Make a picture in your mind of the cedar canoe atop a sharp white ridge of ocean. Carried up and up by the water's determined sweep at the sky, the high-nosed craft, buoyant as a seabird, at last sleds across the curled crest of wave and begins to glide the surf toward the dark frame of your scene, a shore of black spruce forest.

Aristazabal Island, this particular landfall is inscribed on modern charts of the long crumbled coastline south from the Gulf of Alaska, but the voyagers bobbing to its shore here in late January of the year 1853 know nothing of this name, nor would it matter to them if they did.

Now the canoeman as they alight. Karlsson and Melander and Wennberg and Braaf. For nineteen days they have been together in the slender canoe, dodging from one of this coast's constant humps of forest-and-
The everlasting bicker of waves trying to arrange sand.
(Greenland)

(Bancroft quote), as the magisterial Bancroft has told us. Every Russian governor of NA must have given thanks that the power was not extended...

The Russian symbol was the double-headed eagle and it might have signified the two minds toward Russian America...

--fur seals on handful of islands

Bering story
Now they were alongside a rock shore where the tide had marked a straight dark line, like a step: below it the channel, just up from it the thronged trees, looking about to descend, as bathers into the Ganges.
Perhaps it is the colors of the water, tinting mood into the surf's that steady onlooking eye, or the susurration, constant low report of origins a third of the world away. Whatever, something of the Pacific touches out, and the people of this shore put their backs to the rest of the continent and go about thinking that they alone know the rules of life.

Could it be the ocean's quench of the sun each evening, and the resurrection next morning?
Their paddling had slowed and sometimes faltered now, like the wingbeats of a wearied bird.
A land, then, entirely rumpled and agitated, and the Pacific meeting it in vast flat calm. But here was pretense again, as a longer look from upward would show. The whiteness surrounding every rock and island like a collar; so steady was the surf turmoil that the islands and rocks appeared as if they had all been dropped just at that instant, the whiteness all around them frozen into that moment of splash.
The forest darkness had a weight to it, a cling, as if it were a pelt.
Karlsson looked up from the map to the land ahead, reviewed in his mind Melander's sketched geography in the New Archangel dirt, and said, off-handed as he could make it: "To the right. West."

On the next of the Tebenkov maps—had Karlsson possessed that next map—Vancouver Island lay angled across most of the page like a long and plump oyster shell. Blunt at each end, 000 miles in its northwest-southeast length and generally 00 wide, rough-edged with inlets and bays, Vancouver dominates its end of the British Columbia coastline. Its primacy is historical. Midway down Vancouver's western shore on the Tebenkov map, a particularly large and rough nick showed, reading Hymka: the cyrillic script beside it reads Nootka, the sound where the before the world properly knew anything of the Pacific Northwest, European empire-makers entangled like mountaineering parties clambering in from all sides of the same precipice.
This sunlight was bullion to them, the absence of storm a welcome of distance able to be achieved. Prosperity of the most needed sort.

For with Melander gone they needed, O God and Jesu and all the holy beards within the twelve-gated walls of Jerusalem, they needed every glint of aid now.
The mountains no longer lifted directly out of the water, but from some clustered discreet miles inland.
Which is not to say he never knew worry. Particularly now,

with Melander gone. In every distance of Karlsson's mind hung one

\[\text{bother} \]

\[\text{shadow} \text{ or another.}\]
Aloud, Karlsson asked Braaf to scavenge more firewood wood for the breakfast fire. He had the water for tea ready by the time Braaf returned and Wennberg returned from stowing the canvas and blankets in the canoe.
Heard more surf, more silence, the silence there had been

as he stood numbed by the sentry's call in the New Acherel night...

"You both know the where of it. Back aboard the steamship, Where

Melander judged it could stay."

Wennberg stood, fast as such heft could. "Then you don't know

fuck-all about where we are, do you? You're running us blind down

this coast!"

"I know Astoria is ahead. That is enough. Wennberg, I can't

have maps when there aren't maps. Melander reckoned we could make

our way after the maps gave out, and that's what we're doing."

"Melander was so clever he jigged his way in front of a bullet."

"Not the first who did that. Or the last, either." The voice

was Braaf's, from across the fire. One of the muskets had found its

way into balance across the tops of his thighs. His hands rested

atop it as if he were waiting to be invited to play a tune.

"'Anywhere you go, you get nearer death.' Melander said that once,

and he was right. |Don't you think so, Wennberg?"
A smiting kind of imperialism, the Tsar's.
Wennberg looked off fixedly into the forest. "I abandoned God. This is his punishment on me. (quote from Job?)..."

"Wennberg, listen: your dealings with God are one matter. Keeping alive is another. You don't have God on the other paddle of this canoe, you just have me. We have got to work together.

Either one of us alone, this coast will kill."
Clouds lopped the mountains, so that they seemed strange green buttes of timber which angled up and suddenly dissolved from sight.
W: the down-the-nose attitude of the longtime over the newcomer.
By now, the paddling had begun to tell on them.
Now they answered for the late start, the tide resisting their labor.
Sly fingers of the ocean versus the knuckled mountains of the continent.
Putty weather, gray and changeable.
Men and women are hard ore. We do not change composition in a moment's fire.
Surf expelled up the beach, drained back: the ocean's breathing

in and out...
The ocean became a part of their day, like walls to a householder.
It may be wondered, diffident as Karlsson generally seemed, quiet as his manner was, whether he had the capability called "edge."

The biting surface to put against life. Did he want sufficiently, and could he apply himself, at whatever angles were necessary, to fulfill that wanting? It is all very well to go about life unobtrusively—it could be recommended to most of us—but what of when life begins to go about us? There is where "edge" tells.

You surrender or, just as bad, retreat—or you work your own salients, make them thrust here, hold there.
"Oh, aye, and God send wine and figs, too."

"No, hear it. It's worth the try, Melander. If try wasn't in
at
us, we'd still be squatting in New Archangel."

And ended, in a low, silent voice.

"And maybe, in a couple of months, when everything is settled,

the settlement of the land, and all the..."

"But if it is indeed, as you say, we have to be careful."

"If it is indeed, as you say, we have to be careful."

And started walking again, in a hurried pace.

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The morning after the canoe party ambled back to Masset was

in full Anglo-American amity by now),

the Fourth of July. We intended firing a salute from an old cannon

belonging to the Indians which was formerly mounted on the bastion at

Fort Simpson, but on examination it proved too rusty and we were afraid
to test it. Swan instead promenaded the beach and came across a
dead porpoise.

water where the marine mollusks are very useful in cleaning off the
flesh and leaving the bones white and nice.

When the Russians occupied Sitka, one of the surgeons adopted
this method of cleaning skeletons which was found very effective.
The specimen was placed on the beach at low tide and covered with a
mat or an old gunny sack, on the corners of which stones were placed
to prevent it floating off, and in a short time the myriads of sand
fleas would clean it perfectly.

The sand fleas could just as well have taken their time with
the porpoise cranium, because still there was no sign of

Swan's
day upon day. The site
his canoe men. Swan paced the Masset shoreline some more. It had
its beguilements.
These stretches of water put uneasiness into the canoe men.

with the surf and rocks along the eastern shore,
Out on these, the ocean had them like minnows in a bucket.
The dream had come to Karlsson again, stranger than ever because his eyes seemed to be open part of the time. The carved columns advanced on him in those moments of seeing. Double-faced, wearing a long visage nodding at him and a smaller one atop, a mossy mask. The tower broke, the mossy demon drifted free of the longer one and came closer and closer. Karlsson reached across to Wennberg to tell him of this, but voice too seemed to be outside, around him.

"They're both alive, but not much more," the brown-bearded American settler called to his son. "Bring the horses close, Johnny. We'll need to tote this pair to get them to Astoria."
This was a new style of coast to any they had seen yet. They were up on a rock shelf the height of a quay, a few hundred yards wide and twice or more long. Green in places with moss, mostly brown with bulb seaweed, this surprising plateau was thinly sheeted with water, like puddles after rain; evidently high tide came in to cover the bench, for waves even now tried to reach over the seaward edge.

Out of this shelf, in front of them, thrust a tusk of rock, four, five times the height of a man. Karlsson pointed beyond the tusk toward the ocean: the lighter gray there was the seals.

The men crept to the south side of the tusk; on its north lay tidal trough, a sharp-sided trench which brought in a foaming surge of water from the ocean 00 further out.

The shot to the seals would be almost a hundred yards. Karlsson disliked the distance, but tried to amend for it to the extent he could by singling out the inmost seal, a yearling male off by himself.
It is first known to have been told to the English captain, Meares, when he arrived into the North Pacific on the scent of furs in 1788, and like all good horrors it held a core of truth. On ceremonial occasions, one or another tribal chief might employ a bag of skulls to show his strength of heart. Not a society of polite tinking of teacups, this. If the four interloping Swedes had luck, they would not encounter the populated coves where the rain season was being whiled away in performance and potlatch.
In our fathers' time a man catalogued the wind names of the world. (Murchie, 130+: use this to introduce williwaw?)

"...The dry khamsin of Egypt, reputed to blow sand unceasingly for fifty days; the westerly datoo of the Straits of Gibraltar; the misty waimea of Hawaii; the cool pontias of the Rhone gorges; the chinook of the dry American plains"—sixth on his poetic roster, the williwaw of Alaska's offshore waters. An abrupt squall...
Do I? Do I say in the morning, Braaf, Wennberg, a mite of oversight here, we don't have the maps we need? We'll just sail blind and see what happens?...Melander

is over there under rocks. Why him? Him, HIM? All this was in his head, he had some scheme to jolly us along without maps, and now it's gone, leaked out the back of his head...All right. All right. We are still three, we are strong enough, we have a chance. But why Melander? Kill one of like birds on a fence, why wasn't it Wennberg?

Wennberg broke that canoe for us, Wennberg must have earned life with that. Braaf, then. Braaf is no target, Braaf knows how to survive the way a man know to fly... Sleep, How can the pair of bastards sleep? I need to, too...
Melander's course out of the harbor was straight toward the ocean, then the veer south, to bring them along the shoreline of Baranof Island. The men's legs were wet to their knees from launching the canoe, and in the winter night it took the first half hour of paddling to warm themselves entirely.

They could read the coastline by the surf sound and its moving margin of lightness as it struck and swashed. The night was calm, which they needed. The timbered spine of Baranof Island made a high eastern horizon; to their right, the ocean side, night of a single nullness. They stroked steadily rather than rapidly; not even Wennberg was impatient about this, for they knew these first hours were vital, that they had to pull themselves as far from Sitka as possible by dawn. 0 strokes of the paddle each minute, four men paddling, 0 hours from the time they eased away from Sitka to daylight: some 0000 of these exertions, as if the canoe had begun a pulse like a living thing, and they could find a cove and hide.
The blackness was intense, of a sort our eyes have been weaned from by generations of streetlamps. Starless, so much so that it seemed nothing ever had kindled in that void. Vast, alarmingly vast; the next streetlamp was unknown thousands of miles over the Pacific, if indeed the residents of Japan lit their avenues. It bound the eyes, a cosmic kerchief.

The dark was an ocean over them, as well as the one beside them.

As well as the ocean beside them they had one over them, and it was the darkness.
Beyond the mountains, in every direction except west, there was nothing but more mountains. West, there was ocean and more ocean.
Their war canoes were *a sea cavalry, long-headed fast craft*

which romped in on the shore villages of their foes.
It flatters the Russian imperial effort in Alaska to call it

an *Ursus Major*; a great bear
"A strong right arm is the lever of life," Melander had heard one
of the Sitka officials say. In part this style of administration
was due to the frontier population which had to be administered, for
mostly
Alaska was manned by those who had first followed the tilt of their
souls
morals all the way across Siberia—to Okhotsk, the port there—and
were swept on
then on to Alaska. Many of them came with a thirst and appetite for
depravity which appalled even the Russian officials; and the work
force at places such as Sitka had been leavened with Finns, OO, and
Swedes, lured by...

The system evolved for Russian America was crude and relied on
Russian stubbornness and capacity for overwork; but by the time Melander
arrived, at cross-purposes with it, it had functioned for 000 years, and
would go on until 1867, when Alaska was ceded to the US for....

So Melander did not rise at Sitka. He stayed carefully level,
like a sea otter bobbing among offshore rocks, and what began to work
in his thoughts was toward the idea of escape, the details of tricking
the Russians, and the question, the pivot question, of who could be
got to go with him.
Genesis 29, p. 31--

to earn the bliss of
Jacob served seven years for Rachel, the elder daughter of Laban the
Haranite (?). When Laban presented him instead the unfavored daughter
Leah, Jacob became the first known seven-year man to ponder his contract.
Living is a blood sport, and fatal, always fatal.
accomodate to the tribe's narrowed future. (Across the world in Australia, a colonial governor once contrived the euphemism for such horrific impact as the Haidas had been undergoing: "the natural progress of the aboriginal race towards extinction"
The sky opened entirely one morning, cloudless as if curtains had been taken down. After the days of hovering cloud the breadth of existence was astounding. Some entire new commodious corner of the planet here was presented to them.
M now was up at level-gaze with B's Castle, massive on its hump of stone: a great box strapped atop a tortoise. The habitations and work-buildings of New Archangel sat in the bowl between: barracks, shipyard... (hip roofs?—slanting all four directions) New Archangel was a triply-walled enclave, a threefold Jerico: the stockade where M stood, the tremendous height of the mountains, and last, worst, the distances to anywhere else of the world.
Braaf was a slow awakener, the sort who resisted getting up, dreeded to start a day. Even with breakfast in him, he would stumble to the canoe still more asleep than not. "I know what Valhalla is now," he said once. "It's where I never again Hulanter say, 'Tumble up.'"
The sky was silver with various ages of tarnish on it. The most ancient, back to 00, lay to their west...

The brightest portion was letting down white sheets, very possibly snow, to the north of them. "Stay there and frost the Russians' ass," Melander directed the storm with a push of his hands...
A storm is an affront to the steadiness we think we have achieved as a species. When whirl becomes king,
Melander in his memory was back aboard the third ship he had ever served on, the Odin. A North Sea lugger, the vessel smelled of OO and OO, had a low foc's'l which kept Melander hunched for the entire voyage, and in heavy sea took in water like a thirsty puppy. ("Adam was the below-decks oakum-boy on this one," Melander once muttered as yet another seam to began itx drizzle.) Young deckhand Melander was on wheel watch when...

(series of wheel commands from captain, interspersing descriptions of ship's behavior against heavy seas...)
Steadily there would be shore to their left, as if the line of islands were marching into the ocean to meet them.
You have discerned that this Melander had capability brimming in him. The surprise is the rapidity also at wait within his lanky frame. It would have taken the most earnest watching of him, across the next number of days, to notice change; one or two fewer Melanderesque forays of language, some sorting glances toward his fellow seven-year men as they performed their tasks. Yet in no more than a pair of weeks, Melander sifted through his plan down to details the size of fish.

New Archangel with him and challenge a thousand miles of wilderness enough for so life-pivoting a decision—of who could be got to flee books, and was ready now to take up the question—question? not word
In the streams which cut this shoreline, a fist-sized bird called the water ouzel was common. The ouzel could walk the bottom of the streams, busily feeding as the flow of stream pinned it into place beneath the riffles. The canoeists had become something like this hydraulic delver, the pressures of... (see London Times clip in Swedes file)
For the next hour, Karlsson and Wennberg and Braaf labored as Stygian boatmen, Melander's body a cargo which affected not only the canoe but their lives ahead. When they came ashore at the next island, Karlsson they stood for a time looking at the folded-forward dead man, still not wanting to believe the death. Wennberg

The sky opened this morning, cloudless as if curtains had been drawn back. The breadth before the canoe men, after the days of hovering cloud, was astounding, seemed some entire new commodious corner of the planet just unveiled.

Do I? Do I say in the morning? Braaf, Wennberg, a bit of oversight here, we don't have the maps we need? So instead we'll just sail blind and see what happens... Jesus and Judas and the other eleven. Melander
Dixon Entrance is one of dozens of plains of water between the broken lands of the northern Pacific coastline, yet, like the others, is individual in its perils. (quote 1st white descriptn) Fog takes its season in summer, gales from early autumn until April. Learmonth Bank lie amid its opening to the ocean. Its currents are capricious and strong. The flood tide into Hecate Strait can be as rapid as a man can walk.

Coast Pilot, Between Cape Chacon and Cape Fox, the tidal currents are much confused. In bad weather the heavy and confused sea sometimes looks like breakers.

Dixon takes a roiling energy from the geography around it. (above)

It might suck a gale to itself from Portland Inlet, or expel one to CO. Islands lie at its eastern end like ships seeking a lee anchorage.

None of this showed on Melander's map, which was a straightforward outlining of shoreline, no notations of currents and foibles.
The sea-reach seemed total now, around them nothing that gave gray promise of anything but ocean and its anger.
These dramatic people had met the white newcomers to the coast in baffling episodes. When the 00 stepped aboard 00's ship, it was not anything of worth the white sailors wanted, but the fur clothing the triestmen wore. When the 00 swarmed over Astor's ship Tonquin and a crewman tossed fire into the powder magazine, whites and natives shared went to their various netherworlds in a single blast.

Then there was that tale of the pillow of skulls.

That tale first had been told to the English captain, Meares, in 1788 (?) when he arrived into the North Pacific to undertake a fur trade, and like all good horrors, it had a core of truth. On ceremonial occasions, a 00 chief indeed would employ a bag of skulls to show his strength of heart. Not a society of polite tinkering of teacups, this. Yet there was extraordinary refinement to this coastal country.
Until now, for all that Melander and company could tell in their island-by-island descent of the great precipice of shoreline, not another human might have existed along this shore. In actuality, their journey was more like the course a stroller might take through sleeping neighborhoods. There were perhaps as many as sixty thousand residents of this coast, in tribal clusters of astounding culture—Tlingits, Haidas, Tsimshians, Bellabelles, Bella Coolas, Kwakiutls, Nootkas.

The native tribes had learned to find luxury at this overlap of worlds.

The life of the coast was sumptuous. In spawning time, salmon stippled the streams: veins of protein come into the water, to be casually wrested, *filed* filleted, dried for the winter larder. The wealth above water was cedar. The coastal people had learned how to release the cunning within this wood: it built lodges, canoes, and art.

All through this coastal culture was drama. The tribal people danced the stories of the forest creatures, sang and recited them, carved them into the tree-size columns. Art such as the planet
rock to the next. Each man of them has been afraid many times in those days, brave almost as often. Here at Aristazabal they land wetly, heft their ark across the gravel beach into hiding within the salal and swordfarn, then turn away to the abrupt timber. As the trees sieve them from sight, another white wave replaces the rolling hill of water by which the four were borne to this shore where they are selecting their night's shelter. And where one of them is to die.

New Archangel

Their escape from Sitka had been Melander's plan. Melander maybe, under different policy, would have earned his way up the ranks of the Russian-American Company like a lithe boy up a schooner's rigging; promysshlenik, harvester of pelts, become a valued apparatus of the Tsar's Alaskan enterprise in the manner, let us say, that elsewhere along the fur frontiers of northmost North America occasional young Scotsmen of promise were let to fashion themselves into field captains of the Hudson's Bay Company by learning to lead brigades of trappers and traders, keep the native tribes cowed or in collaboration, deliver a reliable 15 per cent
profit season upon season to London and, not incidentally, to hold
those far spans of map not only in the name of their corporate
employers but for the British crown which underlay the company's
charter terms like a particularly ornate watermark. But maybe is
only maybe, and the facts enough are that on the broad map of
midnineteenth-century empires Alaska lies apart from the Hudson's Bay
span of dominion across most of what has come to be Canada; is indeed
a great crude crown of territory tipped sharply, as if in deliberate
spurn, away from London and the direction of Siberia and Moscow;
and that Melander held contempt for the life he and the other Swedes
found themselves in as seven-year men there—indentured workers
of the Russian-American Company in the Tsar's particular system of
empire-by-proxy. "The Russians' oxen," as Melander more than once
grumbled it.

You would have spied Melander at once in any day's comings and goings
at the frontier port called New Archangel. (Called so, that is, until
Alaska passed from Russian hands to American in 1867 and the settlement
was rechristened to what the coast's natives knew it as, Sitka.) Tall
man with lanks of arms and

high hips, so that he seemed to be all long sections and hinges. Even
his manner of talking was prominently jointed into lengths, this way.
every so often ending a sentence with a querulous habit he had of ending frequent sentences with "aye?" as if affirming to his listener whether he really dared continue with the mesmerizing line of conversation. Needless to say of such a quiz, thirty times out of thirty Melander could be counted on, with no all the reluctance born of politeness notwithstanding, further discernible reluctance to continue. Fortunately Melander was well worth sustained attention. His line of jaw ran lengthy, did his forehead, but his bright blue eyes and stub nose and short mouth were closely set, a sudden alert center of face amid the jaw-and-forehead expanse as if peering willy-nilly out the hole-trunk at you, and whatever Melander's tongue dealt with at any given opportunity, and chaff-strewn ayed and roundabout though the route might be, ended up with more weight per word to it than most men's mouthings.

Although born on the isle of Gotland and thinking of himself as a Swede, Melander actually numbered in the landless nationality, that of the sea. On Gotland his people had been fisher-folk beyond memory, generation upon generation automatically capable with herring nets as
if born with hands shaped only for that task, and it had been a

startling

flex of independence when Melander, himself beginning to

resemble a sizable height of pine spar, went off from the village of

Slite to tall-masted vessels. He was apt aboard ship, this man of

alert eyes and adroit tongue, and in a dozen years of sailing

the Baltic and the Atlantic seaboard of Europe

bettered his position voyage by voyage. It was as first mate of a

schooner bringing twenty fresh seven-year men from Stockholm in the

spring of 1851 that Melander arrived to Alaska. Specifically, to the

shoreside assemblage of hewn logs and Russian tenacity called New Archangel.

(Called so, that is, until Alaska passed from Russian hands to American

by sale in 1867 and the settlement was rechristened to what the coast's

natives knew it as, Sitka.) Once

there, a pair of matters decided him to stay. The prospect of an

unusually

eleven

schooners'

Finn

circle-faced Banziger who was veteran in the Baltic trade but quite

literally out of his depth on the ocean; and the sight of the steamship

Emperor Nicholas I berthed against the backdrop of broad Alaskan forest.

Far from having a wind sailor's contempt for steam vessels, Melander

was more than a little intrigued with the contraptions. Setting a

course and achieving it by sheer power of mechanism, this was just

the sort of thing to appeal to him. In an earlier time and place,

Melander would have been the man you wanted to set a spire on a

cathedral; in a later, to oversee a fleet of mail planes. But on

an April day in 1851, at one of the rim-ends of the known world,

what was at hand was this squatty wonder of self-propulsion

and a proclaimed shortage of gifted seamen. "If the wind

were clever enough."
Melander told the baffled Bengtig captain upon taking leave of him,

"it would snuff out these steam-snorters before they get a start. Aye?"

As will happen, Melander after signing on with the Russian-American Company did find his life veered by the alluring attractive new machinery, but not as hoped. The Russians seldom fired up the steamship, which was of a vintage requiring approximately two days of chopping by the wood crew to feed the boilers for each day of voyage—a visiting Hudson's Bay officer once amended the name of the vessel to *Old Nick*, on the ground that it consumed fuel at about the same rate you'd expect of Hell—and on the occasions when its paddlewheels were set into ponderous thwacking motion, positions aboard were snatched by bored officers of the Russian navy contingent stationed at Sitka. In his first Alaskan year Melander steamed out with the Emperor Nicholas II only when Rosenberg, the Russian official in command of New Archangelsk, would make an outing to the hot spring at an outpost called Ozherskoi, a little distance south along the coast from Sitka harbor. That happened precisely twice, and Melander's sea-time totaled six days. The rest of the time, because of his experience of handling men and, from his time on Baltic voyages, his tongue's capability with Russian as well as Swedish and Finnish, and his Gotland knowledge of fish, he was put in charge of the salting of catches of herring and halibut.
Karlsson he thought of at once. Karlsson was slender and withdrawn, with a narrow bland face like that of a village parson. But Melander. The sort of man with not much to say, nor of whom much was said. But Melander one time had noticed him canoeing back from a day's hunting--Karlsson was one of the few New Archangel Swedes occasionally sent out to hunt game to help provision the port; ordinarily, he was an axman in the wood-cutting crew--by skimming across Sitka Bay with steady stopless strokes. Watching him, Melander had been put in mind of the regularity of a millwheel.

One other impression of interesting constancy about Karlsson Melander also had stored away the observation that the slender untalkative man visited more often to the women

native village outside the stockade wall women in the hut outside the fort than did any of the merchants of wind who perpetually bragged in the barracks about their lust.

What brought down Melander's decision in favor of Karlsson, however, was a tinier thing, an instant remembered from shipboard. Karlsson had come to Alaska on the same brig as Melander, and Melander recalled
that just before sailing, when others of the indentured group, the
torque of the journey-to-come tremendous in them at the moment, talked
large of the certain success ahead, the excitement the fur hunting
would furnish and how rapidly and with what staggering profit their
seven years of contract would pass, Karlsson listened, gave a small
mirthless smile and a single shake of his head, and moved off along
the deck by himself. Whatever propelled Karlsson to Sitka, it had
not been self-delusion.

Melander chose a rainless early morning, the gentle overcast
cupping the day’s light downward to lend sheep clarty to the harbor’s
islands of black spruce and the sudden mountains behind the settlement,
the usual morning wind off the bay lazied to a breeze, to approach
Karlsson before work-call. If Karlsson would consider escape on the
best of New Archangel’s days, Melander thought, he was truly ready.
"Let’s take our tea outside the stockade. Flavor always improves
away from the Russians."

Tin mugs in hand, the two of them strolled past the sentry at
the stockade gate and went a short way into the native village which
straggled north along the shoreline. As they stood and sipped, a
dozens natives emerged from one of the nearest longhouses, men and women
together and all naked, and walked casually into the water of the bay
to bathe. "Karlsson,"

"Those canoes are longer than they look, aye?" Melander began,
motioning to the natives’ cedar shells in a row on the beach before
them. "If you could step into one here and step out at Stockholm, "
Karlsson's face, all at once not quite so bland, suggested the
standard skepticism toward talk of uncooping oneself from New Archangel.
Because of New Archangel's isolation by ocean and because muskeg and
sinkholes and an alpine forest so thick it seemed to be thatched began
just beyond the stockade walls, the matter of escape always narrowed
instantly
to a single fine point: where, except up to heaven, was there to go?
Quickly Melander recited to Karlsson the main frame of the plan, that if they chose their time well and escaped by night they could work their way south along the coast, that beyond the Russian territory the Americans had a fur-trading post at Astoria, from there ships would come and go, ships to ports of Europe, to, at last, Stockholm.

Karlsson at once put question to Melander about the canoe route. Karlsson drained his mug in a final gulp.

Melander folded himself down to rest one knee on the dirt and with a stick began to diagram.

A first south-pointing stab of island—Baranof, on the oceanward side of which they squatted now—like a broad knife blade.

A scatter of much smaller islands, then the large Queen Charlottes group, south-pointing too, like the sheath Baranof had been pulled from.

Another broken isle-chain of coast, then long Vancouver Island.

At last, the fourth and biggest solidity in the succession Melander was drawing, the American coastline leading to the Columbia River, and Astoria.