While still within what should have been sheltered waters—nothing but island horizon to their west—the canoemen began to meet swells, long swaybacks which rocked the canoe with the strong message: the ocean is waiting.
If anything, the forest rose more sheerly than ever from the
tideline. Crows and ravens flew in and out, disappearing as if gulped,
re-emerging as if spat out.
The ocean would change from ghastly to enticing. And probably back again in an hour.
Trees—not drift logs but roots, branches, bristles and all—drifted in the channel.
"Last Sunday Monday, as I rode with my son Jared to our oyster-beds at
in the north of our land claim, we found, beside a canoe, two men
nearly starved to death. We spoke to them, but could not make ourselves
understood. After taking them to our house and summoning some of the
other settlers from around, we finally succeeded in conversing with
them. Their history is as follows: In 1850 they engaged to work for
the Russian Fur Company seven years, and accordingly embarked, in
company with 18 others, and sailed for the northwestern coast, bound
for New Archangel. After a residence of nearly two years, they found
they could not bear the ill-usage which they were receiving, and
determined to make their escape.

They were four, who determined to take action on that course of action.
Their number was four. Stepping at a place beyond Vancouver
Island, one of their number was killed by the Indians. A second
unfortunate was drowned in the descent of the Washington coast.
When found, the two who have survived had been in this Bay for three
days—subsisting on roots and berries. They were much emaciated,
and looked the perfect pictures of misery and despair. One of the
poor fellows, when found, was...

Their canoe is about twenty feet in length by three in width; sprightly
built; and with this they have made a voyage of over 1,000 miles on
one of the worst parts of the coast. They are well cared for by the
citizens here, and at present are comfortably situated at Chinook,
whence they will be taken across to Astoria when their strength is
sufficient.

Their names are Nils Karlsson and Henrik Wennberg, and they are
of Sweden."
thought
Perhaps bring to mind that trick done with apple and knife—
the fruit to be peeled in one stopless cutting, down and down the
pare of skin coiling from the knife's blade's glide, a red spiral
stair ever more likely to snap away: but yet is it, for each
shaving of coil twirls a bond with the others, the helix is holding
all
spin on spin,
itsfelf together through by creatonal grace.

an accumulating
This voyage was a dangle like that. Each day the canoe sliced
distance from the North Pacific, making the journey just that much
more apt to sunder, or just that much more cunningly pliant, you
would not have wagered which.
There are moments which form themselves unlike any that have come before in our lives or shall again. Ours might seem a kindlier evolution if what we know as memory had been set in us the other way; if the vital incidents already waited on display there in the mind when we enter the world—a glance, and A can be seen ready to happen some certain Thursday; beyond it B is viewed clear, and due on a Wednesday two years and seventeen days off... The snag is Z, the one prospect we could not bear to know with exactitude: death's date. Is it why the apparatus fetches backward for us rather than forward, memory rather than foreknowledge—so that we can stand existence? Whatever, Karlsson at wait here in the Alaska night is like all of us in life's dark, able to know only that a moment is coming due and hoping it is not the last of the series.
Some moments form themselves unlike any that have come before in our lives or shall again. Ours might seem a kindlier evolution if what we know as memory had been set in us the other way; if the most vital incidents of existence already waited in place in the mind when we are born—A there seen ready to happen some certain beyond it Thursday, B, viewed clear and due on a Wednesday two years and seventeen days off... The snag is Z, the one prospect we could not bear to know with exactitude: death's date. Is it why the apparatus fetches backward for us rather than forward, memory rather than foreknowledge, so that we can stand existence? Whatever, Karlsson awaiting the moment to come is like all of us in life's dark, knowing that something, stalagmite or stalattite, is forming, but not what its shape or thrust will be only that forming is going on.

at wait here is like us all in life's dark, able to know only that a moment is coming due... hoping it is...
Some moments form themselves unlike any that have come before
in our lives or will again. Like speeded-up stalactites or stalagmites
ey they suddenly loom, daggering obstacles somehow to be got around.
Ours might seem a kindlier evolution if what we know as memory had
been set in us the other way; if these abrupt incidents of existence
already waited in place in the mind when we were born, the contents
of life there to be seen, unfolding in orderly manner with
foreknowledge that this would happen, then
A there to
B viewed clearly ahead on a Wednesday two years off...

The problem is Z, the answer we could not bear to know: death's date.
Is it

Which surely is why it had been swung around in us, memory rather
than foreknowledge, so that we can stand existence?

Whatever uncertainty is why K now knows a vital moment in
forming, but not what its shape or theme will be.
Death's credence comes to us in small costs, mounting and mounting. Lack of a reminding word to Braaf when he took time in shifting his paddle. Loss of the sailor-habited scrutiny of the water around, every chance of rock or sheal commented on.

No "aye?" punctuating the day's time.

Near mid-day, when the canoe put ashore at the next island, the three men for a long minute stood looking at the folded-forward Melander, still yearning not to believe the death. Wennberg had cursed periodically during the crossing—"fish-fuckers...fish-fuckers"—but now said nothing, simply seemed to be gritting against whatever came next. Braaf too was silent, and very pale. It was Karlsson who said, "We've got to bury him."

They managed, with Karlsson's ax and the cooking pot, to gouge a shallow trench in the forest floor. Wrapped in sailcloth, Melander was put into the thin grave. Atop the dirt, Karlsson and Wennberg and Braaf piled head-sized rocks from the beach, to discourage animals. Then they made camp and sat to re-think life without Melander.
Kneeling close by the firelight, Karlsson unrolled the scroll of maps and weighted it at the corners with small oval stones from the beach gravel. Melander's pencil mark began near the top of the first map, at the square dots which were the buildings of New Archangel, and looped left around Japonski Island then down and out the bottom of Sitka Sound. On the next map, the penciled route hugged the west shore of Baranof Island to Cape Ommaney, then struck west to Kuku.

The third map brought them down the Kuku-Heceta-Noyes-Suemez-Dall chain of islands and across Kaigani Strait to the horn-tip of the Queen Charlottes. The fourth map showed how they had crossed Hecate Strait, descended the islands of the past several days, and then, just more than halfway down the map, Melander's penciling stopped, at a rough-edged small island with no name.

Now Karlsson glanced to the bottom of the map, and froze. In his mind he saw again the escape as Melander had scratched it into the dirt that first day. The briefness of Baranof Island. Then the Queen Charlottes group. Then Vancouver Island. Next, last, the southering coastline from the Strait of Fuca to Astoria. This fourth map showed the coastline as the northmost tip of Vancouver Island,
Perhaps think of that trick to be done with an apple and a knife:
to peel the fruit in one continuous cutting, the peel spiraling down and down
in greater and greater likelihood of breaking. Their voyage was
like that, each day's dangle—made by the canoe slicing at the ocean—
more apt to snap than the one before.
It is an experience lost to us now, the sea passage between one life and another. But if you were Morgan, Huw, cabinet-maker of Llanelli in Wales, bound out for Patagonia; or Henty, Elizabeth, wife and mother, following husband and sons from Sussex to Van Diemen's Land in Australia; or Van Der Wende, Katrin, girl of eight, wonder-eyed in steerage from Rotterdam to New York; or any of tens of hundreds of thousands of others of the nineteenth century's sea-change citizens, the voyage stayed in your mind. It couldn't not.

Sway of the waves, the shrunk berth to live in, the reliance of your survival on sailors who worked in the mast-trees like slow monkeys; queer turns of the world, all. Some even spoke, after, of the an entire shipboard weeks as a separate life; a compressed existence, like a battle or an illness or a first unsuccessful time in love, which stood like no other set of days in your memory.

Melander had been the calming of the others against the immensity of their attempt. He had been one of those salt-water monkeys in the mast-stays, knew and was not at all bashful to say that an ocean can be managed, fended with.
But now Melander was no longer on hand to be in charge of faith.

Braaf and Karlsson and Braaf and Wennberg, men as different as green and

hip-high upstairs and the moon, had to find their own ways not be daunted

by this sea-run.
Between them and Vancouver, they quickly discovered, lay several hundred instances of monotony. Wave upon wave, the canoe met, was lofted at the bow, then wallowed rightward slumped, down and rightward, into the water's trough. A new law of motion this seemed to be, dive-and-stagger.

Karlsson called to Wennberg. Wennberg half-turned; he was grim, but functioning. "No, I don't need any invitations to toss up my breakfast."

The crossing was 0 hours of slosh, under the most beautiful weather of the entire voyage.
The surf. Is there any other thing on the planet like it?

On any planet? The hurl of it, constantly moving, collapsing, rebuilding, simultaneously white and gray and lethal and lulling. The extent of it, its grave beat upon the shore and against all sides of all continents at once: how is there any foothold left for us?

Braaf had wondered too, looking at the colossal force of the ocean, why it didn't tear great chunks from the land all the time. Perhaps it did, in great storms, and that was how the islands of their route had been made.
The surf came in cream-colored, thinned to milk as it slid up the beach. Between the waves the pattern was marbled, thick loops and circles of foam. Its sound was a constant rumble with lifts of sound, like a strong wind through a forest. And within this, a hiss, a foamsound as the tide-edge deliquesced up the beach. It smelled very fresh, more a sensation than anything the nose could identify: a tang.
This patience of Karlsson's, like any extreme, ought not entirely be counted virtue. It evidently kept him in situations, for instance, when Wennberg would have crashed out or Braaf wriggled out, indeed, had done much to deposit him, without over-ample debate or decision, into Alaska.
The pair of them, tree and stump somehow endowed with legs, moved with no word through the night for two minutes, three.
Apprehension strode with them both. Apprehensions, rather, for their anxieties were sized as different as the men.

A several hundredth time Melander retold himself the logic by which he had singled out this night. Yesterday the Russians all had gone around solemn as church mice, crossing themselves until it seemed they'd wear out the air. Now, Christmas, the religious out of Christmas having been observed, certain as anything they would be celebrating and carousing and dancing their boots off. Assuredly, all the officers and any of the Company Russians who frequented their lodgings for card games and tippling and monotony-breaking argument, every breathing one of them all of them would be at the governor's ball in Baranov's Castle. leaving the gun-room accessible. Nor, when the escapees' absence was discovered, would the Russians be eager to leave their snug festivities to chase them through the cold of Alaskan night. The Kolosh meanwhile would be keeping to their longhouses, staying clear of drunk and boisterous Tsarmen. Confusion, alcohol, reluctance, all would be the Swedes' Christmas allies for escape. But late-going Russians yet within the officers' lodgings...clatter in the gun room heard by a sentry at the most blockhouse...Melander's months of planning now tethered on such points beyond logic, and the feet of them moved with him in the dark.

Wennberg's perturbance was 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. How came it that Why risk the tumble, ass-over-earhole, down this bedamned coast? Why trust even a minute to these three orphans of Hell? So how came it that now he was traipsing off with Melander into disaster's black avid mouth?
Just off the eastern shore stood a long line of fishing smacks with white, white sails. They toppled and were taken back by the water to be reformed for the next trick of surf: this time it was round white islets, an archipelago of surf. Karlsson considered that he had seen wild surf so far on this voyage, and he had, but this high-thrown whiteness was another matter. The power of Queen Charlotte Sound seemed to have a need to climb into the air as phantom boats.
Karlsson was a particle of the Swedish diaspora which began in the 1840's, a man uncoupled from his family's farm by a surplus of brothers and absence of opportunity. The two brothers younger than Karlsson caught America fever, put themselves into the emigrant stream aimed to the prairies beyond the Great Lakes. At their suggestion that he come along, Karlsson said only: "I am no farm maker." His liking for time in the forest, learned as helper to a gamekeeper on a nearby manor during his Skane boyhood, bent him toward Alaska even at the price of becoming
They were in a part of the coast now where broad channels drove directly from the ocean northeastward between islands, like fat wedges. The amount of these was Milbanke Sound, no more than 0 miles but the first test of the lessened canoe crew.

Gaps of daybreak had begun on the eastern horizon when Karlsson came awake. Rosy breaks of light like gaps beneath a curtain. Gradually the islands and mountains all around the channel came to sight like a herd of knobby heads. As fuller daylight advanced, the strips of light on the eastern horizon were as if chinking had fallen out between mountains and clouded sky. The dawn went from silver to slight yellow, to peach. Then the clouds began to shift away, out of sight over the mountains.
One further thing is noticeable on this Oo map. No thread of route goes along that west shore, past Nootka. Melander had known enough of the navigation of this coast to realize that the sheltered route of voyage lay along the opposite side of the island, and at the prow of Vancouver, Cape Scott, he would have taken the canoe men east. Karlsson headed them west.
Weary though he was, Karlsson dreamed often these nights. At least, he had memory of things which must have been dreams. (The occurrences which had to do with women, he knew with regrettable certainty to be dreams.) Again and again the carved columns rose in the forest of his brain, the wild creature-faces stacked one on another. Melander had stepped over to stand beside the big-beaked face. Together Melander and the beaked thing looked back at Karlsson. Karlsson said to Melander it was time to push on in the canoe. "Aye," replied Melander, but still stood there. Karlsson would repeat that it was time to embark; "aye," Melander would say again, unmoving.
As in the forest when branches become moving wands overhead but the air at ground remains still, the weather at times cruised over them without touching down. Streamers of cloud shot along, the sky was indignant hither and thither, you never knew what to expect except that it would be disorderly. would-be storms and pretensions of clearing. Sitka had accustomed them to changeableness with its weather-of-the-minute, but at Sitka the concern was not whether the ocean would erupt beneath them in the next swoop of gust.
Sometime in these days the canoe took them through out of winter into spring. No calendar would have shown it, and the moment itself was as untraceable as the atom-point at which a breeze first sets into motion. The alteration was no less definite for that. Ferns had begun to unroll green from their winter rust. In wet places of the forest came the bloom of skunk cabbage, its butter-gold flame of blossom and smelling like burnt sugar. Salmon had begun their turn...(?) To the north, the strains had begun within the Alaskan glaciers which months later would calve icebergs....On the rivers, Yukon and Stikene and 00 and 00, breakup was that much nearer... stirrings, engenier
[Account it in scores of ways, the long coast had begun to stir with spring.
The paddles dipped, glistened wet on the forward end of the
stroke, dipped again.

Braaf every so-often hummed. That he seemed to have no notion
of tune whatsoever did not matter to the situation. His random
buzzes irked Wennberg, which made them their own justification.

Karlsson constantly looked ahead as he paddled, as though he
could pull the horizon of water nearer with his eyes.

In Wennberg's armwork there was none of Karlsson's thrift nor
Braaf's minimum attention; just the resigned plod of a man wishing
he were anywhere else.

The canoe rode higher in the water now, without Melander. Without,
too, the food supply, which was fast dwindling.
If anything, green crowded more thickly to the tideline than ever.

When crows and ravens flew into this forest, they disappeared as if gulped.
The shoreline mountains and ridges were as if in a state of arrest; awaiting the next flow of existence, the next pose to assume when the geologic clock ticked again.
No longer could they risk gambling the risk of rock or tiderip was too great—greater, they thought, than the chance of natives. Karlsson and Wennberg were agreed that bays and river mouths were where the natives habitated. Approach these with care, hide out during the day and slip past at night, they decided.

One thing helped: they at last were on a gentler slope, so to speak, of the precipitous coast. Coves were frequent. The timber still came like a waterfall over the rim of the continent, but stopped now a beach's-width from the ocean. The truce zone Karlsson and Wennberg gratefully sank to, each night.

The offshore, however, was spiked with more rocks than the coast farther north. Seastacks and reefs were constant; this portion of outlying vigorous mountain shore looked like the ancient ruins of the younger coast behind them to the north.
They came ashore each dusk like old women stiff in the knees. Wennberg encouraged a fire while Karlsson put together whatever could pass as a meal. Only after they had food in them could they face the canoe chores, the sheltering...
"Fear the goat from the front, the horse from the rear, and man ran a saving of from all sides," the Sitka Russians. Now Karlsson watched Wennberg...

If he could have watched him from within sleep-shut eyelids, he would have done.
It is told that, in another corner of the Pacific, when the first
exploring ship from Europe
explorers first appeared to the aborigines of Australia, the aborigines
registered no surprise, nor even any interest. The Endeavour, out of
Deptford(?)—this was Cook's ship of 0000-0000, another of his adroit
clambers to the **inside** ends of the Pacific—stood 35 yards long and
with a cloud of canvas. A few fishermen in canoes did not even look
up at the ship. A woman ashore gave it a glance, "expressed neither
surprise nor concern," and lit a fire to cook dinner. Not until
the English sailors came ashore in small boats did the aborigines
react to them. Apparently the ship had been "too strange, too
monstrous, to be comprehended." The aborigines were entranced by
dream—"all that was unknown or not physically present at any given
moment was referred to as being 'in the dreaming'. On their own
ledge of the Pacific, Karlsson and Wennberg were entering their own
dreaming...
Karlsson's shot struck the seal in the head, dropping it before it could lurch off the tidal shelf into the water. (Or: have it quivering in death, possibly toppling toward water, and the men rushing for it?)

Braaf got up and stepped to the right of the horn of rock from which Karlsson had shot. He made his first climbing stride across the neck of rock when surf burst in front of him and a white weight of water tossed itself against him. Off balance, Braaf fell backward into the tidal trough.

The rifle, thought Karlsson as he clambered down toward the trough, Wennberg cursing behind him, reach him with the rifle, pull him up...

The trough sloshed Braaf wildly, banged him against its sides. He grabbed with both hands, but the mussels and barnacles slashed his hands and he could not get a grip. Then the tide was tossing him again.

The footing along the top of the trough was treacherous; Karlsson and Wennberg were like men on ice as they tried to get close to Braaf.

All the while, he was a moving target, the surge banging him back and forth the length of the trough.
Mr John Orvis Waterman

Editor, Oregon Weekly Times

Dr Sir—On Monday last, as I was riding with my son Jared to examine oyster-beds at the north of our land claim, we found, beside a canoe, two men near to death. We spoke to them, but could not make ourselves understood. We contrived to lift them onto our horses and after taking them to our house and summoning some of the other settlers from around, we finally succeeded in conversing with them. Their history is as follows: In 1850 they engaged to work for the Russian Fur Company seven years, and accordingly embarked, in company with 18 others, and sailed for the northwestern coast, bound for New Archangel. After a residence of nearly two years, they found they could not bear the ill-usage which they were receiving, and determined to make their escape.

They were four, who determined on that leave-taking. At a place beyond Vancouver Island, one of their number was killed by the Indians. A second unfortunate was drowned in the descent of the Washington coast between the Strait of Fuca and here. When found, the two who have survived had been in this bay for three days—subsisting on roots and berries. They were much emaciated, and looked the perfect pictures of misery and despair. One of the poor fellows was making a chant to himself, as though in prayer. Their canoe is about twenty feet in length by three in width, sprightly built; and with this they have made a voyage of over 1,000 miles on one of the worst parts of the
"Hold me," Karlsson directed Wennberg. The burly man put both arms around Karlsson's knees as Karlsson stretched himself flat, toward the spilling water. He held the rifle at its barrel end, thrust the stock toward Braaf. "Braaf! Grab! We'll pull..."

Surf exploded up over Wennberg and Karlsson, both of them clenching their eyes tight against the salt sting. When they looked again, Braaf was past them, on the landward side, his boy's face in a grimace. He seemed to shake his head at them, then the tidal surge sucked back toward the ocean and Braaf whirled past them, his hands stretching just short of the gunstock.

...God's bones, the water doesn't behave the same twice. Have to be quicker, be ready... "This time, we'll edge me down lower and more, there, that'll reach..."

Karlsson and Wennberg stared toward the corner of the trough, braced themselves for the riptide's return and the hurl of spray across them once more. It came, the hard spatter, the runnels down their faces, now eyes could open again...

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

"Braaf!" shouted Wennberg. Karlsson scrambled for the ocean edge, banging knees and hands on rough rock, Wennberg lurching after him.
The footing along the top of the trough was treachery itself;

Karlsson and Wennberg lurched like men on soapstone as they tried
to approach the edge.

Braaf whirled him into sight, grabbing with both hands at the walls
below them, of the troughside, barnacles and mussels denying him grip and slashing
his hands. This time the tide tossed him from sight seaward, around
the trough's seaward bend.
Karlsson knew\footnote{see above that Karlsson knew he was not so wide a thinker as Melander.} that he was not so wide a thinker as Melander.

Come to that, he and Braaf and Wennberg together probably were not so spacious. A man of task, call him--the patterns of effort required to get a job done of most interest to him.

Melander's province of interest had been the entire coastline, over beyond and whatever joined it around the bend of the world. That was all very well, but Karlsson had the instinct that a tinier realm was equally vital: the circlet of strength where the palm of a hand went round the haft of a paddle.
Death's credence comes to us in small costs, mounting and mounting.

The new absence presented itself constantly to the paddling men. Lack of a reminding word to Braaf when he made his habitual dawdle in shifting his paddle. Loss of the sailor-habited scrutiny of the water around, every chance of rock or shoal or current commented on.

The hours unpunctuated by "aye?"
No "aye?" punctuating the hours.
Death's credence comes to us in small costs, mounting and mounting.

capacity only for the disbelief:

At first in the canoe where simply was the harseness of fact.

Melander dead, main beam of the escape collapsed, the long coast

burping down a life as an owl would a dormouse. Like wild new hearts

the repeating shock of

it hammered in Braaf and Wennberg and Karlsson, so profound a

change they could not get it channelled in their minds, only feel the

spill screaming during this blind time

rush, and sense of it racing within them. After, it seemed that

must have the thought
canoe was sensed out its own course during their blind time, when it

at last forced its way to one of them—Karlsson, it happened to be—

that to pull on paddles was not enough, that they needed a compass heading, the

needle showed them to be just where they ought. It was in the pause

for that, Braaf taking the compass from the stowage beneath Melander,

the small instrument

Wennberg passing forward to Karlsson, when the absence of Melander

began to come home to them, loss of his sailor-habited scrutiny of

the water around, every chance of rock or shoal or current

commented on. Lacking of reminding word to Braaf when he made his

habitual dawdle in shifting his paddle. The hours unpunctuated now

by "aye?"
Near mid-morning, the canoe ashore at the southward island, the canoeemen stood looking at the folded-forward body of Melander. During the crossing Wennberg had cursed periodically and profoundly but now said nothing, seemed to be gritting against whatever was on its way next. Braaf too was wordless, and Karlsson it was who came first out of the silence: "We need to bury him."

With Karlsson's ax, the gaff, and the cooking pot, they managed to gouge a shallow trench in the forest floor. Wrapped in sailcloth, Melander was put into the thin grave. Wennberg and Braaf hesitated when Karlsson began to tromp down the dirt, then joined in. From the beach they brought rocks and piled them onto the gravetop to discourage animals. Then they returned to the canoe and pushed off south.
Karlsson and Braaf looked to Wennberg. The broad man shook his head. "I don't believe in that trip any more. Particularly after this."

"Do it for the words," Braaf murmured. "Do the words for Melander."

Wennberg hesitated, then the psalm came from him in a low rumble: "...A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night...we spend our years as a tale that is told...So teach us to number our days..."
The next bad time was quick to come.

Crossing the campsite, the blacksmith passed behind where Braaf was sitting, stopped, and looked down. "What's this on the back of you, then?"

Braaf glanced up toward the blacksmith. Slipping his arms from the Aleut parka, he brought the garment around to have a look. Small dark splats, as if a rusty rain had fallen, showed across the shoulders and the middle of the back.

The three men stared at the stains where Melander's blood had showered forward. Braaf gulped, and twin lanes of tears pathed his face.

Wennberg shifted awkwardly. "Maybe it'll wash..."

Braaf choked out, "Say anything, either of you, and I'll slit you loose from life."

Later Karlsson was not sure what the signal had been between him and Wennberg, how it was that they mutually walked off up the beach away from Braaf.
elsewhere along the coastal tracery of Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and indeed into the life of another man—this is all a journey I have awaited for a decade, ever since I began to be aware

Powerfully, I am bound to last margin of the land.

A season of frontier, this winter will be for me, of exploring, stepping in search of the paths of westering impulse that push across America's girth of

summit

must

plain and over its continental crust and at last nip off here at the surf of the Pacific. Those paths that for so many years carried Swan, and flew to Queen Charlotte Islands where he was told good land could be found. The butterfly, a creature as big as a house accompanied him and would fly up in the air and when he saw any good land he would unfold his proboscis and point with it.

Just the way, Edinso drives the point home with a tap of mockery, Johnny was going with me showing me places.
To the astonishment of Braaf and Karlsson, Wennberg suggested volunteered
the notion that Karlsson now have charge of the maps, and the voyage
decisions. The blacksmith spoke it reluctantly. "We can't chase
each other like cats. Someway, we have to make miles along this
redwood coast. I regret the day I ever put in with you one or him---
a jerk of the head toward Melander's grave in the forest—"but here I
am. Wherever I am."

Karlsson looked to Braaf.

It took the young thief an instant to realize he was being polled.

He blinked and said: "You've to do it. I can't read the maps and
Wennberg couldn't lead a goose to water. You've to do it."
They made early camp. All words seemed to have gone with Melander until Wennber, crossing the campsite, stopped and looked down at the seated Braaf. "What's this on the back of you, then?"

Slipping his arms from the Aleut parka, Braaf brought the garment around to have a look. Small dark splats, as if a rusty rain had fallen, showed across the shoulders and the middle of the back.

Braaf stared at the stains where Melander's blood had showered forward onto him. He gulped, and twin lanes of tears pathed his face.

Karlsson and Wennberg shifted awkwardly.

Braaf choked out, "Say anything, either of you, and I'll slit you loose from life."
Crossing the campsite, Wennberg stopped and looked down at
the seated Braaf. "What's this on the back of you?"

Braaf slipped his arms from the Aleut parka, brought the garment
around to have a look. Small dark splats, as if a rusty rain had
fallen, showed at several places across the shoulders and the middle
of the back.

"Blood. From Melander."  

Braaf stared at the stains, then gulped, and twin slides of tears
streaked his face.

Karlsson and Wennberg shifted awkwardly.

Braaf choked out, "Say anything, either of you, and I'll slit
you loose from life."
Here stood a new style of coast to any they had seen yet. The three of them were at the inshore edge of a rock shelf high and flat as a quay—although no one but nature had use of for a quay some four hundred paces long and half that in width. In the blue and brown afternoon, the ocean bright around the sober coastal rock and the seastacks daggering up offshore, the huge queer natural wharf lay thinly sheeted with water, like puddles after rain. 

By now Braaf had tides in his bones alongside the weather. "The high tides drowns all this, then," he murmured. "We'll need be quick." Even as he spoke, waves were trying to leg themselves up over the edge of the shelf.

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

He led the other two onto the tidal plateau, to where a rock formation the size and shape of a boatsail bladed up. Beside it, from sight of the seals, Karlsson studied out ambush. To the right, the ocean with unimaginable patience had forced a crevasse—a curved tide trough broader than a man would want to try to jump, and swirling harshly with each surge of surf into it. A short fist of rock jutted
Sometime in these days the canoe slid them out of winter into
not-winter.

quite can catch the time, and the cluster of moments themselves
No calendar cites the definite day, and the moment itself is
as impossible to single out as the atom of air which pushes against
the

Northwest

next and has begun a breeze. Yet you know the happening, the rain-

trance is lifting from the coast and pulling new life in after it.

Ferns unroll green from their winter rust. Up from the low dampnesses
of the forest lick the bloom of skunk cabbage, a butter-gold flame
of blossom and scent like burnt sugar. Far out in the Pacific salmon
reverse their compass, swim to make their instinctual veer from underwater
pastures back toward the rivers where they were spawned, and must now
spawn in turn. Seals porpoise forth in the offshore swells. Baja

California is departed by gray whales, the Bering Sea is to know them
next. Geese and ducks write

their calligraphy of flight northward. To the north too, Alaska's

glaciers creak with the first of the strains which months later will
calve icebergs into the azure bays. Within the white rivers, Yukon and
Stikine and Susitna and Alsek, Kuskokwim and Kvichak and Nushagak, currents
begin to pry at their winter roofs of ice.

In stirrings tiny and mighty, the restive great coast was engendering
spring.
In the rivers which cut this shoreline and in the streams which feed down from the mountains into the rivers, a fist-sized bird called the ouzel is common. In color, the ouzel's slaty, peg-tailed bird, its look and behavior are those of a very fat wren perplexed about something overhead: every few seconds the bird bobs, as if flinching. Evidently the motion is not flinch, however, but merely practice of its livelihood, which is to walk the bottoms of the rivers and streams, feeding busily as it goes.

The ouzel seems to be a hydraulic adaptee: the flow of current pins it into place during its route beneath the riffles. In the way that the ouzel shops along the cellar of the river, the canoeists too were now held into route by improbable pressures. The weather over them, ocean beside them, forest solid behind the shore edge—tight as a flume, their course was held for them by the powers of the coast.
at the end of the tidal trough, along the inside of its wrist, directly in front of them, lay a low hump of rock.

Karlsson made the short crawl to the hump, Wennberg just behind him on the left and Braaf on the right. They hunched low as Karlsson peered to the seals.

The shot would be almost a hundred paces. Karlsson disliked the distance, but tried to amend for it a bit by singling out a seal lying farthest inshore, a bachelor—bullied into solitude by the bull of the herd.

"Tickle the chin," Braaf said softly as Karlsson aimed.

"Or it's air soup tonight," Wennberg muttered.
Sometime in these days the canoe slides them out of winter into not-winter. No calendar shows the day, and the moment itself is as untraceable as the way a breeze begins, the first atom of air in push against the next until all is motion. The alteration is no less definite for that. Ferns began to unroll green from their winter rust. Up from the low dampnesses of the forest licked the bloom of skunk cabbage, its butter-gold flame of blossom and the scent like burnt sugar. Salmon had begun their turn, their instinctual veer from underocean pastures toward the rivers where they were spawned, and would spawn in turn. (?) Seals and otters...

Gray whales were departing Baja California... Geese and OO...

To the north, the strains had begun with the Alaskan glaciers which months later would calve icebergs into the bays... On the rivers, Yukon and Stikine and OO and OO, breakup was that much nearer...

In scores of stirrings, the long northwest coast had begun to engender spring.
The Indian arrived at the Port Townsend customs house with an item and a tale. Downcoast from the village his people called Hosett, while hunting seals he had come upon the body of a white person. The native used the word for "boy," and it was not until he added the description of a light fluff of beard that the customs collector realized a grown man was being described. The Indian had quickly buried the body in hope that the spirit had not yet got out of it, first clipped proof for his tale, but as was done in these instances he handed the customs collector a forelock of straw-colored hair.

The customs collector knew that the weather since Christmas had been violent against vessels trying to enter the Columbia. The Merrithew, the Mindoro, the Vandalia, the Bordeux—three barks and a brig, they had gone to grief all been left along that coast in these weeks. Taking up his pen, the collector wrote a rewarding "paper" for the Indian: Wha-lall Asabuy, has assisted the duties of this District of Customs Collection by his report of..." He then turned to his daybook and began Braaf's only epitaph: "A body, supposed from one or another of the vessels wrecked, during this fearful winter, has come ashore; a young man, light hair, round faced..."
Gaps of daybreak had begun on the eastern horizon when Karlsson came awake. By the time Braaf and Wennberg were up and breakfast was into the three of them, the islands and mountains all around the channel had grown to sight. They began to paddle, and on the eastern horizon now were strips of light as if chinking had fallen out between mountains and clouded sky. The dawn warmed from silver to 00 yellow, to peach. Then the clouds, cut free by the light, began to shift away, out of sight over the eastern mountains. Karlsson's first day as vicar was going to be stormless.

They were in a part of the coast where the Pacific got a good pry, its broad channels driven northeastward between islands like fat wedges. The next of these would be Milbanke Sound, no more than 0 miles across but the first sea-test of the lessened canoe crew.

First, though, there was the day in the channel to be got through. They looked around constantly, apprehensive of another canceload of natives. This too wore at their stamina, and Karlsson called an early halt for lunch, and again for the night. Melander could stretch men beyond what they thought were their outmost limits, Karlsson already knew he was going to have to ration, when possible, the demands on the other two.
Karlsson was at the end of his last map now. The northmost nub of Vancouver Island was all that showed, and it had no more utility...

It would have had, though, for Melander. A thread of route \( \star \) led out of Queen Charlotte Sound along the eastern shore of the island, and there at the prow of Vancouver, Cape Scott, Melander would have steered the canoe into this sheltered route--and at the southern end of Vancouver, \( \star \) such route would have brought them to a new Hudson's Bay post, Fort Victoria. There the Swedes would have been at the whim of the governor, to be returned to the Russians or let find passage to Europe.

None of that eventuated, however, for Karlsson knew only to stay without hesitation with the coast, and at Cape Scott Karlsson headed them down the west shore.
--the year, 1770--

Into a basement corner of the Pacific nosed a vessel named the

**Endeavour.** The Endeavour was out of Deptford on the 20

and **captained by James Cook, out on another of his adroit**

clambers to the edge of the earth. The **Australian** inlet into which

Cook now sailed was **to be called Botany Bay**, and it was a momentous

instant, the **coming of white exploration to an unknown Australian**

coast. **Thirty-five yards long and flying thunderheads of canvas,**

the greatest explorer of his era on the foredeck, the Endeavour

swung into **Botany Bay.**

The black people on the shore and in the bay registered--

nothing. Fishermen in canoes did not even look up at the passing

ship. A woman ashore passed it a glance, "expressed neither surprise

nor concern," and squatted to light her dinner fire. Not until the

English sailors began to oar their way to shore in small boats did

the aborigines react to them, and begin to combat them. The ship
They made a long day of it, as if this coast were new footing for them. They passed a line of seastacks which extended offshore like an avenue of castles in ruins. Then, in late afternoon, rain took the shoreline from them and they guided by off-shore rocks. They came along the outer edge of a timbered island, intending to turn to shore there. But rocks bulked in the cove, stone knuckles everywhere. "The island," Karlsson said, and they put to shore on its inland side.

(Next morning, the map dispute?)
Braaf pointed out to sea. Craft were there, a number of them, blade-forms strewn on the water.

Karlsson put the spyglass up to his right eye.

"Canoes," he said. "Big ones, with something in tow. Stay from sight."

Karlsson focused on the canoes, puzzled at their cluster. Then--

"That's a whale."

"Whale. They're towing a whale."

"Whale?" Wennberg was disbelieving. "Where'd they get a whale?"

"You've got the vapors, Karlsson. Let me see that thing."

Wennberg focused in turn, but by now the glass was not entirely needed. It could be seen by all three of them that the canoe fleet was bringing in a glistening length, buoyed with floats that looked like puffed-up seals, which could only be Leviathan.

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

Karlsson had studied again with the glass. "Those laying up over the prows—harpoons. They paddle out and kill whales."

Karlsson now felt a dry clot form at the top of his throat as he watched the long canoes, six, seven, eight altogether, with triple paddles which cut the water so quickly on each side of the craft, and two further men, at either end of the six paddlers, harpooner forward and
steersman aft, who watched the ocean like fish hawks. Rare for him, Braaf was perturbed.

openly frightened. Wennberg tried to look scornful, but Karlsson saw him try to swallow his own pebble of fear as well... If this portion of the coast was populated with these sea hunters...

The canoes angled south of the watching Swedes, out of sight at last.

around a high-standing island just off the tideline.

"So?" This was said by Braaf, in honest puzzlement.

"Yes, so." Karlsson was ready to go on when Wennberg blurted:

"This is a how-d'ye-do we don't need."

"Yes, but we have it anyway. One thing, we can do about it.

travel by night."

Braaf chewed at the corner of his mouth at this news. Wennberg tested out argument: "These whale-chasers, don't you suppose they're like the Kolosh, they'll lay up now for a feast and the like? What about if we paddle wide of them here, swing into shore down the coast?"

"Maybe they'll feast, and maybe this is a season they hunt and hunt. Would you rather risk some dark, or meeting those canoes?"

"Dark," voted Braaf instantly, "and the blacker the better."

"Dark," Wennberg grated out. "These fish-fuckers down this coast, why can't they squat on their asses and look wise all day like the Kolosh?"
"Doesn't look just right."

"We don't give a rat's shit how it looks, just so it's shelter."

"Wennberg, it's not."

The next fifty yards dissolved the cabin profile entirely. The green roof roughened into growth of gr 00 brush, atop a great gray butt of cedar driftlog; the log's weather-silvered side, tall as the men, dropped pretense of gray cabin wall.

Karlsson swallowed, felt the ache sharpen behind his eyes. For once, Wennberg was too disheartened to be furious. He stood and shook his head, like an ox discouraging flies. "Why couldn't it've been..."
"What?"

"Mast paint. Melander called pea soup that."

"Melander." Wennberg gave a half-hearted snort.

"Taken a moment not to be a prick and tell me a thing, will you, Wennberg?"

"You little pile of..."

"The pair of you, douse it," said Karlsson.

"My regrets, blacksmith," Braaf offered. "You don't have to take a moment not to be a prick. Just tell me this; you've swallowed gospel in your time: where is he?"

"Where's...? Braaf, are you out of...?"

"No, just tell me: where's Melander right now?"

Wennberg squinted as if Braaf the plan of the universe. "Melander's buried, you helped...? You mean, where's he...gone to?" Braaf bobbed yes. He bobbed his head in a nod. "Wennberg appeared no more comfortable with this query than with the previous one.

"It's, it's a matter of how he met judgment, that's all."

Braaf blinked and continued to look at Wennberg. The broad man tried again:

"Look at it this way. You remember the balance-scales at New