REVISED

OK

How could. . .

The grip was lifted from off Karlsson's ribs now, he and Wennberg stock-still, face-to-face. But not eye-to-eye: Wennberg was trying to see around the side of his own head, not to Karlsson's hand which yet was beside his ear as if ready to stroke there, but to Braaf and the rifle.

The mouth of the rifle barrel stayed firm against Wennberg's ear as Braaf spoke. ¶ "Not the first one to jig in front of a bullet, Melander wasn't. Or last, maybe."

"Braaf, wait now." Wennberg labored to suck in breath and spill out words at the same time. "It's Karlsson, he played us fools. . . Running us blind down this Hell-coast. . ."

"'Right fit or not, he's our only fit.' Melander said that once about you, didn't he, Karlsson?"

Karlsson nodded, tried to think through the ache of his ribs, work out what he ought to be saying. But Braaf was doing saying of his own.

"Let's think on that, Wennberg. Melander maybe had truth there."

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OK

"Braaf, the bastard's been diddling us along. . . pretending he knows what the fuck he's doing. . ."

"So far, he has," murmured Braaf. "~~Wennberg,~~ Blacksmith, you only ever had a thimbleful of sense and now you've sneezed into it. Back there, after--Melander. You said it ~~had to be~~ needed be Karlsson to find the way for us. He's done it. How, I don't savvy. I'm not sure he does. But we need let him keep on at it. Else we're dead meat." ¶ Braaf peered with interest at the side of Wennberg's head, as if concerned that the gun barrel rested comfortably there. ¶ "So, blacksmith? Back at New Archangel, you wanted a sleigh ride ~~along~~ down this coast. Ready to join us again?"

"Braaf, ~~[illegible]~~ I. . . you. . .yes, put the ~~fucking~~ damned gun off, I . . . I'll let ~~him~~ the bastard be."

Braaf stepped back carefully, the rifle yet in Wennberg's direction.

. . .Saved my skin, Braaf. But there'll be Wennberg at me again, first chance, unless. . .

"Wennberg. Hear me out." Karlsson made himself stride to within a step of the burly man, with effort stood steady there. "This is out last job of coast, all

OK

REVISED

the others are up there north behind us. We've been making the miles without maps. We can make as many more as we need."

. . . Careful with this now, make it warn but not taunt. . .

"Wennberg, maybe I chose wrong, not telling about the maps. Maybe so, maybe not. But turn it either way, I've got us this far, all the corners still on us. They say it takes God and His Brother to kill a Smalander. So far, I haven't met up with either ~~of them~~ on this coast."

Wennberg rubbed his ear, said nothing. Somehow, a very loud nothing. Then scowled from Karlsson to Braaf, and back again. His eyes seemed empty of fury now, but neither man could tell just what else dwelt ~~was~~ in them, acceptance or biding. In the fireshine, Wennberg looked more than ever like a bear with a beard, and who can read the thoughts of a bear?

Wennberg shook his head one time. Again, biding or acceptance, it could have been either, or neither. Then turned and aimed himself ~~went~~ off down the beach toward the seastacks. The other two watched his bulky outline shamble away in the moonlight.

"There goes a fool of a man," Braaf said.

"No," said Karlsson. He picked up the mapcase, out of habit tied it snug, tossed it into the canoe. "No, before we've done, we may wish Mister Blacksmith was only a fool."

OK

#

Karlsson woke to rainsound. Except for the triple windrows of surf the day's colors were all grays, sea and sky nearly the same, rocks and forest darker. The tint in it all was fog. The big cape to the north was obscured.

Wennberg this morning looked as if he was trying to pick the bones out of everything said by Karlsson or Braaf. He offered no words of his own, however, until past breakfast, and then turned loudly ~~ms~~

Rain was so obvious a morning nothing more itself showed

weather-angry. "Pissing down rain again!"

Braaf slurped tea, gazed to the grayness. "Could be worse, blacksmith."

"Worse? How's that, worse?"

"Could be raining down piss."

#

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Again now, that wait to see ~~if~~ when the weather would lift itself from them.

After a few hours of Wennberg squinting resentfully into it and Braaf putting wandering glances up at it and Karlsson calculating whether the gray of it was as gray as it had been an instant before, the murk was agreed to be thinning a bit.

They pushed off from the beach sand, paddled carefully out around the end of the seastack wall, and had a moment when they could see more seastacks ~~mx~~ along the coast ahead, then the rain took the shoreline from them.

"This's like having our head in a bucket," Wennberg ~~said~~ complained nervously.

"The high rocks will steer us," ~~"What we'll do is steer.~~ Karlsson said with more calm than he felt. "They're near shore all along here, ~~as long as we~~ pass just outside them and we're keeping to the coast."

There was no mid-day stop, no visible ledge of shore on which to make one. Karlsson ~~passed~~ divvied the last of the dried meat and they took turns to eat, one man doing so ~~each man eating~~ while the other two kept paddling. Sometime in the afternoon--the hours of this day gray strung on gray were impossible to separate--a

timbered island some hundreds of yards long loomed out on their left.

Karlsson steered along its outer edge, with intention to turn to shore beyond the island. But then at its end, through the rain-haze rocks bulking in the water between island and coast could be made out, stone knuckles everywhere.

"The island," Karlsson chose, and they aimed gratefully to shore on its inland side.

#

After the sopping day, a sopping camp.

The canoemen had come in near the south reach of the island, where several high humps of boulder weighted the shore. Into this rough outwall of rocks they lodged an end of the mast-shelter, and so kept that corner of the weather out. But others got in, this rain evidently willing to probe toward humankind for however long it took to find some. The Swedes managed to coax a choking fire long enough to heat beans and tea, then gave up on the evening.

Surprise it was, then, when Karlsson woke sometime later and saw that the sky now held stars.

#

OK

. . . One gain, Wennberg's a ~~stone~~ mute these mornings. No knowing what's prowling in his head, but at least it's not jumping out his mouth. . .

Wennberg was fussing the breakfast fire to life. The weather seemed to have cleansed itself the day before, was bright as a ~~new~~ widow's ~~mirror~~ window today. Karlsson wanted the canoe to be on the water by now, but for once he had overslept, and Wennberg's fire was proving a damp and balky proposition, and Braaf had drifted off north saying he would check the ocean horizon for lurking storm--dawdle eats hours, and Karlsson decided ~~they were~~ all three of them ~~had fed~~ were feeding it more than enough this morning.

"You've about ~~got that~~ found fire"--an oblique ~~urge to~~ urging Wennberg--sometimes would lodge in "so I'd better fetch Braaf." Karlsson started away toward the north end of the island.

"If I had arms for three paddles, ~~I'~~you could leave the~~i~~ little bastard there and yourself ~~as well~~ with him."

. . .Coming awake, is he? ~~Depend~~ Count on Wennberg, hammer for a tongue and the world his anvil. . .

Just then, Braaf ~~came~~ arrived to sight. ~~But stopped when he saw Karlsson, and beckoned.~~ Running, bent low.

change?

change

more

OK

Past Karlsson he raced, toward the astounded squatting Wennberg. The careful stack of sticks ~~tinderwoodkindling~~ Wennberg had just managed to ~~light~~ puff into blaze, Braaf kicked to flinders.

Wennberg gaped, sputtered. "Braaf, I'll pound you to--"

"Koloshes," panted Braaf. "Whole village."

Karlsson grabbed the spyglass out of the canoe and followed Braaf back ~~to the~~ around the beach rocks.

A high round little island, like a kettle turned down, sat upcoast perhaps a half a mile from where Karlsson and Braaf and Wennberg crouched now behind a boulder on their own island, and just inshore from the kettle island, gray and low under the coastal ridge of forest the longhouses were ranked.

Karlsson flung a look along their own beach to be certain sure: the canoe and camp were from sight behind the tumble of rock. Then with the glass, Karlsson counted. ~~Six~~ Fifteen of the almost flat-roofed structures. If these Kolosh lived as many to a longhouse as the Sitkans, families all the way out to Adam. . .

"People on those roofs," Karlsson reported in puzzlement. "Children, looks like."

"Upside down bastards anyway, these Koloshes," Wennberg said. "What're they squatting up there for?"

Karlsson studied further. "Watching the sea, seem to be. They. . ."

Just then commotion erupted atop the roofs. ~~The~~ It reason ~~for it~~ already ~~had been~~ was found by Braaf, pointing into the stretch of ocean

they had paddled through in yesterday's cloud.

Craft were coming in there, a line ~~number~~ of them. Blade-forms ~~strewn~~ on the water. But all aimed the same, one after another, straight as straight, toward the kettle island.

The glass ratified what was in the minds of the three Swedes ~~of them~~.

"Canoes," Karlsson reported. Braaf and Wennberg were tranced beside him, watching the flotilla. "Several paddlers each." ~~angle toward the coast. "Big ones."~~

The way the canoes stayed a steady space from each other. . . .

Karlsson puzzled at the pattern. As if they were strung into place. Or harnessed--

"Something in tow, there."

The tiny tunnel of sight brought it then to Karlsson.

. . . Melander, Melander, this you ought've seen. Fishers of monsters. . .

"Whale."

The news did not register on Braaf and Wennberg. Karlsson repeated.

"They're towing a whale."

"Whale? Whale, my ass." ~~Wennberg was every~~ Any manner of doubt not known to Wennberg had not been invented yet.

"Where'd they get a whale? You've come down with the vapors, Karlsson, hand me that glass. . ."

Wennberg focused in turn, and the same marvel traveled the tube of the glass to him. The canoe fleet was bringing behind it a glistening length, buoyed with floats that looked like puffed-up seals.

"Working like Finns at it," observed Braaf. "Digging paddles that deep, you'd think their arms'd pull off."

Wennberg, still not wanting to accept: "But how in Judas...?"

Karlsson had plucked the glass from him and was studying again. "Laying up over the prows there. Harpoons. ~~These Kolesh~~ They paddle out and kill whales."

more?

. . .And small fish we'd be for them. Holy Ghost and any of the others, what'll we. . .

Karlsson ~~now~~ felt a dry clot form hard at the top of his throat as he watched the long canoes--five, six, seven, ~~eight~~ altogether, ~~with~~ six paddlers at work in each and two further men, a steersman aft and likely the harpooner forward, ~~and a steersman aft,~~ to ~~watch~~ scan the ocean like fish hawks.

Rare for him, Braaf was openly perturbed; his right leg jigged lightly in place, as if testing for run. Wennberg sought to look stolid, but Karlsson noticed him swallow at his own throat-pebble of fear.

In the next hour or so the canoe procession angled between the ~~agog Swedes~~ three watchers and the kettle island, closing slowly on the beach in front of the village. A strenuous chant--"bastards sound ~~about~~ like Hell let loose," Wennberg appraised--could be heard now from the whalemen. Braaf was first to see what was intended: they would ~~use~~ employ the high tide to beach their sea creature.

The line soon was taken from the lead canoe by quick hands ashore, and the villagers leaned back in pull as the canoe crew carried their craft high onto the beach, ~~each canoe following in swift unharnessing,~~ The harpooner, a man larger than the others, was followed to the surf's edge ~~whale~~ by ~~an~~ a swarling attendance of women and children. Canoe followed canoe now in swift unharnessing, the hawser at last only between the whale carcass and the people of the shore, tug-of-war between nature's most vast creature and its most ~~pursuant.~~ pursuitful.

Slowly the gray form, a reef of ~~creature,~~ flesh, crept toward tideline.

Just short, the tugging ceased. The children of the village ran to the towline and took ~~place~~ places, small beads among ~~the~~ larger. Then, as it is said, a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together, the generations of the village ~~brought~~ drew the whale the last few yards up onto the beach.

"So?" This was put by Braaf, in confoundment.

"Yes, so." If this portion of coast was populated with these sea hunters, the problem was beyond any ready words. Karlsson was casting for anything more to say when Wennberg blurted:

"This is a how-d'ye-do we don't need. You bastard Karlsson, you touched us in at this island, is there nothing you can't make goose shit of?"

"Rather be ashore there to welcome those Kolosh, would you?"

That held Wennberg for an instant, and Karlsson used it to go on: "One thing, we can do. Need to do. Travel from here by night."

This notion set Braaf to chewing at the corner of his mouth. Wennberg meanwhile tried to lurch the argument sideways.

"But these whale chasers--whyn't they be like other Koloshes, lay up now and celebrate themselves silly? Eat and drink and tumble one another in the bushes and the like, won't they now? Reason it, Karlsson. What's we paddle wide of them here, right now, out from this island and swing to shore downcoast?"

. . .A notion, there. Get away maybe while they're prancing around that whale. But. . .

"This lot may cut capers for awhile," Karlsson allowed, "but what if there're more crews, still out there running down whales? Which risk would you rather, dark or meeting a pack of those canoes?"

"Dark," voted Braaf rapidly. "And blacker, better."

Wennberg stared morosely toward shore, where the whale had been lashed into place and the village people seemed to be standing back and admiring.

"Oh, Judas's ball," he at last gritted out. "Dark, dark, dark. These fish-fuckers down this coast, why't they just squat on their asses and look wise all the while like the Sitka Koloshes?"

#

76B

OK

A watching day, they would need to make it.

Wennberg claimed the top of the island, where the seaward side could be scanned for further canoes. "Spares me some hours with you pair," he grumped, and went.

Karlsson and Braaf stayed to where they could see across to the village. One Kolosh--Karlsson thought he might be the big harpooner from the lead canoe--had sliced a saddle of flesh from the whale's back, and with his train of admirers disappeared into a longhouse with it. Otherwise, though, all the come-and-go of the village still was around the long blunt-nosed carcass.

Sentried for the day this way, life maybe depending on what he and Braaf could bring into their eyes and calculate from it, ~~the~~ Karlsson felt the dividing come to him again. The kettle island, green flow of the shore horizon, the waterspan around, the might of the whale, the speckle of white barnacle-scars along its vast skin, the strange festival the Kolosh were going through, all this pageantry of what the world could be held a side of his mind even as he sorted at predicament.

"Sweden." Evidently Braaf's mind was in two, as well. "Tell me truth, Karlsson. Think we'll see it again?"

Karlsson studied the kettle island as if it was Braaf's question. Then ~~said:~~ answered.

"I won't."

Braaf turned to him ~~insistently~~ quickly. "What, you think ~~we~~ we can't keep in life? ~~The Kolosh'll get us--?"~~ Those Kolosh across there--?"

"No. Not that. I'm not going back."

"But then, why're you--the place Astoria, what about--?"

"Astoria, we all need find. And will. It's the foothold of this part of the world. Only one, so far as we know. Or Melander knew. But once there, I'll stay to America."

"And do what?"

"New land, here. Christ knows, we've seen skeins of it along this coast. Melander said the Americans are taking this shore. Reason for Astoria, ~~think~~ must be. New land is land to clear. a timberman can find a place in that."

~~There~~ on the foreshore, the Kolosh were gathered close around the whale. They seemed to be listening raptly to one of their number, the big harpooner again. Among the New Archangel whites it was lore that no Kolosh could so much as glance up at the weather without feeling the need for a speech.

"What d'you suppose he's preaching, Parson Kolosh there?"

"I don't have any glint of it. Maybe saying what it's like to hunt a mountain of creature like that."

Another whaleman seemed to be marking off the carcass into portions. Six or eight old men, still as cormorants, stood watching him.

"Are they brave, Karlsson? To chase whales? Or just fools?"

"Might be more than one yes to that," ~~Braaf."~~

The oration at last concluded, the villagers circled the whale and began to cut at ~~xxx~~ the great form.

"Butchering it, looks like they are! Not going to eat that thing, ~~are they?"~~ can they be?"

"This is all over my head, ~~Braaf.~~ Just count it luck that they're busy over there, whatever the Christ it is they're doing."

Blocks of blubber began to be stripped from the carcass. The whale was open now like a hillside being mined; a few of the women disappeared entirely inside the carcass.

"Must have stomachs like leather," Braaf marveled. "I'm hungry as a hawk, but walking around in that thing and then eating it--"

Braaf was quiet awhile. Then confirmed: "So you'll stay to this coast?"

"This end of America, anyway. Across the world from Smaland and out from under the Russians."

"Along here with these Kolosh whale hounds?"

"They're not everywhere of this coast. It just seems so, today."

Braaf shook his head slowly. "Stockholm for me. These years away, they'll have forgot me, the shopkeepers and the high ones. There'll be my new land, their shops and purses."

The two men turned squarely to each other a moment, as if a goodbye was about to be offered. Instead, Karlsson gave Braaf the quick serious smile and said: "Life's harvest to us both, Braaf."

#—

Meeting the ocean swell at the mouth of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the brig rocked and dipped as though in introduction. A bob and curtsy, it may have been, for the vessel was ~~named~~ christened the Jane.

A quick ship, the Jane, as brigs will be; but also being of Yankee lineage, a working and earning one too. Within its hold lay 0000 feet of recent forest, freshly taken aboard at one of the sawmill settlements which were popping into existence along Puget Sound the past year or so. Piling-stock constituted this particular cargo, plump round Douglas-fir to underpin the docks of one of America's new ports of the Pacific. ¶ Now, outbound, the Jane ~~worked~~ rode clear of Cape Flattery, let out ~~its topsails~~ full sails on both its masts, then bore away in the direction of the most robust of those ports--south, San Francisco-ward.

Three hours from then, off the top of the island ~~where he had gone to brood~~ Wennberg came tumbling.

"Karlsson! Braaf! Christ-of-mercy, out there. . ."

Respectful of the turbulent coast, the Jane was ranging two miles or more out from ~~the island~~ shore, and by the time Karlsson and Wennberg and Braaf clambered up to Wennberg's sighting point, the ship already was drawing even with the island.

The choices ran in Karlsson's mind: Canoe. . .No, full sails bent that way, the ship couldn't be caught or even gained on. Even ~~did~~ could the Swedes paddle into view of the vessel, logic would account them Koloshes from this village, all the better to be left back there sniffing wake. . .Signal fire. . .Same. Even build one instantly, ~~how could is persuade any~~ what sane captain ~~to~~ would hove in along this howling canyon of a coast? But the whale people, they were more than guaranteed to be attracted across by any such smoke. . .Gunshots. . .Same again, only quicker doom. . .

Evidently at different pace and route, the same sorting had been racing in Braaf and Wennberg. Wennberg was yet squinting dismally toward the ship when Braaf swung to Karlsson.

"Sailcloth," agreed Karlsson, and Braaf was gone for it.

Careful to be always below the seaward brow of the island, walled from any Kolosh glance from the mainland, they flapped sailcloth. Flapped it as if trying to conjure flight, a man at each end of the length of fabric, third man ~~stepping~~ jumping in whenever a pair of arms gave out, the fabric bucking as if in anguish to join that clan of sheets kiting atop the Jane. ~~Paddling the air now, four arms at a time, the other man~~ doing their yearning

Whichever of the three was not paddling the air ~~also did~~ performed the steady yearning toward the Jane with the spyglass, rifle of vision aimed in search of a lens ogling back. But found nothing but portrait of a ship on the wing. Wennberg's wishful curses ran steady as incantation, ought in themselves have wrought some drastic change in the brig's glide. Caused the mainmast to split and crash over. Tumbled the cabin lad overboard. Invoked Neptune to rise and shoo the ship back north. Tugged loose the sails and tangled them so thoroughly the captain would trice her right around. Any miracle, whatever style, would do.

Those sails continued to ~~plow~~ waft serenely southward. Leaving Wennberg and Braaf and Karlsson to stand and watch the distancing ship like men yearning to dive to ~~the moon.~~ a cloud. cloud

wing banner of defeat

#

The day at last declining toward dusk, Karlsson took the glass and eased to the downcoast end of the island to study the shoreline ahead. Wennberg was staying atop the island to brood, Braaf was back at watching the Koloshes demolish the whale. Since the passing of the ship, both wore a look as though they had just been promised pestilence.

. . .Danced right by us. Damn. Hadn't been for the Koloshes we'd right now be. . .

Something flitted, was down among the shore rocks before Karlsson could distinguish it.

Birds of this shoreline evidently had caught motion from the surf. Sanderlings, oystercatchers, turnstones, dowitchers, snipe, always some or other of them bobbing, skittering, dashing off; the proud-striding measured ravens of New Archangel were nowhere in it with these darters. Contrary another way, too, this southering coast. Its clouds were not the ebb and flow skidding about above Sitka Sound, but fat islands that impended on the horizon half a day at time. Here it seemed, then, that you could navigate according to the clouds' positions, and that the routes of birds had nothing to teach but life's confusion--which it would be like both weather and wingdom to deceive you into.

With the glass Karlsson checked back on the villagers and their whale festival. Wood was being piled up the beach from the carcass. Evidently the celebration was going to ~~would~~ rollick on into night, ~~which carried~~ ~~the gonkbokkk~~ no # Karlsson one more time put his attention south.

The withdrawing tide was lifting more and more spines of reef to view. But no beach was coming evident, just a broad tidal tract of roundish rocks, as if the farmfields of all the world had been emptied of stone here. Or, cannonball-like as they looked to be, ~~appeared, maybe~~ it might ~~could~~ be said battlefields. . . .

Beyond the stone clutter, no islands stood to sight, only the bladed outlines of seastacks. Many of them. All in all, Karlsson saw, this appeared the rockiest ~~bleakest~~ reach of coast yet, and it needed by paddled past ~~the canoemen needed to paddle it~~ by night and a landing made on it somewhere in earliest dawn...

. . . Day this has been, even that doesn't look much worse. . .

#

"Burning the Goddamn world over there. What in the name of hell d'you suppose they're up to?"

The villagers' beach fire just had flared high, a puff of sun against the dark, from a bowl of whale oil flung onto it.

"Whether they mean to or not, they're making us a beacon to steer from ~~far~~ awhile," Karlsson answered Wennberg. The three canoemen hefted, and the canoe left land, caught the water's pulse.

9-18-81

6

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Not since taking their quit of New Archangel had they paddled at night, and the memory of that stint did not go far to reassure anybody. ¶ Ordinarily dark was Braaf's time, the thief's ~~apprentice~~ workplace; but here in the canoe with blackness around, Karlsson could sense Braaf's distrust of the situation, feel how his paddling grew more tentative, grudging, than ever. ¶ Wennberg at the bow meantime seemed in every hurry to yank them through the night single-handed; his paddling was near-flail.

Karlsson drew ~~a deep~~ breath, deep, exhaled exasperation oh so carefully, and decreed:

"Hold up, the both of you. We need to ~~beat~~ flap our wings together. At my word, do your stroke. Now...now...now...

The night Pacific is little at all like the day's. With the demarking line of horizon unseeable, the ocean draws up dimension from its deeps, sends it spreading, distending, perhaps away into some meld with the sky itself. If stars ever kindle out there ~~on~~ amid the wavetops, we need not be much surprised. And all the while every hazard, rock, shoal, reef, shelf, snag, is being whetted ~~by~~ against the solid dark.

In their watch for collision, Wennberg and Braaf and Karlsson stared tunnels into the black.

no #

From Wennberg's ~~heavy~~ harsh breathing and undervoice curses, every instant that catastrophe did not occur only convinced him that it was overdue.

"How far are we going in this?" Braaf this was, his tone suggesting that he for one had gone a plentiful distance.

"~~Far enough past those~~ ~~Past the~~ whale-stabbers. Unless you want to sail in on them and ask breakfast."

#

. . .There's a night I don't need to live again. But now there'll be tonight. That ought do it, put us past the country of those whalemen. Then day, we can go by, like men with eyes. . .

Noon. As if it were nothing to yacht along this coast, gulls were drifting up a current over a headland to the south.

Karlsson was studying the rock-cornered shore beneath the gulls, a half-mile or so from the crescent of beach the canoe had put in at dawn. The credit of the night was that the canoe and its men survived it, not met with stone in the dark. Its debit was the interminable wait for daybreak, the canoe tied to a patch of bull kelp, Karlsson keeping a watch while Braaf and Wennberg tried to doze, before the coast could be studied for landing site. Now it must have been noon or past, all of them having slept deep as soon as the canoe was from sight behind shore rocks. The afternoon would have to be waited through, until the launch into dark again. Meanwhile, that thrust of shore to their south. . .

. . . Might be. Just might be. Chance to go shake the bush and find out. . .

"We've maybe been looking the wrong direction for game," Karlsson mused aloud. "Forest instead of ocean."

"What, then"--Wennberg--"go shooting at fish, are you? About like you, that'd be." By now even the blacksmith had thinned drastically, his blockiness planed away to width. Their last few meals had been beans and mussels and clams, the shellfish a slow pantry to find and gather. Without fresh meat all three canoemen soon would be husks of themselves.

"Fish, no. But a hair seal, maybe. If they've followed season to these waters. . .That point across there, it's the sort they lie around on."

"Gunshot, though?" This doubt from Braaf.

"A lot of noise from surf there, all that rock. And we can gander around the headland for Koloshes before getting onto the point."

Wennberg hitched his trousers, maybe calculating all the new room in them. "I could eat a skunk from the ass forward. If you think you remember which end of the Goddamn gun to point, Smalander, I'm for it."

Karlsson checked Braaf, received a slow nod. And made it decision:

"Let's go find supper."

#

10 OK

Plump flotsam on the outmost of shore, the seals were there. So was a new style of coast to any the ~~men~~ Swedes had seen yet. Having clambered downbeach to the point, the three ~~of them~~ found themselves were at the inshore edge of a rock shelf high and flat as a quay--although no one but nature would employ a quay some two hundred paces wide and ~~twice that~~ that much again in length. ~~There~~ Odd in this, too: in the blue and brown ~~morning,~~ afternoon, the Pacific tossing bright around the somber ~~[illegible]~~ rock face of the coast, ~~the~~ this huge queer natural wharf lay thinly sheeted with wet, like puddles after rain.

that match again

short red herd

By now Braaf had tides in his bones alongside the weather. "The high drowns all this, then," he ~~mused,~~ stated, nodding the attention of Karlsson and Wennberg to the remnant pools. "We'll need be quick." Even as ~~he~~ Braaf said so, earliest waves of the incoming tide tried to leg themselves up over the seaward edge of the rock quay.

"Quick we'll be," Karlsson responded and was in motion while the words still touched the air." "Over here, that horn of rock."

Onto the tidal plateau he led the other two, to where a formation the height and outline of a ketch sail bladed up. Beside this prong, from view of the seal herd, Karlsson studied out ambush. ~~To the right,~~

Leftward, the rock shelf lay open and bare. Any least twitch of invasion there would be instantly seen by the seals.

To the right, close by Karlsson and Wennberg and Braaf, the ocean with undreamable patience had

forced a tidal trough--a lengthy crevasse bent at the middle, like an arm brought up to ward off a blow. Every insurge of surf slopped a harsh compressed tide through this shore-crack, a hurl of water as if ~~thrown~~ flung from a giant pan, and the crevasse gaped wider than a man would want to try to jump. No surprise to the seals from this foaming quarter either, then.

The sea-end of ~~the~~ this trough, though, there a fist of boulder met the ocean, and just inland toward the men ~~came~~ bulged a low ~~bulge~~ knurl of rock off that formation. A wen on the back of the tiderock wrist, you might think of it.

not

...Little help, but some help. ~~It'll have to~~ I'll need ~~have to~~ make it be enough, won't I...

"I'll shoot from there," Karlsson indicated the ~~hump~~ wen-site ahead to Wennberg and Braaf. He made the short crawl to the hump, Wennberg scrabbling behind ~~him~~ to his left and Braaf ~~on the~~ vastly more left to the right. They hunched

left

either side of Karlsson, Wennberg breathing heavy, Braaf soundless, as the slender hunter peered to the seals.

The seals lay idle as anvils. Some had been lazing in the sun long enough that their fur had dried pale, others were yet damp and nearly as dark as their rock ~~bed~~ promenade. All of them were ~~nearly~~ toward a hundred paces from where Karlsson lay sighting. He disliked the distance for the shot, but decided to amend ~~for it~~ what as he could of it by singling out

more texture hunter's tricks

9-18-81

REVISED

12

a seal which lay a bit inshore from the others--a OO, a young bachelor, bullied into solitude by the bull of the herd.

"Tickle luck's chin," Braaf said softly as Karlsson aimed.

"Or it's ~~air~~ smoke soup tonight," Wennberg muttered.

OK

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Karlsson's shot struck the seal in the neck, not far beneath the base of its head.

A lurch by the animal. Its foreflippers and tail flapped briefly. Then the head lowered as if into doze.

. . . Fetched him! Shot-and-pot, we'll surprise our bellies yet. . .

Meantime, the other seals writhed rapidly toward the rock edge, were gone.

"Square eye, Karlsson," Braaf congratulated. He was first onto his feet, stepping to the right of the bump of rock Karlsson had shot from, Wennberg and Karlsson moving now too, the three of them beginning in hurry toward the seal, the tide in mind. . .

Of what happened next, only this much is sure: that amid a climbing stride by Braaf as he began to cross the wrist of rock, surf burst strongly in front of him; that a startling white weight of water leapt, seemed to stand in the air; that it then fell onto Braaf.

Comical, it might have been. A drenching, an ass-over-earhole tumble, as Wennberg might have said, and there the sum of it, Braaf bouncing up now with a grin of rue. But the push of the water slung Braaf backward more than that, and the hand he put down to halt himself met the wet slickness of a barnacle colony.

Braaf slid on into the tidal trough.

OK

Above, Karlsson and Wennberg, half-turned in stare to the crevasse-water, were twins of disbelief.

Braaf was vanished.

Then, and a long then it ~~had~~ begun to seem, up through foam bobbled Braaf's head. For a breath-space, his eyes held the affronted look they'd had when Wennberg's boot clattered the spittoon in the officers' clubhouse.

Next ~~Then~~ the insurging tide shot him from view of Karlsson and Wennberg around the bend of the trough.

...Rifle, reach the rifle to him, only chance...

Karlsson clambered down toward the trough, Wennberg heavily at his heels and cursing blue.

more!

The footing along the top of the trough was treachery itself. Karlsson and Wennberg skidded like men on soapstone as they tried to approach the edge.

dialogue!

The out-slosh of the tide brought Braaf whirling back below them, grabbing with both hands at the walls of the trough, barnacles and mussels denying him grip and costing him skin. This time, it was around the trough's seaward bend that the riptide tossed him from sight.

OK

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"Hold me," Karlsson directed Wennberg. ¶ The burly man clamped his arms around Karlsson's knees as Karlsson stretched himself flat, down toward the spilling water. Like a man peering down a well, Karlsson now. With both hands he held the rifle at its barrel end, thrust the stock into the channel as Braaf popped to sight once more. ¶ "Braaf! Grab! We'll pull..." ¶ A wrath of water--it bulged a full three feet over all other froth in the channel, as if some great-headed creature was seeking surface--careening in. Surf spewed over Karlsson and Wennberg, both of them clenching eyes tight against the salt sting.

When they could peer again, Braaf bobbed yards past them, on the landward side, his boy's face in a grimace. He seemed to shake his head at them, then the tide abruptly sucked back toward the ocean and Braaf was spinning toward his rescuers once more, his arms supplicating in search of the gunstock. ¶ But short, a hand's-length short...

...God's bones, it never behaves the same twice. Need be quicker, make ready... ¶ "This time, Wennberg! Lower me more, there, now'll reach..."

REVISED

The pair of them stared expectation toward the seaward corner of the trough, bracing themselves for the riptide's return and the hurl of spray over them once more. ¶ It arrived, crashing high along the trough walls, hard spatter, runnels down faces, now eyes could open again...

This time the tide had not brought Braaf back with it.

"Braaf!" ~~shouted~~ demanded Wennberg. "Braaf, where the hell...?" ¶ Karlsson scrambled wildly for the ocean edge, banging knees and hands on rough rock, Wennberg lurching after him.

The coastal ~~morning's~~ afternoon's same royal colors of blue and brown were all about the two men, the horizon-brow of the planet untroubled out there in front of them, the Pacific's flume of surf flowing as ever to their left and right; the single absence was Braaf.

In the surf's froth, very white, beside the rock shelf, Karlsson and Wennberg scanned frantically for other color. Occasionally they glimpsed it, as you might see a brightheaded dancer a quick moment across a crowded room. The straw-yellow of Braaf's hair, all but concealed in the tumult of the water and being banged north along the jagged rock shore.

#

OK

. . . Two now. But why that. God's bones, why, why? Why, one slip and Braaf's gone from life? That how it'll happen, each by each of us? This coast snare us each like that? But Braaf. Braaf, oh Christ, Braaf. I'd give half my life to have it not happen, what did. Gone, though. Taken water for a wife, the ~~sailors said~~ schoonermen say of it. Why. And pair of us now, we're not much better off than Braaf. You were the tip-weight of us, Braaf, kept us level. Turn on me, Wennberg had you to worry about. Go for you, there'd be me sharp on him. But now. . . Wennberg'll be ~~Hell's~~ Trouble's deacon now. ~~Overhears~~ Can hear him now, what must be whispering in that head of his: "Oh Christ, the doom on us. The fish-fuckers shoot Melander, Braaf tumbles in a millrace, ~~now~~ now just the pair of us and I ~~exit~~ can't trust this Smalander any farther than I can fart--not after the maps--not after this ~~[illegible]~~.' Need to tamp him. Someway. Else we're dead men too, waiting to fall. Not the way of it, that shouldn't be. We've done the work of the world, since New Archangel. Done Melander's plan, every hair of it. Ought be enough. But always more. Wennberg, he's the first work now. Find something, some one thing, link us with that. Working slow. Braaf told us of that. Braaf, Braaf.

Swimming the air with Melander, I hope to Christ you are. And now I go over to that bull and work slow. . .

"I should've. Oh, I should've done you the other night. Slit you loose from life. Braaf and I'd kept on somehow, we'd've managed. But you, you're black luck if there ever was. The maps, and then those Kolosh whalehounds, now this. . ."

"You do me, Wennberg, and you've done yourself. Fed yourself to ocean or Koloshes, choose your devil."

They were ~~each~~ either side of the canoe, the afternoon graying away, the coast gone somber. Tide was ~~retreating, baring~~ still high, covering the point where Braaf had been lost--and the seal as well, slosh ~~as high as~~ up to the knees of Wennberg and Karlsson ~~as they tried to retrieve it~~ when they struggled toward the animal, before they saw a retreating wave swash the gray form ~~[illegible]~~ back into the ocean. ~~[illegible]~~ Then the wrangle, on and on--"fucking squaw-rider you, if you'd had the maps none of this"--

"maps are wish, Wennberg, miles are what we need," ~~--~~ so just"--until every word seemed to be out of the both of them. They were weary, groggy, lame in the head. Being deprived of Melander had been like the ~~[illegible]~~ stiffening of an arm or leg, they somehow learned to function in spite of it, gimped their way onward as they had to. This loss of Braaf ~~seemed~~ was like a warp of the balance within the ear. Nothing stood quite where it had before.

And when the lurch of argument and temblors of predicament at last shook the two men silent, Karlsson knew he ~~had~~ needed to begin ~~again.~~ his true work. And did.

"Can't paddle in daylight, you say yesterday," Wennberg ~~said~~ had responded somewhere between bafflement and fury. Beware the goat from the front, the horse from the rear, and man from all sides, ran a saying of the New Archangel Russians. Everything of Wennberg recited this caution into Karlsson now. Yet Wennberg had to be worked back to the journey, into the canoe, brought around from Braaf's. . ."Now it's can't paddle at night. Tell me this one thing, Karlsson. This one Goddamned sideways thing. Where're you going to find us hours that aren't one or other, day or night? Whistle up your ass for them, are you?"

"Dusk." Karlsson had repeated it carefully. "Dusk, Wennberg. We need make a short runs of it, until we figure we're clear of any Koloshes along here. Just the two of us paddling now, ~~we'll need~~ we've got to learn about that, too. So ~~we've got to.~~ we need do it. Steal enough twilight to paddle an hour, maybe two, we can. Whatever we make is gain toward Astoria."

How much of coast Colash hold

need

Now, the day stepping down toward dark, Wennberg sighed dismally, ~~looked~~ squinted to the ocean, gray and steadily grayer, as though it were dishwater and he were being asked to drink it as a swallow.

"Wennberg, ~~we've got to.~~ we need do it."

need

As the two canoemen paddled, they could make out that timber still spilled like a dark endless waterfall over the rim of the continent, but all else here looked ~~like~~ more and more like old outlying ruins of the vigorous mountain coast behind them to the north.

Through the dusk, they achieved a half-handful of miles before Karlsson hoping he was reading this scalloped ~~coast~~ shore aright, pointed the canoe between two headlands.

He strained now to pick shapes in the water before them, felt Wennberg ahead doing the same, heard him mutter ~~something~~ this or that. ¶ Three, four, half a dozen rocks humped to view in an area the size of a commons field--and none more. ¶ The route clear, the canoe drove in to one more haven of ~~sand~~ shore.

The camp this night, without Braaf, was like a remembered room with one wall knocked out.

Almost nothing was said during eating, and less after. Karlsson watched Wennberg occasionally shake his head and tug at his sidewhiskers, as if in wonder at where he found himself now. But none of his usual almanac of complaints, nor any newly-thought-up blaze to hurl at Karlsson. Just those grim wags of head.

Trying to hear into that silence, Karlsson knew, was going to be a long piece of work.

The morning showed ~~them~~ two that they were on a beach as fine as velvet, gray-tan and nearly a mile long. At either end of the sand arc rough cliffs rose, pushing a thick green forest up into the sky. On the cliff-rim directly over Wennberg and Karlsson one small tree stood alone in crooked dance, as though sent out by the others to dare the precipice.

Here the surf was the mildest they had seen, only one wave at a time furrowing in from the ocean. But the crash ~~came~~ of the water came large. The Pacific was playing with its power in another way as well: out on the horizon, white walls periodically would fling up and spray apart--waves hitting on reefs. Unnerving, these surprise explosions as if the edge of the world were flying apart.

Their landing spot presented the two of them what Karlsson had hoped profoundly for, a deep view of the coast ahead. What they saw was a shattered line of headlands, shadowed by seastacks in shapes of great gray shipsails and dark tunnel mouths; sea rock various and jagged as a field of icebergs.

"Not that jungle, Karlsson." Wennberg licked his lips, wiped a hand across. "Not in Goddamn night, we can't."

. . .'Chose wrong,' Melander told the bastard a time. 'Brought you instead of your forge and anvil, they'd been easier to drag along this coast than you.' Still, he's right, two of us can't handle the canoe well enough, and if there's luck at all in life we ought be down far enough from those whale chasers. . .

They were keeping obvious distance between one another this morning. And the dagger was a new feel along Karlsson's left side, inside his rain shirt where he had slipped it the night before; where he would be carrying it from now on. He figured Wennberg was doing the same.

"Then the other time is now," Karlsson answered the blacksmith.

#

That day and all the next Karlsson and Wennberg pulled past shattered coast, watching into the seastack colonies and the warps of shore for Koloshes as boys would peer through a forest for sight of one another.

. . .It needs to be the pair of us against this coast, blacksmith. Ironhead. Just that, no other load on our backs. You're five kinds of an ox but that much you can see, when your temper isn't in the way. If just Braaf. . .'If' is fairy gold. Make it past, what happened. Ahead, we need to point. Wennberg, though: can I keep you damped down. . .

And each dusk, came ashore like old women stiff in the~~m~~ knees.

Wennberg encouraged a fire while Karlsson gathered mussels or clams, whatever could ~~pass~~ pass as a meal. Only after they had food in them ~~could~~ were they ~~face~~ able to face the ~~canoe~~ chores of night, finding water, wood supply, putting up the sailcloth shelter, ~~and~~ laying ~~beds~~ groundcloth and blankets, covering the canoe against ~~storm.~~ possibility of storm finding their night's cove.

. . . Like trying to see through a millstone, this line of coast.

There's this, ~~maybe~~ the Kolosh~~es~~ don't ~~like it~~ seem to fancy the place either. Maybe better tomorrow. It's All dragging work, though. Here on, that's what it'll need be, just the two of us to paddle. All dragging work . . .

And again in the morning, nerved themselves and pushed the canoe into the surf of the North Pacific.

—

Then--

"Beach!" Wennberg was pointing. "Beach like heaven's own!"

—

They land up