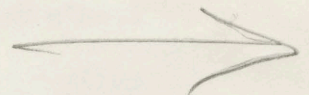
The next time, having conferred beforehand with Melander,
 Karlsson staggered later than ever from the Kolosh village to
 the gate, singing as if drunk--"The fruit of the heart-tree, do
 not eat, for sorrow grows there, black as peat." Also, he carried
 and carrying a jug of the native liquor called hootchina. Which
 without undue difficulty he persuaded Bilibin to take a reviveful
 swig from: "Have fifteen drops, Pavel, it drives the snakes from one's
 boots..."

Karlsson was astounded with the evident believability of his
 gate performances. The hootch, however, deserved at least equal billing.
 Under the New Archangel allotment of fifty ~~quart~~ cups of rum per man
 per year, Bilibin was a man perpetually parched. "They might as well
 be spooning out dust to us," he averred to Karlsson between swigs.

By autumn of 1852, Karlsson was not departing the stockade until nearly
 dark--"Come along and ^{dip} your ^{ladle} spoon in the kettle," ^{the slim Swede} he would invite;
 "No, no, no, I'm limber as a goose's neck, no more women for me, you
 can have mine too," Bilibin would splutter back at him--and returning
 far into the night, ^{proffering} to proffer the hootchina jug.

32A

In early November, Melander said in his procedural way that the time had come 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 saw the steamship's while Rosenberg was bathing his bottom at Ozherskoi. 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 read Russian, Braaf?" Braaf shook his head. "No? Well, no 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.

matter The single ~~thing~~^{event} certain to irk Melander was the unforeseen, and this incapacity of Braaf's he had not calculated on at all. Rarest annoyance crossed his face, then Melander swerved to Karlsson and his disposition readjusted itself. "So. It seem^s to fall to you. This'll at least be 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 ~~at~~^{into} Melander ~~and~~^{'s eyes} for once, so did Braaf.

Under the pressure of these gazes Melander grimaced, ~~then~~
~~sneakthief~~ ^{next} ~~then~~ swore. "Jesu Maria. Have to become a common
 sneakthief, 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," ~~he~~ ^{the tall man} said edgily.
 "But a close matter it was. Christ on the cross, Braaf, how
 you go around like a deacon's ghost I'll never know. I was at
 the maps when for some damnable reason two of the Russian officers
 came aboard. They clomped off somewhere on the port side and I
 got away along starboard." [#] 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 sailcloth for the canoe, can't trust the rotten
 cheesecloth these Kolosh use. You ~~can~~ ^{are able to} recognize sailcloth, ~~aren't~~ ^{canvas},
 Braaf, ~~can't~~ ^{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 skins he ostensibly was ^{transporting} ~~carrying~~ toward the
 tannery, when a voice suggested huskily into his left ear, ~~"Let's~~
 "Shouldn't've skinned so deep this time, Braaf. Let's talk about
 the bottom of your cargo, there."

Through ~~his~~ ^{the} cold ~~flash~~ ^{lightning} of fright it did register on Braaf
 that the voice at least was Swedish rather than Russian. He
 inched his head leftward the fraction enough to ~~recognize~~ ^{test} the

wide sideburn-framed face beside him. ~~The~~ recognition unfroze his mind...one of the blacksmiths...vain bastard he is...Wennstrom, Wennblad: "Wennberg? What..."

"No, don't walk away and don't put them down." Not suggestion happens."
now: orders. "We'll have a visit until we see which interesting
thing happens first."

no # Wennberg moved himself in front of Braaf as companionably as if he had every matter in the universe to discuss with him.

"Whether you spill that load in front of these Russians, or your lopes friend Melander ~~trots~~ 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. For a long moment, there the three of them stood centered in the

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

Broke their silence.
So "Well, Melander," Wennberg said. "Braaf and I were just skins've skins've speaking of how much heavier skins have gotten this year. It seems a man can hardly hold a pood of them in his arms these

days."

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

"You're always a

~~"You always were a~~ thinker, Melander. Isn't he, Braaf?"

The blacksmith stepped close and pressed his elbow slowly, powerfully, into Braaf's left ~~bicep~~^{upper arm}, drawing a strangled gasp from the laden man. "A thinker, hmm?"

"Let's give Braaf a rest, shall we?" Melander offered rapidly. "You obviously have much to say about matters of weight."

If there is an axis of life in every man, Melander's whirled where the rest of us have an ordinary tongue. Wennberg hesitated, cast a glance into the thinning stream of the workshift, then nodded as if Melander's words were the first ~~mint~~ coins down on a debt.

Braaf lurching his way out of sight in the general direction of the tannery, the other two, Melander more toplefty than ever beside the wide Wennberg, strode to a building not far inside the stockade gate. The smithing shop transected the middle of this structure and within its open arched doorway stood three huge forges, aligned from the outside in like stabled iron creatures of some nature. The outermost forge was Wennberg's.

From ~~there~~^{as he} where Wennberg stood day-long ~~directing~~^{ed} the heavy dance of hammer and fire, Melander scanned out into the parade ground. The line of view took in all comings and goings ~~and~~^{there,} and most particularly ~~Braaf's~~^{the route into} storage hulk just across the way.

Melander wagged his head in rueful admission 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~~^{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~~^{So's} ~~Braaf is~~ operated by your jabber. ~~So is~~ that stiff-cock Karlsson."

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

"You're not the high-and-mighty to command anything just now."

"Do you come down with these fevers often, Wennberg? Say we wanted to flee, how would we? Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, saddle the cat and we'll all get on?"

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

"Flattering."

"Which doesn't mean I wouldn't ^{laugh to} ~~happily~~ 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 ~~gave~~ the serious smile ~~came~~ *made its appearance.*

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

Melander spent considerable talking *that night* to convince Braaf and Karlsson that the best choice was to bring Wennberg into the plan.

Braaf ~~was~~ *remained* indignant about the incident on the parade ground. He volunteered to ~~kill~~ *convert* the blacksmith *into a dead man,* if someone would tell him how ~~to go about it~~ it might be done.

Melander soothingly agreed it was an understandable ambition, and laudable too, but no.

He had thought *the issue* ~~it~~ through, and the death of a valued smith such as Wennberg, especially when the killing would have to be ~~done~~ *achieved* ~~the narrow community of New Archangel,~~ here within the fort, would breed more questions than it was worth.

"Besides, he is a hill bull for strength. We can use him."

Karlsson squinted in ~~thought~~ *reflection,* then said 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 have to set a snare for Mister Blacksmith."

A night 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 side-whiskers, but then it could be assumed that no one either was going to invoke foppery against this walking slab of brawn. A time or two ~~the blacksmith~~ ^{Wennberg} had re-edged an axe for Karlsson, but Karlsson knew little more of him than those spaced hammerblows onto red metal. He found it interesting that the man was amounting to so much more than arm.

Wennberg meanwhile tried to reciprocate as much scrutiny as he got, but was at the disadvantage because he needed to share it around the trio of them: fancymouth Melander, this mute fox Karlsson, Satan's choirboy Braaf...

"We have a thing to tell you, Wennberg," Melander began ^{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. If you've had any waverings, it'll be a relief to you to know we've made up your mind for you. There's no profit whatsoever for you to go to the Russians."

the blacksmith flared.

"Your tongue is bigger than your judgment, Melander," "It's not for you to tell me who stands where."

where. Don't forget that I can walk out of here and show the Russians the hidey-hole in that hulk where you've had Braaf stashing things these months."

"But Wennberg, heart's friend, there's nothing there," Melander said with such politeness it seemed almost an apology. "Since you've invited yourself along with us we thought we'd get ourselves a new hidey-hole. Braaf has the knack of finding such places. You'll know where the new cache is when we load the canoe, and not ^{an eyeblink} ~~the minute~~ before. So trot to the Russians whenever you feel like it, but you'll have nothing ^{in 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. Aye? No, Wennberg, it's you against 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,} ~~clean~~, so far as they know. You wouldn't 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 before you wager."

Challenge of this sort was not at all what Wennberg had expected, and he began to retort hotly: "Now listen, you three walrus-pizzles..."

At this Wennberg began to flare again, but Melander beat him to speech once more.

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

Wennberg stared at Melander as if the lanky seaman had just changed skin color before his eyes. Then he swung his 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," Wennberg rumbled finally. "I'm ^{I'm} with you. Now you can tell me, ~~part the wilderness of water.~~ if you know, how we are to ~~run on the sea.~~ ^{become pilgrims in the wilderness of water.}"

Tong the plan around in the forge of his mind as he would, Wennberg could come up with only a ^{few} splatter of questions ^{to bang out} when Melander had finished.

"Why all this fuss with old Bilibin? ^{Whyn't we} ~~Why not~~ just cut his stupid throat when we're ready?" Karlsson stirred a bit at this.

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

"What of muskets? How many can Braaf lay his dainty hands 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 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, 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~~ ^{fixed} 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 back by saying he hadn't got around to affixing the repair yet.

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 ~~un~~ ^{not}reckonable, opposite

from usual, about ^{this} ~~the~~ blacksmith. As when the eyelid of a wood duck watching you closes casually from the bottom up.

Wennberg was not done with the topic of muskets.

"Just where ^{is} ~~is~~ 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," 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 sardonically: "Next, Braaf, you'll want to ^{parade} ~~go~~ up to the Castle Russians and ask if we can have their underwear for warmth ^{on} ~~on~~ your 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 was right. That the ~~small~~ ^{officers'} collection of rifles racked like fat billiard cues within the ~~gun~~ ^{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 army} ~~was~~ New Archangel's richest trove of firearms unguarded by sentries.

But, as Wennberg suspiciously demanded, why unsentried...?

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

This silenced even Wennberg.

~~At last,~~ ^{at last} Karlsson spoke up.

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

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

"Wennberg," murmured Braaf.

"Mister Blacksmith!" Melander proclaimed.

"You squareheaded sons of whores," Wennberg said unhappily.

#



~~for New Archangel Christmas.~~

The waiting became a kind of ghost attaching itself ^{within} ~~to~~ 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 ^{immense} the days wholly in thought of the voyage ahead.

Melander as he waited studied the Tebenkov maps ever more firmly into his mind. Before long, their ~~south~~-descending coastal chain of islands could have been recited out of him like Old Testament genealogy. New Archangel's island of ^{Baranof} Sitka (it is Baranov on today's charts of the splattered southeastern Alaska coastline) 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 because~~ 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 ~~so~~ predominated in ~~Melander's~~ 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 along ^{of} ~~of~~ the four had traveled greatly enough on the planet

^{full} what they would be attempting.
 to ~~entirely~~ understand the ~~scope of their escape~~. To grasp that
 their intended ten hundred miles of paddling stretched--wove,
 rather, through the island-thick wilderness coast--as far as the
 distance from Stockholm to Venice, or from Gibraltar across all
 the top of Africa to Sicily. Each mile of the thousand, too,
 along a cold northern brink of ocean which in winter is misnamed
 entirely: not pacific at all, but malign. ^{Melander's} ~~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, "Listen.
 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} ~~gets~~ nearer
 to death wherever he ^{strides} ~~goes~~..."

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

In his waiting, Wennberg ^{too} ~~also~~ spent long spells of calculation.
 Turning and turning the question of whether to betray the escape.
 Certainty did not seem to be in the matter. If the Russians could
 be relied upon to reward him, say grant an early return to Sweden;
 but it did not seem likely the Russians would forfeit a black-
 smith so readily, whatever they promised. If he told of the plan
 but Melander convinced 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 this ocean like cats in a sack. # If and perhaps; ^{cook} work at them as he would, Wennberg could make them do no more than somersault ~~themselves~~ into perhaps and if. ~~Stanzas~~ of debate were not Wennberg's style. He preferred to bang a point, go on to the next if it mis-echoed. But this, this damned ~~well-bottom~~ skitter of a matter...Wennberg did not at all have ~~full~~ faith in the prospects of Melander's plan, but neither did he see, ~~that bramble.~~ now, any clear path out of it. What Wennberg imagined was going to be his power over Melander and the other two somehow, by some coil of the escape plan, was turning out to be their 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, the space of ^{weeks} ~~time~~ until the escape was to him simply ~~one~~ one more duration, and not as long as most.

This patience of Karlsson's cannot nearly all be counted virtue. It kept him in situations, for instance, when Wennberg would have crashed out or Braaf wriggled out, and indeed it had deposited him, without over-ample debate or decision, into Alaska. Karlsson's liking for time in the forest, learned as helper to a gamekeeper on a nearby manor during his Skane boyhood, had bent him toward a frontier life even at the price of becoming

a seven-year man. The occasional hunting forays out from New Archangel he savored considerably, and the work as an axman seemed to him an unobjectionably crisp task, although he had been caused to rethink that a bit by Melander's josh that New Archangel's true enterprise was the making of axes to cut down trees to turn into charcoal which was then used to make more axes. All in all, ^{then,} Karlsson minded New Archangel life a good deal less than any of the ^{three} other ~~three~~ Swedes. What held Karlsson into the pattern of the escape was the plan itself. That question of capability, whether Melander's idea could be made real, could transport men so far along the wild coast. ^{That, and} ~~There was also~~ the musing to be done about how he himself would perform. For one thing, Karlsson wondered whether sometime during the escape he would have to kill Wennberg. And for another, whether he could manage to kill him.

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 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 second and unofficial--and by order of the governor, absolute--curfew at the big ~~gate~~^{gate} was full dark.

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

Karlsson quirked his mouth enough to show skepticism. Melander was one who would have you believe ~~that sideways vis always true north.~~
~~a vane of another sort.~~ But Karlsson was ~~another case.~~ 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, Karlsson doubted he could ~~fashion~~^{tailor} himself to. ~~But~~^{But} "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


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. Sufficiently a scapegrace to have exasperated a generation of superiors, Bilibin 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 superiors over the years had sufficiently knouted and berated him that 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. He sang as if drunk:

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

Also, he carried 

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 ~~his~~ incapacity of Braaf's he had not calculated on at all. Rarest annoyance crossed ^{Melander's} his face, then ^{he} Melander swerved to Karlsson and his disposition readjusted itself. "So. It seems to fall to you. This'll at least be 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 to become a common sneakthief next, do I? The pair of you..."

seems a man can hardly hold a pood of them in his arms these days."

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

"You're always a thinker, 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?"

"Let's give Braaf a rest, shall we?" Melander offered rapidly. "You obviously have much to say about matters of weight."

~~If there is an axis of life in every man, Melander's whirled where the rest of us have an ordinary tongue.~~ Wennberg hesitated, cast a glance into the thinning stream of the workshift, then nodded as if Melander's words were the first coins down on a debt.

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

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

Melander soothingly agreed it was an understandable ambition, and through, and laudable too, but no. He had thought the issue 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. We can use him."

Karlsson squinted in reflection, then said 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 have to set a snare for Mister Blacksmith."

few nights
A ~~night~~ 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 side-whiskers, but then it could 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 knew little more of him than those spaced hammerblows onto red metal. He found it interesting that the man was amounting to so much more than arm.

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

"We have a thing to tell you, Wennberg," Melander ^{set in} ~~began~~ 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. If you've had any waverings, it'll be a relief to you to know we've made up your mind for you. There's no profit whatsoever for you to go to the Russians."

41 Challenge of this ^{new} sort was not at all what Wennberg had expected.

no 41

"Your tongue is bigger than your judgment, Melander," the blacksmith flared. "It's not for you to tell me who stands where. ^{You} Don't forget ~~that~~ I can walk out of here and show the Russians the hidey-hole in that hulk where you've had Braaf stashing things these months."

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

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

41 "Since you've invited yourself along with us we thought we'd get ourselves a new hidey-hole," Melander went on. "Braaf has the knack of finding such places, ^{aye?} You'll know where the new cache is when we load the canoe, and not an eyeblink before. So trot to the Russians whenever you feel like it, but you'll have nothing in 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. ~~Aye?~~ No, Wennberg, it's you against 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 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 before you wager."

~~Challenge of this sort was not at all what Wennberg had expected,~~
 # **The blacksmith**
 and he began to retort hotly: "Now listen, you three walrus-pizzles..."
~~yet again.~~
 But Melander beat him to speech ~~once more.~~

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

Wennberg was boulder-still, in stare at Melander. Fury had him, but evidently something other, too, for ~~him~~ he had clamped his mouth until his lips all but vanished. Words were having their spines snapped there, the other three ~~men~~ 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. Now you've to tell me,

night."

write up
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Melander as he waited studied the Tehenkov 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

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Turning and turning the question of whether there was a way to betray the escape. be convinced and then Certainty did not seem to be in the matter. If the Russians could be relied upon to reward him, say grant an early return to Sweden; but it did not seem likely the Russians would forfeit a black-smith so readily, whatever they might persuaded promise. If he told of the plan but Melander ~~convinced~~ 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 this ocean like cats in a sack.

If and perhaps; coax at them as he would, Wennberg could make them 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 power over Melander and the other two somehow, by some coil of the escape plan, was turning out to be their power over him.

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That, and the musing to be done about how he himself would perform. Out of somewhere, the session with Wennberg had brought ^{new} unlooked-for considerations of this sort. For one thing, Karlsson ^{new?} wondered now whether sometime during

the escape he would have to kill Wennberg. And for another, whether he could manage to kill him.