Just off the eastern shore stood a long line of fishing smacks with white, white sails.

As the canoe men stared, the fleet toppled and was taken back by the water to be refashioned for the next trick of surf. This time, instead of phantom boats it was round white islets, an archipelago of froth.

Karlsson considered that they had seen wild surf so far on this voyage, and they 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. They would need to keep the canoe well out into the water, away from that turmoil.

The sun had stayed with them. Wisps of clouds hung above the shore, and a few thin streamers out over the ocean, westward, but the Sound itself was clarified in the light. The water was blue-black, an elegant ink with every detail of swirl perfectly shown.

Mountains were not so high here, except a few on the eastern horizon; this was a lower, more rumpled shore than they had yet seen, and the effect was to emphasize the Sound itself, its dark water, and the low blue line on the horizon, far across, which was Vancouver Island.
Not since taking their leave of New Archangel had they paddled at night. The memory of that did not go far to reassure Braaf and Wennberg. Ordinarily night was Braaf's time, the thief's soulmate quilt. But here in the canoe, Karlsson could feel Braaf's distrust of the dark, feel how his paddling was more tentative, grudging, than ever.

Wennberg, in contrast, seemed in every hurry to pull them through blackness single-handed. His paddling was a near-flail until Karlsson drew a deep breath and said: "Wait, the both of you, we need to beat our wings together. At my word: now...now...now..."
"Cape Scott, off there," said Karlsson. The western jut of
coast and broken wall of rock offshore from it matched the profile
at the lower left corner of the map across his lap. The northmost
nub of Vancouver Island.

...So now I go blind, and say that I see. Braaf, Wennberg,
forgive this, but I have to aim us as if I know the shot...

Karlsson resisted an urge to hurl the map overboard, rolled
it and replaced it into the waterproofed canister, and picked
up his paddle. "Come back to us, Braaf," he said to be saying
may
something, "and might as well bring your paddle when you do."
"I chose wrong," Melander once had told the blacksmith, "in bringing you instead of your forge and anvil. They'd have been easier to drag along this coast than you are, Wennberg." Karlsson remembered that now and silently chorused with Melander's irony.
Braaf was the scale-weight of the three of us. With him among us, Wennberg dared do nothing. Turn on me, he had Braaf to worry about; contend with Braaf, there'd still be me. But now. It has to be the two of us against this coast because neither of us can last alone. Wennberg is no ox, he can see that, if his rage doesn't get in the way. But how to keep him tamped down...
Karlsson awoke, as usual these mornings, to the peg of warmth jutting up along his stomach. "Pride of the morning," Melander had called such huge night-born erections. "If your britches don't bulge at dawn, it's a scant day ahead, aye?" Scant days evidently arrived with full-rigged longings of their own. These were nights of dream for Karlsson, chasing one another matters going on in his head, busy and alarming, people of gone years, dream seemed to be a sentinel against sleep, putting their faces inside his skull. All of it brewed through the night into the wanting which he would awake to.

Just now Karlsson wanted a woman and he wanted not to be captainsing this canoe voyage. He was, in fact, in a mood to want any number of things that were nowhere in the offering along this trackless coast, could he have brought them to mind, but those particular two took up all the space. Those otter-smooth female maneuvers, Melander again in charge of fate, memories conjoined... Karlsson lay on his side, waiting out the longing; then got up and went into the forest to let his water.
Weary though he was, Karlsson dreamt often these nights.

At least, by daybreak he had memory of extravagant events which must have been dreams. (Any happenings which had to do with women, he knew with regrettable certainty to be dreams.) Sometimes the canoe was being endlessly paddled and getting nowhere, sometimes Karlsson was under the falling beads of water in the Queen Charlottes forest once more. Or again and again this: the carved columns rising in the forest of his brain, the dead-eyed creature-faces stacked one on another, bear and beaver and eagle and—human?

"There!" Wennberg was panting.

The cabin sat on the far side of the marsh from them, green-roofed and hunkered low.

The two men plunged into the muck, found they had to veer inland for better footing, and slogged rapidly as they could. Wennberg began hollering, his calls loud and lonely in the gray stillness.

No answer came. "Got to be someone about, got to," Wennberg panted. Karlsson concentrated on lifting his feet through the muskeg.

They were within a hundred yards of the cabin before Karlsson let himself say what had been forming in his mind. "Doesn't look right."

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

"Wennberg, it's not."

The cabin profile dissolved entirely in the next fifty yards. The green roof could be seen to be a brush growth, atop a great gray butt of driftlog; the log's weather-silvered side, as tall as the men, was what had looked like gray cabin wall. "Why couldn't it've been..."
Gulls were drifting up a current over the headland to the south. Scree lay under the gray cliff, a wash of rock reaching toward the ocean. This portion of coast attracted bright tides, comber after comber breaking white from the swales of deeper water. All this, the less vehement weather, the beaches were promising signs; there was a feel that the canoe men had come down from heights to lowlands. But then the matter pivoted: the whale-hunting natives, plowing the hard going of the canoe through the troughs of surf, the openness of the evening coves...
"You think you're too keen to be among us roughcast folk, you've had that about you since we thought so all along—quit New Archangel. Your heart's as fancy as Melander's tongue was. Afraid I'll smudge off on you, or that fifteen-fingers Braaf will pick your pocket? Better be afraid of what's worth being afraid of, Karlsson. This journey'll have two ends for you. When we've reached within touch of Astoria, I'll kill you."

"You can make the try."
Wennberg would not go farther along the bay edge. "No use to it," he said dully. "Just more muck. Go on if you need to..."

The blacksmith slumped against the big driftlog, lowered himself until he was sitting with his back to the wood.

worried Karlsson briefly that Wennberg would wander from the log, but he had seemed to understand when Karlsson told him he'd be back, not to move.

Karlsson aimed inland, away from the tideflat, and wallowed through dune grass which came to his waist. It was the color of a faded wheatfield, the rolling lines of grassed dunes extending parallel with the bay.

He made his way north to where the dune grass gave way to beach. As he went across the sand to the water's edge the beach crept in front of him, a slow crawl like tan snakes as the sand blew in ropey slinking patterns.

Then the bay entrance: instead of surf stacking against the shore four and five waves deep as had been common on this coast, here the whitecaps flowed and flowed into the bay, as if breaking into stampede.
Karlsson looked steadily at the breakers, willing against what he knew to be the truth flashing from them. He and Wennberg were not strong enough to paddle out against such flow.
...This was Melander's line of country, the ocean. Not mine.

Sitka Sound, a millpond to this. If this coast was other, maybe

we'd be walking out. My journey, that'd have been. Able to

Forest, you can make

your way through, sort it for yourself as you go. In Skane I could

have been led blindfolded into any wood and found my way straight

out.

put one foot in front of another you know you get somewhere. But

But water moves, can't keep a fix on it. I wonder if it.

Melander understood this ocean. I never have. It is a kind

e of night to me. I see it, but not into it.

can be as deep as Melander said. Some places, deep as these mountains

are high, he said. Well, take his word for it, thank you.

cut here, stroke and stroke and stroke. I wonder, if it

with this paddle had been ax strokes, how many trees'd been brought
down. How many forests, a more like. We could've built our own

stockade, called it New Stockholm. Melander in charge, probably

New Gotland. Melander on ship that time...
This was Melander's line of country, the ocean, not mine. He savvied water, but it's like night to me. See it but not into it. Forest you can sort for youself as you go, lead me into any Skane wood with a mealbag over my head and find my way straight out, I could. If this coast was other, we'd maybe be walking out and that'd have been my journey. Able to hunt, choose camp when we wanted, put one foot in front of another, know we're getting somewhere. But not with this ocean, can't keep a fix on it. Can it be deep as Melander said, some places deep as these mountains are high? Take his word for it, don't go looking...
Karlsson's shot struck the seal \textit{in extremis} behind the base of its head, severing the animal from life. It jerked slightly then lay as if into deeper doze.

"Square eye, Karlsson," Braaf congratulated, as he came to his feet and scrambled to the right of the horn of rock \textit{from which Karlsson had shot}. Amid his first climbing stride across the neck of rock, surf burst in front of Braaf and a white weight of water came up over him. Taken off balance, Braaf was slung backward. He put down a hand to halt his fall; it met the slickness of a barnacle colony, and Braaf fell into the tidal trough.

Instantly water buried him. Karlsson and Wennberg were \textit{twins of disbelief}. Braaf had been gulped like a gnat into a frog. Then his head bobbed through the foam; for a breath-space his eyes had the offended look they'd had when Wennberg clattered the spittoon in the officers' quarters; and the insurging tide sluiced out of view around the bend of the trough.

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

...Reach the rifle to him, only chance...
Because of Melander's sketch in the dirt and the knowledge that their destination lay south, Karlsson had imagined that the escape route dropped straight as a plumb-line; that they would go along the coast like men shinnying down a rope. It was a revolution in his thinking to learn from the maps that they were canoeing east as well as south; that the traced route veered sideways through the boxes of measurement---Karlsson was puzzled by those, wondering why they were deeper than wide, why they weren't simply square---on the paper.

So they came, like a chess piece, through meridians as well as parallels, down the North Pacific.
Wennberg joyfully would have been back at his forge. Any forge, anywhere. The glowing charcoal before him, the circle of water ladled around its edge to concentrate the heat. Then hammer and metal in their heavy dance, the fire-flakes falling from the metal as he imposed shape on it. Wennberg went in his mind time and again to that morning when he came behind Braaf in the parade ground—and each of these times, he veered yards away from the laden thief.

But this was like trying to undo a fire in the forge: pulling coals out in hope they would become fresh charcoal again. Indeed, Wennberg's intense sort which was desired, wishing was of the sort to reverse a forge fire all the way to living tree. And made, he knew, as much sense. In this life paths cross paths, and there you are, tangled up with a Braaf.
The clouds now were not Sitka's ebb and flow, but fat islands that stood on the horizon half a day at a time. It seemed you could navigate by their position, which likely is what the weather wanted you to think.
The birds of the coast seemed to have caught motion from the surf, always bobbing, skittering, dashing off. The slow-striding ravens of New Archangel were not in it with these darters.
If they could have bent their vision upward over the coastal bluffs to see what they were traveling on the edge of, it would have appalled them. A sea of mountains, white chop of snow and ice and rock to the limits of the world. Arms of their own ocean, fjords and inlets, felt into this tumbled expanse, an endless grapple of immensities.

A land, then, entirely rumpled and agitated, and the Pacific meeting it in great flat calm. But that was pretense, as another look from upward would have shown. The islands and rocks appeared as if they had all been dropped just at that instant, the surf whiteness all around them frozen into that moment of splash.
What is memory for? To keep us from falling into the same ditch every day, certainly. But we use it for more than that. We hold it up and look at it as a reward to ourselves. Like the thumbprint on a window, memory is a mindprint.
If Wennberg was not a good judge of situations, he nonetheless had a knack for measuring people. It was what had cast his eye onto Braaf at New Archangel, saw through to the thievery which nearsightedness had escaped others' attention. This set of talent and failing, set judgment and void of it, set the tone of Wennberg. Continually he would thrust or veer into argument, carry it on until he saw how his combatant was responding, then deciding on the hinge of the moment whether to bluster further or back off. There is a phrase out of sea warfare, "a loose cannon on deck": unpredictability of behavior. Wennberg was the loose cannon on this voyage, but with — and occasional chauvinism from Melander and the others — a stiff enough axle that his carom wasn't always deadly. It simply always might be.

Of the other three men it was Karlsson who sensed the situation of Wennberg. Melander had discovered that manipulation of Wennberg was possible, and therefore thought it could be made standard. But Karlsson gauged the disjointment in the blacksmith, the faultline where his judgments jarred against one another.
Perhaps think of that trick to be done with an apple and a knife: to peel the fruit in one continuous cutting, the red spiral coiling down and down from the knife's glide, a stair of skin ever more likely to break—or is it, for each shaven coil concatenates with the others, a whole growing ever greater? Does weight win, or the tension of beauty hold? This voyage was like that, each day's dangle southward—made by the canoe slicing distance from the North Pacific—either more apt to snap than the one before, or more permanent natural in place because of all that had come before it.
"Empty barrels make the loudest _MEEM_ noise," the slender man said.

Karlsson surprised himself as much as the other two. What he had uttered was just the sort of thing Melander would have delivered.
One meal of salt beef left. Then just beans. Three,
four days of those. And hardbread, maybe two meals' worth. Wenner's
already saying his guts think his throat's been cut. Not a bad idea,
Braaf tells him, how'd he like help? If I could hunt
something on one of these islands. Anything, deer, goat. Beaver,
we could learn to think beaver was a man's feast. It's worth a risk to
too. 50's a gunshot. But save there to starving. Better pull to shore early,
try the job of bear-robbing...
The paddler's exertion is much like that if you yanked on a rope:

Gradually the effort eats into the sockets of your arms, and still there is the invisible rope—more and more a hawser as the day extends—reaching ahead of you along the water. There was a method of affixing a short mast to the canoe bottom and affixing sail, making the craft a hybrid sort of ketch, but the winter wind was against this, in the first week, they were able to use the sail only once, for a few hours, on a dogleg route between 00 and 00. Canvas was the yearning of the escape; arm muscles were its reality.
"We could make a wintering of it. You're supposed to be clever with an axe, why'n't we grapple together a shelter of some sort, wait out this pissy weather?"

Karlsson was framing a level reply when Braaf spoke, as if chimed in:

to the air: "Wait for good canoeing the way the Kolosh are, of a few d'you mean? The last time you were in the company, you ran your legs to stubs, blacksmith. What'll you do when they're thick thick as ducks on the water?"

Wennberg cut a glare to Braaf, but continued to look across earnestly over at Karlsson. Karlsson realized that the look contained something he had not thought was in Wennberg: a plead.

...He's in troth about this, wants a wintering instead of going Ready to lick dust, the bastard... haan us

"Wennberg, listen," Karlsson said carefully. "A wintering would be double death. We'd starve down, never be able to hunt enough to feed us on this island. We don't even know if there's anything here with spring to hunt. But say we did last the winter, Braaf's right, the Kolosh will be everywhere here. The first canoe of them will have us with Melander."
The dark-bearded man carried a lamp to the table, established it in the center, then seated himself. He was a trifle uneasy with himself, 

This Sunday evening he was trimming a scruple as well.

Keeping the Sabbath was like a second backbone in a New England man.

But in the morning Bailey's sloop would take the mail out of the bay and it would be two weeks until the next chance. Too, there was the point that Waterman paid coin, and the clink of specie was rare sound here at this abyss-end of the frontier. He dipped a goosefeather pen into ink and began.
Something about the beach disturbed Karlsson, but his exhaustion wouldn't let it surface. They were alive, on land of some manner, and that was all he could grip at the moment. He sank beside Wennberg and slept.

It came clear to him at once in the morning: the water was on the wrong side of them. East rather than west. And it was not ocean, but a bay of some sort. The hills across the water and the other forestescape around them were like the Alaska coastline greatly pressed down: green and rumpled but low. A silvery haze hung through the hills.
By now even Wennberg had begun to look thin. They knew that without better food, the soon would be husks of themselves.

"A seal, maybe," Karlsson suggested. "Let's take the morning to try that point."
The moon reminded him of an egg, and he hadn't looked up.

But the shine on the waves compelled it, a soft dazzle that was gone even as it showed itself; you were compelled to wonder where that flitting sheen came from.
Across the bay, rivers flowing into themselves, turned backwards by the tide advancing between their banks; for some hundreds of yards at each mouth, the Willapa, the Bone, the Oo, the Oo, slowly crept back towards their origins, like bolts of olive-drab cloth surreptitiously trying to roll themselves up.
...This was Melander's line of country, this ocean, not mine. He savvied water, but to the others of us it's a kind of night. See it but not into it. Can it be deep as Melander said, some places as far to bottom as these mountains are high? Take his word for it, thank you. Sitka Sound, a millpond to this. If this coast was other, we'd maybe be hiking out. My journey, that'd have been. Forest you can make your way through, sort it for yourself as you go. In Skane I could have been led with a mealsack over my head into any wood and found my way straight out. Put one foot in front of another, you know you get somewhere. But water moves, can't keep a fix on it. All you can do is keep after it, stroke and stroke and stroke.

If the work with this paddle had been axe strokes, how many trees'd been brought down? How many forests, more like. Could've built our own stockade, called it New Stockholm. No, Melander in charge, New Gotland it'd be...

Karlsson became aware his mind was drifting. He broke his stare at the backs of Braaf and Wennberg, purposely looked at the ocean horizon for the next few minutes.
It had become usual: Karlsson woke to the peg of warmth touching toward his stomach. "Pride of the morning," Melander had called such night-born rearings. "If your britches don't bulge at dawn it's a scant day ahead, aye?" These full-rigged longings were leftovers of Karlsson's nights of dream; in each dark now, matters chased one another through his head, extravagant and charming events took place, people of gone years put their faces inside his skull. Dream seemed to be a wild sentinel against the clutch of this coast; perhapsFKWKMKMKK demanded that the mind of Karlsson hear its howling tales instead of brood on predicament. In any event, all of it built through the night into the wanting which he would awake to. Just now Karlsson greatly wanted a woman and he greatly wanted not to be captaining this canoe voyage. He was, in fact, in a mood to want any number of things that were nowhere in the offering along this trackless coast, but these particular two took up all the imagination in him. Those otter-smooth maneuvers of woman, this and then this, and oh this, and Melander again in charge of fate, ayeing and coaxing, memories conjoined...Karlsson lay on his side, waiting for the longing to unstiffen. Then rose and went into the forest to have a pee.
They made a scampering afternoon of it, as if this new, last coast was firmer footing for their climb down from the north. The Strait was a smaller, dozing relative of Kaigani, and the canoe stole its miles without the gray water arousing. A high, sharp cape, waves boiling white at its base, took over the continental horizon. The canoe passed around the seaward side of a sheer-cliffed island which stood off the point of the cape; Karlsson, Braaf, Wennberg looked ahead to an uneven coast, dark blades of rock strewn at its edge. No one said anything. They paddled on.

At dusk's start they put ashore just to the north of a startling procession of close-set seastacks which came out into the ocean across their route. Day-worn as the canoe men were, Karlsson did not want to risk rounding this coastal tumble into whatever mischief its far side might hold. "Shore," he called to Braaf and Wennberg above the surf noise. "We've done the day."
All this coastal rock appeared very old, as though preserved by

the ocean brine.
Birds of this shoreline evidently had caught motion from the surf, always bobbing, skittering, dashing off. Sanderlings, oystercatchers, turnstones, dowitchers, snipe: the proud-striding ravens of New Archangel were not in it with these darters. On the other hand, the clouds now were not the ebb and flow skidding about above Sitka Sound, but fat isalnds that impended on the horizon half a day at a time. It seemed here at this southering coast then, that you could navigate according to the clouds' positions, and that the routes of birds had nothing to teach but life's confusion—which it would be like both the weather and birdlife to have you think.
Karlsson's shot struck the seal in the neck, not far beneath the base of its head. The animal lurched, flapped its foreflippers and tail briefly, then lowered its head as if into doze. The other seals writhed toward the rock edge, were gone.

"Square eye," Braaf congratulated as he came to his feet and stepped to the right of the horn of rock Karlsson had shot from.

Karlsson and Wennberg moved now too, the three of them starting out toward the seal. But amid Braaf's first climbing stride across the neck of rock, surf burst in front of him and a white weight of water came up, seemed to stand in the air, and then fell on Braaf.

Taken off balance, Braaf was slung backward. He put down a hand to halt his fall. It met the wet slickness of a barnacle colony, and Braaf slid on into the tidal trough.

Instantly water buried him.

Karlsson and Wennberg were twins of disbelief. Braaf had been somewhere into the water snatchéd like a gnat down a frog.

Then Braaf's head bobbed through the foam. For a breath-space, his eyes held the affronted look they'd had when Wennberg's boot clattered the spittoon in the officers' quarters. Now the insuring
Karlsson ran the choices in his mind.

Under full sail as the Jane was, they hadn't a prayer of catching her with the canoe. A signal fire, even if one could be built in time, was unlikely to persuade a ship to have to along this wild coast, but guaranteed to attract the whale-hunting natives.

Gunshots were the same proposition. What was left to the canoeists was to stand and watch the sails serenely plow out of sight to the south.

With the glass, Karlsson studied the shoreline to the south.

The withdrawing tide brought more and more spines of rock to view.

There was no beach evident, just a tidal plain of cannonball rocks, as if the farmfields of all the world had been emptied of stone here.

No islands stood in sight; only the fins of seastacks. It looked beyond, needed the worst stretch of coast yet, and they were going in to have to paddle it by night and make a landing in earliest dawn.

The day this had been, Karlsson thought to himself, even that didn't sound so much doesn't look worse.
scene to come: the days along Vancouver Island.
scene to come: description of them having to coexist in rain-in camp.
scene to come: something out of Karlsson's past, in Smaland or at New Archangel.
scene to come: they paddle to the beach south of Grays Harbor.
scene to come: Karlsson and Wennberg wary of each other, maybe contending.
scene to come: description of where they are on the coast
scene to come: they get rained in, north of Grays Harbor.
that catch-of-breath
In the pause for that, Braaf whitely burrowing the compass and
mapcase
from beneath the corpse that was Melander, Wennberg in
a sick glaze handing the instrument and container on to Karlsson--
in that stay of time, the absence began its toll on them. Day upon
day and all the waking hours of those days, it would be exacted now.

Loss of Melander's sailor-habited scrutiny
of the water around, every chance of rock or shoal or current
announced to them. Lack of reminding word to Braaf when he made
his habitual dawdle in shifting his paddle. Want of regulation on
Wennberg's 
bluster, which evidently even Wennberg had come
parleys
to rely on. No musing consultations with Karlsson, treetop communing
with stone. No minute of their lives, ever again, punctuated by
that voice's watchword, "aye?"

Mid-day now, the canoe ashore at the next southward island,
Melander's three-man crew stood looking at his folded-forward body.

Three men, each with new age on him.
Melander steered the canoe around the seaward side rather than isle-wall and cape-wall.

Ahead now, Karlsson, Braaf, Wennberg could see to a disordered coast. Rock talons, haired on top with forest, grabbed down into the surf; dark blades of rock were strewn offshore.

No one said anything. They paddled on.