"I'll miss the snuffboxes. They hop into a man's hand, here.

What of you? What'll you miss?"

Karlsson shrugged.

"What, can't put a name to her?" Braaf queried.

Karlsson gave him a fast look. After a bit, said: "Maybe she has a lot of names."

"All the more to miss."

"Braaf, easy with this. We may be heard."

"Only by heaven. The overseer's gone off to his bottle."

"You'd know."

"That iron-puddler, Wennberg. Think he's to be trusted?"

"Do you?"

"I don't trust anyone whose ears are buried in his whiskers."

"Melander has put trust in him."

"Melander isn't you."

Karlsson straightened a bundled pelt into line atop the others in the screw press. "We need trust Melander."

"All right, try this hole: the voyage, can we do it strong as Melander says?"

"Braaf, you've more questions than the king's cat."
"Nothing knocks at the ear if you don't invite it. You still haven't said, you know."

"Said?"

"Why're you coming on the escape?"

Karlsson gave attention to peltry and screw press again. When he turned back, his narrow face was as little readable as it's never invited in. every but he peered more interestingly at Braaf. The angle at which the sight of the young thief entered his eyes seemed to have changed. After a moment, Karlsson said:

"Maybe to see what it'll be like."

Braaf was not entirely sure whether this constituted answer or not. But he nodded now, as though it did.
of conquest. And whether a tincture of fear mixed with whatever
else they shouted, for success meant this: their canoe lashed behind
the harpooned whale: a seagoing cart harnessed to a creature several
times the size of a bull elephant and dying angry.

Whale hunters, art fanciers, allegorists, the Makahs also
were a people who chafed more than a little under the pale regime
of frontier bureaucrats who wanted to refashion the tribe's life.
The colors of this theme weave through Swan's written words year
upon year, but never more blazingly than in the aftermath of Swell's
murder at the start of March, 1861. Swan was once more at Neah Bay--
his sixth stint there--the autumn of that year when the Makahs
decided to exact their price for the death of Swell. What amazes
is that it took six entire revengeless months by the territorial
officials before the Makahs made their decision to act. But once
resolved upon, their vengeance on the Elwha Clallams began to be
brewed, savored.

Conference, more conference, the Elwha village sketched
on the sand, a plan of attack argued out. As Swan watched and
jotted, Neah Bay's largest canoes were worked up into fighting
trim; the outsides blackened, interiors daubed a fresh red.
Lord Nelson, with his blood-colored battle decks, would have
nodded approval. Bow and stern of each canoe were sprigged
with green spruce limbs. Onto long poles were lashed faggots
of pitchy wood, to torch the hapless Elwhas' lodges. Guns,
The hardest wait among them was Braaf's. Melander forbade him from further stealing until the final flurry of muskets and food on the date of the escape. How, then, to keep his fingers busy?

Melander had a part-answer: a bank of hefty rope he handed to Braaf. "Work this in your lily hands of yours, as much as you can every day. Get calluses started, else you'll bleed to death through the palms once we begin paddling."

But a man can't twiddle rope all day, and--

"An Aleut calendar," Melander at last came up with, the fifth or seventh time Braaf asked him if there wasn't just one more item wanted for the cache. "Carve us one, so we can number our time on the way to Astoria, aye?"

Braaf smiled like a boy given a sugar-cake. "I know where there's one, I can get it this after--"

"NO!" Melander swept a harried glance around, Braaf blinking up at him. "No. Don't steal one. Carve one. You may have never noticed, but there is a difference. Keep those damn fingers of yours at home, bear?"

So began Braaf's pastime of carvery, a fine Kolosh chunk of red cedar—Melander would not have wanted to ask how it found its way to Braaf—about the size of the lid of a music box and a half inch thick
I have been reading this evening the report of the Comm. of Indian Affairs and it seems singular to be able to sit here in peace and quiet on this, the most remote frontier of the United States, and read of the hostilities among the tribes between this Territory and the eastern settlements.

--James G. Swan, Neah Bay, Washington Territory, June, 1865

As we crossed the Cascades on our way to Seattle, one of the passengers was moved to explain his feeling on the excellence of Puget Sound in contrast with the remaining visible Universe. He did it well in spite of irreverent interruptions.

under the present circumstances either to prevent these drunken scrapes or protect ourselves in case of an attack, but I have not the least apprehension of any difficulty if liquor is kept from them.

Now Swan catches cold—I have not felt so sick for a year certainly. Jimmy Claplanhoo's health mends and he arrives back at school. The agency's winter larder begins to be questionable: Sometimes we are very short of provisions and have to depend
shaved and shaved by him. Then the twelve rows of peg holes across, one hole for each day of month. Braaf next discovered that on the best-wrought of these calendars—Melandier had neglected too to forbid borrowing for the sake of a look—the Russians marked for their Aleut converts each of the frequent religious days, a cross-in-a-circle...
penciled around four or five of the peg holes each month. Lazily

 crude, this seemed to Braaf. He incised his crosses-in-circles.

 Finally, there was the peg, to keep track of the day of year much

 as count is recorded on a cribbage board. Braaf made his of walrus-

 tooth ivory, an elegant knobbled peg like a tiny belaying pin.

 "Aye, well," said Melander when Braaf shyly handed him the

 polished little board. "May our days be fit for your calendar, Braaf."

 "Which is the one, now?" Braaf asked. "When we go?"

 Melander plucked out the ivory peg, counted briefly along a

 row with it, inserted it.

 "This one, Just here, Braaf. The day of days."

 Night, the sixth of January, 1853. By Russian Orthodox

calendar, after custom, the night of Christmas.

 Karlsson staggered from the Kolosh village to the outside

 of the stockade gate, bounced hard against it, propped himself

 and threw back his head.

 "Be GREETed joyful MORning HOURR," he bawled. "A Savior

 COMES with LOVE's sweet POWERR..."

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

 here," Bilbin called urgently, hustled from the hut shelter-

 ing him from the rain, and hurriedly cracked the gate. "Quick,

 in, in,..."
From the dark beside the blacksmith shop Melander watched the gate wink open ever so briefly, then close. Two man-shapes bobbed together. Karlsson's slurred mutter and Bilbin's guffaw were heard. Melander swiveled his head toward the end of the smithing shop farthest from the gate and spoke:
"Now."

A piece of the darkness—its name was Braaf—disengaged itself and instantly was vanished around the corner.

Now Melander became motion. Across New Archangel for three hundred yards he hastened, in black reversal of a route he had roved one twilit evening a half-year ago. A different being, that Deacon Step-and-a-Half had been, not yet cumbered with a thousand miles of plan...

Outside the Scandinavian workers' barracks Melander halted and drew deep breaths. For half a minute the rain ticked down on him.

Entering, Melander clattered the barracks door shut behind him, began to shrug out of his rainshirt, mumbled this or that about having forgot his gloves in the toilet, and was vanished out the doorway again.

A person attentively watching the arrival and departure of Melander would have had time to blink perhaps three times.

Wennberg had been idly stropping a knife as he spectated the card game being played by three carpenters and a sailmaker. Now he grunted that he too was off to mount the throne of Denmark, if the Russians allowed pants to be dropped on such a holy night, and to the chuckles of the card players pulled on his rainshirt and stepped into the dark beside Melander.
late-going Russians yet within the officers' club... clatter in the gun room heard by a sentry at the eastmost blockhouse... just here, on such points beyond logic, Melander's months of planning teetered, and the quiver of them moved with him through the dark.

Wennberg's perturbation was purely with himself. Until he stood up from beside the card-players in the barracks the blacksmith had not been convinced he would go through with the escape. Why risk the tumble, ass-over-earhole, down this bedamned coast? Why trust even a minute to Melander or Karlsson or Braaf, these three orphans of Hell? So how came it that now he was traipsing off with Melander into disaster's black avid mouth?
Abruptly a barrier of building met them. As Melander and Wennberg hesitated before the officers' lodgings, a third upright shadow joined them. It thrust into Wennberg's hands a heavy sharp-pointed pry bar and into Melander's a pair of long-handledsmithing snippers, and it muttered: "This way."

In the dark and rain Melander and Wennberg stayed rooted for a moment, as though the cold feel of metal conferred on them by Braaf had frozen them into place.

"Come on, you pair of lumps." Braaf's jab brought them to life, tumbled the big men inside the doorway of the officers' club where he waited. "Stay an arm's length behind me, and try not walk on each other's ankles."

Braaf led Melander and Wennberg through rooms whose eyes never really took in, so much focus were the two of them devoting to listening, breathing silently, and creeping. Which may go to explain how the outer edge of Wennberg's left boot clanked against a hallway spittoon.

Braaf appeared more offended than concerned.

"Plowhorse," came his terse whisper to Wennberg.

The door of the gun room stood like the lid of a colossal strongbox tipped up on end. Heavy hinges and hasp, a corner-to-corner X of strap iron to thwart notions of chopping in, a padlock the size of a big man's fist.
camping ground by the Hosett hunters. An old canoe split in two was lying in front and bones and horns of elk were strewed about. Now the premises which come into sight are National Park display center and rangers’ quarters.

At last at the lakeside, Swan had a curiously threatening experience.

It was nearly sundown when we arrived and I had barely time to make a hasty sketch of the lake before it was dark. We had walked out very rapidly and I was in a great heat on my arrival and my clothes literally saturated with perspiration.
"Stick in your thing, blacksmith," Braaf said under his breath. "Don't be bashful, the padlock won't giggle."

Wennberg pulled from his breeches a queer piece of metalwork about the length of a serving spoon. At its small end the device was shaped like a thick skeleton key. At the other, it flared into a fat doughnut of metal, like the eye of a sizable ringbolt. It was of iron, and had taken Wennberg great time to forge in secret.

Into the keyhole of the padlock the blacksmith inserted the key-like end of his device. Shafted the sharp point of the pry bar through the doughnut-end. Moved his thick hands to the outer end of the pry bar for all possible leverage. And strained downward.

The lockwork inside the padlock made a single sharp clack. Braaf reached instantly and the sprung lock was lifted away.

"Done, hair and hide," congratulated Melander. "Now one job more." The tall leader handed Wennberg the snippers and tugged open the powerful door.

Somehow rifles racked together multiply their power, akin to the way that cavalry does by drawing up abreast. The repeat of pattern, the echoing numerosness it implies, as though this concentrated squad is just a swatch from bigger trouble—such impress Melander and Braaf and Wennberg, now met the three men, black tubes of barrel and brass ramrod in legions pipes rising straight up from the chain which threaded through each triggerguard. Truth be known, except for an occasional Beaumarchais sportsman's weapon and one hefty American Sharps, the guns here were
eccentric old Bakers or Brunswicks bought from the Hudson's Bay traders, the Brunswicks in particular were hard-recoiling, scatter-barreled specimens recently given up on by the British Army. None of this could be known to Braaf, Wennberg, Melander: blast and thunder were their want, not ballistic nicety.

In went Wennberg, then Braaf. Two exertions on the long handles of the snippers, and tempered jaws crushed twice through filigree metal. The triggerguard of the first rifle cut away, Braaf plucked the weapon free of its restraining chain and handed it past Wennberg to Melander.

Four more rifles the blacksmith clipped rapidly in the same fashion. "Aye," Melander saying softly each time.

Hefting their new armory, the trio readied themselves. Braaf shouldered shut the gun room door, slipped the padlock back onto its hasp. The right cast of look would show at once that the lock was awry, but it would be a rare Russian who came home tonight with a quick eye.

Braaf moved in front of the other two; advised under his breath to Wennberg, "Try pick up your hooves this time;" and led. They exited the officers' lodgings and through the dark set off together, now west across New Archangel toward the stockade gate, Braaf like a bat choosing the most shadowed route.

The noise exploded atop them then.

PALONG! PALONG!
Braaf was four running strides away from the petrified Melander and Wennberg before he, and they, realized--PALONG! PALONG!--how cathedral bells resound to those who sneak through the streets at night.

"Your Russian is fond of bells," a visitor who departed New Archangel with ringing ears once noted down, and the sweet-sad holiday peals from the belfry of the Russian Orthodox cathedral followed the tall figure and the shorter two all across the settlement toward the stockade gate.

A few feet from the sentry lean-to the trio paused, and Melander called in huskily: "Karlsson?"

Out loomed a figure in sentry cap, with a musket at quarter arms.

Wennberg grunted a curse and grabbed for the knife inside his rainshirt.

In Karlsson's voice the figure mildly chided: "I thought I had ought to better look the part. You don't find Bilibin's cap becoming on me, Wennberg?"

"Speaking of caps," Melander said as if announcing tea, "it's time to fling our hat over the nunnery wall."

Karlsson eased the gate open just enough for them to slip through with the guns. Minutes stretched, then the three were back from the canoe and the blackness of the Kolosh village.

"We're off to the cache," whispered Melander. "Stand ready with the gate."
Fewer than fifty paces later, Melander and Braaf halted beside the blacksmith shop.

"What're we doing here?" Wennberg rumbled low to Melander. "Where's this hidey-hole of Braaf's?"

"Here."

"What? Here where?"

"In the sill loft. Above your forge." The sill loft was a narrow platform, like a span of board ceiling, laid across the center of the rafters of the smithing shop. Wood to make windowsills and doorframes was stowed there winter-long in the heat rising from the forges, to forestall warp or shrinkage; until the summer building season came, no one paid it any mind. Except of course Melander, who said now: "On Gotland, we say the darkest place is under the candlestick."

"You pissants!" The stun of it set Wennberg back a step, these weeks of the war within himself, escape-or-betray, the lobes of his mind standing and fighting each other like crabs over its and all the while..."If the Russians'd looked up there they'd have hung me!"

"That thought did visit us. But you had luck, the Russians didn't peek. Shinny the ladder, Braaf, and begin handing down to us, aye?"

Three trips it took, Braaf and Wennberg lugging now while Melander stowed and stowed, to convey the trove which Braaf had accumulated like a discriminating packrat.
Then all at once Melander, alone, was back at the gate.
"We're cargoed," he said to Karlsson. "You'll be our last item, aye?" And was gone.

Karlsson began to wait out a span of becalmed time. The hammer chorale of the bells at last had ceased, and the all-but-silence, just the soft rainsound, was worse. Too, there was an occasional stirring from Bilibin, trussed and gagged and bleary on the floor of the hut behind him. Karlsson decided it was best to keep busy within himself, saying and resaying the word.

There are moments, central moments such as what Karlsson awaits now, which form themselves unlike any that have come before in our lives or will again. Ours might seem a kindlier evolution if what we know as memory had been set in us the other way: if these pith incidents of existence already waited on display there in the mind when you, I, Karlsson enter the world--a glance, and scene A ready to happen some certain Thursday; beyond it, B in clear view, due on a Wednesday two years and seventeen days off...The snag of course is Z, the single exactitude we could never bear to know: death's date.

So then that we can stand existence, the apparatus fetches backward for us rather than ahead, memory instead of foreknowledge, and Karlsson on wait here in the Alaska night is like all of us in life's dark, arriving able to know only that a moment is coming due and to hope it is not the last of the series.
"Hold up, bring us broadside a moment, Karlsson. We've at least earned a look."

As the canoe swayed around, the other three saw his meaning. Back through one of the channel-canyons amid the islands of Sitka Sound, an astonishing wide box of lights sat in the air. Baranov's Castle, every window bright for this night of Christmas merriment, sent outward through the black and the rain their final glittering glimpse of New Archangel.

By and large, a boat ride is a cold ride.

From launching the canoe, the men's legs were wet to just above their knees, and in the winter night it took the first half hour of paddling to warm themselves.

The night was windless, which they needed. The rain was not heavy, and gift above all, it was not snow. A few weeks before, a December snow had come, a white time when ice plated the tops of New Archangel's rainbarrels and Melander went around looking bleak. But then thaw, and the Sitka air's usual mood of moisture ever since.

The course out of the harbor looped the canoe toward the ocean, then swung southeast, to bring the craft along the shoreline of Baranof. Baranof's coastline the canoe men could estimate by the surf sound, and occasionally by a moving...
"Drink, do you mean, Pastor?"

"Actually, no. Wennberg, ah, gambled."

At this, the governor pursed his lips and looked quizzically at the pastor, who himself was known at the officers' club as a devout plunger at the card table. The pastor hurried on:

"Wernberg, you see, is—was—long past his seven years of service here, his gambling debts have kept him on. Not the first ever to—overstay. Yes, well, what I mean... Wennberg has become, may God grant that he see his erring way, a man destroying himself. Sullen, unpredictable. A loose cannon, I think the naval phrase is? If you would like my opinion, he is capable of destroying others as well."

Rosenberg rose, crossed to a window, leaned his forehead against the glass coolness, and stared out at the clouded coast-line south across Sitka Sound. So, now. Send the Nicholas to alert Ozherskoi? If the damnable Swedes could paddle at all they likely were beyond the redoubt by now. No, the decision was broader than that. Whether to order out the steamship to hunt down a canoe which could hide among the coves and islands of this coast like a mouse in a stable. Or let the bedamned Swedes go, let ocean and winter do the hunting of them. Yet this was no trifle of matter, thank you, the economics in the loss of four indenturees, two dozen or so man-years of service left in them... and the example to the other laborers could be treacherous. One thing, though, steamship or not: can't be remedied but can't be ignored, therefore paper it over.

The Governor knew the saying that paper is the schoolman's forest, and the Governor had been to school. On quite a number of matters been to school, as a further saying had it. Months ago the dispatch
it came.
Then the word, as if in chorus to his silent recitings, the word
flew out of the dark to Karlsson, in call down from the block-
house on the hump of ridge above the stockade gate.
"Vrimania!"
"Vrimatis!"

Every New Archangel hour the word made its relay from sentry
post to sentry post. Not much of an utterance, no recital on behalf
of Tsar or God, perhaps the simplest cog in all the guardful apparatus
of the capital of Russian America: simply the reminding call,
"Attention!" But try, a time, with throat dry and all of life
riding there on your tongue, try to echo such a word as if born
to it... Having been endlessly rehearsed by Melander, whose Russian
whose Russian was better than his own, Karlsson swallowed, cupped his
hands to his mouth; and as close as he could raise his voice to Bilbin's
blurt, bray, cried back the watch call.

Silence from the blockhouse.

Karlsson cracked the gate for himself.

"You're croaking like a raven down there tonight." Karlsson spun
to the resumed voice. Down from the blockhouse, here it came yet
again. "Something got you by the throat?"

Motionless, Karlsson frantically rummaged the times he had shared
the hootch jug with Bilbin, tried to draw to mind the guard's gossip
jab, pluck words out, but what words... .

Then from beside him in the blackness, a bray in Russian:
"Nothing fifteen drops won't cure!"

Karlsson's right elbow was being gripped by the largest hand
imaginable, which told him what his eyes could not in the dark: Melander.
Fresh silence at the other guardpost. Deeper, tauter silence, it seemed to Karlsson, unrelenting as Melander's grip.

At last:

"Swig fifteen more for me and make a start on my woes as well. Christ's season be merry for you, Merry Christmas, Pavel Ivanovich!"
As if in mock of some dance the Russians just then were gyrating through in the Castle, the Swedes' vast voyage southward started off with an abrupt two-step to the west.

On the first of the Tebenkov maps Melander had shown Karlsson the pair of southgoing channels threaded like careful seams among the islands of Sitka Sound. Karlsson had glanced down and immediately up: "At night? Probably in rain?"

That granite nubbin of opinion pivoted the escapees to the third possible route, a veer around large Japonski Island, directly across the channel from the Kolosh village and then outside the shoal of Sound Islands. Such a loop was longer than the other channels and unsheltered from the ocean currents, but at least it was not a blindfolded plunge into the labyrinth of isles.

It was, however, the inauguration for Braaf and Wennberg into paddling in untame waters, and as promptly as this, it began that these men were brave and afraid and back and forth between the two.

The canoe bucked, slid down nose first, rocked to one side, bucked again, slid again and rocked to the other side, a nautical jig new to Wennberg and Braaf and a horrifying one to meet in the wet dark.

"Steady up, don't beat the water to death," instructed Melander. But the paddling efforts of the pair in the middle of the canoe still were stabs into the sloshing turmoil until Karlsson directed: over his shoulder:
"Spread your hands wide as you can on the paddle and stroke only when I say. Now--now--now--now--now--"

This contrived tick and tock, Karlsson's nows and the breath-space between, advanced them through the blackness until Melander spoke from the stern of the canoe.
margin of lightness as a wave struck and swashed. Their night vision
was decent, accustomed by New Archangel's dim wintertime, but even so,
any effort to see to their right, the ocean side, brought only
intense black, of a sort our modern eyes have
been weaned from: starless, so much so that it seemed nothing ever
had kindled in that cosmic cave, and vast, beyond all reason vast.

New Archangel apart, the next lamp in that black flickered
thousands of miles across the Pacific, if indeed the residents of
Japan lit lamps.
Of all the kinds of toil there are, the ocean demands the most strange. A ship under sail asked constant trussing and re-trussing; the hauling about of ropes and sailcloth was like putting up and taking down a huge complicated tent, day and night. Advent of the steamship changed the chore to stuffing a mammoth incessant stove, between apprehensive glances at clock-faces which might but more likely might not indicate whether matters were going to go up in blast. Both of these unlikely sea vocations had drawn sweat from Melander, and now he was back to the ocean's original tool, the paddle. He was finding, with Braaf and Wennberg—Karlsson already had been through the lesson—that the paddler's exertion is like that of pulling yourself hand-over-hand along an endless rope. The hands, wrists, arms—yes, they tire, stiffen. But where the effort eats deep is the shoulder blade. First at one, then when the paddle is shifted to the other side of the canoe for relief, the ache moves across to the other: as if all weariness chose to ride the back just there, on those twin bone saddles beneath the skin.
The four men in the darkness stroked steadily rather than rapidly. Not even Wennberg was impatient about this, for he knew with the others that they needed to pull themselves as far from New Archangel as possible by daybreak, and that meant pace, endurance. The invisible rope of route, more and more a hawser as you worked at it, was nothing to be raced along.

Perhaps fifteen strokes a minute, four men stroking, rest-pausing as little they could, seven-eight hours to daybreak: an approximate twenty-five thousand of these exertions and they could seek out a dawn cove for hiding.

Hours and hours later, near- eternities later to the numbed arms of Melander and Braaf and Wennberg, darkness thinned toward dawn's gray.

Karlsson, glancing back to judge the stamina left in to the coming of day, the other three, was the first to see the slim arc of canoe, like a middle distance reflection of their own craft, closing the space of water distance behind them.

"You bastard, Melander!" This was Wennberg. "The Russians won't follow us, ay?"

"They haven't," Melander retorted. "Kolosh, those are. We'll see how quick they are to die for the little white father in Petersburg. Braaf, load those fancy rifles of yours, then pass Karlsson his hunting gun."

The Kolosh chieftain in the chasing canoe counted carefully.
as Braaf worked at the loading, and did not like how the numbers added and added. The half-drunk Russian officer who had roused the Kolosh crew told them the escaping men were only three--Braaf at first had not been missed, his whereabouts as usual the most obscure matter this side of ghostcraft; but plainly there were four of the whitehairs, they possessed at least two muskets apiece, and this one doing the loading was rapid at his task. Against the four and their evident armory the Kolosh chieftain had his six paddlers and himself, with but three muskets and some spears.

"Fools they are, you'll skewer them like fish in a barrel," the Russian officer had proclaimed. "If they haven't drowned themselves first."

But fools these men ahead did not noticeably seem to be. They had paddled far, almost a surprise how far; a canoe chief of less knowledge than his own would not have reckoned them yet to this distance. They seemed prepared to fight, and held the total of muskets in their favor. Tobacco, molasses, even the yellow coins had been promised by the angry Russian. Those, against the battle these whitehairs might put up. Once wondering begins there is no cure, and here was much, muskets and molasses and Russians and the nature of promises and tobacco and coins and four steady-armed whitehairs instead of three exhausted timorous ones, to be wondered about.
As the leader of the Kolosh sought to balance it all in his mind and the exertion of his crew shortened the water between the canoes, the craft in front suddenly began to swing broadside, a bold-necked creature of wood turning as if having decided, at last, to do fight even if the foe was of its own kind.

As the canoe came around, the figure in its stern leveled a long hunting gun.

Startled, the range being greater than they themselves would expend shots across, the Kolosh paddlers ducked and grappled for their own muskets. But the chieftain sat steady and watched. Here was an instant he owed all the attention within his being.

The slender whitehair swung his rifle into place, on a line through the air to the Kolosh leader.

The chieftain knew, as only one man of combat can see into the power of another, what Karlsson was doing. The whitehair was touching across distance to the chieftain’s life, plucking it up easily as a kitten, either to claim or to let drop back into place.

The other three whitehairs aimed their weapons as well, but not with the slender one’s measure.

Rattled by the turnabout of men who were supposed to be desperately fleeing them, the Kolosh crew still were trying to yank their rifles into place, the canoe rocking with their confusion.

The chieftain still watched ahead. He knew himself to be twice the watcher here, the one intent on the waiting rifleman across the water and the other in gaze to himself at this unexpected point between existences.
between existences. There was this and that to be said for courage and a calm death, but the fact was that here was not the place and audience a canoe chieftain of his years had a right to expect. So if life was tasked with a decent departure, was this one, straddled between the strange tribes of whitehairs and Tsarmen?

The decision was out the chieftain's mouth before his mind knew it had concluded the weighing.

The Kolosh paddlers slid their muskets into the bottom of their canoe.

The craft rocked on the water, gentling, a steed of sea cavalry settling into rest.

In the other canoe, the slender man set aside his rifle; as did the big whitehair in the stern. Silently the Kolosh watched as the two of them, strokesmen of power, paddled the canoe away while the other pair maintained rifles.

The craft was passing from view around a shorewall of timber when the chieftain said one thing more.

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

The pastor, a Finn from Saarijaarvi who was considered something of a clodhopper not only by the Russian officers but the Stockholm contingent of Swedes, dolefully had been anticipating his call into the governor's chamber. By breakfast every tongue in New Archangel knew of the escape. The double number of sentries along the stockade catwalk retold the news, and the sidelong glances every Russian was casting at every Swede and Finn this morning bespoke most eloquently of all. The pastor's hesitant entrance into the governor's presence gathered beneath a single ceiling two of the three unhappiest men in New Archangel. The third was named Bilibin.

"Excellency."

"Pastor. As you may have heard, our citizenry is fewer by four this morning."

"I did happen to hear the, ah, rumor."
"Yes. Oblige me, if you will. Were these men parishioners of yours?" Rosenberg intoned through the list of four names his secretary had initiated this blighted day with. Melander: incredible, that gabby stork of a sailor a plotter. Karlsson and Wennberg: the Governor could put vague faces to them; average slag among the seven-year force. Braaf: this one he could not recall ever having heard of at all.

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

"Formerly? Oblige me further."

The pastor housecleaned in his vocal box some more, then ventured into history. "Wennberg was in the group of artisans who came here with Governor Etholin—was it ten, twelve years ago? When I myself arrived to succeed Pastor Cygnæus, Wennberg was a member of the congregation. He came of a God-fearing family, I believe. But you know how a Swede is, a hard knot even for God."

The pastor paused to sort his words with some care here.

"He'd married, you see, a Kolosh woman. Sometime soon after my arrival here, the woman died. Group, I believe. It was then Wennberg slipped from the path of right. When I sought to console him, he cursed me. He also cursed—God. Since then he has fallen, if I may say so, into harmful ways."

Rosenberg pinched the area between his eyes again. Had Melander's name been able to speak off the list, the Governor would have been solemnly assured he had caught the morning-after affliction that they on Gotland called hont i haret: pain in the hair. aye?
had gone off to Russia requesting that he be relieved of his governorship—"ill health...family reasons." In truth, a sufficiency of New Archangel and the declining fur trade and the inattention of the Tsar's government half the world away. With a resourceful bit of clerkship, this matter of the runaway Swedes could slide out of sight into the morass of inkwork his successor would inherit. For his part, Rosenberg would reap one further anecdote with which to regale dinner parties in St. Petersburg.

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

Then, realizing he had rehearsed aloud, the governor added without turning: "That will be all, Pastor. If you know a prayer for the souls of fools and lunatics, you perhaps might go say it."

"Excellency."

That evening, securely downcoast from New Archangel and some careful miles shy of the Ozherskoi outpost, the four canoeists pulled ashore behind a small headland, in a cove snug as a mountainside tarn.

Weariness weighted every smallest move as they tried to uncramp their legs, shrug the hunch from the top of their backs. Creakily, Melander leaned toward Braaf and whispered.

Braaf nodded and ran a swift hand into the supplies stowed within the canoe. When his hand came up, it held an elegant dark bottle.
"Karlsson, forgive us that it isn't hootchina, but champagne from the officers' club was the best Braaf could manage under the circumstances."

Melander's long face as he spoke was centered with a colossal grin, which now began to repeat itself on Karlsson and even Wennberg.

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

Melander, like the others, expected Braaf merely to swig and pass along. Instead Braaf stood looking at the slim bottle in his hands and murmured: "Let me remember a moment...Yes, I know..." He lifted his glance to the other three, sent it on above their heads and recited:

"May you live forever and I never die."

Then he drank deep.
Permitting the others their champagne sleep, Melander enlists the last of dusk and begins to re-stow the canoe, taking more care than could be had in the dark and hurry at New Archangel. Fit the spyglass into this cranny, handy to hand. Pauses now, gives a listen toward the water. Resumes: center the water cask more exactly...

As Melander occupies himself at this, another picture is called for in the mind, large as you can manage to make it. Perhaps larger yet, for this image must be of the northmost arc of the Pacific Ocean: the chill ascendant quarter-moon of that hemisphere of water, from the schooled islands of Japan up to the Siberian coast and across to the Alaskan, then curving south and east along the continental extent of Canada and America.

Vaster stretches can be found on the earth, but not all so many, and none as fiercely changeable. Most of the climates imaginable are engendered somewhere along the North Pacific’s horizon coast, from polar chill to the stunt of desert heat. Within its water-world, the special law of gravity is lateral and violent; currents of brine and air rule. Most famous and elusive of these is the extreme wind called the williwaw—an ambush, an abrupt torrent of gust flung seaward from the snow-held Alaskan mountains.

But times, too, the sea flings back the wind, gale so steady onto
The North Pacific's most tremendous force, however, is something like a permanent typhoon under the water. Kuroshio, the Japanese Current, which puts easterly push into several thousand miles of ocean. Even here at the farthest littoral from the current's origins, Melander and Karlsson and Wennberg and Braaf feel Kuroshio's shove against their journey without realizing it. 

realizing it. Are touched too by the clemency the current sends from the Orient, for this region of coast the canoemen are groping their way along, the furrowed southeastern archipelago which on a map dithers at the flank of the main Alaskan peninsula like a puppy shadowing its mother, is spared the winterlong snow and crackling cold of the northland. Instead, a north-seeking offspring of Kuroshio, the Alaska Current, relays warmth along this shore, moderates winter here mostly to rain and fog. Not that rain and fog are small things, for they tap and sniff at man as if deeply suspicious whether he is substantial. But to storm, true North Pacific storm, they are only lazy cousins. Storm it will take, storm whirling south out of the Gulf of Alaska where the Alaska Current collides with chill northern water, for the canoemen to know in full the North Pacific's set of strengths.
These four Swedes in a Tlingit canoe are attempting a thousand
or twelve hundred miles—something of that range, by Melander’s
estimate—of this North Pacific-world. Not all so much, you may
say. A fraction of a shard of an ocean, after all. Ten or a dozen
hundred miles: in fifty or sixty sturdy days one might walk such a
distance and perhaps
yet have a wafer’s-worth of leather on one’s boot soles. Except that much
of this particular distance is exploded into archipelago; island, island,
島, island, island, like a field of flattened asteroids. Except, too, for
season being fully against these watergoing men, the weather of winter
capable of blustering them to a halt any hour of each day. Except,
more than that, current too being against them, the flow of the Alaska
Current up this coast as they seek to stroke down it. Except,
finally, for details of barrier the eye and mind just now are beginning
to reach—forbidding bristle of forest on those countless islands,
white smash of breakers on rocks hidden amid the moating channels—so
greatly more complex is this jagged slope of the North Pacific than the
plain arithmetic of its miles.

In this picture, Melander as he raptly stashes his boxes of tea and
swags of sailcloth amounts to a worker ant on the rock toe of an Alp.

"Tumble up! Fall onto your feet and suffer morning!"

Melander roused his trio as rapidly as if they constituted the
crew of a schooner aiming into storm, and for the identical reason:
to steal minutes. Snatch time whenever it could be was going to be
him: Went to Billy Balch's house and finished the thunderbird.

This was the hardest sketch I ever undertook. The lodge was
dark and the board covered with smoke and grease and hid by
baskets of food. The Indians removed these and washed the board
with urine and then the only way I could decipher the paintings was
to mark round the drawings with red cravon.

I have painted various devices for these Indians and have
decorated their ta-ma-na-was masks; and in every instance I was
simply required to paint something the Indians had never seen
before. One Indian selected from a pictorial newspaper a cut
of a Chinese dragon, and another chose a double-headed eagle,
from a picture of an Austrian coat-of-arms. Both these I grouped
with drawings of crabs, faces of men, and various devices,
endeavoring to make the whole look like Indian work; and I was
very successful in giving the most entire satisfaction, so much
so that they bestowed upon me the name of Cha-tic, intimating
that I was as great an artist as the Cha-tic of Clyoquot—a tribe
living north of the Makahs, on the coast of Vancouver Island.

No small gifts, these—twin-headed eagles, dragons from
beyond the rim of the Pacific, new flaunts of paint—to a people
as vivid and showy as the Makahs. Similar sprigs of allegory,
after all, throve in the tribal mind in the most day-to-day ways.
the policy of his captaincy. Any distance gained here at the front
of their voyage served as that much less to be slogged out later, when
weariness would be like a weight grown into their bones.

They took the same canoe positions as the night before. Karlsson
the stern paddler. In front of him, Wennberg. In front of Wennberg,
Braaf. Melander in the bow. In such placement, Melander of course
had reason. Karlsson was the adept canoe man of them, far away the
fittest to handle the large steersman's paddle. Wennberg, close by
be driven to
Karlsson's example, would try keep pace with him. Braaf,
Melander wanted nearest his own scrutiny, to insure that he shirked no more
than could be prevented.

Their first miles went in silence, as if the canoemen were not sure
they could afford effort on talk. If they could have bent their vision
upward over
Baranov's dour foreshore to see what they were traveling on the edge
of, they would have been appalled beyond any saying of it. A high-
standing sea of mountains, white chop of snow and ice and rock, with
arms of the Pacific, blue fjords and inlets, thrusting in at whatever
chance: Alaska's locked grapple of continent and ocean. Then--

"Melander, you said these first days we'd only to keep this shore
on our left, there's no other land along here. What do you call that
out there?"

Wennberg was pointing southwest, where a dim bulk rose on the horizon.
caught your eye on

"You've sighted Cape Flyaway," Melander said. "Clouds. Sometimes they sit down on the water like brood hens and you'd swear they're land, couldn't be anything but. That Finn skipper spent half of one morning searching our charts for a thunderhead he thought was a piece of Hawaii. We need to take care. This coast would gladly stand us on our ears. Read the map, read the compass, read the landmarks, and not go chasing clouds. That'll fetch us to Astoria. Aye?"
"What'll it be like?" This was Braaf, who took the chance to stop his paddle while asking. "Another wet woodpile like New Archangel?"

"The sailors' buzz I've heard is that it's a proper port but small. Sits on a fat river with hell's own sandbar at its mouth. The 'Americans--paddle, Braaf, a scissor of a lad like you is sharp enough to move your mouth and arms at the same time, aye?--the Americans, recent years, have been coming into that country in numbers and they boast Astoria as tomorrow's town of this coast. But all we care is whether ships touch at the place, and touch they do."

Not far into the day, Melander called a pause in the paddling.

"Time for a listen," he said.

"A listen--?" Wennberg caught on. "The steamship, you don't think--Melander, damn you seven ways, you said the Russians'd not come chasing after us with it--"

"I still say so. But maybe we'd do well to have a listen now and again, for the practice of it, aye? Close your face, Wennberg."

Melander cocked his long head as if counting the trees of the forested shore. Braaf sat as always, but still as a gravestone. Karlsson leaned down toward the water, to catch any bounce of sound. Wennberg concentrated so hard his back bowed.

The canoe rolled mildly, moved the heads of the men inches to this side, then same inches to the other, a slow tiny wigwag.

Melander at last turned his head, solemn, to Wennberg.

"What--" the blacksmith started, "is there something--Melander, d'you hear--?"

meat on him, Swan thoughtfully boiled it and chopped it, added apples, raisins, wild cranberries, currants, brown sugar, salt, cloves, nutmeg, allspice, cinammon and a quart of rum, then crocked the works in a ten-gallon stone jar. These months later, he cautiously offers to his guests slivers of the result baked from those makings: whale mince pie. Lifts a forkful himself, chews warily for a moment. The eyes of the three men light in elation, and they hurry toward second and third helpings.
Melander steered them to near North Cape, twenty-five miles downcoast from New Archangel, before stopping. By then Braaf, the least accustomed to exertion, looked particularly done in. But he said nothing, and lent a hand in hefting the canoe into shelter among a shore-touching stand of spruce.

"Let's see," Melander stepped over to Braaf, "Chafed somewhere -- the skin from the back of each thumb to the forefinger, particular target of sea spray as he paddled -- 'but not bad.'"

"So are mine," Melander said. "Three or four days, it'll take to toughen the skin there. But then you'll be solid as horn. Braaf, you'll make a deckhand yet."

Wennberg was cajoled into building a fire, Melander apportioned beans and salt beef into a kettle, Karlsson cut spruce boughs for kindling, and they spread the sailcloth which would serve as a ground tarp, and dark brought night two of their leaving of New Archangel.

"Cheery as a gravestone, isn't it? The Russians deserve such country."

They were into their second full day of paddling beside the drab-rocked foreshore of Baranof Island, mile of whitish gray following mile of grayish white, and Melander thought it time to brighten the situation.
"Maybe we ought to have pointed north." Karlsson was going along breakfast, but at least he was going along with Melander's try. with the try. "I've been up the coast a way with the bear-milkers and those cliffs are good dark ground."

"You'd see enough gray-gray-gray, white-white-white there too, Karlsson. Go far enough, up past the Aleuts, it's drift-ice and glacier, and glacier and drift-ice. Cold enough to make the walls creak. No, that's the north slope of hell up there, the high north. there. No, at least credit me with knowing enough to point us the other way. Aye?"

Wennberg jumped for that. "Does that mean you're taking us down hell's south slope, Melander?"

Melander blew out his breath. "Wennberg, your soul is as dingy as those rocks. Shut your gab and paddle."

Of a sudden, rain swept the coast. Not New Archangel's soft, muslin-like showers, but cold hard rods of wet, drilling down on the men. The downfall stuttered on their garments--pitpitpitpit--like restless fingers drumming on a knee.

The other three had donned well-worn sealgut rainshirts, but Braaf
sat resplendent in a knee-length Aleut parka, bright yarn embroidery at the cuffs, a front ruff of eagle down.

"What're you, the crown prince?" Wennberg demanded. "Where'd you come up with that rig?"

Braaf held up a wrist and admired the sewn filigree. "Round and about, where all good ware comes from, blacksmith."

"Elegant as new ivory, Braaf," Melander put in drily. "If the Kolosh come pestering again, we'll tell them you're the Little Father the Tsar, aye? Now paddle."

It took them that day and most of the one after to reach the southern tip of Baranof Island, Cape Ommaney.

In that time Braaf and Wennberg and Melander began to realize, though it never would have occurred to the first two to offer it aloud and even Melander found the sentiment a bit unwieldy to frame into words, that in all their seasons at New Archangel they never truly had put eyes on then the Alaskan forest. True, timber hedged the stockade and settlement, furred the isles of Sitka Sound and the humped backs of mountains around. But here downcoast, the forest stretched like black-green legions of time itself, the horizon on the left of the canoemen relentlessly jutting with trees wherever there was firmament for them to fasten themselves upright on. Where soil ran out at the shore edge, trees teetered on rock. Fleece-thick as the forest was, it seemed possible that every tree of this coast was in touch with every other, limb to limb, a continent-long tagline of thicket.
Along this universe of standing wood the Swedes saw not another human—which was what Melander had banked on—nor even sea-life to "marine Cossacks," the Aleuts, speak of, the Russian-American Company's hunters long since having harvested these waters bare of otters and seals. What abounded were Lordly crows, smaller and baleful about it. Balties raven's, big as midnight cats. Eagles riding the air above the coastal lines of bluff, patrolling in great watchful glides before letting the air spiral them high again. Seagulls, cormorants, loons, grebes, ducks of a dozen kinds. At times, every breathing thing of this coastline except the four paddlers seemed to have taken wing.

Cape Ommaney steepened southward into nearly half a mile of summit, evidently determined to hunch there as the land's last high sentry against the open water all around. Perhaps the stony bluff put Wennberg in mind of the roundbacked mountains near New Archangel, for that evening after supper he nodded out toward the bay between the canoeists' camp and the cape and asked: "What did you do, Melander, if the Nicholas came around that point just now?"

"After I emptied my britches, do you mean? So then, Wennberg, the Nicholas chugs in your dreams tonight, does it? Me, I think she's still anchored in Sitka Sound and the Russians are in their beds with their thumbs up their butts." The canoe's progress thus far had set Melander up on stilts of humor. "But I've been in error before. Once, anyway—the time I thought I was wrong. What about you other pair, now, what's your guess? Are the Russians panting after us like hounds onto hares as Brother Wennberg thinks? Aye?

"No," Karlsson offered. "They think we can't survive."
"What makes you think we can?" retorted Wennberg.

"Because we're alive to this moment, and closer to Astoria with each stroke of the paddle."

"Your prediction, Braaf?"

"They're not after us. They don't think of us at all by now."

Wennberg snorted. "We dance out of New Archangel practically under their noses and they don't even think about us? Braaf, your head is mud."

"They have to forget us, or we'll mean too much to them. You learn that fast in the streets. The ones who rule never bother their minds with the likes of us. The provisions I took from the Russians, they regret. That they're short of four faces at work call, they regret. Maybe they even regret the Kolosh canoe gone. But us ourselves, we're slips to them by now."

None of them had ever heard so many sentences one after another out of Braaf, and in the silence that followed, it seemed to be taken as truth even by Wennberg that whatever they encountered onward along this coast, and there might be much, the challenge probably now would not be Russian.

They readied in the morning to cross the channel from Cape Ommaney east to Kuiu, the first of the island stairsteps onward from Baranof. On Melander's map Kuiu could have been where palsy seized the mapmaker's hand, a spatter of crooked shores and hedging rocks.
Melander said nothing of all this quiver to the other three, simply told them that he judged there'd be stout current up the passage so that they would need to aim mostly south to end up east.

It worked out his way, and by noon the canoe was nearing Kuiu, snow-scarved peaks rising beyond shore. Here, however, the map's muss of dots and squiggles became real, and the coastline stood to them with a rugged headland.

"No hole in the shore, aye?" Surf blasted whitely across rocks not far off the point. "Let's stay away from that horse market," Melander decreed. Avoiding the channel between headland and rocks the canoe stood south again, the paddlers now working directly against the current.

In a few miles a cove revealed itself, but faced open to the weather from the west.

The next break in the shore yawned more exposure yet.

"Damn."

"Jesu Maria:" Melander's exasperation was outgrowing his epithets.

"Is this whole whole damn stone of an island unbuttoned like this?"

Two further inhospitable Kuiu coves answered him.

Dusk waited not far by now, and the labor of paddling against the sapping the canoemen, current was becoming terrible. From weariness, they nearly blundered into a broad slop of kelp before Karlsson glimpsed it in the gloom.

By now the canoe had reached the southern tip of the islands, a rocky point which bade less welcome than any profile yet.

"Bleak as ashes," Melander bestowed on this last of Kuiu. "Karlsson, out to whether there was take the spyglass, see if there's any hope out in the channel, aye?"
Maybe, Karlsson reported. In the water beyond them stood what looked like thin clumps of timber.

Melander lit the candle lantern in order to peer close at his map. Through the channel hung a thread of line; a ship had navigated here, testimony which was needed now because low rocks and shoals so easily could hide themselves in the gray mingle of water and dusk.

Melander set the craft for the timber clumps. They proved to be small islands, and on one of the narrowest, the kind that sailors said could be put through an hourglass in half a day, the canoeists pulled to shelter just short of full dark.

That was their first day of stumble, two stair treads of island in glimpse, when but one had been intended. Yet Melander and his canoeman somehow had alit secure, and after Kuiu the going smoothened.

In the days now, the canoe jinked its way southeast amid constant accessible landfall. The major island called Prince of Wales rests dominantly in this topography like a solitary platter on a table, and the strew of smaller isles along its west is as if that rim of the plateware had been pounded to bits by the North Pacific. Here the canoeists could cut a course which, while Melander said a snake would break its back trying to follow their wake, kept them steadily shielded from the ocean's tempers of weather.

The spaces between stars are where the work of the universe is
"New Archangel, there. What d'you suppose they're at, just now?"

"The Governor's just done his whole day's labor--taken a sniff of snuff."

"Okhotskans're staring themselves cross-eyed at the bedammed mountains."

"The Fins, they're praying for it to rain gold."

"Trade boots with any of them, would you?"

"No. Not yet."

The spaces between stars are where the work of the universe is once...
done. Forces hang invisibly there, tethering the spheres across the black infinite canyons: an unseeable cosmic harness which somehow tugs night and sun, ebbtide and flood, season and coming season. So too the distances among men cast in with one another on an ocean must operate. In their days of steady paddling, these four, various as Joseph's robe when they embarked from New Archangel, found that they needed to cohere in ways they had never dreamt of. To perform all within the same close orbit yet not bang against one another.

Meals made an instant quandary. Melander began as cook, but fussed the matter. Perpetually his suppers lagged behind everyone else's hunger. When he could no longer stand Melander's dawdling and poking, Wennberg volunteered himself. That lasted two tries.

"You're not smithing axeheads here," Braaf murmured as he poked at the char of Wennberg's victuals. Braaf himself, it went without saying, could not be entirely relied upon to prevent food from detouring between his lips instead of arriving at the others' plates. By the sixth day, then, the cooking chore had singled out Karlsson. He was festal prodigy, no chef de cuisine, but his output at least stilled the nightly grumbling that one had might as well go off into the forest and graze.

Wennberg's particular tithe turned out to be his paddling. He was not built best for it, much too much ham at his shoulders and upper arms; but his impatience made him take on the water like a windmill in a high breeze. Always exerting toward Karlsson's example of deftness, Wennberg stroked at half again the pace Melander could manage, twice
as great as the inconstant Braaf. Day on day, the canoe pulled itself through the water primarily on the forward paddles of Karlsson and Wennberg. Melander would have preferred more balance to the propulsion, yet it worked.

To his own surprise as much as anyone's, Braaf proved the best of them at reading the weather. Long before even Melander, the one seasoned sailor among them, Braaf would know a change was coming onto the ocean, as if along with his naive robin face he possessed a bird's hollow bones in which to feel the atmosphere's shift.

And Melander, Melander's personal orbit was detail: Melander navigating, finding fresh water for the cask, fetching firewood, mothering the canoe and its stowage; Melander sew your button for you, treat your blister, commiserate your ache of knee; the edge strength to hold all into place, Melander provided.

More than this henwork he saw to, though. Subtract parts from this extensive man in their successive value to the escape, the ultimate item will be his tongue. For Melander knows what poets and prime ministers know, that the cave of the mouth is where men's spirits shelter. His gift of gab stood him well with crews on all the vessels of his voyaging. Now he works words on Wennberg and Braaf and Karlsson like a polish rag on brass. "Keep your hair on, Wennberg, there'll be supper quick as quick...Braaf, it would be pretty to think this canoe will paddle itself, but it won't. Get the holiday out of your stroking, aye?...Karlsson, that surf looks to me like worse and more of it. Let's bend our way around, so-fashion..."
Could you, from high, have held to view a certain time of each
evening now—the brink when dark is just overcoming dusk—you would
see a surprising tracery of bright embers southward from New Archangel:
the fires of each campsite of the canoe men. Few, as yet, but trending,
definitely trending, drafting fresh pattern along the night coast.

Rather as if fireflies mischievously were taking positions atop the
constellation Ursa Major, the bear, and distending it into, say, a
giraffe.

camel.
"Too much smoke. We're not signaling Saint Peter from here."
Melander once more. He dropped to his knees to fan the camp fire into
purer flame.

"You'd've never lasted over a forge," jeered Wennberg. "A whiff
of smoke tans the soul."

Melander calculated. Three camps in a row, this smokey debate
with Wennberg. The tall man made his decision.

"You need to know a thing, Mister Blacksmith. Braaf, Karlsson,
you also. This I heard from Dobzhansky, that interpreter who helped
me out at first with the Kolosh fishing crews. He came once somewhere
into these waters with a trading mission the Russians tried..."

The mission had been contrived as retaliation against the Hudson's
Bay Company for its practice of slipping firearms to the Sitka Kolosh,
so both the Russians and the downcoast natives were in a mood to make
as much face as possible. They inaugurated with a night of feast, and
Dobzhansky found himself sharing a baked salmon and goathorn cups
of fermented berry juice with a canoe chieftain. The pair discovered
they could converse in the trading tongue of the coast, Chinook
jargon. At once the native sought to know of Dobzhansky how many
heads the Tsar had.

"How many heads? Why, one like you and me."

No, the native made Dobzhansky understand, not how many heads.
How many skulls?

"Skulls? What would the Tsar do with skulls?"
Sleep on them, the way Callicum does, the native said, pointing out to Dobzhansky the tribal chief in the middle of the carousel.

"Sleeps on them? Why does he do that?"

For strength, the native answered. Anyone who sleeps on a pile of skulls is a strong man, is he not?

Melander had not intended to tell his crew Dobzhansky's tale of this coast's people. He was not heaven-certain he should have.

But no more objections were heard about care over campfire smoke.

The water met their daily moods with its own. One morning their channel would drowse, lie heavy, with a molten look like gray bottle glass. Another, it would wake in full fret, white lids of wave opened by wind or current.

The weather could change with knife-edge sharpness. Once they saw to the southeast a pastel fluff of clouds, peach and pale blue, which was directly abutted by an ink-cloud of squall: a tender seascape neighboring with tantrum. The join of continent and ocean seemed to excite the weather into such local targeting. Time and time, the canoemen would see a storm swoop onto a single mountain amid many, as if sacking up a hostage as a lesson to all the rest.

Once Braaf pointed out for the others a narrow white sheet of sky, very likely snow, north on the coast behind them. "Stay north
and frost the Russians' asses," Melander directed the storm with a push of his hands. It stayed.

A thirty-nosed sea creature poked abruptly from the water, delivered the canoeists a thunderous burp, and sank.

"Sea lions," Karlsson called. When the school surfaced again, each pug-nosed head making steady quick thrusts as if breaking the silver pane of the water, the leathery swimmers held pace for awhile alongside the canoe, watching the upright creatures in it.

The past few days, Melander had traded about with Karlsson, thinking it well that more than one of them be able to handle paddle, the steering canoe, and that these waters were the place to do it. Melander had learned from his Kolosh fishing crew that the practice of some southward natives was to dub the bowman of a canoe "Captain Nose." Accordingly, with Karlsson's move forward Melander bestowed the title on him, and Braaf and Wennberg took it up. For the next while, it was all "Captain Nose, Your Honor, what's it to be for supper tonight?" and "May I suggest, Captain Nose, that it's nice to see something ahead besides Melander's back?"

It took a number of nights for any of them to become accustomed to the noise of ocean contending against coast. Surf expelling up the beach and draining back, the increasing crash of tide incoming, the held-breath instants of silence at lowest low tide.

Melander's unease went on longest; an absence of some sort nagged through the dark at him. At last he placed it. He was listening for the creak of ship timbers, the other part of the choir whenever ocean was heard.
Pouched as they were in the canoe day on day, the closeness and then rubbed on them. It be it said, among these four watermen waited crosscurrents which, if they were let to flow free, might prove as roily as any of the North Pacific's.

Wennberg of course was the oftenest source of tension, for after his manner of wedging himself into the escape none of the others could entirely put trust in him. Then too, as with many strong-tempered men, the anger in Wennberg that could flare pure and fast as pitch-fire covered his other qualities. The blacksmith was a highly capable voyager, able to put up with the discomforts and as steady at the canoe work as could be asked. If some incident did not set him off. But the trigger in him was always close to click.

As for Melander, the problem with so lofty a type is that ordinary men cannot always see eye to eye with him. Difficult to be totally at ease with a man who is thinking so many steps ahead, even though those stairs of thought may be your salvation.

Similarly, Karlsson's silent style could be judged a bit too aloof. There was not much visit in this slender man from Skane, and less jokery. "An icicle up his ass," Wennberg was heard to mutter of Karlsson.

Braaf? Being around Braaf was like being in the presence of a natural phenomenon, such as St. Elmo's fire or marsh vapors. Braaf simply was there, on his own misty terms, take him for what he was.

As if still in echo of their encounter on the parade ground, it was Braaf and Wennberg who were most apt to jangle with each other.
Wennberg would suggest that Braaf had about as much weight in the world as the fart of a fly, and Braaf would recommend that Wennberg shove his head up the nearest horse's behind to see whether it held any more exact turds like him. Melander was able to slow their slanging, but never quite to stop it.

"Red berry pudding,"
"Rye cake," Wennberg burst out one night beside the fire.

The other three broke into laughter.

"Laugh yourselves crooked, you bastards, but you'd give as much red berry pudding for a rye cake right now as I would. Currant jam on it, you'd trip your own mother to get to it, too, you would."

"Mister Blacksmith is right," Melander admitted with a chuckle. red berry pudding
"Though with me it's not rye cake, but a featherbed in a sailors' inn I know at Danzig. I could bob in that for a week and never open an eye except to look for more sleep, aye?"

Karlsson nominated next. "A woman I knew in our village in Skane," he said slowly. "Her name was Ulrika and her hair was fox-red."

Braaf blinked as the other three looked at him, awaiting his choice. "I'll settle just for three paces of headstart on each of you."

To do something about the sameness of their menu, Karlsson suggested they try trolling. Out of the canoe, back alongside Melander, was let a line and a hook baited with a sliver of salt beef. On their second
day of attempt, Melander yelped when the line whipped taut across his shins. "It's collect the whale or stove the boat," he boomed happily as he hand-over-handed at their catch.

Melander tugged the head of the fish out of the water against the side of the canoe, then halted his grapple. "Mother of Moses," he swore in wonder.

The other three peered over the side at the spiny, yellow-brown mottled glaring up at Melander.

"Ugly pig of a thing," observed Wennberg. "What the devil is it?"

"Looks like a shark fathered by a toad," muttered Melander. None of them had ever seen the miniature species of shark called dogfish. "Could be some kind of cod, my guess."

"Well, how do you say? Do we try to eat it?"

No one wanted to be the first, repellent as the dogfish looked, to commit one way or the other. Finally Karlsson offered, "I'm the potman, and I'll give a try. But I don't know..."

"Hunger is good sauce," Braaf put in dubiously.

"It better be," said Wennberg.

"At least cut off its head first," Braaf prompted. "Else it looks like it'll be gnawing on us before we can get to it."

"Eat it is," Melander proclaimed. "Somebody reach the gaff and heave the bastard aboard."

"I saw a bear make supper on fish once, near Ozherskoi." "Maybe all this fuss with cooking isn't needed."

Skinned and baked over coals, the dogfish had proved surprisingly civil to the taste, and..."
Karlsson's relief was such that he was breaking out in words. "He looked big as a bullock. But he swatted salmon out of the water and peeled off the skin with his claws, ate it daintily as anything."

"You'd ought to have invited him for supper tonight. He'd have been welcome to the outside of that sea beast we've just put into ourselves."

A moment of these encamped nights, cherish with Melander the scroll he fetches from its snug place in the canoe.

Hunkered within the firelight as Braaf and Wennberg and Karlsson settle to sleep, he places the waterproof mapcase beside him. One by one, he polishes four biscuit-sized stones against the leg of his britches. Wipes his fingers down his shirt front. From a pocket digs a stub of pencil. Lays a square of sailcloth the size of a baker's apron, smooths it ceaseless. Now like a Muslim with a prayer rug, unfurls the roll tenderly onto the cloth and sets a scrubbed stone to weight each corner.

Each time, this unfolding of the Tebenkov maps ruffles a profound pleasure through Melander. It is as if an entire tiny commonwealth has sprung to creation just for him. Sprigs small as the point of his pencil denote the great stands of forest. Tideflats are delicately dotted, as if speck-sized clams breathe calmly beneath. Wherever the land soars—and this coastline, recall, abounds in up and down—the rise in elevation is shown as a scalloped plateau. Threaded among the shores and islets go the proven sailing routes, as though an exploring spider has spun
his test-voyage of each passage. The total of engraver's strokes on each map is astounding, thousands. Melander cannot imagine who among the Russian pen-jabbers in the Castle possessed the skill and energy for such pin-precise work. (In actuality, none. After Governor Tebenkov wrenched the navigational information from his ship captains, he turned it over to a gifted copper-engraver among the New Archangel Grebes.)

In our time, a poet has offered the thought that it is within civilization's portions of maps now that the injunction ought be inked, Here be monsters. Melander's firelit maps represent an instant of balance in humankind's relationship with the North Pacific: after sea serpents were discounted, and before ports and their tentacles of shipping lanes proliferated. To cast a glance onto these superbly functional maps is like seeing suddenly beneath the fog-and-cloud skin of this shore, down to the truth of nature's bone and muscle and ligament. The frame of this shoulder of the Pacific is what Melander avidly needs to know, and the Tebenkov maps peel it into sight for him.

The first map, that of New Archangel and Sitka Sound, Melander particularly gazes at again and again. Detail here comes most phenomenal of all: the exact black speck, slightly longer than wide, which was the Swedes' barracks is shown just above the cross-within-a-cross indicating the Russian cathedral. (Melander had unravelled for Karlsson this map for his opinion about the best route through the Sound's covey of islands, and been gratified by Karlsson's blink of
surprise. "You can see everything but the flea in the governor's ear, aye?" Melander worked much with maps in his sea-time, but to be able to trace from the very dwelling where you packed your sea-bag, this now is a new thing of the world.

The coastscape at hand just now is not Sitka Sound, however, but the geography enwrapped in the third of Melander's furl of maps. Here these dozen days south from Sitka, the map begins to report a lingual stew, islands left as Heceta and Noyes, Baker and Suemez, Dall and San Fernando, from the crisscross of British and Spanish explorations, these names Russified by the New Archangel, then notated into Swedish by the pencil of the man above them now: Melander of Gotland gives his centered grin when the full hibble-bibble occurs to him.

Yet seen another way, such a muss of languages is exactly apt, for everything else of this map Number Three sprawls in pieces as well. Dabs, driblets, peninsulas, spits and spatters, this portion of coastline when rendered into linework looks startlingly like a breathing moil of sea things, jellyfish and oysters and barnacles and limpets and anemones. It takes an effort of will, even for Melander on his knees, to believe they are going to hold motionless, either on the map or in actuality, to permit voyage among them.

The four fresh beards itched. At New Archangel, because the Russians sported beards, most of the Finns and Swedes had made it a point to keep clean-shaven. Now Melander's face and Karlsson's were barbed with growth as blonde as barley stubble, while Wennberg's ducal
whiskers came a surprising rich sorrel shade. Braaf sprouted a thin
"Spread cream on and a cat'd lick them off for you."

Melander had started from camp to gather firewood from the
drift-piles along the top of the tideline when Braaf surprised him by
saying, "I'll fetch with you." Braaf volunteering for a chore was
an event to put you on your guard considerably, as when a parson might
offer to keep you company on your stroll to a brothel.

When they were out of earshot of the others and had started on
their armloads, Braaf asked: "Melander, tell me something, can you?"
"If I can. What?"

Braaf gave him his upcast look and began. "You were a sailor."

"I was that. Until the Russians set me to putting salt on fishes'
tails."

"I had a half-brother. Or at least people said he was, and we
looked alike. He was years older, and a sailor like you. I'd
see him on the docks at Stockholm when his ship was in. The Ambrosius,
a brig, it was. Then I heard the Ambrosius had sunk. They said it
followed false lights onto the rocks somewhere, England or Spain, one
of those places, and everyone of its crew was drowned, and then the
people there took its cargo from the wreck. Do they do that, Melander?
Set false lights so that a ship will come onto the rocks?"
For once Melander's tongue held back. Finally the tall man let
his breath out with great slowness and began.

"They are called moon-cursers, Braaf. On a black night they hobble a
horse and lead him along the shore with a lantern tied to his bridle. The
lantern looks like the running light of a ship, and a ship at sea will
follow in because it seems a proven course. Aye, Braaf, they do that."

Braaf nodded above his armload of wood. "I thought they did,"
he said, and turned back toward camp.

By now, it could be noticed that daylight, what there was of it,
stayed with them a bit longer. "After Christmas, each day gets a
chicken-step longer," Melander assured them solemnly.

Even in these sheltered waters, the currents sometimes twirled
witches' knots in themselves. Once the canoemen watched as such a
whirlpool took a drifting tree and spun it like a compass needle in
total turn.

The sky opened entirely one morning, cloudless as if curtains
had been taken down.

After days of hovering gray the breath of existence was astounding.
The nearest mountains stood green as May meadows. The next, loftier
group darkened toward black. "Then the highest, the horizon peaks
farthest east and south, were a shadowed blue, as though thinning of substance as they extended along the coast.

"Mid-Summer Day come early," Melander exclaimed. "Today we jump over our own heads."

But through the morning the sun hung so low along the southern horizon that its glare made hazard of the water in front of the canoe. An hour or so of the ferocious dazzle left the men air-headed, sozzled with light. Melander squinted and swore. "Too much of everything, this bedamned coast has..." By strong afternoon effort, when the sun had swung out above the ocean, the canoeists managed to make a usual day's mileage.

"Braaf, you piss near me one more time and I'll rub your nose in it like a bitch pup."

Wennberg's warning halted Braaf in mid-pull at the front of his thighs. Thoughtfully he arced a look from the item of interest there to the blacksmith seated a few yards away. The look, it could have been, of a marksman calculating windage and declination. Across the campsite from the pair, ever so slightly Melander shook his head in message: No, Braaf, don't rile the bull.

"I'll wait the day I've enough to drown you," Braaf said off-handedly and eased away into the timber.

A dusk breeze gossiped here and there in the higher-up swags of trees. His wool britches undone, Braaf stood spraddled, any mother's lad with head cocked dreamily to the croon of the great forest.
Abruptly Braaf stopped hearing the wind, all his listening jerked elsewhere. Standing there with his legs wide, Braaf felt the touch of being watched, as when the thief's timbre within him would warn that the instant was wrong for pilferage. But in these woods, who...

Braaf spun and met the eyes. Eyes big as his hands, staring at him from either side of an arm-long hooked beak.

In a half-moment Braaf recognized that the phantasm was blind, as wood must be: and that up from its carved stare squatted several more stock-still ganderling creatures, a ladder of sets of eyes.

Braaf broke to the edge of the trees and urged softly to the other three men, "Come look."

Within and around an opening in the forest they found other acrobat columns of gargoyles, some atilt as if peering more sharply down at the interlopers. Creature upon creature bursting from cedar bole, these carvings annihilated reality, loomed in a middle air of existence, as if the knife, adze, whatever edged tool shaved fantasy into form, somehow had flinted life into them as well.

"What's it all?" asked Braaf. "Like those poles the Kolosh put up, but bigger."

"I'd guess a kind of cathedral," Melander replied.

"Don't give us your hagbag riddles, Melander." Wennberg was reaching a hand up to inspect the joinery of the beak-piece onto the column seen first by Braaf. Rather, which first had seen Braaf. In spite of himself, the blacksmith was tugged close by the serene craft of these goblin
poles. "Next you'll be telling us Braaf is the saint of egg-snatchers."

Melander looked steadily at Wennberg. "A kind of cathedral," he repeated. "Whatever it is that these people believe is said in these carvings. Like rune stones, aye?

Until now, insofar as Melander and company could discern in their clamber down the precipice of coastline, not another human might ever have existed among these shore islands. Take the matter to truth, though, and their journey more resembled the course a late-of-night stroller might follow through slumbering neighborhoods. In tribal clusters, perhaps as many as sixty thousand residents inhabited this long littoral of what would become British Columbia: Tlingits, Haidas, Tsimshians, Bellabellas, Bella Coolas, Nootkans, peoples often at odds among themselves but who had in common that they put their backs to the rest of the continent and went about matters as if they alone knew behind the rain-curtains of this winter, the terms of life. For theirs was a Pacific-nurtured existence which asks to be called nothing less than sumptuous. In spawning time the coastal rivers were stippled thick with salmon, veins of protein bulging there in the water to be wrested, fileted, dried for the winter larder. Abovestream the wealth was wood, particularly the cedar whose cunning these people knew how to set free; under their hands it transformed to capacious lodges, canoes the length of a decent trawler, and art, this the most startling of art. Tree-sized columns of carvings simply offered the most evident form of how these tribes told stories of
the creatures of timber and sea, sang and recited them, danced and acted
them behind masks, in chill times wore pelts as if taking the saga-animals
into themselves. (And thereby drew the attention of white newcomers to
the coast, who bartered for those furs to cargo them beyond the bend of
the world and barter in turn to yellow people: linkage queer in its
way as any carved concatenation.)

Out of this vivid swirl wafted, inevitably, the reputation of these
coastal people as canoe warriors and slave-takers--plus illustrative
tales such as that matter of the pillow of skulls. These four interloping
Swedes knew no specifics of the downcoast tribes, but reason told them
this much; if they never dipped paddle into a one of the populated
coves where the rain season was being whiled away in performance and
potlatch, so much the better luck.

Just now Braaf was the one of them to speak that dialect called
out here.

"Why's this deserted? If it is."

"Likely they do as the Kolosh," Melander guessed. "Hunt from
a summer village right around here, in winter pull back to a main
village somewhere."

In the dusk, eagle poised eternally atop bear. Whale stood on
end in dive through contorted lesser creatures. One being, possibly
frog the size of calf, pranced merrily upside down. Every sort of
winkless forest changeling, they goggled in unison at the backs of
the retreating men.
Later, the others breathing their rhythms of night beside the fire, Melander could not find sleep. His memory was at a New Archangel market morning, hubbub of Sitka Kolosh and three or four dozen visiting tribesmen from somewhere to the north. Amid the newcomers hawking their wares squatted a seam-faced carver. Word had rippled through the settlement about this man's daggers: blades of power with each hilt carved as the rising neck of some alarming beast. The head topping a hilt-neck sometimes would be a bear with glinting abalone inlays of eyes and nostrils and teeth, sometimes a long-faced wolf, again a great-toothed beaver; always, angled and fierce and magical as dragons. The interpreter Dobzhansky tried to converse with the northern carver. Dobzhansky's first question received answer, then the native stayed silent. Melander inquired what had been said. Dobzhansky related that he had asked how many years it took to obtain such skill.
"So long as I have lived, so long have I carved," the daggerman responded. "If the spirit people will let me, I will carve even after I am dead."

Even Melander could not have said why, but that response echoed around in the corners of his mind this night.

Just past daybreak, the four men slide the canoe out into surf. Usual bruised-looking sky, tatters of fog in the tree tops. This coast's mornings are as if brawl had gone on in the heavens all night.

As ever, trees push down to absolute waterline: boundless green, then immediate blue. You could reach up from swimming and make your way arm-over-arm through the forest.

This day more, the canoemen continue along a lengthy timber-thick island, Dall.

That night: "Sleep deep," Melander advises. "Tomorrow we introduce ourselves to Kaigani."

The letters spoke large near the bottom of Melander's third map, and in sober block rather than the finespun script elsewhere on the paper. The space framing them, three widths of Melander's thumb could have spanned. In actuality the plain of water represented there extends twice the distance of the English Channel between Dover and Calais, and no calm white cliffs stand as guides. Taken all in all, calculated
Melander, they compressed into themselves a marathon day of canoe voyage, did those two thickset words: Prol Kaigani. Kaigani Strait.

The water stretched to them out of a horizonless gray, a blob of overcast messily sealing together sea and sky. Melander did not at all like it that no line of land could be seen out there. In their island-by-island descent of the coast, Kaigani and the channel which intersected it to the east, Hecate Strait, were the first expanses where the day's shore did not stand steadily in sight. Yet the map vouched to Melander that across in that fume of seawater and cloud, the northeast tip of the Queen Charlotte Islands arced toward the canoeists. By holding to a heading of south-southeast they would aim into its embrace. At least, Melander had to believe that south-southeast could be held to. If not, if current swung them too far eastward, they would be swept from Kaigani directly on into Hecate Strait. One waterstead of distance and risk, Melander reckoned they would manage in the day. Two, he doubted gravely.

From his resumed place at the bow, Melander studied back along the canoe at the others. Braaf with his paddle across the gunwales and his fingers restless atop the wood as if absently plucking music. Wennberg eyeing askance at the wide water. Stock-still, Karlsson; the steering paddle needed his skill today.

What was required of Melander now was a division of faith. Certain of himself, confident of what he could make in his mind, going through life as if had always a following wind; such had been Melander's history, self-belief. Now he needed to apportion trust into these other
three in the canoe with him, into the coil of map which promised firm 
earth out there over the precipice of water, into the hovering 
grayness, into the canoe, paddles, compass...

Melander spat over the side to clear his mouth, not recognizing 
the taste of diluted faith but decidedly not caring much for it. Then 
he said: "Time for our stroll."

The powerful rumple of the Pacific made itself felt to them at 
once. Swells were spaced wide, perhaps two lengths of the canoe 
between crests, but regular as great slow breathings. Each swell 
levered up the prow of the canoe, Karlsson, Captain Nøe, instantly 
even a foremast of man, created taller, than the men behind, then the craft was shrugged 
downward.

"More beef, Wennberg. Push that paddle deeper, aye?"

Melander's urging began while the tips of the fir trees of Dall 
Island still feathered distinct against the sky behind them. Wennberg 
he had not expected to be slack in this situation; it was Braaf who 
could be anticipated to scant his labor if high heaven itself depended 
on it. But Braaf was thrusting steadily, and onto Melander's 
admonition tossed gibe of his own.

"Bashful are you, Wennberg? Reach right down there and meet 
the wet, why not..."

Wennberg grumped something unhearable, but his paddling picked 
up markedly.
Kaigani Strait today is called Dixon Entrance, a name engrained for the English captain who delved the region in the ship Queen Charlotte. By whatever christening, the expanse forms one of the largest of dozens of plains of water between the broken lands of the North Pacific coastline. For canoeists to come onto this span of water from days in the frequent islands to its north was as if, having got accustomed to visiting from castle to castle across moats, they now found themselves looking from Normandy across to Devon. This water is extensive in its perils as well; "The tidal currents are much confused," modern navigators are cautioned; in storm the channel can seem to be forty white miles of breakers. Fog spends its season in summer, gales from first autumn until April. All times of year, the flood tide east into Hecate Strait can surge as rapid as a man can walk. Small wonder that at the eastern reach of this mariners' thicket, islands are bunched like galleons desperately seeking a lee anchorage.

Not a whit of this was suggested from that calm space between shorelines on Melander's map. "Got a lump in it, it has," Melander admitted as a wave shuddered the canoe.

Thirty or forty hillocks of water later, again the heart-skip in the rhythm of the boat.

"Wennberg!" Melander's tone crackled now. "You're dabbing at it again."

Wennberg held his paddle just above the lapping waves, as though trying to recall whether water or air was the element in which it operated. The broad man swiveled the upper part of his body enough
to find Melander. Wennberg's face hung open in surprise. His mouth made motions but no sound. Then, with gulped effort: "I'm. Getting. Sick."

"If you don't paddle you'll get dead, and us with you. Have a puke now and be done with it, Wennberg. We need your arms, aye?"

WENNBERG glassily found Melander, seemed to mull the suggestion, then shook his wide head.

"Drag it up," Melander insisted. "You've got to."

WENNBERG put his head over the side of the canoe and gaped his mouth as if hoping to inhale better health up from the ocean. After a minute his gasps managed to be words: "Can't. Too. Sick."

"You've got to. " Wennberg, listen to me, aye? Jab a finger down your gullet, tell yourself you've swallowed baneberries, pretend that Braaf here plopped a slug into your tea this morning--do anything, but heave the sickness out of you now. Do it, Wennberg. Dump your gut."

"Keep on, you'll have me tossing up, too," muttered Braaf.

Just then Melander's prescriptions took their intended effect on Wennberg.

"There now, you're empty and scraped," Melander proclaimed in satisfaction. "You'll be a bull again before you know it. Rest a half-moment, we can spare you until you get your breath back."

WENNBERG focused whitely toward Melander. "Melander, one time I'll reach down that mouth of yours and..." But before long, he retrieved his paddle and, while still not able to stroke in smoothness with the others, was adding push to theirs.
For a time—say, the first several dozen hundred paddle strokes of their journey—a wall of reassurance yet could be seen behind the canoemen, the outline of Dall Island and its greater neighbor, Prince that landline of Wales. Farther though it was becoming, the shoreline of the islands lay as a footing, a ledge to return to.

Then, just after Melander reckoned aloud that they might be a third of the way across, Karlsson glanced back and saw that the landwall was gone. In place of the islands hovered a sheet of fog. Kaigani had enwrapped the canoe and its men, anywhere about them nothing other than water or cloud or fog. mix of the two.

They had no timepiece, but an onlooker could have clocked Melander's decrees to within two minutes' regularity of one another. Each time he called rest, one man continued to paddle to keep the canoe from backsliding in the swells. That sentinel then rested briefly while the other three resumed, then plunged to work again. At the next rest, the solitary paddling duty slid to the next man.

Near to what Melander estimated ought to be the mid-point of the channel, waves began to chop more rapidly at the canoe. A fresh sound, a slapping higher against the side of the craft, could be heard, and spray now and again tossed itself over the bow and Karlsson.

"A fast ship's always wet forward," he called out, the while wondering how much more the water would thicken.