

2004

# Innocent of Alaska : a novel

Robert F. James  
*San Jose State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd\\_theses](https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses)

---

## Recommended Citation

James, Robert F., "Innocent of Alaska : a novel" (2004). *Master's Theses*. 2546.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.xebh-xa7e>  
[https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd\\_theses/2546](https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses/2546)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses and Graduate Research at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@sjsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@sjsu.edu).

**INNOCENT OF ALASKA**

**A Novel**

**A Thesis**

**Presented to**

**The Faculty of the Department of English**

**San Jose State University**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Master of Fine Arts**

**by**

**Robert F. James**

**May 2004**

UMI Number: 1420428

Copyright 2004 by  
James, Robert F.

All rights reserved.

### INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

**UMI**<sup>®</sup>

---

UMI Microform 1420428

Copyright 2004 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against  
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company  
300 North Zeeb Road  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

© 2004

Robert F. James

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

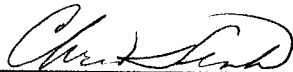


APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



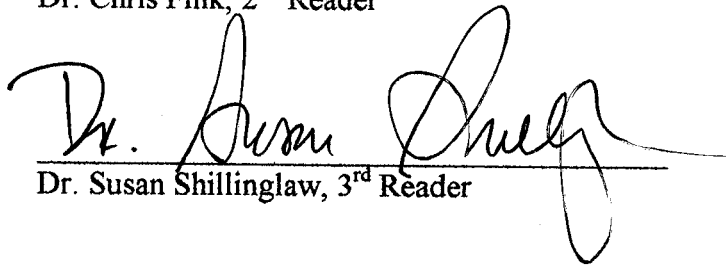
---

Robert Swigart, Director



---

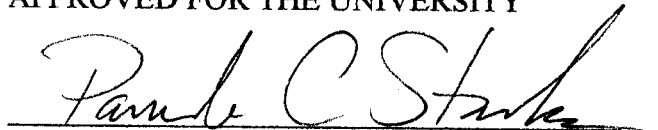
Dr. Chris Fink, 2<sup>nd</sup> Reader



---

Dr. Susan Shillinglaw, 3<sup>rd</sup> Reader

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY



---

## ABSTRACT

### INNOCENT OF ALASKA A NOVEL

By Robert F. James

In 1822, the newly ordained and married priest, Ivan Veniaminov accepted an assignment to far-off Alaska, taking with him to the frontier his pregnant wife, his mother and his infant daughter. In Alaska, the family would forge reputations not only as ministers of the Orthodox faith, but also champions of the native Alaskans and the wild landscapes they inhabited.

*Innocent of Alaska* is the story of Russian eastward expansion from Siberia, through Alaska, to Northern California, as told through the life and experiences of Father Ivan Veniaminov (who became Saint Innocent in 1977). The book chronicles his more than five decades of work both as a theologian and scholar, and explores the themes of family, legacy, and humanity in a deeply historical setting. It blends the genres of fiction and nonfiction to bring to life the men and women who lived and worked in that era.

**For Ellen, my muse**

**And for Silas, my legacy**

## Acknowledgements

As with all creative works, many people involved themselves in the successful completion of this book, not the author alone. I cannot begin to thank each and every person who touched my life or contributed to the completion of this book, but what follows is my best effort.

First and foremost, I must thank my companion and friend, Ellen, who has been my sanity and refuge through the duration of this project. She has been the person most intimately involved with the dynamics of both this book and my life. I would say that I could not have done it without her, but she would only reply, quite seriously, "yes, you certainly could have. And you did!" Instead, then, I will just say thank you, from the very core of my being.

Anne Jennings, Sweeney Schragg and Abigail Pennington demonstrated the kind of friendship I think every person hopes for in life. Tolerant in my more pitiful moments, encouraging during the times I felt most lethargic, and indignant in those times when I wanted to quit and go to law school, these three people are my very best friends, and I am eternally grateful for their companionship, support, and their admirable ability to keep from throwing things at me while I rambled on and on and on through thousands of pages of rough draft material. What amazing people.

Dr. Kristen Iversen and Robert Swigart contributed the expertise of literary mentors so desperately needed by a writer who still struggles with just admitting that writing is the path of choice. Kristen encouraged me to push my writing further, and to truly explore myself through this writing. She helped me to see "the why" in this work, and not just the how. Likewise, Rob tolerated more mood swings from me than he

deserved. His unflagging willingness to read drafts of this work and then help me navigate through my eroding self-confidence is much appreciated. And for being the first person to be as enthusiastic about Veniaminov as myself, I owe him a debt of gratitude.

Doctors Chris Fink and Susan Shillinglaw also contributed greatly to the completion of this book in their roles as second and third readers on my thesis committee, and I am forever grateful for their willingness to read this material and comment on it thoughtfully and sincerely. I must also take this opportunity to thank the faculty and staff in the English Department at San Jose State University, who had the faith enough in my writing to admit me to this program, and also to stand behind this work and help me find my voice.

This book would not have come to fruition were it not for the generous contributions of Martha Cox, whose endowment of the John Steinbeck Fellowship in Creative Writing must be acknowledged. As a recipient of one such fellowship in 2002-2003, I was able to devote myself to the arduous research necessary for such an endeavor as this work, while also being afforded the time I needed to continue with the real business of writing.

I must also thank three writers of significance in my life, who helped instill in me the work ethic of a writer and who shared with me ways to keep my sanity while trying to survive as a working writer. Richard Bausch started it all while I was still an undergraduate at George Mason University. I would not be the writer I am today if not for his guidance and friendship, and I aspire to be a writer worthy of his company. Likewise, Molly Giles guided my writing in ways I am sure of which she is not even aware. Through her expert criticism of my writing and friendly encouragement in the

craft, Molly gave me hope that I could not only be a writer, but also stay relatively sane through the process. And Simon Winchester, who was so generous with his time and so sincere in his efforts to help a class of struggling graduate students realize that writing is not only necessary, but also possible, I offer my heartfelt gratitude for being such a delightful and knowledgeable friend.

On a more personal note, I want to acknowledge Peter and Eva Meyer, along with Rundi K. Hansen and Martin Thomas, who never missed an opportunity to ask me how the book was going. Even during those times when I hated the book (and they knew it), they still asked, and still encouraged, and endured more oral narratives about the book than I had right to inflict upon them. To Lisa Stead and Jeremy Ruane, my writing companions from George Mason University, I am forever indebted for their support and encouragement as far back as my first writing workshops.

And to my family, especially my mother and father and sister Catherine, I must say that I appreciate their support. Not once did any of them ask what I intended to do to support myself while being a writer. I told them I wanted to write, and they have stood behind me the entire time (although I am sure they have made faces at me on occasion without my being aware of it).

For all those people who have helped me through the past three years, although not mentioned by name, I do thank you in spirit. And for all those readers who may find this text, I offer my gratitude for taking a moment to read it, to enjoy it, to contemplate it, and hopefully to appreciate the work that went into it and the spirit of the characters I set out to convey.

## Preface

I swore an oath as a boy that I would never live in the state of California. It seems strange to say such a thing now, living as I do, in San Jose. But at the time the oath was made, I was influenced by the cultural wariness of the Midwest; Southern Illinois to be exact. My upbringing was one of coal miners and farmers, hard-luck masochists eager to rail against the pitfalls of the outside, anxious, gaping world of California.

In my youth, California was the land of dashiki-wearing hippy leftovers prowling the streets for unsuspecting converts to a cult just waiting to make national news. If you were from my neck of the woods, it was the land where potential went to die, not to prosper. It was the state in which my brother, Paul, had died of a heroine overdose in 1978. It was a brutal, foreign landscape sewn with landmines of indulgence and excess, and I wanted no part of it. To be quite honest, I couldn't foresee my world ever extending beyond a 50-mile radius of corn and soy bean fields, hunting lodges and dive bars.

The United States Navy cured me of my shortsightedness; cured me, too, of my aversion to leaving the comfort of the familiar. Here is where I find myself thinking of Grateful Dead lyrics: "what a long, strange trip it's been." I guess everyone feels this way about his or her own particular journey. In reality, it wasn't really that long, and it wasn't so far removed from the ordinary. Eight years serving. Separation because of marriage. An easy transition into Government work as a civilian. An English degree. A divorce. A desire to escape the stifling politics of Northern Virginia, and California was no longer out of the realm of possibility.

Which, on its surface, has absolutely nothing to do with this book or its subject. At least not superficially. When I did move to California, however; after I had maneuvered my way through my own hypochondriacal perceptions of all things "Golden State," I was open. I was searching. It was my mid-life crisis taken early; my one-third-life crisis. I found myself thinking about the simple pleasures. A nice fire on a chilly evening. The comfort of a well-made chair. The warmth of a hand-crafted quilt. I found myself thinking like so many craftsmen in the late 1800s and early 1900s protesting against the mass-production enterprises of the industrial revolution. *Where is the craftsmanship?*, they said. *Where is its humanity?* I thought I could write their story. I thought I should. What better metaphor, what better symbol, than a chair, painstakingly hand-crafted into a semi-sentient work of art? Here was a subject worth exploring. Here were characters worth memorializing. Alas, here was a dead end.

I am a writer, after all, and what starts out as a seemingly wonderful idea in its inception, becomes problematic at best when I actually start moving my fingers on the keyboard. The first snag happened on page one, and I never overcame it. In this craftsman novel of mine, set in California in the late 1800s, who would be the craftsman? He must certainly be an old-world woodworker, someone set in his ways, like an old tree grown too stiff for flexibility. But I couldn't figure out how to get him to the San Francisco area, especially at that period in history, without resorting to the cliché of gold. Here was an idea that would simply remain a wonderful idea locked inside my mind. It would be folly to unleash it.



Here's a truism: when you keep an open mind, you see things much more easily. Forget about the craftsman novel. That's a bit of a red herring. I can see that this observation is glaringly obvious with the benefit of hindsight. What matters is that, perhaps because of my aversion to all things California in my youth, I knew absolutely nothing about the state I now call home. So it was with a great deal of embarrassment that I discovered Fort Ross. I say discovered, because that's how it felt, so knew was this presence of a nearly 200-year-old Russian settlement in the United State of America.

My initial reaction was that here could be the answer to my craftsman problem. A concocted reality of a remnant left behind after the fort's closer in the mid-1800s and sale to that most famous Californian of the time: Sutter. The old-world ways taking root in the final frontiers following the gold-rush. But, as I just pointed out, the craftsman novel is a red herring, at best. Perhaps another story told in another time. What ended up mattering most to me was my ignorance that such a place could ever have existed. I should have known about Fort Ross.

There are, perhaps, several contributing factors to this lack of general knowledge. For starters, I was born and raised in an atmosphere of escalation between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. Communists were the enemy and I remember Reagan's errant mic check; "The bombing starts in 10 minutes." We were "Proud to be an American," and made-in-the-USA stickers were ubiquitous. I carried a Captain-America lunch box to school everyday. We were 50 sovereign states making up a strikingly democratic, militantly anti-communist nation owing nothing, absolutely nothing, to Mother Russia. Looking back, it's no wonder the text books glossed over the fact that the Russians had occupied a

small spit of land 50 miles north of San Francisco, or that there is a strong Russian presence to this day in Northern California. No. Better to teach our children, and the next generation of commie haters, that Russia had a minimal impact on anything remotely resembling America. Alaska would be taught as little more than a wilderness until an enterprising American realized its true potential.

Secondly, of course, geography is a culprit. For all our talk of unity, Americans (and here I use the term in its politically incorrect denotation of citizens of the United States of America) are self-centered to a fault. If it doesn't impact our lives directly, we don't care about it. *So what* if there were a bunch of Russians in Northern California in the 18-teens? That ain't Southern Illinois, so it doesn't matter. My books, when they dared go beyond the boundaries of the country's bread basket, ranged only into safe territory: the gold rush of the 1850s; the Statue of Liberty, perhaps; the Spanish-American War was safe, as was the Alamo; the Wild West, yes; and the Civil War. We learned about foreign countries and world history only through the context of U.S. conflict (read military victory): World War I (we had to go over there and finish it); World War II (lucky for the world the Yanks were here to save it); a smattering of Korea (a "tie" still doesn't count as a loss). Vietnam was mentioned in a paragraph or two. There was no room for Russian fur traders in California because we never fought them, and, truth be told, they would have required the textbook writers to paint the Russians in a positive light, and that was a no-no in 1980s mid-America.

And then there was my own vast and self-inflicted interest. I hadn't yet developed my phobia for looking stupid in a crowd. California, so far as I was concerned, had two

cities: Los Angeles, which constituted the entire lower half of the state; and San Francisco, which constituted everything else. L.A. was where there the gangs and violence and pornography and sin and disillusionment found refuge. Tinsel Town. Plastic. Saccharine. Fake. Unworthy. And San Francisco was the spookily forbidden city of indulgent eroticism, homosexuality, and a strange illness that had already begun its infectious march across the planet.

The Cold War, geography, and my own ignorance undoubtedly played roles in my surprise when stumbling, years later, across an old Russian fort in Northern California—as did the simple dearth of information that is the history of the United States. There simply is too much to teach it all. But what matters, getting us back on track, is that I was open, and I realized in seeing this battered Redwood bastion on that coastal bluff that I was, absent any will of my own, already becoming part of its story. I stood in the cemetery of unnamed markers, each adorned with an Orthodox cross, and realized, more than just sketchy characters with whom I had become enamored, here was an entire culture waiting for rediscovery. Here, at Fort Ross, was the story I wanted to tell.

What I have come to realize in the years since, as I have written and rewritten this book, is that I could spend my life telling stories of Russians in Northern California and Alaska and even Siberia, so inextricably linked are these three areas, and still only dent the crust of all there is to tell. So what I have rendered here is one part of the story, as best I know how, which brings me back to that foolish but sincere-at-the-time oath I took as a boy in Southern Illinois. It serves a purpose for humor, of course, and of reflection.

But it stands, too, for a certain sincerity that must be dealt with before I proceed into this novel of mine.

I could have told you, at the outset, that I made that oath when I was 13 years old, and that I remember the day distinctly because it was so abnormal for Southern Illinois. It was a day in November, an Indian Summer respite with air absent its autumn chill. My father, making the most of the break in the cold to effect some repairs to the roof, had summoned me to help. During the course of passing tools and nails and glasses of sweet tea between us, he paused and sniffed the air like some native tracker from a pulp western, and pronounced that it reminded him of California. I could tell you that the word had a marked feeling to it, and that at its utterance and the subsequence connotations already mentioned, I felt a need to spit, or genuflect (even though I was a Baptist) to ward off the evil of its enunciation. And there, knees scraping on the tar-paper roof, I uttered an earnest oath never to set foot in California as long as I lived, which was met with a solemn nod of approval from my father. I could make a compelling story of it, I'm sure, but none of that happened.

I made such an oath, yes. I remember New York being the other state in which I vowed never to live. I probably made many oaths, each one more sincere than the previous one. What matters in this context is that there was a time when I swore off California without ever having seen it. There is no need for me to dramatize it further. There is no reward in reaching into the novelist's bag of tricks over such a piece of information. But astute readers will, undoubtedly, suspect where I am going with this

train of thought, and their prescience will begin wandering toward the line of demarcation between fiction and nonfiction.

This liminal space is contentious terrain, as hotly contested as any battlefield of the Cold War. There is a camp who says facts cannot change under any circumstances, which is countered by an opposing camp arguing that facts, themselves, are immediately suspect based on the subjectivity of writers. Both sides have some veracity, to be sure, even though I would find myself more closely aligned with the latter. The point is this: I wanted, above all things, to tell a story. I want you to fall in love with these people and this period the way I have. To that end, I have strived to be as accurate as possible to the *spirits* of the characters and events. Which is to say that, where it suited my sensibilities as a novelist, I have rendered as closely as I was able, given my own subjectivity, the facts and "truth" of the story. In those places I felt it necessary, I have strayed from the historical "happening-truth," --sometimes contentedly, sometimes regretfully-- and into the realm of imagination. Hopefully the transitions are seamless and unnoticeable. My alterations are those of necessity, in my mind, and not of substance. I have not made good men evil, nor have I called evil, good.

And here, I believe, I have adequately labored over this point. Oaths, for all their sincerity when uttered, often end up being taken far less seriously in the end than in their beginnings. I am thankful for this understanding, just as I am thankful for being chosen to tell this story.

**Part I**

1.

*The Village of Anga (Anginskoye)*

*Irkutsk Gubernia, Siberia*

*September, 1803*

For young Ivan Popov, the nights were the worst. He came to see the snuffing out of the candles and lamps as profoundly sad. His childhood was that of the melancholy poor, rife with the sad songs of a hard life. Days were filled with moderate study and labor, but the nights were filled with thoughts and imaginings of his dead father.

Evsei Popov, the sacristan of St. Elias church in Anga, lived and died in the small village on the left bank of the Angara River in Irkutsk Gubernia. Ivan was leery of the reverie his father felt about the sacristy, that room of the church housing the vestments and sacred articles. "There, a poor man can keep the riches of God," his father said. But the riches of God, at least in Ivan's young eyes, were not worth more than his father's life, which was undoubtedly poor. At the time of his father's death, the family could not afford to keep Ivan at home, so he was sent to live with his Uncle Dmitrii, who was a deacon at St. Elias. His Uncle was a kind man, patient in his work as a craftsman, and patient, too, in his role as surrogate father to young Ivan.

But the nights were the worst. When it was finally dark and still, the insidious thoughts of death —of the corruption of the body, of the terrible stillness he had seen in his father— would creep over him like a chilling blanket. At first, he indulged his own imagination, exhaling and refusing to breathe in; a youthful approximation of the dead.

He would lie still on his back, his hands clasped loosely over his chest, his lips only slightly open, and deny himself the breath for which his lungs ached. He would hold the pose, hold his exhalation until the burning was too great, until his eyes would squint tightly with the exerted efforts, only to give way to a great inhalation; a gulp of air loud enough to bring a warning from his Uncle.

Warning or no, the boy couldn't stop his mind from thinking of what it must be like to be dead. Neither could he prevent his body from acting out, in its ignorance, what the boy thought the process must be. He became keenly aware of his breath. He would inhale deeply and hold it for just a moment in preparation, then he would simply relax his lungs, allowing the air to find its own way up his throat and past his lips. He concentrated on its tickling path over his tongue, through his cheeks, finally escaping like the whispered steam from a kettle. This, he thought, surely must have been what his father had felt when expelling that last breath. Then Ivan would lie still, thinking of his father buried in the ground, *sleeping*, as his Uncle described it.

It was this idea that overtook Ivan's imagination and replaced it with attacks of anxiety. Often, just at the edge of sleep, young Ivan would wake sweating. At six years old, Ivan worried himself with an old man's torments. The lack of breath was replaced with the ominous idea of the inescapable grave. He felt himself closed up inside his own coffin, thought of his consciousness trapped there while his flesh withered and sloughed away. With his crying in those times, Ivan would wake his Uncle, who would come in and sit with the boy until he calmed. Dmitrii thought the bouts of crying a boy's grief



over the loss of his father, and he would sit with Ivan long into the night, even after he had drifted off into an unsteady sleep, before retiring back to his own bed.

"Where is God?" Ivan asked one late afternoon in his Uncle's workshop.

The elder man looked at the boy and smiled through his beard. "Such simple questions you ask. Perhaps we should start with something more complicated, eh?"

Ivan toed the ground a bit and pretended to lose interest in the conversation. He went to one of Dmitrii's long work benches and picked up a plane, as big as his forearm, and ran it limply along a discarded piece of scrap lumber Dmitrii kept on hand for just such occasions.

"Come here," Dmitrii said.

Ivan dropped the plane back to the bench more heavily than he had intended and walked to the central bench where his Uncle stood clamping down an arch heavy dowels.

"Hold here," Dmitrii said.

Ivan reached up to a dowel as thick as his fist and held it steady as Dmitrii hammered it into place with a heavy mallet.

"That's the last one," Dmitrii said. "Now, it's time to work the miracle."

Dmitrii knew that Ivan enjoyed being in the workshop when there was bending to be done, and made sure the boy was present on almost every occasion. The bending of wood, to Dmitrii, was a miraculous process. He had made a tin steamer box nearly 10 feet long and half again as wide. It was supplied with steam by a copper tube trailing outside to an impressively large tank affixed to the top of a wood-burning stove. It was of his own creation from mostly used or discarded items and materials, and he had used it

for many years, proud of his ability to create something useful out of objects so obviously ineffectual.

Dmitrii would place long strips of wood, fractions of an inch in thickness, held up by small blocks inside the box, then steam them for hours, stoking the furnace with kindling and knotted wood unsuited for craft. When Ivan was present, tending the fire was his job, until that time came to open the box, when the workshop filled with the thick aroma of steamed wood; a mixture of expended sap, wet bark, and often the smell of ammonia or oils his Uncle placed inside the box to tease out the grain.

Ivan then would help his uncle lift slat after slat of steamed and pliable wood into the arched-dowel frames, the lengths pliable now from their steam bath, curving into elegant or elaborate shapes. Dmitrii then, would use glue and heavy clamps to fuse the slats together, several at a time until he reached his desired thickness, all bending with minimal effort into the shape he had willed for the wood. The fused pieces were left to cure, to dry out and lose the steam that had been forced into them. Once dry, the wood would retain forever, if undisturbed, the shape of the frame into which it had been bent—what Dmitrii called the miracle.

"Look here." Dmitrii held Ivan's hand with the fingers extended and traced the tight grain of a piece of wood. "This is where God is, Ivan. He is in each and every grain, weaving in and out creating this design. We might shape the wood, but we cannot create it. We have no power there. Only to work with the material God provides us."

Dmitrii removed his hand from Ivan's and took off his heavy apron and gloves. When he turned to fetch the boy for dinner, Ivan was standing still by the table, his fingers searching out each line as if, by feel alone, he might find the path of God.

## 2.

"It isn't very pretty, is it." Ivan's words were a comment, not a question, and they made Dmitrii smile.

"There is more to a good chair than beauty," Dmitrii said. "The most beautiful chair in the world, if it doesn't function, is worthless, even as art. Beauty comes from functionality, and its usefulness should derive from its beauty. Do you understand?"

Ivan ran his hands across the arm rest of a chair his Uncle had made for their home. It was a simple chair, though well made, and Ivan realized that he perhaps had said something wrong in speaking of its lack of beauty. He thought the chair, though, looked heavy and solid, with the attention of his Uncle's craftsmanship paid to its sturdiness rather than its aesthetics. But as his Uncle spoke, Ivan could see that the chair's beauty did, perhaps, lie in its construction, not in its appearance. True, it was not as ornate as some of the chairs he had seen other craftsmen make, neither was it light and open the way of other chairs. Even at his young age he could tell that the chair was made to last. There were no nails used in the manufacture, no hardware of any kind. The chair's sturdiness resulted from its seamless mortise-and-tenon construction, the slats on the back locking organically with the head piece and seat. The arm rests folded into the back of the chair as if only now realizing their true purpose.

"When you make something right," Dmitrii was saying, "it will be both functional *and* beautiful. The two should not ever be apart."

Ivan was smiling at the curving arm pieces that circled through the back of the chair, the same pieces he had helped his Uncle steam then bend and form into place. He knew that the arm rests were made from a dozen pieces of wood, but though he was there for its making, he could not see where one piece ended and another began, so tight was his Uncle's craftsmanship.

"Look here." Dmitrii picked up the boy and sat him in the new chair. The boy's arms bent awkwardly, straight out from his shoulder sockets, so much larger was the chair than himself. But he smiled all the same.

"I'm the first person to sit in it?"

Dmitrii tousled the boy's hair and laughed again. There was something about his laugh that made Ivan feel warm. It was a light kind of laugh, without the weight of all that the young boy had been carrying at night. "You'll always be the first person to sit in it." When the boy looked confused, Dmitrii added, "This chair will be here a hundred years from now. You make something right, it won't break or weaken, it will keep on going despite the march of time. And as long as this chair is here, it will always remember that you were the first person to sit in it."

Ivan did, indeed, feel privileged to sit in his Uncle's chair, and he did listen intently to his Uncle's words, but the thoughts that plagued him at night time began seeping into these daylight thoughts, and the idea of time and the chair lasting for a

hundred years or more sent his young mind inevitably down that troubled path. "Was my father not well made?"

Perhaps Dmitrii stiffened at the question, but it was only for a moment, nothing more. He was already working on planing the long side of a door. His hands gliding with effortless purpose across the board, turned on edge to reveal a tighter grain, calligraphic lines weaving along its length, intersecting, doubling back, all lifting off with a slight hiss; perfect curling peels beneath his planer. Dmitrii expelling his own breath at the end of each stroke to rid the wood of its detritus. "Your father was a great man."

"He's dead, though."

Dmitrii nodded at the curt response but did not seem distracted by the boy's bluntness. "But you are not. You are your father's legacy, and everything you do in this life, whether it is a kindness to your Aunt or making a good chair, reflects on your father's legacy. You carry his name."

The answer seemed enough to satisfy the boy, and he was quickly distracted by the collection of wood shavings piling up at his Uncle's feet. Ivan would gather up the shavings and feed them one by one into the stove that warmed the workshop. Dmitrii did not object to the activity, rationalizing to himself that the end result of a cleaner workshop was worth the means by which the cast-off debris was disposed.

"You are like a fish in your bed at night," Dmitrii said. Ivan replied only with a shrug and a laugh that sounded, to Dmitrii, rather insincere. "Flopping about and such nonsense. Are you still having bad dreams?"

"I think of papa." Ivan did not look up from the pieces of scrap wood he was cobbling together. As with most of the conversations with his Uncle, this one took place in the workshop, the boy feeling very much like a craftsman in his play alongside his bearish Uncle.

"And what do you think?"

"I think about where he is."

"You think about heaven?"

Ivan shook his head.

"Where then?"

"The ground."

Dmitrii stopped his work and looked at the young boy building what looked like a rather crooked house on the floor. "You understand that your father is no longer in his body, Ivan?"

The boy slurred out a response Dmitrii had a hard time deciphering, but it was noncommittal and dismissive.

"Look at me, Ivan." The boy did look up, then. "When your father died, his soul left his body. That is why we pray for him at church. We pray that God recognizes him and gives him a home in heaven."

Ivan continued meeting his Uncle's concerned look, unblinking. His young eyebrows already worked toward meeting in the middle and they were in such a constant furrow that his forehead showed a map of wrinkles that would appear in deeper, more permanent forms in the boy's later years. "How will God know papa?"

"From the works he did when was here. He served God in the church. He was a trusted sacristan. He was honest and good and he worked hard."

Ivan was picking apart the pieces of the small building he had been working on and had begun carrying them back to a barrel his Uncle kept in the corner for scrap.

"Why doesn't anyone say anything, then?"

"About what, child?"

"Papa."

"We speak of him in prayer."

"But..." Here Ivan ran out of words and lost his line of thinking. He bowed his head and studied the pattern of his footprints in the sawdust on the workshop floor. He heard, but did not respond to, the sound of his Uncle's heavy footsteps move around the table and walk toward him.

Dmitrii stopped just in front of the boy, who came up barely to the man's waist. The boy cocked his head up to look up at him for just a moment, then the gaze dropped back down to the floor and to one of his boot prints, not even half the size of the boot standing next to it. Dmitrii reached a weathered hand under the boy's chin and lifted the face back upward again. "You should not ever feel like you need to look at the ground,

Ivan. Even if you have questions, be proud of them and look up. Look people in the eye. Do you understand?"

Ivan nodded his head but already his small face was moving back down toward the ground. Dmitrii, his hand still under the boy's chin, lifted the face back up, gently. There was a kindness in his eyes that made Ivan smile. "People will respect you more if you look them in the eye. Do you understand?"

Ivan nodded, and when his Uncle removed his hand, their eyes still met. "Why isn't there anything at his grave?"

"There's a cross."

"But it only says his name."

"Because it is a marker of his body only. His works and what he accomplished live on. There's no need to put them on a stone."

That night, Ivan did not fight sleep, neither was he restless with the extinguishing of the light. But he did dream. He dreamed of monuments and markers, of erecting something so huge, so permanent, in honor of his father that the man would never be forgotten.

Even though Ivan was still a boy, he had been forced to mature more quickly, perhaps, than other children, though his was not the only difficult life in the villages of Siberia in the early 1800s. But his desire for play ebbed quickly, replaced with a compulsion for industry, for hard work and intellectual challenge. He learned all he could from his Uncle about working wood, and he absorbed all the knowledge his home-schooling would allow. And he dreamed of a life so grand that all would notice and



remember not him, but his father. He swore that he would live a life worthy of the name he carried, a living monument in the sight of all.

#### 4.

Ivan was closer to his Uncle Dmitrii, so the death of his Aunt, initially, was not so difficult to cope with. He lavished sympathy on his Uncle, who loved Ivan like the son he did not have. The idea of death in the villages along the Angara River was not so difficult to understand, even for a boy still under 10 years of age, so Ivan expected that life would continue much the same as it had before his aunt's death, perhaps a bit coarser, but not much different.

"We would certainly welcome you." The voice was one the boy did not recognize, but the late-evening visitor sounded not unpleasant, only alien. Ivan had laid in his bed feigning sleep since the man's arrival, and he had eavesdropped on the conversation in hopes of understanding what was transpiring between the stranger and his Uncle. "It will take time, of course, to study and prepare yourself for your vows, but we will see to your care."

"And the boy?"

"Enroll him in the seminary school. It is not uncommon. He will be well cared for. He will have the opportunity to learn and grow in a healthy environment. His inquisitive mind will be challenged."

"I am afraid he might—"

"There is no need for fear."

"—*concerned* he might not take the news well."

"It depends on how the news is given. He is young. He will adapt soon enough."

"You have to understand that I am the only family the boy has now. If I am in a monastery, he could—"

"The church will be his family. God will be his father. You will still see each other, Dmitrii. It will be in a different context, yes, but you will be leading him down a much more sacred path. Think only of the example you will be setting for him."

Ivan thought that perhaps, in the ensuing pause, the two men had figured out that he was, indeed, awake and aware of the conversation going on between them. He thought for a moment of trying to snore, but thought better of it. He breathed deeply, instead, a shaky breath like that of someone on the verge of waking up but still soundly tucked within the veil of sleep. It was the stranger's voice that began the conversation again.

"There's more you are worried about?"

"Not a worry, Father."

"Tell me."

"It's these." Ivan heard a sound soft as a whisper, a long gentle hiss, and he recognized the sound of his Uncle rubbing his hands slowly together, a calming habit he had when conversations lagged or when he negotiated for his fees.

"They will be of much help," the other voice said. "The church is always in need of skilled craftsmen, and they would, I'm sure, see to it that you were well-equipped. I'm sure many of your own tools and industry could be moved for you. It is not so far away."

Ivan heard his Uncle sound his approval, then the gurgling of hot tea in cups. He pictured his Uncle sipping his tea through the hard block of sugar clinched between his front teeth, and from the sound of it, the stranger doing likewise. Dmitrii, like all Siberians, loved tea, and owned a wonderfully elaborate samovar despite the more spartan furnishings elsewhere in the house. Ivan already had a taste for tea in a culture that celebrated the drink as much as, if not more than, any other in the world. He could not have imagined at that point in his life the complex politics of the tea and sugar being sipped in the next room. He was not aware that Russian hunters, already, were taking more sea otter pelts than the waters of Alyeshka could supply and trading those pelts in China for tea, which was sold plentifully in the ports of Siberia and transported throughout the region. And although he was acquainted with a hard life and familiar with death, he had no concept of the harsher lives on the Alyeshkan frontier, nor of the policies of kidnapping and ransoming Aleutian children for otter fur, of murder and conquest in nearly every village that was at the bottom of every extravagant cup in Siberia.

At this point, Ivan was content to drift off to sleep, his dreams tinged by the biting fragrance of the strong tea, a hint of exotic spice, sweet sugars and sipping contentment. He was oblivious to the rest of the conversation between his Uncle and the stranger, just as he was oblivious to the changes taking place outside his door, and indeed, inside the very house he had come to call home.

For Dmitrii, the decision to devote his life in the service of the church was not an easy one. In the three years Ivan had lived under his roof, Dmitrii had watched him grow out of his early shyness and into an inquisitive young boy full of wonder and exploration. Indeed, he had come to view Ivan as his own son and he worried what the loss of his aunt, and what could easily be construed in a child's mind as the loss of his uncle, might do to that burgeoning personality. There were times in the workshop when Ivan seemed more a young man than a nine-year-old boy, and Dmitrii liked to think that the maturity he so admired in the boy was something of his own doing, and he worried that his leaving for the monastery would be enough to arrest that maturity. He didn't know who would be taking care of the boy or what kind of education he would get. He doubted if Ivan would be physically worse off than he would be in Dmitrii's care, but he found that for every argument in the affirmative, he found an equally compelling argument for staying and rearing the boy.

"Do you have to change your name?" Ivan asked.

Dmitrii was caught somewhat off guard. He had not yet spoken to the boy about the possibility of entering the monastery, and he found himself scratching his beard and eying the boy and that uncanny observation. "Why would I have to change my name?"

"Aren't you going away?"

Dmitrii put down his hammer and walked over to where the boy sat on a wooden step writing in a small bundle of papers. Dmitrii could see over the boy's shoulder to read what was being written, and he smiled at the pages of numbers: times for sunsets and sunrises, variable temperature readings all measured at the same times of day; rainfall

amounts; snowfall amounts. "You haven't answered my question, Ivan. What makes you think I'd be going away?"

"I heard you talking to that man."

"Bishop Veniamin?"

The boy shrugged and did not look up from his writings.

"You were awake for that, then." Dmitrii stood behind the boy and took off his apron and folded it over the back of a chair he had been working on. He moved to the steps upon which Ivan was sitting and he rested a hard, calloused hand on the boy's shoulder. "Come inside for awhile. It's getting cold and I want some tea."

Ivan did not look up at his uncle, only folded and bound the collection of papers and slipped the pencil inside the small cloth tie. Satisfied, he tucked the bundle inside his shirt and followed his Uncle inside.

It did not take long for the pleasing aroma of black tea to fill the small kitchen of the house, and Ivan sat small in the heavy wooden chair of his Uncle's construction. His feet still did not yet touch the floor, and he folded his hands in his lap because he could think of nothing else better to do with them. Only his shoulders and face sat taller than the lip of the table, but he held them straight and tall, watching his Uncle prepare the cups of tea. They were out of sugar, which was not so very uncommon considering its expense and relative difficulty in acquiring, so his Uncle had put out a plate of hard Chinese candies wrapped in paper with which they could sweeten the tea.

Ivan held the cup of tea in both hands and blew on it gently to cool it before taking a quick, satisfying gulp. He liked the first sips the best; the way they slipped

warmly down his throat to his belly. He pictured the hot liquid puddling up in his stomach, the steam wending its way through his body like a steaming box. "I'll be fine," he finally said as his Uncle took his place at the table.

"I didn't know that was in doubt," Dmitrii said.

Ivan continued blowing on his cup and sipping his tea, speaking only when he was satisfied. "You sounded worried when you talked to the Bishop."

"I am. But the Bishop... The Bishop is a good man and he will take care of me. And he will take care of you, too."

Ivan hadn't expected the answer so quickly, or in such terse terms. "If he's so good, why are you worried? I can go to live with my mother."

Dmitrii laughed at the boy's ease with the conversation, and he studied Ivan's wise eyes. He thought of all he had already seen, all the boy had already had to experience, and he wondered if yet another change, another upheaval, would break him finally or if the experiences he had endured might strengthen him and enable him to cope. "Your mother loves you, but it costs money to feed you and clothe you. She wants you to have a better life. You see her now, and you'll continue seeing her. But I want you to be well cared for, too. The school is a good place, and I won't be leaving you, either."

"But you are leaving."

Something about how Ivan had phrased the words gave Dmitrii pause. They weren't imploring and they weren't tinged with disappointment. Ivan simply had spoken the words as if correcting a misspoken expression on his Uncle's behalf. The words

sounded like a foregone conclusion to which the boy had already resolved himself. "If I go, then yes, I would be leaving you in the care of the theological school."

"I don't think there's an if."

Dmitrii laughed. "Don't you, now?"

"You have to do what the Church says, yes?"

"What God says."

"Then there's no if."

"How do you feel about my leaving?"

"Will I get to see you?"

"Of course you will."

"Will I still get to study?"

"I am sure of it."

"I mean really study. Not just about the Church and God, but about important things. Will I still get to study those, too?"

Here Dmitrii could not help smiling and he stood from his chair and slid a piece of candy across the table to the boy. The two of them had finished their teas and Dmitrii decided it was time for them to go back out to the workshop. There still were a few hours of daylight left, and he wanted to take advantage of them. "I'm sure you'll get to study anything you like."

The two of them walked back out to the workshop and Dmitrii stopped on the way to pick up a piece of graying old wood that had been piled next to the workshop. He

put it inside the steaming box, which already had several other slats of young wood curing inside them.

"And will you have to change your name?" Ivan asked.

"Yes, I will have to change my name."

Ivan puzzled over the response for some time. The two of them were compatible in the way they conversed. Neither interrupted the silent interstices within the conversation. They both honored the time spent in thought and in formulating what would be said next. It was this thoughtfulness that made Ivan seem, to so many who knew him, mature beyond his years. "Why do you have to change your name?"

"Because I will no longer be the person you know. This life will be finished and I will be a new man born to serve only God through His Church."

"Are you scared?"

Dmitrii tousled the boy's hair before tying the heavy apron back round his waist.

"What would I be scared about?"

"Aren't you dying?"

"Only in a way, Ivan. Not really dying, though. Only spiritually."

"And the name?"

"Why are you so concerned about my name?"

"Because it's how people know you. I could never change my name because it's my father's. If you change your name, then you lose everything."

Dmitrii nodded his head and went back to work. The boy had obviously given the subject some thought, and the idea was troubling to him, but Dmitrii was unsure how to



assuage that disquiet. "It isn't loss, Ivan. Not so much. By changing my name, I will help other people see me differently from what they are used to. I won't just be a carpenter any longer, I'll be a monk. All that they know will still be inside, unchanged, but there will be this new about me. That's what the name represents. It's the new."

Ivan had extracted the bundle of papers from his shirt and untied them. He rested them on his knees as he smoothed out the wrinkles and fussed over a smudge in the center of the last page. He did not respond to Dmitrii's explanation of the name changing, but he thought about it, then and later that night when he was trying to find sleep in the darkness. He was scared to what would happen to him. He liked his Uncle's house, and he liked staying there. He liked the food they ate and the tea they drank together. He liked the familiarity of the home's walls and how the air smelled. He knew the knots and splinters of the thick beam construction of the walls and he worried that he might never see them again. But he also knew that his Uncle would not go into the monastery if he thought Ivan unable to accept the change, so Ivan prayed that night for the courage to let go. He prayed for his Uncle and for the time coming when he would have to change his name. And Ivan prayed that he would never have to change his own.

## 6.

The last lesson Dmitrii taught Ivan at the house came when he extracted the old piece of wood from the steamer box. The boy had always been present for this part of any craft, and Dmitrii wanted to show him how the old wood responded under the pressure of being steamed and bent.

"It doesn't move." Ivan was futilely trying to manipulate the wood over his knee. It had been steaming for hours and he watched how comparatively easily the yellow wood from the fresh trees bent into shape without protest.

"Or..." Dmitrii picked up the other half of the graying piece of wood and hit it hard over his knee. Where the other steamed wood might have bent with minimum effort, this piece of old wood splintered. He then held up the shattered plank and held it in Ivan's direction. "Either way, you can't make the old wood do what you want. You have to accept that it has grown too used to its own shape and won't listen to anything you have to say."

"So it has no use?"

"There is a use for everything, Ivan. This fact you must never forget. Just know that the young wood is more flexible and willing to do what you ask of it. The old wood will only do what it wants to do, no matter how much steam and pressure you apply to it. Do you understand?"

Ivan recognized this habit of his Uncle's. He knew that the lesson he was telling him about the wood applied to something else he would encounter, but he didn't recognize its implications until that day sometime later, while sitting in the back of the church at his Uncle's taking of his monastic vows.

Ivan was rather transfixed by the simple display in the monastery. He listened intently to the forlorn intertwining of the male voices harmonizing their way through a maze of chants that made the hair on Ivan's arms stand on end. He felt charged, somehow, and he found himself praying that the music would not end. He breathed

deeply as the brassier of incense was carried up the aisle. The blue curls of smoke seemed alive as they drifted along the feet of the men, his Uncle included, who made their way to the front of the church where they would take their vows of second baptism in front of the laymen of Irkutsk.

"We pray that these vows taken today will serve as an example to all men."

Ivan recognized the voice as belong to the man who had come to speak to his Uncle in the house not long after his Aunt had died, and he listened keenly as the purpose of the vows was explained.

"These vows taken by our brethren will serve not to create an abyss between themselves and the laity, but rather as an example of strengthening the vows of first baptism taken by all. Just as you all have vowed to renounce Satan and all his works and all his angels and all his service and all his pride, so too do these men come to unite themselves to the body of Christ in life and works."

Ivan found himself thinking of his Uncle's workshop and of the old piece of wood and he knew that his Uncle had not been pressured to do anything he did not want to do. He knew that the vows he took were something of his own volition, and Ivan respected his Uncle more for not going against whatever purpose to which he had felt called. The men who would had committed to take the vows now prostrated themselves in front of the church, full with is witnesses, and answered each question accordingly.

"You are called to renounce Satan and all his works and all his angels and all his service and all his pride and to unite yourselves unto Christ, believing in Him as King and God. Hast thou renounced Satan?"

"I have." The voices of the monks resonated throughout the church and Ivan felt the chills return to his arms as the men answered in unison.

"Hast thou united thyself unto Christ?"

Again, the church resounded with the affirmation "I have" uttered in unison by the prostrated men, then the laity of the church spoke to affirm the vows taken. "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

When the echoes of the affirmation had subsided, the priest again spoke, "You must bind yourself to Christ through vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. Just as laymen are called to chastity prior to the married state and fidelity within it, you must preserve yourself from the enslavement of your souls to sensual passion. Hast thou so sworn to preserve thyself from impurity?"

"I have."

"According to the Gospel, no man shall hoard riches or spend money to fulfill the whims and desires of the flesh. Does not the Gospel condemn the foolish rich man who all his life only dressed himself in fancy clothes and lavished entertainments upon his friends without forethought to the fate of the unfortunate poor man, Lazarus, who lay covered in sores at the gate to the rich man's house? Did not God reproach another rich man who resolved with his soul to eat, drink and be merry? It is the Christ who says in the book of St. Matthew that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of the needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven. Thus do we call upon you to renounce material possessions and the hording of wealth for any purpose other than the

relief of the poor and the charity commanded by your vows uniting you with the Lord our God. Hast thou so sworn?"

"I have."

"Saint Paul gives the exhortation to obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves. Saint Peter, likewise, calls upon each man to submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king, as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. We celebrate this occasion when your free will is given over to the Lord for His service alone. Each of you is called upon to renounce his own will for the will of God through a lifetime of service, by which you shall be obedient to God's commandments, to your spiritual fathers and teachers, and to your elders and persons in authority in spiritual life. Hast thou sworn to bind yourself to God's service in his Church?"

"I have."

The priest then moved to the prostrated men and, before each one, pronounced him dead to the world and resurrected with new life and new purpose. Their hair was cut into the tonsured corners of the cross. Ivan could not help crying when the priest touched his uncle's shoulders. "Dmitrii Popov, thou art dead to the world. Arise, David, and take your place in service to God."

For Ivan, the Irkutsk Theological Seminary was a blessing of stability. The rigorous religious training answered many of his questions about his father's death and his Uncle's monastic vows, and they helped him make sense of things; an overlay of order in an otherwise turbulent childhood. Equally a blessing was the classical education he received, even on his modest pension from the state, in which he learned Latin and Greek, as well as mathematics, history, rhetoric, and philosophy. So it was that the eleven years he would spend within the seminary were filled with intellectual challenges and spiritual rewards such that by his adolescent years, he had fast distinguished himself as a promising pupil; first in his class in all subjects and the pride of his superiors who saw in him an opportunity for vicarious success.

As promised, Ivan also was allowed to see his uncle, now Hieromonk David, on frequent occasions, and the two continued working together not only in woodworking, but also in metalworking, blacksmithing, stonemasonry, and mechanics. Of particular interest to the maturing Ivan was the intricate science of time as it pertained to the making of clocks. He was fascinated by the library at his uncle's disposal, and he would pore over them for hours, lost in diagrams and schematic drawings of all manner of devices both simple and complex.

It was at this time, ironically or fortuitously depending on your persuasion, that Archbishop Mikhail commissioned a horologist settler to construct a tower clock outside the bishop's residence, and knowing of young Ivan Popov's academic and religious achievements, as well as of his penchant for all things mechanical, the rector of the seminary permitted the boy to spend his free time helping with the project.

"Ivan Popov." He was so excited by the prospect of working with the clockmaker that he extended a stiff hand in the direction of the stranger and smiled stupidly, shuffling from foot to foot. The settler was an older man with a beard down almost to his waist, and Ivan thought him very much like one of the fantastical caricatures from his Greek studies, but as the awkward silence spread out between them and the old man made no indication of movement, Ivan felt awkward and searched for something with which to occupy his hands. He settled on a nail on the ground, which he picked up and began worrying while waiting for the elder to speak.

For his part, the old man gave a hoarse laugh, a shocking sound of breath escaping his concealed lips, and shook his head. "I don't know you, son. Is there something you are looking for?"

"My name is Ivan Popov."

"So you've said. That should mean something to me, no?"

"No. I mean yes. I'm here to help you."

"A Godsend, I can already see." The old man turned his back on Ivan and entered the tower to survey the winding staircase leading to the belfry.

"I'm from the seminary. The rector there suggested I help you."

"Uh huh."

Ivan wasn't sure if the sound was in response to his explanation of help or to some calculation the man had been doing in his head. Ivan walked inside the tower and joined the man in surveying the walls. The old man broke his concentration and studied the tall young man a moment and shook his head once more and stepped outside.

"I'm thinking a three-legged escapement. What about you?"

Ivan took a moment to realize that the man was testing him with the question, the result of that realization such that the boy found himself staring dumbly at the stranger and unable to respond. He knew the term escapement; had read about it in one of the many manuals in his uncle's monastery, but anything resembling a coherent sentence fled from him in that moment until the old man turned to leave with a dismissing wave of his aged hand. "Wait" was all Ivan managed to get out. The old man did stop just on the threshold to the tower but he neither turned nor spoke. "You're right to use the three legs instead of two, but the size of the clock you are going to make, if you are planning on using an extensive gear train, will require a stop for accuracy. I'd use a double three-legged escapement if it were up to me."

"Of course."

Ivan couldn't help being frustrated with the man who had yet to introduce himself. He couldn't read the man's responses and wasn't sure if he was right or wrong, if the "of course" had been an affirmation of some earlier judgment already considered by the man or if it was an acknowledgment that Ivan had passed the test. He found the man's reticence aggravating, as his overriding thought since learning of the commission was to get started with the business of making clocks.

"So you read a book about clocks, no?"

"I did," Ivan said.

"Why?"

"I'm sorry?"



"I figure you're probably filled to bursting with lots of 'how?' questions, but you need to focus on the why."

"Why?"

The old man went inside the tower and turned to keep Ivan from following him inside. "Now you're already learning, see? Come back tomorrow and I'll let you know if there's room on this project for you."

"Yes, yes." The stupid grin had already returned to Ivan's face. "What time?"

"We make our own time here." The old man had already started the door back along its closing arc, but Ivan caught it at the last moment with his outstretched arm.

"Your name," he said. "I don't know your name."

"Klim."

Ivan let the door close then turned and walked the road back toward the seminary. He turned the conversation over in his mind like a farmer in a field full of heavy stones. He wasn't sure when he left, nor was he sure at any other point that day, if things had gone well or not.

In the coming days and weeks, Klim showed himself a likable, if somewhat eccentric, old man. He seemed to view horology as much as a religion as a mechanical science, and he genuinely enjoyed the enthusiastic companionship of his young apprentice. More than the construction of the clock, however, which had been planned, Ivan later discovered, to employ the double three-legged escapement from its inception, was to Klim as much a philosophical as a practical endeavor.

"The question, Popov, is defining time."

"What is there to define?"

As was usual, the two reserved their life lessons, much as Ivan and his uncle, for those times when they were bent over a particularly meticulous construction, such as polishing the spokes of the gears. "What there is to define is the exact nature of time. Is it something physical or something psychological? Or is it both?"

"Time just is."

"I see." Klim was nodding his head and mumbling through the wiry gray strands of his beard. "I didn't realize it was such a simple matter."

Ivan, who sat hunched over a smaller gear, was filing vigorously at a stubborn nub of metal that had resisted being worked out and couldn't hear what the old man was muttering. "If you are expecting a response, you'll have to speak up." Ivan and Klim had developed this easy kind of banter once Ivan realized early on that Klim was not used to working with a partner and was guilty often of speaking to himself.

"I said to tell yourself that time 'is' the next time you are standing over your stove waiting for your water to boil."

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"It has everything to do with it, no?"

"Everything?" Ivan said.

"It's the 'why' of it all."

"I don't understand."

"You're not old enough to understand yet. Someday you will, but not today.

Today, time seems worth barely a thought. But when you are as old as me, you will

wonder where it all went. You will wonder so hard that you'll doubt the past ever existed, and you'll wonder, too, if the future is really there or if it is something of your own imagining. You will think about what happens to time when *you* stop happening. When you aren't conscious of it, does time continue?"

Klim had dropped his own file and had broken into a sweat. He dabbed at the beads on his forehead with a handkerchief he kept always tucked in his trouser pocket. He stood and walked to the tower door and opened it, breathing deeply. Ivan sat transfixed. The outburst was more than he had heard Klim say in any one breath since he had met the man.

"It's easy for you," Klim was saying. "We're just building a clock, but you don't really know why. You are doing it because you want to know how it works. But it isn't relevant to you. These clocks are for physical time. They're for the town to see. A single kind of awareness so everyone can meet someplace when they're supposed to be there. But it's not personal, and that's what I like to think about. I like to think that time is relative to the person experiencing it. Your time is just beginning so it's impossible to explain. My time, though. My time is ending so I give it a lot of thought."

Ivan didn't know what to say. He knew Klim was trying to say something profound, but it came out somewhat jumbled to the young man's ears and he was unsure whether he should let the man continue or if he should intervene. Certainly he felt some level of affection for the old man, but he wasn't familiar with him the way he had been familiar with his uncle. But it was interacting with his uncle that gave Ivan some sense of

comfort and allowed him to be patient enough to let the man's philosophical tempest run its course.

"Listen to me rambling," Klim said. "Look at the pendulum. It moves, but not by itself. It's constantly being acted on by some outside force. When it works the way it is supposed to, then the clock moves at an even interval. But if a gear slips, or if the building shakes, or if a strong wind blows it, or the escapement breaks, if there is too much pressure on it, then it is just a useless piece of wood. Time is like that. It works on everyone differently. Everyone has his own time, Popov. Don't forget that. You can only control the time that applies to you. You have no control over my time, or anyone else's time. Remember that when you're a priest. It's the 'why?' question you have to ask."

## 8.

After building the tower clock, Ivan felt even more compelled to study mechanics. He was fascinated by the inner workings of things, and he often used this context for his restless thoughts in the waning hours of the night while trying to go to sleep. He thought, too, about all that Klim had said about time, and he couldn't help feeling lost, but he did understand the idea of working on the clock because he wanted to know how it worked. He wanted to see the pendulum swinging and to see the load spring. He wanted to touch the gears and know their ratios: seconds to minutes, minutes to hours, hours to days; 60:1, 60:1, 24:1. A train of six gears following a simple ratio of progression to reach the end result of one cleat clicking off through the escapement, one minute turning on the face of the clock, the entire populace turning simultaneously because of one man's efforts.

Ivan had a hand in those efforts, and he understood, to a certain extent, that Klim's "why?" for building the tower clock was in large part an expression of his own legacy. He had, for a brief moment, brought the world in step with his own time. Ivan thought that the metaphor would make a useful homily someday and he wrote it in his journals, a segment of which had been devoted to the making of the great tower clock in Irkutsk. And although he would not see Klim again nor work with him in the future, the act of writing this lesson down in his journal somehow kept Klim alive in Ivan's thoughts, and that seemed at the time a profound idea to him; this idea that words had the power to keep someone else in the present tense, that the construction of a paragraph could bring an outsider into one's own time.

He could not see the tower clock from his room in the seminary, so Ivan had requested, and received permission, to borrow one of the horology books from his uncle's monastic library, and he began construction of a water clock. The hydro-powered clock was nothing new. It was first employed by the Egyptians and later perfected by the Chinese, who used it to mark not only time, but also astrological movements. Ivan thrilled at the idea of reviving a craft from ancient civilizations, and again he was struck by the idea that perhaps he was somehow keeping them alive, or certainly, at the very least, not forgotten. And he thought his simple water clock a fitting tribute to the scientific minds who had first devised the mechanism, and he appreciated them for leaving him a legacy with such detailed instructions.

The clock was a simple construction of elaborate design. Ivan wanted something that was, as his uncle had worked so hard to teach him, both functional and beautiful, so

he had ended up with a rosewood box inlaid with scrollwork of white pine. He had used a discarded illuminated text from Ecclesiastes as his clock face, and for the hands, he had manufactured a pair of simple, flat lengths of brass. His uncle had allowed him to use his tools and workshop for the construction of the clock's interior, which existed of several gears, a holding reservoir and a float that replaced the pendulum as the method by which the hands were manipulated through their circular movements. It was all neatly concealed within the casing, and although it was not as accurate as he would have liked and he was inconvenienced by the act of filling and refilling the clock's reservoir each morning and night, Ivan was nonetheless proud of his achievement. It represented to him a manifestation of his own abilities, Klim would have called it his own time, and Ivan felt, upon its completion, that he was more aware of himself in that moment than at any other moment preceding.

Ivan had proven something to himself in building the water clock. It proved his self-sufficiency. It showed not only himself, but also others, that he was capable of moving beyond their expectations or limitations. He would be his own man and chart his own course, wherever that course might lead. So it was a great surprise to Ivan when he was summoned to the seminary's rectory.

Bishop Veniamin's death was difficult for many in the church hierarchy and laity alike. He had been much loved and respected as both a compassionate intercessor and patient mentor. In their grief, the church had contacted the seminary to ensure that this great man's name would not be forgotten.

"It is an honor," Father Derugin said.

Ivan could only sit dumbfounded, his jaw hanging slack, in the presence of such a request.

"To be chosen from all the students here to carry on such a noble name. I can scarcely imagine."

"Forgive me, Father. I am sure it is a great honor to many, but I already carry the weight of my father's name, and you know full well his story. I am his only son, and if I were to—"

"And Bishop Veniamin had no son at all to carry on his name. I know you loved your father, and you respect him and do him honor with each breath you take. Do him this honor, too, of letting him go so that a great name might be granted a legacy."

Ivan had a hard time remembering his place. He wanted to stand up and rail against the words being spoken. Like many students, he, too, had loved the Bishop of Irkutsk, but to be asked to forsake his family name, to cut all outward ties with the father he had only begun to know, seemed to Ivan a cruel request. He thought of his uncle's workshop when he had chosen to take his monastic vows, and he remembered the feeling in the back of his church as he witnessed those vows, the death of the man he knew and the resurrection of this other, this David. "I am not the right person for this," was all Ivan managed to say.

Father Derugin understood the boy's hesitation but he saw it simply as a temporary uncertainty, nothing deeper. After all, the boy had only been six when his father died, and his uncle had set an admirable example in taking his monastic vows when the boy was nine. Father Derugin assumed Ivan would fully understand the

circumstances. "You are our top student, Ivan. We expect great things of you. That is why we are honoring you by giving you the opportunity to honor Bishop Veniamin. As you grow in our order, so, too, will the memory of Bishop Veniamin grow stronger."

"Father, please. You must understand. I cannot bear such a name. I cannot—"

Father Derugin stood abruptly and leaned forward across the desk. "This is *not* a request, Ivan. I understand your reservation, but the choice has already been made, and I have given my blessing. It is time for you to put the church before yourself. You *will* be Ivan Veniaminov, and our consideration of the matter ends there."

Ivan recognized the futility of further argument, and although he felt passionately about the subject, he suppressed that zeal and accepted the church's wishes. In reality, he had little choice, but the transition was difficult for him. He could not help feeling even more guilty in those quiet night hours. He could not erase from his mind the image of his father's cross in the St. Elias cemetery, the effects of exposure and time slowly but steadily eroding the identity from the cross, and Ivan helpless to stop it. He could not help feeling that Klim somehow had seen this moment coming and had tried to warn him, to prepare him for it. He tried to think of the course of events as the beginning of something grand, but he could only see it as an ending. Ivan felt small and obscure in those moments, feeling that time as he knew it, his time, had come to an early and untimely end. He rocked himself to sleep that first night, and many nights afterward, with the name Veniaminov tripping haltingly out of his mouth. A sort of mantra that, to Ivan, seemed alien, and he wondered what ever could become of a young man who could lose his own name.



9.

He had taken no vows, but the understanding was that the young man who had become Ivan Veniaminov would travel to Moscow and enter into study at the Church's seminary there. He had been the top student in the Irkutsk Theological Seminary, and his keen mind and willingness to serve had made him worthy of even the highest accolades. Yet Veniaminov could not escape the image at night of his father's lonely marker, a simple Russian Orthodox cross adorned with only a name and dates devoid of all context but a time of beginning and a time of ending. That one image lingered and endured in the young man's mind, and he found himself longing more and more for the family of which he had seemed deprived at every turn.

The first time he saw Ekaterina, he failed even to mark the occasion, so effortlessly did she blend into the small flock of girls, all children of church fathers, some priests, as was the case with her, who were walking through the streets of Irkutsk. It was in the spring of 1816, and Ivan was very much in school, still very much absorbed with his studies, and the thought of attraction to the opposite sex had not entered his mind until that day. And it was the recognition of the group that came to work on his mind, the very realization of the otherness in that group, so public yet so secretive with their shielded speech guarded by the backs of jealous hands. They giggled as young women in large groups are wont to do, especially in the sight of someone as tall and commanding in presence as the young Veniaminov, although he would not have viewed himself as such,

and the idea was planted inside him that making the acquaintance of one of the girls, or perhaps a few of them, as friends, nothing more, might not be such a bad idea.

For Ekaterina, the occasion was more well noted. She had been aware of Veniaminov for quite some time, just as had the majority of young ladies in Irkutsk, as a young man of great potential. He was highly regarded by his teachers and the priesthood, who were the most respected and often feared members of the community. He was admired by his peers, and despite his apparent grooming for a life in the priesthood, he was considered quite a catch by most women of marrying age. Ekaterina was no exception, although she could not help concern herself that meeting him might prove somehow disastrous. The knowledge of the Church's expectations was prevalent, and she feared any association with the young man might be frowned upon. But she did allow herself to think on the possibilities from time to time, just as did her friends, with no real expectation of anything other than a childish fantasy the end result.

Veniaminov cut an impressive figure among adults, let alone his peers. At well over six feet tall, he carried himself with an easy kind of confidence that, as more than one person would come to say after meeting him, could inspire without intimidating. When Ekaterina first spoke with Veniaminov, though, he was sitting down, and the height advantage was hers. He was on the highest step of a staircase leading down from the dormitory to the street, intently studying a loose collection of notes he held flat on his knees. It was some time before he became aware that he was not alone, and he looked up at the woman standing behind him reading over his shoulder. He shielded his eyes to look up at her, then stood to introduce himself.

He stammered his name and bowed at the waist, touching his forehead to her proffered hand. He was instantly unsettled by the softness of that hand and the uncanny way in which she kept her eyes on him at all times, even when he dropped his papers into the dirt at the base of the steps.

Ekaterina laughed and bent down to collect the papers before they could blow away. "I'll help."

"Thank you," Veniaminov said, "but there really is no need. It's my own clumsiness to blame." In his mind, though, he was already rolling her two paltry words in his mind. They were spoken strongly, without hesitation, and without a hint of submissiveness. She stated a fact simply, and that simplicity resonated with him more than a shy glance or the lilting voices of some of the other girls who had spoken with him. She was confident in her carriage, and Veniaminov noted again that she continued to study him with her eyes, unwilling to lower her gaze or find some other object upon which to focus. He stood and dusted himself off and held his hands out for the papers Ekaterina had collected.

"What are these?" she said.

"Nothing, really," he said. "Just ramblings. Scribblings. Things I've seen over some time. Nothing important."

"You have written a great deal of the unimportant, then." She handed over a bundle of papers so thick that she had to use one hand on top of the other to keep them from blowing away.

Veniaminov was the one who laughed somewhat shyly. "They are not unimportant, then. You are right. Just disinteresting." He straightened the papers.

"Are they disinteresting in general, or is that just a supposition on your part?"

"Meaning what, exactly?"

"Do you just assume I won't be interested, or do you assume the world to be disinterested?"

"You," Veniaminov said, but the pained expression on his face belied the fact that he instantly regretted the response. "I mean to say that I doubt someone without a formal education would appreciate—"

"So you assume that I am ignorant, then?"

"I didn't say that."

"Just uneducated?"

Veniaminov sighed and ran his long fingers through his thick black hair. He looked down the street as if hoping someone might appear with whom he would be required to speak, but he and Ekaterina were quite alone and he forced himself to look her in the eye. Now that the two of them were standing, he realized he towered over her. She was barely as tall his shoulders, but even looking up into his face, she seemed to him as tall, if not taller, than himself. He marked the way the wind played with one particular lock of hair on her forehead and how, despite her efforts to push it aside, it would stubbornly fall back down into her face. He desperately wanted to touch that hair and to push it gently behind her ear, to feel the texture of it, to measure its length between his fingers. He wanted to know if it felt as silky as it looked, and the awareness of that desire

alarmed him all the more. He forced his thoughts back to the papers in hand and excused himself hastily before walking briskly back up the steps and inside.

"Brother Veniaminov."

Veniaminov turned down the hall and smiled at the approaching priest. Father Derugin always walked briskly, and Veniaminov had no difficulty matching the quick steps with his own long stride. The men strode through the hall to the priest's private chambers, where he indicated with an outstretched hand a seat for Veniaminov.

"We have been discussing your future," the priest said.

Veniaminov blushed at this knowledge, but did not look away. "You do me too much honor."

Father Derugin brushed away the acquiescence. "There's no need for that here. You know of your abilities, and you know, too, of our desire to see you succeed in the church."

"I do, Father. I hope that I am able to meet your expectations. I am willing and able to—"

"Moscow."

Veniaminov could not finish his sentence. Indeed, the word spoken by Father Derugin was enough to derail his thoughts entirely. "Moscow?"

"The Theological Academy in Moscow. The priests and elders have been discussing affording you the opportunity to continue your studies there. From there you will be able to live and work in service to the Church, and to our Father."

"I'm flattered," Veniaminov said, "but I'm—"

Father Derugin interrupted him with a pat on the shoulder, an affectionate gesture meant to disarm and comfort. "I know the news is somewhat overwhelming, but there's no need to comment now. Go and enjoy the news. This opportunity is not lightly given, and we have great faith that you will do great things for Irkutsk, Siberia, and, indeed, all of Russia."

"You do me too much kindness." Veniaminov could not match the priest's stare. He was shocked at the news, not because it was unexpected, but because of the image of that single lock of hair falling down across Ekaterina's face. He was shamed at the thought; unnerved that at a time when the Church and his superiors had chosen to honor him so richly, all he could think about were those stubborn strands of hair.

"Go and enjoy yourself," the priest said. "We'll have plenty of time in the coming weeks to consider properly outfitting you for your journey and preparing you for the Academy. It is exciting not just for you, but for all of us."

That night, alone in the dark and pursuing, again, the ever-elusive sleep, Veniaminov was troubled not with thoughts of his father or of the loss of his family, his aunt and uncle, but rather the loss of whatever opportunity he might have to know Ekaterina and touch that lock of hair, just one time. The thought of that deprivation was nearly too much for the young man to bear, and sleep would not come. He prayed for release from his desires, but it seemed in that moment that even God, Himself, could not keep Ekaterina's hair in place.

As the daughter of a priest, Ekaterina well knew the responsibilities Veniaminov was undertaking in preparing to serve the church, but that knowledge did not prevent her from accepting his proposal of marriage, the two being wed on a clear summer day in 1817.

The two of them had labored over the decision for some time, and Veniaminov persuaded her that marriage was what he truly wanted. While married priests were not uncommon within the Church, Veniaminov still had to sacrifice any hope of moving further up the ecclesiastical ladder. In marrying Ekaterina, he accepted no more than an assignment in a church in Irkutsk, his formal education at the Theological Academy of Moscow nothing more than an opportunity that might once have been his, but was now only the stuff of forgotten possibility.

"They won't forgive you," Ekaterina said.

"They have no choice," Veniaminov said.

"Then perhaps I won't forgive myself."

"Have I missed something? I wasn't aware that we had done anything requiring forgiveness." Veniaminov reached over and gently moved the strand of hair from her forehead and tucked it neatly behind her ear. The two of them were sitting together in the bedroom of the small house Veniaminov had acquired for the two of them when they had decided to wed.

"They had such high expectations for you, Ivan."

"They had high expectations for themselves. I was just a vehicle for them."

"You don't mean that."

"Don't I?" There was a look in Veniaminov's eyes, a resoluteness that showed a resolution with which it would not be worth arguing. "We are all creatures of free will. God tells us as much, and it was His will for me to remain here and be with you. And it was my own free will to accept that arrangement. Now they much use their free wills to understand my choice and come to live within it."

Ekaterina was enamored, above all else, with Veniaminov's ability to remain resolute, despite whatever obstacles and stumbling blocks might be placed in his path. And although she admired him for not cowing to the Church, with all its plans and machinations for his success, she could not quell the restlessness inside her that made her think that he might come to regret his choice as time progressed. "Are you sure it is God's will and not yours alone?"

Veniaminov smiled at his wife and took her hands in his. He was in awe of her skin. "It is too late for that question now." There was a mischievousness to his tone and to his words, and he couldn't help smiling childishly as he spoke. "I am yours now, just as I will always be, and there is no room for regret in this marriage."

"I only want for your happiness," she said.

"Then you, my love, should be satisfied, indeed. Nothing could make me happier than being here with you and knowing that our union is already blessed."

She sighed and leaned into him as he spoke. "I am satisfied," she said, "for as long as you are satisfied."

Veniaminov knew there was deeper meaning folded into her words, but he did not pursue it then. He could approximate her concerns, had put himself in her position on



more than one occasion, and thought he understood at least some of her apprehension in getting married. For Veniaminov, though, he felt changed enough. There was no need to pursue a larger world outside Irkutsk. Here was a city large enough, with a church presence more than sufficient, to keep even the most enterprising man busy for a lifetime. He did not imagine himself growing bored. Neither did he ever envision a calling other than what he had already experienced. He had no desire to go to Moscow, and despite the realization, and in some cases warnings from his superiors, that his career had all but ended before it began, Veniaminov had already made peace with his choice and said often, to anyone who challenged his decision, that if God's will would see him in Moscow, then He would make it so, marriage or not.

## 11.

Shortly after the marriage, Veniaminov was assigned as a deacon to the Church of the Annunciation in Irkutsk. When he did graduate from the seminary in 1820, he was ordained as a priest and was told to remain at the church that had been his family's place of worship for Veniaminov's entire life. He truly loved delivering the homilies to the worshippers, and he never missed an opportunity to tell a story or teach a lesson using the illustrations he had learned from his Uncle, and from his father. And it was this thought that still plagued him. Each time he adorned himself in the vestments of the church, he couldn't help think of his father, the sacristan at St. Elias, and how proud he had been to take care of these possessions. How Veniaminov longed to see his father's face once

more. How he longed for that sacristan to behold the son who had grown up to be a priest.

"What a legacy you are," Hieromonk David said during one of Veniaminov's visits to the monastery. "Your father would be proud, indeed."

Veniaminov cut an impressive figure in his dark raiment, the robes flowing about him like truth. "I often feel guilty."

"Guilty? What can you possibly have done to feel guilty about?"

"It is the same doubt I had as a child in your house," Veniaminov said. "Do you remember me asking you about my father's marker?"

David nodded and looked admiringly on the man walking beside him. "I wish somehow you could see yourself through the eyes of others." He was shaking his head. "You have no idea how far you have come."

"I am worried that I have arrived."

"You worry too much for a young man with a new wife. You haven't even started your life yet. Worry if you have done enough when you are at the end, not at the beginning."

"It seems to me it should be the opposite." Veniaminov stopped and the two men sat on a bench in the monastery's courtyard. The building surrounding them was heavily constructed of thick wooden beams and white mortar. It was three stories tall, but the onion-shaped domes gave it a more impressive, some might say ominous, appearance. "If I am my father's legacy, what does it say about him if I do not fulfill my potential? All my life I have wanted to be a monument to him, and the fathers at the seminary gave me

an opportunity for more. They gave me another man's name so that I could be his legacy, too. Everywhere I turn, there are expectations unmet."

David was impressed with the young priest's honesty. He knew that, like himself, Veniaminov had a difficult time expressing himself with matters as weighty as this. Unburdening had always been a troublesome prospect, so used were the two of them to assuaging others' guilt, that neither wanted to feel culpable in contributing to it. "I should think both men proud of their heir," he finally said. "You have done what you must. You have remained honest to yourself and you are serving God. There is need here, and you are meeting it."

"Is that enough?"

"It is more than enough."

The two spent the remaining hours of the afternoon together in the courtyard. Eventually they made their ways back to David's small workshop where they talked about clock making and the joys at being able to manipulate time.

The only time Veniaminov ever felt indulged was when he would lay his head in Ekaterina's lap and let her run her fingers through his hair. He always felt, in almost all her overtures, as if he were taking advantage of her. But when it came to yielding to her head rubbing, he was defenseless. Veniaminov had thick, wavy hair that always seemed to tangle when he ran his fingers through it, but for some reason, Ekaterina could navigate his scalp with only the rare instance of a tangle. Veniaminov often teased her of possessing a map to the terrain of his head, but the truth was that he was more

appreciative of her attention than he would ever have words to express. And nearly every evening, without his requesting it, she would sit beside him and begin rubbing the back of his neck, and he would lean involuntarily into that caress. Before submitting completely, he always asked "are you sure you don't mind?" and she always replied "I don't mind at all."

In these quiet moments, Veniaminov enjoyed the feeling of surrender; of vulnerability. It was the one time of the day in which he felt no weight of concerns; no manifestations of other people's priorities. In this hour, he was just a man feeling rather indulged by the woman he loved. The result of this quiet time together is that the couple communicated about whatever was possessing their thoughts at the time. And the night after he had visited Hieromonk David was no exception.

"And where are your thoughts?" she asked.

"With my father." Her circling fingers stopped for a moment, barely perceptible, but enough that Veniaminov opened his eyes and looked up to see the expression on her face. Ekaterina was rather guarded with her expressions and she used them sparingly, as if expressions were in finite supply and she might be in danger of running out. But that calmness, Veniaminov thought of it as serenity, was one of the attributes that made her, in his eyes, so beautiful.

"What were you thinking?" She had resumed her slow intricate circles and he relaxed and smiled.

"David and I were talking about him today. I feel guilty sometimes for having taken the name of another. It feels sometimes as though I am disappointing him somehow."

Ekaterina leaned forward and kissed his forehead. "You are always concerned for others. That's what makes you anything but a disappointment."

"He would have liked you," Veniaminov said.

"I would have liked to have met him," she said. "I am sure I would have loved him."

Veniaminov opened his eyes again but did not look directly at Ekaterina. Instead, he looked off to some vanishing point within the lattice work of open beams in the ceiling. It was some time before he spoke. "I think about him probably more than I should. Certainly more than I tell you." He looked at her and saw a flicker of disappointment on her face. "Not because I don't want to share, but because I am afraid you'll tire of hearing it."

"If it is in your heart, I won't grow tired of it."

Veniaminov smiled at her reassurance and gripped her free hand in his. "I wish had words to express how happy I am with you. I have wanted a family all my life, yet it seems at every turn that it is the one thing of which I have been constantly denied."

"Well, you have it now, so close your eyes and rest."

"Are you sure you don't mind?"

Ekaterina smiled down on her husband. "I don't mind at all."

The year was 1821 and life for Veniaminov and Ekaterina was, quite literally, only beginning. Within the church, he had been ordained as a priest and had started his ministry to the people of Irkutsk. He became known quickly as a man of great compassion and kindness. A person could approach him under almost any circumstance, and Veniaminov would make that person feel welcome, ensuring that no one left his company without being cared for in whatever way the church was able to provide care. Veniaminov grew into his role as a father confessor quite quickly, and the families who came to him for care and guidance came to revere him for his gentleness and sincerity. The Kriukov family was no exception, and when Ivan, that old mariner for the Russian-American Company returned to Irkutsk, he was likewise taken in by the young man's spirit of kindness and generosity.

At the time Ivan Kriukov entered the Church of the Annunciation in the early winter of 1822, Ekaterina and Veniaminov were finally starting to feel settled into their roles as both husband and wife and caregivers to the local population. They had brought a son into the world and named him Innokentii, after the much-loved Saint Innocent of Irkutsk. Veniaminov thought the name quite appropriate, and he prayed that the child would live free of the guilt that had come to plague his father.

## 12.

"I've come to ask for your blessing, Father."

Veniaminov, surprised by a voice in the quiet sanctuary, turned toward its source. A slight man —weathered, old— stood in the back of the church, behind the rowed pews.

"Do I know you?" the priest asked.

"You know my family, Father. Kriukov."

"Of course, and you are?"

"Ivan, Father."

"Come, please." Veniaminov gestured with his hands, a kind of inward rolling, as if bundling together the string to which the other is attached. He watched the man move slowly down the center of the church toward the carved crucifix and open Gospel, toward himself in his black vestments. The man seemed unsure of himself, some invisible weight shackling his legs together. At the front of the church he bowed, a slight bending at the waist, his hands cupped in front of him.

"I've come to ask for your blessing, Father."

Veniaminov smiled and made the sign of the cross in the air between them. "May God be with you."

"Thank you, Father."

"Come, Ivan, and tell me your confession."

He led Ivan to the first pew, sat and motioned for the other to do the same. Ivan hesitated, working the brim of his fur hat with his fat, misshapen fingers and glancing about the sanctuary, then sat beside the priest, whose hand stretched out across the back of the pew, worn smooth through time and worry.

"I have always enjoyed good craftsmanship," Veniaminov said. "There is an affirmation in the work, the awareness of the craftsman's hands. Then, too, there is the notice of its use. It validates in such a beautifully poetic way, don't you think?"

For Ivan, the observation and the question were rather unexpected. He had grown accustomed to an inconsistency in the priesthood, and Veniaminov's thoughtfulness, for Ivan, was a wonderful invitation. "I must confess that I have never thought of it in those terms," he said, "but I, too, am a kind of craftsman, so I can appreciate a well-crafted piece."

Veniaminov's look was understanding and unflinching. He was not afraid of looking his confessee in the eye, but the softness of his look and the smile he displayed hinted of a conspiratorial presence, a man who could be trusted. "And the craftsman is always joyed to know his design is working as it is meant to work, no?"

"You are wise beyond your years, Father." Ivan sat back further into the pew, the tension in his back giving way and the tight lines of his face relaxing slightly. The smile he showed in response to Veniaminov now seemed more genuine and less forced. "You have already guided me to where I wanted to go, though I came here with no idea of how to get there."

"Then the blessing is mine, Ivan, for working as I was designed. Tell me your confession, Ivan, and let us take it before our God."

Ivan Kriukov was a mariner who served more than 40 years in the service of the Russian-American Company, Russia's fur-trading monopoly in the Alyeshkan territories. As a promyshlennik, hunter, he had left Siberia for the Americas in the late 1700s, arriving, as most young hunters did, eager to stake out a name for himself and a living wage to support his family. By 1813, he was considered competent enough in body, and strong enough in spirit, to be chosen by Alexander Baranov, the governor of the



Alyeshkan territories, to succeed Fedor Burenin as manager of the Unalashka district, where he would serve for the next decade.

His knowledge of this wilderness, of the native peoples there and the indigenous animals, enthralled Father Veniaminov during their confession, and the two men spent hours during that first day together, simply getting to know one another. Ivan felt an immediate affection for the young priest, who had, so early upon his ecclesiastical path, had found a comfortable parish life for himself in his ancestral home of Irkutsk. The scientific mind, however, that part of his mind devoted to the workings of all things mechanical and the observations of all things natural, was piqued with Ivan's exotic tales of the Russian frontier in Alyeshka.

Ivan produced a paper for the priest, signed by governor Ianovskii, who had replaced Alexander Baranov as the Alyeshkan authority. "In the whole of Russian America there is no one who has been here longer than he. He has given 40 years of service to us, but is still bold and without equal in his labors. He is honest; all of the Russians here are satisfied with him."

Veniaminov read the letter, which was bundled with a certificate from the chief manager of the Russian-American Company in Sitka, dated March 15, 1821, commending him for his service and discharging him from the company with a bonus of 2,000 rubles. This certificate, like Ianovskii's letter before it, testified to his 42 years of service and of his 10 years as manager of the Unalashkan District.

"These are most impressive," Veniaminov said. "You have a right to be proud of your works for the company. And of your works for God?"

Ivan could not help blushing at the directness of the priest. He was not discomfited by the remark. Instead, he welcomed the directness as a sign of the affinity the two already had formed for each other. "I have not done all I should," he said, "but I have done what I could when I was able."

"Such as?" Veniaminov had a way of encouraging the confession with the inflection in his brows, which were thick and expressive as they arched above his blue eyes.

"I did help build a small chapel on Umnak Island: the chapel of St. Nicholas."

"I'm sure it was splendid, and how good of you to serve God with your hands as eagerly as you served commerce."

"How I wish there could have been a priest such as yourself there."

"I'm sure I could do no better than my compatriots there who—"

"Forgive me, Father, for being rude, but the frontier is a difficult place, and the priests there, some of them, do God's work in many ways. More of them, though, do not do much work at all. Alyeshka needs someone like you."

Veniaminov did not dismiss the praise, but neither did he take it to heart. He nodded his understanding of the words being spoken between them, and he realized that to push the issue further would, perhaps, only upset the obviously passionate Kriukov. "I hope that as you come to know me better, your opinion of me does not change."

"I'm not," Ivan said. "I'm not straying at all. I'm telling you just as I saw it." He had made the visits to the Church of the Annunciation an almost daily pilgrimage, so fond had he grown of the young priest, who was at once powerful in his height, yet always approachable, always humble. Ivan had never felt so comfortable speaking with another person, and his ongoing confession was a way through which he could relive and keep alive the many years he spent in Alyeshka. So, too, did he hope that he might be able to persuade Veniaminov to recognize the need in Alyeshka, which through his presence might be filled.

Veniaminov was always courteous about the issue, and he was flattered by Ivan's high esteem, but he thought of his wife, Ekaterina, and of their infant son, Innocent. He thought, too, of his aging mother and the idea of leaving the comfort of Irkutsk seemed ludicrous, at best, suicidal at worst. He would say, unashamedly, that a part of him felt something akin to envy when Ivan spoke of faraway Alyeshka, but that part was too small to be more than a tickle in his subconscious, and so he listened contentedly to Ivan's tales, even the outlandish ones.

"God as my witness —forgive me, Father. You see, at first we just saw some remarkable thing swimming; we thought that it was a whale, God knows we've seen plenty of them —forgive me, Father. But this animal was 350 feet long if it was an inch, but then it suddenly reared up and raised its head right out of the water. No whale that, I can guarantee you. My God, what a horror it was —forgive me, Father. But the huge thing was as thick as a sea barrel around with a head like a horse and an open mouth."

Here, Veniaminov found himself thinking of the nautical charts and maps he had seen in his uncle's library at the monastery, with their fanciful drawings in open waters of creatures not unlike that of Ivan's description. "You are going too far, to be sure."

"I'm not, Father. I tell you we were numb with terror. It sank under the surface and then appeared behind us. Well, we thought we were lost, but fortunately just then a great herd of killer whales appeared. Everything fears the kasatok. Whales and all large animals are afraid of the killer whale; this is a small fish, just about 20 to 25 feet long, but they travel in great herds and sometimes chase whales to death. The monster saw the killer whales, turned and quickly left us. Thus, the Lord preserved us."

Father Veniaminov looked struck, sat still for a long moment with his mouth agape, not intentionally looking disbelieving, but unable to control his shock, nonetheless. "You're telling me that—"

"The Lord saved us that day, Father. That's what I'm telling you. And the Governor wrote it down."

"But surely you don't believe that you saw an—"

"It's in the record, Father. I know what I saw. You can check it if you think I'm lying. The Lord saved us that day, and that just made me feel that there was something left for me to do, you see?"

Father Veniaminov put his hand over the old seaman's, which up to that point, as the story grew and more animated, had been wringing together in agitation. He gripped the other's hands as he would a misbehaving child's and looked him in the eye. "I believe you think you saw something out there."

"It's more than that." Ivan studied the priest's hands covering his own and laughed again, a nervous sound. He shook his head. "Forgive me, Father. I get excitable sometimes, and before I know it, I'm off telling tales again."

"You're a wonderful story teller, Ivan. I think God has preserved you to entertain us all with such wonderful stories." He smiled easily and released Ivan's calmed hands.

"I won't let you put me off that easily, Father. I'm not here to entertain children, I can tell you that. God has a greater plan for me, and I think you know what it is."

"I confess no such knowledge." Veniaminov's look was one of playful mischief. The two men had been over this ground numerous times before, and it inevitably arrived with equal, if not greater, determination on each subsequent visit.

"You're not a very good liar, Father. I'm here for you, and you know it."

Veniaminov laughed, and the sound was so genuine that it seemed appropriate for the church. "I believe you believe what you believe. But I do not share this belief."

Ivan blinked once following the logic and waved the priest off. "You need to go to Alyeshka. That's my purpose for being here, and I believe it with all my heart. You'll see. Just give it time."

At Ivan's words, Veniaminov hesitated a moment and his eyes focused on something not in the church—not in the same moment—but to words so similar from a man not unlike Ivan Kriukov, and he shook his head thinking that coincidence was one of those unknowable quantities in the universe sneaking up behind you to make you think that perhaps there was some validity to the circumstances, some connection to the greater scheme of things. The problem for Veniaminov, though, was that he did not believe in

coincidence. Both his theological and scientific beliefs and understandings argued for a symmetry that did not account for chance. Things happened for a reason, according to a greater design, and that design was found, for Veniaminov, within the context of his faith. Ivan Kriukov's comment of "time" resonated now with Veniaminov, and for just a moment, his confidence in his comfort was shaken.

"It can't be," he said.

"If God wills it, it can be," Ivan said. "That is something I know you believe."

"There is no office there for me, though. And even if there were an office for someone like me, I would not be the right one to fill it."

"You will see," Ivan said, sounding more confident with himself. "I have faith."

#### 14.

*December 6, 1822*

*I must say that this Ivan Kriukov, a man of some years, both in age and in experience, vexes me. He is, on the one count, a delightful man, full of sea stories and tales of the Alyeshkan wilderness. His knowledge of all things related to the Russian-American Company is, to say the least, extensive. He seems to know not only the politics behind the company's development, but also the personal motivations of the principal players. One can only assume that his accounts, detailed as they are, come from first-hand knowledge.*

*He has become, in the month that I have known him, somewhat of a friend, and I look forward to his daily visits. More than any other parishioner, he is a presence in the church. He has come to me for confession, yet I have been unable to rid myself of the feeling that there is more to his confessions than his own past. I believe that all things happen for a purpose, but Ivan's purpose, so clear in its intent, seems implausible to me. I do admit that I am intrigued with the idea of traveling to this land so richly described to me by this man, but the task seems impossible. I could not ever bear subjecting my family to such strenuous life. We are so comfortable here that I find it almost cruel to think of uprooting them.*

*I know that God is no cruel Master, and I know, too, that no task would be laid before my feet if I were not given faith and strength enough to meet it, but I am troubled that perhaps there is some prescience to Ivan's words, and to his ideas. He speaks with such great conviction that I am moved by it. I am guilty, too, of taking pleasure in the man's tales. I know that I serve the Church, and must take all confessions seriously. But hearing Ivan Kriukov tell of Alyeshka, the passion with which he pleads for me to go to this frontier to bring the Word of God, is compelling. And the content of his tales is far more interesting than I am used to in Irkutsk. All I can do is pray for strength and guidance. Ivan is right in saying that if it be God's will, then a way will be made. I must remind myself to not be an hindrance to the will of God.*

*I will endeavor to be a good and faithful servant.*

—Ivan Veniaminov

15.

Before Father Veniaminov continued the ongoing discussions with Ivan at the church, and before the priest was able to pay an unexpected call upon the Kriukov household, Ivan sent an invitation for tea, which in Siberian culture is often considered more important than dinner. Veniaminov accepted the invitation, but it being the latter part of December, began second-guessing that acceptance along the snow-covered trail to Kriukov's house in the woods.

Veniaminov warmed himself with thoughts of Lake Baikal during the summer, when the air is blackened with enormous flocks of teal and the waters are filled with fishermen and their vast catches of omul. He imagined the stream he crosses as fast-flowing and soothingly loud, rather than frozen in a perfect cast of motion, as if the water had been caught unaware of the air's winter bite. Along the sides of the trail he pictured the plentiful pink cosmos, like so many lavender daisies twisting lightly under the sun, and in place of the earth's white blanket, he envisioned little more than poplar fluff coating the ground like an unexpected snow.

By the time he reached Ivan's house, however, the conjured images of a season still six months in the offing had done little to warm the physical body, and Veniaminov's extremities were numb. The house was warm, even on the outside— Baroque platbands spanned by intricate volutes and decorated with carved bouquets, darkened carved tulips over the windows and fans and sunbeams adorning the shutters on the sturdy exterior of



the squat house. The thin curl of smoke plumed through the snow-laden cedar branches, and already the smell of meat-filled pastries wafted to the priest.

Kriukov greeted Father Veniaminov at the door before the priest even knocked, the latter thinking he had never seen the old mariner smile so broadly.

"It's a lovely home," Veniaminov said.

"It's old and sturdy, which is more a comfort than beauty on a day like today.

Come in, come in!"

Veniaminov entered and took a moment to shed his frost-encrusted outer garments, commenting on the craftsmanship of the woodwork both inside and outside of the house.

"Forty-two years, I better have learned to be useful with my tools by now," Ivan said, and Veniaminov found the other's laughter contagious.

"I've been writing in my journal about you."

Veniaminov had grown accustomed to this precursive discourse between he and Ivan. The other always worrying something, in this instance a cup and saucer for tea, with his rough and weathered fingers, the wrinkles on his forehead grouping into a topography of years.

The two men sat and ate while Ivan's wife busied herself away from the conversation. In the samovar on the table between the two men, the tea was already steeped and fragrant, and when they had eaten, Veniaminov took a moment to bless the tea before righting his cup and accepting the first draught. There was little sugar at that time of year, so Ivan offered Chinese hard candies for sweetener.

For the first cup, neither man said much: comments on the temperatures and musings on the seasonal changes. When Veniaminov finished his cup, he turned it upside down on his saucer and replaced it on the table before setting a candy atop the overturned cup.

"You'll want another," Ivan said.

"No, thank you. I've had more than enough."

"Please, go ahead, take another."

"Perhaps later," Veniaminov said.

Kriukov nodded, the familiarity of the tea customs comforting the nervousness and delight he felt at having the priest in his home.

"It feels out of sorts to not be talking to you in church, Father."

"I think that church is wherever you choose to make it."

Kriukov smiled again and clapped his hands, childlike. "Wonderful," he said.

"Simply wonderful to have you here, then. What are we talking about today?"

It was Veniaminov's turn now to laugh. "Is there ever any doubt?"

"No, I suppose there is little change there. Perhaps someday there will be a difference in how the conversation ends, no?" Ivan gave a caricaturish mock of Veniaminov's raised-brow expression, which brought more laughter to the men.

"You'll have more tea," Kriukov said, and Veniaminov did not protest. The two spent the afternoon covering what was already familiar territory to the both of them, yet Veniaminov felt there was more to the discussion on that particular day.

"Is there something more on your mind?"

"Not for me, no," Ivan said. "It's the knowledge that I have of the company; of certain men in the company."

"Such as?"

Ivan took a long, slow sip from his cup of tea and smacked his lips in appreciation. He knotted his brow in concentration and closed his eyes, as if the words he wished to speak might be printed on the insides of the lids. "We have a strange sort of presence there."

"In Alyeshka."

"Alyeshka, yes. On the one hand, there are people like myself—forgive me, Father, for sounding too proud—who are honest and work hard and treat people the way we want to be treated. But there are castes there, really, much like here."

"I see."

"I hope you do, but it's difficult for me to explain. There are castes of— of attitudes there. Alexander Baranov, for instance. He's too complex for me to describe, but what is important is that he made mistakes as all men do."

"Whether they are aware of it or not."

"Yes. Yes, awareness. That's what matters, no? Baranov was a difficult man sometimes, but he did learn. He did things wrong and it cost him, but he learned and changed what he was doing. He saw how insulting the lash was to the Aleuts, so he ordered his men to stop the practice, you see? He was in New Archangel when the Tlingit rose up and slaughtered the garrison, and he took it back with only a hundred or so men, and there's been a harmony there since. You see, he learned."

"Yes, Ivan. I do understand." Veniaminov wanted Ivan to realize that his message was not as muddled as perhaps he thought it in his mind, but the priest was powerless to keep the animation from Ivan's voice, or his legs, which worked themselves in anxious bouncing. Veniaminov knew that Ivan had thought long about sharing these details and he gave him as much space as he could. *Time*, he thought. *All things in his own time.*

## 16.

"Building a legacy can never be a positive motive for action." Veniaminov began to understand that what Ivan truly was searching for was how to interpret the kinds of men for whom he worked all those years; that interpretation being key to Ivan's own piece of mind. It is, after all, the working class who bears the scars of others' ambitions.

"Resanov was that and more," Ivan said. "The things this man would do, and all so that he could be remembered as a 'great man.' He'd award medals to native workers, then take them away when they died to give them, again, to someone else. It was like a curse to know that man. And who reaps his legacy?"

"Ivan, you cannot concern yourself with what seems like an unfair memory. This Resanov is of no concern of yours."

"Insofar that his legacy impacts on my own, I worry about it. I just wanted to do good, Father. I still want that. But who am I against such ambition. He was never loved, and was barely liked by the few associates he had, yet in his death he has set up the machine to remember him differently than he lived."

Veniaminov paused before speaking, shaking his head slightly as he bowed it. He could not help being amused at the frequency with which he referred to time, yet he found himself incapable of finding a more appropriate statement in this instance, though it might be considered a bromide. "Time will reveal the truth, Ivan. You must believe that."

"I believe that you can make a difference."

"Of course I can. I am doing so now. Just as you can, and you are. We are all part of—"

"That's not what I mean, Father. You can make a real difference there, I know it. There are too few committed priests there; too few good man. Your impact would be remembered for—"

Veniaminov stopped his friend with an upturned hand, gesturing with a lighthearted smile that the point has already been made. "You are arguing now for what you argued against. If anyone goes to Alyeshka, it will be of God's will, not for some personal desire to build a legacy."

"And what, exactly, is a legacy, Father?"

For all their talk on the subject, Veniaminov was surprised by the question, it being obvious and obfuscated both. On the surface, it remained a superficial word with a simple meaning. What was complicated was not the meaning of the word, but the question implied in asking for a definition. It was the achieving of a legacy, particularly one of a preconceived notion, that caused difficulty.

"Perhaps it is better to say what it is not," Veniaminov said. "It is not the fulfillment of an ambition. It is not something that should be pursued for selfish reasons. Indeed, it is not something that should be pursued at all. A legacy cannot be caught, or bought, or manufactured. A legacy is built without an awareness of it. You are building your legacy here and now, with your words, with your actions, just as I am building mine. We cannot know what we will be remembered for, if anything. And we cannot allow it to bother us."

"And for those who do?"

"Then the loss is theirs, because they will miss the opportunity of living a good life in service to others. There can be no greater legacy than being a person who was loved for giving love."

Ivan nodded his head and beamed, his cheeks rosy with the glow of the warm tea and his own satisfaction at such an expression. "It is a wonderful message."

Veniaminov nodded through his smile and said that, indeed, the message was a worthy one, and that perhaps he would find a way to work it into his homily sometime. "It is not the fact that we are all going to die that should concern us. It should concern us how we conduct ourselves during our lives. How well we live this life and fulfill what we were crafted to achieve—that is what determines our legacy, Ivan. I am my father's legacy. You are your father's legacy. We carry on when others cannot, so that those others are not forgotten."

"You, then, Father, are a worthy legacy." Ivan finished his cup and stood to walk Veniaminov to the door. "You count yourself short, though, Father. You will bear the legacy of countless souls before all is said and done."

"There is no need to start—"

"Faith, Father. Have faith and you will see."

## 17.

In purest hindsight, it seems perfectly logical that Ivan Veniaminov would accept the challenges, arduous though they were, in moving himself and his family to the Russian holdings in the Americas. He is remembered for his zeal, and his ability to articulate his faith in such a way that it seems personal to each person hearing it. He, too, is remembered as a compassionate man, full of love and patience, who made many great allies in his day, in the sense that allies were then lifelong friends. He is spoken of highly by all nationalities, in ship logs from visiting captains of the British Empire, from sailors aboard American vessels, by native Alaskans who found in Veniaminov not an oppressor, but a confidante and friend, who allowed them to come to faith, when they did, of their own volitions and in their own times.

Yet at the time Ivan Kriukov sat with Veniaminov over the period of a handful of months in that early winter of 1822, there was no benefit of hindsight. And although Veniaminov's faith was strong and sure, and his presence throughout his parish of the Church of the Annunciation ubiquitous, the true zeal of the day belonged to the old voyager who worked so long, and so hard, in the service of the Russian-American

Company. He felt in his heart that Veniaminov was exactly the kind of man needed in America: strong, sturdy, commanding, patient, and independent. He felt that the church's presence there was weak, and that the need for the church was strong. In his four decades of service, he had never come across a more towering figure, within either the church or the secular world, than Ivan Veniaminov, his Father Confessor.

Well and good that Ivan Kriukov understood the need in the Americas, and had a prescient vision of Veniaminov filling that need. It is never difficult to have a belief. The difficulty lies in convincing others that your belief is correct. So the playful banter, for all its implications and serious undertones, bounced back and forth between the two like sport: Ivan Kriukov lobbying for the needs of the people in Alaska, both native and Russian; and Father Veniaminov volleying each intimation with a reminder of his duties in Irkutsk, of the trials such a move would surely place upon his family, of his infant daughter, of his aging mother, of the needs of his parish. All valid reasons, but Ivan Kriukov saw the small crack in the priests defenses and he knew that there was some desire to experience such an adventure, to undertake what on the outside seems like such an impossible task. And the talk continued, whenever they were together, each trying to convince the other to listen to the logic of his argument.

It was the arguments, themselves, that were lost to history —what, exactly, Father Veniaminov must have said each time Ivan Kriukov mentioned Alyeshka. No one from the priesthood in Irkutsk, Siberia, or any other part of Russia, truly desired to go to the American frontier. The reputation of that area was of a wild, untamed place, where only the criminal and drunken classes managed assignment. Frequently, there were native



uprisings, one of which, for a short while, put control of New Archangel, Alaska (Sitka) back into the hands of the Tlingit. Certainly not a place for a man, no matter how sturdy or just he might have been, to begin his life's work.

Yet Ivan Kriukov must have been persuasive. He must have known Veniaminov exceedingly well and become a mighty friend in the four months the two men interacted. Ivan Kriukov is a worldly man, but with an abiding faith in his cause. He is a devout man who has seen the best and worst in men, and surely he sees the best in Veniaminov and is observant enough to understand what appeals to a man with such unobscured potential.

To begin with, there is the issue of Aleut zeal to hear and know the teachings of the church. Certainly an argument can be made, especially in light of the experiences of other missionary works in other parts of the world and from other faiths, that any representation of native "zeal" is, perhaps, an overstatement. But the fact remains that the Russian Orthodox Church, more than any other denomination in the world, left a legacy of kindness and patience and respect for the beliefs of others. It ministered in practical ways, and through those practical ways made converts of much of the population. Russia had been a permanent presence in the Alyeshkan territories for more than 50 years, and while there surely were instances of cruelty and oppression, its legacy, by and large, is a positive one. And it is highly likely that there was a population of native Alaskans and Creoles who did desire a stronger church presence, and that desire could easily be translated into zeal. What is certain is that no one had ever treated the Native Alaskan population as equal in class, other than the church, and that was far from certain.

Veniaminov, with his skill in learning language and his methodical, almost scientific approach to ministry, could certainly effect positive change in the territories.

Not all priests of the Orthodoxy were ineffectual. Indeed, there were some, such as Herman of the Woods, who would go on to become Saint Herman, garnered such an enormous reputation that he is still spoken of with reverence and fondness even to this day. He, and a few others like him, saw in the Aleutian Islands, a people desperate for understanding and compassion from their Russian controllers. But the majority of priests, unlike Herman, did not leave much in the way of positive contributions. The history of the Russian Orthodox Church, prior to the stories of emerging figures like Herman and Veniaminov, had an often sad reputation. There are tales of ship captains being displeased with the drunken ways of their chaplains. Of district managers pleading for a stronger presence to replace their unskilled, or oftentimes inadequate, clergy. Clergymen are fired from their positions and deemed fit only to minister to the garden, and even that, in some cases, seems too large a task. Surely Ivan Kriukov could have spoken of these types of men, and of how he thought Veniaminov might be able to usher in a new kind of presence there, how someone of his standing and stature could engender respect in not only the parishioners, but also the fellow clergy.

And while Veniaminov was an extremely faithful man and served the church for all his days, just as his father had served as sacristan in St. Elias church in Irkutsk, the same church where grandfather had served as priest, the church was not the only interest in Veniaminov's life. Indeed, his thirst for knowledge in the worlds of science and nature, surely, too, must have been a strong cornerstone of Ivan Kriukov's persuasion. No one

had ever tended to any serious study of the Alyeshkan holdings. Things like daily meteorological data had not been of any particular concern: depth soundings, water temperatures, air temperatures, barometric readings, wind speeds and direction, flora and fauna. Alyeshka had been seen only through the eyes of commerce: money in the form of fur from sea otter, fox, seal; whaling operations. It was a landscape in which Veniaminov could thrive both theologically and scientifically.

And in what might have been the most pleasant realization of all, there was a need for skilled labor in Alyeshka. The towns and hunting counters were hastily cobbled together by inexpert hands. What skilled laborers were to be found, such as carpenters and blacksmiths, were dedicated to keeping the ships intact and the hunting equipment in top working order. As with most everything else in the territories at that time, skilled labor was geared toward commerce and keeping the wheels of such industry turning in the right direction. For Veniaminov, who so enjoyed working with his hands, Alyeshka represents a place in which the skills he learned from his uncle—woodworking, blacksmithing, stonemasonry, and others—could be passed on to other eager apprentices. He could minister to the needs of the theological spirit and human spirit at once. Not only could he show how valuable each person is in God's eyes, but he could then show them how they could make the best use of the skills he could teach, instilling in them a sense of self-worth that is, perhaps, just as important in shaping a man's character.

Ivan Kriukov would have known all of these arguments and more, and Veniaminov, undoubtedly would have listened to his friend and, at times, denied whatever appeal he might have found in them. And, most importantly in dissuading the

old seaman, Veniaminov could simply point out the fact that even if he wanted to go to Alyeshka, there was no provision from the Holy Synod to allow such an undertaking.

## 18.

Incense creates a purposeful smoke. Veniaminov was alone in the church, which was a rarity, and he found himself studying a small cone of incense as it smoldered in its burner. Usually, there was such activity around such an offering that the oily curl was disturbed, but in the quiet of solitude, the smoke moved where it wished. Veniaminov found himself mesmerized by this seeming sentience and intent.

It did not immediately curl up from the cone. Instead, it lifted off in a spire, a long thin stream of smoke headed directly upward. It was only when the column reached more than a foot above its source that it dissipated into a ribbon of rippling transparencies. It folded, as it were, and split from that single source and left in directions that seemed to him arbitrary and purposeless. Yet they shared such a purposeful beginning, and he found himself thinking that somewhere in that column of smoke was a riddle, or perhaps an answer to a riddle. He was unsure of which, but he was sure that the Archbishop of Irkutsk had visited with the news that the Holy Synod had approved the sending of one priest to Alyeshka, which left him with a jumble of emotions to contemplate the meaning of a single blue column of smoke.

"I hope I am not interrupting a reverie, Father." Ivan Kriukov always worried that he might be interrupting the priest, which made almost all of his introductions softly spoken, often little more than a whisper.

"Indeed not, Ivan. Come in. There is always time for friends."

The two men sat in a small room Veniaminov used for studying for and preparing his homilies. Veniaminov couldn't help noticing how the smoke from the incense, as Ivan passed, swung wildly into a chaotic swirl about its conical source, and he thought that perhaps he might come to understand it yet. "What brings you here today, my friend?"

"I have been thinking of you and what we have been discussing, and I thought we might continue."

Veniaminov laughed, realizing that Ivan could not yet know of the Archbishop's news. "I must say that you have impeccable timing, Ivan. The Archbishop was here not an hour ago to tell me that the Holy Synod has, indeed, ordered that someone from our diocese journey to Alyeshka to minister to the needs of the church there."

"You are going then. See? I told you it would—"

"I'm not going anywhere, Ivan." At Veniaminov's sharing of the Archbishop's news, Ivan had almost leapt for joy, but the gravity in Veniaminov's tone and the way he held his hand motionless in front of him, fingers together, palm upward as if to stop some force hurtling toward it, served to stop whatever celebratory mood into which Ivan might have been about to erupt. "There is much to consider, and I am not, I am sure, the best candidate for such a position."

"How can you say such things? I have been there, and I know better than any how your presence there would benefit everyone. I see that. Surely you have to see that now, too. God is making a way."

"God is making a way for someone, yes. But I have not felt that particular calling yet. It may be, Ivan, that God is preparing the way for someone else. There is much to be considered."

"What else is there to consider, Father? I have told you that you would be most welcome there and that you would have an immeasurable impact, and you have doubted and not believed that I could be telling the truth. Now this. Now these words from the Holy Synod and you cannot tell me that there is anything but Divine providence at work."

Veniaminov returned his gaze to the column of smoke from the incense. It had settled down again and resumed its own path. "I have been watching this smoke now for some time, and I find that I am amazed by it."

The incense sat between them, quietly going about its business of scenting the room with Myrrh. "I don't understand," Ivan finally said.

"Neither do I," Veniaminov said. "That's what makes it beautiful. I don't know if the smoke is the question or the answer, but I know that it is being influenced by outside forces. When left to its own devices, it seems to be able to decide exactly when is the best moment to disperse itself through the room. Until that time, though, it keeps its own company. It is, I think, the most serene thing I have ever seen, and I think there is a lesson there for me today."

"Perhaps there is a lesson there for all of us, everyday," Ivan said.

"You are a good friend, Ivan. I know you want only what is best, and I hope you understand that although I may have some small desire to go, I cannot say yet with any

certainty that it is the best thing for me to do. I cannot know yet that it is the best thing for my family. I cannot say yet that it is God's will."

"Perhaps I should leave you for now," Ivan said. "I did not mean to interrupt—"

"You have never interrupted me. I welcome each visit with you, and you have done more for the cause of Alyeshka than you know. Now you must have faith that whatever seed you have planted will grow. Someone will go to your beloved frontier, Ivan. And whoever that someone is, he will be God's servant. Have faith in that."

"I do have faith in that, Father." Ivan stood and moved to the door. As he walked, the smoke followed him across the room. "And I have faith in you, too, even if you do not. I will pray for you, Father."

Veniaminov nodded to his friend and smiled slightly. "I think prayer is very much in order."

## 19.

In their home, Ekaterina prayed for her family and for her husband. It is said that marriage is a union, and in the case of Ekaterina and Ivan Veniaminov, the observation was accurate, indeed. The daughter of a priest, she, perhaps more than anyone, understood her husband and the enormous weight of seeing to the spiritual welfare of so many people. Even for so young a priest, the expectation of responsibility was enormous, and she prayed throughout the day that God would guide his every step.

When he told her of the Archbishop's news, she understood his desire to go, and as well as why he was hesitant, and she was alarmed that she might be the cause of hindering him in his duties to the church.

"Let me help you," she said.

"There is nothing for you to do."

"But there is, my Love. You need permission."

"Permission?"

"Permission to be who God has intended you to be."

"And who can permit that for me?"

The two adjourned to the kitchen, where the large iron stove and baking bread warmed the room. "Eat," she told him, tearing a large piece of bread from a loaf made earlier and passing it on a plate with a bowl of soup across the table to her husband. She served herself, too, and he blessed the meal. In the other room, they heard their son, Innokentii, move once in that fitful way of infant sleep, then return to his resting. The two of them ate in relative silence and resumed their conversation when they finished.

"I need to say something to you," she said.

He looked quietly at her, not sure of what she would say. He shared little of his feelings about his discussions with Ivan, and he had not intended to broach the subject at all until today, when circumstances warranted a true discussion. "I value you," he said. "I value your opinion."

"Then I pray that you will hear me out and listen to what I have to say."



Veniaminov folded his hands together and rested them on the table. He regarded her warmly and encouraged her to continue without even saying a word.

"Do you realize how much I love you?" she asked.

"I cannot know," he said. "I can only hope it is as much as my love for you."

"Then you know there is nothing I would not do for you. I know that marrying me and having this family has been a hindrance to your career. And—"

"Ekaterina, please. You—"

"No, please. Let me finish. I know you do not see us as a burden, but I can see how we have been a stumbling block for you. I cannot live with myself knowing that I am keeping you from your calling. You have a gift. You have a gift that perhaps you are only mildly aware of, but I see it. And so does everyone else. And you have an opportunity here, to go to this land where no one else wants to go, and you can do great things for God there. You can do great things for yourself. I want you to make this decision without thought for me, or for this family. You must make this decision in your own heart."

"I have already done so, Ekaterina. Surely you must know that."

"Must I?" She kept her voice low, but the agitation was evident. It was not anger or insult creeping into her voice, but passion.

And the concern reflected in her eyes was touching to Veniaminov. He saw in her a conviction he had not expected to see, and he thought perhaps he has not credited her with enough strength, with enough fortitude, and he saw that he miscalculated his wife's resolve. "I want to do what is best for this family, that is all."

"Then pray, Ivan, for God to show you what to do. But do not use me, or this family, as an excuse to shy away from your duties."

"We are comfortable here. This is our home."

"Promise me that you will not use us as an excuse to stay."

"Ekaterina, please."

"Have you already done so? Have you already said you cannot go because of me?"

"Not in those words, no."

"But in that spirit?"

Veniaminov knew the error in his thinking. He assumed her response for her, instead of giving her an equal say in the matter, and because of that assumption, made Ekaterina feel that she was to blame for his responses thus far to Ivan Kriukov's exhortations. "Yes. I'm sorry to say that I have."

Ekaterina was a strong woman, used to hardship and sacrifice, and while she was not ashamed of emotion, she knew that there were times when showing tears was not a sign of strength, so she pushed them away now, collecting her breath before she continued. "You have already sacrificed for me. Don't think I am not aware of that."

"Ekaterina."

She held up her own hand—just as Veniaminov held up his hand to steady his earlier enthusiasm—and he recognized the gesture as hers, something borrowed, and as she spoke he found that she was a larger part of him than perhaps he realized up to that point.

"They had plans for you. Moscow and the Academy there. And I know that they are disappointed that you married. It freezes you here. And I know you are loved here. I see you and how the parishioners love you. They respect you. Even revere you. But 'comfort' is not a word that is usually associated with service to God. If hardship is called for, then I can handle hardship as well as you. You are not a man for comfort, Ivan. You are a man for action. And as long as you stay here and live your comfortable life, happy though we may be, there will be a part of you that remains unfulfilled, and that part will belong to me. It will be my doing, and I won't have that."

"What would you have me do then?"

"I would have you think about what it is you are saying, and what it is you are truly considering. This opportunity is not about us. It is not about our comfort. It is about a calling from God. What I ask is that you consider all the possibilities and reasons why it is so important. If you answer this call and you go to Alyeshka, you will do great things for God, I know it. And you will also do great things for yourself. I know this, too. I want you to be able to succeed. And as things stand now, you cannot succeed, you cannot meet your potential, for the simple fact that I am here and you are my husband. This opportunity is a blessing, Ivan. Please see it as such."

## 20.

Meetings with Archbishop Mikhail were not rare for Father Veniaminov. In a short time, despite being a young priest, he had made quite the impact on his parish and in the eyes

of the church officials in Irkutsk. But while visiting the Archbishop was not uncommon, this is the first in which he finds himself in the Archbishop's personal living room.

"Thank you, Most Reverend. You honor me with this invitation." Veniaminov finds, much to his surprise, that he is nervous.

"I trust you are well, Father Veniaminov?"

"Yes, Most Reverend. Thank you."

"And you have come to see me today because..."

"Surely Most Reverend knows why I would come."

"Indeed, I do. But I'd like to hear it from you."

"Of course, Most Reverend. I come to inquire about the position in Alyeshka."

"And you wish to go, I take it?"

"I do not know that my wishes are what matter in such a decision, Most Reverend, but God's will be done."

"I see. Are you choosing to volunteer, then?"

Veniaminov hesitated. He was not sure that volunteering was what he had come to do. He secluded himself the night prior, spending the long hours in prayer and meditation. He had hoped for some clear sign, some way of discerning with some precision the will of God. When morning dawned and he felt no surer of his course of action, he could not help laughing that he would be so presumptuous as to assume that God would manifest some sign. He then prayed for clarity of thought, and he prayed, too, that he would have the words when he met with the Archbishop. Now that he was in his presence, he found that he was not adverse to volunteering for the position of the

Alyeshka mission, but he could not bring his lips to form the words. He was still hearing the words of Ivan Kriukov, whom he had seen just prior to speaking with the Archbishop, and for the first time, the other's pleas for a good and faithful servant to tend to the needs of the Aleut, and to all peoples in the Russian holdings in America, had resonated in a way unlike prior encounters.

"Perhaps a walk with me would do you some good."

"Yes, Most Reverend."

The two men walked through the hall of the Archbishop's home, neither man speaking until the Archbishop stopped to look out the window at the light snowfall blanketing the inner courtyard.

"Amazing, is it not?"

"It is beautiful, Most Reverend."

"But what amazes is not the beauty, but the collection of it. We look outside and see the whole. We do not see the individual flake. Think of how we refer to what we see. It is a blanket. It is a rug. It is a covering of snow. We do not see billions of tiny flakes linked together. Only the whole."

"Much the same can be said for the Church, can it not?"

"Of course, and it can also be said of the man within the church."

Veniaminov felt hesitant with the course of the conversation. He was staring again into the curl of incense smoke in his tiny pastoral study, the Archbishop's musings on snowfall much the same: riddle and answer both.

"I have quite a decision to make," the Archbishop said. "Not only must I find a willing soul, difficult considering the counseling many have received against accepting such an assignment, but I must also worry about the parish from which I will choose the candidate. I must think about the people to which I am about to send a minister. I must worry about the perception and appearance of the Church, and for that, I must judge the man whom I send."

"I am not, perhaps, the ideal person for the position," Veniaminov said. "I know that. I am not sure that I even feel called to go, but I know that with such an ordination from the Holy Synod, my name is not an unlikely topic of conversation."

"Perhaps, Father Veniaminov. Then again, perhaps not. There are many here who feel you are not the right person for the position because you are married."

"Which is not uncommon in the priesthood."

The Archbishop waved a dismissive gesture. "True. True. Then again, you were a promising candidate for the Academy in Moscow. Many of your elders had lofty expectations for you and your career; a career which now, it would by all outward appearances, be stalled at its current level."

"I know I ask much."

"Do you? I wasn't aware you had asked anything."

Veniaminov realized in that moment that he had found his answer. That indeed, although he had not asked specifically for the Archbishop's blessing for the mission to Alyeshka, he wanted it. He heard in those anxious moments the voice of old Ivan Kriukov talking all those weeks and months of the territory in the Americas. He heard the

tales of people needing a strong church presence, and he wanted to fight for that opportunity. He wanted to defend himself against whatever drawbacks the Archbishop, or any member of the church, might use to keep him from this opportunity.

"I do wish to go, Most Reverend." Veniaminov spoke the words confidently, and voicing them seemed as if he had grown lighter, the decision no longer his to make, but the Archbishop's.

And the Archbishop did stop at the proclamation and turn to study the priest for any hint of doubt. "You have been one of the most outspoken opponents of this mission. Why do you wish to go?"

"I have a man in my parish, Most Reverend. Ivan Kriukov. He has worked for the Russian-American Company for more than 40 years, and he speaks with such passion and eloquence of the Aleuts there, their hunger to hear the word of God. I know that I can deliver it to them. I am patient, Most Reverend, and I can endure whatever hardships might befall me."

"And befall your family?"

"I have faith, Most Reverend. If it be God's will, then my family will be protected, just as I will be protected."

"There will be those who would disagree with me. They will say you have abandoned your potential. They will say that you will be burdened by your family, and that you will be no more effective than some of the other priests who have gone into this wilderness. What am I to say to them?"

"Say to them that I was favored once. I pray that they can recall what it was in me, the attributes I displayed while under their tutelage, that persuaded them that I had so much potential. Surely this opportunity satisfies everyone involved."

"Surely?"

"For those who think me still a man of potential, then Alyeshka provides a landscape, both physical and spiritual, to test me of that potential. And for those who feel I have squandered my abilities, then they can look upon Alyeshka as my exile. But the eyes of men are not important here, now. I pray only for God's will to be done. If He finds me worthy, then I pray that He will lay it upon your heart to send me hence."

"I ask you again, Father Veniaminov: why do you wish to go?"

"To do—"

"—God's will, yes. But why do *you* wish to go? What goals do you have in going? What legacy can you build for yourself there that you cannot build here?"

"Only that I am a man who heard God once, and who did His bidding. Either here or in Alyeshka, I only want to be recognized by God as a good and faithful servant. Surely there can be no greater legacy."

The two men left the window and the whispering snowfall, walking in silence for some time before the two of them returned to the Archbishop's chambers. "It has been a pleasure, Father Veniaminov. I hope you will call on me again in the future."

"Thank you, Most Reverend. And I hope to hear from you soon on the matter of Alyeshka."

"Yes." The Archbishop said. "We shall see."



21.

*God's will for me was manifested foremost in my transfer from Irkutsk to Unalashka, that is, to America. I was consecrated deacon on 13 May 1817 and priest on 18 May 1821 in the same church where I served until my departure for America. The visitor from Unalashka was, indeed, the apparent cause of my move to America. But it was not that his tales enchanted me personally.*

*This American visitor, a certain Ivan Kriukov, who had lived among the Aleuts for 40 years, stopped in our parish when he arrived in Irkutsk. He lived there from November almost to the middle of February. I was his spiritual advisor, as well as his entire family's, and therefore came to know him quite well. Yes, he told me very much, indeed, about America in general, and Aleuts in particular, and urged me by all possible means to go to Unalashka. But I was deaf to his stories and none of his arguments touched me.*

*To look at it realistically, from the human point of view, why should I go to God-knows-where when I was serving in one of the best parishes in the city, was respected by parishioners and even loved by them, under the eye of and in good standing with my superiors, had my own house, and income higher than the salary offered at Unalashka?*

*For these reasons, when by order of the late Archbishop Mikhail all priests in the diocese were being asked if they wished to go to Unalashka, and if they did not wish to do so, for what reasons, I was among those who signed stating that I did not wish to go to*

*such a remote place. I wrote this in all sincerity, thinking that if our widows living only ten versts away from the authorities are left destitute (there was no charity organization to care for them at that time), what would happen ten thousand versts away? So I thought, and so I counseled my brethren.*

*But then, this same American visitor, who was urging me to go to Unalashka even as he bid me final farewell (I remember this vividly), on that same day, taking leave from the Archbishop (in whose living room I happened to be on this occasion for the first time), right then he began to speak about the Aleuts' zeal for prayer and for listening to the Word of God. I had doubtless heard this from him before and probably not only once. Then, and Glory to the Lord's Name! – suddenly, one may say, with my entire being, I became aflame with the desire to go to such people. I vividly remember even now my impatience waiting for the minute when I could declare my wish to the Archbishop. He was surprised, and said only: "we shall see."*

*How, in view of this, with any justice, can I take credit for that, or consider it a remarkable deed that I went to America?*

But go to America Veniaminov did, and it is remarkable despite what he would come to say years later, with the benefit of hindsight. For in that time, it was not Father Veniaminov alone who would journey to Alyeshka, but also his pregnant wife, Ekaterina, their son Innokentii, and Veniaminov's aged mother. The journey from Irkutsk to Unalashka was more than arduous, with several legs covered on foot, then by reindeer sleigh, then on horseback, before reaching the port city of Ohkotsk. From there, they

would sail across the north Pacific, a difficult journey under the best conditions, before reaching New Archangel on the mainland coast.

For these reasons alone it is a remarkable deed that he went to America, made all the more remarkable for not knowing what awaited them in that frontier. The willingness to travel is a testament to his character, which is the legacy of a lifetime of adversity and challenges overcome. Every event, whether it is known at the time or not, is preparation for some other event to come. For Veniaminov, who was born and raised in poverty, 25 years of struggle had prepared him for the opportunity to journey to Alyeshka and whatever hardships that landscape might hold.

22.

*New Archangel*

*Sitka Island, Alyeshka*

*October 21, 1823*

The entire journey took nearly five full months, the group having left Irkutsk on the ninth of May the same year, and departing from Ohkotsk for Sitka on August 20<sup>th</sup>. For Ekaterina, the timing could not have been worse, being, as she was, already into her second trimester upon their departure from Siberia's interior. And although the port of Sitka was sighted the day prior to the group putting ashore, rough weather had prevented the Russian-American Company sloop *Velikii Kniaz' Konstantin* from attempting a mooring. That extra day proved fateful for Ekaterina, who went into labor and delivered her first

surviving daughter, Ekaterina, while riding out the storm at sea. It was Ekaterina's fifth child with Father Veniaminov, but three had died shortly after birth, and only Innokentii, barely a toddler, himself, had lived to make the journey to Alyeshka. The presence of Veniaminov's mother, Fekla, was perhaps the greatest blessing for Ekaterina, the elder woman acting as midwife and caretaker for the children throughout their stay in Alyeshka.

For Veniaminov, the birth of his daughter was yet another reminder of how difficult things would be as a priest in these territories. He would be under great demand by the church, with many of the priests ineffectual and the church buildings themselves fallen into a sad state of disrepair. He would also be pressed into service as a craftsman and teacher. The local population was sorely skilled in all but hunting and fishing, and the monies available to the priest were too short to afford much in the way of constructing new buildings or furnishings. And from below decks, the cries of his newborn son served to call him back to his family, too. His duties as a father and a husband would be just as demanding as any of the myriad other activities demanding his attention.

Standing on the wet boards of the *Konstantin* deck, Veniaminov rode the swells easily. And though prone to seasickness, he felt remarkably well, choosing to be invigorated by the experience, by the scope of the unknown, rather than pulled down by it. He was buoyant like the ship beneath him, built to ride out the rains and the winds. He looked to the spruce-lined shore beyond the deep, black waters a moment longer before

returning below-decks, to the makeshift quarters the crew has prepared for him and his family.

Ekaterina fed the infant as Fekla entertains the elder brother. Veniaminov put his hands on the heavy beam crossing overhead and he supported his weight thus, his body leaning forward slightly, his head erect, his dark beard dripping water down his black robes. "My family," he whispered.

Ekaterina looked up from the newborn. "You'll catch cold if you don't dry yourself."

He waved her off. "I am fine. God would not bring us this far to have me die of cold."

"Don't tempt Him," Fekla said with a wagging finger. "Such pride. Such pride."

Veniaminov laughed and ran his fingers through his beard, pulling the beaded water out to fall in a tiny rain shower, a shadow of the outside world, on the deck below his feet. "It is an awesome land. Even the settlement seems temporary on the shores."

"You should rest," Ekaterina said. "You are too excited and have been outside for too long. There will be time enough to work tomorrow."

Father Veniaminov had been assigned, through the Diocese of Irkutsk, to Unalashka as its parish priest, but by the time the *Konstantin* had finally arrived in New Archangel, the navigation season had ended because of the notoriously severe winter weather in that area. While Veniaminov was disappointed in not being able to continue immediately to his new assignment, the wintering at New Archangel provided an

opportunity for Veniaminov to better understand not only the theological workings of the Russian territories in Alyeshka, but also the politics.

Waiting for Father Veniaminov and his family as they disembarked was Father Aleksei Petrovich Sokolov, and although Veniaminov had hoped the stories of weak clergy were exaggerated, this first meeting did little to inspire the younger priest to hope any further. Sokolov would be described some years later by the Chief Manager of the Russian-American Company, F.P. Wrangell, as a "mild man, soft-hearted, of extreme negligence and remarkable unconcern. ... Also he is addicted to the use of strong spirits and therefore cannot carry out his duties as pastor." Thus, Veniaminov was introduced to the Russian Orthodox presence in Sitka.

On the administrative side, Veniaminov was greeted by Matvei Murav'ev, only the third Chief Manager of the Russian-American Company. It was Murav'ev who had begun undoing many of the wrongs perpetrated by Alexander Baranov, who had founded New Archangel early in 1799 (by taking over the Kolosh, or Tlingit, village of Sitka) and who had been the overseer of all things Russian-American Company for nearly 28 years. Murav'ev had invited the neighboring Tlingit peoples to move back onto their ancestral lands surrounding the garrison at New Archangel, which under Baranov they had been forced to surrender in 1804 after a rebellion pushed the Russians back out to sea. And while natives were not allowed inside the garrison after sunset and the streets were patrolled by armed guards, the relationship between the Russians and the Tlingit had greatly stabilized under Murav'ev's direction.

The Russian Orthodox Church was not an evangelical church at the time, and the priests not trained as missionaries, so Veniaminov, once settled in to a winter house in Sitka, turned to working under Father Sokolov ministering to the faithful among the Russian population, Creoles, and those natives who had converted to orthodoxy and adopted Russian names. The stories of Ivan Kriukov, however, echoed in his mind, and Veniaminov wanted badly to venture outside the garrison to meet the Tlingit and come to know them better. This course of action, however, was not allowed, so Veniaminov satisfied himself through voracious readings from his own personal holdings, the library of New Archangel, and the personal library of Nikolai Resanov, with whom Veniaminov could not help being fascinated. Equally fascinating, but for other reasons, was Alexander Baranov, who was perhaps the most complex figure Veniaminov would encounter during all his years in Alyeshka.

It was under Catherine the Great that Russia expanded eastward to include Alyeshka and the Aleutian islands, but Catherine was more interested in discovery and learning than profit. And while she allowed charters for several companies to exploit the resources of her far-flung empire, she abhorred the idea of monopoly, believing it would lead to corruption and abuse. Her son, Paul, however, had a far different view of companies and their exploitation of resources. Upon ascending the throne, Paul immediately granted a monopoly to the Russian-American Company for all fur-trading operations in Alyeshka. A shrewd group of businessmen, chief among them Alexander Baranov, had seen the change coming and had prepared carefully for the monopolization.

It was Baranov, then, who had positioned himself to be the Chief Manager of the Russian American Company, foreseeing for himself, and promising the shareholders in the Russian-American Company (who happened to be part of Tsar Paul's family and court), a hefty profit. But the Russian-American Company, much as Catherine would have predicted, fell victim to corruption, rather fickle fates, and erratic returns.

For Baranov, the first major hindrance came in 1802 by way of a Tlingit uprising, in which the small garrison at New Archangel, which had been established only three years prior, was overrun and returned to Tlingit hands. Baranov immediately returned to New Archangel with a small contingent of well-armed Russian hunters and, largely because of the timely arrival of the around-the-world vessel *Neva*, put down the rebellion and fortified New Archangel. From this uprising, Baranov pushed the Tlingit to the islands north and south of their ancestral homes of Sitka, and kept them well at arm's length. The distance, however, allowed the Tlingit to plot at will against the RAC, supplied as they were by information from the Tlingit women who were either married to Russian hunters or servants in Russian households. Thus, Russian hunting expeditions were often harassed and attacked, which only reinforced the sporadic successes of the company.

While Baranov established his headquarters at New Archangel, the settlement was often on the brink of starvation, even as it progressed into a more modern town and farther away from a frontier village. Supplies were in almost constant demand, and Baranov's tenure is littered with schemes and attempts to resupply a beleaguered population. New hunting counters and settlements were established throughout Alyeshka



and as far south as California with the hopes of supplying New Archangel, but none of these new establishments ever lived up to their full potential, either through abuse or neglect.

Baranov brokered an agreement at one point with John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company, but the partnership fell through. The disappointment can not be overstated, insomuch as the agreement would have not only offered routine resupply to the Russian settlements, but also limited New England fur hunting along those coasts of the Pacific Northwest claimed by Russia. The dissolution of the partnership, however, was beyond Baranov's control, in that the two chief reasons were the weather (which claimed numerous ships, including the *Neva*, which had once aided him in retaking New Archangel) and war (namely the War of 1812).

While there is evidence that Baranov had the capability to learn from his mistakes (ordering, for instance, that whipping of native workers cease because of the insulting nature of such punishment within their culture), Baranov also proved an historically obstinate figure, concerned with his own legacy and the legacy of the Russian-American Company than with the health and welfare of its employees. By the end of his leadership, he was viewed with something far less than respect for a job well done. Indeed, when L.A. Hagemeister was instructed to relieve Baranov and retrieve him from New Archangel, he was told to put Baranov on the *Kutuzov* by force if necessary, indication that despite the better part of a third of his life in service to the RAC did little to engender the reverence and respect he no doubt thought he deserved.

"Tell me why we are here?" Ekaterina had come into the small reading room where her husband sat by lamplight poring over the volumes of the RAC history. "Is it everything you hoped it would be?"

He rubbed his eyes for a moment and brushed down his beard. "Men are such strange creatures."

"Men as in males, or men as in human beings?"

"I think both."

"I think the first."

Veniaminov reached around and grabbed her by the waist, pulling her to him and into the chair, which was big enough for the both of them. She laughed and kissed him softly. "I am very proud of you."

"Wait to be proud of me when I've actually done something."

"You already are doing something."

"I'm reading."

"Which seems to me something of rather remarkable currency around here."

Veniaminov shook his head and considered the disservice Father Sokolov had perpetrated against his daughters, who only began learning to read under Veniaminov's tutelage. "You know how I feel about education. We could educate the world, I tell you, even the adults. And what a society that would be if all were educated."

"You are a dreamer."

"I am a dreamer, yes. And thank God for it."

"Yes," she said. "Thank God for it."

The two spent some rather rare moments alone, she sitting with her arms around his neck, he telling her of the Russian American Company and of Alexander Baranov, and of how so many men seem compelled to action by money, and the thought that doing great things in the name of commerce will ensure life everlasting.

"There is much to be undone," he said.

"And there is much to do after," she said. "And we are all thankful that you are the one to do it."

### 23.

It was Nikolai Resanov who had been responsible for the purchase of the *Neva*, that ship that would play so prominently in Alexander Baranov's retaking of New Archangel. But Nikolai Resanov is an enigma. In certain circles, his legacy is recalled with certain fondness, but that legacy is a product largely of exaggerations of his accomplishments prior to his death, and purging of the collective conscious of his gross wrongs perpetrated against peoples and countries at home and abroad.

What can be said with some accuracy of Resanov is that he was given to dreaming of conquests and riches and a lasting legacy, truly ambitious for a common citizen. But through perseverance, determination, and undoubtedly some shrewd politics, Resanov managed to attain a rank of lesser nobility for himself.

Born the son of a judge who meted out punishment to those involved in the Pugachev rebellion of 1774, Resanov spent his formative years in Irkutsk, Siberia, before moving to St. Petersburg for study. He served for a short period in the military, then was

able to procure for himself some lower functionary-level appointments within the government. It was while serving in such an office that Resanov received an assignment to travel to Irkutsk, where he became acquainted in 1795 with G.I. Shelikov, who would be a prominent player in the Russian-American Company. Resanov, always aware of opportunity, married Shelikov's 15-year old daughter, Anna. That same year, Shelikov died, and the controlling interest of the Shelikov fur-trading enterprise fell on Resanov.

Further good fortune fell upon Resanov the following year when Empress Catherine died on the sixth of November, 1796. With her son Paul on the throne, Resanov was in position to procure for himself both social standing and monetary wealth. Resanov quickly oversaw the merger of the Shelikov Company with the Myl'nikov Company, which with the Emperor's blessing, brought the majority of all fur-trading operations under the aegis of the newly establish United American Company, with the controlling interest going to the Shelikov Company and Nikolai Resanov. The partial monopoly, however, was not enough, and in 1799, Resanov had won an Imperial Ukaz sanctioning a full monopoly under the name of the Russian-American Company.

Tsar Paul's reign was brief, but after his death in 1801, a son, Alexander I, ascended the throne with an eye toward granting favor upon those who had served his father. Resanov was first in line, and was appointed to the Finland Commission, through which he urged the new Tsar, as well as many members of the Imperial house, to become shareholders in the Russian-American Company, and by the end of 1802, the RAC had gone from 17 shareholders to more than 400. And when Resanov's wife, Anna, died that

same year, Resanov suddenly found himself in sole power and control over a rapidly acquired financial empire.

With his considerable power, Resanov urged the purchase of two vessels in England, which were renamed the *Neva* and the *Nadezhda*, the first to be assigned to Russian America and the latter to serve in Kamchatka. On June 10, 1803, only a month before the ships were to be dispatched to their respective home ports, Resanov was rewarded yet again by the Tsar, this time with the Order of St. Anna 1<sup>st</sup> degree and the title of Chamberlain of the Imperial Court, which entailed his being assigned on the *Nadezhda* expedition as ambassador to Japan.

This brief period of Nikolai Resanov's life is worth mentioning for two reasons: it demonstrates a particular aspect of his character that will repeat itself through the coming years in all his travels and endeavors, and it also becomes a seminal moment in his life that becomes a singular obsession.

Having risen so quickly to power, and being used to getting things his way, especially under the impression the Tsar's backing, Resanov was not one to sit back and let others steal the spotlight. This attitude set the stage for a particular conflict in 1803, when the *Nadezhda* left Kronshtadt. Captain Kruzenshtern and Resanov, whatever their relationship prior to the voyage, quickly became adversaries, the source of their conflict being who, exactly, was in command of the vessel. Resanov, naturally, thought it to be himself, but Captain Kruzenshtern, and more importantly his crew, viewed Resanov as cargo only, with no maritime background and no claim to command. The crew, really, was the problem, in that they focused their ire on the newly appointed ambassador in the

form of practical jokes, taunts and on more than one occasion, threats on his life. The result was that Resanov finally retired to his quarters for the duration of his journey to Kamchatka.

Upon arrival, Resanov reported the ship captain, and an official enquiry was performed, with Major General Koshelev presiding. The final report so attacked the character of Captain Kruzenshtern that, to save his career, he was forced to publicly beg Nikolai Resanov for his forgiveness. Resanov, it can be imagined, quite reveled in his adversary's humiliation, the end result being well worth whatever indignities the ambassador had to endure. For Resanov, this idea that the final result is all that matters, that what happens along the way are mere inconveniences to be dealt with or overcome, would become the core attitude of his character. For a man having elevated himself from common citizen to member of the Imperial Court, ambition knows no bounds, and Resanov had his sights set on a lasting legacy: the immortality of a man celebrated and venerated for a life of achievement.

Anyone willful, arrogant, or self-possessed enough to stand in Resanov's way would be dealt with accordingly.

With Kruzenshtern adequately punished, Resanov continued on to Japan, where he expected to be greeted with open arms. In his mind, Resanov had elevated himself to a position of unattainable importance. The evidence of that unattainability came in the form of his arrival in the land of the rising sun, when he was immediately placed under house arrest and denied access to any government officials. For almost seven months, Resanov stewed in Nagasaki, an ineffectual ambassador unable, even, to deliver his gifts. Seven

months of rising anger and outrage over his treatment. Seven months of plotting his revenge. An entire nation, now, had affronted his person, and he swore that nothing would prevent his exacting an appropriate toll from them.

On April 6, 1805, Nikolai Resanov was unceremoniously expelled from Japan, gifts unopened, diplomatic mission unsuccessful, pride damaged beyond repair. He returned to Kamchatka immediately, and boarded the Russian-American Company ship *SV. Mariia Magdalena* bound for Alyeshka, where Resanov would oversee operations as Imperial Inspector and Plenipotentiary of the Russian-American Company, always with an eye on Japan and the insolent inhabitants of that island nation.

"Did father ever wonder what he would be remembered for?"

Veniaminov's question was a surprising one for Fekla, who felt old beyond her years, despite the fact that she, in her fifties, was already old for her time. Her life had been a difficult one, and her relationship to her son strained. She saw in him a sturdy young man, unlike his father, who had been more scholarly, unhealthy, and even frail. Evsei had died too young, yet even now she could see the impression those few short years had left on their son.

"He did not have to think about it," Fekla said. "He knew every time he looked at you." Veniaminov did not respond and she knew that the conversation was far from over, but she had no idea what more she was to say to her son. "You are too young to be asking such questions."

"It's not for me," he says. "I've only been reading, and it is sometimes difficult for me to understand what motivates people so."

"Everyone is motivated by different things." Fekla turned her face to the sun, a rarity in the New-Archangel winter, and patted her son's hand. "Everyone has to choose why he does things. You just make sure it is always for good."

"Do you think it is good that we have come here?"

"There is no answer to that question. You are here, and where you go is good. You bring good. You must understand that. Look at everyone and everything the way your father looked at you, and then you will not have to ask that question."

"As my legacy."

"With love, my son. Look on everyone and everything with love. Let time worry about the rest."

## 24.

*April 6, 1806*

*The Presidio, Spanish California*

Scurvy is a debilitating disease. Seamen, like those crewing the *Juno* as it neared the Spanish American coastline, were especially susceptible. In its beginning stages, as was the case with Resanov and many of the officers of his ship, the disease is a painful annoyance, beginning with fatigue, joint pain, bleeding gums and misshapen hairs corkscrewing from bleeding follicles. In its later stages, after continuing unchecked for a period of four to five months, scurvy claims the use of the victim's extremities: joints swell and blacken; teeth fall out from the deterioration of dentin; gums become the



consistency of oozing jelly, making eating a painful and futile endeavor; chronic fatigue relegates the sailor to his hammock where, hanging his head over the side to allow the seeping blood to flow out of the mouth, the man succumbs to the illness.

Aboard the *Juno*, even Resanov was not immune. A handful of men had been placed on limited duty and moved to the forward compartments to live in what had become a makeshift sickbay. Having sailed with low rations, however, and because of Resanov's insistence on making good time, the *Juno's* crew entered the San Francisco Bay scurvy-ridden and miserable.

"Do you have a plan?" Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff was a German naturalist and physician who, though 10 years Resanov's junior, felt no compunction of being overly direct with the Inspector. Von Langsdorff had been traveling with Resanov for several years serving as personal physician, and few, if any, had such unfettered access to the man.

"To just sail," Resanov said.

Von Langsdorff gave a quiet smile, himself less afflicted by scurvy than the majority of the sailors because of his strict policy of eating as little of the dried seal meat as possible and making sure that he drank tea at least twice a day, the tannic acid of which, though not as effective a deterrent as citrus, proved adequate enough for a journey of relatively short duration..

"And if the Spanish hold to their policy of repelling unexpected guests?"

"We'll deal with it when the time comes, Doctor. I for one, however, don't think we'll have any trouble. If there's one thing I know, it's how to make an entrance."

Resanov devised a plan to sail into the bay under a flag of truce, the crew and officers of the ship manning the rails, singing. Von Langsdorff had laughed at the idea of singing songs as they passed under Spanish guns, but Resanov had impressed upon him the importance of appearances.

Resanov swore that bleeding gums and corkscrew hairs would not prevent him from cutting the impressive figure he had in mind. He buttoned the brass fasteners on his royal-blue suit, affixed his Order of St. Anna sash (red with its gold piping and silver starburst fastener) and medal (a black cross backed by intricate lattice designs suspended from a crown), and took up a position at the ship's bow, his hands on his hips, his lips stretched smiling over his bleeding gums. Russian voices swelled around him, the songs of the Volga swelling the crew's spirits if not their bodies.

"Well, Doctor," he said, calling back over his shoulder, "at the very least, we'll be dramatic." Resanov smiled and waved to the Spanish soldiers inside the Presidio. He did his best to inspire confidence in his men, but their physical conditions, coupled with the very real possibility of being fired upon by the Spanish, had them wavering. By sheer will, Resanov kept the men singing, moving among them like a conductor, waving his arms up and down, coaxing louder and louder songs from them. From the ship, he couldn't tell if the Spanish were listening or not, didn't know if they could even hear the songs from their positions, but Resanov had come too far and dreamed too big to allow his plans to unravel on such trivialities. He knew that if he could somehow arrange to speak to the commander, he'd be on even footing, or at least solid ground, from which he could work the diplomatic skills in which he thought himself so proficient.

Despite his unease, Von Langsdorff couldn't help being impressed by Resanov. He couldn't decide if he thought the man foolhardy or just ridiculously brave, but the glint in the Inspector's eyes was alarmingly sane, his gaze fixed firmly and steadily on the Presidio. The men on the ship, too, seemed to measure the Inspector in the same way, not knowing what the outcome of this encounter might be, but coming to trust Resanov if for no other reason than his intensity.

As fortune would have it, the commander of the Presidio, General Jose Dario Arguello, was meeting with the Governor of the territory in Monterey, some 100 miles south of the Russian arrival. Though booked as a passenger aboard the Juno, which was commanded by the lackey, Nikolai Khvostov, there was little doubt that Resanov was the man in charge. There would be no repeat of his encounter with the ship's crew sailing to Kamchatka. After the run-in with Kruzenshtern, Resanov was careful to put any potential rivals firmly under his thumb, with sailors like Nikolai Khvostov chief among them, working their ways sometimes rather quickly up the ranks of command.

Because of the distance the General would have to travel, the Russians and their vessels were surprised by several weeks of welcome by the local farmers in and around the small settlement of San Francisco. The clergy, too, with their nearby Catholic missions of San Francisco de Asis, Santa Clara, San Jose, and San Rafael, held a favorable view of the visitors, so that the Russians did, indeed, feel not only welcome in Spanish California, but also expected.

Resanov, of course, seized the opportunity to treat their presence there as nothing less than an expected port-of-call, and immediately put ashore to meet the military

commander. The soldiers, understandably, were wary of the foreigners, and they did their best to uphold their General's orders, but Resanov, who knew Spanish well enough to articulate his persuasive rhetoric, was able to, in short order, convince the garrison that the Russians should be left unmolested to conduct whatever business they could until the General's return. As a sign of good faith, Resanov allowed that no members of any of the Russian crews would disembark for shore until permission had been granted by General Arguello, himself.

Resanov, of course, was an exception to that rule, claiming the rights of a diplomat and representative of the Tsar. As such, he enjoyed the companionship of several of the General's soldiers, but primarily of one of his daughters, Concepcion, who was, at only 15 years of age, already bored with her surroundings at Spain's furthest outpost in the Americas, and who became instantly smitten with Resanov's polish and panache and tales of the Russian Court. Resanov, having charted this particular course once before to great success, saw in Concepcion Arguello an opportunity to cement a relationship between the Russian settlement in New Archangel and the Spanish settlement in San Francisco. Further, in that initial meeting, he saw opportunities for Russian expansion as far south as the northern coast of California.

Resanov's absence from his ships, of course, left the crew plenty of time to contemplate what may or may not be happening, especially upon the General's return. Here, then, on board the *Juno*, anchored under Spanish guns, Nikolai Khvostov, Gavriil Davydov (another of Khvostov's ilk) and the physician von Langsdorff gathered for a tense evening meal. Khvostov, as was the norm, was drunk despite being ship's captain,

and the ever-present Davydov did his best to assuage the rage that usually accompanied such binges. Von Langsdorff, personal physician to Inspector Resanov, brooded over the food, his wooden spoon doing little more than swirling together the cubed beef and potatoes in his bowl. He surreptitiously moved the bottle of wine from the center of the table to a place between he and Davydov, hoping to limit the captain's further intake. For his part, Von Langsdorff seemed bemused, if not amused, at the spectacle of the most trusted companions of the Inspector; a collection of officers and researchers of some reputation, but with faults as glaring as sunlight glinting off the water in San Francisco Bay.

"They've killed him, I tell you," Khvostov said.

"You don't know that," Davydov said.

"I don't need to know. I know without knowing."

"You're drunk," von Langsdorff said, the first words he'd spoken since sitting down to dinner.

"And you're worthless," Khvostov said, draining the last of his wine then looking to the empty center of the table for the bottle.

"He doesn't mean that," Davydov said. "You know how he gets."

Von Langsdorff smiled without emotion, nodded his head, and continued to stir in his bowl. He had been with Resanov for several years now, since before the failure in Japan, and, by the time the ship had arrived in Spanish California, had begun to second-guess his enthusiasm for accompanying the man. The two companions, the inseparable and insipid Khvostov and Davydov, did little to counter von Langsdorff's doubt.

"I mean every damn word," Khvostov said. "I'm tired of all the waiting. We sit down here and wait. We go to sleep and wait. We wake up and wait. And we don't know if he's alive or dead."

"I thought you said he was dead," von Langsdorff said.

Khvostov grabbed a dull knife from beside his plate and half stood, thrusting the implement toward the physician. "Keep it up," he said. "Keep it up and I'll kill you."

"What are you going to do," von Langsdorff said, "spread me over your toast?"

Khvostov sneered at the implement in his hand then let it drop to the table before sitting back heavily in his chair. Davydov laughed and von Langsdorff found his thoughts roaming the fog-shrouded hills, thinking how much he would enjoy exploring the topography and collecting and cataloging specimens.

## 25.

Days later, Concepcion Arguello began visiting Resanov aboard the Russian vessels. Resanov was heedless of the sailors' superstitions that viewed women aboard ships as ill omens and harbingers of bad luck, but von Langsdorff, though not a superstitious man, also found himself concerned for Concepcion Arguello's presence aboard the ship.

But it was not up to Von Langsdorff. He was a naturalist and physician aboard the ship, which being at anchor in the harbor left little for him to do in the way of duties save bolstering the crew, smoking his pipe, and wondering what calculations Resanov had made. He was little more than a spectator to the whole thing, but he couldn't help thinking that, no matter how badly supplies were needed, Resanov's thinly veiled

overtures with Concepcion Arguello were inappropriate. He found himself watching her and wishing he could speak Spanish so that he could tell her of the disasters with which she was flirting. He was impotent in speaking with her, however, and resigned himself to lament only in his journal: "she was lively and animated, had sparkling love-inspiring eyes, beautiful teeth, pleasant expressive features, a fine form, and a thousand other charms, yet her manners were perfectly simple and artless."

How he hated to see that simplicity exploited by Resanov, but von Langsdorff had witnessed many times over the consequences to interfering with Resanov and his designs. Where von Langsdorff withdrew into his own thoughts and reservations, Resanov felt, for the first time in months, alive. The game was his element, and he plotted his moves with the acumen that garnered the Tsar's favor in St. Petersburg.

"Tell me again of St. Petersburg," Concepcion said.

Resanov laughed. "I've already told you all there is to know, my dear Miss Arguello."

The sun had barely risen, illuminated the curtain of fog that was, it seemed to the Russians, a permanent feature of the landscape in the bay. They had learned, too, that the cool, moist mornings more often than not, yielded temperate afternoons after the sun had burned back the fog enough to illuminate the sea and the surrounding rolling hills.

"I don't care that you've told me everything. I want to hear it again."

"You truly are too much."

"You won't tell me of the courts once more?"

Resanov shook his head. "By now you could probably tell the stories better than myself."

"You tease me."

"I do not."

"Then tell me something, anything. Tell me of yourself and where you grew up."

"I've come to think that I had no life at all before St. Petersburg."

Concepcion frowned. "I'm sorry to hear that, then. But it makes your position with the Tsar all the more commendable." She sighed, a wistful, light sound, and closed her eyes. "You've more than made up for whatever wrongs you suffered in your youth."

Resanov laughed, a sound harsher than he'd intended. "You make it sound so romantic."

"It is romantic."

"No, it's not. There is no happy ending."

"Oh, but there is if you want it badly enough."

"And what would it be, Concepcion? I'm curious to know how a story like mine would end."

"Triumphant," she said with a smile. "A glorious return to St. Petersburg, a hero to your country."

He nodded. "The way you say it, I can almost believe it true."

"Then you admit to a happy ending."

"As long as a happy ending means my name etched in history as a man of consequence, then yes."



"And how do you define a man of consequence?"

"A man, dear Miss Arguello, who accomplished more than was expected of him, a man not to be trifled with; who represented his country and did whatever he had to do to make that country great."

She pulled her shawl around her shoulders, one of the many items she had requested from, and had delivered by, Lieutenant Echeverria. "Your definition sounds rather cold."

"Perhaps."

"And why this passion to be 'a man of consequence'?"

"That doesn't really matter now." Resanov breathed deeply, enjoyed the smells of the bay: the moist air, the rich breezes from the hills. "Nothing matters now but settling things with your father."

"Ah, yes," she said. "My father. He is a stubborn man."

"You come by it honest, then."

She laughed. "The two of you are much alike. You're better off trying to deal with the priests."

"Different how —from your father, I mean?"

"He longs to leave what you long to claim."

Resanov eyed Concepcion, saw the woman she was, and was still becoming. He saw too how poorly she hid her desire to leave the tiny garrison. "I don't know how he could want to leave such beauty."

She did not look at Resanov as she spoke; studied, instead, the rolling hills beyond the garrison. She did not see the way he looked at her. "It has its beauty at times, like now, when it is green and rich. It will all be old and brown before long, and the days monotonous. There is nothing special once you've grown accustomed to it. It is only the newness that holds your attention."

Resanov looked at Concepcion until she realized his eyes were on her. Then he quickly looked away to the surrounding countryside. "There is so much potential, however. What is already beautiful could become more beautiful. Do you see that much, at least?"

She blushed slightly. "I see an unforgiving landscape, one that won't bow easily. It is as likely to cause ruin as success."

The rest of the day, as with the other days preceding the General's arrival, was rather uneventful, and Concepcion rather enjoyed replaying the morning's conversation with the Inspector. She was enchanted by him, to be sure, and she fancied that though they talked about the landscape, there was something more passing between them. She found herself hoping for that very thing, tucking that desire away in her chest, feeling it each time she breathed.

"Are the nights always this cool here?"

Concepcion had not heard the other man come up to the fantail of the ship. She had come with a heavy shawl draped over her young shoulders to enjoy the evening in the bay. She loved the fog more than most of the soldiers in the presidio. It allowed her to imagine she was somewhere other than the prison that represented the farthest reach of

the Spanish empire. Though she knew she had to return to shore soon, she was in no hurry and was pleased to see the physician, von Langsdorff, join her, though she could not understand a word he said.

"No intiendo," she said.

"I'm guessing that means you don't understand," Von Langsdorff said. "I must be sorry company for you out here."

Concepcion listened to the harsh sounds coming from the older man, and hoped that, somehow, she might come to understand a few of the words. But the sounds were just that, guttural reverberations sounding of something ancient and unknown.

Von Langsdorff tried to smile, but the expression seemed out of place on his leathery face. "I'd tell you of all the places I've been," he said. "I'd tell you about the world. I bet you'd like that, wouldn't you. I bet that's what Nikolai has been telling you all these past days."

Something in his tone made Concepcion feel comfortable, as if she were speaking with a brother. She liked the smell of his pipe tobacco and the sad inflection of his voice. She watched the blue smoke curl around his face before meandering off the fantail to join the fog. She had an image that the fog around her could be generated by some great pipe, a comforting conversation allowing her to imagine that she was somewhere far away.

"It looks like you and the Inspector were getting warm with each other," von Langsdorff said.

"Resanov" she said.

Von Langsdorff did smile now and accompanied the expression with a soft chuckle. "Yes, you understand those words, don't you."

"Neekolie," she said.

"I guess you'll be seeing Alyeshka sometime in the near future," von Langsdorff said.

"Alaska," she said. She smiled feeling only a little absurd at her repeating the words von Langsdorff spoke. She knew that she wasn't exact in their pronunciation, but she appreciated the company and did her best to keep him on the fantail with her.

"I guess he's told you of that, then," von Langsdorff said. "I guess he's told you all sorts of things, and you have no way of knowing if they're honest truths or half-hearted lies. I hope..."

Concepcion watched the man closely as his words trailed off. The tone of his voice suggested a sadness, perhaps, or some sort of wistful recollection. She couldn't be sure, but she knew that the man was quiet with his companions, and, regardless of whether she understood him or not, he was speaking to her. She wrapped the shawl closer around her neck and von Langsdorff took it as a sign that she was either cold or finding a polite way of excusing herself from the awkward conversation.

He turned to go, but Concepcion caught him gently by the arm. He squinted at her, the smoke from the pipe curling lazily up over his eyes. "Stay," she said, even though she knew he understood nothing of her words. "I like speaking with you. I like the sound of your voice and your words."

"I'm comfortable if you are," he said. "We'll just stand here and talk to each other then. It doesn't matter if we understand each other or not, I suppose."

"I have always dreamed," she said, "of someone from another place coming to rescue me from California. I wonder if Nikolai is that someone."

"You speak of him often," von Langsdorff said. "I wonder how much of him you really know. You're a sweet girl, but that man..."

"I wonder what you know of him. I wonder if you would ever tell me the things I should know."

"Maybe he really does like you," von Langsdorff said. "Maybe you're good for him. But I've never been able to tell the truth about that one. I've heard Khvostov and Davydov talk about plans after California, and I wonder if you know how that man can hold a grudge."

"The way he speaks to me is so tender," she said. "The way he looks at me. I know I've only known him for a week, but it seems as if I've waited for him all my life; known him from sometime earlier than life."

"Oh, he's a charmer," von Langsdorff said. "He could convince a snake it was a swan if he had the chance to speak to it long enough. I look at you and can't help thinking that you should know how he uses people. I'd tell you of his first wife—has he even told you he had a wife?—no older than you when they met, and how she made him who he is today. I'd tell you about Kruzenshtern. I'd tell you about Japan."

For an awkward moment, there was silence and Concepcion, even though she couldn't understand the man next to her, knew that he wasn't sure how to respond to her

closeness. He leaned his elbows on the railing and bent forward and Concepcion hooked an arm through his. "You're a good friend, and wonderful company. And now it's time to go."

## 26.

There was no fog the morning of General Arguello's return. Dawn shone clear through the straight trunks of lining redwoods back dropped by the rolling green hills, ripe from the winter rains, lifting not only the spirits of the isolated sailors aboard the Russian frigate, but also Resanov's hopes that his plan, albeit hastily assembled, of reaching a trade agreement with the Spanish might come to fruition.

His conversation that morning with General Arguello had been brief and to the point. Resanov could tell that the General was not entirely pleased with the Russian presence in the bay, but he could see, too, that the General was a rational man with a tactical mind. The local population around the Presidio had come to see the Russians, thanks in large part to von Langsdorff's overtures, as friends. And the friars, who held spiritual sway over not only the local population, but also the preponderance of the garrison's soldiers, saw an opportunity for exhibiting in a practical way the faith they preached.

Politics, aside, the General also grappled with the situation with Concepcion, which he voiced to Resanov. "It is, you might say, a delicate situation."

"I can understand your concerns, General. And I can assure you that I meant no harm in our coming here." Resanov said.

"Whatever your intentions, the fact remains that you are here, and you are my problem."

"I would hope our presence something from which you might gain. I did not intend us to be a problem that must be solved."

"You have my daughter enamored with you, Inspector. That would be problem number one. And you are clearly in Spanish waters, where foreign trade is forbidden. That would be problem number two. Would you have me turn a blind eye to the Spanish throne?"

"Here," Resanov said with outspread arms, "there is no throne. Here is the wild country, where we are all forced to decide what is best. You for your garrison, and I for my crew, and for my charges to the north. I am here, General, for the sole purpose of saving our settlement in New Archangel, which is on the brink of starvation and reliant upon us as a measure of last hope. Surely you cannot begrudge us the opportunity to try to—"

"Spare me the tale, Inspector. I prefer to deal with logic, not emotion. I do not have a problem, per se, with allowing you to trade here. I have a problem with how this situation has come about."

"Whatever I can do to—"

"I haven't finished."

General Arguello was pleased with the bruised expression on Resanov's face, but he admired how the other maintained his composure, sequestering his emotional response to allow the General to continue.

"Today, you will return to your ship, and my daughter will stay with me in the Garrison." When Resanov opened his mouth to protest, General Arguello held up his hand to prevent the thought from taking voice. "You have my word that no harm will come to your crew as long as they are anchored in the bay. That will have to suffice. It is my decision, and it is final."

General Arguello motioned for Resanov to walk with him out to the courtyard. With their footsteps echoing along the corridor, Resanov allowed the silence to hang between them until Arguello found the words. When they had left the stucco structure and emerged into the clear morning air, the General ushered Resanov to the Presidio's wall overlooking the bay. General Arguello took a deep breath and exhaled loudly before turning to face the Russian.

"Concepcion is a young woman, Inspector. She is only 15, but I know more than any other how headstrong she can be. I understand from my officers that the two of you have developed a fondness for one another, and I must confess that, although it is doubtful she might ever find a companion among my men, I have serious misgivings about entrusting her to your care."

"I understand, General. I offer my apologies for any unease I have caused you."

The General waved Resanov's words away. "Apologies are wasted words, Inspector. I have doubts, yes. But I also see the rationale at work here. There will be obstacles to your courtship. I can only say that I would hope you use your time here wisely."



The General left Resanov with an escort and walked in the direction of the Presidio's walls. He stopped, having only gone a few steps, and turned back. "And Inspector," he said, "under no circumstances will I allow you or any of your crew to leave your ship without my authority." The General opened the door from the courtyard and stepped through, its solid closing leaving no room for a reply.

For nearly three more weeks, the *Juno* sat at anchor in the bay underneath the Presidio. The crew were restless, but Resanov did his best to bolster their spirits with tales of the glory their mission would surely reap. The negotiations with General Arguello had all but succeeded, with the list of supplies Resanov presented equaled and added to by the Spanish.

For the most part, Resanov had remained true to his word to the General in keeping his men aboard the ship. But Resanov knew, too, that the ambitions of the Russian-American Company included new hunting grounds along the California coast, which the Russians called New Albion. The crew had spotted numerous sea otter, with pelts worth more than their weight in gold, along the coastline during the initial journey. Although the California otter were smaller compared to their Alyeshkan cousins, Resanov knew that their dense populations would make up for any size differences.

What remained, however, was locating a viable portage for his vessels, and the terrain beyond the Presidio was still foreign. It was Khvostov's idea to fabricate the story of missing seamen who jumped ship with the fever of monotony. General Arguello, sensing a genuine concern in Resanov that the wayward crewmen be found, permitted three teams of Russians *promyshlenniki*, to fan out across the countryside in hopes of

tracking them down. Resanov was pleased further when von Langsdorff suggested and received approval for a scientific study of the flora and fauna of the California countryside. The General assigned an escort for the doctor, with two junior soldiers dispatched as porters for his collected specimens.

Looking for the fabricated crewmen afforded ample opportunity for the Russian hunters to make detailed maps of the entire bay area. General Arguello also lifted the restrictions on Resanov, allowing him to come ashore as he pleased and to officially court his daughter. General Arguello never fully accepted the courtship, but he preferred that, should Concepcion err, she do so in full view rather than skulking about. This way, he thought, at least he would not be playing the fool.

The engagement was announced the evening prior to the Russians' departure, with General Arguello's blessing. But Resanov could not help feeling that there were many obstacles still in the way of the marriage. Although her father spoke felicitously about the union, Resanov was used to hearing the unspoken words, understanding the thoughts not articulated. The General had a way of looking at Resanov that made him think that everything that had transpired between them was just a ploy to get rid of the Russians, and once gone, erase any memory of them.

There was also the issue of religion. Resanov, being Russian Orthodox, had written a letter, signed by both he and Concepcion, as well as General Arguello, requesting permission from the Tsar Alexander I for permission to marry outside the Orthodoxy. Likewise, General Arguello had drafted a letter to the Pope, requesting, on behalf of his daughter and Resanov, permission for her to marry outside the Roman

Catholic Church. Resanov knew the letter had been drafted, but he could never be sure of its safe passage to Rome. He couldn't help thinking that the General would harbor similar thoughts about him, since Resanov was hand-carrying his letter to St. Petersburg after leaving California.

Nevertheless, Resanov and Concepcion had set into motion the necessary machinations of matrimony. He promised to return in two years' time to claim Concepcion, and she vowed to wait for him until that time. Their parting was, by all accounts, what would be expected on such an occasion.

Resanov stood stoically at the pier, waiting for the rest of his officers to get into the longboat the Spanish would row to the *Juno*. Concepcion had wanted to accompany him to the very last moment, but Resanov, with the help of her father, convinced her that it was better to say their goodbyes out of sight of the ship's crew.

"I will wait for you," she said.

"I know you will."

"Promise me that you will return."

"I do promise you."

"Then I will wait for you."

Resanov only smiled and kissed her gently before turning to shake hands with the General, who looked, in that moment, the happiest Resanov had seen him.

"Safe journey, then, Inspector."

"Thank you, General, and when Concepcion and I are wed, I will insist that you call me by my first name."

The General laughed and slapped the other on the back before helping Resanov into the longboat. Concepcion waved as long as she could, but her emotions eventually got the better of her and she retreated back within the walls of the Presidio.

27.

Having awoken one morning to find that all of the samples and specimens taken from California had been thrown overboard during the night while he slept, von Langsdorff was in a rage near the end of the voyage back to New Archangel. He felt impotent in the face of the insult, leaving Resanov as the only official to whom he could voice his grievances. He barged into Resanov's cabin when the morning was still young and the white caps dissolved into mist where the sun's rays heated the spray. The seas were choppy, but not overly rough, yet Resanov found even this motion unsettling.

"It was your minions that did it," von Langsdorff said upon entering the room.

"Go away, Doctor, whatever it is it will have to wait."

"They threw them all overboard. Weeks of work tossed overboard while I slept."

Resanov shielded his eyes with his forearm and managed only a moan in response. Von Langsdorff had tried to help the Inspector with his sea sickness several times before, but had been rebuffed each time.

"Fine, I'll get you on your feet again and then we'll do something about meting out punishment for the crimes."

"I don't want your help, Doctor. Just leave me."

"Isn't there something I can do for you?" von Langsdorff asked.

"No," Resanov choked down the bile that was his constant companion during the voyage. "I hate the sea."

Von Langsdorff couldn't help laughing. "You have to admit it's somewhat ironic," she said.

"I fail to see the humor in my situation."

"You are an emissary for a fur trading company."

"And?"

"And it is a seafaring trade. Couldn't you have found something more permanent on land?"

"I'm afraid that wasn't my choice. I have to do as the Tsar requests."

Von Langsdorff folded his hands in his lap and closed his eyes. "I love the sea. The motion, the rocking back and forth, back and forth. It's so soothing."

As he spoke, he couldn't help swaying, his voice taking on the rhythm of the ship's movements through the waves. He breathed deeply as he swayed, talked about the briny scent of the ocean. "I feel so small, so insignificant out here. It's so vast and powerful."

When Resanov put his hand around von Langsdorff's wrist, he opened his eyes.

"Stop it," he said.

"Stop what?"

"All that moving back and forth. It's bad enough already. I don't need you to make it any worse."

"You mean talking about the *heaving* through the waves, the *up* and *down*, *up* and *down* of the ship, the *tossing* and *turning*—"

Resanov's grip relaxed and he turned his head toward the bucket. Von Langsdorff held his tongue as Resanov retched into the container, collapsed back into his hammock with an audible groan, the back of his hand resting on his sweat-soaked forehead.

"I'll get you for that," he said.

"You can't get out of your hammock," von Langsdorff said.

Resanov managed to look at von Langsdorff. "We won't be at sea forever, Doctor. When we reach New Archangel, I assure you, I'll make you pay."

But by the time the pair, along with the precious cargo of foodstuffs, reached New Archangel, whatever indignation Resanov felt at the hands of von Langsdorff's teasing had dissipated, sated by the realization that, though trivial to Resanov, the naturalist's specimens had been important enough to warrant the chiding and, more importantly, that the physician had confined his retribution to the privacy of Resanov's small cabin and away from the eyes of the crew.

What truly occupied Resanov's mind, though, was the plan that had been gestating in his retributive mind during the return journey, indeed, even since prior to their initial departure from New Archangel. It is true that Resanov did lead the expedition to San Francisco and that the resulting trade agreement surely saved the New Archangel settlement from starvation. But the other benefit, at least in Resanov's mind, was that he was now in control of two ships which he ordered, under the commands of the volatile Khvostov and the servile Davydov, to make sail post haste for the northern island

possessions of Japan, there to pirate and raid at will, exacting revenge on the impudent state for its treatment of the Russian ambassador those years prior.

Incumbent now for Resanov was to race to St. Petersburg, to head off the news of his actions before it reached unfiltered the ears of the Tsar. Resanov reasoned that, could he be in the Tsar's presence at the time the information arrived, he could spin it not only from an indictment against his own character, but also into a positive affirmation of the zeal he carried for the good of the Imperial name. The fact that he was engaged now to Concepcion provided him with the perfect cover; the excuse necessary for leaving the Russian-American Company's holdings in Alyeshka for the arduous journey to St. Petersburg.

Resanov stayed in New Archangel only long enough to be celebrated by Alexander Baranov, a man Resanov had come to respect for his conducting of operations from New Archangel. Then he and his physician, von Langsdorff, left on the next outward-bound ship, the Okhotsk, returning to Siberia. There, the two men raced across the countryside, making it all the way to and past Irkutsk before Resanov contracted a fever.

"I'll only warn you once," von Langsdorff said. "You're driving yourself too hard. It's madness, and all for a girl."

"You have no idea what this is about," Resanov said. "And we must press on."

"You are in no shape to continue this journey."

"You are in no condition to tell me what I will and will not do. I am Nikolai Resanov. Don't you know who I am?" The man's eyes were wild in those moments, full

of the deluded sense of self-worth that had been working on him for the past years. He had grown, it seemed to von Langsdorff, beyond the man who had married Shelikov's daughter and found himself the administrator of more wealth than he knew what to do with. He had outgrown the man who had climbed the social ladder into the very court of the Emperor, and who had dreamed for himself a legacy far too grand for satisfaction. Resanov had become a victim of his own obsessive dreams, and having overextended himself with the incursion upon Japan, he now had no choice but to play out the scenario to its bitter end, riding, despite the fever, onto the road to St. Petersburg, still several months journey ahead.

"I'll not accompany you any further," von Langsdorff said. "I'll not go to watch you die."

"Then stay here," Resanov said. "I no longer care for your opinion."

Von Langsdorff did stay behind in Irkutsk, and Resanov died alone on the roadside near Krasnoiarsk, having fallen from his horse and struck his head on a rock. Khvostov and Davydov would be caught and imprisoned for their acts of piracy, having succeeded in razing a handful of Japanese villages on the Kurile Islands. They escaped their confinement in Kamchatka and somehow fled to St. Petersburg, where they were finally tried for their crimes, but freed. Khvostov was assigned to Finland where he distinguished himself in the war with Sweden, but the years under Resanov would remain the stuff of all his tales. In September 1809, indeed, it was the tales of Resanov that would end up killing both he and Davydov, the two having come together again in St. Petersburg for a reunion of sorts, drinking and toasting their dead idol. It was in walking



home at 2:00 a.m. that the men found the Isakievskii drawbridge up. The two of them, filled with courage both from spirits and from talk of their years under Resanov, attempted to jump to the deck of a passing barge, presumably to jump then to the other side of the bridge, but neither man hit his mark and both fell into the river. Their bodies were never found.

For Resanov, he left a strange legacy, equal parts fiction and fact. It is undeniable that he accomplished some great things for Russia and for the Russian-American Company, but underlying all of his accomplishments is the ulterior motive of petty revenge. He was a man who had become warped and twisted in spirit over the years, and he had little lasting positive impact on either the Russian-American Company or the Russian holdings of Alyeshka. He was remembered as a petty man who would give awards, for instance, to Native Alaskans, then take the awards away when that person died so that he could give it to another. He had no problems ruining a man's career, or even his life, if that man, either real or imagined, had the misfortune of crossing Resanov.

But the tales of petty jealousies gave way to more romantic tales of Resanov and his love for Concepcion, of his breakneck ride across the Russian steppe to reach St. Petersburg in the hopes of asking permission to wed the young woman from San Francisco. The events he had set in motion as a cover had taken on a romantic life of their own, obscuring the truth and clouding whatever legacy he might have hoped to leave behind; the man was largely forgotten as the last of his men left the Russian-American Company and died.

"Have I come here for the right reasons?" Veniaminov asked.

"You are worrying too much about nothing," Ekaterina said.

The two of them slipped away from the demands of family and of parish, walking down to the waterfront where they both sat mesmerized by the thick waters of the inlet, impossibly deep just feet from the shore, allowing vessels to harbor all the way in instead of having to anchor out. The air was pleasant, wrapped as they are in warm coats bought from Tlingit craftsmen.

They sat in the soft mist drifting inland off the ocean and talked of all that Veniaminov had learned in the few months they had been ashore in Sitka. The stories of Baranov and Resanov, of the Russian-American Company history, weighed heavier than might be expected upon the young priest.

"I don't worry for nothing. I find myself questioning my motives."

"You know as well as I," Ekaterina said, leaning into him, "that you came here from a higher calling. Not for some fool's errand. Not on some vainglorious excursion. You came here because there is a need, and you should not concern yourself so much with the things of the past."

Veniaminov sat still for a while and watched a handful of gulls lazily tooling over the placid waters. The flight of the birds never failed to fix his attention. On the one hand, they were annoyances —their loud, shrill calls piercing even the quietest confines of the

house, of the island, indeed of anywhere he found himself. They were ubiquitous animals full of bravado and whines. But in flight, they were graceful creatures, indeed, riding the swells of air, hovering motionless or diving at frantic speeds with but a subtle shift of their wings.

"One must learn from others how to fly," he said. "Resanov and Baranov are my teachers. Father Sokolov, Chief Murav'ev. These men preceded me here, and they have good and bad lessons to teach."

"Then learn from them but stop comparing yourself to them."

"You are wise, Ekaterina. I'm thankful for you."

"You are wise for bringing me here." She poked him playfully in the ribs, and he laughed at the silly gesture.

Indeed, Veniaminov was more than pleased with his choice of bringing along his wife and his family to Alyeshka. Although New Archangel was a beautiful place, he had difficulties avoiding disillusionment. When he accepted the call for a priest on the frontier, Veniaminov had several plans he looked forward to implementing. He was a zealous teacher, both secular and theological, and his desire to create a formal school system was never far from his mind. He also had a zeal for ministering to the needs of the Aleut peoples, which was unmatched by any of the priests he had met to that point. A master carpenter and joiner, as well as an accomplished stone mason, blacksmith, and amateur naturalist, Veniaminov was champing at the bit to be his own man in Alyeshka; to be in a position to at last prove his theories for learning and teaching, for ministering

and working. The interminable days spent at Sitka were like a purgatory for him, despite his efforts to throw himself into the liturgical works of the church in New Archangel.

He and Father Sokolov concelebrated divine services, and Veniaminov found some time to teach in the parish school, but it was woefully inadequate with regard to enrollment and supplies for students. Veniaminov was constantly reminded by Ekaterina that patience is, indeed, a virtue, and that the time in New Archangel was a practical lesson in honing that virtue. She had refined the speech to a look and a playful shake of her index finger, the gesture, whenever it was given, even under the most serious of circumstances, breaking her husband's tension with a moment of levity.

The family continued ministering to the settlement of New Archangel, Veniaminov ever hopeful that his example might inspire some sort of involvement on Father Sokolov's part, despite the latter's continued displays of unashamed apathy. Veniaminov continued, too, to read voraciously, taking in anything in print in a variety of languages. And it was ultimately the idea of language that pushed Veniaminov to spend his time most wisely learning the Tlingit tongue from a handful of trusted employees, and coming to a level of fluency that allowed him to begin building with Cyrillic characters a rough translation of the Native Alyeshkan alphabet. He understood that the mission he was undertaking was only beginning, but with each new word he learned, he felt closer to the Aleut people Ivan Kriukov described. He began seeing how these people, who had never heard the word of God in their own language, could benefit from someone who demonstrated even the slightest bit of interest in their culture and heritage.

Thus was Veniaminov inspired anew that he made the right choice in coming to Alyeshka, and his vibrancy was apparent not only to his family, but also to the Russian-American Company administrators for whom such spirit and resolve exhibited in a priest had become a rare, if not completely forgotten, spectacle.

## 29.

The history of the Russian Orthodox Church to this point, particularly with regard to its relationship with the Russian-American Company, was convoluted at best. A handful of effective and well-intentioned priests like Father German, who would go on to become one of the most loved saints within all orthodoxy, came as missionaries to the newly opened territories of Alyeshka and the Aleutian Islands with compassion for the natives and passion for the Orthodox faith. Their opposites, however, were either priests like Father Sokolov, who used the remote assignments to remain rather lethargic figures, or corrupt figures plundering church funds for personal use. Exacerbating the difficulties faced by those few honest clergymen was the difficult interaction with the Russian-American Company, whose leaders shared an ethos at odds with Christianity. Into this historical fray stepped Father Ivan Veniaminov, who had more than enough time to read through journals and histories of the church, as well as observations from outsiders, both secular and theological.

Veniaminov, as all Russian Orthodox priests, owed much of his knowledge to the foundations laid decades earlier by a mission predating the establishment of the RAC

monopoly. It was Shelikov, the very man who would later be responsible for entitling the anti-Orthodoxy Nikolai Resanov, who requested missionaries be sent to the Alyeshka territories in 1793. Catherine the Great acted immediately upon the request, permitting a party of eight monks to make the journey under the direction of Archimandrite Ioasaf.

The group arrived in Paul's Harbor on the island of Kad'iak in late September 1794, where they immediately set about building a church, which honored the Resurrection of Christ, and a house in which the monks lived. They began a garden where they grew their own food and fanned out in various directions to meet the local populations and baptize, reporting enormous success. They would claim in letters that in the first year alone there were more than 7,000 conversions and more than 2,000 Christian weddings, which on the surface, at least in the eyes of a priest following in similar footsteps, was a good thing to read. And although the period of activity at the height of the mission encompassed a scant three years, it seemed on the surface to be a suitable foundation for later work.

But appearances can be deceiving, and these reports were no exception, for as Veniaminov learned, the mission was beset by a number of obstacles; some of which were man-made, some of which seemed like nothing short of divine ordination. In either case, the mission met with a series of difficulties that should have at least concerned Father Veniaminov.

For one thing, Veniaminov was unable to escape the references to Alexander Baranov and Nikolai Resanov. He heard his wife, Ekaterina, beseeching him to not

compare himself to the managers and administrators of the past, but he had difficulty escaping their gravity.

Alexander Baranov, for instance, wrote of Father German: "We have a hermit here now by the name of German, who is worse than Makarii. He is a great talker and likes to write. Even though he keeps himself in his cell most of the time, not even going to church out of fear of worldly temptations, nevertheless he knows everything that we think and do, not only in the daytime but even at night. By means of pious cajoling, he extracts all the information that he wants from pupils, the servants here and sometimes from our own men."

The Makarii referenced by Baranov was Hieromonk Makarii, who was also part of the spiritual mission sent to Russian America. With the aid of interpreters, in a period as short as two months, he was able to baptize everyone on the south side of Kad'iak Island. After Father Makarii and Father Iuvenalii, another of the missionary priests, decided it would be the latter who would see to the conversion of natives on the Alyeshkan peninsula, Father Makarii pushed even further inland. Of the man Makarii, Archimandrite Ioasaf wrote that "contrary to all expectations, he is very useful here. I had not thought that he would make the journey, but he has traveled around half the island almost alone, baptizing and marrying, and now on the ship bearing this letter he has set off for the island of Unalashka and the surrounding islets, to baptize the natives there."

Although the eldest of the missionary party, Hieromonk Makarii was an unparalleled evangelist, which irritated Alexander Baranov to no end. The Russian-American Company was far removed from what most people would have considered

civilized society, and the rules of conduct were far more lax than they would have been near a larger settlement in Russia. The men of the company, including administrators like Baranov, quickly acclimated to being allowed to do as they pleased; Baranov going so far as to live openly with a young girl serving as his concubine, even bearing him two children, despite the fact that Baranov was very much married to a woman who had remained behind in Russia.

While some such as Baranov saw the mission as an inconvenience to be loathed, others such as Nikolai Resanov saw it as an outright usurpation of authority. "As for the ecclesiastical mission, they have baptized several thousands here, but only nominally. Seeing that the ways of Kad'iak natives become milder I find less explanation for that in the work of the missionaries than to time and to their aptitude. Our monks never followed the path of the Jesuits in Paraguay by trying to develop the mentality of the savages, and have never known how to enter into the extensive plans of the Government or company. They have just been 'bathing' the Americans and when, due to their ability to copy, the latter learn in half an hour how to make the sign of the cross, our missionaries return, proud of their success, thinking that their job is done. Having little to do they try to take part in the civil government of the country, calling themselves government representatives. The restless officers use them as their tools against the manager. The result is grief and there is danger of our losing the whole country."

The mission priests were well known to the administrators of the Russian-American Company, finding their ways into several letters and memoranda regarding the mission and its impact. Because of the brevity of the mission, however, Resanov and



Baranov were able to exert more and more influence over the church and its legacy. In the summer of 1796, by order from Catherine II to the Holy Synod, Ioasaf was called back to Irkutsk, Siberia for consecration as bishop of Kad'iak. He returned first to Okhotsk aboard the *Phoenix*, under the command of its British shipwright James George Shields (a naval officer in Russian service), accompanied by the aforementioned Hieromonk Makarii and another of the missionaries, Hierodeacon Stefan. Upon reaching Irkutsk, Ioasaf was, indeed, consecrated as bishop, but the three priests would never see Kad'iak again, the *Phoenix* going down with all aboard somewhere in the Bering Sea on its return trip.

With their spiritual leader and two of their companions dead, the mission quickly deteriorated to isolated outreaches, the majority of them remaining on Kad'iak, with Father German retreating to his sanctuary on Spruce Island. Others still continued venturing out, but the farther they pushed, the more dangerous the mission became, and too often their legacies rested in the hands of Russian-American Company officials like Resanov, who wrote of Hieromonk Iuvenalii and his proselytizing along the peninsula: "Sometimes, unknown to the manager, they would set off uselessly to make new converts. On the [Alyeshka] Peninsula, trade promising big profits was opened with the hill dwellers on Lake Iliamna, sometimes called Lake Shelikhov. The monk [Iuvenalii] went there immediately to propagate the faith. He baptized them forcibly, married them, took girls away from some and gave them to others. The Americans endured his rough ways and even beatings for a long time, but finally held council, decided to get rid of the Reverend, and killed him. He does not deserve pity, but the Iliamna natives in their

exasperation killed the whole crew of Russians and Kad'iak people. Since then this people think of revenge and fearing that Russians will settle there again, show no mercy at the slightest misstep. Last year they killed Russians again. I told the holy fathers that if any of them took another step without first getting the manager's approval, or if they meddled in civil affairs, I would order such criminals deported to Russia, where for disrupting the peace of the community such people would be defrocked and severely punished to make an example of them."

The truth of the matter was that the priest and his companion were killed while still on their boat, before ever having reached shore. But such details were of little concern to Resanov, who seized upon the opportunity to suppress the mission and its influence within the company.

Other priests limited themselves by their own illicit actions, such as Father Frumentii, who believed German in possession of hidden wealth, forced the hieromonk off Spruce Island and ransacked his home, going so far as to order his henchmen to tear up each plank of wood in the floor. Finding nothing, Frumentii returned to Kad'iak and promptly usurped the church funds as his own.

With the mission in decline, even disarray in some areas, another priest, Hieromonk Gedeon was sent aboard the *Neva* on its historic round-the-world voyage with its sister ship, the *Nadezhda*, upon which Nikolai Resanov was then making his way from Kamchatka for Japan. Gedeon, though, was on his way to Kad'iak Island to revive the declining mission and to act as "the Metropolitan's eye." Like Resanov, though, Gedeon soon found himself ostracized by the crew, writing: "Captain Lisianskii and Midshipman

Berkh were men with unruly natures and caused me much offence, against which my only cure was boundless patience." Gedeon was prevented by the captain from performing liturgical services while at sea on Sundays and church holidays. The rest of the crew, much as was happening aboard the *Nadezhda* with Resanov, followed their officers' leads and taunted the priests with sneering remarks about religion and threats upon his life.

It was in St. Catherine, Brazil, that Hieromonk Gedeon and Resanov truly became acquainted, when Lisianskii took the opportunity to whisper an inflammatory comment, supposedly attributed to Gedeon, into Resanov's ear. Although the account is glossed over, Gedeon and Resanov developed a strange relationship. Certainly Resanov, for at least one point in his life, understood the meaning of persecution in the same sense the monk understood it, and perhaps in their mutual beratements, they found in each other an odd ally. Conversely, however, Resanov was adamantly opposed to the church, of which Gedeon was undoubtedly, and unashamedly, a champion.

For instance, once on Kad'iak and need of supplied, Gedeon handed, at Resanov's request, a list of everything needed in the parish: tools, construction materials, food, clothing, monetary contributions for payments and rewards of personnel. All of these items were summarily denied in a return letter, prompting Gedeon to write "All of the above was refused with great indignation, and I have had no choice but to draft a reply in such terms as to leave it entirely to Resanov's good will to take measures to alleviate their annual needs."

And while Resanov so blatantly denied the very things critical for the mission's revitalization, he nonetheless held something of a fondness for the man, Gedeon, in inviting him "to take part in a secret expedition I am planning for this very same year," which would have placed a priest, and perhaps an even greater stamp of legitimacy, upon the raids of Khvostov and Davydov as Resanov raced back to St. Petersburg. Gedeon, however, did not accompany the raiders, staying, instead, to effect some sort of revival among the missionaries. But his continued difficulties with company personnel like Alexander Baranov, coupled with the fact that his charges, Hierodeacon Nektarii and Hieromonk Afanasii, refused to obey even the slightest order, doomed his efforts.

With Resanov's death and Baranov's eventual removal, company attitudes toward the orthodoxy relaxed, with several of the incoming managers and promoted personnel recognizing the benefits of a strong church presence in the settlements. But the legacy of recalcitrant and corrupted priests was one that was difficult to overcome, making Veniaminov an even rarer commodity in a rather hostile land.

Veniaminov closed yet another book and rested his face in his hands, the heels rubbing deeply into his eyes. He looked to see his reflection in the glass of the rain-sheeted window, the lamplight casting a yellow tint to his flesh, and he saw the black hair gray, his stiff beard downy and waist-length. His eyes had fallen inward and the flesh of his face drew together in a harsher visage. He rubbed his eyes again, returning to the vision of himself in the glass, staring until he convinced that he was still a young man in

his twenties, that his hair was long and dark and full of heavy curls, and that his beard was still the blackened beard of a young man with a life well ahead of him.

"There is so much to do," he said to the air.

"Then do it tomorrow."

Veniaminov startled at the sound of Ekaterina's voice, her footfalls coming so soft that in his reverie he was quite unaware of her presence. He watched her form in the reflection in the room's standing mirror, the suggestions of Ekaterina's body visible under the white gown she wore. She moved behind him and puts her arms over his shoulders, leaning into him so that he was warmed by her, and he smiled at that warmth.

"Tell me again how wise I am to have brought you here with me."

### 30.

"Ours is a legacy of neglect, and of ignorance." Veniaminov sat in the front room of Murav'ev's home, which was a reconstructed version of "Baranov Castle" overlooking the whole of New Archangel. "My intention is to serve, and nothing more."

"Nothing?" Murav'ev was a strong man with a keen understanding of both human nature and cultural politics. He rose quickly through the ranks of the navy and served with distinction through several battles during the wars with Sweden and again in the war with France. Matvei Murav'ev was a man who saw both the best and worst in men, and he found that he was more than intrigued by the specimen of Veniaminov. "Surely you have come to do more than that."

"Why so? Is it not enough that the servant of God come to serve man in his stead."

"Whom do you serve?" When Veniaminov arched an eyebrow, Murav'ev clarified that he wished to know which population the priest intended to serve during his tenure in Alyeshka. "I am no Pilate, I assure you."

"Indeed not, sir. And I come to serve all who need service."

"The Aleuts?"

"Unquestionably. And the Russians and Creoles, too. We are all in need of service in one form or another, and I have come to be of service however I might be best used."

"You are a rarity, indeed, then Father. Most of our priests are..."

"I will not take offense."

"...less than capable of fulfilling their duties. I am one of those who believes a strong church presence a good thing. Regardless of what might have been perpetrated prior to my arrival, I hold firm to my faith and believe in the good the church is able to propagate."

Veniaminov raised his cup and gave the chief manager a small salute. In the months Veniaminov lived in Sitka, he saw the changes Murav'ev implemented, and he came to view him as a man of his word. Likewise, Veniaminov came to see the difficulties faced by priests preceding him in Alyeshka, and he saw how the church had failed—continued to fail—and how it succeeded on those rare occasions when it did.

Finally, he and his family were packing their belongings for the month-long voyage to the island of Unalashka, and this would be, as far as Veniaminov knew, the last

time he was able to discuss the political structures of the Russian-American Company with its chief administrator.

"You have nothing to worry about from me," Murav'ev said. "Whatever you need, I encourage you to ask."

"I trust I will be met with a more courteous response than my predecessors?"

"I know you've been reading, Father. And I know, too, how my predecessors conducted themselves. I will only say that as you come to serve, so too will I do my best to serve in whatever capacity I am able."

"Then I thank you," Veniaminov said.

Later that evening, Veniaminov, his mother, Fekla, who sat quietly at the table bent in focus over a stitch she was working into the hem of a dress, and Ekaterina enjoyed the last moments of their time in New Archangel. He paced, and Ekaterina chided him for it.

"Walk all you like, it won't make the sun rise any faster."

"Thank you for that astute observation."

"Sit down," Fekla said. "You're making my lantern bounce."

"You, too?" Veniaminov said.

"We are all part of the conspiracy," Ekaterina said. "Get used to it."

"You would think that after nearly eight months here, I would have."

"Denial," Fekla said. "Too much to think about, so you might as well pretend that we aren't here."

"That's not fair," Veniaminov said. "You know I don't—"

"That's a joke, Love," Ekaterina said. "You really must practice patience."

"I am only anxious," he said. "I don't mean to be impatient."

"Then sit and drink. We are ready. The trunks are loaded aboard the ship already. We have but to sleep and wake and leave."

"Everything in its own time," Fekla said.

"He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

Ecclesiastes three, eleven."

Ekaterina took a long swallow of her tea. "Of course you would think of that. And how appropriate, no?"

"Yes," he said. "Everything beautiful in its own time. We should go to bed. It's getting late."

### 31.

#### *The Harbor of Unalashka*

*July 29, 1824*

*On July 29<sup>th</sup>, at nine o'clock I stood anchored in the harbor at Unalashka. I had set off from Sitka on July 1<sup>st</sup> of this year, at seven o'clock in the morning, aboard the brig Riurik, and had a successful, though prolonged, voyage – successful, except for its ending.*



The ending at Unalashka, much like the ending of the voyage to Sitka, saw the conclusion of a strong storm, the swells making navigation through the deep channel too hazardous for a time. Unlike Sitka, however, the weather broke within hours and they were able to make it to shore later that morning instead of having to spend another night at sea. On the island, throngs of people crowded the shore for a glimpse of their new priest, as the bells from the old octagonal church chimed in welcome.

Disembarking from the ship, Veniaminov towered over everyone, the crowds of curious onlookers gathering strength to reach out and touch his black garments or his long black hair. He endured it all with remarkable humor, keeping his arms elevated out to his sides, several hands holding onto his arms as if a dozen leaders would walk him to his destination. Through the greetings, he was met by a man with an impassioned look on his face, and Veniaminov, unable to hear the man's concerns genially quieted the crowd.

"Merkul'ev, Father. My name is Larion Merkul'ev. It's my wife. She is very sick with the consumption and needs to see a priest."

Veniaminov turned to Ekaterina, who was holding the infant Ekaterina to her neck and shushing her with cooing noises and playful bounces. "Go," she mouthed and turned to two of the Russian men standing beside her to pick up her husband's things and carry them to their quarters.

Veniaminov hurried off with the man, who was no more than 10 years the priest's senior, but whose skin was weathered and leathery, making him appear much older. The home to which the man lead Veniaminov was small, half-subterranean —dug out and rough-hewn in a small hillock.

His wife was lost in a bed piled high with quilts. Her brow furrowed and she was pale and wan, her lips curled back in coughing fit punctuated with blood. Veniaminov did not hesitate, kneeling beside the woman and placing his hand on her forehead. She opened her eyes at the touch and locked her gaze onto the young priest. She spoke, but the sound was breathy and erratic, a staccato exhalation one word at a time.

"I've been ... waiting for ... you." She smiled again, obviously scared of what was happening.

"Rest, my child. Do you wish to offer me your confession?"

This time she only nodded, and Veniaminov asked the husband and everyone else to leave the room. He leaned in close to speak with the woman, who told him to the best of her abilities of a life lived harshly and fully in the wilds of Unalashka. She spoke of her love for her husband, and of the anger she sometimes harbored at his long hunting absences. She spoke of her too-often dislike of the Native Alyeshkans, and Veniaminov took it all in, a life in essence, all that was important fitting neatly into one short conversation.

Veniaminov was touched by her confession, and he felt a serendipity in hearing a confession as his first official act for his new parish, considering it was a confession that, in large part, sparked the desire in him to leave Irkutsk. He administered the Eucharist to her and invited her husband back in. Close friends joined them, and soon the small house was too cluttered and crowded to comfortably hold them all.

"She hasn't been out of bed for seven months, Father," Merkul'ev said. "It's like she's been waiting for you."

Veniaminov did not take his eyes off the woman, who seemed to be resting more comfortably now, the fight that had been etched in her features replaced with a peaceful resignation. Perhaps the husband had been right. Perhaps she had known that he was coming and had held on this long to die in a state of Grace. Veniaminov held his hand to her forehead once more, for just a moment, whispered a prayer for her and made the sign of the cross in the air above her. Her breathing shallowed noticeably and he knew it would not be much longer. He turned to the husband and put two powerful hands on the smaller man's shoulders. Merkul'ev swallowed hard, his eyes welling up, and Veniaminov excused himself so that they could enjoy those last few moments without the intrusion of a stranger.

Emerging into the weak sunlight of the overcast afternoon, Veniaminov took in the settlement. The church was functional, but in disrepair. There was no official school. He found his house and realized instantly that it was far too small to shelter them all for very long. His mind traveled back to Ivan Kriukov, that old and weathered storyteller, and Veniaminov laughed at the fact that, for all the tales the man had shared, none of them had ever described the physical *conditions* on Unalashka.

Ekaterina walked out to meet her husband, and locked her arm in his. "A robust welcome," she said.

"Unexpected." He reached his smooth fingers to that lock of hair blowing so vibrantly in the wind, vainly trying to tuck it behind her ear. He told her of his experience in the hunter's house and of hearing the woman's confession. The two stopped walking

and he looked about the town again, this time voicing the things he knew needed tending to. "New church. New school. New house for us. There is so much to do."

"Yes, there is," Ekaterina said, but her voice was filled with happiness.

"You are so calm. I don't even know where to begin."

"You already have."

## **Part II**

## 1.

Ekaterina didn't move as the first hints of morning swept past the window. The shutters were closed and only the slimmest rays of light illuminated the room. She rested her head on Veniaminov's chest, listening to the rhythmic sounds of his heart beating, the rise and fall of his breathing. She thought of Veniaminov when the two had wed, he with barely a hair on his chest, his frame thin and wiry. Already the harsh life of work, of a short handful of years aboard ship and through arduous overland journeys, had aged the tall, gaunt boy into a man, strong and powerful.

She thought, too, for a moment that she would break open in either laughter or tears, knowing only that moments like this one had become rarer in the years they had been together. And with the demands of church life in Unalashka and the far-flung parish, as well as the company business playing in their lives, these moments had become rarer still.

Veniaminov's skin was warm to her, and she closed her eyes, willing the sunlight to delay its entry, wanting nothing more than to prolong the moment, to suspend time, to capture his scent and hold it inside her. She clinched her eyes shut and memorized the contours of his body, the way his legs felt against hers, and she recalled the night before, how the evening could have been just another in a long series of complaints and frustrations, but had, instead, flowered into a moment she already knew she would cherish in the days and months ahead.

The two spoke often of family, and though they already had a son and a daughter, and though harsh conditions had robbed them of other children, still they wanted nothing more than to be parents again, to introduce life into the world. In the time they had been on Unalashka, conditions improved greatly, and though Veniaminov was often away to some remote corner of the parish, Ekaterina wished with each encounter like this one, that something would take root.

She wrapped her arms around him more tightly as she felt his breathing become more frequent, shallower, less restful. She wanted him to stay sleeping, but the careening gulls overhead, outside the window, signaled a new day, and Veniaminov was never a late sleeper. He moved his arms up over her naked shoulder and curled a lock of her hair around his fingers.

"Good morning." He kept his voice low, still not sure if Ekaterina was wholly awake.

"Not yet," she said.

"Not yet?"

"Not yet." She lifted her head to look into his eyes. "I don't want it to be morning yet. I want to stay here, and have you stay here with me. Say you'll stay here with me and pretend that it is yet nighttime."

"Why are you crying?" Veniaminov brushed a calloused thumb under her eyes, letting it linger on her cheek. "What is wrong?"

Ekaterina sat up and faced away from him. "Just a girl being silly," she said.

Veniaminov rubbed his hand along the length of her back, sat up in the bed and pulled her back against him. Ekaterina closed her eyes as Veniaminov wrapped his heavy arms around her.

The knocking at the door, short and loud, startled both of them. Veniaminov moved quickly out from behind her, pulled on his breeches and marched barefooted through the house to the front door. Ekaterina fell back in the bed, not bothering to cover herself, letting her skin drink in the cool morning air. She pushed the thick blankets off the bed and onto the floor. She listened to Veniaminov speaking with someone, the other voice muted.

The front door closed with a soft thud, then Veniaminov returned to the bedroom. He stood in the doorway smiling at the sight of his wife lying naked on the bed.

"You truly are a sight, my wife."

"Am I?" Ekaterina didn't open her eyes; instead pictured Veniaminov standing in the doorway admiring her.

"Yes, my love, you truly are."

"Then ignore whoever it was at the door and pretend that it is just turning night and you have nothing to do but make love with me."

Veniaminov walked to the bed and sat beside her. He moved his hand across her shoulders and between her breasts, admiring the softness of her skin compared to the harshness of his own.

"You know I would like nothing more than to—"

"Ivan," she said. "If you must go, go. But don't ruin my dream with words."



Ekaterina felt the weight on the bed lift where Veniaminov was sitting; felt, too, the warmth of his touch leave her body before the sound of his leaving echoed its last within the room. She kept her eyes closed and dreamed that the world was theirs, two young lovers who had nothing more to do than to live inside each other and pretend that day is night.

With the light outside a blue haze, Veniaminov met the small group of Native Alyeshkans who would accompany him to the surrounding islands. The trips had grown commonplace, and he had become proficient with the baidarka, the seal-skin kayak commonly used by the indigenous hunters. It had been difficult for him to master, his long legs and tall frame being too awkward to kneel in the craft, as many of the hunters knelt, and the vessels too short to accommodate his limbs stretched out. To Veniaminov's delight, a special baidarka was framed to fit him especially. He was touched by the gift, just as the Native Alyeshkans appreciated this priest, so very much unlike themselves, who was willing to learn their ways, even their words, only so that he could better relate to them. They had gathered this morning early, knowing the young priest always eager to get started, so they are startled when the priest arrived at the black waters of the deep harbor, just a few yards away from the newly constructed church, and told them that rather than leaving forthwith, they should enjoy the morning with their families and set out later in the day.

He opened the front door of his home and entered, rehung his coat and walked back toward the bedroom. The shutters were still drawn and the house was dark and

quiet. He stopped and caught his breath when he came to the bedroom door and saw Ekaterina exactly as he left her, nude on the bed, eyes closed, apparently dreaming.

Veniaminov stood for a long moment in the doorway just watching as she breathed. He memorized each line, every detail of her body, and captured, too, the air around her, the smells, the sights, the way the motes drifted lazily through the thin tracks of light spilling into the room from the closed window.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Memorizing you," he said.

"Good idea," she said. "I'll be a crone before you know it."

"Not to me, you won't be."

"You're sweet." She opened her eyes and looked at her husband standing in the doorway. "Everything is ready?"

Veniaminov nodded.

"And you are leaving now?"

"Later." Veniaminov picked up the furs from the floor and pulled them gently over Ekaterina's body. He sat down on the bed beside her and took off his clothes, then shifted himself under the skins and next to her. "This morning," he said, "I'm going to pretend that it's still the middle of the night."

"You're beautiful," he said.

Ekaterina blushed; her chin quivered and she lowered her eyes back to Veniaminov's shirt, the buttons of which she was fastening for him, a ritual the two began

some time earlier, before his first voyage, when, without any other way to control her emotions, Ekaterina had discovered the task of buttoning and the comfort the simple, repetitive task produced.

"Are you alright?"

"I will be," she said.

"Is there anything I can do?"

"No." Ekaterina finished the buttoning of his shirt and held a fistful of the material in either hand. She pulled on it slightly, then let it fall slack against his chest. "I hate this part."

"I'm not fond of it."

"I just want to be done with it."

"I'll be gone soon enough."

Ekaterina knew that he would be. She knew, too, that the sooner he left, the sooner she could begin dealing with his absence. It was the saying good-bye that was the difficult part. During the morning, it had begun raining, and the fact that Veniaminov would still get underway, even when the weather was sure to be bad, didn't help steady her nerves.

"Will you walk me to the harbor?" he asked.

"You know I won't."

Veniaminov knew before he asked her the question what her reply would be. Just as Ekaterina rarely met the baidarka when they returned from a voyage, neither did she ever see them off. She preferred to keep herself busy in the house, focused on tasks that

she could control. Even though Veniaminov asked her to accompany him, he, too, preferred her staying at home. He had much to focus on in preparing to get underway, and he was afraid he would seem callous or neglectful because he couldn't spend time with her. The two of them had fallen into the routine of farewells long ago, and they were as comfortable with the process as a husband and wife could be.

"I'll see that Petrovskii comes by this afternoon to check on you," he said.

"I'll be fine. Let Ivan Veniaminov take care of Ivan Veniaminov."

He kissed her on the forehead and walked toward the front door, Ekaterina moving ahead of him. Veniaminov picked up a large cloth bag with extra clothes and slung it over his shoulder. Ekaterina moved behind him and opened the bag at the top, picked up a cloth-wrapped package from the table near the entryway and stuffed it inside the bag. She cinched it closed and patted him on the shoulder, leaning in close to whisper in his ear.

"Something to remember me by."

"As if I'd need any help." He touched his hand to her cheek. "My wife."

Ekaterina covered his hand with hers, closed her eyes and leaned into the touch. "Go now," she said, "before I get silly." She opened the door for him and he walked into the early-morning light. He turned to say something more to her, but the door had already closed behind him.

Veniaminov had not realized how much traveling he would be doing when they first arrived in the Unalashka District. He knew that his responsibilities would be extensive, but he had been unable to forecast the time demands such a parish would require, nor the state in which he would find the church. Immediately upon his arrival in Unalashka, he saw the need not just for repairing the existing church, but razing it to the ground and building a better larger structure from the ground up. Likewise, the small house allotted to the priest was far too small and in far too great a state of disrepair to function as suitable quarters.

The local population, excited at the arrival of Unalashka's first resident priest, greeted him with a written decree of welcome and a cash stipend for the purpose of establishing his household within the community. With the money, Veniaminov procured those supplies necessary to construct a larger house for himself and his family. He also was issued, on August 12, 1823, a charter from Archbishop Mikhail in Irkutsk to build and consecrate a new chapel in Unalashka. But nothing moved quickly in 1820s Alyeshka, and although the cornerstone had been laid under Mikhail's charter, the plans for new construction had to be approved by the Archbishop in Irkutsk. It was Veniaminov who drafted the blueprints and dispatched them hence, receiving the church's blessing in 1825, with the cornerstone being laid on July 2, 1825, almost two years after Veniaminov's initial arrival. It was a momentous occasion, with the three vessels in the harbor firing salutes as a cross was raised on the spot. It was Veniaminov who was first to swing an axe.

No one had foreseen the rapidity with which the young priest would institute changes. He was passionate about education, and immediately set about establishing a school for the children, with his brother Stephan acting as a second teacher when Veniaminov was away, which was often. He was dedicated to not only serving the local inhabitants of Unalashka, but also every single person within the surrounding villages, saying often that he would not be satisfied until he had met each person within the district.

Unfortunately for Veniaminov, who was plagued with chronic seasickness, the only way to travel from village to village was by either baidara, a large, open boat paddled by several men, or by baidarka used by the Aleut hunters in the taking of sea otter and other marine mammals. Neither of the craft were comfortable for Veniaminov, but he was determined to master them nonetheless.

For the Native Alyeshkans, the towering priest was an anomaly, taking more of an interest in them and their ways than any of his predecessors or contemporaries. They were eager to teach him the skill set to handle the small and large craft, and the interaction provided an opportunity for the Aleuts to teach their spiritual mentor their native tongue. It was this linguistic opportunity that intrigued Veniaminov most, because he saw the value in helping to instill self-confidence in a people who were at the bottom of the class system in Russian Alyeshka at the time. In delivering services in native tongues and improving literacy, Veniaminov was convinced the Aleut condition in Alyeshka could be bettered.

### 3.

Not long after his arrival in Unalashka, Veniaminov woke to the pings of a peen hammer on an anvil. It was early, and the layer of mist rising up off the cool ocean seeped through even the thickest wood.

"He's got a steady rhythm," Ekaterina said.

"Not much of a blacksmith," Veniaminov said.

She sniffed at him and told him he couldn't know such a thing.

"If he's a true blacksmith, then he's deaf by now. That amount of ringing would drive a man crazy."

"Then what is he doing if he's not a blacksmith?"

"He's probably fixing a harpoon or a spear. There are no blacksmiths here."

Indeed, Veniaminov discovered quickly that there were no skilled workers in the village when he arrived. The administrator, in a gesture of good faith, had sent to Veniaminov's home a group of young Aleut men to help in the new construction. They had introduced themselves as skilled laborers: woodworkers, stonemasons, and the like. But Veniaminov found these claims vastly exaggerated. "Everything they do is for hunting."

"Not for long," Ekaterina said.

"And what is that supposed to mean?"

Veniaminov rolled out of bed and pulled on his trousers. When he told Ekaterina that he would return shortly, she laughed and teased him about how she was always right. He, in turn, carried the sound of her laughter with him into the cool morning air, the rhythmic pinging from the anvil louder in the out of doors. Veniaminov took a bucket

with him down to the shoreline, where he filled it with handfuls of sandy soil and small rocks before turning to the small smithy, ill-equipped but for the anvil and a fast-decaying forge made of mismatched stones. The man with the hammer, an Aleut in garb Veniaminov recognized as that of a hunter, smiled at the priest as he entered.

The anvil had been abused, but as was the case with most any anvil, it was still in workable condition despite ill treatment and age. It sat atop a rounded tree stump resting securely in a shallow pit that was constructed for this very purpose. Veniaminov surveyed the scene before him and realized, almost laughing out loud when he thought of Ekaterina's words, that he was right about the pinging on this morning: the Aleut hunter was fixing an arrow shaft and head for his atlatl. Veniaminov saw the problem immediately in that the metal was far too hot (though he wondered how long the hunter must have had the shaft and point in the coal fire to heat it up to such a state considering the level of disrepair of the forge) and the hammer he wielded much too heavy for the job.

Veniaminov crossed the open area of the forge and anvil, which had been constructed under an open awning to shelter the space from the frequent rains, but not from the winds, a common construction for forges given the noxious emissions of the coal fire and the difficult, hot labor of the smithing. He sat his bucket of sand down by the forge and extended his hands first in greeting, then in an offer to take over the work. The hunter thanked the priest immediately and gladly surrendered the task to someone who, by all outward appearances, knew what he was doing.



"Pavel," the Aleut said, using his surname given him after his baptism into the Orthodox Church. "We are glad you are here."

Veniaminov nodded and made small talk with the man while working on the project at hand. He cooled the metal first by dipping it into a large barrel designed for just such purposes, then moved to the decrepit forge and stoked the coal fire with the bellows as best he could before retrieving the metal shaft and inserting it into the glowing heat of the forge. While the metal heated, Veniaminov moved to a shelf on the wall holding all the smithy's tools, scattered and in poor condition. Sorting through them, the priest emerged with a hammer half the size of the one used by the hunter, turned and retrieved the shaft from the forge. It was malleable, but not molten, as appeared to be the case when he first arrived, and he moved to the anvil where the hunter watched curiously.

Veniaminov tapped his ball-peen hammer on the flat of the anvil—to dislodge some of the rusting scales—then to arrow shaft, which had been badly bent by the repeated pounding. The timbre of Veniaminov's hammer strikes were profoundly different from those heard earlier, and the change drew curiosity from the men working in and around the village. By the time a small group of Aleut hunters had gathered, Veniaminov hammered the warped shaft remarkably straight. He moved back to the forge where he reinserted it. It was only then that he recognized just how many men had gathered around him. The dozen or so hunters watched his every move, and they mumbled in approval as he returned to work at the anvil. He worked quickly and efficiently, the melody of his hammer strikes fast and accurate, staccato tones of shaping and molding the iron into its desired shape before submerging it into the water to emerge,

despite its initial protests, as a finished arrow and shaft, which would be inserted into the long wooden shafts he had seen the other hunters working on.

When he returned the hammer to the shelf, he saw that the forge contained several more pieces similar to the one with which he had been working, some more finished than others, and he realized that the hunters were hoping that perhaps the blacksmithing skills would extend to their weapons, too; that some of the priest's blessings might somehow carry over.

"You try," Veniaminov said, using the heavy tongs to retrieve a piece of metal from the fire and laying it flat on the anvil. He worked through a few swings with one of the hunters watching intently. Then he handed his hammer over to the man and stood back, nodding his encouragement.

The strike was rough and made the man wince. "I'm sorry," the hunter said. "I don't know what I'm doing."

"There is no need for sorry. Imperfections are a part of life. That's why we have the forge and hammer. We can fix any damage done."

The morning was spent thus, with Veniaminov walking the hunters through the smithing process, first using the arrowheads and shafts as teaching tools, making sure each man had a chance to wield the hammer. By late morning, it was clear to everyone involved that there would be no hunting that day, as the novelty of the blacksmith priest continued drawing more and more people, then the wives and children of the hunters, and more than a few of the native Russians in the village. Veniaminov smiled through it all, enjoying the physical labor and enjoying the teaching opportunities it provided. He told

them, with one of the bilingual Aleuts translating for those who didn't speak Russian, of the symbolism of baptism while one of the hunters submerged another piece of hot iron into the barrel of water.

Before long, however, the ringing got to Veniaminov, who called for a halt in the lessons and allowed the forge to cool down, after extracting the final piece of metal, which was far thicker and broader than the small weapons they had been working on. The metal was hotter, too, and glowed angrily at its exposure. Veniaminov first hammered out some of the thickness, then moved the piece to the anvil's bick and began hammering a curve into it. He worked it quickly, back and forth across the bick's curve, bending the thick metal into the shape he was looking for, then plunged it into the water to cool. He spent a good deal of time working the end of it with a file, metal shavings peeling back to form a sharpened edge along the hammered curve. This sharpened implement was fitted with a wooden handle until Veniaminov had created a workable adz.

"Move the anvil," he said, and several of the Aleuts move lifted it off the tree stump. Then he used this new tool to carve a hole into the stump's middle. He worked tirelessly, and the visible progress he made was commented on by the Aleuts, who saw in their priest a man they could respect. He treated them equally, not talking down to them or giving the Russians in the audience special treatment, and he was a powerful specimen, easily the tallest and most muscular man present.

When he was satisfied with the hollow nook he had created, he brought over the bucket of sand and soil and poured it into the place, packing it tightly before calling, again, for the anvil, this time placed atop the sand-filled hollow in the stump. When it

was in place, one of the Russian promyshlennik moved to secure it in place with u-shaped nails, but Veniaminov stopped him, telling him to get chains, instead. With the chains, Veniaminov secured the anvil, then took the peen hammer he had used earlier and struck the flat of the anvil. The blow still rang, but it did not reverberate as loudly as it had earlier.

"Being the loudest voice is not always a good thing," Veniaminov said.

"Sometimes it is best to allow others to be heard over you."

"What do you want?" Veniaminov asked.

"Nothing," Ekaterina said. "I'm just sitting here."

"I don't mean it that way. I mean here, in this place. From life. What do you want?"

"Ah, an easy question, I see."

Veniaminov appreciated the levity she brought to his more reflective moods. The evenings often found the two of them, after the children had been put to bed for the night and his mother, Fekla, had adjourned to her own small room to afford the couple some modicum of privacy, alone and able to share their thoughts. In such moments, Veniaminov was often prone to reflecting not only on the day's work and accomplishments, but also on her thoughts.

"You want me to tell you what I want," she said, "but you are really thinking about what it is you want, and you are hoping you are not alone."

He looked as though he had been caught doing something wrong. "It's just that..."

"It's fine," she said. "I don't mind. In fact, that is what I want. I want to help where I can, however I can. Today, you fixed the noisy anvil and the whole village is happy for it. That's why you're here, to show love to people who saw little of it. And I am here to love you through it. That's what I want, to be known as a strong woman who did what she wanted to do most, which is support her husband, raise a family, even in the harshest of settings."

"This place is not so harsh," he said.

"But you're missing the point. We are far from home, but I am with you. When people talk of me, I want them to see me for who I am, which is a woman who is just as strong as her husband, willing to move into an unknown land and find a way to make a difference."

"Are you?" he asked. "Are you making a difference? Am I?"

"How can you even ask that? Today, you quieted an anvil. That's making a difference."

He laughed in spite of himself and he immediately brought his hand to his mouth and apologized. He wished in that moment that he could find the words to tell Ekaterina just how much she meant to him. She always seemed to find the strength in his weakness, the worth in those things he thought without value. He had not thought of the anvil as

much of anything, yet she had seen in it a symbol of something much larger, and he waved his laughter away in the hopes that she would continue.

She was smiling along with him, the two of them having developed this easy rapport with each other, the demeanor of the couple often impassioned but seldom, if ever, accusatory. "You cannot tell people how to live their lives and expect them to just go out and start living their lives that way. You have to show them how to live. That's why you are here. That's why I am here. We are examples for what is good in man, and I can think of no more humbling responsibility than that. So you show that goodness in a practical way. They may or may not remember the readings you give or the prayers you say, but they will remember the day their priest smithed their arrows and quieted the anvil. That's making a practical difference; showing love in a practical way."

"I had not thought of that."

"That why you have me," she said, leaning forward to kiss his forehead. "You ask me what I want, and I tell you why we are here; why I believe we are here. And what I want is to be remembered as having done what we set out to do. I want to accomplish it all."

"You are wonderful," he said, snuffing the candles resting on the table between them and turning to follow her to bed.

The following day, when Veniaminov picked his way over the gently sloping hill to the blacksmith's forge, the crowd of hunters had already gathered. By way of greeting, he said only "I'll have to stop doing so much work or you'll never get any hunting done."

The comment was immediately disarming, and everyone laughed at the joke, still trying to figure out just how they should take this priest who was so unlike any of the Russians they had met before.

Veniaminov moved through the small crowd and picked up the large hammer Pavel had been using the day before, and offered it to him again. Then he took several more hammers and distributed them through the crowd and stepped up to the forge. With his own hammer, he began chipping away at it, tearing off a small chunk of the rock that had fused at the top. "Today," he said, "is a day for rebuilding. Gone is everything that has been built up poorly before us. Now we have the joy of building things anew, the way they were intended to be constructed, so that they will serve their purpose to the fullest of their potential."

The vigor with which the hunters tore into the forge was surprising to Veniaminov, and the work was exhilarating, the group of men working in such close proximity with one common purpose, and he thought once more of Ekaterina and her perspective on his work within the village, and he said a prayer for her safety and long life; that the two of them would have many such conversations over the years to come.

The day passed quickly and the forge was demolished sooner than he had expected. He set the men to sorting the rock; various stones that could be reused in the wall and rest reduced to rubble for chinking or for filler material to solidify the interior structure of the wall. Other sorting continued, with the men separating out piles of cornerstones, ties (long stones extending through the entire width of the wall and supporting the weight of the structure), and capstones. There were large flat stones that he

used as footings, and other heavy stones placed as risers for added stability and visual interest.

"Functional, yes," he said. "But also beautiful." He took the time to point to all those assembled how even the smallest rubble had a purpose in the structure, and finding that purpose was the reason he was there. He told them they were like the rocks, each with his or her own place within the community, and, if they chose, within the church. He was careful to not appear forceful, and he thought of Klim, the old clockmaker in Irkutsk, who told him that everyone would come to conclusions in his or her own time.

The construction of the forge was a simple one, with a chimney for taking away much of the smoke, and vents in the bottom for bellows and strong ventilation. Veniaminov was careful that each person was able to understand why things were constructed the way they were, and why that way was the right way. Together, the group dug through the loamy topsoil until they got to more solid earth that could be tamped down to a hard pack. With the trench no more than a foot or two deep, they staked out the sides with straight pieces of wood, then used coarse rope to tie between the lengths to show them level and to guide the construction of the walls.

Footings were first; a solid foundation that sloped gently inward upon itself so that gravity and the wall's own weight would keep it sturdy and secure. The flat stones that served as the footings were tested for their stability, the men standing on top of them and correcting even the slightest wobble before continuing the process of building up the walls. They started at the ends and worked inward on all the walls, building a layer of large rocks at the bottom, then filling in with rubble. When one pass was completed, they



placed tie stones throughout the wall, and repeated the process atop these tie stones, with more risers and flat stones anchoring the wall and the rubble filling the spaces inside.

"Patience always," Veniaminov said. "If you wish to build something that lasts, you must trust in the process and take the time to build it correctly. One stone over two; two stones over one." With this formula always in mind, the group became a cohesive team, building the walls to hold their new forge. The work was beautiful in its progression, and the assembly saw quickly that the construction was much sturdier. As the wall progressed in height, Veniaminov showed them how to lever the larger stones into place, constructing even crude ramps, up which the heavier stones were rolled.

The endeavor took them through the entire day and into darkness. It was Ekaterina who came out to check the progress of the men who were eager to point out the puzzle they had just put together, how one flat stone was covered by two, and two adjoining stones were covered again by one. She was impressed with the work and said so, then said that she had come to steal her husband away before their children forgot what he looked like.

Thus Veniaminov ingratiated himself within the community of Unalashka, and indeed with the communities surrounding the village proper. Word traveled quickly of this new priest who had taught not only stonemasonry, but also woodworking and blacksmithing and other practical skills that empowered the Aleuts. They talked of their own language and how this priest had taught them how to write it and read it, and how they were learning to speak and read and write in Russian, too. The effect was such that as Veniaminov used his newfound mastery of the baidarka and baidara to travel from

village to village several times over, entire populations, down to the last child, rushed to the waterfronts to meet him. He became, very quickly, a revered figure among the people, teaching them how to live their lives through the examples he set, and both Russians and Aleuts alike quickly came to appreciate the practical differences he made in their lives.

In the coming years in the Unalashka District, Veniaminov worked to turn small village meeting places for worship services into proper chapels. He worked equally hard to implement his ideas for educating populations and empowering them with practical skills. He established a school where the artistic talents of the Aleuts were put to use painting icons and fashioning accoutrements for the churches in his see, and the Russians were not left out, either. Veniaminov was overjoyed to discover in his school a young Russian with a penchant for rendering saints, and when the new church was finally consecrated and a new iconostasy completed in 1828, it was the icons of this man, Vasilii Kriukov, son of the man whose confession played such a crucial part in Veniaminov's own coming to Alyeshka, that were on display.

#### 4.

Father Veniaminov, for the duration of his 13 years in Alyeshka, the first 10 of which were spent in the Unalashka District, was always a priest first. That is to say that he never strayed from his primary duties as clergyman. His time was devoted always first to the needs of the church and of its parishioners through the performance of church services on a regular basis and also duties such as weddings and funerals. Would he but have limited himself to fulfilling those ecclesiastical duties, Veniaminov would have accomplished

much as one of the few priests who lived up to expectations. But Veniaminov was much more in that he also served as a kind of arbiter for the local population, and in the remaining time left to him he devoted himself to his own particular passions, primarily scientific study of the ecology of Alyeshka and the languages of the Aleut tribes.

On May 6, 1827, Veniaminov wrote that, while journeying through his parish, "strong winds made it impossible to pitch the tent [used for church services]. Therefore, today I only took a census of all the local inhabitants. Then, after careful questioning of the elder inhabitants, I resolved the following dispute:

*One of the Creoles, one Iuda Balamutov, had lived with an Aleut woman for more than five years. He had made an agreement with her to marry her. Finally, after living with her and their children, he left her without providing the slightest support for the subsistence of her and the children. He gained influence over another woman, his relative —although not a close one. This second woman was already married to another Aleut. He took her as a wife and lived with her for nearly four years.*

*I questioned in detail all persons, except for Balamutov himself; he had temporarily gone far away. I then decided the matter in the following manner. Since the woman whom he had taken as a second wife had long been living with him against her will and now wanted to be married to her first husband, and since the latter was still unmarried and had long waited to take her as a wife, I decided to marry them. After taking some time to think it over, they were married.*

*As for Iuda Balamutov, I warned that if he did not agree to take his first wife, then he would not be allowed to marry another. As for the support of his wife and children, I*

*suggested to the chief manager that he might order that full support for the family be taken from Balamutov's salary.*

In later travels to another village, Belkofski, distant from the troubles, Veniaminov met up with the wayward man Balamutov. The man, when hearing of the difficulties his actions had caused, asked Veniaminov for forgiveness and promised to take his first wife and her children and marry at the first opportunity. "Thus, the entire matter was concluded."

It is difficult to imagine life in Unalashka during the years Veniaminov resided there, and his journals offer only a glimpse into it, as many of his entries, even when relaying the most dire circumstances, are noticeably absent of any flourish, and present such circumstances as rather mundane and a part simply of everyday life in Unalashka. For instance, not long after the aforementioned dispute, Veniaminov and his group of assistants set off for Unga on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May, with the following entry making it into Veniaminov's journal:

*After replacing the baidara, we set off with a tailwind at seven o'clock in the morning. At nine o'clock in the evening we arrived at Delarof Harbor on Unga Island, having gone more than 100 versts. Thus, my journey in the baidara ended safely.*

*The reasons we arrived so quickly at Unga on this day were as follows: (1) we sailed straight through, not stopping at the village of Pavlovskoe; and (2) we had a tailwind, with which one can cover more than ten versts per hour in a good baidara.*

*This day's voyage was not without danger, however. Firstly, the sea was rather highly agitated after the strong easterly winds that had blown on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>.*

*Secondly, the skin of the baidara tore as the boat was being lowered into the water; the boat contained Company cargo weighing more than fifty poods. It was necessary to bail water at least four times an hour. However, things calmed down once we had found the hole and stopped it up. Thirdly, we traveled at a great distance from the shore: before we had traveled about thirty-five versts toward Unga, the Alyeshka Peninsula was already more than fifty versts distant on our left, and there was no land on our right. It was impossible to turn back because of the wind.*

*Still, our familiarity with being at sea, and even more our hope in God Who directs the course of men, overcame our fear of danger. Besides seasickness, I experienced no fear or unpleasantness, either on this day's journey or on earlier ones, except for on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Still I was in constant danger of losing my life, since, as the saying goes, out here a man is separated from death by not even the thickness of a board, only that of a little skin.*

The instance Veniaminov refers to as occurring on the 24<sup>th</sup> was a simple entry that gave no indication other than the May 30<sup>th</sup> entry as to just how severe things had been. "We set out into a slight wind that was partly against us. After going about twenty versts, we put in on the Alyeshka Peninsula because the wind had grown dangerously strong." This instance, though treated mildly in his journals, was the only time, according to the later entries, when Veniaminov had felt any "fear or unpleasantness."

The difficulties of the journeys, combined with Veniaminov's susceptibility to seasickness, only helped to further his reputation. Few men would have undertaken such constant traveling, let alone one of the many priests who had preceded him, and his

reward was an always thankful population, as was the case on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May, during the arduous journey that included the battering winds and leaking baidara, on Trinity Sunday.

*In the morning, after a reading of the Rule of Prayer, I celebrated a prayer service in the iurt of the manager. Then, at 9:30 and 12:00, I celebrated the Liturgy with Vespers and gave Communion to those who had confessed and to the youngsters.*

*At 5:30, after visiting all of the inhabitants in their dwellings, we set out on the return trip to Unga across the neck of land, and crossed over to the southern side of the Alyeshka Peninsula. We were accompanied by almost all of the inhabitants, who had been greatly gladdened by my presence.*

*Not only these inhabitants, but, in a word, every resident of every place I visited, thanked me emotionally upon parting for having visited and explained the Faith and the Christian Law.*

*Still, I always told them to thank God, Who had shown the kindness to allow me to reach this remote region and stop here, and Who had illumined them with the light of the Gospel. As for me, I told them to pray to Him so that I might again spend some time among them.*

Veniaminov translated many of the most important texts, such as the Catechism, into the Aleut languages, and the Native Alyeshkans were eager to obtain copies of it for themselves, which demonstrated the empowering qualities of his linguistic efforts.

But there was another benefit to his priestly duties and travels in and around the Unalashka District. He was the first person of any profession to keep detailed and

accurate records of the local ecology, geography, geology, and peoples of the islands. Over the course of 10 years, Veniaminov had visited, quite literally, every single human being in his parish, and he had been to and commented on in his journals—which were sent back to Irkutsk to keep Archbishop Mikhail apprised of Veniaminov's progress—every village and settlement in the district. Through years of observations, Veniaminov had compiled notes on nearly all aspects of life and landscapes encountered by a visitor to this land. His records would form the foundation for one of the first, and most comprehensive primers on the Alyeshkan territory.

He compiled entries on the mountains and valleys: These islands in general are extraordinarily mountainous, so that there is not a single island which does not have mountains on it, or does not itself constitute mountains or mountain ranges. ...Many mountains, lying either along the shores or sometimes in the interior of the islands, show, by their craterlike or crested summits or steep cliffs, that this region and especially the mountains were at some time acted upon strongly and directly by subterranean fire.

He wrote of the coasts and headlands: "The coasts of these islands for the most part are cliffy. Sloping and low lying coasts are found more often near the high mountains and between the ranges and headlands, which terminate at the sea as cliffs. Generally speaking, the offshore waters between the headlands are clear and deep.... Aleut tradition says that in many places the shoreline has increased in the course of time. Such tradition is very credible because in a number of low lying places, as in bays and particularly on the landnecks of the smaller islands as well as on spits of sandbanks, it is apparent that the hills and mounts greatly resemble the waves of the sea and lie always

parallel to small cobbles." And for seamen, his descriptions of the seas and inlets, too, would prove invaluable. "In considering the sea I may say only this, that: a) the sea, about the shores, generally has a great depth, so that, for instance, in Kapitanskii Zaliv [modern Unalaska Bay], between the headlands, the depth is over 100 sazhen and in the middle and closer inshore, from 80 to 100. ... b) Phosphorescences on the sea water occur principally in August, whereas in spring and winter near the shores, almost invariably, there is none. It would seem that, at that time of the year when there is a great deal of phosphorescence, with any winds and particularly severe ones, the sea must, it seems, always be glowing. On the contrary, however, I have had a chance to see this only twice in ten years —on the first occasion on a voyage from the Pribylov Islands on the night of August 18, 1829, some 60 to 80 miles from the shores of Unalashka, with a fresh NW wind blowing. One must see with one's own eyes this marvelous phenomenon in order to form a full idea of it. Near the ship, which held to a very good speed, the sea boiled with fiery sparks and crystals but the farther from the ship the dimmer grew the light on the sea. ... On the second occasion of such an appearance, it was also in August, the 25<sup>th</sup>, in 1831, in Kapitanskii zaliv itself. The Aleuts averred that they were seeing it for the first time and said it was a sign of a coming flood or unusually height tides. And indeed, during that very autumn, the high tides were fully two feet higher than the customary autumnal tides." He would go on to describe the straits, tides, currents and riptides, floods and ice, earthquakes and volcanic activity, rivers and lakes, rocks, minerals and soils, vegetation, animals, products and resources, climate, barometric pressure, winds, and so



on. The scope of his observations is overwhelming, and his mind, which was keenly scientific, also strayed into the realm of hypothetical.

For instance, from a footnote to his work: *Mammoth tusks, found in America, are always found in the sand and in low places, and in different positions [exactly thus the one which was found on St. Paul was in the sand and near the shore]. From whence come the mammoth tusks here? And why are the tusks found only in the sand? And why are only the tusks found and not the bones? The solution of these questions is very interesting but not at all my business. I shall say only that it is not permissible to suppose that the mammoth tusks were washed up together with the sand from the bottom of the Bering Sea (where, perhaps, there are whole mammoth skeletons). But how did they come to be in the sea? One can assume that a part of the Bering Sea or all of it was once dry land; and only the tusks are found because they, easier than any other part, may become detached from the skeleton.* In such sections, he attempted to answer questions that, in his time, were truly unanswerable: *Have These Islands Been Inhabited Long? And Whence Come the Present Inhabitants?*

Veniaminov compiled notes on each of the individual islands within his purview and details his observations of the inhabitants. He explained the origins of their names: *The inhabitants of these islands, called 'Aleuts' by the Russians and by all Europeans, call themselves Unangan. This word has no meaning in Russian and cannot be derived from any other Aleutian word. The local inhabitants received the name 'Aleut' initially from the Russian-Siberians, though for what reason they named them Aleuts is difficult to say. In the light of the Aleutian language and customs, it may be supposed that the Aleuts,*

*in their encounters with the Russians, the first visitors and human being whom they had seen except themselves and their neighbors, probably in wonder, said among themselves, 'alik waya?' or in abbreviated form, 'aliwaya?', that is, 'What is that?' or 'Of what kind is this?' And so, to all questions of the Russians, who undoubtedly were not acquainted with their language, the Aleuts, not understanding them, answered with those words, 'alik' or 'aliwaya' which, indeed, they use very often in ordinary conversation and at times as mere expletives. The Russians, hearing these sounds repeated many times, could have thought that the people so called themselves. Not being able to learn the real name, they at first called them 'Aliuts,' later on 'Aleuts.' This, at any rate, was Mr. Chamisso's guess when at Unalashka in 1817. Although that guess would be disproved in time, when Veniaminov was compiling his notes and giving thought to such issues, it was the most logical explanation as to the origin of the Aleut name, and it has become a "truism" despite its inaccuracy.*

Veniaminov devoted a great deal of his time to the Aleuts, insomuch as the majority of his time was spent living and working in close proximity with them, combined with the fact that, as far as the social hierarchy was concerned, they were at the bottom and little scholarship had been committed on their behalf. Veniaminov, though, did not believe in such a class system, being as he was from the poorest of families in Irkutsk and raised to not consider himself above anyone else. So he wrote of their origins, of their traditional appearances and of their abilities and beliefs. He did not shy away from pointing out many of the ways in which he considered the Aleuts superior to their Russian contemporaries: *The Aleuts, in general, men as well as women, are of a rather*

*solid build and many of them are broad-shouldered and strong. This makes them very robust and tireless in work and walking. Aleuts especially astonish with their tirelessness in baidarka travel. I happened to travel with them several times for from 14 to 20 hours, not putting in to shore. During such voyages, they did not stop more than once and not longer than about 15 minutes. ...The eyesight of the Aleuts is excellent and, in comparison with the Russians, incomparably superior. For instance, where a Russian scarcely notes something in the ocean, an Aleut already sees what it is. If this be a baidarka, he can discern if it be a one-hatch or two-hatch one. By the time a Russian sees a baidarka, an Aleut already recognizes the faces of the paddlers. They attribute the cause of such excellent eyesight to the fact that they do not use salt in their food. ...About their other bodily sense I can say nothing in particular except that they have their own tastes—special ones. In order to eat with relish whale meat and fermented fish heads and consider sour roe a delicacy, one must indeed have a particular taste and not too delicate sense of smell.*

Veniaminov did recognize, though, that the Aleuts, in comparison to Russians, were at certain disadvantages, but that their potential was unlimited. In a footnote, he wrote: *If every plant and each species of animal can be improved and brought to its potential perfection by cultivations, then without doubt, a breed of man, capable of improvement of all kinds, can be improved by education and, consequently, can have degrees of perfection. The Aleuts'...habitat forces them to invent means for assuring subsistence and, consequently, to develop their mentality. Their acquaintance with Europeans and the acceptance of Christianity awakened the abilities of their minds.*

Veniaminov, through such close observation and interaction clearly came to admire the Aleuts, and he understood, perhaps more than any other Russian or European in his day, what the Aleuts considered proper behavior. *The Aleuts considered it glorious: to kill as many enemies and wild animals as possible; in a storm and during other calamities to save others, be it even one person, while clearly endangering one's own life; during raids or long journeys, by one's boldness and intelligence, to ward off a general misfortune or scarcity of food; to be courageous in war and show it in deeds; knowing that he is subject to ambush on revenge for an offense committed, or having been condemned to death for an action harmful to society, to face death unflinchingly; to strongly guard the secret with which one has been trusted; to be faithful in friendship; to help others without recompense and especially when one is himself poor; at all times to observe fairness; in cases when the slaves were expected to be killed, spare their lives and set them free and, especially, having supplied them with all the necessities for the journey, to let them go to their native land. All such persons the Aleuts extolled with praise and transmitted their memory from generation to generation in songs, tales and the very ornaments of the women.*

By such accounting, it is no wonder Veniaminov ingratiated himself so deeply into Aleut culture. He embodied those attributes most desired and appreciated within Aleut society, and it is obvious in reading his notes that he appreciates the Aleuts and their positions within his parish and within the Russian-American Company. He describes them in such detail, from beliefs and customs to clothing and food, that even the uninitiated could understand the life these people lived on those faraway islands.

Veniaminov worked not only to translate Russian works into Aleut languages, he also toiled to present to the outside world the lives of the people for whom he had become a spiritual father, writing unflinching notes on all that he observed in the hope that, at some point, that work would be compiled into a publishable form (though he had not attempted such a compilation up to that point) and that it would be not only useful to, but also accepted by the scientific and theological communities.

During the course of his service in Unalashka, Veniaminov also observed a good deal of the declining animal populations, namely the fur seals and sea otters and the other fur-bearing land animals like the fox. He recognized the approaching calamity if hunting pressures on such animal populations did not decrease. He proposed a plan by which the animal populations would be able to rebound through moratoriums on hunting for a period of several years, and then opening seasons in specific areas at only specific times, so that no one area was put under undue stress by over hunting. He also was able to point out how animals such as the fur seals could not only rebound, but also be bred through a controlled program; a kind of farming, to restore the yield of pelts to its earlier heights while lessening the impact on the wild fur-seal population. Although his ideas were sound and his observations were correct (he was one of the first to recognize that an animal could be hunted to extinction), the Russian-American Company did not implement any of them. And although the Russian impact on the wildlife of Alyeshka was enormous, it was miniscule compared to the exploitation and decimation that would arrive decades later in the form of American, Asian, and European hunting interests.

In his time, though, the Alyeshkan wilderness had come to be his home, and he had come to love it. Despite requesting a transfer as early as 1828, Veniaminov served his parish more than adequately, and it is impossible to overstate the impact he had on all peoples which whom he came into contact, an impact both immediate and lasting.

5.

The entry in Veniaminov's journal was simple:

*June 3, 1834. Sunday. I celebrated the Liturgy*

*Comment: A ship arrived from Sitka. This ship brought the news that a new priest will be coming to Unalashka.*

Although Veniaminov applied for a transfer to Irkutsk as early as 1828, he was unprepared for the abruptness of the announcement, and further taken aback when he discovered that his transfer was not back to Irkutsk but to New Archangel, the settlement the Native Alyeshkans, and Veniaminov himself, called Sitka.

"Your reputation has grown larger than you know," Ekaterina said that night at dinner. In the 10 years on Unalashka, the family grew, and her time was occupied with the worries of motherhood. In addition to the oldest boy, Innokentii, and his sister Ekaterina, born aboard ship on the way to Sitka, the couple added Gavriil, born in 1826, Aleksandr, born in 1827, Olga, born in 1829, Paraskov'ia, born in 1830 and Fekla, the child he called by the Aleut nickname "Kusha," born in 1832. Theirs was a bustling household, filled with the laughter and exuberance of children and always in an atmosphere of learning.

"What reputation would that be?" Veniaminov asked.

"Think about it," his mother Fekla said. "You can't be that thick to not recognize it."

The children looked to their powerful father, who sat with his arms spread open in supplication, as if to question whatever his mother could mean. "I have done nothing extraordinary."

"And the fact that you don't see it makes it all the moreso," Ekaterina said.

"Listen to your wife," his mother said.

"I do listen to my wife. She's the only wisdom I have."

"Then you have to know why you stand out from all the other priests here," Ekaterina said.

"I'm taller than they are," Veniaminov said, and his mother rapped the knuckles of his resting hand with the back of her wooden spoon.

"No one has ever done for these people more than you have. And no one has ever learned their languages and spoken to them as equals. Not even the mission who first came here accomplished as much as you have accomplished."

"But they have laid the groundwork for me."

"And you have taken that foundation and built a mansion upon it. Such industry does not go unnoticed, not by the church, and certainly not by the Company."

Indeed, it was the new Russian-American Company manager, Ferdinand Petrovich Wrangell, who had taken such a notice to Father Veniaminov. Compared to Sitka's priest, who after ten years was still the ineffectual Father Sokolov, Veniaminov

was a giant. Governor Wrangell was a man with a singular purpose: vigorous efficiency in all matters pertaining to the administration of the Russian-American Company. Father Sokolov was neither vigorous nor efficient, and his demeanor had changed only for the worse in the ten years intervening. Likewise, the only other well-known priest, Father Frumentii Mordovskii was as corrupt an individual as Alyeshka had seen; the same man who had ransacked the venerated German's home on Spruce Island in search of rumored wealth.

Wrangell was a man unafraid to shake things up, and like his predecessor, Murav'ev, immediately recognized the benefits of such a powerful and industrious priest serving in the very seat of power for the RAC. Wrangell had arranged for Father Grigorii Ivanovich Golovin to replace Veniaminov on Unalashka, arriving on the island barely two weeks after Veniaminov had received word that he would be replaced. Wrangell, however, was not contented to leave the shuffling alone there. By all accounts, Father Golovin was a worthy replacement to continue the work Veniaminov had begun in Unalashka, and Veniaminov, in Wrangell's opinion was the perfect figure to head the church in Sitka. Father Sokolov was sent to Kodiak, a parish already decimated through the corruption of Father Frumentii Mordovskii, who was sent packing back to Russia, where he would be defrocked for the debacle that had been his tenure in Alyeshka.

With his large family now, Veniaminov, though attached to the people in Unalashka, was ready to leave. The coming few weeks together with Father Grigorii Golovin were spent with the latter observing how Veniaminov worked throughout the parish of Unalashka. Veniaminov continued performing all Liturgical duties of the parish



until the first of July, when he began to transfer church property over to his replacement. By the 15<sup>th</sup> of July, Father Grigorii Golovin celebrated the entire service and the Liturgy, and the Aleuts and Russians, who had so grown under Veniaminov, both theologically and secularly, began fully comprehending the impending change. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of July, Veniaminov, once again celebrated the Liturgy with his parish, adding a prayer service afterward in which he and those present offered thanks "to the Lord God who had blessed me with a performance of a ten-year service in Unalaska that had been healthy, happy, and —if I be allowed to judge from what I see— not without its successes. On this day I gave my successor the entire church archive and written record."

On August 14<sup>th</sup>, during the Hours, which were celebrated by the priest Golovin, Veniaminov gave his last sermon to the parish of Unalashka. In his journal he wrote of that event free of sentiment and emotion, despite the evidence that the service was a difficult one for him, and for the parishioners.

*I spoke before a gathering of all those living here. The text of the sermon was the following: "A little while and you will see me no more; again a little while, and you will see me" [John 16:16]. I spoke about the fact that we all will unquestionably meet again there in the blessed eternity. Immediately after this, I set out for the ship, accompanied by each and every Aleut. The sincere gratitude and sympathy of every Aleut were attested to by his tears. At one o'clock on the same day we weighed anchor and went to Sitka. Thus concluded my stay on Unalashka, a stay that had lasted ten years and seventeen days: from July 29, 1824, to August 15, 1834.*

## 6.

The writer's desk is a chaotic place, even for those whose scientific minds encourage some sort of imposed sanity, strictures of order that keep the paperwork in neat bundles logically categorized. Veniaminov was one such writer, his ten years of scientific work—calculations of temperature and wind and geological occurrences—all neatly compiled and before him, but there was still chaos at his desk, despite his best attempts at imposing order.

The chaos was in his mind, a swirling mass of thoughts and doubts and fears and unnamable voices telling him that he was out of his element, that he was writing something he had no business writing. He was a priest, not a scholar, and his science, though relevant, was not the science of a scientist, it was the observations of an amateur naturalist, nothing more, and the scientific community would not take notice. Or worse, if it did take notice, it would be to mock only, or scorn in its contempt that such a novice would dare write from a position of authority.

So his desk was a collection of neatly bundled pages of meticulously researched charts and observations, all tidily collected and put in their places alongside his writing paper and fine pen and well of ink. The paper was blank, the pen resting, the ink still capped, and Veniaminov sat staring at the lot hoping that somehow the voices would quiet enough, the doubts dissipate, to allow him to sit and write the compilation of his passionate hobby.

And as the word "hobby" floated through his mind, he was sent careening once again down that doubt-filled corridor of his mind. Who wanted to read about the hobbies

of a priest, and could his observations ever be taken apart from his theology? He wanted to give up on this project. He wanted to find satisfaction in the fact alone that he had obeyed his conscience and observed —written down, even— those observations, and that was enough, surely, for him to feel a sense of completeness. Yet he was bothered by the nagging thoughts, still, that if his work was not published and consumed by those who would call themselves interested parties, then all his work was for naught and he had wasted too many years of his life on a fool's pursuit.

"It doesn't sound like you are getting much done."

Ekaterina's voice startled him. She was usually sleeping at that hour, as he truly was too busy with matters of his church to devote any but the latest hours to his writing.

"I am thinking."

She approaches and puts her hands on his shoulders and leans forward to kiss his cheek.

"Say it," he said.

"Say what?"

"Whatever it is that's on your mind."

"There's nothing on my mind other than how proud I am of you."

"What have I done to be proud of?"

She straightened and gave him a playful slap on the back of his head. "I know you didn't just say that. If I have to tell you of your own accomplishments..."

"No need for that," he said.

"Then what is there a need for?"

"A professional writer to do this job for me."

"No, this is yours to tell. If you don't do it, no one else will."

"I'm no writer, I'm a priest."

"You are what you tell yourself you are. Now get to work or I'll take all your clothes away and lock you in here without them."

Through his laughter, Veniaminov said, "And what good do you hope to accomplish by such an action?"

"It's blackmail, pure and simple. I'll let you out when you have written something of quality."

"How about written something, period?"

"That will do," she says. "But only for now."

Ekaterina bade her husband a good night and left the room, playfully closing the door and locking it on her way out, then unlocking the door when Veniaminov offered a feigned protest. He was heartened by her brief visit, and he found, when he at last returned to his pages, that what mattered was not the words he chose or the scientific background he did or did not possess, but rather the fact that it was being done at all. He found the voices in his head quieted enough that he picked up his pen and at last opened the inkwell and dipped in the nib and set about writing, from the beginning, which was the only way he knew how to write.

*No comprehensive account yet exists of the Aleutian Islands which divide the Pacific Ocean from the Bering Sea. The people inhabiting them, which in spite of its small*

*size numerically, yet possesses its own language, character, and customs, is unknown to us. Even its habitat is strange, for the narratives of our travelers, Messrs. Sarycheve, Lisianskii, Kotzebue, Lutke, and others, aside from their nautical bearings, contain only brief sketches of the country. These, too, unavoidably, are not entirely reliable, since the shortness of their stay, ignorance of the native language and preoccupation with various important matters did not allow these writers to gather information either sufficiently detailed or sufficiently accurate.*

*Having spent ten years in that region and, in the course of my duties, traversed it several times, I had the opportunity to make myself thoroughly familiar with the people of that distant part of our native land, to win their good will and confidence, to acquire, as far as possible, a knowledge of their language, manners, customs, and daily life, as well as to take note of the products and climate of the region. I therefore deem myself bound to convey to my dear fellow-countrymen the results of that ten years' experience, and in my present Notes on the Islands of the Unalashka District I am setting forth everything I could see, understand, discover, and collect, worthy of consideration or mention, appertaining to this country.*

*I have divided my notes into two parts, with three subdivisions of each part. The first part embraces the geographical, the second the ethnographical observations. To these I have added a third, wherein I treat of: 1) the Aleuts of Atkha. These folk, though sharing with the Unalashkan a common speech, character, and customs, nevertheless have*

*peculiarities of their own, which are dealt with here by their local priest, Iakov Netsvetov.*

*And 2) notes on the Koloshi, who dwell at Sitka and on the neighboring islands.*

*In order that my notes may be as complete as possible, I have appended observations of learned travelers who have visited these regions: on geognosy, those of Mr. Postels, on botany, of Messrs. Mertens, Kastal'skii, and Chamisso, while for geography, I have relied upon the latest descriptions of Messrs. Lutke, Oronkovskii, and others, in each case indicating the source on which I have drawn. The deductions regarding climate are based on my personal meteorological observations carried on for more than seven years.*

*In portraying the mental capacity and character of the Unalashkans I have not collated the statements of others but have been guided by my own insight. The traits of their character were gathered by myself from life and, when occasionally suggested by the natives themselves, have been carefully verified by me. The better to appreciate their habitual conduct, I have been at pains to examine them when and where I ran across one more frank or more loquacious than his fellows, or where circumstances tended to render his nature more apparent, as when he chanced to be a little tipsy. However, I have happened on nothing that controverted my own inferences or exhibited any unexpected traits.*

*Despite all this, I am free to admit that my Notes, although in every respect as full and exact as possible, are neither more nor less than material or materials, segregated by subjects, with little or no elaboration, for which reasons some of them, for example, the*

*topographical descriptions of the several islands, will hold but small interest for the general reader.*

Veniaminov's writing, however, would prove far from disinteresting, and his efforts would be validated by the publication of his book, the expenses of said publication underwritten by the Russian-American Company, a gesture that would have been unheard of under the direction of Baranov or, more precisely, Nikolai Resanov. The book, the culmination of 10-years observing the natural surroundings of the Unalashka district, truly would be the first book of its kind, and it would distinguish Veniaminov as more than a priest, but also a knowledgeable man whose ideas bore listening to. Veniaminov was not only the first to observe and write about Alyeshka from an objective point of view, he was also one of the first to recognize that quickly disappearing animal species of the Alyeshkan peninsula and Aleutian islands due to over hunting. His proposal was to control the hunting seasons, and to insure that populations had time to stabilize before hunting were allowed again. And from a human standpoint, Veniaminov, perhaps because of his being a priest and working so closely with the Aleuts, saw their own humanity and even equality with the Russian and European races. The book, despite whatever fears he might have harbored, was embraced by the scientific community as an unapologetic collection of data, precisely the kind of data used by scientists around the world to observe faraway lands and draw hypotheses based on those observations. In short, his work was priceless, and it introduced a largely ignorant public to the lands he had come to hold so dear.

By comparison with his tenure in Unalashka, Veniaminov's time in Sitka was short—only three years—but the opportunities afforded there were no less important, and he began his duties as parish priest with his usual zeal. In his spare time, he also oversaw the construction of a new church and residence for clergy, built a clock for the town's tower, and established a seminary. He also was afforded the opportunity to visit the company's, and Russia's, most remote holding at Fort Ross, a settlement on the New Albion Coast just north of the Spanish garrison and mission at San Francisco. For Veniaminov, the opportunity was a fascinating one, in which he could observe another society and minister to the needs of what surely must have been a community in need. Prior to leaving, he acquainted himself with the politics of the settlement's construction, reading again through Resanov's library, as well as through the writings of Alexander Baranov and the settlement's founder, Ivan Kuskov. In reading of the latter's exploits and life of service to the Russian-American Company, Veniaminov found himself wishing he had the opportunity to meet such a man and to talk about those fateful years journeying to the New Albion Coast and establishing a settlement there. Veniaminov found himself easily imagining what it must have been like to be a man like Ivan Kriukov on such an important journey.

*The Haven* was a large American ship, its crew sharp, and its officers presenting themselves as gentlemen. Ivan had been happy to pass the ship almost a week before it arrived in New Archangel. He knew that an American ship would be planning to trade with the Russians for furs. He had hailed the ship as it approached, the two pulling



alongside each other, the American officers inviting Ivan and a handful of his men across for an evening meal.

"The weather?" The American captain was a slight man, bespectacled and wise in his appearance, his uniform crisp, his brass polished. He appeared by all outward signs to be Ivan's equal.

"It's held so far for us," Ivan said.

The two men stood on the bow of *The Haven*, the seas relatively calm despite the overcast skies. On the main decks, Ivan's companions moved among the Americans practicing their English as the Americans did their best to understand the Russian language. For Ivan, he had gone along on a chartered American vessel to hunt the Baja coast when he was younger, and he had picked up enough English to feel comfortable speaking with the American captain, even though he knew his accent was thick.

"And how has the hunting been for you?" the captain asked.

"Difficult," Ivan said, "but you'll find furs enough to trade in China."

The American captain nodded.

"What are you bringing to trade?" Ivan asked.

"The usual: some meat, grains, coffee, tea."

Ivan and the captain moved from the bow to the main deck, where they collected the promysloviki and American officers, then moved into the officer's mess for dinner.

"The Spanish won't speak with him," the captain said, speaking of Nikolai Resanov, who had set out just ahead of Ivan's hunting expedition.

Ivan only nodded. "Don't tell him that."

"Doesn't he already know?"

"Sure he knows, but he doesn't care. The Inspector is a tough man, and he has his eye on Spanish California."

The American captain thought about the information Ivan had given him about the Russians making a move toward the West Coast of America. He, himself, had sailed the waters in question all his life, and knew first-hand how little the Spanish thought of trading with foreigners.

"Well, he'll have a rough go of it if he tries to just sail in there. They do know he's coming, don't they?"

Ivan shook his head. "As far as I know, he's sailing in unannounced."

The American laughed. "He'll be lucky to live. When is he going to arrive?"

"April."

"Well, I hope for your Inspector's sake that the Spanish are feeling generous when he arrives."

"You don't know the Inspector. He has a way about him."

"A way?"

"He always seems able to get things to turn out exactly as he planned."

"A good trait to have if he intends to deal with the Spanish."

Ivan laughed and held up his glass, toasting the captain and his observations. The rest of the dinner, Ivan and the American captain talked about the situation in New Archangel, and how difficult the hunting had become, how depleted the supplies had gotten. The American captain excused himself and Ivan from the table, and the two of

them walked back out onto the main deck of the ship, the captain taking a lantern with him so that he could show Ivan the cargo. Ivan explained the desire for continued Russian expansion into Spanish California, and the American captain agreed that the move seemed prudent.

"You're still going to have to contend with the Spanish," the captain said.

"We'll stay north of the Spanish."

"Still, they won't take so kindly to having a Russian settlement so close to them. They might take that as a rather aggressive move on your part."

"They'll see that we aren't aggressive."

"How do you propose ensuring that?"

"The Spanish don't care about furs, they don't hunt. We aren't competing for the same resources. So I don't see how there can be a problem."

"I hope, for your sake, that you are correct in your assumptions."

"We have some good men in the Company, captain. We've done well with the Aleuts, and we've learned to live with each other."

"The Spanish have an empire, Captain. The Aleuts do not."

"Then the Spanish can worry about the countries that are part of their empire. What will they care if some Russians settle north of them? They might not ever know we exist."

"Oh, they'll know. Once your Inspector deals with them in San Francisco, they'll be paying close attention to every move your company makes."

"Assuming things go badly for the Inspector, yes. If he is able to reach an agreement with the Spanish, though, then that's a different story."

"You're right," the American said. "Here, take a look to see if there is anything you might like."

Ivan admired the American cargo, ran his hands along the polished woods of the crafted chairs, the simple design of a wardrobe. In one corner, Ivan stopped for a long moment in front of a drawing table, a simple design of polished oak, the top folding away neatly when not in use. He reached down to open the table, commented on the craftsmanship.

"It's a beautiful piece," Ivan said.

"I know the man who built it," the American captain said. "He is a friend of the family."

"You can tell him for me that I admire his work."

"I'll do just that," the American said. "Do you draw?"

"No," Ivan said, "but I have always thought it would be nice to have time to try."

"Isn't it beautiful?"

"It is, Efim," Ivan said.

The other was Efim Petrov, Ivan's helmsman on board the *Kad'iak*, who had become a friend and confidante during the voyage to the New Albion coast. What was beautiful to the two promysloviki was the gritty stretch of beach where the rugged bluffs ended. A beach teeming with seals on shore, and with sea otters in the heavy kelp beds

sheltering the inlet. The site was made all the more beautiful for the difficulty of the journey. They had set out from Sitka with a sister ship, the schooner *Nikolai*, which had foundered and broken up in Gray's Harbor. Heavy seas and violent weather had prevented the *Kad'iak* from effecting much of a rescue, so they had continued south in hopes of somehow making up the losses through hunting and reconnoitering the coastline.

Ivan's tiny baidarka, barely the size of the seals he hunted, bobbed up and down with the waves next to Efim's long boat. On board Efim's boat, and the other five like it up and down the stretch of beach, were the promysloviki, each armed with a heavy rifle. The handful of Aleut hunters stayed closer to Ivan, each of them in their baidarka, a long harpoon-like spear tethered to the side. What otter had been lounging in the kelp beds had already been taken and skinned, and now, with so many seals for the taking, the hunters had turned their attentions to the shore.

"We'll move in slow," Ivan said, indicating he and the Aleuts. "The promysloviki are better at shooting the seals in the water."

Ivan and the Aleuts moved forward to either end of the beach, not wanting to spook the seals and send them fleeing into the water for safety. The sounds of the seals barking covered the scraping of the baidarkas on the gravel shore, Ivan and his hunters working quickly to pull the small craft up out of the water's reach. The beachhead was perhaps a hundred meters long, and Ivan hoped that he and the other group of hunters on the opposite end could work stealth to their advantage, the silent spears taking their count before the sunning seals panicked into flight.

Ivan waved his hand to the Aleut hunters opposite and the two small groups of men moved cautiously onto the open stretch of land. The scent of the seals, a musky smell of fur and fish, invigorated him, and he fought to keep his emotions under control. The seals lounged easily in front of him, the bigger males barking challenges while the females sunned themselves, heavy flippers showering their bodies with cool sand.

One of the seals, an older female, closest to the hunters opened her eyes, and Ivan froze, certain that she would send an alarm to the pack and scurry into the seas. Ivan held his breath until she closed her eyes in a prolonged blink, then focused the dark, heavy orbs on him once again. Curious, Ivan took another cautious step forward; the seal seeming to view him as more a curiosity than a threat.

Ivan smiled, able to walk up to within two meters of the seal before she shifted her weight.

"She doesn't know what we are," one of the Aleuts said.

Ivan nodded and steadied his grip on his harpoon. "No," he said, "not yet."

The initial foray onto the beach netted the hunters some 200 pelts, the majority of the animals killed where they rested. Only after the seals on the fringes of the pack were killed did the remaining animals slip into the waters, unalarmed, where the promysloviki in the longboats waited with their rifles.

The Russians used the beach to clean and dress the kills, then loaded the pelts onto the larger longboats to ferry them back to the *Kad'iak*. The Aleut hunters moved among the carcasses to collect fresh meat, not wanting the animals to be wasted. They

knew, however, as they always knew, that there were too many carcasses and too few men. The majority of the carcasses would be left to rot.

Ivan, although the furs were his primary concern, also understood the Aleuts' desire to respect the seals that provided for their living. He also knew that to leave the carcasses on the beach would spoil the area and prevent it from being used in the future. As the longboats made their way back to Ivan's ship, he and the Aleut hunters tied the carcasses to their baidarka, one at a time, and began the long process of ferrying them out to sea where the flesh would not be wasted.

Ivan saw the fin on his third trip out. He had heard some of the Aleuts, those who had been chartered on the American ships to hunt to the coasts in years past, talk about the great fish the Spanish called Tiburon. Ivan himself, however, had never seen the sharks, and he was wholly unprepared for the animal's enormity.

The group of men had been towing the seals out past the breakers to prevent them from washing back onto shore, the carcasses tethered to the baidarka and floating behind. The fin Ivan saw was large, but well off his bow. He quit paddling and watched the waters around his boat, wanting to catch another glimpse of the shark. Ivan did not see it again before it struck.

He heard one of the Aleuts call out, then felt his baidarka jerk backward, the aft end rising slightly then plunging downward below the water. Ivan thrashed his paddle, tried desperately to keep his baidarka from submerging, but his strength was no match for the animal on the other end of the tether. Ivan barely had enough time to gasp a lungful of air before he slipped under the waves.

8.

Ivan had felt colder, but the barely 50-degree water off the northern California coastline was jarring. Coupled with the fact that he was being pulled underwater by a beast for which he had no name, Ivan was scared. He had managed a lungful of air before he submerged, but he wasn't prepared for his rapid descent into the dark waters. And although the shark had only hit the carcass once, the impact was enough to pull the cockpit of the baidarka underwater, effectively sinking it before the owner could extricate himself.

Ivan could feel the animal thrashing at the seal carcass tethered to the aft of his baidarka, and he knew that if he could manage to cut the tether, he would bob to the surface like a cork. Knowing and doing, however, are two different things, and Ivan had difficulty freeing the large hunting knife lashed to the side of his boat. He couldn't see, and he fumbled with the knots as the boat shook with each repeated impact of the shark on the carcass. On some level he was aware that there must have been more than one shark feeding on this particular seal.

With his air running out, Ivan twisted violently in the cockpit, hoped to free himself from the baidarka and swim for the surface. The pressure of the water, however, made it difficult for him to move, and the cockpit covering adhered to the baidarka, making it impossible to move. Panicking now, Ivan returned to trying to free the knot holding his large knife. He managed to get the knot halfway undone when the shark



jerked on the seal carcass once more, sending a shock through Ivan's body, forcing out what little air he had left in his lungs.

He looked up and could see the diffused light of the surface just seconds above him. He could see the outlines of the other baidarka above him and he reached upward for them, knowing they couldn't see him, knowing he couldn't reach them, but trying nonetheless. He fought the urge to breathe, denied his body's impulse to gulp in water for breath. With the darkness closing in on him, Ivan tried once more to finally undo the knot on his knife.

When the knot *did* come undone, Ivan could barely hold onto it, his grasp weakening from the prolonged submersion. He fumbled with the heavy handle, lost his grip, and wanted to scream as it slipped from his grasp. He watched the silver blade glint once, twice, just beyond his fingertips, and he knew that he was going to die.

The shark hit the carcass one more time, this time shaking Ivan's baidarka to the side, whipping his body out of the craft as he took in his first lungful of water.

Alexandr, one of the Aleut hunters, was the first to spot Ivan. He called out an alarm and the other Aleuts raced their baidarkas toward the unconscious body, each of them fearing the worst but hoping that they could get to him before he drowned, or was attacked again. The Russians, too, had seen the baidarka go under and had rowed the longboats as fast as possible toward where they had last seen Ivan. They, too, raced to save their captain.

Ivan was unaware of anything going on. He had given up the fight to stay alive, his lungs filled with water, the shock of the cold, the trauma of being hauled underwater,

proving too much to overcome. Having surrendered to the darkness, Ivan didn't hear the splash of the Aleuts' paddles or the steady rowing of the Russian oars, didn't hear his men calling out to him, didn't feel the hands grasp him by the collar of his coat to turn him face up in the water, didn't feel the Aleuts drag his body out of the waves and heave it across Alexandr's cockpit.

Neither was Ivan aware that, while he had given up, his men had not. He couldn't feel them pounding on his chest and stomach, didn't hear them calling out his name. He didn't feel the cold, coarse sand against his skin. For Ivan, the world had gone black, the reality of his life fading into a scene of another time; not a memory, but a fantasy.

Ivan walked through a field of wheat, his hand clutching at the stalks and uprooting them, the rich smell of a warm summer wind blowing across the fields. He touched the feathered top of the grain to his cheek and smiled. He was at peace, that much he knew, even though he didn't know where he was. He had an urge to run, to take off his boots and feel the earth giving way beneath his bare feet.

"It's nice here, isn't it?"

Ivan turned to see a man he knew was his father, even though he was younger than at any time Ivan could remember him.

"Yes, it is."

"Why are you here?" his father asked.

"I don't know."

"Sure you do. Don't you remember?"

"I—" Ivan stopped and furrowed his brow. He felt as though he should remember something, should know what his father was talking about, but the only thing he could think of was how nice the sun felt on his face. "I don't know what I'm supposed to remember."

"You've given up, then."

Ivan looked hurt, watched his father turn away from him. "Wait, I don't want you to go. I want to stay and talk."

His father waved over his shoulder without looking back. "We'll have time to talk later. You have some thinking to do first."

Ivan waved, even though his father wasn't looking, and watched his father disappear inside the high stalks of grain. "What am I supposed to do?" he asked, but only the sounds of summer in the fields answered.

Ivan turned and continued walking, thought of the words his father had said, wondered what it was he was to remember. Ahead, Ivan saw a house, small and nondescript, cozy without being elaborate. He imagined that there should be the smell of bread baking, of a hearty evening meal waiting for him. But as he neared the house, he realized it was empty.

He opened the door without knocking, felt as though this was his home, and shouldered his way into the front room. The furnishings were sparse: a simple table, two hand-carved chairs, a single lamp that he thought he should recognize but didn't. He moved to one of the chairs and ran his hand across the dust-covered top rung and felt that he should remember this chair, too. As he moved around to the front of the chair and sat

down, the insight hit him: he had owned these chairs once, from somewhere far away from here. Ivan closed his eyes and rested his head in his hands, fought to think of the time and place from which he knew these chairs.

The sounds came first, followed by the smells: waves washing against a pebble-strewn shoreline, distant voices, laughter, the keening gulls flying overhead; the fragrance of cooking meat, thick and gamey, of skins being cured. Ivan fought to hold onto the sounds, listened to them over and over again, longed to recall their source. He concentrated on the voices, heard one more familiar than the others and imagined himself moving toward it.

Sight followed sound, and Ivan recognized the streets of New Archangel, saw Anatoly, one of the hunters he had known who had once been an important figure but who had been killed in a raid and long since forgotten, standing in the middle of the street talking to Alexander Baranov. Ivan waved to the men and ran toward them, happy to see his friends. He remembered them now and called out to them.

"He'll be hard to replace," Alexander was saying.

Anatoly was shaking his head. "He won't be replaced."

"I still can't believe it. Did you hear what happened?"

Anatoly nodded.

"Happened to who?" Ivan said. Both men ignored him.

"I never would have expected it to end that way," Anatoly said.

"End what way?" Ivan asked. "Tell me who."

Anatoly and Alexander started to walk away and Ivan followed them, hoping to get their attention somehow.

"Will you be all right?" Alexander asked.

"I'll be fine," Anatoly said. "I would like to be able to take back some of the things I said."

Ivan finally lost his patience and reached out to grab Anatoly by the shoulder. New Archangel disappeared as Anatoly turned to face Ivan. There was something in Anatoly's eyes that frightened Ivan, something that made him feel small and insignificant, out of place.

"Anatoly, it's me," he said, his hands up in front of him.

"Why are you here now, Ivan?" Anatoly asked. "You don't belong here."

"What do you mean? Of course I belong here."

"No," Anatoly said. "You left."

"I had to. I had to hunt the..."

Ivan took his eyes off Anatoly and looked down at the ground, confused.

"They didn't move, Anatoly."

Anatoly only stared at Ivan, a kind of amused look on his face.

"The seals. They didn't move when we killed them," Ivan said. "There were so many."

Anatoly grabbed Ivan by the collar and pulled him up close. "You remember now, Ivan. You remember."

Ivan nodded his head.

"Then stop acting like you don't know what's going on. If you want to remember, that's up to you. I can't help you any more. I've shown you everything I know. I expected more from you."

"I don't understand."

"Look," Anatoly said.

Ivan looked down at his feet and saw the body, lips blue, eyes closed, arms extended lifelessly out to its sides. There was something familiar about the face, the way the nose hooked at the end, the broad shoulders and narrow waist. Ivan stared dumbfounded, and Anatoly pushed him down onto all fours.

"Look closer, Ivan."

"Oh, god," Ivan said. "It's..."

"You," Anatoly said. "On some god-forsaken beach."

Ivan shook his head. "Not like this," he said.

"Yes," Anatoly said. "Just like this. You quit right here. You got scared and let everything go."

"I fought," Ivan said.

"Not hard enough," Anatoly said. "You want to go run off to the fields. You want to forget everything and let it all end here."

Ivan shook his head.

"Yes," Anatoly said.

"No," Ivan said. "Not like this."

Anatoly stood up, left Ivan kneeling in the sand looking into his own lifeless face.

"You really don't want it to end like this?" he asked.

"No," Ivan said. "Not like this."

Anatoly kicked Ivan in the stomach then, a single blow, hard and surprising, that toppled Ivan onto his back, coughing. Ivan gritted his teeth, clasped his hands over his stomach and looked up to Anatoly who was backing away from him now, smiling.

"That's better," he said, and Ivan coughed again.

"Much better," Efim said, and Ivan coughed harder, confused as he tried to focus his eyes on the man kneeling over him.

"Anatoly?" he whispered.

"What?" Efim kneeled beside his friend and captain and put his ear close to Ivan's mouth. "Say it again, Captain, I can't hear you."

"Ana.."

"Efim, Ivan. It's Efim."

"Efim?"

"Yes, sir."

Ivan coughed again, tasted the salty water bubbling up from his soaked lungs, turned his head and vomited it into the sand.

"Just breathe," Efim said.

Ivan nodded his head and grasped Efim's hand in his. "Just breathe."

"That's 2,000 by my count," Efim said.

Ivan looked into the holds and couldn't help being pleased. The hunting had been better than any he had ever experienced, and the taking of so many pelts would surely bolster support for the Russian America Company's continued eastward expansion. He also knew that to do so would mean establishing a permanent counter on the New-Albion coastline, and although the hunting had been good, none of the sights proved very promising for establishing a permanent settlement.

Deciding to cease the hunting expedition and return to New Archangel, Ivan took his ship along the coast northward in hopes of finding a suitable location. The thought had crossed his mind that, if he were able to make progress along that front, he would further his chances of returning and heading up the most eastward operations.

The experience with the shark changed Ivan dramatically. He had, in the days since, been more introverted and thoughtful, reflected on who he was and where he was. Most importantly, Ivan thought about where he was going. The more he thought about it, the more convinced he became of his dissatisfaction with New Archangel. The joys of Alyeshka had diminished over the years, and he realized that he was happiest when he was out on some expedition or another to a remote redoubt or on an exploratory mission to the south, and he had made up his mind that, one way or another, he would make a better life for himself on his own terms, away from outside interference and influence. He had already come to think of the New-Albion coast as his home.

"It is a good haul," Efim said.



"It is that," Ivan said. "Under different circumstances, I have no doubt that we could have doubled the number of pelts easily."

Efim smiled. "It will be a nice homecoming, indeed. I doubt many captains have found such success on their first outing."

"To be honest with you, Efim, I'm not really concerned about the other captains."

"I didn't mean to—"

Ivan held out his hand. "No need to apologize. You haven't offended. It's just that I have seen the results of such naked ambition. I think it's better to judge success against ourselves rather than against another captain."

Efim nodded. "Wise of you, I'm sure. It is difficult to let go of the spirit of competition, though."

Ivan laughed. "It is, that, I agree. I've just had an opportunity to think on the subject a bit more."

"Because of the attack?"

"It's hard to put into perspective," Ivan said. "I like it here. It's simpler somehow; removed from the ambitions and drives everyone seems to have in Sitka. Everyone wanting to make a name for themselves. I want to just life."

Efim nodded, but wasn't entirely sure of where his friend and captain was going with his conversation. "Everyone is ambitious towards one thing or another."

Ivan nodded. "Of course they are. Setting goals is a good thing. I want to come back here and help establish a counter. But I want to do it not because I want glory or

expect to be remembered for it. I want to return because I feel at home here. It's a beautiful land, and far enough away from New Archangel that I could be my own man."

"So it's the idea of being told what to do that doesn't sit well with you."

"Ivan shook his head, smiled. "I guess it is, Efim. I guess it is."

"You would still have to answer to Alexander and the Inspector, would still have to answer to the shareholders in St. Petersburg."

Ivan held up his hands in mock protest. "You've made your point." The two men laughed easily, then Ivan leaned against the railings and looked through the light fog to the coastline to starboard. "Keep your eyes open, Efim. I want to find a place to recommend to Alexander when we get back to New Archangel."

Two days into the northward journey, Ivan ordered the ship to drop anchor. He and a handful of Aleut hunters lowered their baidarkas into the water and moved through the breakers toward the mouth of a river. Ivan smiled, knowing that a fresh water source would be vital in maintaining a settlement. The river meant not only water, but also food: in a matter of hours, the Aleuts had found a variety of fish and wildlife in the tributary, which would be called Slavianka, resting midway between Rumiantsev Bay and the Kashaya village of Metini.

The river was in a low-lying area, a valley flanked on either side by steadily rising terrain. He had also seen signs of indigenous peoples, but he didn't see anyone come into view during the day-long excursion up the river. There would be negotiations if the Russians, indeed, decided to make a push to settle this area. He knew from his charts that they weren't far from the northernmost Spanish enclave, which made him a bit nervous.

But he hoped that, if Resanov was successful, that proximity might be used as an advantage.

Ivan sent two Aleuts back to the ship with orders for the hunters to gather as much foodstuffs as they could carry. The banks were overgrown with ripening fruits and edible plants, and the river teeming with fish and fresh-water muscels. The initial excursion turned into two full days exploring the river and the surrounding areas before Ivan ordered everyone to return to the ship.

"Promising," Efim said.

## 10.

The Fort Ross to which Veniaminov traveled in 1836 was vastly different from the small settlement constructed and initially governed by Ivan Kuskov. It had begun as a brainchild of Nikolai Resanov, who long had been an advocate of expanding not only eastward through Alyeshka, but also southward to the fringes of Spanish California. Indeed, unbeknownst to the Spanish in The Presidio at San Francisco, Resanov had, coincident to his arrival, dispatched Ivan Kuskov to not only reconnoiter the coast of California, but also to hunt the ubiquitous sea otter and other marine mammals along its coast.

Ivan Kuskov did as he was told, hunting along the New Albion coastline, and in so doing was able to scout a suitable location for the establishment of a settlement there. Rumiantsev Bay, contemporary Bodega Bay, had a deep harbor and easy access to land,

but it was perilously close to the Spanish and would be more difficult to defend than the small winter home of Kashaya Pomo at Metini, a dozen miles further up the coast.

Although Metini lacked Rumiantsev's deep harbor and easy access, the sheer cliff faces and rocky shores, coupled with its sheltering mountains behind, made both defending and hiding a much easier task.

Kuskov continued leading hunting expeditions southward to Metini and the New Albion coastline for the next five years before formally establishing his redoubt, formally dedicated on August 13, 1812 as "Fort Ross," a poetic nod to the settlements connection with Imperial Rossiya. The unique political climate made the Russian foray into New Albion unnoticed. Europe was preoccupied with the Napoleonic conflicts, with all eyes turning toward Moscow. Great Britain, never much of a threat to the New Albion and Alyeshkan settlements of Russia, was again at war with the United States, which through ventures by entrepreneurs like John Jacob Astor, was an uncomfortable presence for the Russians. With war occupying the major governments, several months passed after the formal establishment of Fort Ross before anyone, namely the Spanish, even realized such a settlement had been constructed. By then, it was too late, as the Russians had been embraced by the local native population, and the local Spanish population, including many at The Presidio, had not forgotten Nikolai Resanov and the Russians they had helped not so long before.

This is not to say that the intervening years were easy ones for Ft. Ross. Aside from the natural calamities —like weather, diminishing animal populations, and a small pox outbreak— there were also political difficulties. On the Russian side, there seemed to

be no clear consensus as to how the settlement on the New Albion coast should be most effectively used. It was established as a hunting counter, with Kuskov taking some 2,000 sea otter pelts on his first voyage alone, but the hunting eventually was secondary to the needs of the settlement at New Archangel, which seemed perpetually on the verge of one failure or another, primarily famine. Fort Ross seemed an ideal location to grow foodstuffs for the company headquarters, but the agricultural undertaking was an immediate failure, as none of the Russians at the settlement were motivated enough to tend the crops, there were no agricultural experts among them, and the climate offered one of the most fickle growing seasons. The fort, it was thought, would be a good source of meat, so herds of cattle and sheep were bought, but these either were killed through natural predation or allowed to wander off. Shipbuilding, too, was considered, but the plentiful redwood used in such construction proved unsuitable for the task, the timber rotting away in a matter of a few short years through exposure to the elements at sea, making the ships not only financially unviable, but also physically hazardous.

If the shifting missions weren't problem enough, the regional politics proved nearly impossible, suffering as Ross did from isolation from its motherland; the same problem plaguing The Presidio to the south. The Spanish, when they did find out about the settlement at Ross, were at first disinterested, as there really was no means to oust the interlopers even if such an order had come. The garrison was already well constructed and armed, making armed conflict suicidal to the small contingent from Spain. Politically, however, there would be a long string of demands and counter demands and rescinded demands. For instance, Governor Arillaga gave permission for the Russians to

trade with the Spanish holdings to the south, through the proviso that all goods would be ferried ashore by rowboats and that the Russians vessels would not enter port. But Lieutenant Pablo Vicente de Sola, Arrillaga's successor, presented a harsher front in accordance with the Viceroy's orders, telling Kuskov in 1814 that he was trespassing on Spanish land and that he was expected to disband the settlement and immediately depart: this decree in accordance with the Russo-Spanish treaty of 1812. In a diplomatic coup, however, Kuskov used a ploy that will serve the Russians for the settlement's duration.

Because the settlement was established by order of the Tsar, it would take a second order by the Tsar for Ivan Kuskov to effectively order the fort's disestablishment. The Spanish agreed that word should be sent, but speed of dispatch was not exactly the order of the day, communication with St. Petersburg taking, as it did, a full two years to complete. So it was that with each year, the Spanish would arrive at the settlement and voice their grievances to Kuskov, who would, in turn, promise to send dispatches post haste to St. Petersburg.

The political climate was not helped with the arrival of Otto Evstafevich von Kotzebue, who was sailing around the world in search of a *northeast* passage from the Pacific to the Atlantic Ocean. Kotzebue was an important figure in Russian seafaring. The round-the-world voyage took place after the defeat of Napoleon and was financed by Count Rumiantsev, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, at his own expense. For the voyage, he had commissioned the construction in Finland of a 180-ton brig that was outfitted as well as any modern vessel of its day. For command, Rumiantsev turned to his trusted friend and admiral, Kruzenshtern, who had, years earlier, been chastised by Nikolai

Resanov and forced to make a public apology for his "ill treatment" of the latter in hopes of saving his career. With Resanov a faded memory, Kruzenshtern advised Rumiantsev that a young lieutenant by the name of Otto Kotzebue was the right man for the job. So it was that Kotzebue set out aboard the *Riurik*, the brig named after the semi-mythical founder of the Russian state, outfitted with the latest charts and seafaring equipment from England. Additionally, the *Riurik* was outfitted with a new, modern lifeboat and food preserved in tin containers.

When Kotzebue arrived in San Francisco, he arranged a meeting with General Arguello, who was still the commandant of The Presidio there. Kotzebue appeared to side with the Spanish claim that the Russians were squatting, and he assured them that he would deliver the message to the Tsar and personally plead the Spanish case. By all accounts, Kotzebue portrayed himself as representative of the Russian state, and as such, able to negotiate treaties and settle disputes. The fact of the matter, however, was that he had no such authority and his jurisdiction was nothing greater than the ship upon which he sailed. The result is that the Spanish never truly knew with whom they were dealing, and under what circumstances authority was granted. So the politics continued, with demands and assurances given by both sides, until the Fort's eventual sale in 1839.

What Ross did have going for it, however, was the interaction with the indigenous population along the New Albion coast. Being embraced, or at least tolerated, by the native population was not unheard of for the Russians. While they had certainly had their share of difficulties with some of the Native Alyeshkan tribes, primarily through acts of ignorance by company administrators like Alexander Baranov and Nikolai Resanov, they

had also had more successes than most colonial or imperial powers. The primary reason for this success came in the form of priests like Father Veniaminov and the much loved missionaries who preceded him. These men and the orthodox church were inclined to see the humanity in the native peoples rather than naming their practices heathen and forcing them to convert to Catholicism, like the Spanish with South America, or destroying their cultures outright for the purpose of gaining lands, like the United States with the native populations standing in the way of its Manifest Destiny.

Consider, for example, the letter Father Veniaminov sent to the Procurator of the Holy Synod in St. Petersburg, concerning the beliefs of an Evenk native from northern Kamchatka, who said to Veniaminov:

"The Tungus always prays. A Tungus knows that all is given by God. When I kill a partridge, I know that it was given me by God and I pray to God and offer thanks to Him; if I fail to take a partridge, this also is from God, who withheld the game from me; it means I was not good and therefore I also pray to God."

Veniaminov responded in his letter to the procurator: *I cannot remember these words without my heart being moved, especially since these words, truly Christian words, were spoken by a man whom our new philosophers would not dignify with the name of human being. And one thing more: the more I become acquainted with the "savages," the more I am convinced that these so-called savages are much, much better in respect to ethics than the so-called enlightened ones. It follows then: we, with our enlightenment, move away from, do not come closer to, perfection. And it must be so: we abandoned the source of the water of life and dig ourselves safe wells. My flock is small in*



*numbers (up to 18 1/2 thousand) but not small, not in the least, in virtue. It is not only the Aleut, as I thought earlier, who know how or knew how to share the last fish with the hungry, not they alone who are patient, modest, obedient, peaceful and pious, etc. All the small peoples (we cannot call them nations because of their small numbers) living within the borders of the Kamchatkan Diocese evidence the same qualities. Only in piety, devotion to the faith, and in attention to God's word to the Aleuts occupy the first place. Even Chukchi and Koriak who are not baptized have many good qualities and customs. Hospitality, self-respect and respect for one's name, honesty, keeping one's word, readiness to assist the hungry without any kind of expectation of recompense – all is a common custom of almost all local indigenous peoples. Among the unbaptized and independent ones there are traces of ancient customs. For example, unchastity is punished among the Koriak by death. The more I come to know the so-called savages the more I love them and become ever more convinced that we, with all our enlightenment, left the way toward perfection, almost imperceptibly. In the entire Kamchatkan Diocese there is no thievery or murder; at least there are no instances in which a Tungus, a Kamchadal, or an Aleut is in court for such crimes. On the contrary, there are many instances of virtue. I cannot avoid saying, in the spirit of gratitude, blessed by the Lord who reveals knowledge of faith and truth to infants and conceals it from those who believe themselves to be the wise ones.*

With such attitudes toward the native peoples, the Russians were seen as tolerant by the Kashaya Pomo and coastal Miwok natives of New Albion, who had already come

to see the Spanish and other encroaching powers as untrustworthy. The establishment of the fortress at Settlement Ross, even though small, was some guarantor of autonomy for the natives, and in return for that perceived protection from such colonial interests, the Kashaya and Miwok learned, as the Native Alyeshkan, to work for and with the Russians in all endeavors of the settlement.

But Fort Ross suffered from its location, and when Veniaminov arrived, it was nearing the end of its usefulness. Three years later it would be sold to an influential land owner in California by the name of John Sutter, but in 1836, Fort Ross was Russia's farthest outpost, and the marine mammal life, as was the case elsewhere, had been decimated. When Veniaminov arrived, the Native-Alyeshkan hunters were paddling their baidarka as far south as Baja to hunt the now-scarce sea otter. He had seen it before and proposed ways to "farm" the pelts of animals in such high demand.

By the time he reached Fort Ross, however, he was tired from the day's journey. Because of the shallow inlet at Sandy Cove, the small sheltered bay at the base of Fort Ross, visiting ships had to anchor south at Rumiantsev Bay and passengers proceeded back northward on horseback to reach to the settlement. The ride was not easy, and Veniaminov quickly realized the unpredictability of the weather on the New Albion coast. During the winter months, the sheer cliff faces are battered by gale-force winds and tumultuous seas. These winter storms, which bring to the land nearly all its annual rainfall, give way to the temperamental wind gusts of spring and the saturating and cold marine fog layer of summer. On the journey from Rumiantsev Bay, it is possible, at almost any time of year, to pass from microclimate to microclimate, at once damp and

saturated with chill or exposed to the hot sun, which can make a traveler equally damp in his own perspiration. As a result of the extreme climate changes, Veniaminov arrived under the weather, falling so ill with respiratory problems that for two days he was unable even to get out of his bed.

It was Ekaterina's voice he heard as he rested coughing in his shaded room, a giant of a man brought low by the elements.

"You do too much," she had said prior to his leaving.

"How can you say that? I do only that which is required."

"It is not required that you travel to New Albion."

"There are people there, too, and they need to hear of God's love for them just as much as the people here in Sitka, or the people in Unalashka, or the people in Irkutsk. Surely you see this."

"Sure you see that all this travel is too hard. It takes its toll, Ivan. You must see this. Look at your face in the mirror and see the years piling up there. Look at my face and see..."

"Ekaterina, please..." But for a moment, and a rare moment it was, her facade was broken and Veniaminov saw the price she paid for *his* years in Alyeshka; for *his* years pursuing his calling. He saw in her eyes the eyes of their children; five of them still traveling with them and three dead in Siberia. He saw the rich fatigue in her face, the years of worry and concern, not only for the children, but for himself. All his travels had weakened her, and for the first time he recognized age in her body: her shoulders sagged in a way he had not noticed; her hair, indeed, was graying; her ankles were swollen with

more than a decade of hard walking and standing in service to her family; the small of her back cracked as she rubbed it, the bearing to term of eight children wreaking its own havoc; her spirit, so visible through her deep-set eyes, seemed just as tired as her body.

There was more to the conversation that was lost to him now. It was that moment, no more than a handful of seconds shared between them, that lingered in the foreground of his thinking. It scared him, her frailty. She had always been sturdy; he teased her of being his own Peter, the rock upon which he'd built his family. In the solitude of his sickbed, Veniaminov fully comprehended the harsh life inflicted upon Ekaterina; the toll of bearing children year after year, and the worrying after them and after himself, always off on some mission.

And it was the mission that ultimately brought him out of his reverie. Although sickened and weak, Veniaminov had still been able to observe many of the daily activities of the settlement. There were barely more than a score of native Russians, and the majority of them were of an undesirable demeanor characterized by sloth and addiction to drink. The work that was carried out at Fort Ross was performed by the many natives who set up their own camps around the fortress. What hunting there was to do was done by the Aleuts brought from Alyeshka. Veniaminov admired the work ethic of the natives, who truly were the only reasons the settlement had survived as long as it had. He found that the Russians were difficult to not judge. Their actions were almost criminal, and he thought, once again, of Resanov. Veniaminov saw through the years to Resanov, or someone like him, remembered for this settlement and whatever achievements it made. He prayed for forgiveness for such harsh thinking, because the

thought that had just traveled through his mind was that he would not trade his beloved Ekaterina for the accomplishments of all the Resanov's in the world.

On the third day, Veniaminov emerged from his sickbed, and though still weakened, picked his way across the open courtyard of the fortress, past the sally port overlooking the sheer bluffs and the vast expanse of ocean, beyond the fast-corroding canons trained out that same sally port, and rang the heavy bell on its placement outside the small chapel. The chapel was functional, but for such a settlement as this, a larger church should have been constructed. Still, he was the first ordained orthodox priest to speak in the chapel, and even the most obstinate Russian was there to hear the message.

From the heavy scripture upon the altar before the church, Veniaminov read from the book of Daniel, in the fifth chapter beginning with verse 18:

*Then Daniel answered, and said before the king, 'Let your gifts be for yourself, and give your rewards to another; yet I will read the writing to the king, and make known to him the interpretation.*

*'O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor.*

*'And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down.*

*'But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him.*

*'Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.*

*' But you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this.*

*'And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.*

*'Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written:*

*MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.*

*'This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it:*

*'TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting: '*

*'PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.'*

*Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.*

*That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain.*

*And Darius the Mede received the kingdom...*

*All of us have been where Belshazzar sits. All of us, even knowing the events that preceded us, have puffed ourselves up before God; have said to God that we are more important than You. We have all been guilty of pride, and it is that pride that blinds us to the redemption and compassion of God through His Son.*

*There are those among you here, today, who have told me stories of not only yourselves, but also of others, who allowed pride to stand between them and the glory that could otherwise have been bestowed upon them by the Almighty. Whether the pride comes in the form of seeking personal fame and glory, or for believing yourself above recrimination because of the ideal you stand for, it is pride, nonetheless; and there can be no glory from pride, only failure, guilt, and the fall from grace.*

*All we have in our lives is granted us by God. Great men are made great by their Creator, not by their own works, less they boast that they are greater, even, than God, Himself. We are granted our portion to glorify God, not to diminish Him. Whatever anger you carry toward your brother; whatever envy you might turn on your brother; whatever violence you might wish upon your rival —and I might go far as to say, even, your friend— is rooted in pride. Search your hearts and know that there is a God in Heaven who has given to your neighbor, your brother, your friend, just as He has given to you. Do not corrupt those gifts with pride and vanity and thoughts that you, somehow, are better than your neighbor. Give thanks, instead, that God granted you your circle of relationships, that you might be made better.*

*When the heart puffs up and says for you to think yourself better than others, open that heart to God and let your tongue give Him praise, instead, and see, then, what kindness; what richness; what blessings flow as a result.*

## 12.

Veniaminov spent a total of two weeks living and working with the inhabitants of Settlement Ross, and as was the case in every locale he visited, the people came to love him. But the New Albion coast was a difficult place for Veniaminov, and he found himself each evening moving out through the sally port on the southwest-facing side of the stockade and making his way to the edge of the bluffs where the dry brown coastal grasses yield to the open space of the sheer drop to the ocean some 200 feet below. There he watched the sunset and found himself feeling restless. It was some time before he realized that he was homesick, not for Sitka or Alyeshka, that land that had been so kind to him and to his family, but for Irkutsk.

In California, Veniaminov saw all the potential of beginnings and all the disappointments of endings. He felt the very earth beneath his feet, split as it was by the San Andreas Fault, as something unsettling, and he thought of the landscape as something that would always be in flux. It would always be someone's end and another's start. For now, it was Russia's final outpost, but Veniaminov realized that it would not be for much longer. He had consecrated the cemetery on the overlooking ridge, and prayed that those who rested there would remain undisturbed by the coming changes. Likewise,



he blessed the small chapel and prayed that it, too, would survive whatever coming strife it might see.

He knew that the Spanish, too, saw this land as an end, and with such natural wealth as possessed in New Albion as was there for the taking, Veniaminov knew that it was a territory to be coveted by those powers vying all over the globe for supremacy. In the evenings, though, Veniaminov was able to push such tumultuous thoughts from his mind and reflect on the natural beauty, and it was in that reflection that he yearned most for his homeland of Siberia. The fertile soil gave way easily to plants and flowers. The surrounding countryside teemed with life, and to his eye the landscape seemed not so far removed from that of Lake Baikal, and one small corner in particular where the lake shallows and fingers into a flat prairie ringed by a small range of mountains. He thought of the gladiolas that would be blooming and how he would love to pick those sprays of color for Ekaterina, who bore such hardship on his account. Then there would be the yellow poppies, their fat bulbs spilling open in miniature reflections of the sun. And as that sun slipped below the horizon, the purple hues thrown across the windswept clouds were the same shade as the clouds hiding behind the line of fir trees not far from the seminary in Irkutsk, where he spent evenings watching the sunset and ruminating on what the future might hold for such a poor child.

The sunset in California was like a distant calling home, and he marveled for a moment at just where he stood. There on the cliffs of the New Albion coast, Ivan Veniaminov was young Ivan Popov once again. His father was still alive and reading books to him, telling him of the wonders of the world that awaited if he just closed his

eyes and imagines them. Far off places the young boy thinks hopelessly exotic: St. Petersburg and Moscow; Paris and London. Once more he was laughing at the things his father said, knowing that a family of such limited means would never be able to send a son on such extravagant journeys; knowing that it would be his imagination only that carried him.

But go he did, and he stood weeping at the edge of the world, whispering to his father, long dead but living vibrantly in that memorable moment. There, too, was hieromonk David, his beloved uncle and teacher, who traveled, like Evseii Popov, through books. And Ekaterina was there with him, too, looking out at the beautiful sunset and thinking, that it did, indeed, look just like Lake Baikal in springtime and how much she loved the gladiolas he picked for her. Veniaminov, in standing in that liminal space between beginning and ending, held open his arms as if to embrace them all; as if he could gather the whole world into his grasp.

"Have I done enough?" he asked to no one. "Do I have time yet to do enough to live up all these expectations? To live up to Yours?"

He stood and listened to the chill winds sweeping up the cliff face in reply, until his cheeks were stinging with it, then he wrapped himself with his heavy cloak and moved back into the squat fort of heavy redwood timbers, the Russian lanterns lighting his return.

Upon returning to Sitka from his excursions south to Fort Ross —with side trips to the Spanish missions at San Jose and Santa Clara where, for the first time, he used his training in Latin to converse with the priests— Veniaminov thought, if only briefly, of the nobleman Resanov and his ill-fated grab at power thirty years earlier. It had been Resanov, after all, who had so longed for a lasting legacy of heroism but who had, instead, grabbed only infamy and misunderstanding. Standing at the bow of the company sloop *Sitkha*, Veniaminov looked across the thick waters of the bay at New Archangel and thought of all the waste and greed that had preceded him, of all the men who had so longed for the hero's triumphal entry. Perhaps those thoughts were there, but in all likelihood, if they were there at all, they were fleeting afterthoughts at best, for standing on shore, waving to the arriving sloop and the powerful figure in his black vestments, was an impossible crowd.

Veniaminov had grown somewhat accustomed to such welcomes, often being greeted upon his arrival at a particular island by every last inhabitant of the village. Returning to Sitka, it seemed to him that the whole population turned out in welcome, but the figures he saw first, and who held his attention, were those of the woman who, to him, still seemed striking despite the harshness of her years, and the pressing crowd of children surrounding her. The separation had grown, for them, far too commonplace, but the homecoming was such an overwhelmingly festive occasion that it seemed to make the time apart almost worth it. Every face was touched with a smile, and for Veniaminov, looking down at the entourage, he thought he could leave no finer legacy than this family, and he counted himself blessed.

The trip out had been punctuated by the award of the Order of St. Anna, 3d degree, "in recognition of his service at Unalashka," for which the Archbishop of Irkutsk, the beneficent Mikhail, had recommended him in 1833 as the mission to that island district was drawing to a close. His return was punctuated by the news that Veniaminov's notes, which Ekaterina had helped him compile, on the Unalashka District had been accepted for publication. Upon hearing the news, Veniaminov requested that he be granted leave to journey to St. Petersburg to oversee the production and publication of his book as well as the publication of several translations of various writings into the Aleut language. The request was granted, and the family quickly fell into the task of preparing to be separated once more.

"You are more than welcome to come," Veniaminov said. "You'd be most welcome."

"In St. Petersburg?" Ekaterina said. "What would a poor country girl do in a place such as that?"

"Keep a poor country boy company?"

"Humph. You'll have more company than you'll know what to do with. The synod will want their time with you, and you will have much to do with the production of the book. That part belongs to you. My work with the book is finished."

"But I will miss you."

"And I will miss you. But I am looking forward to returning to Irkutsk for time away. Our children deserve to know their homeland, and I want to show them."

Fekla, who was minding her tongue finally chimed in that Ekaterina couldn't go to St. Petersburg because she was needed in Siberia to keep her from running amok.

"You've not run amok in all the years I've known you," Veniaminov said.

"Which is why she's due," Ekaterina said. "So the matter is settled."

"Is that so?"

"Indeed it is."

"Let me take the little one with me, at least. Let her see the grandeur of St. Petersburg."

"You mean let her keep you company."

"It will keep me on the straight and narrow."

"That's a tall order for such a little girl," Ekaterina said, shooing her away. "I'll have to think about it."

Veniaminov winked at the child, Fekla, who disappeared in a bob of dress and curls. "I'm worried about you," he said to Ekaterina.

"Good," she said. "I spend too much time worrying about you, so the change will do us some good." It is her turn to wink, and Veniaminov's smile came easily to his face.

#### 14.

So much he had seen in what seemed to him so little time. The commission to travel to Unalashka more than a decade past, and Father Veniaminov visited every island of the Aleutian chain. He translated religious writings into Aleut language so that they could hear it in their own tongues. He studied the flora and fauna of the region, and he

compiled a worthwhile book of science on the subjects, one of the first of its kind from Alyeshka. He worked with the Native Alyeshkans to establish the writing of their language, heretofore a spoken form of communication only. And he accomplished all of these tasks, and more, with an attitude of acceptance and love, his idea to show all those with whom he came into contact that love demands practical demonstration: through sermons, yes, but also through the pleasures of carpentry; through blacksmithing and stonemasonry; through mechanical endeavors like clock and organ-making. He was a man of the world and he accomplished more than anyone predicted possible, but he was tired when he returned to Sitka from Ross.

His spirits, though, were quickly buoyed when he learned that his *Notes on the Islands of the Unalashka District* would, indeed, be published, and far distant Russia, that land that seemed to be calling to him as he stood upon the cliffs of the New Albion Coast, was closer than perhaps he dared to hope. Ahead of him waited yet another adventure, and he and Ekaterina decided that while he went on a round-the-world voyage from Alyeshka to St. Petersburg in the company of their youngest daughter, Fekla, Ekaterina would take the other children, including their youngest son, with her back to Irkutsk.

"I thought of Lake Baikal in springtime," he said. "While in New Albion, I thought of the gladiolas blooming."

"You're such the romantic." She was packing her things and trying to not show emotion, even though she did a poor job.

"Are you sure you are all right?"

"I'm fine. Don't be silly."

"I'm not being silly. I'm concerned. You don't seem yourself."

"I'm not sure I remember what it feels like to be myself."

Veniaminov embraced Ekaterina and she allowed herself to be folded into his arms. She marveled at the strength in his body, and imagined that it must surely be made of the same stuff from which his spirit was cast.

"I will miss Alyeshka," she said.

"As will I," he said. "It seems to me a miracle that we were able to accomplish what we accomplished."

"What you were able to accomplish."

Veniaminov studied her face for a moment, and thought that perhaps the emotions he interpreted as sadness might be tinged by something closer to animosity. "Are you angry with me?"

She put the linens down inside the trunk, closed the lid and sat on it, facing him. She wiped at her eyes with the backs of her hands and breathed deeply. "I could never be angry with you. I don't know how to say what it is I feel."

"I will listen," he said. "However long it takes, I'll listen."

He sat on the bedside, taking one of her hands in his. She looked to the ceiling as if words might appear in the rich wood grain meandering there. "You are an amazing man," she finally said.

"I could do nothing without you."

"Yes," she said. "Yes, I think you could. And I think you will."

"What are you saying?"

"I don't know," she said. "It's just silliness."

She made as if to take her hand from his, but he held onto her wrist and kept her sitting there with him, her hand still firmly inside his. "You must tell me what you feel."

"I feel scared sometimes," she said. "I don't know why, but it's as though I live my life through you. And I will miss Alyeshka because here I have something to do. Here, I am known for the things I do, not just because I am your wife. I love you, Ivan, and you must understand this, I do not resent what you have done. But I am afraid that I am only fading away, and that soon I will only be known because of you."

For a long moment he looked into her eyes, unsure if he should speak or remain silent. He only loved her, wishing that somehow he could fix what was breaking inside of her. "If you were a clock I could fix you."

Through a choked laugh she told him he was funny. "I cannot tell you how proud I am to be your wife. You do not realize all that you have done, and here I know what I have done to help those things come to pass. I will miss that knowledge. And I will miss you."

"I'm not going anywhere," he said. "I'll be back in Irkutsk before you realize I was even gone, and what stories we will be able to tell each other then. And when people look at you, they will see that you are the strength behind whatever accomplishments were made in Alyeshka. God has given me the greatest helper ever a man could hope to find."

"Tell me of when we will be old together," Ekaterina said.

"Aren't we already?"



The two of them stood at the waterfront in Sitka, he about to board his ship with their daughter for his trip to St. Petersburg. They had been through this routine before, but Ekaterina, to him, seemed more distant, more ruminative. When she didn't smile at his rejoinder, he asked "Are you sad?"

She shook her head, but the expression on her face belied her melancholy. He reached out to her chin and lifted her face to his. "Here now," he said, "what's all this, then?"

"Just tell me about it. I want to picture it in my mind and hold it there."

"Of when we are old together?"

She nodded.

"Oh, it will be grand, won't it. There will be quiet for the two of us, and I will not be traveling off. There is a cabin, built by our own hands, with thick walls and high ceilings. Outside the gladiolas and cosmos will be blooming, and inside we will sit side by side and talk of the days when we were young and foolish, off exploring this strange new world of Alyeshka, and all our friends will come to visit us and we will—"

"Tell me again about the part where you won't be traveling off."

"It has you sad this time?"

"It has me sad every time. I have watched you sail away far too often, but I'm still not used to it, and now you will be gone not for a few weeks or a few months, but for more than a year. I cannot describe the emptiness that thought leaves inside of me."

He put his hand over her heart and pulled her close to him with his other arm, kissing the top of her head and whispering that they were absent one another only in the

flesh, not in spirit, and that the time would pass quickly and she would see that she was never alone.

"I feel alone without you, though."

"Ekaterina," he said. "It is time for me to go. Let's not leave with this feeling between us. Be happy for us, for what we have accomplished, and for what lies ahead of us. Very soon there will be no more traveling. There will be a quiet parish for us and we will grow old together, and you will see me so much that you will grow sick of me inside a month."

She did manage a small laugh, and Veniaminov embraced her saying that this was the wife he knew, then all too quickly he was aboard the ship and it was leaving, and Ekaterina was thankful for the distance so quickly put between it and the shore, because she had lost the ability to hide her emotions any longer.

In November of 1838, then, Veniaminov, accompanied by his 7-year-old daughter, Fekla, boarded the *Imperator Nikolai I* for a round-the-world voyage to St. Petersburg. The ship was commanded by the 28-year-old Evgenii Andreevich Berens, who had studied in the naval cadet corps and had been employed by the Russian-American Company since his commission. His ambition and skill at the helm made him a trusted employee, as evidenced by his being given command of his own ship and circumnavigating the globe not once, but twice, with Veniaminov aboard for the return trip from Sitka. But Veniaminov did not leave Alyeshka before leaving his own indelible mark upon the landscape and the people with whom he had come into contact.

As a priest and minister to the peoples of Alyeshka, his service was unparalleled, being as he was perhaps the least judgmental of all clergymen to hold posts through his day. He performed whatever duties the church demanded of him, and he was revered for it, but he was also revered for his entire demeanor, which included the secular pursuits of science and linguistics and all things mechanical. In 1837, when the HMS *Sulphur*, under the command of Captain Edward Belcher, called in Sitka, it sported two broken barometers, which the crew referred to as being "sick." No one aboard possessed the knowledge to tinker with such a mechanism, but Veniaminov, who had no formal knowledge of barometers either, was able to effect repairs on both barometers and return them to the grateful crew.

Like the young captain Berens of the *Imperator Nikolai I*, Belcher was younger than Veniaminov. And although the difference was only two years, the difference did not escape the priest, who had been younger than either of the two men when he had set out from Irkutsk in 1823. It was the first outward indication he perceived of how his position in the world and the church was changing. At the time of his being called to Sitka by chief manager Wrangell, he had thought little of the fact that he was relieving of duty a much more senior priest in Father Sokolov, but the respect afforded to him did not seem out of place considering the treatment he had received in Unalashka after 10 years of service. But in meeting these two ship captains, Veniaminov saw that they were giving him respect as well, not out of reverence of faith, but out of deference to age. Veniaminov had, though he still felt as young (if a bit saltier) as the day he had arrived in Alyeshka some 15 years earlier.

Captain Belcher was an intriguing man: a brilliant surveyor retracing and defining the inconsistencies of navigation that had existed since the voyages of Cook and Vancouver; and a tireless author, publishing several books on his journeys and services around the world. He was also almost universally disliked by each of his crews, because of his self-absorbed nature, which makes his observations of Veniaminov, who seemed to have impressed every person he met through one part of his aspect or another, all the more impressive: "I visited their church, and witnessed the ceremony. The interior of the edifice is splendid, quite beyond conception in such a place as this. The padre, who officiated in his splendid robes, was a very powerful, athletic man, about forty-five years of age, and standing in his boots (which appear to be a part of his costume) about six feet three inches; quite Herculean, and very clever. I took a great liking to him, and was permitted to examine his workshop, in which I noticed a good barrel organ, a barometer, and several other articles of his own manufacture. He was kind enough to volunteer his services on one or two of our sick barometers, and succeeded effectually. Notwithstanding he only spoke Russian, of which I knew nothing, we managed to become great allies. He has since been promoted and gone home."

Although not promoted, Veniaminov, indeed, had left quite an impression on the chief managers he had come into contact with during his service in Alyeshka, and he had been recognized by the ecclesiastical hierarchy as a priest of great merit, the reward of which came in the form of his being invited to oversee the publication of his secular work, the ethnographic and naturalist observations in his notes on the Unalashka District, and his theological work, in the forms of several critical works of orthodoxy translated

into Aleut. Ekaterina and the children, along with his mother, Fekla, would board the *Okhotsk* and return for a stay in Siberia. The separation would be, by his estimation, nearly two years, at which time he would rejoin Ekaterina in Irkutsk and the family would again pack their belongings and move to wherever it was the church saw fit for him to serve.

## 15.

Veniaminov's time in Alyeshka earned him several friends in places of influence, and his arrival in St. Petersburg—he would always speak highly of his touring the Sandwich Islands and Rio De Janeiro, among others, with his daughter Fekla, and what a wonderful educational experience such a journey was for one her age—was punctuated by the reunion with, and support of, some of those persons.

To begin with, Father Veniaminov's staunchest ally within the Russian-American Company, Ferdinand Wrangell, had been relieved as chief manager by Ivan Kupreianov in October of 1835, not long after reserving the honor of bestowing upon Veniaminov the Order of St. Anna, 3d degree upon him. He had returned to St. Petersburg where he often entertained some of the Company's, and indeed some of the country's, most powerful men. Two such men were Kirill Timofeevich Khlebnikov, a self-taught scholar from a storied family, who had used his experience as a Company official to propel him into a lucrative and extensive literary career, and Fedor Petrovich Lutke, an admiral and explorer, geographer and writer who was the grandson of an immigrant German pastor of the Lutheran faith. Both men, along with Wrangell, had garnered strong reputations

within the social and intellectual circles of St. Petersburg, and they all three shared a common respect for the priest Veniaminov.

"So you have made it out of Sitka alive." Baron Wrangell was a striking figure, even out of his accustomed uniform. He carried himself with the bearing of royalty and a man of some power, yet his features were seldom, if ever, harsh. When agitated, usually out of good humor, he had the habit of running his hand atop his balding head or curling the tips of his long, graying mustache. And tonight, with his friend and former spiritual advisor, Veniaminov, gracing him and the baroness with his presence, he was in the best of humors, indeed.

"I am intact," Veniaminov said, "and that shall do for this evening."

"And Ekaterina. How is your wife." It was the baroness, Elisabeth, who asked the question after greeting the priest with a kiss to the cheek. She, too, was in good spirits, and her slender cheeks glowed with contagious warmth.

"She and the children departed Sitka not long after I did, about the *Okhotsk*, on their way to Irkutsk for a much-deserved rest."

"She is a remarkable woman," she said.

"Exactly the kind of companion he needs," Wrangell said, his mustache already curling more dramatically than in the preceding moments. "Do come in and make yourself at home. There is much to catch up on, and I want to hear it all."

The orthodox church in Russia had a long and complex relationship with both the government of Russia and the commercial enterprises endorsed by it, and Veniaminov, despite his untiring zeal for spreading the word of God to those people who had not had

an opportunity to hear it, could not help also being caught up in the political climate as well. On more than one occasion, he was present during the negotiations of one treaty or another, and his proximity to the seats of power in both the Russian-American Company and within the Russian Government made his knowledge of politics as vast as his knowledge of theology, and the majority of the conversation this evening with the Wrangells centered on the politics of the RAC and its role in the Americas. Veniaminov gave details of the different ventures and disputes, including the 1837 small-pox epidemic, "that horrible and unwanted guest," that decimated the Tlingit population in Sitka.

"And now you are here overseeing the publication of your book," Wrangell said.

"Yes. I must confess that I'm enjoying the process, although I do miss the duties of the church."

"And have you been before the Holy Synod yet?"

"I have talked to them on a few occasions, yes. Count Protasov, the Ober-Procurator, has taken an interest in my work and is helping me navigate the publishing community. He thinks that there is merit to some of my theological works in addition to the scholarly writings."

"I have no doubt," Wrangell said. "You are a valuable ambassador for your faith, and for science. That's why I had you assigned to me in Sitka."

The three of them sat in Wrangell's sumptuous living room sipping tea, and Veniaminov realized then, amidst all the comforts of the Baron's home, how distant he truly was from Sitka; distant, too, from Irkutsk where even now Ekaterina was returning

to their small home. He wondered on the state of things in Siberia after so long an absence, and he worried for her.

"Is everything all right, Father Veniaminov?" the Baroness asked.

"Yes. Yes. I'm sorry. Sometimes I cannot help thinking of Ekaterina and her travels. It is worrisome for her to be traveling."

"It is always easier to be the traveler," said Wrangell. "Always easier."

Veniaminov nodded his agreement and sipped his way through the remnants of his tea before setting the china cup back into the nest of its companion saucer. "Tell me of your travels. How did things go in Mexico?"

Like Veniaminov, Wrangell traveled often on assignment from either the Russian government or from the Russian-American Company. By the end of his tenure in Sitka, he was dealing with the Mexican government instead of the Spanish, despite the fact that Russia did not officially recognize that new government. The topic of the discussions was the settlement at Ross, and the negotiations proved inconclusive, though it did provide an opportunity for the Baron and Baroness, along with their children, to travel not only through old Mexico, but also on to New York, where they became well acquainted with many of the American elite.

"That's a country worth watching," Wrangell said.

"Every country is a country worth watching," Veniaminov said.

"Yes, but there is a haste in their words unlike the old countries. Ours, for instance, is a country that has been in existence for centuries; the same with Japan or



China or England. But these United States are already eyeing our holdings and they think it their birthright to push westward."

"There is room enough for such movement," the Baroness said.

"As long as ambition does not outstrip the land's ability to keep up," Veniaminov said. "There are Americans already in New Albion. The settlement at Ross will be sold soon, and I would not be surprised if it is an American who gets it."

"Not the Mexicans?" she asked.

Her husband laughed. "They won't be there for long. They are the only government standing in the way of their westward expansion. I don't think Mexico will enjoy their position for too terribly long."

Indeed, in the following year, in 1839, the Russians would strike a treaty with the Hudson's Bay Company to provision Sitka, making the settlement at Ross no longer necessary, and with the political risks involved, coupled with Ross's remote location, the decision to disestablish the fort seemed inevitable. And true to Wrangell's predictions, despite the Company's overtures to Mariano Vallejo and others, the fort and its surrounding lands would be sold to a rising power in the area of New Helvetia in the Sacramento Valley. And though John Sutter would never live at Fort Ross, he would profit from it nonetheless, and serve, if nothing else, as a portent of things to come.

"I find all the intrigue tiring," Wrangell said. "I thought I would enjoy it all my days, but now..."

"Now it is too much," she said. "Now we want to enjoy our time together." And while the Wrangells continued to act on behalf of the Russian-American Company, they neither one desired the political intrigues of service in the government.

"It is an admirable desire," Veniaminov said. "Ekaterina and I have discussed it many times."

The rest of the evening passed quickly, with the Wrangells promising to introduce Veniaminov within the proper circles as they put it, and they told him, too, to his embarrassment, that the statements of Lütke and Khlebnikov had preceded his arrival in St. Petersburg. He found in the coming weeks and months that he was no small figure in the capital, both within the secular and scientific communities and within his religious order. Upon completion of his book he was invited to Moscow to meet with the Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolumna, Filaret.

## 16.

To Veniaminov, the years in St. Petersburg and Moscow were a blur. The Holy Synod was excited about his publications into the Aleut language, and the scientific community was excited about his ethnographic research, making him a figure much in demand. The Holy Synod was also impressed by Veniaminov's report *Condition of the Church in Russian Settlements in America, with recommendations for their improvement*, and they recommend it, too, for immediate publication and elevated its writer to the rank of archpriest, the highest rank allowed for a married clergyman, and he was bestowed with other decorations; namely the Order of St. Anna, 2d and 1<sup>st</sup> degrees.

"We are all pleased with your successes." Metropolitan Filaret was, like Veniaminov, a commanding presence, partly because of his physical carriage, and partly for his mind and faith, which made him one of the day's most noted theologians. "And by all accounts, it is well deserved."

"It is only because God has ordained it so," Veniaminov said.

"Not only," Filaret said. "You, too, were willing. Without such willingness..."

The two men become fast friends, with Filaret seeing in the younger, powerful priest, an intellectual and spiritual equal. They spent a good deal of their time in private, discussing theological matters and ruminating on the potentials of orthodoxy in Alyeshka and beyond. They both shared a desire to see a reunification of the church, and both prized the benefits of education. Filaret saw in Veniaminov a kindred spirit, and though it pained him to do so, he agreed with the Holy Synod in assigning Veniaminov, again, to Alyeshka, so profound was his impact there. Veniaminov, too, agreed on such an assignment and he was nervous with the thought of explaining to Ekaterina that they must, again, pack their things for the journey to Alyeshka.

It was 1840 and the year was young. It was Veniaminov's favorite time of year, when the bite of winter faded and the first hints of potential warmth found their ways through the cold clouds. Trees sprouted tentative buds and the shoots of spring plants fingered their ways through the defrosting top soil. He pilgrimaged to the Holy Trinity Monastery of St. Sergius of Radonezh, which would come to be called Zagorsk during Soviet rule. It was, for Veniaminov a time when he felt reinvigorated, and the prospect of returning to Sitka was exciting once again, that distant land beckoning for him to return,

just as Ekaterina would call to him from the shore, her arms waving in excited recognition of a face almost forgotten.

Veniaminov was still in Moscow when he received word of Ekaterina's death. His mother and youngest son, too, were taken by an outbreak of influenza, and the news was devastating. His first thoughts were that there must be some mistake, that the news was somehow misinterpreted, but his friends and counselors assured him that the news was not a mistake. The denial was replaced by a raw, open guilt over what had been for him, at the time of her death, a time of uplifting triumph. He thought of how frivolous it all seemed now; the publishing of a book; the drafting of letters and pamphlets; the awarding of medals and hereditary titles. It seemed to him as if the world had simply folded in on itself and he had been too oblivious —too distant— to notice.

"I must return at once to Irkutsk," he said. "My family there needs me."

"Father Veniaminov, please." It was Filaret who spoke softly to the distraught priest. "There will be time enough for grief, but there are other considerations now."

"Other considerations? What other considerations could there possibly be? My wife is dead. My child is dead. My whole family is dead and dying and I am here, too far away to do any good. I am impotent, and you speak of other considerations?"

"I speak of logic and reason."

"There is no reason."

"There is always reason, Ivan. You know that. You must know that. There is always God, even in times such as these."

"I cannot see Him."

"You can if you—"

"I cannot see Him," Veniaminov said again. "I cannot see Him."

In time, he would come to hear Filaret and the others who spoke to him, but in that moment, there was only the grief of unanswered questions; the vacancy of unknown answers, and his every action was devoted to preparing for his travels to Irkutsk, where surely his family was in need of him, and where his heart so desperately wished to journey.

For a time, the heart was held in check by the rage of motion. Veniaminov, the man, hastily hurling together those things he felt most necessary for travel. He did not worry about food or water. He did not worry about all but the barest of necessities, as he planned on traveling light and with great haste.

But packing presented new challenges for him, and in each item he touched, he found a remembrance of Ekaterina. In the garments she mended, he felt her needle piercing and tying together the thread inside. In her letters to him, many written while he was away on some journey or another, he felt her fingertips tracing the edges of the paper. He closed his eyes and smelled her scent; saw her standing on the shore apart from him, her arms waving to him though she was fading from sight, her mouth forming words he could not hear, and he sank to his knees, broken. His weeping was more profound than anything he had known; as if something inside him burst. He held it in as long as he could, but it was as if some great reservoir holding a lifetime of emotions had broken through its levee and would spill out of him at once. His hands clenched white in their

impotence, and his eyes squinted so tightly that he was aware of the pain, but the parts of his body acted of their own volition, and though he would open his eyes, he found them closed beyond his control. Somehow the tears squeezed their way through, though, and they traced fast tracks across his burning cheeks. His lips distorted themselves, and soaked themselves in saliva; the salt of mucous. He felt as though his emotions were manifesting in the fluids of his body and they were all raging to get out. He lost all control and he no longer cared, kneeling as he was on the floor in the middle of his room, hopelessly trying to breathe.

At long last a ragged sound emerged from somewhere deep inside of him and his grief found voice in it, rising in pitch and strength until he wailed to God to strike him dead in that moment, no longer wanting to continue. The torrent continued for how long, he did not know, and each time he thought he might be able to control himself, he began the process anew. His lungs ached from the strained gulps of air, and his muscles ached from their spasmodic clenching, but through the fit he became more aware of the self; more aware of the man kneeling in the middle of the room, a weeping mess, and the words he spoke earlier echoed in his ears and he heard himself saying that he did not want to hear God. He was horrified.

In that horror, he saw Ekaterina again and he saw the look on her face —the profound disappointment in her husband's state. "We have come too far to quit now," she seemed to say to him across the distance; across, even, the span of life and death. He thought of her there in Irkutsk, alone despite his promises of growing old together, and he saw the futility in packing for a journey now. He saw his own foolishness in wanting to

act immediately; to do something, anything, as long as he was not standing still. Though still upset, he found his muscles finally responding and he pushed himself to stand. He moved to a basin and filled it with water, splashing it across his face. He forced himself into a calm facade punctuated by a cough or a sob, as he made his way back to the church.

It was ultimately the church that did beckon to him. He was ashamed of himself for turning his back on God, and he begged forgiveness as he walked toward the familiar surroundings of the sanctuary. It was there he found Filaret, who moved quickly to his friend, who appeared as though he could fall over in a breeze, and braced him by the shoulders. In seeing such a powerful body stricken so profoundly, Filaret, too, found himself heartbroken beyond words, and the two sat in the quiet for hours: Veniaminov needing more than anything the silent companionship of a sturdy friend; Filaret recognizing that in that moment, all that was required of him was real presence. When at last they spoke, it was Veniaminov who broke the silence.

His voice was unsteady, pausing often as if he might lose control once again, and that loss of control scared him more than he cared to admit. "I owe you an apology," he said. "You offered me comfort, and I—"

"There is neither room nor need for apologies. You said what you felt at the time, and I trust that God understands your heart as well. You have not fallen so terribly far, Ivan Veniaminov."

"I feel as though I could not fall any further."

"In your present condition, I'm sure you feel that way. And later, when your wounds have begun to heal, you will see that is not the case at all."

"I thank you for your friendship."

"Thank God, for He is the one who ordained our paths should meet."

"It is difficult now," Veniaminov said, "to feel grateful. I am lost."

"You are not lost, my friend. God knows exactly where you are. And very soon, you will see where you are as well."

"I must go to Irkutsk."

"Not now," Filaret said, which drew a surprised look from Veniaminov.

"My family needs—"

"Your family has been coping with this news for months now. The wounds that are so fresh to you are old for them. Why do you rush to Irkutsk? What do you hope to accomplish there?"

"Ekaterina is—"

"She is dead, Ivan. You cannot get there in time to save her. I am sorry for your loss, I can only imagine how devastating it must be for you. But your place is here now, and you must ask yourself of God's plan."

"What of it? What could He possibly hope to gain from taking Ekaterina?"

"You."

The answer was so simple that it confused Veniaminov, and all he managed in those moments was a mute look of disbelief. So much happened in the past hours that he was still unable to think clearly. But that one word —You— spoken so emphatically and



directly by Filaret, reverberated in his mind, and his thoughts coalesced there, around the implications of such a statement. He felt as though Filaret was wrong somehow. God already *had* him, and He had Ekaterina, too, and there was nothing more that could be accomplished without Ekaterina than could be accomplished with her. And it was in that precise moment when time seemed to stop itself for him, and Veniaminov saw everything clearly.

"You wish me to take monastic vows," he said.

Filaret discerned from the expression on Veniaminov's face that he thought the proposal less than satisfactory. "It is not as preposterous as you might think."

"A monk?"

"You are a man of great value to God, and to the church here in—"

"How can I be expected to be a monk? How am I to—"

"Take the vows and see the doors God—"

"—use Ekaterina's death to my advantage? I can do no such thing."

"—will open for you. Stop. Stop and listen to yourself. Why does the suggestion frighten you so much. It is a logical step for you to take. There is nothing you can do for your family now. Turn to God and allow Him to use you as His instrument."

"Ekaterina."

"She's gone, Ivan."

"She's gone." The word, to Veniaminov, now seemed the cruelest word of all. "I must go now, please. I feel I need to be alone."

Once alone, Veniaminov's thoughts drifted more firmly to Irkutsk and to Ekaterina lying cold and lifeless in the ground, and the thought terrified him. He wondered if there was a priest in attendance to administer the Eucharist to her. He wondered if his son, or if his mother, were able to make peace before they died. And such thinking reminded him that if he had been present, he could have seen to such things. Although impotent to stop whatever sickness robbed them of life, he could at least have been present in those moments to see that they died in a state of grace.

The hours he spent alone soon turned into days, and Veniaminov thought such measurements of time had lost their meaning. He lived in a single, insular moment, when it seemed to him as though the entire world ceased to exist. Yes, the sun continued its plodding pattern of rising and setting, and he was aware that things were continuing on without him —without Ekaterina— but that time no longer concerned him; no longer contained him. He stepped outside himself and outside of his own awareness to inhabit the timelessness of the dead.

It was here that he saw the panorama of his life. He saw all of Alyeshka and the imprint he, with Ekaterina's constant support and encouragement, made upon that landscape. He saw himself and the gathered hunters around the forge so long ago in Unalashka, the hammer light in his hands and the faces of the Aleuts eager in concentration, clearly listening and longing to learn. And he saw himself, too, as a young boy in his Uncle's workshop, the plane hissing softly across the grain of the wood, the hypnotizing curl pulling up lightly from its surface to fall to the floor in a heap of blonde detritus; the steamer box and the young wood bending to form.

And in thinking of his Uncle, Veniaminov found a parallel; for it was after his aunt's death that Dmitrii retreated to the solace of the church and devoted his life to God as Hieromonk David. Perhaps there was a correlation, but he thought further on the differences between the two. Although his aunt and uncle were helping to raise him, they had no children of their own, whereas Veniaminov, despite the loss, still had five living children, for whom he was responsible, and the life of a monk would not allow for their care.

Still, when Veniaminov finally emerged in some semblance of himself, Filaret was insistent that the move was proper and fitting. But it was not so easy to convince Veniaminov of the course. "I have my own guilt to deal with," he told Filaret. "Until I can let go of that guilt, I am of no use to anyone." And for a year, almost to the day, Veniaminov wrestled with his emotions. He received word from his children that they were well and that there was no need for his return; that he should stay in Moscow and St. Petersburg to finish the tasks appointed him and to return only when he was finished. The children, save for Fekla who journeyed with him and who had been enrolled in a school for girls while Veniaminov worked to collect himself, were old enough to live on their own, and again Veniaminov found himself asking where the time had gone. He missed the lives of all his children.

He found in his daily readings both the articulation of his condition and the hope for his recovery. In the third chapter of the book of Lamentations he read:

I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath. He has led me and made me walk in darkness and not in the light. Surely He has turned His hand against me time and time again throughout the day. He has aged my flesh and my skin, and broken my bones. He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and woe. He has set me in dark places like the dead of long ago. He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out; He has made my chain heavy. Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked.

In reading this passage, he began weeping again, and through the emotion he saw Ekaterina there. He heard her voice and felt her breath tickling the flesh of his neck. He closed his eyes and smiled at the sensations, leaning back as though into her embrace. She leaned forward to his ear and whispered her love for him; whispered, too, that she needed him to carry on, for he was *her* legacy on earth, and without him she was forgotten.

Veniaminov, unaware that he had dozed off, woke with a start and stood to look for Ekaterina —as if her presence could be real— before she faded away from this world. Her words rang painfully in his ears, and he was chagrined at the idea that she might be forgotten, and suddenly the importance of her words washed over him. He understood the purpose for his continuing on; that he *was* Ekaterina's legacy. It was her love and devotion that helped shape him into the man he had become, and the idea that he was responsible for propagating that love was overwhelming.

Equally overwhelming were the thoughts that pounded against him in the following moments; thoughts that reminded him that Ekaterina was not alone in looking

to him to carry on their stories and their contributions. There, standing with Ekaterina, was his mother and son. There, standing with that group were the children who preceded all of them in death. There with them all was Hieromonk David, his tools still in working condition and ready as if a need to use them might arise. There, too, was his father, so long departed that he was all but forgotten, but his words remained fresh in Veniaminov's mind. The lessons instilled were firmly rooted. And there, too, was Father Veniamin, whose name Ivan Popov agreed to carry so that a legacy would be provided *him*. The idea of these people looking to Veniaminov was overwhelming, and he knew, too, that he could not bear such a burden alone. When he returned to his readings, he found that it was Psalm 51, not Lamentations, open atop the table.

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies. Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleans me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions. And my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken my rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and

uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

Veniaminov did not immediately return to Filaret, despite the intervening year of rumination on the idea of monastic tonsure. He pilgrimaged, instead, to Kiev, the seat of Russian Orthodoxy, and he met with the Holy Synod, in whose eyes he still was highly favored as an educated theologian with, despite the losses he had suffered, a bright future. His fear was that somehow he would be tainted by his being married, and that his ascension into the monastic order would be seen as a move for personal gain rather than devout calling. They assured him that he had demonstrated, through the time spent in prayer and meditation, that such interpretation was far from likely, and that, theologically speaking, Filaret's advice was not only sound, but also prudent.

Still, the issue of his children concerned Veniaminov and served as a stumbling block. It was finally Metropolitan Filaret himself who devised a workable solution to the issue, bringing into the picture one Aleksandr Potemkin, an influential nobleman, who agreed to allow himself to be appointed the children's guardian. The involvement of the royal family reassured Veniaminov that his children would be well looked after. And he was assured, too, that far from being gone from their lives, he would always be their father and could remain in close contact with them. The benefits to the church, and to Veniaminov, would be the freedoms to travel when and where he was most needed, and

with matters settled to his satisfaction, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 1840, his wife's name day, Father Veniaminov submitted his petition for permission to become a monk.

The petition was immediately accepted, and in a quiet ceremony it was Metropolitan Filaret who tonsured him at the Holy Trinity Monastery of St. Sergius. When asked what name he would take as his own, Veniaminov—with the full realization that he, again, was taking a new name, with all its implications for the names left behind, as well as the ramifications of the new name chosen—rose and spoke, "I am Innocent."

## 17.

With the ecclesiastical order now opened to him, and with his accomplishments thus far in service to the church, on the day following his being tonsured as a monk, Innokentii was promoted to the rank of Archimandrite. Upon returning to St. Petersburg, Archimandrite Innokentii was invited to the Winter Palace of Tsar Nicholas I, where he celebrated services and met for a time with the royal family. They were, like most who encountered Innokentii, impressed not only by his stature, but also by his demeanor. In all things he was instructional, and to those who had seen him through the grief of losing his wife and giving up the raising of his children, Innokentii seemed at last to be returning to the "Herculean" man described by Captain Belcher before to leaving Sitka. So impressed were the Tsar and his family that Innokentii became a regular visitor to the Winter Palace where he assisted in educating the children, especially on the subject of Alyeshka.

More changes, though, had taken place within the church prior to Archimandrite Innokentii's return to St. Petersburg. Before his initial arrival, he had suggested that, in order to consolidate the teachings of the church throughout the farther reaches of the Russian Empire, a new diocese encompassing as much territory should be established. Tsar Nicholas I, upon hearing of the plan suggested to the Holy Synod that such a diocese would, indeed, be in the interests of Russia. With the fortune of having Alyeshka's foremost clergyman and scholar so near to them, he further encouraged the Synod not only to establish the new Diocese of Kamchatka, the Kurile Islands and the Aleutian Islands, but also to promote as the Diocese's first bishop the young Archimandrite recently tonsured as a monk. The move was quick, to say the least, with Veniaminov, on November 24<sup>th</sup>, moving to Archimandrite, and less than a month later being promoted again, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December, 1840, to the rank of Bishop in the Cathedral of the Theotokos of Kazan' in St. Petersburg. Innokentii would spend only a month in St. Petersburg, but during that span of time he ingratiated himself both to the royal family through his regular visits to the Winter Palace and to the Holy Synod, who immediately saw the wisdom in their rapid promotion of the 43-year-old monk from Irkutsk. By the new year, Innokentii was on his way once more to Alyeshka.

## 18.

For the now-Bishop Innokentii, the nights were the worst. His days were spent in preoccupying study and teaching and preparing for his departure, but night slipped in like a vandal bent on stealing away whatever lightness of spirit had been hoarded during the



day. As in the days of his youth, Innokentii saw a profound sadness in the snuffing of the candles, and it was no longer just his father's death that haunted him, but also the deaths of his mother and wife and children, and as he drifted off to sleep he could not help feeling as though a vast candelabra of acquaintances and loves and influences was carried alongside him, lit in daylight by his desires to carry on their legacies and snuffed out in the night by the disconcerting blanket of night. He heard Ekaterina's words too often, saying that all she wanted was to be remembered for having done what was expected of her, and to have done so willingly. In Tsar Nicholas's children, he heard the playful delight of his own children's voices, and the weight of those cries, gleeful in their innocence, was almost more than he could bear. He thought of these things and more as he sat for the first time for a portrait.

While preparing for the arduous overland journey to Alyeshka, he already knew he should stop in Irkutsk where he would meet with his children for the last time for perhaps years, and that he would usher them back to St. Petersburg where they would be looked after by the royal family and by the church. He knew, too, that in Irkutsk he would see the graves of his beloved kin, and that he would say a service for the dead. The thought nearly leveled his spirit. He did not look at the man painting the portrait, the way he would look directly and unblinkingly at the cameras years hence when the camera's shutter overtook the painter's brush. Resplendent in his black vestments he looked off, and upward, as if something fleeting and divine had caught his attention and he would hold it there. In his hand, a scroll, and around his neck a ribbon displaying The Order of St. Anna, and a gold chain holding within it a lacquered pieta with an intricate brocade of

encircling gold and a precious stone caught in a teardrop setting from its base. His hair was a rich black, as if the oil from the lamp smoke had been captured just for that specific hue. It shone in its deep curls and the artist labored there to make the hair fall effortlessly across the priestly shoulders and beneath the equally black beard, which had a single large wave just below his chin. His thin lips were not pursed tightly together, but slightly opened, as though he had just caught his breath and was about to exhale, and the thin mustache —completely covering that thin spit of land between his top lip and the base of his nose— was manicured perfectly downward at the corners to join the small cascade of beard and rising curls atop his shoulders. The rest of his head was lost beneath the black miter sitting hard and severely atop his head. At its top, the miter released a flow of black cloth to cover the back of the head, and Innokentii looked as though he was caught within the rippling material that richly folded down across his shoulders and gave way to his robes, which continued its contoured topography down his arms. The folds caught the light and shone, and despite the blackness, gave off a kind of light that seemed more intense because of the dark surface, and his hands and face stood out in stark contrast, as if they might be the source of that light, or at least its strongest reflection. It was his face, ultimately, that captured the eye and enticed the viewer into the gaze, framed by thin wires of eyebrows. His eyes were more open than expected, and he was looking up at that unseen divinity somewhere off the canvas, and the painter there, too, labored to capture the expression.

Innokentii understood that he would be so far gone in Alyeshka, and gone, too, for so long, that the portrait was necessary for the members of the Synod to remember

him by, but he did not stay to look at the finished product. He was afraid that he would see within the rendering his own remembrance of those he lost, and he planned on being far, far into his journey by the time the portrait found its place on some wall.

The day of departure was more emotional than expected. It was well over a year in the making, and despite his appeals to leave earlier, it seemed to him now somehow anticlimactic. He grew accustomed to being alone except for the friendship of a select few: some officials of the Russian-American Company; officials of the Church, such as Metropolitan Filaret, who had become much more than a mere acquaintance. Innokentii was thankful for Filaret, above all, for he was truly the man whose guidance was the most steadfast and sure, the man who saw Innokentii through the most trying days of the ordeal of losing his wife.

With the goodbyes said, however, Innokentii was glad to finally be on the way. It was not long until the old habits of the journey returned to him. He traveled lightly, which was his custom, not stocking up on perishable foodstuffs and wastefully heavy mementos, preferring, instead, to rely on the charity of those he met along the way. He had grown accustomed to going without during his childhood, so as an adult, missing a meal or two was not of the utmost concern to him. Despite this approach and willingness, Innokentii, because of his position within the church, and because of his endearing way with strangers, never went hungry.

At the time of his travels, the weather was good; winter still months away. His arrival in Irkutsk was anticipated and much-heralded, with his two sons, Innokentii and Gavriil riding out to meet their father. Likewise, news of the new bishop's arrival had

made its way to the theological school where he had been raised since his uncle's departure for the solace of monastic life, and a contingent of some of the men who had been mentors and spiritual leaders to the young Veniaminov, also were on hand to greet their protégé.

These priests and teachers greeted him cordially, with kisses for his cheeks and strong claps on the shoulders. His son, Gavriil, however, rushed through the crowd to embrace his father, who was taken aback by such an open display of affection from the son, whom he realized, he barely knew. The embrace was long, and Innokentii could feel the boy, his wiry frame clinging, and the tiny exhalations of his barely contained crying. The other son stood off from the crowd and displayed no such affection; instead watching from atop his horse and meeting his wayward father's stare unflinchingly.

"Gavriil," Innokentii said. "Gavriil, I am here. Come now. Be a man and take me to your mother's..." Though his voice trailed off, Innokentii knew that the sentiment had been completed.

Gavriil straightened himself and blushed, the backs of his slender hands bruising away the tears that had escaped onto his cheeks. He laughed off the display and fumbled his way through an apology for his outburst. "You have been missed."

"I've missed you, too. Come and show me the way." Innokentii was taken aback by the boy's growth since they had been apart. He thought he must have been a foot taller since last they saw each other, the boy's hair longer now and thinner than his father's, and his smooth skin already punctuated in a few wispy patches of black, fuzzy hair.

"Innokentii... do you have a greeting for your father?"

"I don't know my father," the young Innokentii said. "Is he the man who bears my name? Is he Veniaminov? Is he Popov? Does he even know himself?"

Innokentii, the man, moved past the crowd of onlookers who politely busied themselves with a conversation of feigned importance so that their bishop could address the insulting boy who was already 17 and caught in that awkward interstices between adolescence and manhood.

Bishop Innokentii did not address his son directly, preferring, instead, to move to the head of his son's horse, holding tightly to the reigns that swiveled from the bit clamped casually between the mount's foam-flecked teeth. "You've been drinking, so perhaps it would be best if you went on ahead of us and slept awhile. We can talk later, when you've sobered."

"I'm sober enough to—"

"Don't make me prove the boy you still are —especially here, in front of your brother and in front of my friends."

The son looked as though he might finish the thought, but he took in his father's stern-set jaw and the icy demeanor. He recalled the strength contained in that body, and whatever courage the bottle might have inspired prior to the bishop's arrival quickly dissipated, and the boy thought better of continuing the exchange and did as he was told, pulling his horse's head round with a hard jerk and nickering it into a gallop back toward the area of home.

"He's been like that since mom..." Gavriil, now, was the one who could not finish the thought.

"Don't worry about your brother," Innokentii said. "That is my fault if anyone's, and I will deal with it. I'm glad to see you."

The two, father and son, also had things to discuss and resolve, but Gavriil, as would be the case throughout his life, adored his father and desired nothing more than talking as they walked toward the cemetery, despite the late hour and the growing darkness. They discussed the journeys to St. Petersburg, the overland journey from there to Irkutsk, the publication of his books and letters, his ascension to bishop, and, indeed, so much that the two of them fell into a rapid call and response that continued to the very moment they reached the cemetery.

Innokentii sought some form of closure in going to the graves of his beloved Ekaterina, buried now and resting beside her three children and his parents. The sight of the graves was too much to bear and his legs gave way, leaving him crumpled and crying on the hard ground. He, however, was alone at his own insistence, so the spectacle went unwitnessed by those of his party. "What a mess I have made," he said to no one and nothing in particular. He shook his head as if by that act alone he might loosen the cloud around his perception. He wanted to deny the reality of the grave staring back at him; wanted to ignore the stone marker carved by his own sons' hands, that spelled her name out far too visibly for any denial to hold merit.

"I am so sorry, Ekaterina." His fingers caressed the letters of her name as if her body lingered inside the etched lines. "How do I ever ask your forgiveness? I have thought now, for more than a year of what I would say to you when at last I was here at

your grave, but those words are gone now. All I can say is how sorry I am not to have been here for you."

The memories flooded the man. What seemed like moments came back in a baptism of years, drowning him in their enormity. Here were the quiet days of courtship in Irkutsk: the poplar trees with their golden-spade leaves twirling carelessly in the autumn breezes; the thick gladiola stalks blooming in stubborn adornment; the fragile cosmos he picked for her on so many occasions, presenting the tight bundles of lavender flowers like an offering. This land represented the time of furtive smiles and hopeful thoughts. He recalled the softness of her hands and the way his entire body chilled at the tenderness of her touch. He remembered the easy sound of her laughter and the straightness of her nose, as if those details somehow were linked. He remembered that stubborn lock of hair that seemed always unwilling to stay tied back with its kin. He had loved that endearing bundle of hair and the thrill he gained from simply touching those golden strands in mock severity, as if he might be skilled enough to keep them in their proper place.

Here, too, were those uncertain years of preparation and departure for the unknown in Alyeshka, and the memories were like a guilty tide lapping at his feet: her soft, lovely hands worn hard through labor and calloused with the demands of the frontier of Unalashka; the same stubborn strands of hair turned gray with worry for his many journeys to places unknown and impossibly foreign; the hard lines on her face from bearing and raising so many children, year after year; the sagging of her shoulders as if by the force of some weight she alone must bear.

And there was the final thought, of a simple afternoon on the shores of Sitka; she preparing to board the *Okhotsk* for her return to this place, and he and his daughter, so excited at the coming voyage, boarding for passage around the world to St. Petersburg. How he would love just to be there one more moment, in that moment, to fully appreciate what he would never see again with earthly eyes. How distant that time seemed, separated by the veil of mortality, and how impossibly close, too, as if he might simply extend his hand and touch the veined skin of her cheek and whisper his love for her.

It was there that Ekaterina spoke to him the loudest of all, she recalled conversations of sacrifice and advice, of her willingness to make his work possible, and of her pride in seeing that work accomplished. "You were always so wise," he said to the cold grass covering the grave. "How am I to go back to that place without you? What good will I be able to do without you by my side?"

He imagined Ekaterina extending her hand to hold him in her gaze for just a moment longer before he left on yet another journey. It was one of the many endearing rituals between them, and he closed his eyes and leaned his face into that imagined caress and could feel the trembling warmth of her flesh. "My husband," she said. "Travel well and know that I am here for you when you return."

The sound of footfalls behind him drew Innokentii from his reverie. "I lost track of time," he said.

"It's all right, father," Gavriil said. "But it is late and we must return home. The others will be worried for us if we aren't back soon."



"Yes, yes," Innokentii said. "There will be time enough for goodbyes tomorrow. Take me to my children."

## 19.

The following day, Bishop Innokentii spoke with his children about where they would go and how they would be provided for. The youngest daughter, Fekla, had remained in St. Petersburg, where she made fast friends with many of the children her age in families Innokentii came to know during his stay there. The other daughters, Parask'ieva and Olga would make the journey from Irkutsk to join their sister in the girls school there. Likewise, Gavriil and his brother Innokentii, the eldest son, would make the journey to St. Petersburg where they would attend the St. Petersburg Seminary and study there under the tutelage of their father's friends and colleagues. The eldest daughter, Ekaterina, had announced, with her father's blessing, that she would be marrying a young clergyman by the name of Il'ia Petelin and would not be making the journey with them.

"It is a difficult time, I know," Bishop Innokentii said. "I wish I could take you with me, again, to Alyeshka, but there is no one now to look after you. I have done the best I can to see that you are afforded every opportunity."

If the younger children were disappointed in the arrangements, they did not voice it, but the eldest, Innokentii, was a different matter. "It's convenient that you can go away as you please and hide us away. Thank you, but I'll stay here."

"I am not hiding you away. It is what is best for you."

"How do you know what is best for us? You do not even know us."

Bishop Innokentii was a man notoriously slow to anger, but the words of his impudent son stung him harder than the words of colleagues or peers. The role of father was one that was still rather foreign to him, the majority of the domestic responsibilities falling, as they did, on the strong shoulders of Ekaterina. "You all will excuse us," he finally said, dismissing the other children. "Innokentii and I will need to talk."

As the others left the home, the young man moved to a cupboard and extracted an opened bottle of wine, the cork stained red. Innokentii made a show of removing it with his teeth and spitting it across the room. "Is this where you teach me a lesson, father?"

Bishop Innokentii smiled, although it was a gesture more of bemused understanding than mirth. "You want to be angry with me, so go ahead. I won't stop you."

"You cannot stop me."

"But I will not give you further reason to hate me. You are already doing things to hurt me."

"Oh yes. You have me all figured out, don't you father. You're the wise one."

"No, I'm not wise. I only know that as a father I have been absent far too long, and I see now that I will be made to suffer for that."

"Not to worry, *father*." When Innokentii said the word it was like a curse dripping from his lips. "You still have the others."

"I still have you."

"No." Here Innokentii tilted the bottle back and swallowed hard, wiping his lips with the back of his hand when he finished. "You don't have me. You never had me. And I'll be damned if I go to St. Petersburg to the seminary there."

"You'll watch your tongue with me."

"And you'll watch yours. You think I'll become a priest like you?"

"No. I think you'll be a priest far better than me."

"Of course you do. And then all will be forgiven, is that it? Well it won't be. I won't forgive you, because I won't forget all the years you were never here. And I won't forget the fact that you weren't here when mother needed you the most. Where were you when she was on fire with fever and throwing up all over herself? Was it you who held her head in your lap and put cold compresses on her forehead?"

"No, it—"

"No! It wasn't you, even though she was calling for you the entire time. She only wanted you to be here, but you couldn't do that, could you? You couldn't be where your family was, because you had more important things to do. You had to go save the world and write your precious book. You loved those fucking savages more than her or—"

Innokentii, before he was even aware he was moving, slapped his son hard across the face, the force of the blow knocking the bottle from his limp grip, the wine spilling across the wood of the floor, staining it. "You may think I have no love in my heart for you, but it is because you have hardened your own heart against me. I can only imagine the suffering you have gone through, but you will never understand the hell of being in Moscow when I got the news of your mother's death. You will never know how much I

loved that woman, or how much I love you. Hurt me if you must, I will not deny you that right. But don't you dare tell me that I did not love my wife, or that I do not love my children. Only in eternity will you ever know how much my sacrifices have cost me here in this world."

The young Innokentii rolled to his feet and stood when his father, who had been hovering over him menacingly, lowered his hands and retreated to the other side of the room. The imprint of the elder's hand glowed bright red on the young man's face, an angry brand in a rare moment when passion overtook control. "Are you finished, father?"

"I will never be finished with you, Innokentii. We share a name now, just as we have and always will share blood. You may hate me, but every time I hear this name spoken I think of you, and I think of the guilt I will always carry for not being here when your mother died, and not being here when you needed me the most."

"And this is to garner sympathy from me?"

"No. It is only for you to know the truth."

"The truth." Innokentii picked up the spilled bottle from the floor and put it on a thick wooden counter in the adjoining kitchen before moving toward the door to the home, his eyes warily on the father who stood apart from him. "Your truth is one I do not understand. You speak as if you know God personally, but all I see in you is the face of a stranger, and I will have you live the rest of your days knowing that I care nothing at all for you."

Indeed, his eldest son would be a thorn in the priest's side for the rest of his days, although he would never give up on him and, despite the urgings of some of his friends

and even family members, would not disown the boy, no matter how much trouble he found himself in, and no matter how much the son would spread his vitriolic opinions of his father. But for the time being, Innokentii and his brother Gavriil did go to St. Petersburg to attend the seminary there, just as their two sisters went for schooling with Fekla under the care of the Royal Family. The episode with Innokentii, however, stung the priest more than he would care to admit, and he counted it some comfort that his eldest daughter, Ekaterina, had chosen to have her father officiate her marriage to young Petelin, and afterward, to be a part of the her father's suite traveling once again to Alyeshka and the massive, far-flung diocese that lay ahead of them.

For Bishop Innokentii, the time in Irkutsk was reinvigorating. He was able to return to his old seminary, where many of his old teachers still lived and worked and in increased positions of authority, and thank them for the opportunities they had afforded him as a youth. His had been a circuitous route to the rank of bishop, but Innokentii, despite the current difficulties with his eldest son, would not have changed his path for anything. As for the priests in the Irkutsk seminary, the promise they had seen in the young man to whom they had given the name Veniaminov, had at last come to fruition, and he carried with him a validation of their intuition.

Outside the bishop's residence, though, the weight of expectation fully engulfed the bishop. Innokentii had been talking with his friend and clergyman, Hieromonk Misail, a former classmate and compatriot, when he stopped at the sound of the ringing clock, the timbre of its tolling still true and nearly perfect in its timekeeping.

"What is it?" Misail asked.

"I built that," Innokentii said. "Many years ago, an old man named Klim and I built that clock."

"Yes, we all know the story."

"Of course you do. But you don't know it from my perspective. I have thought of Klim often through the years, but I did not remember the clock when I first came to Irkutsk."

"No one expected you to remember."

"I do not mean it as such. I mean to say that it is only now that I recalled the role this clock has played in my life. I cannot tell you how many times I heard Klim's words instead of one of the priest's, telling me to be patient and to take my time. The old man had a philosophy about time; he acted as if he could make it of his own free will."

"Can't we all?"

The question caused Innokentii to turn and behold his friend in a different light.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean only that each person is responsible to himself and making the most of the hours he has on earth. In that sense, yes. He could make his own time."

Innokentii said that Misail's observation was correct, indeed. "I am glad I have come back to Irkutsk. It is good to see my friends again and to remember where I came from."

"And to remind you how many people have not forgotten you. Your reputation truly precedes your arrival here."

Innokentii waved the comment away, but Misail persisted.

"I do not say such a thing to flatter, but to illuminate. No one from our seminary has done so much with so little as you. You are a living testament to the Grace of God, and you provide a way that all of us might live through you and your exploits."

"I have no exploits, please. I am just doing what I have been called to do."

"And you have taken all of us along with you. When people anywhere remember your name, they are remembering us, as well. Do you not see that you carry all our legacies upon your shoulders?"

Innokentii put his hand on his friend's shoulder and said that, indeed, he understood quite well the meaning and value of a lasting legacy, saying, too, that the matter had been of some import in his thoughts of late. "I often think of Ekaterina, and just now, you have brought her memory to life once more, for she used to say such things to me, years ago, in Alyeshka."

"She was a wise woman."

"Yes, she was my wisdom in all that I did. I do not know how I will replace such a partner, but I am thankful that I have friends such as yourself to accompany me on this journey."

Before leaving Irkutsk, Innokentii blessed each of his children for their journey to St. Petersburg, writing each of them a personal letter so that they might know something of his feelings for them, his feelings for their mother, and his reasoning for continuing to work in the service of the church in spite of the losses they have all suffered. To his son, Innokentii, he wrote:

"I hope someday you will come to understand who I am and why I have made the choices I have. I wish there was an easy explanation to give to you, but there is not, and I will not pretend that there is not hurt between the two of us. I can only pray that as time goes by, your heart will soften toward me, and you will come to see me as the father you wished had been there in those times I was absent. I am sorry I was not there to comfort you as a babe, or to soothe your aches when you were sick. I am sorry I was not there more when you were a young boy to give you comfort when the dark brought fear to you, or to kiss away hurts when you injured yourself. You are nearly a man, now, Innokentii, and you will make decisions for yourself soon. I pray only that you will remember that our decisions cast shadows long enough to cover our entire lives. I pray that the choices we both make will be wise ones."

Bishop Innokentii, prior to his departure, was happy to celebrate Divine Service in the main cathedral in Irkutsk before returning to the Church of the Annunciation, where he had first served as a young deacon and heard Ivan Kriukov's confession. There he retold the the old mariner's tales of Alyeshka for the benefit of those who were not familiar with them, and he underscored the importance of each and every person in the parish, for truly no one knew how their actions —be they words or deeds— could impact the lives of others and even come to define a life.

Afterward, Innokentii, returned a final time (although he would visit the cemetery each time he returned to Irkutsk for the rest of his life) to Ekaterina's grave and placed there a bouquet of cosmos and gladiolas and bundled them together with a small braid of his black hair. "I wish you the rest you so richly deserve, my beloved. I do not know how



I will do what is required of me without you by my side. So I pray for your strength and for your wisdom, for truly I do nothing apart from you." He kissed his fingers and pressed them to the stone marker etched with her name then rose quickly and left before his emotions got the better of him.

The experiences in Irkutsk invigorated Innokentii, and the bishop set out, again, for Alyeshka, this time with a stronger sense of purpose and a clearer idea of what would be expected of him. When he left the first time, he was accompanied only by his family, but this day he set out with a much fuller, and more ambitious suite, knowing that the responsibilities awaiting them would be not only missionary in nature, but also administrative in design. Innokentii already knew that his diocese would be expansive and that in order to minister to such a vast and far-flung parish, he would need to be meticulous in the church's government. So he took with him his eldest daughter Ekaterina and her new husband Il'ia Petelin, who would be a valuable priest to some of those distant communities. He took with him Hieromonk Misail, his friend from the seminary, who would act as dean of clergy and later, one of the most influential missionaries to the Tlingit people, notoriously patient in their acceptance of the church and wary of all things associated with the Russian-American Company. Hierodeacon Nikolai, Deacon Serapion Mamin, Hypo-deacon Lev Popov and the seminarians Il'ia Tyzhnov and Mikhailo Masiukov, also accompanied the bishop to fill key roles within the church. Finally, he brought with him a group of choristers —Andrei Bladovidov, Petr Berdennikov, Prokopii Letvintsov, and Konstantin Zarudenkov— who would help make the cathedral in Sitka a more metropolitan and far less frontier house of worship.

The overland journey from Irkutsk to the port city of Okhotsk was no easy feat in and of itself, and Innokentii was thankful for the presence of his child and son-in-law, as well as with the retinue of priests and churchgoers who give the procession a sense of purpose he was not sure he would have mustered by himself. Each of the party looked to Innokentii for guidance and for decisions on what should be done and when, which forced him to think more as an administrator and less like a missionary, which had been his overriding mindset during his first decade in Alyeshka, in which he spent the majority of his time paddling via baidarka and baidara to the distant parishes in his disjointed see. From Okhotsk, the group sailed aboard the brig *Okhotsk*, for Sitka.

The ship was the same vessel Ekaterina and the children had taken from Sitka on their return journey to Irkutsk, and the irony did not escape the bishop, who on their first evening at sea stood at the fo'c's'le, staring off at the white-capped swells blowing their briny sprays into the air through which the prow of the squat ship ploughed.

"She would come up here at night and watch the sunset." Ekaterina, the eldest daughter, came to stand beside her father and watch with him the darkening sliver of horizon now barely visible in the distance. "She said she felt closer to you here, knowing that you were at sea, too. I think it gave her some comfort."

"I do so hope that is true."

"Same sky. Same sun. Same sea. She was good at finding ways of feeling closer to you."

"It must have been difficult for you, too."

"I hated seeing you go, just like everyone else did. But mother understood and she would tell us stories of all the great things you were doing."

"Small comfort, I'm sure."

"Actually, they were a great comfort to me. I used to pray each night that God would keep you safe and bring you back with bedtime stories to tell us. We never wanted for love, if that has you worried. Innokentii is mad at the world, not at you."

"He will have to find peace with himself."

Ekaterina shivered in the stiff breeze and pulled a thick black shawl tightly around her shoulders. She moved closer to her father with a laugh and muttered that she was cold. "I miss her," she said.

"That's why I am going back to Alyeshka. I would go mad in Irkutsk."

"Maybe you're already mad?"

The tone of her voice was reassuring, and Innokentii realized that it was so very similar to her mother's. The playful tone, too, evoked memories of the two of them in their quiet time; the easy banter they shared between them. "Even the harshest settings were made easier by her. I wish I could tell you."

Ekaterina reached up and brushed her father's cheek with her delicate hand. "Sea spray," she said. "This is nice, coming up here and being with you."

"Yes," Innokentii said, "and I had thought I wanted to be alone..."

"Now you know," she said.

He squeezed her at the ribs and she jumped. "Like your mother."

"I hope so," she said.

The pair was quiet for a time longer, and when the mood grew, again, reflective Innokentii said, "I feel guilty about what happened to her."

"She knew why you were in St. Petersburg. We wanted to send for you, but she wouldn't hear of it. She wanted to be strong for you and didn't want you to worry."

"That sounds like her."

"So stop feeling guilty. It won't bring her back now."

"The life I gave her was a difficult one, Ekaterina. Bearing children, living on the frontier, ministering to the Aleuts. I would have loved to give her more comfort..."

"Grandfather was a priest, and mother wasn't stupid. She knew what she was getting into when she married you. And I know what I'm committing to in marrying Il'ia. She told me once, when I was missing you off on one of your journeys, that if I closed my eyes and concentrated, I could see you, and it would be like being there with you. She had this amazing way of knowing how to sooth any of us when we were upset, and I'll bet she knew how to do the same thing with you. And she loved that. She felt that was why God had put her on this earth. So in going to Alyeshka again and doing what you are doing, you're keeping her alive, Papa. We're all alive through you."

Innokentii looked at his daughter and saw the fortune of his son-in-law. She was all that her mother was, and he was thankful for her presence. He told her so, then told her, too, that he was tired and going to bed soon. He felt good being at sea once more, and he gave Ekaterina a reassuring kiss on the forehead. "I am so proud of you," he said.

She smiled and watched her father descend back to the main decks and below, then turned her face into the wind, as if she could smell on its biting currents the land that waited for them all.

## 20.

When Bishop Innokentii resided in Alyeshka during the late 1820s and through the majority of the 1830s, the most obvious and contentious problem facing the church was the lack of an organized structure. The church in essence relied for that structure on the Russian-American Company, whose aims up to that point had not always been coincidental with the theological undertakings of the priests. Innokentii encountered the results of such lack of leadership in the personages of priests like Sokolov and Frumentii, who used their posts either as bully pulpits, in the case of Frumentii, to make their lives easier through the acquisition of wealth, or hid behind the cloth, in the case of Sokolov, whose sloth and love of drink was known well beyond the small parish of Sitka, for which he was responsible.

Returning as bishop, Innokentii had the power, at last, to see that changes were effected immediately, with the church now able to operate within its own immediate administration, which up to the establishment of the new Kamchatka-Kurile-Aleutian Diocese had been only a dream. As Bishop of this diocese, Innokentii had several initiatives he wanted in place, but the first and most important was clear lines of communication within the church. No longer would records haphazardly kept and seldom inspected. To prevent the kinds of abuses perpetrated by Frumentii, Innokentii

established strict guidelines for record keeping, and insisted on holding accountable the priests who fell under his leadership. The effect was immediate, with the immaculately kept records serving as a history of the church and its impact on the peoples of Alyeshka. Similarly, within days of his arrival in Sitka, Innokentii established the diocesan consistory on October 14, 1841, making sure that everyone —orthodox priests and Russian-American Company administrators alike— understood the implications of such an establishment.

For Innokentii, the position of bishop was taxing, but rewarding. The challenges were different than what he had experienced as a missionary priest in the Unalashka District. As bishop, his role was far more administrative, and he quickly learned to delegate assignments to those priests he trusted most. And with his arrival in Sitka this second time, the quality of priests rose dramatically, and he would see to it that the trend he began would not falter. For the first year in Alyeshka, accompanied by his suite of monks and priests and church laity, Innokentii worked to establish those institutions he considered most crucial for the success not only of the church, but also its parishioners, which he considered his greatest responsibility.

The mass of conversions to the Orthodox faith meant that an increasing number of native clergy was needed to minister to the people. The ordination of such native clergy was vitally important, as even someone as involved and attentive as Innokentii would never fully come to see the Aleuts from the inside of their culture. Native and Creole clergy, however, had opportunities within the ministry of the church that filled a crucial need under Innokentii's authority, so he and his workers went about establishing an

ecclesiastical school dedicated to preparing clergy to serve his diocese. By December, only two months after arriving in Sitka, the school was operational.

The new chief manager of the Russian-American Company, Arvid Adolf Etholen, was greatly relieved by the presence of such a powerful figure of the Orthodoxy in Sitka, for two reasons. First and foremost, it established a level of legitimacy within the church administration hitherto unknown, meaning the Russian-American Company, which had been up to that point the de facto arbiter and decision-maker in many of the matters pertaining to the church, could use the time and assets previously devoted to the church for its own interests, which, at the time of Innokentii's arrival, were being sorely pressed. The second, and only slight less important result of Innokentii's presence was the solidification of the Russian-American Company's hold on Sitka. At the time of Innokentii's return, Alyeshkan territories, and indeed many of Russia's holdings throughout the Pacific, were being encroached upon and threatened by other imperial powers; principally Great Britain, whose Hudson's Bay Company, and ubiquitous Sir George Simpson made frequent excursions into the territory and overtures toward the Company.

Etholen was a rather unique figure in the history of the Russian-American Company, and his presence in Sitka at the time of Innokentii's arrival is, by all accounts, a perfect match of determined and perseverant personalities. Etholen, who was born in Helsinki Finland in 1799 —Finland was then part of Sweden, which was annexed by Russian in 1809, offering Etholen an opportunity for education in St. Petersburg and a commission within the Russian naval service— and he understood the imperatives

required of an imperial power over a foreign population. Under Etholen, conditions for the Native Alyeshkans improved dramatically, with an edict being issued that no Russian-American Company employee could "raise his hand to strike any indigenous person except in defense of his life." Etholen, motivated by profit and loyalty to the crown, was as determined and stubborn a man as Innokentii, who was motivated by caring for and ministering to all people under the purview of his diocese. These facts meant that, though motivated by vastly different forces, the two men were instant and inseparable allies in Sitka.

When they first met, Etholen was able to elaborate for Innokentii an event that had been relayed to him by Wrangell while in St. Petersburg. After he and Ekaterina had departed Sitka, an incident occurred between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Russian-American Company that would instill a level of animosity and hostility heretofore unknown between the two competing companies.

Russia and Great Britain very nearly came to a "shooting war" on behalf of their respective fur-trading companies in the region. In 1833, under the guidance of then-chief manager Ferdinand Wrangell, the Russian-American Company began expanding its influence in the southeastern region of its holdings, where it was being pressed by both the Hudson's Bay Company and American interests. The British had been building a series of forts and redoubts along the interior in an attempt to usurp trading opportunities from the Russians in the Kolosh Straits of the Alexander Archipelago. The British did hold a trump card that they played to their great advantage: The Convention of 1825 between Russia and Great Britain, which gave the British free navigation rights upon any



streams or rivers originating in British controlled territory; allowing the British to navigate through Russian territory in the process. The Hudson's Bay Company, in a bold move, chose the brig *Dryad* to be fitted for the establishment of a permanent station fifteen miles up the Stikine River, which was just into the Russian Frontier. Wrangell knew that to allow the establishment of such settlement would lead to further encroachment into Russian holdings, so he dispatched the brig *Chichagov*, under the command of Arvid Etholen to the straits, accompanied by the schooner *Chilkat* under the command of Lieutenant Dionisii Zarembo.

After securing the straits and hoisting the Russian flag, the two vessels hove to the mouth of the Stikine River where they would encounter the *Dryad*. In the time preceding the encounter, Wrangell had written Tsar Nicholas to press that the clause allowing free navigation to the British be rescinded, to which the Tsar agreed, immediately notifying both the British and American governments. Wrangell, however, did not wait to receive word of the approval, instead choosing to take the initiative by dispatching his own vessels. The vessels established a fortified station on the peninsula at the mouth of the river, which Zarembo named Dionis'evgskii redoubt after his own patron saint, and it was here that the *Dryad* approached.

Upon seeing the mouth of the river effectively blockaded, the *Dryad*, confident under its Union Jack, pushed forward toward the two vessels and the fortified redoubt, only to have warning shots from the Russian ships fired across her bow. Clearly outgunned by the *Chichagov* and *Chilkat*, the *Dryad* wisely put back for Fort Vancouver, but the incident had touched off nearly a decade's worth of legal wrangling and

negotiations of what were known concurrently as the "Stikine Issue" and "The *Dryad* Affair."

The incident instilled a determined petulance toward anything that might, in any way, work to erode Russia's presence in Alyeshka and North America, which was one of the primary reasons Etholen so enthusiastically supported Innokentii's mission and the increased presence and authority of the Russian Orthodox Church. He had seen firsthand how winning the hearts and minds of the people was the surest way of insuring a healthy and prosperous future in the name of the empire.

Under Etholin's support, a new permanent residence for the bishop was build to include space for a school and consistory administrative offices. The huge building was easily identifiable from any point in town, and it was a physical manifestation of the new order of things concerning the Russian Orthodox Church. It afforded Innokentii and his suite a solid base of operations from which every arm of the mission could be coordinated.

With the administration firmly in place, Innokentii began the work of the mission, which was to bring word of the Christian faith to those peoples in Alyeshka who had not been within the church's gravity to that point. Within a year, Innokentii had established a formal church to minister to the needs of Yup'ik people through the Nushagak Mission, which he handed over to his son-in-law Il'ia Petelin.

Petelin was a competent young priest and enthusiastic, but he could not help being nervous, especially walking as he did under the very full shadow of his father-in-law. "I hope to do you good service," he said on the eve of his departure.

"Do not worry about me. Do what is right by God and you will do more than please me."

"I can't help being nervous."

"That is a good thing, Il'ia. Without a little nerves, how else would we know we are alive?"

The two men met in Innokentii's parlor, as was often the case with the consistory administration, school, and bishop's residence located in the same building. Innokentii could not help reminiscing about a similar conversation he had had all those years ago with the Archbishop of Irkutsk, when he volunteered to undertake the mission to Unalashka. He was nervous, then, too, and he told his son-in-law of the feelings he had then, and how alike the circumstances were.

"I was newly married, too, don't forget. So I know what it is you are facing. But you know a bit more of what you are getting yourself and your new family into. When I came to Unalashka, Ekaterina and I were so very naive of what awaited us, and the church structure here left much to be desired. I trust your experiences will be much more enjoyable, but no less exciting than ours."

"I can only hope. I must say, Father, that I am thankful for your presence so nearby, and for such a legacy left for me to inherit. I cannot imagine beginning this mission as you did, with little groundwork laid and little administrative support. You have made my work much, much easier."

The two men enjoyed another cup of tea, and Innokentii found that the people he could be silent with, with whom there was no need to fill every second with conversation,

were those people whose company he enjoyed most. His son-in-law was one such person, and he saw in the young man something akin to himself when he was a young priest; a kind of enthusiastic rebellion to do things his own way and not simply choose the path that seemed easiest. Innokentii admired him for marrying his daughter, and he admired his frankness and candor in dealing with the administrative establishment in Sitka.

"You will do good work, Il'ia, I am sure of it. But I pray, too, that you will find an enjoyment of your time. It will be gone far too quickly."

"You are too young to be so nostalgic."

"Am I? Just yesterday I was no older than you, and with my own Ekaterina bride on my arm. Now I wake up and I'm giving advice to people half my age. Time, Il'ia... Time is a strange master, going slow when you are impatient, and speeding by when all you want is to grasp a single moment and live within it forever."

"I will make sure that Ekaterina and I take nothing for granted."

"Yes, do that." Innokentii moved to the window, his own reflection ghosted over the candlelight of the room within and the waxing moon in the night sky without. "There was a time when I didn't know what I would do with my life, and now you are able to talk of the 'legacy' you've inherited from me. Where did the time go, Il'ia?"

"You have only begun, Father. There is still much more ahead of you."

"Yes, I'm sure there is. And thank you, Il'ia, for saying so."

In addition to Petelin's mission to Nushagak in the company of Deacon Vasilii Shishkin, another able and dedicated man, Innokentii oversaw, in a staggeringly short time, the construction of two other missions: one at Ikogmiut on the Yukon, which would

minister not only to the Yup'ik people, but also the Inupiaq and Athabaskan from Unalakleet and St. Michael to the Innoko and Kukokwim River basins under Father Iakov Netsvetov, who had been a peer and coworker with Innokentii at Atka; the other mission was at Kenai, where Hieromonk Nikolai cared for the needs of the Chugach, the Upper Alaska Peninsula Alutiiq, and Athabaskan peoples. Under Innokentii's direction, formal chapels were built and consecrated in almost every village, allowing lay leaders to conduct services where permanent priests were not established. And where the larger churches were constructed, Innokentii saw to it, also, that schools were built. The result of this industry was no fewer than fourteen schools operating even in the remotest regions of the Aleutian Island Chain.

The other benefit to such an established administration was that Innokentii himself was able to undertake several trips to inspect his far-reaching diocese and to minister directly to the people. By the time of his return to Unalashka in 1842, Bishop Innokentii was viewed as a hero of the people. On that first foray back into the wilderness of the outlying islands, Innokentii visited Kad'iak, where he celebrated the service for the dead at the grave of Father German on Spruce Island, recognizing the commitment and sacrifices of that first mission nearly 50 years earlier. He also visited Ungal and St. Paul and St. George, Atka (where Father Netsvetov was collected for service in the Yukon), the Commander Islands and other villages and settlements throughout the Aleutian chain. But the enormous diocese did not end at those islands, which meant that after visiting so many Russian enclaves in the archipelago, he continued on to Kamchatka, where he wintered in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii.

The harsh winter, however, did not deter him from making the rounds of even the remotest church under his see. He traveled to remote villages by dog sled; and where dogs were not available, he traveled via reindeer sled, demonstrating in a very practical way the love he had for the people he was responsible to, and the importance of the task that had been laid before him.

## 21.

Bishop Innokentii made the tours of his diocese a regular occurrence, despite their exhausting toll and the lengthy periods away from the offices of Sitka. His staff of highly trained priests and administrators, however, ensured that the consistory was always efficiently managed. And the bishop's many visits to even the remotest of parishes ingratiated Innokentii further with not only his parishioners, but also his fellow priests and subordinates within the ecclesiastical order.

He would come to make four trips in all, each one taking well over a year to cover his entire see. In that intervening time, Innokentii's exploits —this time as a manager and administrator as well as missionary— far exceeded even the grandest of expectations. Indeed, within the whole of the historical record of Innokentii's work in Alyeshka, be it as a priest or a bishop, there is seldom a disparaging remark, so widely admired was he, even by those who would be rivals to the Russian-American Company and the country's holdings.

Sir George Simpson, for instance, of the Hudson's Bay Company, even had the occasion to hear Innokentii deliver the Easter sermon at the church in Sitka. Of the great priest, he wrote:

"His appearance impresses a stranger with awe, while on further intercourse, the gentleness which characterizes his every word and deed, insensibly moulds reverence into love; and, at the same time, his talents and attainments are such as to be worthy of his exalted station. With all this the Bishop is sufficiently a man of the world to disdain anything like cant. His conversation, on the contrary, teems with amusement and instruction."

With the absence of Ekaterina in his life, and with the addition of so sure a staff of priests and administrators at his disposal, time for travel was much easier to come by. That excessive travel, however, did take a personal toll, insomuch as Innokentii, as loving a man as he was, learned of his children almost entirely through letters, except on those rare occasions when opportunity afforded a chance to meet.

For the eldest daughter, Ekaterina, interaction with her father, especially through his frequent visits to her husband's district, was much easier to effect. Similarly, after studying at the seminary, the second son, Gavriil, was consecrated into the order of priests, to follow in the footsteps, quite literally, of his father. In 1850, he, like his father before him, married a young woman by the name of Ekaterina, and entered the ministry, the two of them traveling to join Bishop Innokentii in Sitka. As for the eldest son, Innokentii, life did not lighten for him. He was expelled from the seminary. He gambled and amassed debts. He would be a constant sore, causing Innokentii to worry over his

eldest son like none other of his children. At one point, Innokentii begged his father, through a letter, to allow him into the priesthood, but the imploring failed, not out of spite, but out of concern. The bishop worried that his son's life, so in shambles, would fare no better as a clergyman, and he did not want to bring any kind of dishonor to the priesthood. Instead, the bishop recommended that his son be assigned to the army and sent to the Caucasus to fight in the hopes that the experiences there might help place his son on the right path. In fact, quite the opposite happened, and Innokentii the son was jailed. He spent a good portion of his life in prison, although his sentence was reduced when the bishop implored the government to lighten its terms against his son. Prior to being imprisoned, the bishop's son married without his father's knowledge, and out of spite or fear refused to divulge to the bishop his wife's name. Bishop Innokentii, however, felt that it was his responsibility to take care of his daughter-in-law while her husband was incarcerated, so he managed to discover her identity and assign funds for her care. For the duration of the bishop's life, material care was provided by way of a controlled fund for his wayward son.

Shortly following Bishop Innokentii's tenure in Alyeshka, his daughters Fekla and Olga married. Parask'ieva became the nun Poliksenia, and she would communicate often with her father from the confines of her convent where she lived and served. But the eldest son was always, with regard to the children, his primary concern. When Olga willed a sum of 1000 rubles to her sister, Poliksenia, Innokentii begged the latter to give the money to her relatively poor sister Ekaterina, but most of it to her brother Innokentii. Despite suggestions from children and peers alike, Innokentii refused ever to abandon his



eldest son, constantly urging Gavriil to care for his brother and brother's wife, and was grateful to friends who did not abandon Innokentii. In a letter he would write years later, the bishop would say:

"I am not disowning him, no, no! Wherever he will be, whoever he will become, I shall always call him my son. If there should be a necessity and it is possible to do so, I personally would attend him in his needs. For Lord's sake, I implore you, take care of him. I do not blame anyone. If there is blame, it is mine. Where is my unhappy son? I never stopped loving him."

But the concerns about his children and their collective welfare, though important to him, were matters that, as a result of the pressing issues of the church and the responsibilities of a bishopric, would have to wait. Indeed, all of his daughters were provided for at the most basic level, either by the church or by their husbands, and his second son had arrived to accompany his father in his travels. By 1850, Bishop Innokentii, now in his 50s, had sent a letter to the Holy Synod petitioning that, in order to effectively maintain such a large area, a new archbishopric should be developed, taking into account the entirety of the Alyeshkan territories and those areas in Yakutsk not already covered by the purview of orthodoxy. The Holy Synod agreed that such an expansion was in order, and they further recommended that because of his vast experiences in the region from his travels and contact with the remote worshippers in his see, coupled with his undying enthusiasm for linguistics and the translation of texts into indigenous languages, he be promoted immediately to Archbishop.

The official promotion occurred on April 21, 1850, and Innokentii learned of the promotion while on his fourth and final tour as bishop. He would return a final time to Sitka in 1852, to finalize the many plans that had been put into effect during his tenure there and to see to the administrative well-being of the consistory. Innokentii's final year in Sitka saw the consecration of the Tlingit Church of the Holy Resurrection, notable in the fact that the Tlingit were among the staunchest holdouts to the Russian influence, displaced and wronged as they had been when the Russian-American Company first arrived on the island of Sitka to establish the city of New Archangel. At the church, Innokentii held service in the Tlingit language, continuing his tradition of learning the ways and tongues of the people coming to the faith, and empowering them with their hearing services in their native language. There were plans for several other churches, too, that received the official blessing of the Archbishop, namely the Church of the Elevation of the Holy Cross at Ikogmiut and the Cathedral of St. Michael in Sitka. New missions were opened in Kamchatka, along the Okhotsk sea in Chukotka and at Anadyr' in eastern Siberia.

Ascending to the position of Archbishop was no small task in Innokentii's case. His see would cover the largest territory the world had ever seen, and it would cover myriad languages and political landscapes, forcing him to be not only the head of the church, but often a head of state as well. The population of the new archbishopric numbered in the millions and stretched from the Arctic Ocean to the Amur River valley bordering northern China, including many of the maritime regions in the south. Some of the parishioners inhabited ancient Russian cities, others lived in small, remote settlements

scattered across the steppes, where they lived nomadic lifestyles as reindeer herders or hunter-gatherers. The racial boundaries were blurred further, encompassing the northern Ainu of the Kurile Islands, the Itel'men and Koriak of Kamchatka, the Chukchi of the Chukotka Peninsula, the Even and Evenk of the Siberian taiga, the Yukagir in the extreme north of Yakutia, and the numerous Yakut, whose heritage and language were among the most firmly entrenched. There were also Buriat settlements in his jurisdiction and Mongolians, Manchu, Chinese and Koreans in the south. The ways of life ranged from cattle herders to hunters, agriculturalists to fishermen and whalers. They each had their own language and their own system of beliefs, and into this confusing miasma stepped, again into uncertainty, Archbishop Innokentii, who had built and maintained his reputation for being able to exceed expectations in the face of such overwhelming confusion and alien beliefs.

## 22.

Though Innokentii's focus never wavered from his duties within the clergy, socio-political events beyond his control forced him to be a spokesperson for the state and to take a more active role in affairs of state. By the time of his return from Alyeshka, the mid-1850s, everywhere he looked, things seemed unsettled. His one peace was the priests and trusted colleagues brought with him from Alyeshka, who had worked for and grown with Innokentii to such an extent that many of the tasks he would have delegated were undertaken without the need for any directive. And as was always the case with Archbishop Innokentii, traveling to the farthest reaches of his even larger see was of

utmost priority, and the challenges encountered would be far more daunting than anything he had faced up to that point.

As with his other assignments, Archbishop Innokentii oversaw the massive project of translating orthodox teachings into indigenous languages. The enormous space and the numerous of unstudied tongues under his authority made the undertaking monumental. But under his guidance, the fiercely independent Yakut, for instance, for the first time, heard a Russian-Orthodox priest deliver services in their own language, granting them a good deal more respect than had been afforded them by any previous Russian institution.

Innokentii also continued touring throughout the archbishopric, but travel was becoming more hazardous because of two events: the Crimean War, in which Russian forces were opposed by British, Turkish and French forces along its borders; and the return of the Russian flag to the Amur River Valley, which had been ceded to China in 1689 under the Treaty of Nerchinsk. It were these events that propelled Innokentii onto the political stage.

By the late 1830s, much of Europe's (and even the United States') focus had turned to China because of the trade opportunities with the country of more than 450 million people. The trade issue that would force conflict, however, was opium, which had long been used as an anti-diarrhea medicine, but that had begun to be used recreationally to disastrous effects in China. The opium was traded primarily through private vessels from Great Britain, France, the United States and Turkey, and reached a height of importation in the 1830s with more than 30,000 chests (each chest containing more than

150 pounds of pure opium extract) coming into China. The government decided that steep tariffs on the opium imports would stop the trade imbalance, but Great Britain in particular chose the opportunity to press for a more advantageous trade agreement with the Chinese.

The tensions came to a head in 1839, when Chinese authorities in the port city of Canton seized the incoming shipments of opium and burned them. The response of the British forces was to take up positions in and around Canton, which triggered three years of armed conflict with the imperial power. The Chinese were quickly outmatched by the European armaments, and their forces were overwhelmed by the tactically superior British forces. The result of the conflict, in 1842, was the signing of the Treaty of Nanking, through which China ceded to Great Britain the port city of Hong Kong and opened for trade and residence other port cities such as Canton. Hearing of the treaty, other foreign nations (namely France and the United States) demanded equal trade rights under the Treaty of Nanking, thus effectively emasculating the country of China.

The foreign powers, however, were not satisfied with the agreements in the Treaty of Nanking, and within a decade, a second round of opium wars had broken out between the Chinese and European powers. In 1856, China was again defeated by Great Britain and France, with the end result being the Treaty of Tientsin in 1858, which further opened the interior of China to any foreigner with a passport, as well as to Christian missionaries, who flocked to the country to spread the edicts of their faith.

Between the opium wars, the Crimean War, which in many ways, at least regards the Pacific regions, was an extension of China's opium war with Great Britain and

France, who saw an opportunity to gain an even stronger foothold in the region. The war had begun half a world away, when France and Russia disputed who should protect Christianity in the Holy Land of Jerusalem and Nazareth, with the French Roman Catholics bitterly criticizing Tsar Nicholas I and the Russian-Orthodox Church. The shape of all of Europe was thrown into chaos when Russia, with a need for a solid footing on the Black Sea and fearing British establishment in Constantinople and the straits proposed a Russian "protectorate," and an autonomous governance of the Balkans. The British, however, were equally distrustful of Russian influence in the region, seeing the nation as a threat to its own imperial ambitions.

The response to Nicholas's proposal was ambivalent, saying that the Ottoman Turks needed to be consulted before such a decision could be made, especially considering the fact that the Balkans were still part of the Turkish state. Austria and Prussia, likewise, had a stake in the drawing up of political maps in Europe, which left Russia standing alone in the face of a dispute that had begun in Jerusalem with the French. The political powder keg was touched off when Tsar Nicholas, either in full knowledge or because of the product of a "misunderstanding," sent troops into the cities of Wallachia and Moldavia in modern Rumania. Because the cities were still under Turkish control, the Ottomans immediately declared war with Russia, and the Franco-British forces seized the opportunity to move fleets of warships through the Straits of the Black Sea.

The first shots were fired between the Russian and Ottoman forces off Sinope, when the Russian fleet effectively decimated the Ottoman flotilla. The immediate result

was Russian control over The Straits and Constantinople, which was a nightmare for the British admiralty. The British press propagandized the battle by writing that Russian vessels opened fire on wounded and dying Ottoman sailors, with the results being a clamoring for Great Britain to protect herself from the encroaching enemy.

Likewise, Louis Napoleon III, the nephew of Bonaparte who was eager to emulate his uncle's successes, followed Britain's lead. In March of 1856, he sent troops to the Balkans where Wallachia and Moldavia were liberated from the Russians. The war, by all accounts, should have ended there, but Great Britain decided that the time was right to do away with the Russian presence in the great port city of Sevastopol, and the French concurred. In an address to the House of Lords, Lord Lyndhurst said, "I believe that if this barbarous nation [meaning Russia], the enemy of all progress, should once succeed in establishing itself in the heart of Europe, it would be the greatest calamity which could befall the human race." The populations of France and Great Britain apparently agreed, with Queen Victoria herself saying that "The war is popular beyond belief."

The Crimean War, however, was a war of ineptitude and terrible tactics on both sides. Sevastopol was impervious to attacks by sea, and its land defenses were equally formidable. The result was that opposing armies had to marshal their forces along other, more remote, beaches and march them to Sevastopol to lay siege. The Russians, however, evacuated much of Sevastopol of its regular army, which retreated to the surrounding mountains to menace the Franco-British troops. As the British Army built up its siege works, the Russian army lurked along its flank, finally attacking at the Battle of Balaklava. The Russians were eventually defeated in that battle, but only at a terrible

price to both sides, with Great Britain all but losing its entire light cavalry. The Russians, meanwhile, regrouped and attacked again, this time at the battle of Inkerman, where the fight was hand-to-hand in a fog so thick that combatants could not see more than a few feet to either side of them, making firearms useless and rendering the battle a fistfight between men.

After a winter under siege, Sevastopol finally fell, but not before a series of calamities befell the mighty British army, whose supply chain was in such a shambles that the majority of the men spent the winter clothed in rags and underfed. The lone bright spot of the war was the emergence of Florence Nightingale, whose nursing skills and compassion single-handedly lowered the catastrophic mortality rate.

The results of the war were vague, with little changing in the way of control of the Straits and Constantinople, with the other European powers gaining a say in how things would be run as opposed to autonomous rule under the protection of Russia, alone. In the Pacific, the war was an excuse for Great Britain and France to harass Russian holdings in the Kurile Islands, the Amur River valley, Kamchatka, and North America. While not "officially" a part of the war, the Pacific holdings of Russia were an attractive target to the rapidly expanding British Empire. Russian-American Company vessels were confiscated at sea, and Russian villages and settlements in the Kurile Islands and Kamchatka were razed, with numerous civilians killed or taken as prisoner, including priests.

The Pacific front extended from the Kurile Islands north of Japan to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, but the Franco-British forces in the region fared far worse



than their European counterparts. Repulsed at Petropavlosk, the forces followed a raider-like hit-and-run policy in the hopes of inflicting as much damage to the region as possible, and perhaps forcing the Russians to the bargaining table over the valuable Amur region, with its deep rivers and entree to the interior of China and Kamchatka.

In 1855, British forces arrived at the port city of Aian at the same time Archbishop Innokentii was visiting. It was during his delivery of the divine service that the forces entered the church and attempted to arrest the cleric.

"You don't want to take me prisoner," he said. "If you do, you'll have to feed me, and I doubt you have that much food available to you." Invoking the names of Captain Belcher and Sir George Simpson, two allies of many British friendships cultivated through his time in Alyeshka, the British troops, rather than taking Innokentii captive, merely escorted him to their commanding officer, who was immediately won over by the man's unflappable calm.

"I've orders to burn this city to the ground."

"That would seem a sad waste, Lieutenant. I might suggest, instead, you and your officers join me in the parish house for dinner this evening. Allow your men a night of rest from ransacking these coasts, and enjoy a rare night off yourself."

While other cities in the area fared far worse, Archbishop Innokentii's appeals on behalf of civility saved the city of Aian, with the British surrendering into Innokentii's care another priest and a number of civilians who had been seized elsewhere. The result served to cement his already towering reputation within the church, and for the Russian state, Innokentii came to be seen as a man not only of theological consequence, but also

of political savvy. He wrote on behalf of the ethnography of the Amur region and addressed the economic potential of the region and a need for a stronger state presence in the region. His pressing for a new treaty with China garnered the favor of the Governor General of Eastern Siberia, Nikolai Murav'ev, who shared the same name with but was not related to the chief manager of the Russian-American Company at Sitka with Archbishop Innokentii had first arrived there some 25 years earlier.

"I trust we will have an opportunity to speak soon," Murav'ev said in a letter dispatched to the Archbishop.

### 23.

"Your Grace. It is an honor to meet you, at last."

"The honor is mine, Governor."

"Good, then I trust that you and I would do much better without such formalities."

Archbishop Innokentii agreed, and he and Governor-General Murav'ev fell into an easy afternoon of conversation. Murav'ev built for himself a reputation in the political world not unlike that of his theological guest. Nikolai Murav'ev was educated at the elite Corps of Pages and fought in the Caucasus from 1838 to 1844, where he attained the rank of major prior to being governor of Tula gubernia. He was known for his honesty, accessibility, tact, support of subordinates, and for the strict legality of his orders. Murav'ev championed the serf cause, which earned him some degree of ire from Tsar Nicholas, who labeled him a "liberal and a democrat," but the label did not prevent the

Tsar from promoting the idealistic Murav'ev to the post of Governor-General of Eastern Siberia.

"We share an interest, I think, in this region," Murav'ev said. "It has been a long time since 1689."

The two men sat in the office of the Governor-General, who smoked a pipe through the entire conversation. "Perhaps we do, but I think it is probably for much different reasons."

"Whatever the reasons, you can't deny that the Amur belongs, rightfully, to Russia."

"I am a man of my word, as are you by all accounts. It seems odd to go back on it now."

"You would go against me, then?"

"No. I would only say what will be said when you broach the topic. Our Tsar has been embarrassed by the outcome of the war, and he will be hesitant to provoke another one. And with Britain working hard to expand its influence in this area, any excuse might be used to incite them to conflict."

"You are wise."

"I'll take your word for that."

"You would make a good diplomat."

It was not the first time Archbishop Innokentii has heard such a comment, but the sentiment put him off. When such a comment was made, he became simply aware of how far he traveled from his uncle's workshop in Irkutsk, or from the ideals championed by

his wife before her death. Without meaning to, Innokentii was back in those simpler times in Unalashka, when all that was expected of him was to help the people in need.

"I make a better priest," he said.

"I'm sure you do, but if you ever change your mind..."

"Trust me, I won't be a threat for any political office. I find politics all confusing with too much innuendo. It is why I am no fan of St. Petersburg."

"But surely you can see the beauty that is in that city."

"Ahh. Beauty, yes. Tell me, Nikolai, have you ever been in a blacksmith's?"

"No, I haven't."

"St. Petersburg, to me, is like a blacksmith's shop. You have one of two options: get dirty or get burned. That is not an attractive choice for me."

Murav'ev said the analogy was appropriate, indeed. St. Petersburg was a city full of intrigue, with the royal family in a seemingly constant state of flux, and the allies one held could provide either success or dramatic failure, and those alliances shifted far too often for a man like Innokentii or Murav'ev to function well at all. "It is a good thing there are frontiers. Otherwise, men like us would have nothing to do and no place to go."

Ultimately, it was Murav'ev and Innokentii who played one of the most important roles in Russian history through their negotiations with the Chinese over the Amur River valley. Murav'ev's motto was that wherever the Russian flag had flown, so should it always fly. And the Amur River Valley was one such region. He yearned to see it returned to the Russians, and to that end, Murav'ev was convinced that all of Russia's

efforts should be based on the region and that interests in North America should be done away with. He wrote:

*One could foresee the rapid spread of the sway of the North American States in North America, and that once these States had established themselves on the Pacific Ocean, they would soon take precedence over all other naval powers there and would require the northwestern coast of America. The sovereignty of the North American States in all of North America is so natural, that we should not regret our failure to consolidate our position in California twenty-five years ago —sooner or later we would have had to yield it...and now, with the invention and development of railroads, it is more certain than ever that the North American States will without fail spread over all of North America, and that sooner or later we shall have to yield to them our North American possessions. However, in contemplating this, we ought also to keep in mind something else, that it is inevitable for Russia, if not to control the whole of eastern Asia, at least to hold sway over the whole Asiatic coast of the Pacific.*

In the face of such determination, the Chinese, weakened by its two wars with Great Britain and France, and in no mood to fight over the region, ceded the Amur back to Russia, with Archbishop Innokentii, responsible then for the spiritual well-being of the people in the region, and both men presiding over the signing of the Treaty of Aigun. Unlike the majority of missionaries now flooding into the area, however, Innokentii held firm to his ideal of allowing people to come to faith in their own times, and under their own convictions. He abhorred the practice of forced conversion; abhorred, too, the idea that a foreign presence would come into an area only to force the indigenous populations

to conform to an entirely different culture, learn an entirely different language, and surrender all that had gone before it. Innokentii reiterated his call for the Russian Orthodox readings to be translated into indigenous tongues, no matter how difficult the task.

"I would like to see Alyeshka again," he said.

"Then we should go, Father." It was Gavriil who was the constant companion to his father, now, and Innokentii was thankful for his presence. Gavriil, too, suffered difficulties throughout his life, but he was devoted to his father through the stressing times in the Amur Valley. At the signing of the Treaty of Aigun, Innokentii moved his headquarters to the confluence of the Zeia and Amur Rivers, founding the city of Blagoveshchensk, since it was there he felt his presence would be most effectual. Additionally, at his request, the Holy Synod established two bishoprics to help maintain the vast see under the direction of the Archbishop; one bishop in Iakutsk and the other in Sitka. Through these bishops, Innokentii was at last able to slow down, and it was the slowing down that made him most reflective of all.

He came to love the Amur River most of all, and his favorite pastime was navigating his own motor craft up and down the river, sometimes visiting remote areas, and sometimes just enjoying the soothing lapping of the water against the gun'ales. It was on one such trip that he and Gavriil talked, again of Alyeshka.

"I never thought I would think of those years as easy."

"They were different, that is all, Father."

"Different. That's a fine word, Gavriil. A fine word, indeed. I should like to see it again before I retire."

"Is there something I don't know?" Gavriil asked.

"It's time, Gavriil. I'm old. I'm over 60. I can't be trekking overland in reindeer sleds and between islands on baidarka any longer. Someone like you needs to take over for me."

"You can't be serious."

"And why not?"

"It's obvious. I don't have the abilities you have." Gavriil suffered, as many sons of great men do, of constant comparison with his father. He was not as mechanically inclined, and was not as mentally sharp as the Archbishop, and he was embarrassed by his deficiencies.

"You worry too much, Gavriil. I wish you knew how much pleasure I take in watching you study so hard and work so diligently. Don't complain that you lack swift intellect. All that is ours comes from the Lord. He knows why you were not given great intellectual gifts. But you have a good heart, and that is worth a thousand times more than intellect. You have not been shortchanged. Don't bury this precious talent of yours."

Innokentii put his aged hand upon his son's chest and pushed to emphasize his point.

"You have such a good heart."

Gavriil thought his father's hand still stronger than any man's he knew. The years of working wood, of smithing metal, of hard life in frontiers far-removed from what most would consider the civilized world, had taken their toll, to be sure, but that toll was paid

out in the form of solidity and strength. "You are still stronger than any of the priests I know, myself included. Make sure you do not bury this precious talent of yours before it is time."

## 24.

In 1862, Archbishop Innokentii was awarded the Order of St. Alexander Nevskii for his works in the secular world as well as for his works in theology and scholarship. He continued to travel throughout his see administrating the church and ministering to its members from the Amur River Valley throughout Kamchatka and the Aleutian Archipelago.

He also continued corresponding with his children, particularly Parask'ieva, who had become Mother Poliksenia. The life of a nun was harsh, and she could not help looking upon her sisters with a certain envy. They knew lives she could not: of marriage and children and the lasting legacy of continuing on a family line. In response to one of her letters, Innokentii wrote:

*I wrote you that your elder sister envies your present state —and this even when she has a husband who is mild, with whom she had no cross word for 13 years, and the children are healthy and intelligent. Yet, she thinks you are happier than she. She has nowadays so many cares, for her husband, children, her home, and about the future as well as about her soul. And in time there will be even more concerns. How many fears she has about the future! You, my little friend, have none of these and will not have such areas in the future. You may have many children —I mean good deeds and prayer—*



*those, thy children, will never trouble you, but will give you solace and joy; they will never be sick and they shall never die. They will not become orphans at your death. They shall follow you to the grave."*

That year, Innokentii was, at long last, on his way once again to visit his beloved Alyeshka, but the opportunity eluded him when the ship upon which he was traveling, still within sight of the shoreline, foundered on the rocks during a storm, where it rested unsteadily through the night until dawn, when boats safely rowed to the stricken vessel and effected a rescue. For his part, Innokentii spent the night calming the huddled crew and passengers aboard the vessel, praying throughout the duration as though by faith alone he could not only keep the vessel intact and afloat, but also abate the storm and seas that raged around them. When finally removed from the ship the following morning, though wet, Innokentii was unharmed and laughed off the peril, saying that he had been through much worse in Alyeshka.

"It is a miracle we ever survived," Gavriil said.

"It is nothing," Innokentii said. "Just a little water."

"I'm not just talking about the shipwreck," Gavriil said. "I mean the whole thing. Alyeshka to here. It's nothing short of a miracle."

"Those aren't miracles, my son. Those are simply God letting us know that it isn't time for us to go just yet."

"I see. So the years in Unalashka were not miraculous? What about the British troops in Aian? And what about the shipwreck?"

"It's nothing, Gavriil."

"But surely you must see that—"

"Gavriil. You must listen to me. These events you mention, they're nothing. You must be careful what you say about me, because people are looking for a reason to make me into something I am not. Do you understand?"

"No, Father, I don't—"

"Gavriil, I am a man only. I am simple flesh and bone. My eyesight is failing. My joints ache when I walk. I will die like everyone else. I used to lie awake at night after my father died, terrified of what the darkness held for me. Now I welcome it, do you understand that? I am nothing to be put upon a pedestal. I'm just an old man who did as he felt he must. I have hurt many people in the process, and I have helped many people, too. Those things you mention are just events. I had nothing to do with them, and I firmly believe that."

"I'm sorry, Father."

"Do not apologize. Whatever your feelings, keep them to yourself from now on. Let God figure out what is worth remembering and what is not."

For Innokentii, the role of wizened leader was a difficult one to accept. In his mind, he was still that young, naive priest from poor Irkutsk. He gave a similar self-deprecating oratory to Mother Poliksenia later that year when she wrote asking for spiritual guidance: *You ask my advice how to seek salvation. Oh my Pashen'ka! I myself am ready to ask your counsel how I am to seek it. My learning began long ago, but I am still learning the primer; occasionally, it seems, I reach the syllable level, but then I look*

*and find I have forgotten almost all and start again with the primer. To understand the Gospels— God alone knows if I ever shall reach that level.*

For all his playing down of his life and his accomplishments, however, the church and the Russian state both continued bestowing various recognitions upon him. He was appointed a permanent member of the Ruling Synod in 1866, and in 1867 was awarded the Order of St. Vladimir. But the accolades all paled in light of the sale of his beloved Alyeshka, which he had so wanted to see just one last time, to the United States of America, all but fulfilling Murav'ev's vision of Russia's diminishing role in North America. And though the church was able to ensure protection for its diocese in the Aleutian Islands and the Alyeshkan Peninsula, the sale and subsequent exploitation of natural resources, including the poor treatment of the native populations by the U.S. Government and its representatives in the territory it called Alaska, would continue to worry Innokentii the rest of his days.

"They are doing what we did. The same mistakes," he said to Gavriil, "but on a scale far greater than anything we could ever have imagined. I hear tales of the indigenous dying from disease and starvation. The animals are gone, all slaughtered, and the people have nothing to eat. They have given a monopoly to a single company to hunt the waters, and they vilify the Russians and their presence there, as though all the devastation of the land —the annihilation of the people— was our fault. They are hypocrites all, pointing the finger at the absent grandfather while the new father destroys what was so hard won."

For Innokentii, the news was the final blow, and he felt as though all his labors — all that was his and Ekaterina's— had slipped away. The Americans would surely erase his legacy there, or worse, twist it into something it was not. He found himself thankful for having submitted his papers for resignation. He had gone so far as to offer to retire to St. Petersburg if it so pleased the Holy Synod, so sure was he that his time of service was over. "There is nothing left for me to do but grow old and die," he said to Gavriil. And though the comment had earned a spirited chastisement from his son, Gavriil could find nothing with which to refute his father's claim. Neither of them knew at the time that on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November, 1867, Archbishop Innokentii's dear friend and confidante, Metropolitan Filaret, had died.

## 25.

On his way to Moscow, Innokentii stopped for the final time in Irkutsk, his beloved birthplace, and final resting place of Ekaterina and of his family.

When he had first received news of Filaret's death, he had been immediately saddened. No one had seen the effects of grief upon Innokentii the way Filaret had, and the idea that he was gone was overwhelming. But whatever sadness might have manifested was quickly chased away by the incredulous statement that followed. The Holy Synod and Tsar Alexander II had recommended for the position of Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolumna the distant Archbishop Innokentii himself, who saw the appointment as perhaps the most ludicrous act ever perpetrated by that ruling organization of Russian Orthodoxy. His initial response, as had been the case all those

years earlier when Filaret had encouraged him to be a monk, was an emphatic negative. But his advisors had pressed upon him that surely it was Filaret, himself —and, indeed, it was so— who had recommended his friend and colleague to fill the highest post within all of Russian Orthodoxy. The news was enough to send Innokentii into sequestered prayer through the night, where he prayed for some form of guidance. In finding no clear answer, he rose and said simply "God's will be done, whatever that might be."

The trip to Moscow was a long one, lengthened by the frequent stops Innokentii made along the way to celebrate divine services with the faithful from all parts of Russia. He was met, as the highest ranking clergyman in Russia, by entire towns and villages, city streets lined with people from all classes, and every church bell announcing his arrival. None of the stops, however, were as important to him as Irkutsk in March of 1868. It would be the last time he would visit the city in which his exuberant and celebrated career began.

"My uncle once told me," he said at Ekaterina's grave, "that old wood could not be built with. It could not be steamed and molded into a new shape, so why am I doing going to Moscow? I should be retiring. I'm an old country priest, not a metropolitan. How can I go from a parish church in Alyeshka, filled to bursting with Native Aleuts, to the church where Tsars are crowned? I am at a loss, but I don't know what I should do *but* go. That philosophy seems to have served me well enough so far. Perhaps there's another adventure yet in me. But I do so wish you were here to share it."

The Irkutsk evening was cool and dry, the whirl of insects rising and falling in a drone about him, and a quiet breeze skipped across the stone markers, ruffling his robes.

He closed his eyes and let his imagination play tricks on him; and he was in Unalashka again, on a rolling hillside of green grass. Below, his children played and laughed, even the eldest son. His mother was there chasing them, and the youngest daughter, her namesake, skipped like the breeze catching white flowers and knotting for herself a crown. They were content there and safe, free from the concerns of the years that would follow; they were alive and robust and blissfully ignorant. If he thought harder —let his imagination pull him just a bit further in— he could feel Ekaterina's long hair, that one stubborn strand reaching across in the breeze to tickle his cheek. He could smell her; the scent of a warm kitchen and wood smoke, and something floral and clean beneath. He put his arm around her and she leaned into him.

"It is so good, isn't it Ivan," she said.

"I could not ask for more."

The sun was setting in Unalashka, too, and he and Ekaterina watched it slipping below the sea's horizon, the magical green flash illuminating for just a moment the cumulous of clouds encircling the island. Ekaterina pulled her shawl about her shoulders and he pulled her closer.

"Cold?"

"No," she said. "I'm comfortable. It's nice that you are here. It means a lot."

"I couldn't stay away," he said. "I like it when you call me Ivan."

"You're silly," she said. "That's your name."

"I had almost forgotten."

"That's why you have me. A constant reminder. I like this, by the way." She bounced his gray beard in the palm of her hand. It was neatly manicured and slightly darker in a small stripe immediately below his chin. "You look very distinguished."

"It's a ruse," he said. "I figure I can at least look the part. Maybe someone will believe what I'm saying."

"I see. And what is this nonsense about starting something new?"

"You think I shouldn't?"

"No. The nonsense is you thinking you can't do it. Did you ever think that maybe you are exactly the kind of person they need?"

She turned to face him. Still on her knees, she cupped his aged and wrinkled face in her hands and simply looked into him. Her hair was as he had remembered it last; slightly graying at the temples, a little thinner perhaps. Her body still showed the outward signs of the life they had lived, but her eyes nearly broke him. They were more vibrant than he had remembered. Hazel with flecks of green that seemed to spark like the sunset. They were the eyes of a wise child, and she only looked at him, as if studying his face for future memory, and he realized that the benefit was not for her, but for himself. He could feel the stinging moisture rising in his eyes and she looked away, biting her lower lip.

"I have to go," he said. "I'm sorry. I want to stay here with you."

"I know."

"Are you all right?"

"I will be."

"I hate leaving," he said.

"It's fine," she said. "You have great things still to do. And I'm proud to be able to be a part of it."

"You are, Ekaterina." He took her by the shoulders, as if he could hold himself there a moment longer. "You are the biggest part; the best part of all."

She placed her hand on his chest and forced a smile. "You carry me inside you, now. You carry all of us..."

In Kazan', Archbishop Innokentii was met by Archbishop Antonii, who gave to his colleague the sign of his new rank: the white bishop's headdress with diamond cross that was the emblem of the Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolumna. In Nizhnii Novgorod, Innokentii boarded a train for Moscow, still sounding like a foreign word on his lips. By the time he arrived in the old capitol of Russia, the train had come to be a metaphor to him. The speed with which it traveled blurred the landscape like time, features swirling into a wash of color too fast for all but the faintest moments of recognition, such as when he could fix a point off in the distance, or fix a point behind. How like that train he found himself: a living relic linking the church to all it had achieved; a visionary dreamer who still had hope that the future, despite its uncertainty, might still be shaped for good.

His church now was the Dormition of the Theotokos in the Kremlin, but he didn't go there directly, preferring instead to retreat for the night to the Holy Trinity Monastery of St. Sergius of Radonezh, which was the same monastery in which his friend Filaret tonsured him a monk, and of which as Metropolitan he would be the hegumen.



His years as Metropolitan, though unknown to him in that evening, would stretch a full 11 years; far enough to see the ominous tides of Russia's future shifting. His years, though, would not be spent in leisure. As with everything he undertook, he used his position to push forward his most heartfelt agendas: for education; for support for retired clergy and nuns; for the establishment of an independent diocese in America; for material support of the church in Alaska, which would remain close to his heart; and for an ecumenical world council in which the rifts between the denominations of Christianity might be healed, making the church one again. To these ends, Innokentii would tirelessly devote his remaining life and energies, despite rapidly failing eyesight that left him nearly blind and dependent on the help of his closest priest —Father Gavriil Veniaminov.

But those things would be years in the making; focused as they were clearly in the future. Innokentii knew well how to prepare for his immediate responsibilities. He saw clearly in his mind the following day, the congregation before him, awaiting to hear the man who would replace their beloved Filaret. He knew, even, what he would say to them: *Who am I that I presume to take up both the word and the authority of my predecessors? Reared in a time and place of great remoteness, more than half of my life spent in a distant land, I am no more than a humble tiller of a small portion of Christ's pastures, a teacher of infants and those in the infancy of faith. Is it fitting that one such as I, the least of Christ's laborers, should be allowed to work in this great vineyard, glorious and ancient? And that such a teacher should be entrusted with a flock from whose bosom teachers and mentors, and even teachers of teachers go forth to all ends of Russia? Who am I next to my predecessor? There can be no comparison. But who am I to oppose the*

*bidding of God, the King of Heaven, without Whose will not even a hair falls from our heads? No, I said to myself, let it be done to me as it pleases the Lord: 'I shall go whither Thou biddeth!' And thus I have come to you. And so, bless me, O Lord, in my new undertaking. Brethren and fathers, especially you, our enlightened mentors and fathers, it is not befitting that you should have an ignorant hierarch such as I am. But for the love of Christ bear with me and remember me also in your private prayers: intensify your prayers that heresy and sophistry do not take advantage of my ignorance and steal into the heart of Orthodoxy.*

He would deliver the speech the following morning and speak of simple days long gone learning to shape wood and work metal. He would speak of the simple beauty of a simple faith unclouded by judgment and expectation. He would speak to them of legacy and recall to himself how moments earlier he ascended the steps of the great church in the company of ghosts: all those who had gone before him; those close to him, and those who were strangers, all looking at him to fulfill his portion. But in the night preceding, he pushed the thoughts of future things from his mind and focused, instead, on that single, blurred moment speeding past him: a peaceful night of prayer and rest, disturbed only by dreams of a distant hillside far away, the laughter of children, the love of his wife, and the hope of good things to come.