

A month's canoe journey, Melander estimated it would be to Astoria.

If they had luck, three weeks.

Karlsson stood silent for a minute, looking off around the ^{island-speckled} bay.

Melander noticed his glance linger in the direction of the ^{bathing} native women.

^{New Archangel} ^{blacksmith shop}
 # ^{no #} On such a day sound carried like light, and from the ~~fort's~~
within the stockade began to come
~~blacksmith shop~~ came the measured clamor of hammer against anvil.

As if roused by the clangor,
 # Karlsson turned back to Melander and said: "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 a replica of Karlsson's own

aboard the schooner in Stockholm harbor. # "We need a thief," he

explained.

Braaf would have given the fingers of one hand to be gone from ^{New Archangel.} Sitka.

He had, after all, the thief's ^{outlook} ^{vast} belief that in this boundaryless world

4

^{surely arrive}
 an occasion would ~~come~~ when he could
 of opportunity, ~~he would somehow be able to~~ pilfer them back.

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.

^{veered to}
 Alaska he had ~~chosen~~ because, after a steady growth of skill from
 beggary to picking pockets to thievery, the other destination

^{kastell:} ^{New Archangel when}
 beckoning to him was ~~prison~~. Braaf arrived to Sitka the year after
^{had,} ^{and snuff boxes}
 Karlsson and Melander and at once, skinning knives and twists of Kirghiz
^{settlement}
 tobacco and other unattached items began to vanish from the ~~fort~~ as

if having sprung wings in the night. The Russians vented fury on
 the harborfront natives for the outbreak of vanishment, but the ^{contingent of}
 Swedes rapidly made a different guess, for Braaf was becoming a king

of human commissary in the barracks. Because he was reasonable in
 his prices--interested less in ^{income} ~~making money~~ than in ^{chipping} ~~breaking~~ the

^{Alaskan}
 monotony of ~~Sitka~~ life, which he found to be a kind of rain-soaked
^{walled}
^{prison in its own right--}
 hell and was diplomatic enough not to ^{forage} ~~steal~~ anything major from

his countrymen, nothing was said against him.

dreary
 -walled

It would have been hard anyway to make a convincing st case against

Braaf. At twenty, he displayed the round ruddy face of a farmboy--

an apple of a face--and a gaze which lofted innocently just above the

eyes of whomever he was talking to, as if he were considerably

measuring you for a hat. # The next morning after ^{breakfast} tea was taken outside ^{a pair of} the stockade by ^{a trio} two men, it was taken by ^{studying} three; Braaf ^{studied} back and forth from Melander's

forehead to Karlsson's as Melander once more outlined the plan. Only for an instant, about the duration of a held breath, did Braaf's eyes come steady with theirs, just before he agreed to join the escape.

That is ^{the way} ~~how~~ they became three. Disquieted shipman, musing ^{woodsman,} ~~hunter,~~

agreeable thief, now plotters all. Against them, and not yet knowing

it, although habitually guardful as governing apparatuses have to be,

^{New Archangel} stood ~~Sitka~~ and its system of life. The system of all empires, when

you come to ^{ponder} think of it. For empires exist on the principle of

^{in the night sky} constellations ^{otherwise unimaginable} pattern imposed across ^{New Archangels} expanse--and the ~~Sitkas~~ of the

planet at the time, whether named ^{Singapore} ~~Sitka~~ or ^{Dakar} Santa Fe or Hong Kong or

^{or Luanda} ~~Algeciras~~ or Astoria or Sydney, were their specific scintillations

of outline. The far pinspots representing vastly more than they

themselves were. There in the middle of the nineteenth century, ^{this} ~~the~~
~~work of putting out~~ ^{the} ~~lines~~ ^{of star-web} ~~across the planet~~ ^{yet} ~~in a star-web this way~~
 was being done with ~~the~~ white wakes of sailing ships; sealanes along
 which ~~the~~ imperial energies resolutely pulsed back and forth, capital

to colony and colony to capital. Africa, Asia; ~~Australia:~~
 the lines of route from Europe ^{were} ~~converged~~ ^{ing} and tensed ^{ing} one
 another into place. Such maritime tracework ^{was} ~~succeeded~~ ^{ing}
~~as~~ astoundingly in North America as well. The gray-gowned
 wee queen

of England reigned over Ojibways and Athapascans and Bella Coolas,
 merchants of Moscow and Irkutsk were provided fortunes by bales of

Alaskan furs, the United States took unto itself a second broad

oceanfront. ⁴ But ~~all~~ this atlas of order rested on the fact that

it requires acceptance, a faith of seeing and saying, "Ah yes, that

is the Great Dipper, and here Pegasus comes flying, and there sits

shining Andromeda, exactly so," to make constellations real. So

that what the makers of any imperial configuration always had to be

most wary of was minds which happened not to be of stellar allegiance.

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~~Even~~ in the galaxy of frontier enclaves sparked into creation by imperialism, New Archangel was a mapdot ^{unlike} ~~not like~~ any other.

Simultaneously a far-north backwater ^{port} and capital of more than half a million square miles, ^{a greater} ~~more~~ territory than France ^{and} Spain ^{and} England and Ireland combined, ~~for fifty years~~ the settlement ^{ran} ~~had run on~~ ~~the~~ Russian capacities for hard labor and doggedness, and was kept from running

any better than it did by ~~the~~ Russian penchants for muddle and infighting.

New Archangel here ~~remained~~ fifty years after its founding still stood

set: ~~forth very much~~ in the image of its progenitor, the stumpy and tenacious Baranov, first governor of Russian America and contriver of the Russian-American Company's system of fur-gathering. It was said of Baranov, like Napoleon, that he was a little great man, and he it was who in 1791 began to stretch Russian strength from the Aleutian chain of atolls down the great arc of Alaska's coast, bending or breaking the native cultures along the route one after another: the Aleuts chastened into becoming the Russians' seasonal hunters of seals and sea otters, the people of the Kenai cajoled into alliance by Baranov's mating with the daughter of the foremost chief, the stubbornly combative Tlingits--whom the

Russians ^{dubbed} ~~called~~ Kolosh--at last in 1804 dislodged from Sitka Sound by

the cannonades of a gunship.

~~Sitka Sound~~, ^{the} single sizable and well-sheltered ^{indenting} ~~bay~~ harbor along the archipelagic shoreline of southeastern Alaska, ^{represented} ~~was~~ the maritime

ringhold Baranov needed for the firm knotting of Russian influence.

Along virtually all of that coast

^{Pacific} Mountains drop sheer to the ~~ocean~~, spruce slopes like green avalanches

into the seawater, along virtually all of that coast, but at Sitka

a long notch of bay is sided by a ledge of shore, and further grudging bequest of topography, at the shore's

southmost hook a knoll of rock pokes up like a soldier's helmet. This mound, sixty or so feet in elevation and twice as broad, the Kolosh had employed as a stronghold, and Baranov seized the commanding site for his own thick-logged bastion.

^{this} ~~Here~~ in the summer of 1852, ^{the estimable} Baranov three decades dead, ^{a huge} ~~the~~ double-

storied governor's house still called ~~Braaf~~ Baranov's Castle squatted

there in the air at one extent of New Archangel's single street, at

the opposite end rose the onion dome and carrot spire of the comely

little Russian Orthodox cathedral. (The morning after Braaf joined

the escape plan, Karlsson emerges from around a corner of the cathedral,

on his way from the workmen's barracks a short ^{span} ~~way~~ to its north, and

walks the brief dirt street between God's domain and Governor's.

Karlsson has been ^{delegated} ~~sent~~ to work this day at the shipyard, so left

with an ax that he often is lent to help with the first shaping of

a mainmast. Before reaching the shipyard, ^{just beyond Baranov's Castle,} however, he veers west

toward the stockade gate and the Kolosh village beyond, steps outside

and along the wall, ~~underrun~~ ^{undoes} his wool ^{britches} ~~trousers~~, and urinates.

As he does so, ^{Karlsson} ~~he~~ studies the Kolosh canoes lined like sleeping serpents ^{on the white sand of} ~~along~~ the beach.) All of New Archangel, cathedral and Castle and

? the fifty or so squared-log buildings painted a pale yellow as though they were seaside cottages, sat dwarfed by the ^t ~~thriving~~ ^{Alaskan} mountains.

Virtually atop the ~~town~~ as the spire and dome crowned the cathedral,

the peaks were ^{precisely} ~~those~~ a child would draw ^{sharp} ~~high~~ ^{tall} pyramids of forest,

occasionally a lesser summit ~~rather than~~ round as a cannonball for

comparison's sake. (As Karlsson begins hewing pine at the shipyard, ?

Braaf materializes at the partially-wooded rise of land ^{just} ~~north~~ of

the settlement and stockade. When Braaf arrived to New Archangel and

it ^{rapidly} ~~immediately~~ became evident that he was not, as listed on one manifest,

a shipwright, nor, as ^{supposed} ~~listed~~ on another item of record, a shoemaker,

and Braaf with shy innocence denied knowing how such misunderstandings

possibly could have come about, a perplexed clerk assigned him to
 the readiest unskilled job, as a cook's helper. Daily Braaf ~~manages~~ ^{manages to use this livelihood}

to manufacture free time for himself, much of it spent hiding out
^{somewhere on} ~~amid~~ this brow of land which hold^s New Archangel's four capacious
 graveyards, ~~Kolosh~~, Russian Orthodox, Lutheran, and unconsecrated.

This morning ^{as usual} Braaf angles, ~~as usual~~, past the particularly handsome
 headstone of a Russian officer named Gavrilov. Braaf cannot comprehend

the Russian incscription, but it reads: "Peace be to your dust."

Perpetually at ^{combat} war with the massed mountains ^{around Sitka Sound was its} ~~was the~~ weather, for

New Archangel lived two days of three in rain and much oftener than
 that in cloud. ~~At~~ One minute the vapor flowed along the bottoms

of the mountains to ^{float} ~~make the~~ peaks ~~float~~ like dark icebergs, the

next the cloud layer would ~~up~~ rise and lop ^{every} ~~the~~ crags, leaving a
 plateau of forest ~~which~~ beneath. Yet the diminutive port within

all this swirl was a place of queer

clarity as well, its rinsed air ^{somehow holding} ~~looking~~ touched with a quality of ^{tint}

blue light which ^{caused} ~~made~~ everything ^{to} stand out: the ^{smallest} ~~limbs~~ ^{spruce} ~~branches of trees~~ ^{limbs}

on ~~the~~ mountains a mile off, the rock skirts of the timbered islands

^{throughout} of the harbor. Voices and the barking of dogs carried extraordinarily.

on his way
to leave

?

speaking

(At mid-morning, Braaf reluctantly emerging from the cemetery slope

~~to begin~~ ^{toward} chores for the noon meal, Melander on work-break ^{presents himself} ~~appears~~

^{within} from the saltery being constructed on the point of shoreline southeast

of the cathedral. Sitka Sound shares amply in the twenty-foot tides

of this region of Alaska, and on the broad exposed tideflat, a pig is

rooting up clams while ravens seize his find, ^s one after another. Melander

watches for a moment, then ~~he~~ laughs. Other workmen look over at him

from their mugs of tea. Melander points to the raucous gulping birds:

"The Castle Russians at one of their banquets.") A last oddity of

^{this} the port of New Archangel was that it had a ^{larger} fleet of ships permanently

~~aland, and in the harbor, beached from one to another~~ ^{to be found} than were usually in its

harbor. ~~Hulls were pulled ashore~~ ^{onto} when they could no longer be safely

^{hulls were pulled onto shore,} sailed, then improvised upon as needed. Of the first two, beached into

usefulness in Baranov's time, one had been used as a church and the

other as a gun battery, a diversity which ^{surely} must have ^{caused} the Kolosh to

ponder deeply about their new landlords. ~~New Archangel is a cooperative~~

Its habit of collecting hull-corpses gave New Archangel, as one visitor

put it, "an original, foreign, and fossilized kind of appearance."

Fully equal in complication and unlikelihood to its architecture and geography and weather was New Archangel's tenantry. The settlement was ruled by the Russian navy, administered by a covey of Russian-American Company clerks and other functionaries, was provisioned chiefly by British ships of the rival Hudson's Bay Company, seasonally abounded with Aleut fur hunters, relied 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 was ^{far} the most ~~sizable~~ ~~mingata~~ ~~numerous~~ group--or upon Russian vagabonds from the Siberian port of Okhotsk, and for its craftwork, such as carpentry, it imported seven-year men from Scandinavia. The hundred and fifty or so Scandinavians mostly were Finns; the Swedes such as Melander and Braaf and Karlsson made a minority within this minority.

Yet even this social pyramid, sharp-tipped and broad-bottomed as the triangle peaks above the ~~little~~ little port, did not account the most numerous populace on Sitka Sound. The Kolosh, the Sitka Tlingits.

Their low-roofed longhouses straggled for nearly a ~~mile~~ ^{mile} along the

beach west of New Archangel's huddle of buildings, and the ~~eighteen~~

~~foot-high~~ ^{eighteen feet high and five hundred yards long} wall of defense, and four bulky blockhouses and a couple

of dozen full-time sentries constantly expressed the colony's wariness

of the natives. (With ~~sufficient~~ ^{cause} reason. The Sitka Tlingits

obliterated the first settlement Baranov ~~had~~ ^{had} implanted here, and a

bare three years after this summer of 1852 they ~~were to~~ ^{were to} mustered themselves and ~~tried~~ ^{try}, just short of success, to obliterate this one as well.)

Precisely this ~~wariness~~ ^{prudence} toward the Kolosh, the way New Archangel

had to set its most vigilant face ~~daily set its face of vigilance~~ ^{scheme} toward those who might ~~want~~ ^{want} to get in,

Melander was counting on as advantage for getting out.

Melander was of singularly few words three evenings later--June's

last evening, another of New Archangel's summer twilights which ~~toyed~~ ^{dawdled}

~~on in~~ ^{on in} with dusk until near midnight--when he fell into step with Braaf and

Karlsson on their way to the barracks. ⁹¹ "All right, Braaf. Tomorrow,

begin your harvest."

7

dawdled
and dawdled on

?

4 Braaf proved so adept a provisioner that Melander ^{soon} was forced to ration out his stealing assignments, lest the Russians become suspicious about the fresh blizzard of thievery. 4 By the end of July, the planners' cache held a compass, two tins of gunpowder, ^{one of the} ~~a long~~ three-pound boxes of tea the Russians used to trade with the natives, several fishing lines and hooks, and a coil of rope. 4 During August Braaf added a gaff hook, three knives, a couple of hatchets, and a fire flint apiece. 4 September's gleanings were a second compass--

Melander wanted to be as certain as possible about navigation--a small iron kettle, another ^{box of tea} ~~musket~~ and a water cask.

4 Early in October, ^{New Archangel's} ~~Sitka's~~ month of curtaining rain, the plotters convened about the matter of a canoe. ~~met to talk about the canoe~~ 4 Karlsson had eyed out one to recommend, an eighteen-foot shell of unusual delicacy with a prow ~~carved in the~~

which, unlike the short terminating blade of bowsprit on most Kolosh canoes, angled onward into a high sharp needle of nose. ~~Along both~~

It gave the craft the look of only awaiting the right ^{instant} ~~word~~ before flying upward. Along both bow and stern, this alert canoe was vividly carved and painted: box-like designs with rounded corners, so that the lines flowed with smoothness in and out of one another.

inertiality?

Karlsson judged there was only one ^{canoe} more promising ~~canoe~~ among ^{all} the Kolosh fleet, a chief's ^{vessel} ~~canoe~~, larger and more elegant; but its beaching spot was nearly to the far end of the village. This choice lay amid ~~the~~ the half dozen canoes nearest the stockade gate, convenient.

Melander knew something of canoes, from having paddled a number of times with Kolosh crews to the fishing grounds off the western shorefront of New Archangel; indeed, ^{those} ~~such~~ journeys were main strands in his decision that seven-year-dom could be fled by water. But ^{the} ~~those~~ fishing canoes were half again the length of this keen-beaked version singled out by Karlsson. Asked his opinion, Braaf only mumbled that any canoe was smaller than he preferred. Karlsson vouched hard for the waterworthiness of his choice, pointing out that it would be livelier to steer than a larger canoe and less weight to propel. Further, he had watched to see that the native who owned it was scrupulous, on

than any canoe was smaller than he preferred--but Karlsson vouched

~~for its waterworthiness~~ ^{He had watched to see that} the native who owned it was scrupulous, on

New Archangel's rare warm days, about sloshing water over the ~~canoe~~ ^{cedar interior}

to ~~prevent~~ ^{heaped} its drying out and cracking, and in damp weather kept

woven mats over it for shelter.

^{troubled to} Melander was persuaded. ^{no 41} Next Karlsson, who rarely asserted himself about anything but was displaying downright passion about everything to do with the canoe,

insisted on Clyoquot paddles, a broad-headed type carved by a tribe

far south along the coast and occasionally bartered north as prized

items of trade. ^{full} Braaf frowned. He had ^{full} reason; it took him all of

the next week to accumulate a trio of Clyoquot paddles from the Sitka

natives along the harbor.

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

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

^{own} Karlsson's ~~assigned~~ task, in these months of preparation, was

^{night} the watchman ^{at} above the gate of the ^{stockade} fort.

^{are the one with} "You ~~have~~ the wedge to open that gate for us," Melander ^{instructed} told him

jovially. "It's between your legs."

~~Karlsson now made his visits to the native huts even more frequently,~~

more?
quote?

10

Like the ^{single} ~~eye~~ ^{some} of a great watchful creature, each morning at six
 the stockade gate near the westmost corner of New Archangel ^{winked} ~~came~~ open,
 at six each evening it ^{swung} ~~came~~ resolutely closed. Only during ^{those dozen hours of} ~~the~~ day
 were the Kolosh allowed into the settlement, in ^{scrutinized} ~~carefully~~ gauged
 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} ~~trouble~~. Moreover, the first of the four
 gun-slitted blockhouses buttressing the ^{east-stretching} ~~five hundred yard~~ wall of
 stockade sat ^{close by} ~~above~~ the area of market and gate on a shieldlike ^{short slope} ~~wall~~
 of rock, miniature of the strong ^{knob} ~~slope~~ supporting Baranov's Castle.
 Scan it from inside or out, ~~just~~ here at New Archangel's portal
 Russian caution about the Kolosh ^{showed} ~~was at~~ its strongest focus.

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

which
 I have
 opened
 and
 closed
 with
 my
 foot
 up

commotion

wait?

Karlsson began to ~~make his~~ ^{increase his frequency of} visits to the native villages ~~more~~
~~frequent~~, and to stretch each stay deeper into dusk. Before long,
 he was nudging regularly against the ^{second} ~~the~~ curfew, much to the anxiety
 of ^a ~~the~~ gate sentry named Bilibin. Bilibin was one of the longest-
 serving of the Russians ^{laborers} ~~who had come~~ ^{been pushed or pulled} across from Siberia, but also
 something of a scapegrace who had exasperated ^{a succession of} ~~one~~ superiors ~~or another~~
 to the point where he now stood the least desirable of ^{watch} ~~guard~~ shifts,
 the one spanning the middle of the night. He had felt the knout
 enough times not to invite it again, and the first time Karlsson
 arrived back late, Bilibin blustered a threat to march him double-
 quick to the sergeant in charge of the sentries. But did nothing;
~~rousting~~ out a sergeant because a Swede couldn't finish his rutting
 on time was not the sort of thing Bilibin savored either.

The next time, having conferred that day with Melander, Karlsson
 staggered later than ever ^{from the Kolosh village} to the gate, singing as if drunk--"If your
blue eyes I could see, gloom would soon depart;" Karlsson was amazed
 with the evident believability of his acting; "for to me, sweet maid
Marie, is sunshine ^s ~~shine~~ through the heart"--and carrying a jug of the native

~~"00"; Karlsson was amazed with the evident believability of his acting; "00"--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..."~~

The hootchina did its task. Under the New

Archangel garrison allotment of fifty cups of rum per man per year, Bilibin

was a man perpetually parched. Soon Karlsson, on the nights when

the stockade until nearly dark --
Bilibin stood watch, was slipping out of the fort after curfew

"Come along, ^{he} and put your spoon in the kettle," Karlsson 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~~ back at him--and returning

far into in the middle of the night to proffer the hootchina ~~hutzina~~ jug.

4 By first snowfall of that autumn of 1852, Karlsson was well on

his way to legendary status among the native women along Sitka

Sound harbor, and Bilibin had been primed carefully as a stubborn pump for ~~primed for~~ led to topple into the escape

plan.

carefully
of a
pump

ditto
of a
pump

(11)

~~said in his procedural way that~~
 In early November, Melander told Braaf the time had come ~~to steal~~
 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 ~~when~~ ^{while} Rosenberg was bathing

his bottom at Ozherskoi. We'll take those, they ~~aren't likely~~ ^{won't} to be
 missed until spring ~~when they fire up~~ ^{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~~ 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 shook his head again. "Aye?" Melander demanded. "What is it?"

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

The unforeseen always irked Melander, and this he had not thought
 of at all. His stare of annoyance held on Braaf, then Melander swerved
 to Karlsson and his disposition restored 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

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 Melander and for once, so did Braaf. Under the pressure of these looks Melander grimaced, then scowled, then swore. "Jesu Maria. Have to become a common sneakthief, do I? The pair of you..."

———

The pair of them met him with the same square glances two weeks later. "I have them, I have them," Melander 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 one side of the boat and I got away along the other." Melander opened his mouth as if to go on, but went into thought instead. After a moment he said: "Aye. Anyway, it's 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 recognize sailcloth, Braaf, can't you?"

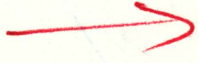
———

(12)

Braaf was making away with the sailcloth, the folded length of it cradled beneath an armload of skins he ostensibly was carrying toward the tannery, when a voice--through his fright it did register on him that the voice at least was Swedish rather than Russian--suggested huskily into his ear, "Let's talk about what you have under those skins."

Braaf turned his ~~his~~ head the fraction enough to recognize 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 now: orders. "We'll have a visit until we see which interesting thing happens first." Wennberg moved himself in front of Braaf as companionably as if he had every matter in the world to discuss with him. "Whether you spill that load in front of these Russians,



or your friend Melander trots himself over here."

Melander arrived with a lanky swiftness which to any onlooker would seem as if he had been beckoned over to consult with the pair.

Around the three of them now centered in the long rectangle of parade ground between Baranov's Castle and the stockade gate, New Archangel's morning life eddied, quartermasters and overseers and shipwrights and caulkers and brassworkers and sailors, humanity in its start-of-day seeps and spurts of motion. ^a Melander's dark look met Wennberg's broad blandness like a cloud against cliff-face.

^{said} [↑] "Well, Melander," Wennberg ^{said. ~~didn't get around~~} ^{all but purred.} ^{speaking} "Braaf and I were just ^{of} ^{skins} ^{about} how much heavier ^{hides} 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 always were a thinker, Melander. Isn't he, Braaf?" The blacksmith stepped close and pressed his elbow slowly, powerfully, into Braaf's right bicep, 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." ~~Braaf lurched~~

If there is an axis of life in every man, Melander's whirled where the rest of us have an ordinary tongue.

Wennberg hesitated, then nodded as if the words were

~~a debt paid~~
~~reparation.~~

~~¶~~ Braaf *lurched*

his way out of sight in the general direction of the tannery as the

other two, Melander more angular than ever beside the wide Wennberg,

~~strode~~ ^{inside} to a building not far ~~from~~ the stockade gate. The smithing

shop transected the middle of the ~~building~~ ^{structure}, and within its open arched

, like stabled iron creatures of some nature,
doorway stood three big forges aligned from the outside in. The

outermost forge was Wennberg's. Melander now ~~studied~~ ^{scanned} out into the

parade ground from here where Wennberg stood by the hour at his work,

of the view thus presented,
nodded in understanding and asked: "So?"

¶ "You have plans to get away from this Russian bearpit, and I'm coming with you."

¶ "Are you?"

¶ "I am. ^{Eise} ~~or~~ you and Braaf and Karlsson will be hung from the top
^{stockade}
of the ~~fort~~ for the magpies to feast on."

Melander held Wennberg's gaze in a lock with his own, then gave the serious smile. # "First you speak of too much weight, then of too much height. Wennberg, I think you maybe underestimate how far a man can stretch himself if he has to. Can you handle a Clyoquot paddle?"

considerable
Melander spent ~~some~~ talking to convince Braaf and Karlsson that the best choice was to bring Wennberg into the plan. Braaf volunteered to kill the blacksmith, if someone would tell him how it might be done. ~~agreed~~ said it was an understandable ambition, but no. Melander ~~shook his head.~~ He had thought it through, and the death of a valued smith such as Wennberg, ~~especially~~ especially when the killing would have to be done here within the fort, ~~would raise~~ breed more questions than it was worth. "Besides, he is a hill bull for strength. We can use him."

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

concurred,
Aye, Melander ~~agrees~~ that was the very problem to be grappled. "We Blacksmith shall have to set a snare for Mister ~~Wennberg~~ Wennberg."

13

dephaut first time

A night later, the four of them met. Karlsson openly studied

Wennberg. 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 ~~side~~ ^{feathery} whiskers, but then it could be assumed that no one either was going to invoke foppery against this walking slab of brawn.

~~Wennberg.~~ A time or two the blacksmith had re-edged an axe for

Karlsson, but Karlsson knew nothing more of him than those spaced

hammerblows onto red metal. ~~he~~ ^{he} found it interesting that the man ~~was~~

~~amounted to~~ ^{ing} ~~more~~ so much more than arm. ~~Wennberg~~ ^{meanwhile}

gave back as much scrutiny as he got. ~~Wennberg~~ [¶] Braaf's gaze now floated

steadily along three foreheads instead of two.

¶ "We have a thing to tell you, Wennberg," Melander began. "Since

you're new to our midst, we can't really know whether your fondest

wish is to go with us from ~~here~~ ^{here} Sitka or to sell us to the Russians as

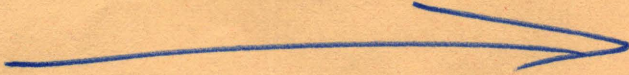
~~runaways~~ ^{runaways} conspirators. If you've had any waverings, it'll be a relief to you

to know we've made up your mind for you. There's no profit whatsoever

for you to go to the Russians."

Challenge of this sort was not what Wennberg had been expecting,
and he retorted hotly.

"Your tongue is bigger than your brain, Melander. It's not for you
to tell me who stands where. Don't forget that I can walk out of here and always show the
Russians the hidey-hole 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. This is a large fort, and Braaf is ^{very} good at finding ^{such places.} his way around ^{no #} in it. You'll know where the ^{new} cache is when we load the canoe, and not the minute before. So trot to the Russians whenever you feel like it, but you'll have nothing to show them."

"Except mouse turds." This unexpectedly from Braaf, who still was ^{scanning} studying the air above the other three. Wennberg shot him a look which all but ^{left sparks in the air.} sizzled in the air. ^{blazing look.}

"Yes, except mouse turds," Melander chuckled. "And even the Russians might find it hard to believe that we've been busy storing away mouse turds. Aye? No, Wennberg, it's you against the three of us, Wennberg, and we'll see who the Our souls are clean, so far as they know. Russians choose to believe. You wouldn't be the first one here to be thought off his head, ^{for} a maker of mischief for some other reason."

Melander paused, then said in his know-all fashion: now and again, ~~Now, Wennberg, you think~~ "you play a hand of cards occasionally, don't you, Wennberg? I suggest you have a second look before you ~~bet~~ wager."

Wennberg ~~glowered~~ ^{glowered} around the trio, ~~began~~ ^{began} opened his mouth to say something, but ~~Melander~~ ^{Melander} beat him to it, ~~once more~~ ^{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 ~~ghost~~ ^{burden} of bad feelings. If you're going to the Russians, you don't want your last words to weigh wrongly on your soul."

Wennberg stared at ~~Karlsson~~ ^{Melander} as if the ~~slender hunter~~ ^{lanky seaman} had just changed skin color before his eyes. Then he swung his heavy look to Braaf, at last and longest to ~~Melander~~ ^{Karlsson}. "You set of squareheads may be better at this than I thought," Wennberg ~~said~~ ^{rumbled} finally. "I am with you. Now you can tell me, if you can, how we are to run on the sea."

———
Test the plan in the forge of his mind as he would, Wennberg could come up with ~~a brief spate~~ ^{only a short splatter} of questions when Melander had finished.

"Why all this fuss with ~~Bilibin~~ ^{old} Bilibin? Why not just cut his stupid throat when we're ready?"

"Because if we kill one of his men, ~~Chirikov~~ ^{Rosenberg}—the Russian garrison have his people chase us. ~~officer--~~ "will have to come after us. If we leave Bilibin alive, ~~Chirikov~~ ^{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 ~~same~~ 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 even Karlsson looked ^{mildly} surprised,

but it was

Wennberg who blurted: "Great good God, Melander, ^{eight} ~~nine~~ rifles 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} ~~crows~~ are going to feed us on this journey, and the ^{bears} ~~wolves~~ will guard

us with their kind teeth? We don't know what we'll face, but I want

ball and powder to face it with. If you wish to come along naked,

so be it."

Wennberg grumbled, then offered that if Melander was so fixed on

muskets, he was willing to help out. ~~When the time was ready Wennberg~~ →

A sentry's musket had been sent into the smith shop for a new buttplate. He could hold it back ~~for a time~~ by saying he hadn't got around to affixing the buttplate 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 muskets 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 unreckonable, opposite from usual, about the blacksmith: as when the eyelid of a wood duck watching you ~~casually~~ *casually* closes ~~from~~ from the bottom up.

Wennberg caromed on from the topic of muskets: "And you know

for heaven-certain, Melander, that we'll find this American fort

at--what is it, Asturia?"

"Astoria, named for the rich fur man Astor. It is there. I have

known sailors whose ships have called there. Perhaps we will not

even have to go that far, if we meet a merchantman or supply ship

along the way. English, Spanish, Americans or the devil, it won't

matter. So long as they're not Russians."

"And the natives?" ~~Karlsson put in.~~ Kolosh and whatever-the-hell-else they might be?"

Even Wennberg was silenced by that, and Melander now disclosed to them the escape date. Christmas. The ~~14~~ Russians would be celebrating and carousing and dancing their boots off ~~as they did on the holiday, nothing~~ could be more natural than for Karlsson to offer Bilibin a few extra swigs of hutzina, Melander explained. Nor, when their ^{escapees'} absence had been discovered, would the Russians be eager to leave their warm festivities to chase them through the cold of ^{Alaskan} night. ~~Confusion,~~

Moreover, nothing could be more natural than for Karlsson to offer Bilibin a few extra holiday swigs of hootchina.

Confusion,

alcohol, reluctance, all would be their allies for the escape, the tall leader concluded. ^{the best possible guests for} ~~Sikta~~ ^{New Archangel} Christmas.

The waiting became a kind of ghost attaching itself 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} ~~jobs~~, eat, sleep, carry on barracks gabble--while inside, this sudden new shadow-creature, the one in wait, bided the days ^{wholly} ~~only~~ in thought of ^{the voyage} ~~what was~~ ahead.

(15)

4 Melander as he waited studied the ~~map~~ ^{Tebenkov maps ever more} firmly into his mind. Before

? more desc.

long, ~~the~~ ^{their} south-descending coastal chain of islands could have been

recited out of him like Old Testament genealogy, ~~Sitka's Baranof Island~~ ^{New Archangel's island}

of Sitka ~~it is~~ Baranof on today's charts of the ~~Alaskan~~ splattered southeastern Alaska coastline ~~it would~~

to beget Kuiu Island, ~~for the escape~~, Kuiu to 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 he had in him the seaman's way

of letting the days take care of distance, simply accepting that because

there is more time than there is expanse of the world any journey at

last will end, Melander tended to think of the escape ~~only~~ in this

stepping-stone manner, rarely by the totality of what he and the other

three were ~~intending~~ ^{undertaking}. This made a loss to them all, for Melander alone

of the four had traveled greatly enough on the planet 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. His knowledge of ~~water~~ ^{the} wrapping
 the world, the force of its resistance to the intentions of man, he
 might have used to put a tempered edge on the plan, ^{to} have said,
 "Listen. Things beyond all imagining may happen to us..." Yet--it may
 be ^a necessity for those who choose vast risk--even Melander seemed
 not able to face the thought of all the miles at once, ^{only} those from
 island to island to island.

In his waiting, Wennberg ^{also} ~~too~~ spent long ~~speils~~ ^{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~~ ^{early return}

to Sweden; but it did not seem likely the Russians would ~~willingly lose~~ ^{forfeit a}

blacksmith ^{so readily} ~~that way~~, whatever they promised. If he told of the plan

^{but} ~~and~~ Melander convinced the Russians there was nothing to it, Wennberg

~~that~~ ^{that stealer of milk teeth}
 would never after be safe in New Archangel; Karlsson and perhaps even

Braaf would be a ^{steady} ~~constant~~ 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;

work at

them as he would, Wennberg could make them do no more than somersault themselves into perhaps and if. Stanzas of argument were not Wennberg's style. He preferred to bang a point, go on to the next if it misechoed. But this,

~~this~~ ^{damned} skitter of a matter...Wennberg did not at all have full faith in the



prospects of Melander's plan, but neither did he see, now, any clear ^{path} way 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 ~~as well.~~

#

4 Karlsson waited with less edginess than the others. There always was about Karlsson a calm ^{just short of chill.} which ~~verged on coldness.~~ He ^{possessed a close idea of} knew his own capabilities, could gauge himself ^{with some dispassion} accurately as to whether he was living up to them, and had ^{not much interest in} indifference for people who lacked either capability or gauge. ~~Unlike Wennberg who was continually flexing himself,~~ Karlsson went through life ^{in the manner of a} as a man in wait. This patience of his was not nearly all virtue, ^{it} kept him in situations when ~~a~~ Wennberg would have crashed out or ~~a~~ Braaf wriggled out, and indeed it had deposited him, without ^{undue over-ample} much decision or debate, into Alaska. Karlsson was a particle of the Swedish ~~diaspora~~ diaspora which began in the 1840's, a man uncoupled from his family's farm by a surplus of brothers and absence of opportunity. The two brothers younger than Karlsson caught America fever, put themselves into the emigrant

stream aimed to the prairies beyond the Great Lakes; At their

suggestion that he come along, Karlsson gave his ~~serious smile and~~

said only: "I am no farm maker." His liking ~~for hunting and trapping,~~ →

for time in the forest ^{then} bent him toward Alaska, even at the price

of becoming a seven-year man. The occasional hunting assignments

he enjoyed greatly, and ~~even~~ the work as an axman seemed to him

unobjectionably ^{caused} an ~~attractive~~ crisp task, although he had been ~~made~~ 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} ~~make into~~ charcoal, which was

then used to make more axes. ~~But~~ [≡] all in all, Karlsson minded New

Archangel life ^{a good deal} ~~less than~~ ^{did} any of the other three Swedes. What held Karlsson into

the pattern of the escape was the plan itself. ^{that} ~~the~~ [≡] question of

^{capability,} ~~capacity,~~ whether Melander's idea could be made real, could transport

^{so far} ~~men~~ along the wild coast. 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.

The hardest wait among them was Braaf's, ~~for~~ Melander ^{having} ~~had~~ forbidden him from stealing until the final flurry of muskets and ~~hard~~ ^{food} ~~tack~~ on the date of the escape. To ~~keep~~ his hands busy Braaf had taken up carving. After his first effort, a copying of a madonna in the Russians' cathedral of ~~St. Michael~~ who emerged from Braaf's fingers somehow looking simultaneously mournful and sly, ~~it had been~~ Melander ~~who~~ suggested, "Carve us a little figurehead for the journey, Braaf. A lady for luck." It had been Wennberg who added, "Where we're going, better make her a mermaid," and so Braaf did.

—

16

The night, of the sixth of January, 1853. By the Gregorian calendar of the Russians, ^{Orthodox custom,} the night of Christmas.

^{from the Kolosh village to,}

Karlsson staggered against the outside of the ^{stockade} ~~fort~~ gate, ~~propped~~

bounced hard against it, propped himself and

there, he threw back his head. # "Be GREETed joyful MORning HOURLRR,"

he bawled. "Christ the SAVior is BORNNN..."

"Shush! Christ save us, man, you'll have the sergeant down here,"

Bilibin called urgently, hustled from the lean-to sheltering him

from the rain, and hurriedly cracked the gate. "Quick, in, in..."

From the dark beside the blacksmith shop Melander watched the

high gate wink grayly open, shut, and two shapes bob together. When he heard

Karlsson's slurred mutter and Bilibin's guffaw, ~~Melander~~ Melander swiveled his head toward the end of the smithing shop farthest from the gate and spoke: "Now." A piece of the darkness--its name was Braaf--disengaged itself and instantly was vanished around the corner.

^{The For} It was nearly three hundred yards across New Archangel to the ~~workers' barracks~~ ^{outside the workers' barracks} Melander strode rapidly, then halted and drew deep breaths. Entering the barracks, he clattered the door shut behind him, began to shrug out of his rainshirt, mumbled something about having forgot his gloves in the toilet, and was gone out the door again. A person attentively watching ^{the} Melander's arrival and departure ^{of Melander} would have had time to blink perhaps three times.

Wennberg, who had been ~~casually~~ ^{idly} stropping a knife as he ~~watched~~ ^{spectated} the card game being played by three carpenters and ~~a~~ ^a sailmaker, grunted that he too was off to the toilet, ~~if~~ ^{and} the Russians allowed such a matter on such a holy night, ~~and~~ to the chuckles of the card players pulled on his rainshirt and stepped into the dark beside Melander.

The pair of them, tree and stump somehow endowed with legs, moved with no word through the night for three minutes, four.

Apprehension rode them both. Apprehensions, rather, for their anxieties were as different as the men. The single time in all the unfolding,

of the plan that Melander had visibly blanched was when he asked Braaf

where best to steal the final installment of muskets on escape night

and Braaf responded with entire matter-of-factness: "The officers' club.

The gun room."

("Next, Braaf, you'll want to go up to the Castle Russians and ask if we can have their underwear for warmth," Wennberg had said sardonically.)

But ~~in~~ ^{arguing} talking the matter out, it had ~~seemed~~ ^{emerged} that Braaf probably was

right. That the officers and the ~~other~~ ^{Russian} ~~Company~~ Russians who frequented the

clubhouse for card games and tippling and monotony-breaking argument

probably all would be at the governor's Christmas ball in Baranov's Castle.

That the small collection of rifles racked like fat billiard cues ~~in~~

one end wall of the clubhouse--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 Ozherkoi probably could be got to on

that necessary night. Probably.

But a few late-going Russians yet within the clubhouse... a padlock on the door of the gun room... Melander's months of planning now teetered on such chances, and the fret of it all moved with him in the dark.

Wennberg's perturbation was with himself. Until he stood up from beside the card-players in the barracks he had not been certain he would go through with the escape. How came it that now he was traipsing into disaster beside Melander?

Abruptly a barrier of building met them. As Melander and Wennberg hesitated before the officers' club, a third upright shadow joined them, thrust into the hands of each of them two hefty long rifles, and held the fifth weapon for itself.

In the dark and

rain Melander and Wennberg stood rooted for a moment, as ^{though} ~~transformation~~

^{conferred on them by Braaf}
by the filigreed feel of the metal ~~and~~ in their hands ~~numbness~~ would
^{so much as twitched.}
vanish if they ~~dared move.~~

The noise exploded ^{stop} over them then.

PALONG! PALONG!

^{froze Melander and Wennberg}
Braaf was four running strides away from the ~~other two~~ before he,

and they, realized--PALONG! PALONG!--how cathedral bells resound to
those who sneak ^{through} ~~in~~ the streets at night.

"Your Russian is fond of bells," a visitor ^{who departed} ~~to~~ New Archangel
with ringing ears once noted down, ^{sweet-sad} ~~the~~ and the holiday peals from
~~the~~ ^{belfry of the} ~~little~~ cathedral followed the tall ~~slender~~ figure and the shorter
two across the settlement ^{A few feet from} toward the stockade gate. ~~at~~ the sentry
lean-to, the trio paused, and Melander called in huskily: "Karlsson."

all is
now
47
more

A figure loomed out in ~~raincoat~~ sentry cap with a musket at quarter arms. This time Wennberg's nerve-ends ignited first: the blacksmith rumbled a curse and grabbed for the knife inside his rainshirt.

The figure chided in Karlsson's voice: "I thought I had better

look the part. You don't find Bilibin's hat becoming on me, Wennberg?"

as if announcing tea.

"It's time," Melander said, # Karlsson eased the gate open just enough

for them to slip through, and the ^{three} ~~men below him~~ began to carry supplies

*as if
announcing
tea.*



to the canoe somewhere in the blackness of the Kolosh villages; the five guns from the officers' club, Karlsson's hunting rifle and the sentry's musket Wennberg had dawdled over in the smithing shop; the month upon month trove Braaf had accumulated ~~like a discriminating packrat; and supplies~~ the final ~~of~~ food he had diverted from the kitchen ~~that~~ that very day. ~~It~~ It took a number of trips, for Melander would have stuffed the canoe full as a sausage if he ~~hadn't~~ hadn't had to leave room for the human occupants, Braaf and Wennberg lugging while Melander stowed and stowed, then all at once Melander, alone, was back at the gate to say, "Ready. Come when you can."

Karlsson began to wait out a span of motionless time. The hammer chorale of the bells at last had ceased, and the all-but-silence, just the soft rainsound, was worse. Yet Karlsson ~~was~~ ^{managed to keep} busy within himself, saying and resaying the words.

Then the words, as if in chorus to his ^{silent} recitings of them, came out of the dark to him, ~~and~~ ^{on} in call down from the blockhouse ~~upside~~ ^{above} the stockade gate.

→ # "Eleventh hour, all quiet, God

save our father the Tsar."

Having been endlessly rehearsed by Melander, whose Russian was better he had been ~~saying~~ saying inside himself, than his own, Karlsson cried back the watch call, as close as he could now raise make his voice to Bilibin's bray.

Silence from the blockhouse.

Karlsson cracked the gate for himself. And then, although he had no idea he was going to do such a thing, Karlsson turned his head up the hill and brayed once more:

"Merry Christmas!"

A moment of silence of another sort at the other guardpost-- deeper, tauter ~~suspenseful~~, as of surprise. Then:

"And Merry Christmas to you, Pavel Ivanovich!"

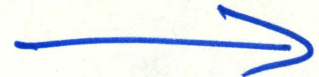
As if in mock of some dance step the Russians ^{just then} were gyrating through in the Castle, ~~just then~~, the Swedes' vast voyage southward started off with a sidestep to the west. ⁴ Melander had shown Karlsson on the first of the Tebenkov maps the pair of southgoing channels threaded like ~~a~~ careful seams among the islands of Sitka Sound, and Karlsson had said: "At night? ^{Probably} ~~Likely~~ in rain?" That ^{nubbin} ~~strong~~ ^{opinion} ~~sum of words~~ ^{pivoted} set the escapees ^{possible} ~~to~~ on the third ^{route}, a veer around large Japonski Island directly across from the Kolosh village and then outside the shoal of Sound islands. Such a loop was longer than the other channels and unsheltered from the ocean currents, but at least it was not a blindfolded plunge into the labyrinth of isles.

~~Braaf and Wennberg~~

It was, however, the inauguration for ~~the three except~~ ~~Karlsson~~ into paddling in untame waters. The ~~canoe~~ bucked, slid down nose first, rocked to one side, bucked again, slid again and rocked to the other side, a nautical jig new to ~~Wennberg and Braaf~~ ^{the pair of them}, and a horrifying one ^{in the wet dark}. Their paddling efforts were stabs into the sloshing turmoil ^{below} ~~beneath~~ them until Karlsson, in the bow of the canoe and feeling the splutters of ^{attempt} ~~effort~~ occurring behind him, directed over his shoulder: "Spread your hands wide ^{as you can} on the paddle and stroke only when I say. Now---now---now---now---now---"

This contrived tick and tock, Karlsson's nows and the breath-space between, ~~then~~ advanced them through the blackness until Melander spoke from the stern of the canoe. # "Wait, ~~now~~ bring us broadside a moment, Karlsson. We've at least earned a last look." # As the canoe swayed around, the other three saw what he meant. Back through one of the channel-canyons amid the islands, ^{an astonishing} ~~a~~ wide box of lights sat in the air. Baranov's Castle, every window ~~lamp~~-lit for this night of Christmas merriment, ~~its glittering outline the one final flare of New Archangel.~~ sent outward, ^{through} into the black and the rain their final glittering glimpse of New Archangel.

—



Hours later, near-eternities later to the numbed arms of Melander and Braaf and Wennberg, darkness thinned toward dawn's gray. They saw then the slim arc of canoe, like a middle-distance reflection of their own craft, ~~hastily closing~~ closing the distance behind them.

———
 "You bastard, Melander." ^{This} ~~It~~ was Wennberg. "'The Russians won't follow us,' ay?"

"They haven't," Melander ^{retorted} ~~said~~. "Those are ~~Kilosh~~ ^{those fancy} ~~We'll see~~ ^{of yours,} how eager they are to die. Braaf, load ~~the rest of the rifles~~ ^{then} pass Karlsson ^{his hunting} ~~the seal~~ gun."

———
 The ~~Kilosh~~ ^{chasing} chieftain in the ~~stern of the~~ canoe counted carefully as Braaf worked at the loading, and did not like ^{how} ~~the numbers~~ ^{added and added.} The half-drunk Russian officer ^{crew} ~~who~~ had roused the Kolosh ^{Int} ~~told~~ ^{leader} them the escaping men were only three--Braaf at first had not been missed, his whereabouts as usual the most obscure matter this side of ghostcraft--but plainly there were four of

^{possessed} the whitehaired ~~men~~, they ~~had~~ ^{at least} two muskets ~~apiece~~ ^{and without doubt} ~~some pistols~~, and this one doing the loading was rapid at his task.

Against the four and their ^{evident} ~~armory~~ the Kolosh chieftain had his six

paddlers and himself, with but three muskets and some spears. ~~The~~

"Fools they are, you'll skewer them like fish in a barrel," ^{they haven't drowned themselves first.} ~~the Russian officer had said.~~ ^{these men ahead now} but fools ~~they~~ ^{they} did not noticeably seem to be

They had paddled far, they seemed prepared to fight, and they ^{held} had the total of muskets in their favor. ~~The~~ had been promised by the angry Russian, Russian had promised much tobacco and molasses, but was it worth the battle these whitehairs might put up?

Once wondering starts there is no cure, and the ~~Kolosh~~ ^{of the Kolosh} ~~chief~~ leader definitely had begun to wonder.

¶ As the chieftain sought to balance it all in his mind, muskets and molasses and Russians and tobacco and four steady-armed whitehairs instead of three ^{exhausted} cowardly ones, and the exertion of his crew steadily shortened the water between the canoes, the craft in front ^{suddenly} abruptly swung broadside, the figure in its bow leveling a rifle as the canoe came around. ¶ Startled, for the range was greater than they themselves would expend shots across, the Kolosh paddlers ducked and grappled for their own few muskets, ducked and grappled for their own few muskets, but the chieftain sat steady and watched. If this was his moment to die, he owed the instant all the attention [¶] Smoke puffed from the rifle of, within his being. The slender whitehair, in the other canoe, and splinters sprayed from the high curve of the at the level of his chest. stern behind the chieftain. The chieftain knew, as ~~an~~ only ^{one} man of combat can see into the power of another, what Karlsson had done. The whitehair had touched across phenomenal distance to ^{the chieftain's} ~~his~~ life, plucked it up easily as a kitten, ~~and~~ ^{then} let it fall back in ^{to} place.

Rattled by the turnabout of men who were supposed to be desperately fleeing them, the Kolosh crew tried to yank their rifles into place, the canoe rocking with their confusion. The chieftain still watched ^{ahead.} he knew himself to be twice the watcher here, the one intent on the rifleman across the water and the other in gaze to himself at this ^{unexpected} point between existences. The slender whitehair lifted another rifle--the other three steadily aiming their weapons but not firing--and swung it into place, once more on a line through the air to the Kolosh leader. This time the chieftain could see in the manner of the aiming man that he would claim ^{from his watcher} the existence called life.

The decision was spoken by the chieftain's mouth before his mind entirely knew of the words.

The Kolosh paddlers slid their muskets into the bottom of their canoe. [#] In the other canoe, the slender man set aside his rifle; so did the big whitehair in the stern. The Kolosh watched silently as the pair of them then powerfully paddled the canoe away while the other two kept their rifles ^{pointed} aimed.

"Let the sea eat them," the chieftain said.

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Shortly before noon, Naval Captain of Second Rank Nikolai Yakovlevich Rosenberg, governor of Russian America, pinched hard at the bridge of his nose in hope of alleviating the aftereffect of the previous night's festivities, decided that no remedy known to man could staunch such aches as were within his forehead, sighed, and ^{instructed} told his secretary to send in the Lutheran pastor.

The pastor, a Finn from Saarijärvi who was considered something of a clodhopper not only by the Russian officers but the Stockholm contingent of Swedes, dolefully had been anticipating his call into the governor's chamber. By breakfast every ^{tongue} ~~soul~~ in New Archangel knew of the escape, the ^{retold} ~~doubled~~ number of sentries along the stockade catwalk ~~undersecreted~~ the news, and the sidelong glances ^{every} ~~the~~ Russians ^{was} ~~were~~ casting at ~~all~~ ^{every} ~~the~~ Swedes and Finns, this morning ^{bespoke} ~~were~~ most eloquent ^{ly} of all. The ^{hesitant} pastor's ~~entrance~~ into the governor's presence ^{gathered under one ceiling} brought together two of the three ~~in~~ ^{at moments} ~~unhappiest~~ men in New Archangel ~~that morning~~ the third was named Bilibin.

"Excellency."

"Pastor. As you may have heard, our ^{citizenry} ~~number~~ is fewer by four this morning."

"I did happen to hear the, ah, rumor."

"Yes. Oblige me, if you will: Were these men"--Rosenberg glanced at the list of four names his secretary had initiated this blighted day with, and read them aloud--"parishioners of yours?"

The pastor cleared his throat. "Wennberg was. Formerly, I mean to say."

"Formerly? Oblige me further."

The pastor housecleaned in his vocal box some more, then ventured into history. "Wennberg was in the group of artisans who came here with Governor Etholén--was it ten, twelve years ago? When I myself arrived to succeed Pastor

Cygnæus, Wennberg was a member of the congregation. Soon after that, ^{Croup} ~~Measles~~ I believe. he married a Kälösh woman, and soon after that, the woman died. ⁴ The with some care here. pastor paused to sort his words. ⁴ "When I sought to console him, Wennberg cursed me. He also cursed--God. if I may say so, Since then he has fallen, into harmful ways."

Rosenberg pinched the area between his eyes again and asked:

"Drink, do you mean?"

"Actually, no. He, ah, gambled." ⁴ At this, the governor pursed his lips and looked ~~down~~ quizzically at the pastor, who ~~was~~ himself was plunger at the card table. known at the officers' club as a devout cardplayer. The pastor hurried

"Wennberg, you see, is--was--long past his seven years of service here, his gambling debts have kept him on. He has become, may God grant that he see his erring way, a man destroying himself. ^{Sullen, unpredictable.} If you would like my opinion, he is capable of destroying others as well."

Rosenberg rose, crossed to a window, leaned his forehead against the glass coolness, and stared out at the clouded coastline south across Sitka Sound. Worthless to send the Nicholas to alert Ozherskoi; if the damnable Swedes could paddle at all they would be past Ozherskoi by now. Nor could the steamship hunt down a canoe which ^{could} hide among the coves and islands of this coast like a mouse in a stable. The single piece of luck Rosenberg ^{found} ~~could find~~ in the situation was that his request to be relieved of his governorship--"ill health... family reasons": in truth, a sufficiency of New Archangel--months ago had been dispatched to Russia, and the insight ^{arrived} ~~came~~ to him now that with a resourceful bit of delay, this matter of the runaway Swedes could slide out of sight into the paperwork his successor would inherit. For his ~~part~~ part, Rosenberg would ^{reap} ~~have~~ one further anecdote with which to regale dinner parties in St. Petersburg.

^{he intoned} "Three fools and a lunatic in a Kolosh canoe," ~~he said~~ ^{against the window pane} as if practicing.

^{rehearsed} Then, realizing he had ~~spoken~~ ^{perhaps} aloud, the governor added, without turning:

"That will be all, Pastor. If you know a prayer for the souls of fools and lunatics, ^{perhaps} you might go say it."

"Excellency."

That ~~night~~^{evening}, some forty miles downcoast from New Archangel and a secure twenty beyond the Ozherskoi outpost, the four canoeists pulled ashore behind a small headland, in a cove snug and tideless as a ~~tarn~~^{mountainside}. Melander ~~muttered~~^{whispered} something to Braaf, Braaf nodded and ran a hand into the supplies stowed within the canoe. When his hand came up, it held a small jug.

"Karlsson, forgive ~~me~~ us that it isn't hootchina, but rum from the officers' club was the best Braaf could manage under the circumstances." ^{As he spoke} Melander's long face was centered with a colossal grin, which now ^{began to} repeated itself on Karlsson and even Wennberg. ~~When this~~

^{To our first day of journey}
 "We think it may do well enough for a toast, even so," ^{sip first?}
 Melander turned on. Braaf, would you care to begin?"

Melander, like the others, expected Braaf merely to swig and pass along. Instead, Braaf stood looking at the jug in his hands and murmured: "Let me remember a moment...Yes, I know..." He ^{lifted his glance to} looked up at the other three, sent ^{it on above} his glance over their heads and recited: "May you live forever and I never die." ^{deep.} Then he drank.