Permitting the others their champagne sleep, Melander enlistes and begins to leave of dusk re-standen the canoe, taking more care than could be had in the dark and hurry at New Archangel. As he occupies himself at this, another picture is needed 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 the Siberian coast and across to the Alaskan, then downcurving south and east along the continental extent of Canada and America.

Waster stretches can be found on the earth, but not all that many.

The Pacific Ocean is the blue mammoth among features of this planet.

Sum the reaches of Pacific water—nine thousand miles across from the Philippines to Panama, 0000 from the Bering Sea to Cape Horn—and they add up to area much greater than all the earth's land surfaces. Of this colossal integer, the North Pacific makes the hugest fraction.

Is, to put it in a geographical sense, a kind of shard-shaped planet possessed of

unto itself, holding its own logic of existence. Most of the climates
imaginable are engendered somewhere along its horizon of coast, from
polar chill to the stun of desert heat. The North Pacific's special
law of gravity is lateral and violent: currents of water and weather
rule. The most tremendous of these, something like a gigantic
permanent storm under the water, is called the Kuroshio, the Japanese
Current, and puts an easterly push into several thousand miles of
ocean. Melander and Karlsson and Wennberg and Braaf, at the
farthest littoral from the current's origins, feel Kuroshio's
shove against their journey without knowing it.

These four Swedes in a Tlingit canoe are attempting a thousand
miles of this North Pacific-world. Not all that much, you might say,

\[ \text{fraction of a fraction, after all. One thousand miles: in forty or} \]
\[ \text{fifty sturdy days one could walk such a distance and perhaps yet have} \]

wafer-thin a newspaper slip of leather on one's boot soles. Except that this

particular distance is exploded into archipelago; island, island, island,

like a field of asteroids. Or thickly bristled with forest, where not

riven with channels. Except, too, that season is fully against these

men, the winter weather capable of halting them any hour of each day.
Except, finally, for details, the eye and mind cannot yet reach, so much more complex is this slope of the North Pacific than the mere arithmetic of its miles. No, in this picture, big Melander, rapidly stashing 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!" his trio contributed.

Melandar roused them as rapidly as if they were 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 the policy of his captaincy.

All distance gained here at the front of their voyage was that much less to be ground out later, when they would be wearier.

They took their same canoe positions as the night before. Karlsson was the bow paddler behind him, Wennberg behind Wennberg, Braaf afterwards.

Melandar as ever had his reasons for such placement.

Karlsson was the strongest paddler, the best to handle the prow of the craft. Wennberg, behind Karlsson's example and with the eyes of the other two on him, would try to keep pace with Karlsson. Braaf, Melander wanted under his own nearest scrutiny, to see that he shirked no more than could be prevented.

Their first miles went in silence, as if the canoe men were not sure they could expend effort on talk. Then—"Melandar, you said these first days we'd only to keep this shore on our left, there's no land along here. What do you call that out there?"


Wemberg pointed southwest, where a dim bulk rose on the horizon.

"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 Hawai'i. We need to take care, this coast'd 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 talking. "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--"

sharp paddle, Braaf, a scissor of a lad like you is smart enough to move your mouth and arms at the same time, aye?--the Americans, recent years, have taken it back from the British and they boast it as tomorrow's town of this coast. But all we care is whether ships come in, and some they do."
Melander c Taned them to near North Cape 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. Wennberg was cajoled into building a fire. Melander apportioned beans and salt meat into a kettle, Karlsson spread the sail-cloth 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 gray-rocked foreshore of Baranof Island, and Melander thought it time to brighten the situation.

"Maybe we should have pointed north." Karlsson was going along with the try. "I've been up the coast there with the bear-robbers (the hunters) and those cliffs are white as cottages."

"You'd see enough white, all right, sooner than soon. Icebergs and glaciers. It's the north slope of hell up there. No, credit me with knowing enough to point us the other way. Aye?"

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

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

It took them that day and most of the one after to reach the southern tip of Baranof Island, Cape Ommanney. 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 it a matter too unwieldy to frame into words, that in all their time at New Archangel they never truly had seen the Alaskan forest. Pinched onto its site as it was, New Archangel stood grand as Stockholm when compared with this expanse of standing timber. True, a hilly rim hedged the fort and settlement, furred the isles of Sitka Sound and the humped backs of mountains all around. But now the forest stretched relentlessly beside the canoemen, relentlessly jutting there jutted with trees, trees, trees wherever their was firmament for them to fasten themselves upright on. Where soil ran out at the shore edge, they teetered on rock. Each tree pyred dozens of long branches upward to its thin red of top. The Swedes saw not another human—which was what Melander had banked on—nor even any sea-life to speak of, for the Russian-American Company's
hunters long since had harvested these waters bare of otters and seals. What abounded were birds. Big as midnight cats, circling.

But birds were constant. Baleful ravens, sometimes circled the canoes.

Eagles rode the air above the coastal lines of bluff, making their great watchful glides before letting the air spiral them high again.

Seagulls, cormorants, grebes, ducks of a dozen kinds. At times, every breathing thing of this coastline except the four paddlers seemed have taken to take wing.

Cape Komolyan steepened as it stretched south until it had hunched itself into a stony bluff nearly half a mile high, evidently determined to stand as the land's sentry against the open water all around.

Perhaps the upcoming point 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 bay and asked: "What would 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 is in your dreams tonight, is it? Me, I think she's still
anchored in Sitka Sound and the Russians are in their beds with their thumbs up their butts." Melander was in high humor from their progress thus far.

"But what about you other two, what's your guess? Are the Russians after us like hounds onto hare's eve?"

"No," Karlsson offered. "They think we can't survive."

"Why do 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 scutter 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. They even regret the Kolosh canoe. But us ourselves, we're wisps dismissed to them by now."
None of them had ever heard so many consecutive sentences out of one another taken as truth. Braaf, and in the silence that followed, it seemed to be accepted even by Wemmenberg that whatever they encountered onward along this coast, there might be much, and 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 staircases onward from Baranof. On Melander's map Kuiu could have been the mapmaker's seizure of palsy, a spatter of crooked shores and hedging rocks.

Melander said nothing of this to the other three, simply told them that he judged there'd be stout current up this 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-decorated 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 threatening 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, and 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.

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

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

Two further inhospitable coves answered him.

Dusk waited not far by now, and the work of paddling against the 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 Kulu, off a rocky point which bade less welcome than any profile of the island yet. But surprisingly, what looked like clumps of timber stood in the water beyond. Melander lit a candle lantern in order to peer close at his map. A thread of line hung through this channel, indicating a ship had navigated it. That testimony was needed, because rocks and shoals could hide themselves easily in the gray mingle of water and dusk. Melander set the craft off for the timber clumps; they proved to be small islands, and the canoeists pulled to shelter on one of the narrowest just short of full dark.

This had been a day of stumble, two stairreads of island when but one had been intended. But Melander and his canoeists had alit still secure.
That was their first day of stumble, two stairtreads of island
when but one had been intended. Yet Melander and his canoe men had
alit secure, and after Kuuil the going improved. In the days now,
they jinked their way southeast amid constant accessible islands.

The major island called Prince of Wales rests dominantly in this
topography like a long platter, and the strew of isolates along its
west is as if that rim of the plateware has been pounded to bits.

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 weather.
The spaces between stars are where the work of the universe is done. Forces hang invisibly there, tethering the spheres across the black infinite canyons: a cosmic harness which somehow tugs night and sun, ebb tide and flood, season and next season. So too the distances among men must operate. In the sheltered days of steady paddling, these four in the keen-beaked canoe found that they needed to cohere in ways they had never dreamt of—to perform all within the same close orbit yet not shoulder against one another.

Meals were the earliest quandary. Melander began as cook, but fussled the matter too much; his suppers lagged far behind hunger's pangs. Wennberg could not stand Melander's dawdling and poking and volunteered himself, but proved too rough and ready. "Wennberg, you're not smithing axeheads here," Braaf said as he poked at the char of Wennberg's cuisine. Braaf himself, it went without saying, could not be entirely relied upon to prevent food from finding its way into his mouth before it reached the others' plates. By the fifth day, the chore had chosen Karlsson. He was no chef de cuisine, but his output at least ended the nightly grumbling that one had might as well go off into the forest and graze.
Wennerg's particular tithe turned out to be his paddling. He was not built best for it, too much ham at his shoulders and upper arms, but his impatience made him take on the water like a windmill in a steady breeze. Always exerting toward Karlsson's example of deftness, Wennerg stroked at half again the pace Melander could manage, twice as much as the inconstant Braaf.

The canoe pulled itself through the water on the forward paddles of Karlsson and Wennerg. Melander would have liked more balance to the arrangement, but it worked.

Braaf, to his own surprise as much as anyone's, 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 ingrared robin face he had a bird's hollow bones in which to feel the atmosphere's shift.

And Melander, Melander provided the edge strength to hold them all into place. Navigating, finding water for the cask, fetching firewood, mothering the canoe and its stowage, detail was Melander's personal orbit. Yet this ability to hover usefully was less notable to the other men than his vocal trait. Had
parts had been subtracted from Melander in successive value to the escape, his tongue would have been the ultimate item.

For Melander knew what poets and prime ministers know, that the cave of the mouth is where men's spirits shelter. His gift for talk had stood him well with crews on all the vessels of his voyaging. Now he worked 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 so-fashion..."
of it. Let's bend our way around..."

"Too much smoke." Melander once more. He drops to his knees to fan the fire into purer flame.

"You'd never have lasted over a forge," jeers Wennberg. "A bit of smoke tans the soul."

Melander calculates. Three camps in a row, this smokey debate with Wennberg. The tall man makes his decision.
"You need to know a thing, Wennberg. Braaf, Karlsson, you also.

I heard this from Dobzhansky, that interpreter who helped me out at
first with the Kolosh fishing crews. He came once somewhere into
once to 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 began with a night of feast, and Dobzhansky found
himself sharing a baked salmon and goathorn cups of fermented berry juice
with a canoe chief.

The pair discovered that they could converse in the trading tongue of
the coast, the Chinook jargon. At once the native wanted to know of
Dobzhansky how many heads the Tsar had.

"How many heads? One, like you and me."

"How many skulls?"

"Skulls? What would the Tsar do with skulls?"

Sleep on them, the way he does, the native said, pointing out to
Dobzhansky the tribal chief in the middle of the carousel.
"But why does he sleep 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 meant to tell his crew Dobzhansky's story. He was not certain he should have. But no more objections were heard about care over campfire smoke.

The sea met their daily moods with its own. One morning it would drowse heavily, like a molten glass, lie with a molten look like gray bottle glass. Another, it would wake in full fret, white lids opened by wind or current. Once there was a golden morn of satin-like water and open sky.

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 actions. 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 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

"Avila,"

in a heavy week's pace, the boat of the Rebecca scours the British River
and grooves onto the dark clear base of our sea launch. We press
our course as close as the rocks which have covered it until
He spoke perhaps on the base for the Rebecca. For the biting time
of the ice, the course of a river which had reduced itself greatly
keeps earlier. In the 1800's the old white bellies had

"Avila,"

twisting into the seas of central nonwants, much came to be
called the Smith River Gully. It is the entrance of the mountain
in on a day when the water made smell of roses and the clear
air lens is close of the generality of bears and game, from there

what I glimpse into it must have seemed. A new country
pioneer and some of the stranger scenes, account for the looking
the home valley of the will for their and came in every direction
like a dark inland sea, lying in purple and fast ridges of the
work and the busy ends, and east and west the movement renders
the Missouri River. On the opposite slope of the big Besse, pleasure camps
A thirty-nosed sea creature poked abruptly from the water, delivered the canoeists a thunderous burp, and sank.

Karlsson called.

"Sea lions," Melander said. When the school surfaced again,

steadily each pug-nosed head making quick thrusts as if breaking the silver pane of the water, they swam for awhile alongside the canoe, watching the upright creatures in it.

Melander had learned from his herring crew that it was the practice of the southward natives to dub the bowman of a canoe "Captain Nose.

and he bestowed it on Karlsson, and Braaf and Wennberg took it up.

For the next few days, it was "Captain Nose, your honor, what's it to be for supper tonight?" and "May I suggest, Captain Nose, that we point ourselves to the right of that rock."
"Rye-cakes," 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 for a rye-cake right now as I would. Currant jam on it, you'd trip your own mother to get to it."

"Mister Blacksmith is right," Melander admitted with a chuckle.

"Though with me it's not rye-cakes, 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?"

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 more paces of headstart on each of you."

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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 salt pork was a sliver of salt beef. let out of the canoe behind Melander. On their second day of attempt, Melander yelped when the line whipped taut across his shins. "It's collect the dead whale or a stove boat," he boomed happily as he hand-over-hand pulled at their catch.

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

The other three peered over the side at the snouty dark lump 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 miniature of them had ever seen the species of small shark called dogfish. "Well, how do you say? Do we try to eat it?"

No one wanted to be the first, repellent as the dogfish looked, to decide one way or the other. Finally Karlsson offered, "I'm the chief, 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."

"Are it is," Melander proclaimed. "Somebody reach the hatchet and conk the bastard."

"Maybe all this fuss with cooking isn't needed."

"Good job of work on our sea monster," Melander complimented Karlsson. "Skinned and baked over coals, the dogfish and had proved surprisingly civil to the taste, Karlsson was trying was so relieved he tried a rare joke.

"Maybe all this fuss with cooking isn't needed. "I saw bear eat fish once, near Ozherskoi. He looked big as an oxen. Swatted salmon out of the water and scoffed them down belly-first."

Melander pretended to ponder. "I think it was well you didn't invite him for supper tonight. He might have turned up his nose at that sea beast what 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, one by one he polishes four biscuit-sized stones against the leg of his britches. Wipes his fingers down his shirt front.

Lays a small square of sailcloth, smooths it flat. From a pocket digs a stub of pencil. Now like a Muslim with a prayer onto the cloth rug, unfurls the roll tenderly and sets a scrubbed stone to weight each corner.

The unfolding of the Tebenkov maps ruffles a pleasure through Melander. It is as if an entire tiny land has sprung to creation just for him. Sprigs small as the point of his pencil denote where forest stands. Tideflats are delicately dotted, as if speck-sized clams breathe beneath. Wherever the land soars—and this coastline abounds in up and down—the rise in elevation is shown as a scalloped plateau,  

Threaded among the shores and islets are the proven sailing routes, as 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 skills and energy for such 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 Arbhangel Creoles.)

In our time, a poet has offered the thought that it is within civilization's portions of maps now that the injunction might be inked,

Here be monsters. Melander's firelit maps represent an instant of balance in humankind's relationship with the North Pacific: an era after sea serpents were discounted, and before ports and shipping lanes proliferated. To cast a glance onto these functional maps was like seeing suddenly beneath the fog-and-cloud skin of this shore, down the truth of this to bone and muscle and ligament. The frame of the shoulder of the Pacific is what Melander avidly needs to know, and the Tebenkov maps peel it into sight for him.
There was not much that Melander was reverent about, but these
maps qualified. The first map, that of New Archangel and Sitka Sound,
Melander particularly gazed at again and again. The detail here was most
phenomenal of all: the exact tiny black speck, slightly longer than
wide, which was their barracks was shown just above the cross-within-a-
cross indicating the church of St. Michael. "Tawes

(Melander had unrolled for Karlsson this first map for his opinion
about the best route through the Sound's covey of islands. He had been
pleased with Karlsson's blink of surprise. "You can see everything
but the flea in the governor's ear, aye?"

Melander had worked
much with maps in his sea-time, but to be able to trace from the very
dwelling where you packed your sea-bag, well, now, this was 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 0 dozen miles south from Sitka, the map begins to report a lingual stew, islands left as Heceta and Noyes, Baker and Puemal, Dall and San Fernando, from the crisscross of British and Spanish explorations, these names Russified by the Creole mapmaker: Melander of Sweden gives hibble-hibble
his centered grin when the full album gatherum occurs to him.

Yet seen another way, such a splatter of languages is exactly apt, bbble
for everything else of this map sprawls in pieces, Dabs, driblets,
spits and portion of
peninsulas, spatters, this coastline when drawn is something like
æmold of sea things, jellyfish and oysters and barnacles. It takes an effort of will, even for Melander, 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 whiskers came a surprising rich sorrel shade. Braaf produced a thin downy fluff of almost white. "Angel feathers," Wennberg snickered.
Melander had started from camp to gather firewood from the drift-piles along the top of the beach when Braaf startled him by saying, "I'll come 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 way to a brothel.

When they were out of earshot of the others and had begun their armloads, Braaf asked: "Melander, will you tell me something can you?"

"If I can. Why?"

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 he was a sailor like you."

First mate too. I would 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
drowned 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 went awkward and held back. Finally,
the tall man let his breath out with great slowness and said:

"They are called mooncursers, Braaf. On a black night they hobble a horse and put 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 safe course. Aye, Braaf, they do that."

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