Still needing to orient myself--after my past weeks of reluctant snuggle next to Riley in the back of the Bago, the bedroom of the ranch house yawned around me like an auditorium--I slid my achey leg carefully to the floor and sat up on the edge of the big double bed.

Already there was enough dawn to see the bulk of the mountains; the rimrock of Jericho Reef, the tall slopes of Phantom Woman Mountain above and beyond it, and beside them to the south the most mountain of all, the giant bow of cliff that was Roman Reef. When we built this new house Marcella and I purposely put every possible window to the west, to that view of the jagged rim where the Two Medicine country joins onto the sky.

I swallowed hard on the thought of Marcie again and tried to center my mind only on watching this day begin itself. The mountains were going to be clear and near today. A last few desperate patches of snow still showed bright among the topmost clefts of Jericho Reef, but their destiny was evaporation in another week or so.
Besides my mother and me, our square was Bob and Arleta Busby, back from returning T to the Tide and the Musgroves who ran the drugstore, and Pete and Marie, dancing hard for the past hour or so to make up for time lost. All of them but me probably had danced the Dude and Belle 500 times in their lives, but it’s basic enough that I knew the ropes.

You begin with everybody joining hands—my mother’s firm feel at the end of one of my arms, Arleta’s small cool hand at the end of the other—and circling left, a wheel of the eight of us spinning to the music.

Then the circle reverses, a prance back to where we started. Swing your partner, then the lady on the left, which in my instance meant hooking arms with Arleta, another first in my life.

Then return to partner, all couples do some sashaying right and left, and the “gent” of this round steps forth and begins swinging the women in turn until he’s back to his own partner. And as the Belle of the Ballroom.

“Third gent, swing the lady in blue—"
In the Forest Service in Montana at that time, a person rose to Forest Supervisor one of two ways: by achieving some big, big timber sales, or by making his name as a fire boss. Given that our east side of the Continental Divide is not much for lumber, only some cutting for pulpwood and some lodgepole taken for corrals, it was not surprising that the Two Medicine National Forest was overseen by a fire squire, Ken Sipe. Sipe was one of the first to see how to use the plentiful new manpower when the Civilian Conservation Corps was set up, and

As a fire boss, he liked to take a fire by its face: defeat it head-on, let it burn as little area as possible. Which was a wonderful answer when it worked.
He liked to tell that the first time he voted, he cast three ballots for Congressman Carter—one at the half-way station on his stage run, another one when the stage pulled into Craig, and a final one when he got back to Augusta on his return run.
to one great cube of saturation. Karlsson stood within the heavy warmth for a moment, slender and very white in his nakedness, before bringing the small woven reed breathing mask to his mouth and holding it there within his cupped right hand.

"At least this cloud is a hot one. New Archangel could use a few such outside, aye?"

Melander's voice, deeper for being muffled, came from across the room, and in three steps Karlsson could see the hazed man, his body alone in its long-boned angles on the bathing bench. Melander's reed respirator mask all but disappeared in the big hand palmed around it, so that he seemed to be covering a perpetual chuckle.


"Where's our pickpurse?"

"He will come. The hours of Braaf's day are not like any other man's."

"How far do you trust him?"

"Ordinarily, only a whisker's width. But Braaf wants to shake New Archangel from his boots as badly as we do. He'll do much to achieve that. Much that neither of us can do, just as he can't canoe himself down this coast. The three of us are like a bindle of rye when your Skane fields are harvested, Karlsson. Together we lean in support of one another. Take any one away and we fall."
when Toussaint turned toward me. The potato salad and some other dishes were nearest my end of the blanket and I guess I expected that he was going to ask me to pass him something. Instead Toussaint stated: You

have become a campjack.

So moccasin telegraph had the story of my sashay with Stanley.

What coursed through me just then, I would need Methusaleh's years just to begin to sort out. Apprehension and confusion maybe came first.

How did Toussaint know, and what exact details did he know? Geography came next: how far had the tale spread? Was I on tongues throughout the Two country? And if I was--since that time, I have read of the (soul?)

Indian notion of a photographer as a shadowcatcher... The mix of wonder and apprehension, and even a corner of pride, which I felt must be something like that shadowcatching. Part of me now was in Toussaint's knowledge, his running history of the Two: in there with Phony Nose Hogan and the buffalo and the first sheep... They say when a cat walks across the ground that will be your grave, you shiver. As I sat there that July noon with the breastbone forgotten in my hands, I shivered....
Meeting the ocean swell at the mouth of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the brig rocked and dipped as though in introduction. A bob and curtsy, it may have been, for the vessel was named the Jane.

Within the Jane's hold were the pilings to underpin the docks of a new port of the Pacific. The pilings had been taken aboard at one of the sawmill settlements which had popped into existence along Puget Sound in the past year or so, and now, outbound, the Jane worked clear of Cape Flattery, adjusted its sails, then bore south, San Francisco-ward.

Wennberg saw the vessel two hours later. Its sails and trailing gaff sail were like two and a tepee on the water, two miles or so out from the shore island and already passing. "Karlsson, Christ-of-mercy, look out there..."

"Braaf, what'll we do...?"

They stared at the ship like men yearning to jump to the moon. 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 hove to along this wild coast, but guaranteed to attract the whale-hunting natives.
In any other circumstance, I would have killed for the chance to explore what she seemed to be suggesting. But...
"Hold me," Karlsson directed Wennberg. The burly man clamped both arms around Karlsson's knees as Karlsson stretched himself flat, down toward the spilling water. Like a man peering down a well, he both hands Karlsson held the rifle at its barrel end, thrust the stock into the channel as Braaf popped to sight once more. "Braaf! Grab! We'll pull..." A wrath of water--it bulged a full three feet over all other froth in the channel, as if some great-headed creature was seeking surface-- careening. Surf spewed over Karlsson and Wennberg, both of them clenching eyes tight against the salt sting.

When they could look again, Braaf yards past them, on the landward side, his boy's face in a grin. He seemed to shake his head at them, then the tide abruptly sucked back toward the ocean and Braaf was spinning past his rescuers again, his arms supplicating in search of the gunstock. But short, a ham's-length short... 

...God's bones, it never behaves the same twice. Have to be quicker, make ready..." This time, Wennberg! Lower me more, there, now'll reach..."
Double Win right - brings Alas to mind -
Dick wants to ask Mac — get him to talking to John.

Also (baked clay route) annex where Dan
had been sighted - Noen C & Bing Co.

Farmers selling peas - cattle priests — sheep

survived

Since Two had seen earlier?

Mr. Smith's brother's - and another
out of town. I'm getting contacts out of town.

School: I'm calling parents out of town.
You're a school teacher. I'm ready to lend a hand.

What is this? Just a bit of study to help you understand the
importance of this. I'm ready to lend a hand.

Where? I'm ready to lend a hand.

Thank you for your time.
Dear Bonnie Jean McCaffree,

I'm at work on a book about Montana during the homestead era, and I wonder if you'd be game to help me out by providing a few of your memories. My own memory doesn't go back far enough; it was my grandparents who homesteaded south of Helena, and the Depression had wiped out the place by the time I was born. As I've been casting around to find people who have first-hand homestead experience, a friend who grew up in your home area of Montana -- Ken Weydert, whose father once managed the sheep-shearing company in Ingomar -- loaned me a copy of the history written for the Ingomar-Sumatra-Vanada reunion in 1976. I hope you don't mind my getting in touch with you; the only way I can be accurate about what I write is to ask people who know.

You may have heard of my previous Montana book, *This House of Sky*, which is a memoir of my father and my grandmother and myself when we worked on ranches in the White Sulphur Springs Country, and later ran sheep on the Blackfeet Reservation out from Browning. The book I intend now will be fiction -- which means that names don't matter in any stories you might be willing to share with me -- but I want it to be truthful to homestead life. I'd particularly like to hear from you if you have any details on such topics as these:

--- Living arrangements in a homestead cabin: where everybody slept, what you ate, how you passed the evenings, what games you played with brothers and sisters or neighbor kids.

--- Chores: how old was a homestead child when, say, he or she got the responsibility of gathering the eggs? Filling the woodbox? Milking the cow? Did you help with the farming, and if so, at what age did you start?

--- School: I myself boarded out during most of my school years, but always with some other family -- not at a boarding facility as I read that Ingomar had. I'd like to hear any memories of what it was like to live there. Also, anything that particularly sticks in your mind about school days: a memorable teacher or fellow student, for instance.

--- Finally, I'd appreciate any information on how the homestead life ended for your family. For mine and a lot of others, it simply was done in by weather, lack of money, or the rigors of the work. Those things too are part of the story of where we came from.

Thanks for your time,

IVAN DOIG
Which is like trying to describe all the Indian tribes just by saying they were Indians. Sure, we call them by that single word—

even though it has such a half-assed history, of Columbus figuring he was sailing into Bombay instead of Puerto Rico—but the truth of the situation is that some tribes had horses and some didn’t, and some built birch canoes and some used cedar, some favored tents and others built lodges or hogan’s or cliff apartments: there were differences wherever you looked closely. That was the way with sheepmen, too. 00 would leave herder of his only three cans of vegetables, each week, for fear somebody would rob the wagon. 00 provided his herders, even the ones who it was pretty clear couldn’t read, with plenty of old issues of Saturday Evening Post and Collier’s. The big Long-Clearly outfit Browning amounted to a kind of ranch confederacy, with headquarters at O0 and O0. Walter Craig meanwhile herded his sheep himself. But they were all sheepmen.
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 likely to snap than the one before.
Stanley Meixell first came through Gros Ventre in 1908 or '9, on his way to... 

( use descptn of "lunches put up" hotel; italicize M's pun that place looked like it could use a prop, all right. Continue italicized anecdote with some memory of staying or eating in the place, or something to characterize the town.)
Originally the creek simply shared the name of the town. This was simply GV Creek, to go with the town. But people took to calling it English's Creek.
itself and instantly was vanished around the corner.

For three hundred yards across New Archangel Melander strode rapidly, then halted outside the workers' barracks and drew deep breaths.

Entering the barracks, he clattered the door shut behind him, began to shrug out of his rainshirt, mumbled something about having forgot his gloves in the toilet, and was gone out the doorway again.

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

Wennberg had been idly stropping a knife as he spectated the card game being played by three carpenters and a sailmaker. Now he grunted that he too was off to mount the throne of Denmark, if the Russians allowed pants to be dropped on such a holy night, and to the chuckles of the card players pulled on his rainshirt and stepped into the dark beside Melander.

The pair of them, tree and stump somehow endowed with legs, moved with no word through the night for two minutes, three. Apprehension rode them both. Apprehensions, rather for their anxieties were as different as the men.

Late-going Russians yet within the officers' lodgings...clatter within the gun room heard by a sentry at the eastmost blockhouse... Melander's months of planning now teetered on such chances, and the fret of it all moved with him in the dark.
Some years before, when Alec and I still were attending the
North Fork English Creek school, Ed Heaney came out one summer day to talk
business to my father. And with him came his son my age, Ray. I could see
what was intended here, and that's the way it happened. My father
and Ray went off toward 00 to eyeball the stand of timber which
interested Ed, and Ray and I were left to play together for the
morning.

I always was stumped about what of my existence would interest
another boy, so Ray and I ended up wandering the area around the
ranger station, and I suppose the boredom built up pretty fast in
both of us. I showed him the 00 (fish in creek) and we thrashed
along the brush for awhile, but if I couldn't be on horseback, I
didn't really have much to show anyone. Ray I think didn't make
much effort on his part, either. He was dressed in what I suppose his
mother thought were old enough clothes to go into the country with,
but his old clothes were considerably better than my everyday ones and
he maybe was embarrassed about that.

It was one of those slanging matches you afterward wonder
how you ever got into.
As the leader of the Koloshes sought to balance it all in his mind and the exertion of his crew shortened the water between the canoes, the craft in front suddenly began to swing broadside, a bold-necked creature of wood turning as if having decided, at last, to do fight even if the foe was of its own kind.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The chieftain still watched ahead. He knew himself to be twice the watcher here, the one intent on the waiting rifleman across the water and the other in gaze to himself at this unexpected seam
Isak Riis arrived to America from 00 in Denmark in 0000. By way of an immigration official's pen he promptly was Isaac Reese, and by dint of his own observations on the way west, he arrived to North Dakota set on a minimaxx living from horses. The Great Northern railroad was pushing across the top of America--Jim Hill had promised to cobweb North Dakota with railroad iron-- (Isaac followed construction of the roadbed west. The mountains seemed to hold him. He came south along them to Gros Ventre in 0000...) 

(Reese married a Scotswoman, who died in WWI flu epidemic.) When my father came to ask for my mother's hand, Isaac spent the whole evening talking about horses. My father at last managed to get the question in.

Isaac eyed him hard. "Do you ever took a drink?"

Mac figured honesty was the only answer in the face of public knowledge. "Now and then, I do."

"We'll took one now, then." And with 00 reached down from the cupboard, the pairing that began me was toasted.
Day fifteen

what I should of this winter.
I have not said enough about the startling weather In usual
winter I can simply accept rain and cloud as our regional rain cloak,
the season's garment of

interesting texture and of patterned pleasant sound as well. "Rain
again," a friend will growl. "Right," I will smile absently. But
as rainless day after rainless day has gone past, it dawns on me how
different is this winter; different—drier, colder. Until yesterday morning,

hung
the temperature had been below freezing for four days and nights in

a row, the longest spell of its kind I can remember here. I bury

our kitchen vegetable scraps directly into the garden patch for compost,
and the shovel has been bringing up six-inch clods of frozen soil,

like lowest-grade coal.

What brought the weather to mind is the renewed presence of birds.
This morning kindled into

This morning brought bright sun, and already, just to be out in

the tide of warmth, I have walked up to the rim of the valley. The

view west from there is bannered in five blues today: the foreshore

of the Peninsula in its heavy wooded forested tint; the

Olympic Mountains with their blue dust of distance; the clear cornflower

sky; the water of Puget Sound in two shades, azure nearest me, a more
Alec and I both inherited not just our father's build, but the McCaskill tendency to be a little too quick with our fists. I held off until he came out with "pus gut!" I swung on Ray and caught him just in front of the ear.

He popped me back alongside the neck. We each got in a few more swings before it degenerated into a wrestle, and...
Meadows of wild hay were splotched all along English Creek, some of them narrow nests of brome grass which a moving machine could scarcely maneuver in, others fat sweeping fields which took a day or so apiece to cut flat. As in so much of the west, in the Two country hay is as necessary as air. The earliest stockmen didn't think so, believed they could graze their herds of cattle through a Montana winter. 1885 showed them that they hadn't yet seen a real Montana winter... Carcasses on the prairie I suppose as the buffalo had lain after one of the slaughtering hunts for hides. Some foreign traveler crossing the prairie every decade or so might have thought it an experimental site for killing four-hooved animals.
How could...

The grip was off Karlsson's ribs now, he and Wennberg stock-still, face-to-face. But not eye-to-eye: Wennberg was trying to see around the side of his head, not to Karlsson's hand which yet was beside his ear as if ready to stroke there, but to Braaf and the rifle.

The mouth of the rifle barrel stayed firm against Wennberg's ear as Braaf spoke. "Not the first one to jig in front of a bullet, Melander wasn't. Or last, either.

"Braaf, wait now." Wennberg labored to suck in breath and speak at the same time. "It's Karlsson, he played us fools. . . Running us blind down this Hell-coast..."

"Right fit or not, he's our only fit." Melander said that once about you, didn't he, Karlsson?"

Karlsson nodded, tried to think through the ache of his ribs, work out what he ought to be saying. But Braaf was doing saying enough:

"Let's think on that, Wennberg. Melander maybe had truth there."
I was the gutwagon man. They didn't have any hay, and these old ewes were thin. We went clear over there on 00 butte to get any grass for them at all. And these ewes was dropping 80 and 90 lambs a day out there.

I worked every horse on the ranch, saddle horses and everything—he wouldn't buy any feed for the horses, their hair was about that long and they were in weak, pulling that heavy wagon in those hills—I'd walk as many as three times a day and get different horses, play them out out there. So I was coming in at almost dark with the last load of lambs, and took them over to the shed and unloaded them. That was my third team of horses I'd played out that day. I was pretty well warped anyway, and still had to drive a mile from the shed to the ranch. And here was old 00 out there, corraling a band of ewes and lambs. I thought, well, to hell with him, and I just kept going. Old 00: Hey, come over here and help me corral these ewes and lambs. Well if he'd asked me I'd probably been fool enough to done it, even though I had put in my day. But yelling at me that way...I said, You go plumb to hell, you old son of a bitch. And I just kept driving.

At the breakfast table, we had our checks in our plate. Mine was a dollar a day short, from what I'd hired out for. I said, what's this, 00? He said, that's your time.
"We could make a wintering of it."

The words halted Karlsson and Braaf in mid-chaw. They eyed across the fire carefully, as if to be sure some daft stranger had not put on Wennberg's beard this morning.

"Keep snug here, we could," the broad man was saying. "You're clever with an axe, Karlsson, why'n't we grapple together a shelter of some sort, wait out this pissy weather?"

Braaf palmed a hand out and up as if to catch rain, gazed questioningly into the air. The sky this day again was as clear as if scoured down to blue base. A moment, it took Wennberg to catch Braaf's mockery.

"Hello swallow you, Braaf. So it's not pissing down rain just now. That only means it will tomorrow and the forty days after." Wennberg paused, evidently finding his way back to his original sally.

"Why not a wintering? Wait till better season, not fight this ocean at its worst..."

Rapidly as he could, Karlsson was rapidly fitting angles to a reply, but meanwhile Braaf chimed, as if to the air:

"Wait for a enowing season the way the Kolosh are, d'you mean?..."
To be around Alec then, you'd have thought nobody in history had known love before. He was inventing it all.
had gone off to Russia requesting that he be relieved of his
governorship—"ill health...family reasons." In truth, a sufficiency
of New Archangel. With a resourceful bit of clerkship, this matter
of the runaway Swedes could slide out of sight into the morass of
inkwork his successor would inherit. For his part, Rosenberg would
reap one further anecdote with which to regale dinner parties in
St. Petersburg.

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

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

"Excellency."

That evening, some twenty
miles downcoast from New Archangel
and a secure eight
beyond the Ozerskoil outpost, the four
canoeists pulled ashore behind a small headland, in a cove snug
as a mountainside tarn.

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

Braaf nodded and ran a swift hand into the supplies stowed
within the canoe. When his hand came up, it held an elegant dark
bottle.
Nobody knows any more that horseback way of life on a trail...

(this, early in ch. 1, is reprised as Jick and Stanley near the ranger station, Jick's mind working back over the family situation as he rides...)
was not going to be good. Because of his ability of handling men and, from time on the Baltic, his tongue's capability with a bit of Russian and spatter of Finnish, and his Gotland knowledge of fish, henceforth Melander was in charge of the crew which salted catches of salmon and herring and halibut for New Archangel's winter larder.

Seven-year men. "The Russians' hornless oxen," as Melander more than once grumbled it.

"Deacon Step-and-a-Half is at it again."

Melander peered with interest along the card-players and conversationists in the workmen's barracks to see where the gibe had flown from. A fresh turn of tongue was all too rare in New Archangel. No himself had just tried out his latest declaration to no one in particular: "A seven-year man is a bladeless knife without a handle, aye?" That had attracted him the anonymous dart, not nearly the first to bounce off his seaman's hide.

These shipmates--Melander corrected himself: barrackmates--were an every-sided lot. Finns and Swedes under this roof, about all they could count in common were their seven years' indenturement and the conviction that they were sounder souls that the Russian workforce in the several neighboring dwellings. The Scandinavians, after all, had been pulled here. Most of the Russian laborers had been shoved; stuffed aboard ship at Okhotsk on the coast of Siberia and pitched across the North Pacific to the Tsar's Alaskan fur field. Be it said,
Stepping out a door somehow seemed to change my father, and the farther he went from a house, the more he seemed at home. You could see him feeling the country when he was out in it. It somehow came into him, a layer just beneath his skin as sod is 

beneath grass. I don't know, maybe it flowed up into him through the space between his toes, but anyhow, the attitude arrived into him.

Thinking about it since then, and going over in my mind how a person arrives into the time he does, I see that my father was of a particular sort of person who are that special generation, the first-born in the new land. The old country, Scotland in this case, was as distant as the North Pole, and the new one, America, was still making itself. Particularly a part of it such as the Montana he was born into and began growing up in. The west seemed to be theirs, that generation's, if they could figure out what to do with it.

Of course the decisions were happening all the while their figuring was going on, and a lot of those decisions came from somewhere else. I suppose it was not possible to see this until about World War One...
between existences. There was this and that to be said for courage and a calm death, but the fact was that there was not the place and audience a canoe chieftain of his years had a right to expect. So if life was tasked with a decent departure, was this one, straddled between the strange tribes of whitehairs and Tsarman?

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

The Kolosh paddlers slid their muskets into the bottom of their canoe. The craft rocked on the water, gentling, a steed of sea cavalry settling into rest.

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

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

"Let the sea eat them."

Shortly before noon, Naval Captain of Second Rank Nikolai Yskovlevich Rosenberg, governor of Russian America, pinched hard at the bridge of his nose in hope of alleviating the aftereffect of the previous night's festivities, decided that no remedy known to man could staunch such aches as were contending within his forehead, sighed, and instructed his secretary to send in the Lutheran pastor.
Even then I had size, my father's long bones the example to mine.
March The Cracked Canoe
I was in the mountains with a one-handed man leaning on a bottle.

"Stanley, this isn't gonna work."

"What's that, Jick?"
stockade, next by these tremendous mountains, and last, the distances to anywhere else of the world.

Melander moved off toward the central street of the settlement and here encountered one of the Company clerks, no doubt on his way to stroll in the Governor's hill garden. Many of the Castle Russians took such a constitutional at evening, any custom of home being paced through more devoutly here than in Russia itself. Melander considered that the man was wasting footsteps; more than beds of pansies and fuchsias were required to sweeten the soul of any Russian. Nonetheless--

"Drastia," the lanky Swede said with a civil nod, and was greeted in turn. Since Melander could not rise at least till invested at New Archangel, he was taking some care to stay level.

This was one of the first lengthening evenings of summer of 1852, the moment of year when New Archangel's dusk began to dawdle on until close onto midnight. The long light copied Swedish summer, so while this slow vesper of the day was the time Melander liked best, it also cast the remindful shadows of all that he had become absent from. His birthland. The sea. And his chosen livelihood. Triple tines of exile. Much to be prodded by.

Only because it afforded the most distance for his restless boots, Melander roved on west through the narrow shoreline crescent of settlement. Past log building after log building; if bulk of timbering were the standard of civilization, New Archangel would have preened grand as Stockholm. Sea-drifter he was, Melander had never got used to this hefty clamped-into-the-wilderness feel of the port-town.
On the Beartooth he spent at least 160 days a year in the saddle, pack horse behind, living always at an elevation of nearly two miles. "That high up, the clouds just drug along the ground and lightning played all around you. A time when I was riding on the Line Creek Plateau I got caught in an electrical storm so strong that when the horses got wet there was a blue flame about three inches round that run almost continually off their ears. I remember that we broke off from the end of the plateau down onto the flat towards the Line Creek ranger station and as we come to the fence around the station the young ranger with me jumped down to open the gate and I hollered to him, "God amighty, man, stand away from that fence." He jumped back and said, "Well, how we gonna get in?" I got down and took a club and knocked the wire off from the top of the gate and drug the gate out of the way with the club. We just got to the station when lightning hit that fence and melted the top wire for about 50 yards either direction. It dropped off in little chunks like you'd cut it up with fencing pliers."
write as if the Depression set in the day Wall Street tripped over itself in 1929 seem not to know it, but Montana had been on rocky
times for ten years by then. The winter of 1919 delivered the stockmen
by the awful winter of 1919.
crippling losses. As Dode Spencer, who had the ranch farthest up
English Creek, used to tell: "I went into that winter with four
thousand head of ewes and by spring they'd evaporated to five hundred."

Trouble never travels lonesome, so about that same time livestock and
crop prices nosedived because of the end of the war in Europe, and
drought and grasshoppers showed up to take over the dry-land farming.

Consequently,

It's not much remembered, but back there in the early Twenties half
the banks in Montana were driven under. You could still see that
right in Gros Ventre—the English Creek Valley National Bank still
doing business, such as it was, there at the main intersection downtown,
and cattycorner across from it the West Pondera Stockman's closed down
and boarded over all those years.

So it was time hope showed up.

"Jick! Set your mouth for it!"

It was supper time, and that was my mother. I remember that all
eating lunch, sitting facing the glassed doors of the patio. When I
was startled when two shapes flashed down onto the patio, one
detached from the blurred pairing, hit the patio door about two feet
beneath the latch, bounced away onto the concrete. The other shape
stayed with it, pummeled and pounced: it was a hawk, about the size
of a crow, tan with patterned chest—in my Field Guide Book, it
appears to be a Swainson's hawk—which had chased a robin.

The hawk sat clenched on its prey for a couple of blinks,
then lifted off with the corpse and flew into the woods at the
back of the house—those forgiving woods, where the birds vanish,
regroup. A tiny pile of feathers remained on the concrete, and
a few sifted down from the sky for a minute or so afterward, apparently
the remainder of aerial combat before the last fatal dive. The
hawk had seemed no more than three times the size of its victim.

The day was pale, sunshiny, birch leaves littering lawn as a
backdrop. I looked down and found I still clutched my sandwich
in my right hand.
especially babysitters with five raisings of children to their credit. Grandma began spending entire days with the small daughters of a family busy with travel, then evenings for other families. When a night came that two stints of work were offered her at once, she eyed Dad: \textbf{Why don't you take this other one, Charlie?} I looked at him for the fight to start. Instead he said, \textit{Yes, and why the hell don't I?}

Through the evenings of winter after that, the two of them regularly went babysitting several times a week. The notion at first embarrassed me; it didn't seem genuine work for grownups, especially for my top-hand father. But I began to see that they both enjoyed the change of task and scene. The household was easier to breathe in when we weren't crammed against each other every moment. The pair of them soon had more babysitting than they could handle, and I took some evenings of it myself. It was, I suppose a way for Dupuyer to lend us a hand, and for us to lend one in turn, not the least of the town's graceful moments in our life.

In that last year of high school, 180 classroom days between me and the world, I began thrashing for ways to go away to college. I did not know it, and it seemed least likely, but the one ally more I needed I met on the football field. I had begun playing the autumn before,
Jick's friendship with Ray Heaney:

yrs before, Ray had come with his father, lumber yd owner on business
with Mac (talking sawmill possbly, perhaps?), and played with Jick while
the men were gone. They didn't get along—traded slobberguts etc insults--
and got in a fistfight. (Jick: besides Mac's build, he and Alec inherited
their father's tendency to be a little too quick with their fists.) But
when Jick begins school, they somehow become friends, and he stays at
their house occasionally; maybe does so again over 4th of July.
Swedes and other outlanders who signed on with the Russian-American
Company's fur-gathering enterprise did so as indentured laborers,
seven-year men. And that our man Melander's name thus is not to be
discovered anywhere among the frontier baronage.

For as

will happen, Melander after pledging to the Russian-American
Company did find his life altered by the alluring new nautical machinery,
but not as hoped. Only seldom the Russians fired up the Nicholas, which
proved to require 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 vessel's name to Old Nick, on the ground
that it consumed fuel at about the rate you might 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 small
Russian navy contingent stationed at New Archangel. Melander's service
aboard the Nicholas occurred whenever the Russian governor, Rosenberg,
took his official retinue on an outing to the hot spring at Ozherskoi,
an outpost south eighteen miles along the coast from Sitka Sound.
In Melander's first Alaskan year this happened precisely twice, and
his sea-time-under-steam totaled six days.

The rest of his workspan? A Russian overseer conferred
assignment on Melander as promptly as the supply schooner vanished
over the horizon on its voyage back to Stockholm and Kronstadt.

"Friend sailor, you are going to give you a chance to dry out your
bones a bit," the overseer began, and Melander knew that what followed
I have been privileged to know a beaver man. I was in high cafe-owning school, boarding with a family in the northern Montana town of --his name, impossibly, was Joe Smith-- Dupuyer. Joe took his meals there, and for four years I chuckled along with his ha-ha-haw. He was the height and build of my father --midway between five feet and six, a hundred twenty-five-thirty-five pounds--but his shoulders lacked my father's squareness, and Joe's face was more wrinkled, hard-used.

He had come out of Minnesota, the son of a preacher, and spent some decades as a sheepherder. With that life, he also took on its habit of spree drinking, coming to town at the end of a season his and blowing time wages in a few weeks of non-stop drunk. During one of these, he woke to find himself in motion, swaying back and forth as mountains sped past him. He was aboard a train for Idaho, having hired out for a job there, been tossed aboard, a bottle of rotgut contemptuously tucked beside him because he would need it when he awoke--and he could remember none of the transaction. His drinking ended there, and he became a sober citizen in double senses of the phrase, ever helpful around Dupuyer, liked, respected.
the rest of her growing years entirely at home. That upbringing of choring for her mother and edging past her father's thunderhead temper left her unsure of herself, but guessing that the world must have something else to offer. So that's the how of it, she would say whenever some new turn of life had shown itself, and she seems about to say it there to the camera eye. It is, all in all, an offering glance for the world, of which she might yet have had a strong gleam four years later as she held her prized daughter and watched the western Montana mountains begin to stand high ahead of the train.

Alongside Bessie, the train window shadowing his face close in beside hers, sits Thomas Abraham Ringer. Housepainter, handyman, wiry Irishman with a hatchet nose and a chin like an axe—last and least, husband. All three Glun children flew as quickly as they could from that narrow home, but Bessie went with one last disfavor from her father. He singled out for her this seldom-do-well Tom Ringer and bent her, at the age of 18, into marrying the man. Gee gosh, a girl like I was who didn't know her own mind—I done it because my pa said it was my way to get by in the world. Tom was twice her age, nearly as old as her father himself, and the one thing he had done exactly right in all his life until then had been not to take on a wife and a family. In fair charity—one half of those who speak of Tom Ringer
It is one of my lost chances, failings of imagination, that I never went with him to his trap-line. Somehow Joe had learned the secret of catching only sizable beaver...

They found him, face-down
remember my pa so stern. I was always scared of him. Now

train tracks, hour upon hour, were leaving always to the past,
to the lend falling away behind the West.

On Bessie's lap a daughter dozes in the train's cradling motion--my mother, Berneta, waking now and again to see the land flying and flying past her six-month-old eyes. She is plump and pretty, and with her full dark hair has begun to look like a small jolly version of a much older girl. A version, that would be, of Bessie herself not long before. On the wall by me is a studio portrait of Bessie when she had reached the age of sixteen or so, posed with the two Krebs sisters who were her best of friends. Out the oval window of photo, the sisters stare down the camera and any lookers beyond it, mouths straight as Bible lines. You would not tease with this pair, nor dare their wrath without an open door behind you. They are iron and granite side by side, and are going to leave some bruises on the world. Beside them, Bessie's look is all the softer, the eyes more open and asking, her face wondering at life instead of taking it on chin-first. She must have had much to wonder at, raised as such an apron-stringed girl, snugged all the more firmly into the family by the one lapse in her father's strictness. John Glun had brooded against a way of schooling which even for in instant could taunt a daughter of his, and after her third year, Bessie was not made to attend again. She spent
The end of the next winter—on the 17th of March of 1898, the exact—Stanley boarded the first train of his life. From someone he had heard about Montana, and a go-ahead new town called Kalispell.

The trip took three days and three nights. The big shoebox full of fried chicken a girlfriend fixed for me didn’t quite last the trip through.” As the train approached the Flathead Valley Stanley became curious as to what kind of country they were getting into. “Just above Columbia Falls I went out on the back platform and stood there all the way to Kalispell, and it was solid timber, the forest whirling past that train. Two or three times, I saw cabins in little clearings. The sight is still clear in my mind because it was early in the morning and each one of those cabins had a little thread of smoke coming out of it like people getting up and starting the first fire.”

Kalispell was bringing itself into existence in a hurry. “You could hear hammers going all over the town.” For the next few years Stanley grew with the town, working mill jobs — driving a sawdust cart, sawfiling, foremaning a lumber piling crew — until the winter of 1902. “Then a fellow came to me and wanted to know if I would manage his outfit that winter; he had a contract for hauling lumber from Lake Blaine into Kalispell. He had three four-horse scissorbill teams and a two-horse team, and the horseman he’d had in charge was inclined
shells and remains of ancient forest-trees that for ages have been buried.

All in all, a vast estuarine pudding in a clay bowl.

One of the few advances since Swan's time has been the amendment of the shallow bay's name from Shoalwater to the less embarrassing Willapa.

When Swan showed up here, more than likely shaking the rain off his hatbrim, Shoalwater Bay's sum of civilization...
to hang around saloons and play poker and let the setup go to hell. So right
that they could hitch up and be on the road by 7. It had been their habit
scissorbill under the keepers to get away from the barn late as 8 or 9 o'clock and then
trot these horses out about 10 miles to Lake Blaine and by the time they got
to the lumber mill there the horses was all warmed up and they stood there and
got cold and of course they were all getting sick and losing flesh. I made
the drivers walk the horses both ways and we never had a sick horse all that
winter.
In the summer of 1916 a big sheep outfit in eastern Washington shipped in five thousand head of sheep to graze the Kootenai. Stanley was in his office at Libby when a telegram came: "Come at once. Sheep dying by hundreds."

He found that the sheep had been unloaded early in the morning, hungry from 18 hours on the train, and allowed to drift onto a flat blooming with death camas and lupine. Stanley sent men to every drug store in the county for pinanginated potash and sulfate of aluminum. Mixing the stuff in wash tubs, he dosed the sheep with the stuff and the sheep man's crew dosed stricken sheep by the hundreds.

Most of the dosed ones survived, but it was too late for about 800 of the others.

Stanley put some of his crew to dragging carcasses on to nearby brush piles and all that night brush and sheep burned on that Kootenai flat.
"I helped draw most of 'em."

This compounded my confusion. "What, were you with the Geological Survey crew?"

Stanley: The look Stanley gave me was the levelest thing in that cabin. "Jick, I was the ranger that set up the Two."

I had heard my father and the other Forest Service men of his age mention some of those original rangers, the ones who were sent out with not much more than the legal description of a million or so acres and orders to transform them into a national forest. Glen Smith down on the Custer, Ellers Koch over on the Bitterroot; the stories of them still were around, refreshed by the comments of the younger rangers wondering how they'd managed to do it. But that Stanley Meixell had been the original ranger of the Two Medicine National Forest, I had never heard a breath of, and that was strange.
The rest of the way to Andy Gustafson's camp I rode with constant looking back over my shoulder at the packs on Bubbles. They never shifted. I did get my mind off them long enough to stop and eat a can of pork and beans, so I'd be able to say I'd had lunch and didn't need feeding by another herder.

The sheep were spread prettily along a timbered draw. (more descript)

Andy Gustafson had no dead sheep, nor any particular complaints, nor even much to say. He did seem puzzled as to why I was tending his camp, even after I explained as best I could, but he evidently took the Norwegian view that as long as his grocery supply was in order, he was not going to pursue philosophy.

Where a day goes in the mountains I don't know, but it was late afternoon by the time I reached the cabin again. Stanley's horses were picketed there, and he emerged to offer me some left-handed help in unsaddling mine.

He noticed the spliced cinch. "See you have to use a little wildwood glue on the outfit."

I grunted something or other to that, Stanley I suppose observing that it was a topic I didn't care to dwell on. Instead, he asked: "How's old Gufferson?"
Ivan Doig was born in 1939 in a small town in Montana. He grew up on ranches and farms along the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains.

He attended Northwestern University and a Ph.D. in history holds two degrees in JSIS from the University of Washington in Seattle, where he now lives.

He has worked on ranches, and as
Norwegian shepherds seemed to come in two varieties, those who couldn't read a word and those who would quit in an instant if you forgot to bring their mail copy of Tidskrift Aftonbladet.
timbered island loomed out on their left. They followed its outer edge intending to turn to shore beyond it. But through the rain-haze they could make out rocks bulking in the water between island and coast, stone knuckles everywhere.

"The island," Karlsson said, and they gratefully put to shore on its inland side.

After the sopping day, a sopping camp.

The canoe men had come in near the south reach of the island, where some high humps of boulder weighted the shore just north of them. They lodged an end of the mast-shelter onto one of these rocks and so kept that corner of the weather out. But others got in, the rain evidently willing to probe toward humankind for however long it took to find some. The men managed to coax a choking fire long enough to heat beans and tea, then gave up on the evening.

Surprise it was, then, when Karlsson woke sometime later and saw that the sky now held stars.
The exodus stories had been coming out of the High Line for years, about the furniture—
tales of loaded jitney trucks with words painted across their boxboards in big, crooked letters: GOODBY OLD DRY and AS FOR HAVRE YOU CAN HAVE 'ER.
Ivan Doig J 61, GJ 62, narrated and appeared in
The fracture of a family is not something that happens at once and then begins to be over with. No, it is like one of those worst bone breaks, you can mend the place, peg it and splint it and work to strengthen it, and while it can be brought to look much as it did before, it is a spot that has to be favored.
and Karlsson had watched to insure that its possessor was scrupulous. On New Archangel's rare warm days, the native sloshed water over the cedar interior to prevent its drying out and cracking; in normal damp weather, heaped woven mats over the craft for shelter. A canoe of fit and style endorsed Karlsson.

Melander and Braaf took turns at casual glances down the shoreline to Karlsson's nominee.

True, the canoe had so sprightly a look that it seemed only to be awaiting the right word of magic before flying off upward. But Melander believed he too knew something of canoes from having paddled a number of times with Kolosh crews to the fishing grounds off the western shorefront of Sitka Sound; indeed, it can be realized now that those journeys were first filaments in the spinning of his decision that seven-yeardom could be fled by water. The fishing canoes were half again the length of this keen-beaked version singled out by Karlsson, and this question of size balked Melander.

Asked his opinion, Braaf mumbled that any canoe was smaller than he preferred.

Karlsson maintained that his nominee had all the capacity they needed. What did Melander have in mind, to stuff the craft like a sausage?

Melander could not resist asking Karlsson if he was arguing that his wondrous canoe was bigger on the inside than on the out.
"Leona, we got nothing against you." Which was only about half true, but I'll delve into that situation a little later. "It's just that, Godamighty, Alec, cattle have gone bust time after time these last years. That way of life just has changed. Whether anybody'll be able to start off from scratch in the cow business and make a go of it, I don't know--"

"Rather have me herdin' sheep up on one of your allotments, would you? There's something to look forward to, shepherding."

My father seemed to consider. "No, I suppose not. It takes a trace of common sense to herd sheep." He said it lightly enough that Alec would have to take it as a joke, but there was a barbed edge to the lightness. "Alec, I just think that whatever the hell you do, you need to bring an education to it these days. That old stuff of banging a living out of this country by sheer force of behavior doesn't work. Hasn't for almost twenty years. This country can outbang any man. Look at 'em along this creek. Coop, Ed Van Bebber, the Busbys, they've just managed to hang on, and they're as good a set of stockmen as you'll find in the whole goddamn state. You think they could have got underway, in years like these?"
Noon. As if it were nothing to yacht along this coast, gulls were drifting up a current over a headland to the south.

... That's a night I don't need to live again. But now there'll be tonight...

Karlsson was studying the rock-cornered shore beneath the gulls, a half-mile or so from the crescent of beach the canoe had put in to at dawn. The men had slept until now, and the afternoon had to be waited through, until the canoe could be launched into the dark again. Meanwhile, that thrust of shore...

... Might be. Just might be. Chance to go shake the bush and find out...

"We've maybe been looking the wrong direction for game," Karlsson mused aloud. "Forest instead of ocean."

"What, then"—Wennberg—"go shooting at fish, are you?"

By now even the blacksmith had thinned, his blockiness planed away to width. Without fresh provisions they all soon would be husks of themselves.
"Last year was better than the ones before. This one looks good."

"And if about five more come good back-to-back, everybody'll be back to where they were almost twenty years ago."
"How far are we going in this?" Braaf this was, his tone suggesting that he for one had gone a plentiful distance.

"Past the whale-stabbers. Unless you want to sail in on them and ask breakfast."
My father finally thought to set down his coffee cup. "Alec, let's keep our shirts on here"--language can be odd; I had a vision just then of us all sitting around the table with our shirts off, double-barreled Leona across from me in full display--
At New Archangel they had known every manner of rain, but none

of it was anything to this. This was as if the sky was trying to

step on you.
Focused as he was on how my parents were going to respond, this philosophical inquiry from my side of the table jangled Alec.

"Because, because we're—we love each other, why the hell do you think?"

"Kind of young to be so certain on that, aren't you?" asked my father.

"We're old enough," Alec said back. And meanwhile gave me a snake-killing look as if I was going to ask old enough for what, but I honestly didn't intend to.

My mother cleaved matters entirely open. "What you're also saying is you intend to stay on at the Double W. To forget about college."

"Yeah. It's what I want to do."

"How you gonna support yourselves on a cow chouser's wages?" came my father's next query.

"You two did, at first."

"We starved out at it, too. Wilson'll let me draw ahead on my wages for a few heifers this fall and winter them with the rest of the outfit's. It'll give us our start."
The Indian arrived at the Astoria customs house with an item and a tale. South from the village his people called Hosett he had gone to hunt seals, but soon sighted instead a great tangle of kelp brought inshore by the tide, and the kelp had seine in with it the body of a white person. Now he had come downcoast aboard a lumber schooner to report of this find. "Tole," the native said, the coastal jargon word for "boy." Not until he pantomimed and pidgined the description of a downy fluff of beard did the customs collector grasp that a grown man was being depicted.

And the Indian had done the disposition, rapidly and buried the corpse in hope that the spirit had not yet got out of it. But had thought first to clip proof for his report. He handed the customs collector a forelock of straw-colored hair.

That the weather since Christmas had been violent against vessels trying to cross the bar into the Columbia River was all too well known to the customs collector. Merrithew, Mindoro, Vandalia, Bordeaux--two barks and two brigs,
How's this, how's that, fine, all right, you bet. If this was the level of sociability that was going to go on, I intended to make some excuse to get back to working on my saddle, the attractions of Leona notwithstanding, and I was trying to gauge whether an early piece of pie could be coaxed from my mother when Alec came right out with:

"We got something to tell you. We're getting married."

This kicked the conversation in the head entirely. My father seemed to have forgotten about the mouthful of coffee he'd just drunk, while my mother looked as if Alec had announced he was going to take a pee in the middle of the table. Alec was trying to watch both of them at once, and Leona was favoring us all with one of her searchlight smiles.

"How come?"

Even yet I don't know why I said that. I mean, I was old enough to know why people got married, there were times, seeing Alec and Leona seemed to savvy more than I actually knew, if that's possible. together, when I savored more than I was comfortable with.
This day, different eyes had been set in their heads. Nothing they saw except the beak of the canoe had sharpness, definite edge, to it. This must have been what it would be like to drift amid the mare's-tail of the sky.

Fog, a gray dew on the air. During a rest-pause Karlsson touched

Wennberg did not like it, but hated the prospect of seasickness more. He dipped his paddle.
"How's cow chousing?" My father was handing the mashed potatoes to Leona, but looking across at Alec.

"All right." Alec meanwhile was presenting the gravy to Leona, before he realized she didn't yet have spuds on her plate. He colored a little, but notched out his jaw and asked back: "How's rangering?"

My father studied the meal traffic piling up around Leona, then replied: "All right."

I had the bright idea this conversation could benefit from my help, so I put in: "I'm ridin' up with Dad tomorrow and the next couple days to count the bands onto the forest. Remember that time, you and I were along with him and Cooper's herder's dog got full of porcupine quills and we both--"

Alec gave me a grin that was tighter than it ought to have been. "Don't let all those sheep put you to sleep," Sprout."

"How do they feed at the Double W?" My mother here. "Leona, take some more ham and pass it to Jick. He goes through food like a one-man army these days." I might have protested that if my plate hadn't been nearly empty, particularly of ham.

"It's--filling," Alec said.
The fog hid all, as if the canoe had been clasped up by a cloud.

Karlsson and Wennberg stopped paddling. They could barely see one another, but each knew that the other now was listening, listening until it seemed an ear must narrow as a squinting eye would. If the ocean was pushing them through this blindness onto tidal rocks...

But the slosh around them stayed steady, no drum of rock behind it, and the canoe continued to move.
"How's the buttermilk business?" my father asked Leona. Her parents, the Tracys, ran the creamery in Gros Ventre...

"Just fine," Leona said with her flash of smile. She seemed to be on the brink of saying something more, then asked, "But then just passed that smile alone to the rest of us. She had a knack of that, getting by with some pleasantry then lighting up the room so you thought amounted to more than it did.

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

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

"Excellency."

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

"I did happen to hear the, ah, rumor."
By the time I came back with the chair which had been serving
as my nightstand, Alec and Leona were arriving through the doorway.

They were a pair to see. Alec was even taller than my father...

He wasn't bowlegged, but had begun to stand in that shambly way
cowboys do, legs a little farther apart than they need to be as if
hoping a horse will trot in there between them.

Leona too was a horseperson, I guess you'd call it these days.

Right now, though, in my mother's kitchen, her role was to be milk
and honey. Which she also was good at. There seemed to be a kind
of pause whenever Leona arrived somewhere, a heartbeat or two during
which everyone seemed to weigh whether her hair could really
be so gold, whether her figure lived up to what it advertised. I
noticed once that her chin was pointier than I like, but by the time
any male had looked Leona over enough to reach that site, he was
prepared to discount that and a lot more.
"Back there at the tide trough..."

Karlsson waited, impassive.

"If I'd been to the right of you and Braaf to the left, I'd've gone into that millrace instead of him."

... If that'd been, my ears would get rest these nights...

Aloud: "If the moon were window we could see up angels' nighties, too.

away
Lay it up, Wennberg." Less than anything did Karlsson want to discuss
the perishing of Braaf. "Tomorrow paddles will still fit our
hands, and the canoe will still fit into the ocean. Live by that."

Karlsson moved his head from side to side. He was a boulder
with a beard now. "You can wash your mind of such matters, Karlsson.
I can't. Death this side of me and then that, I have to think on it.
See through to why I was let live."

"Maybe God's aim is bad."

"No, got to be more to it than that." Wennberg would not be
swerved. "Maybe like sheep and goats... \textit{And He shall set the}

sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left..." No,

Braaf
\textit{was to the right...}"

"Wennberg. Stow it."
I went on in to wash up, and I suppose was a little more
dramatic than I had to be by waiting until I'd dippered water into
the basin and added hot from the kettle before I announced, "Company."

My mother's eyebrows drew into that alignment that let you know
you had all of her attention and had better be worth it, and my
father looked up from where he was going over paperwork about the
grazers' allotments.

"Alec and Leona," I reported, "Riding like the first one here
gets to kiss the other one." (My mother said, "You seem to know a lot about it," Actually, that sort of thing
was starting to occur to me. I was fourteen. Fourteen, hard on to
fifteen, as I once heard one of the beerhounds in the Misty bar in
Gros Ventre describe that age. But there wasn't any of that I was

going to confide to my mother, who now instructed: "When you're done
there, you'd better bring in that spare chair from your bedroom."

She meanwhile put a stick of wood in the kitchen range and made
some rearrangement of the pots and pans which held supper.
In truth, fen country, trying to decide whether to remain marsh
or to danken into bayou. Tide, stream, current, seep, all were
steadily at work on the decision, sometimes almost within splash
of each other. During the sleep of Karlsson and Wennberg, this
bay's rivers headdn were flowing into themselves, turned
backwards by the tide advancing between their banks; for some hundreds

Wennberg peered earnestly through the firelight to Karlsson.

"You know what the parson'd say, about all this."

"No, and I don't give a . . ."

"They'd say I'm being put to test. All this, bedamned coast, you other

three, Koloshy. . ." Just now a thought could be seen to surprise

Wennberg: "Maybe even you, too, Karlsson! Being put to test!"

his
proclamation of eligibility did not noticeably enthuse

Karlsson. "Wennberg, I know at least this. We're not playing

whist with God along this coast. Either we paddle to the place

Astoria or die in the try. One or other. Just that."

Wennberg shook his head. Not, as it turned out, against
Actually, our family was scraping along better than many. Even though during the worst years the Forest Service laid off some rangers--Hoovered them, the saying went--my father wasn't among them. True, his salary was chopped from 000 to 000 and Christ only knew when it might ever go back up again, but we were getting by. Not much extra, but getting by. But

"Jick! Set your mouth for it!"

It was suppertime, and that was my mother. I remember that all this began right at the start of June because I was working on my saddle, readying to ride up with my father on a counting trip the next morning, and her call brought me out of the barn just as the pair of them, Alec and Leona, came galloping into view. That is, I would have known Alec as far as I could see him by the way he rode. Leona, had to be somewhat nearer before I could verify her by the blouseful.

INSERT: Probably I can even safely say what the weather was, one of those tag-end days under the Rockies when...
Karlsson aimed inland, off the mud of the tideflat. When he reached sand and made his turn north, now he was wallowing through dune grass high as his waist. He pushed it aside as he trudged, until he became aware of the sharpnesses biting at his hands.

To stop the stabs he put one hand inside his rainshirt and held the other atop it, woodsman's habit against brush.

The whetted grass was on all sides of him now, color of a faded rye field, lines of these sown dunes rolling parallel with the bay. Karlsson tramped north until it came through to him that the footing was wavering, creeping, in front of him. A slow crawl like tan snakes: sand blowing in ropey slinking patterns. He was out of the dune grass, water lay a tillable width in front of him.
"We were dehorning these Texas steers one
ornery sonofabitch of a
time. There was one old buckskin steer we never could get into the corral with

After so long,
the rest. So the foreman said he'd pay five dollars for anyone that would
snot-nose kid
bring this steer in. So another man and I decided we'd just bring him in.

We come onto him about five miles away from the corral all by himself, and he
was really on the prod. Tried to drive him and couldn't. So we just thought
we'd rope him and drag him in. Then we got to thinking, five miles is quite a
ain't it?
loosed out
drag. So we each took our lariat, about 15-20 feet of it, and took turns to
took
get out in front of him and pop him on the nose with that rope and he'd make a
big run at us and we'd dodge out of his way, and he choused us back toward the
corrail that way. We finally got up within about a quarter of a mile of the
dehorning, then each of us roped an end and tied him down and went into the
hitched up
boated
in high old style.
ranch and got a stone boat and loaded him on and took him in. The foreman

was waiting for us with five silver dollars in his hand."
Fresh dollars in his pocket, Swan is found again at Shoalwater at the start of summer, 1854. For the first of numerous times in his life, he now wangled a brief, modest niche in the federal payroll. He was appointed assistant customs collector, for that portion of the coast north of the Columbia, including Shoalwater Bay and Gray's Harbor, to Cape Flattery; the duties of the office being to report all vessels arriving at or departing from Shoal-water Bay, and to keep a diligent watch on the coast to see that none of the Russian or Hudson Bay Companies' vessels came around either for smuggling or trading with the Indians.

Since this comprised an all-but-empty stretch of shore, with only the lackadaisical oysterers at Shoalwater, a few stump farmers and sawmillers up around Grays Harbor, and the tiny drowsing tribal settlements at a few river mouths, Swan's precinct seems to have been spectacularly free of smuggling prospects. The only time he is on record as having had to exert himself was when the Indians, as a joke, lured him several days up the coast to check on a vessel which turned out to be a U.S. Geological Survey steamship. Swan being Swan, he did not much mind the futile jaunt: So far as related to smuggling, I had walked sixty miles up the beach for no purpose, but I did not regret having started, as I had seen a line of coast which few, if any, white men had been over before.
Stanley Meixell came out of Missouri, off a farm east of St. Joe in Daviess County. The summer he turned thirteen, he encountered the down-row of corn—that tumbled line of cornstalks knocked over by the harvest wagon as it straddled its way through the field.

The youngest of the crew always was put on the down-row and Stanley was the last of five Meixell boys; so ahead of him stretched a green gauntlet of down-row summers, except that by the end of the sweltering first day of stooping and ferreting for the ears of corn, he reached a decision about further Missouri life. Within the week he had headed to the high plains of Kansas.

Four or five years of ranch jobs ensued, and it was there Stanley got his reputation for determination.
He hesitated in that job, and at the firm's dockside office in San Francisco, for only a matter of weeks, then signed on as the purser of a schooner bound for Hawaii to take on a cargo of potatoes.

Why he so promptly went sailing off for spuds is not known, but the jaunt into the Pacific seems to have been instructive enough. Swan managed to linger at Lahaina for twenty-five days, and one of his rare surviving letters to Matilda gives a dozen pages of blunderbuss observations of the islands and islanders... on great occasions or when the white men will pay the expenses they get up a feast called a Lu wow... This Lu wow consists of a series of Baked dishes such as Dogs Hogs Turkeys fowls fish Fruits and Greens... Their native dances being prohibited are only given by stealth or by express invitation of the whites. They are called Hoolah hoolah. I was desirous of seeing one... The natives all call themselves miconaree or missionary which is the term they use to express their ideas of Christianity... there are but very few really sincere & devout persons among them. and are mostly like one I saw in Mr. Bolles store, who was cutting up some capers, when Mr B remarked, I thought you was a missionary. Yes said the fellow pointing to his mouth "me miconary here, all rest no miconary."

Say for Swan, however, that censorious as he sometimes
The line cabin was just outside the forest boundary, through a fence, and I climbed off to open the gate.

I was reaching for the top wire hoop when Stanley yelled, "Get away from that!" I jumped back as if shot, looking around to see what had roused him.

"Get a stick and knock it open with that," he instructed. "If you're touching that wire and lightning hits that fence, I'll have fried Jick for supper."

I humored him, tapping the hoop off the top of the gate stick and then flipping the gate off to one side the way you might flip a big snake.
town in the manner that the spire and dome crown the cathedral, the peaks are precisely those a child would draw. Sharp tall pyramids of forest, occasionally a lesser summit round as a cannonball for comparison's sake. Topknots of snow show here and there, but the color everywhere else on these stretching peaks is the black-green which only a northern coastal fir forest enmixes.

As Karlsson begins hewing pine at the shipyard, Braaf materializes at the southwestern extent of the settlement, beside the eldermost of two schooner-hulks beached there. When Braaf arrived to New Archangel and it became evident that he was not, as listed on one manifest, a shipwright, nor, as supposed on another item of record, a shoemaker, and Braaf with shy innocence denied knowing how such misunderstandings possibly could have come about, a perplexed Russian-American Company clerk assigned him to the readiest unskilled job, as a cook's helper. Daily Braaf manages to use this livelihood to manufacture free time for himself, much of it spent hiding out somewhere within this maritime carcass. The hulk neighboring it yet is in service as a cannon battery aimed into the Kolosh village, but dry rot has made a casualty of this vessel of Braaf's. He slips through a gangway carpentered into the ship's hull when it became a storehouse, creeps to the forecastle, and within a particular one of the several stave-sprung barrels there makes a deposit, a walrus-ivory snuffbox which hitherto was the possession of a Russian quartermaster. Then, per Melander's instructions, Braaf begins to measure by
Yet, I didn't want anyone coming to my rescue. There was that
about this damn-in-between age, too. I wondered instead if I could
contrive the cinch back together somehow.

A search of Bubbles and the packs didn't produce any hope. Then
I got to looking myself over. A bootlace might do it.

With my jackknife, I punched holes in both pieces of the cinch, then threaded the
bootlace back and forth and tied it to make a splice. Bubbles'
standard of behavior occurred to me, I made more holes farther along
each part of the cinch and wove in another splice, for safety's sake.

It took all of the lace and I now had one boot gaping open at the top
like an unbuckled overshoe, but the cinch looked as if it would hold.

Now there was just the matter of getting Bubbles back up where
he had launched from. That was probably a twenty-minute fight-and-
drag, though it seemed some hours. Bubbles would take a step and
balk. Balk again, and let himself slide back
down the slope a little. I at last got his head level with the
trail, and when he saw it, he pranced up onto it as if it was his
own idea.
dressing scrofulous sores syringing out sore ears, bathing sore eyes and bandaging up wounds. Then round to visit patients. By this time it is eleven o'clock and I then sit down to write, or if any children come in, try to teach them. And with the exception of a walk to Jones or Jordans, keep in the house all the time so as to be ready either as teacher or physician.
I spent a strong hour being furious with my father before it occurred to me to wonder just how he ought to have alerted me to Stanley’s condition.

Cleared his throat and said, "Stanley, excuse us, but Jick and I got something to discuss a matter to talk over here in the bushes, we’ll be right back"?

Neither of those
None of it seemed to be what could be called etiquette, and that left me with the disturbing notion that maybe it’d been up to me to see the situation for myself. Which gave me another hour or so to chew on, trying to figure out how I was supposed to follow
Day five

Christmas. Carol steps from the ramp of the airplane at 6:03 p.m., five air hours from New Jersey. Swan in his lifetime managed to go from one coast of America to the other a total of five times. In the fourteen years of our marriage, Carol and I have crisscrossed the continent on visits or business so many times we have lost count.

The pun I have been saving for days—So you're the Christmas Carol?—draws her groan and grin. We hold each other, amid the community of hugs of families re-uniting. The New Jersey report is good: her parents are in health, and chipper. On a winter day in 1860, the mail off a revenue cutter calling at Neah Bay brought Swan news of the death of both his mother and his wife. Next words in the diary:

With aching, breaking heart we must submit and say, 'Thy will be done.' But oh, how hard.

Our car enters the freeway aqueduct of headlights flowing north to the city. We are to stop for Christmas dinner at the home of friends. On the table, we can predict, will be sauerkraut from her Baltimore, pecan pie from his Texas.

Christmas Day of 1861, Swan's first at Neah Bay and with two other white men for gustatory company, Swan seriously set to work at the business of holiday dinner. Duck stew and roast goose he produced, then undertook the gamble of the day. That autumn when the Makahs bestowed a chunk of whale
Our second day out was a lot like the first, although mountain
days are never quite identical. Vic Haugland's sheep were late,
I don't know whether because of a slow start by the herder or if
they just were reluctant. If you tried to follow some exact time
when you worked with sheep, you would drive yourself crazy. While
we were waiting, my father said he would go have a look at the
timber (for brush as fire hazard, for ex?)...
I took out my jackknife and put my initials into the fallen 00
log I was sitting on: J McC. That was absorbing, but after a while
I heard the first blats of the Haugland sheep, and went down the
the timber to help bring them to the counting vee. Vic Haugland
saw me and called, "Mornin', Jick. That father of yours come to
his senses and turn his job over to you?"
"He's inspectin' timber..."
The three of us, Vic and his herder and I, shoved the sheep
on up the mountain slope. It took a while, because up is not a
direction sheep particularly like to go, at least at someone else's
suggestion.
Plump flotsam on the outmost of shore, the seals were there. So was a new style of coast to any the men had seen yet. Having clambered downbeach to the point, the three of them were at the inshore edge of a rock shelf high and flat as a quay—although no one but nature would employ a quay some two hundred paces wide and twice that in length. In the blue and brown morning, the Pacific tossing bright around the somber rock this face of the coast, the huge queer natural wharf lay thinly sheathed with wet, like puddles after rain.

By now Braaf had tides in his bones alongside the weather. "The high draws all this, then," he nodded the attention of Karlsson and Wennberg to the remnant pools. "We'll need be quick." Even as said so, earliest waves of the incoming tide tried to leg themselves up over the seaward edge of the rock quay.

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

Onto the tidal plateau he led the other two, to where a formation the height and outline of a ketch sail bladed up. Beside this prorg, from view of the seal herd, Karlsson studied out ambush. "To the right, close by Karlsson and Wennberg and Braaf, the ocean with undreamable patience had..."
Autumn, in a sense, was the onset of a McCaskill year. School of course started then, which accounted for the next many months for Alec and me. What people would be if born with schooling already in our heads, or could learn it in a single stint of months instead of stint after stint filling twelve years, I don't just know. More independent of each other, maybe, and that isn't always to the good. But anyway, Alec and I went into a different world when school began. My father I think did too, because then we became part-time sons. Sons on our way into our own lives, eventually out of his. Which possibly accounts almost as if making sure he at least had it left for the way he would rework the Two each autumn, A ranger is supposed to inspect the range conditions at the end of the grazing season, my father all but X-rayed the Two. And when the bands of sheep trailed down, he was on hand to look them over, talk with the herdsmen, the ranchers, the lamb buyers. I suppose it was the time of year when he could tot up his job, see the results of his rangering; in a man who sometimes seemed doubtful whether his life totted up to all it should, that must have been a necessary time.
And when the lurch of argument and temblors of predicament at last shook the two men silent, Karlsson knew he had to begin again. And did.

"Can't paddle in daylight, you say yesterday," Wennberg said
	somewhere between bafflement and fury. "Now it's can't paddle at night. Tell me this one thing, Karlsson. This one Goddamned thing.

Where're you going to find us hours that aren't one or other, day or night? Whistle up your ass for them, are you?"

"Dusk." Karlsson had repeated it carefully. "Dusk, Wennberg. We need make a short runs of it, until we figure we're clear of any Koloshes along here. Just the two of us paddling, we'll need learn about that, too. So we've got to. Steal enough twilight to paddle an hour, maybe two, we can. Whatever we make is gain toward Astoria."

Now, the day stepping down toward dark, Wennberg sighed dismally, looked to the ocean, gray and steadily grayer, as though it were dishwasher and he were being asked to drink it at a swallow.

"Wennberg, we've got to."
Spring is an uneven time on the Two. First of all, you can't be sure when it's going to arrive, or if it's going to stay when it does. More than a few times, I have known mid-May snowfalls, the damp heavy ones, to hit the country. That they are perilous to the lambs and calves but also are great grass-bringers is the usual sort of one hand this, on the other hand that, situation. My father seemed to green up with the country, though. Paperwork he had avoided all winter would get tackled and disposed of. Any of Creek station received a going-over—saddles, bridles, pack saddles, fire equipment...

And all through spring, he would read the mountains. Watch the snow level along the peaks: how fast the drifts were melting. Kept an eye on English Creek, to see how high it was day by day. Kept track of the wildlife, when the deer started back up, how soon the pile of black crap would show that bears were out of hibernation.

The mountains are their own almanac, you might say. The Two seemed to us a special edition, positioned as it was along the east slope of the divide of the continent, its water and welfare touching out to the plains...
a seal which lay a bit inshore from the others, a young bachelor, bullied into solitude by the bull of the herd.

"Tickle luck's chin," Brøaf said softly as Karlsson aimed.

"Or it's smoke tonight," Wennberg muttered.
Only the northmost part of the national forest is actually in the vicinity of the Two Medicine river. The forest joins onto the southern boundary of Glacier National Park, and fits between the Continental Divide and the Blackfeet Reservation up there...

I suppose it is just the ring of the words that has carried the name south. The derivation as I've heard it is that the Blackfeet made their medicine lodge two years in a row in the valley near the lake, and the name carried from there. However it came to be, it is an interesting piece of language, I think.
"Let's get back to the beach before I go chasing raindrops myself."

Melander discovered from the summit that the arc of beach continued some miles north eastward, to Hecate Strait. This intelligence turned into taunt, however, by the time he and Karlsson returned to the campsite. A stiff wind was pushing in off Kaigani. Not wanting a repeat of the crossing they had just endured, the canoemen sat to wait out the bluster.

Braaf scuffed a boot against something in the sand, close by where the other three sat sheltered. A dead loon, its bill thrust ahead like a bayonet, one checkered wing stiffly cocked a bit as though readying to fly, the rest of the body beneath the beach surface.

"Buried as Bering," said Melander.

"Means what?" queried Braaf.

"It's something the Russian navy men say. Bering was a skipper, an old sir, first one into the islands up where the Aleuts come from. He was sailing in the Tsar's hire, a ship called the Saint Peter. A true Russian vessel, leaky as a basket. Somewhere up there among the Aleuts they got themselves wintered in. Those islands don't have a whisker of timber, so Bering and his crew dug into sandhills, pulled over sail canvas for roof. Lived in burrows like lemmings, aye? Lived till they died, at least, and then, the Rooski tell it, foxes would come into camp and gobble the bodies. Bering himself took frail
He of course took the lead rope with him, and me at the end of it like a kite on a string. I can't say how far downhill I lit, but I was in the air long enough to get good and worried. I landed standing up, though. Standing about ankle-deep in the sidehill which had been softened by all the rain.

A horse's eyes are big anyway, but I swear Pony's were the size of headlights as she peered over the rim of the trail at Bubbles and me. "Easy, girl!" I called to her. All I needed next was for Pony to get excited, pull her reins loose from that stump and quit the country, leaving me down here with this tangled-up packhorse. "Easy, Pony! Everything's gonna be--just dandy."

Now I tried to sort out the situation. Bubbles still was floundering around a little below me and snorting a series of alarms. He too was on his feet, though. The main damage I could see anywhere was a gash where a side of the pack had snagged on something on the way down. Sugar or flour was trickling from that, but it looked as if I could move a crossrope over enough to hold the slit closed.

I gave Bubbles a general cussing, meanwhile working along the lead rope until I could reach his neck. I patted my way back from there,
quarter million, and James Gilchrist Swan long since in the
sum.

The many weeks to round Cape Horn in 1850, the long
climbing voyage along the Pacific shores, arrival: and then
Swan was like a good many of us ever since in not quite
knowing what to make of California. I am reminded that only
months ago Carol and I drove casually through the Sierra
Nevada foothills where the gold towns had blossomed and found
all rivers bucking in high white fury and daily reports of
rafting Californians drowning themselves. "Damn river is like
Niagara Falls laid out flat," somebody complained, and so
the waters of the lode country all looked. To the annals of
exasperation about forest fires, earthquake and drought
heard during our previous California journeys we now added
crazed streams, and wondered to one another when the place
he was trying to homestead with the old whaling captain,
Purrington. The captain was famous for cooking every thing
that had ever lived. We had eaten of young eagles, hawks,
owls, lynx, beaver, seal, otter, gulls, pelican, and, finally,
wound up with crow; and the crow was the worst of the lot.
The captain once tried to bake a skunk, but, not having properly

by crews which had swarmed to the goldstrikes.

Swan himself completed the pilgrimage up the Sacramento
to the mining camps, but only as a purser on a river steamer.
to get to the ruptured place on the pack.

When I put my hand onto the canvas, the pack moved a bit. All the load on Bubbles' back moved a bit. I swore “Son of a goddamn sonofabitch,” I said. It was either that or must have figured I was start crying, and I was moving out of the crying age into the cussing one.

downhill

Bubbles' excursion had broken the lash cinch, the one that holds the packs into place. So I had a packhorse still in one piece—I could have testified fluently right then that Bubbles was such an ornery but no way to secure the load onto him. I would have to ride somewhere for a new cinch, or get it repaired.

My choices were bad and worse. Stanley was at the other herder's and his thirst both the way they were, I wasn't sure sheep camp by now, and with his hand the way it was, might not be— he would be much of a repairer anyway. Or I could get on Pony, head back down the trail all the way to the English Creek station, and tell my father to come mend the fix he'd pitched me into.

That last notion had appeal of a sort. I would be rid of Stanley and responsibility for him. I'd done what I could, it was not my fault that Bubbles had schottisched off a mountaintop.
the Columbia, including Shoalwater Bay and Gray's Harbor, to Cape Flattery; the duties of the office being to report all vessels arriving at or departing from Shoalwater Bay, and to keep a diligent watch on the coast to see that none of the Russian or Hudson Bay Companies' vessels came around either for smuggling or trading with the Indians.

Since this comprised an all-but-empty stretch of shore, with only the lackadaisical oysterers at Shoalwater, a few stump farmers and sawmillers up around Grays Harbor, and the tiny drowsing tribal settlements at a few river mouths, Swan's precinct seems to have been spectacularly free of smuggling prospects. The only time he is on record as having had to exert himself was when the Indians, as a joke, lured him several days up the coast to check on a vessel which turned out to be a U.S. Geological Survey steamship. Swan being Swan, he did not much mind the futile jaunt: So far as related to smuggling, I had walked sixty miles up the beach for no purpose, but I did not regret having started, as I had seen a line of coast which few, if any, white men had been over before.

On January eleven, his forty-sixth birthday, Swan entered
Out of his experience, Stanley testified that he'd rather work with sheepherders than cowboys. "You might find one that's crazy now and then, but at least they ain't so likely to be ornery sonsabitches."

I wondered. If Fred Bant was representative, sheepherders didn't seem to be any bargains of hospitality either.
As the headlights felt out the thin route between driftwood debris and crashing waves, our Coast Guardsman bucked the vehicle through cloud upon cloud of spume drifting thigh-deep on the beach. The journey was like being seated in a small plane as it sliced among puffy overcast.

From that night I have the sense of what the early pilots must have felt, Saint-Exupery's Saint-Exupery's men aloft with the night mail over Patagonia, avid for one vagrant ray of light...even the flicker of an inn-lamp--of little help indeed yet shining like a beacon, earnest of the earth..." We had our ray of light, leading us to find reliable winks, but even it could not see into our foaming route for us.

At last at the lighthouse, with the motor cut, no next encounter between four-wheel-drive and fat driftlog having been ordained, we breathed out and climbed forth to the Dungeness sand for our weekend stay.

Two moments stand in my memory from the next day. The first was seeing the light itself, coming onto the fact of its art here on a ledge of sand and upcast wood. What I had expected perhaps was something like some metallic unfathomable a celestial spotlight, a modern capsule of intense power: not a seventy-five-year-old concoction of prisms which took just one thousand-watt bulb
"How long's this going to take?"

"Well, you see what we got into yesterday with Frank Dent. Could take a day a piece for these other two herders, too."

"What about if we split up? Each go to one herder today?"

Stanley considered. "I guess that'd work. Which yahoo do you want, Gufferson or Preston Rozier?"

I thought on that. Preston Rozier was a young herder... a long-timer in the Two country. He was savvy enough to let the bands get mixed...

"I'll take Andy."

"Okay. Let's go see sheepherders."

The drawback to my choice was that Andy's supplies were in the pack animal rig that went on Bubbles. I stayed well clear of his hooves while getting the packsacks roped on, and Pony and I headed west, Bubbles grudgingly behind us, as Stanley went north toward Preston's camp."
Melander soothingly agreed it was an understandable ambition, and laudable too, but no. He had thought the issue through and through, and the death of a valued smith such as Wennberg, especially when the killing would have to be achieved here within the fort, would breed more questions than it was worth. "Besides, he is a hill bull for strength. We can use him."

Karlsson squinted in reflection, then said that what galled him was to be at Wennberg’s mercy in any way. What if Wennberg took it into his narrow bull mind to betray them to the Russians for a reward?

Aye, Melander concurred, that was the very problem to be grappled. "We shall have to set a snare for Mister Blacksmith."

A few nights later, their first time as four.

Karlsson openly appraised Wennberg as if the blacksmith were marrying into the family. Their newcomer was both hefty and wide, like a cut of very broad plank. An unexpectedness atop his girth was the fluffy set of sideburns—light brown, as against the blondness of the other three Swedes—which framed his face all the way down to where his jaw joined his neck. Except for young dandies among the Russian officers no one else of New Archangel sported such feathery sidewhiskers, but then it would be assumed that no one either was going to invoke foppery against this walking slab of brawn. A time or two Wennberg had re-edged an axe for Karlsson, but Karlsson was a little more of him than those spaced hammerblows onto red metal. He found it interesting that the man was amounting to so much more than arm.
Somewhere out back, Mac knew, there would be a wool sack hanging from a tree limb. The bottom of the sack would be in a bucket of water, and within the sack, being cooled by the water as it wicked up through the burlap, would be a hind quarter of venison. Good Help Hebner was known to prefer his deer the way some people liked their eggs—poached. The forest larder was the certain part of the situation; the question part of it was where the next square meal for the Hebner kids would come from if Good Help were shut away for his deer proclivities, and that was the part Mac had never been able to answer.
The next morning, the twenty-third of July, 1864, Swan intended to go out with Peter and sketch his way along the Ozette shoreline, but awoke instead to heavy fog. He and the Makahs prepared instead to hike back to Alava. I had accomplished two things. I had proved the existence of a lake and had made a sketch of a portion and as I was the first white man who had ever seen this sheet of water I concluded I would might take some other opportunity when I had white companions with me and make a more thorough survey. The trailside brush was saturated from the fog; by the time Swan was back to the coast he was as well drenched as if I had been overboard.
The Hebner place looked as if a demolition crew was working on it and
had just taken a break for lunch. It was said locally that nothing held up
the Hebner barn but wind. Good Help Hebner himself was more than a little
ramshackle, one bib of his overalls perpetually torn loose and flapping across
his face abristle with
a shoulder, a gray-white grizzle of whiskers which mysteriously never matured
into a beard. Years back, Hebner unexpectedly had volunteered for the Two
Medicine roundup, and the first morning hoisted himself onto an iron gray
pony which promptly slung him off and then tried to pound him apart. Hebner
proved elusive time and again the furious horse missed the rolling ball of
man on the ground under it, until one of Ben English’s cowboys reached in,
grabbed a Hebner ankle, and snaked him out under the corral poles. Hebner
had got to his feet, looked around at the crowd, and declared "Well, I didn’t
had some Good Help gettin’ out of that, didn’t I?" The nickname
stuck partly because of the story and partly because Hebner was of such
thoroughgoing inutility.
In the middle of the barnyard, a defeated looking gray mare stood with two of the Hebner boys astraddle its sway back. The front one was kicking the mare heartily in the ribs and piping, "Giddyup, goddamn you horse, giddyup."

Good Help yelled across the yard, "Giddyup, hell, the pair of you giddy off and giddy over to the woodpile."
"Morning, ranger. Hello, Jick." Good Help had materialized behind the screen door of the log house. "Ought to have been paying attention to the world so I could have seen you coming and got some coffee on."

"Thanks anyway," said my father who had heard years of Hebner protocol and never yet seen a cup of coffee out of it. "We're just dropping off some baking."

Just then commotion began in front of the barn. The front boy atop the old horse was whacking her alongside the neck with the reins, while the boy behind him was kicking the mount heartily in the ribs and piping, "Giddyup, goddamn you horse, giddyup."

Good Help yelled across the yard, "Giddyup, hell, the pair of you giddy off and giddy over to the woodpile!" We all watched for the effect of this on the two would-be jockeys, and when there was none, Good Help addressed my father through the screen door again:

"Ought to have taken that pair out and drowned them with the last batch of kittens, way they behave. I don't know what's got into kids these days."
Dear Tom--

Celebrated much of the Memorial Day weekend by going thru page proofs, and a celebration it was. The book looks dandy, reads better to me than I remember having written it (must be the alchemy of your editing). A chevron on all our sleeves, I say.

As to crx, they're few, and only one semi-critical--one of those nightmare dreads which came true, the compositor mucking up a line of the acknowledgments on p. 279 when he supposedly was correcting another. I've left paper clips in where I caught things, but fyi here's the list as well:

1. the word "chevron" on p. 279 as "chevron" not "chevroner"
2. the word "helter" on p. 279 as "helter" not "heltered"
"I don't mind Good Help snitching a deer every so often," my father put it, "or even that he's so damn lazy he can barely breathe. But when he starts in on his oughtobiography--how he ought to have been this, ought to have been that,
Not since taking their quit of New Archangel had they paddled at night, and the memory of that stint did not go far to reassure anybody. Ordinarily dark was Braaf's time, the thief's apprentice; but here in the canoe with blackness around, Karlsson could sense Braaf's distrust of the situation, feel how his paddling grew more tentative, grudging, than ever. Wennberg meantime seemed in every hurry to yank them through the night single-handed; his paddling was near-flail.

Karlsson drew a deep breath, exhaled exasperation carefully, and decreed:

"Hold up, the both of you. We need to beat our wings together. At my word, do your stroke. Now...now...now...

The night Pacific is little at all like the day's. With the demarking line of horizon unseeable, the ocean draws up dimension from its deeps, sends its spreading, distending, perhaps away into some meld with the sky itself. If stars ever kindle out there on the wavetops, we need not be much surprised. And all the while every hazard, rock, shoal, reef, shelf, snag, is whetted by the solid dark.

In their watch for collision, Wennberg and Braaf and Karlsson stare tunnels into the black.
Where horses were concerned, my father's imagination took a
vacation. A black horse he invariably named Coaly, a sorrel Red.

Currently he was riding a big dun gelding whose yellow color had inspired

\[\text{legged}\]

the name Mouse. I was on a short, high-legged mare called Pony. Frankly, among

\[\text{among}\]

my hopes for growing up was that I would get a more substantial horse out of it.
on just about any frontier task, Swan did his part to fulfill the reputation. The tribal people arrive to him with complaints of headache or rheumatism; he doctors then with a liniment concocted of ammonia and whale oil, which was considered, from its pungency, to be very potent.

All too soon, Swan's doctoring stopped being a jest. One evening he noticed that the face and neck of one of the Chinook women were covered with little spots like flea-bites. I said to Russell, "This woman has either got the small-pox or measles." Smallpox it was, and that frontier plague tore like an assassin through the Shoalwater community. Swan did what nursing he could; all his life he would show a fine compassionate touch for that task. But several of the natives died, Russell and a number of other whites were laid low for weeks. Somehow Swan himself went untouched. I trust, he wrote somberly afterward, I may not be obliged to pass through such another trial.

Life at Shoalwater thereafter proved to be seldom dull, hardly ever strenuous. In the spring of 1853, when the region north of the Columbia River was hived off from Oregon to become Washington Territory, several of the Shoalwater oyster-boys were inspired to file for land claims. Swan in May selected a site at the mouth of what is now the Bone River--the Querquelin, it was called by the Indians: Mouse River--on the bay's northeastern shore. Reasoning that the absence of a wife by
The sky split white outside the cabin. The crack of thunder
I honestly felt as much as I heard it: a jolt through the air.

"Now that," Stanley observed, "was a whiz too close."

I believe my hair was on end, but Stanley didn't seem ruffled.

"The quick hand of God, my ma used to say."

---

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---
to the harbor’s spruce islands and the sudden spearing mountains
behind the settlement, the usual morning wind off the bay lazèd
to a breeze, to approach Karlsson before work call. His thought
was that if Karlsson would consider escape on the most silken of
New Archangel’s days, he truly was ready as ready.

"Take our tea outside the stockade, why don’t we? The farther
you get from the Russians, the better it tastes."

Tin mugs in hand, the two of them sauntered past the sentry
at the opened gateway of the stockade and went to the edge of the
native village which extended in a single-file march of dwellings far
along the shoreline.

As Melander and Karlsson stood and sipped, a dozen natives
emerged from one of the nearest longhouses, men and women together
and all naked, and waded casually into the bay to bathe.

"Those canoes are longer then they look, aye?" Melander began,
motioning to the natives’ cedar shells in a row on the beach before
them; the line of lithe craft, like sea creatures dozing side by
side on the white sand, which his gaze had been drawn to when he
stood atop the stockade. "We could step into one here and step out
at Stockholm."

Karlsson's face, all at once not nearly so bland, suggested
the standard skepticism toward talk of uncooping oneself from
New Archangel. Because of the isolation so far into the North Pacific
and because muskeg and sinkholes and an alpine forest so thick it
The day book was his worst burden in being a ranger. Early on, Stanley Meixell had told him the story of a rider-turned-ranger down on the Shoshone. Cut short my horses tail and the wind blew all day, read his first day book entry. Then with further thought, he concluded: swallow advise if he had to, From the northeast. My father could recognize a cautionary tale, and he did what he could with the day book. When he did it was another matter. He would go two or three dutiful weeks, then would come a Saturday when he had seven little yellow blanks to show, and the filling in would start.

"Beth, what'd I do on Tuesday? That the day it rained and I put in a new stall...

"That was Wednesday. Tuesday the 00..." Her sense of order usually prevailed over her exasperation, which was what he was counting on.

When I became big enough to go into the mountains with him, he saw some relief to the day book situation. "Whynt you kind of keep track of today for me?" he said, handing me a fresh-sharpened new pencil and a 00 notebook.
happy at all times to add my humble collections to specimens in your museums. From then on, his mailings to Baird read like an inventory of Gulliver's pockets after several years on the road.

- 16 bird skins, mostly large
- 2 Indian skulls
- 1 backbone of fur seal with skull
- 2 grass straps for carrying burdens
- 1 dog hair blanket
- specimen sea weed
- 1 fur seal skin
- 2 fur seal skulls
- 4 specimen fossil crabs
- 2 miniature hats
- 2 down blankets
- shells taken from ducks' stomachs
It took me a bit to catch onto my father's style. But after some days of me reporting in the manner of Joe Robinson, I adjusted.

Squashing it down in the day book to Sam J. Robinson about steer proposition, I adjusted.

On the south side of Billy Creek and talked with him about how he could get a bigger allotment to run 10 more steers, and my father squashing it down in the day book to Sam J. Robinson about steer proposition, I adjusted.

It took me a bit to catch onto my father's style. But after some days of me reporting in the manner of Joe Robinson, I adjusted.
On the third day, the canoes flashed back into sight, the crews announcing themselves across the water by exuberant musket shots and songs of victory. The war, however, turned out to have been considerably less than total. The avenging Makahs landed on the beach opposite the monument of Swell... and forming into a line came up the beach in single file with old Cowbetsi, their great war chief, at their head. A short distance behind him came a savage holding with both hands a bloody head that had been severed from the body of an unfortunate Elwha. Two or three Indians followed this and then another grim trophy, held in the same manner as the first.

Swan learned that the war party had come upon the unlucky pair of Elwhas hunting seals at Crescent Bay, the precise site of Swell's murder. When blood was most ready to answer blood, then, the two were simply the targets of opportunity. Having shot and beheaded them, the Makahs noted the alarms being shrieked by the Elwha women who had watched the ambush from a distance, held a rapid council, and decided revenge had been sufficiently done.
The English Creek station was a different place this summer, we
seemed to be different people under its roof than we had been.

I tried to think how any of this had happened. Went back through
that supper the night before my father and I rode up for the counting.

Godamighty, it wasn't even a week ago. One thing did seep through
to me, about what I had asked that night. Instead of "how come?"
what I intended maybe was what my parents were asking of Alec, too:

"already?" What was the rush? How could it be happening so soon?

My parents,[n] I suppose were looking at it as the loss of a
son; although moony as Alec had been most of this year of Leona,

[personally]

I couldn't see that he was all that much loss. What I felt, or sensed
and was trying to bring into focus, was the unsettling marvel that
Alec's course was somehow shaping my own. It was like looking at
a suit of clothes and saying, [it] they'll never catch me dead in
those, but at the same time noticing that they seem to be your fit...
Karlsson's shot struck the seal in the neck, not far beneath the base of its head.

A lurch by the animal. Its foreflippers and tail flapped briefly. Then the head lowered as if into doze.

. . . Fetched him! Shot-and-pot, we'll surprise our bellies yet. . .

Meantime, the other seals writhed rapidly toward the rock edge, were gone.

"Square eye, Karlsson," Braaf congratulated. He was first onto his feet, stepping to the right of the bump of rock Karlsson had shot from, Wennberg and Karlsson moving now too, the three of them beginning in hurry toward the seal, the tide in mind. . .

Of what happened next, only this much is sure: that amid a
climbing stride by Braaf as he began to cross the wrist of rock, surf burst strongly in front of him; that a startling white weight of water leapt, seemed to stand in the air; that it then fell onto Braaf.

this

Comical, it might have been. A drenching, an ass-over-

earhole tumble, as Wennberg might have said, and there the sum of it, Braaf bouncing up now with a grin of rue. But the push

of the water slung Braaf backward more than that, and the hand he put down to halt himself met the wet slickness of a barnacle colony.

Braaf slid on into the tidal trough.
The accumulated cold in the cabin had us both shivering.

"Feels like it's gonna frost," I muttered.

"Yeah," Stanley responded. "About a foot."

That gave me a thought I didn't particularly want. "What, ah, what if this turns to snow?" I could see myself blizzarded in here for a week with this reprobate.

"Aw, I don't imagine it will. Lightning like this, it's probably just a thunderstorm."
peering directly down at the edge of shore subjacent to the outside end of the stockade.

Here his looking held for a good while.

Eventually, and so softly that the sentry nearby in the blockhouse mistook it for another mutter against twittering Finns, the tall man murmured: "Perhaps not bladeless."

Do such things have a single first moment? If so, just here Melander begins to depart from a further half dozen years of the salting of fish.

Karlsson was a part-time bear-milker. That is to say, ordinarily he worked as an axman in the wood-cutting crew, but, his upbringing near the forests of Chilkat had sufficiently skilled him as a woodsman that he was sent with the hunting party which occasionally forayed out to help provision New Archangel; to milk the bears, as it was jested. The sort of fellow with nothing much he cared to put to voice, and of whom even less was remarked, Karlsson. It is told that at a Scandinavian free-for-all, Danes will be the ones dancing and laughing, Norwegians endeavoring to start a fight, Finns passing bottles, and Swedes standing along the wall waiting to be introduced. Melander constituted a tall exception to this slander, but Karlsson, narrow bland face like that of a village parson, would have been there among the wall-props.

Sociability was not what Melander sought out of Karlsson. A time, he had noticed Karlsson canoeing in Sitka Sound, back from
I had a dark brown taste in my mouth, and the pieces of my head above there didn't seem to fit together, sort of oozed and swayed into one another.

Stanley was at the stove. "Mornin'," he said. "Wash down your insides with this." He handed me a tin cup of coffee...

"No guarantee on this left-handed grub, but how do you take your eggs?"

"Uh, flipped."

He hovered over the stove another minute or two, then turned and presented me a plate. Stanley's left-handed eggs were masterpieces—fried to a crisp brown lace at their edges, their pockets of yolk... Big tan strips of sidepork fenced in the eggs, and in a minute more, Stanley was providing bread fried in the grease.

I was on the last bite or so before it occurred to me to ask.

"Where'd you get these eggs?"

"Aw, I always carry a couple little lard pails of oats for the horses, and the eggs ride okay in the oats."
Until dusk went into solid night, it was not unknown that a
recreative stay might be made among certain bargainable women in
the Kolosh village. For those dwelling within New Archangel rather
than without, then, the second and unofficial—and by order of the
governor, absolute—curfew at the big gate was full dark.

"There you are, then," Melander explained to Karlsson. "Free-
ride on the spotted pony, so to speak."

Karlsson quirked his mouth enough to show skepticism, Melander
was one who would have you believe that sideways is always true north.
But Karlsson was a vane of another sort. He possessed a close idea of
his own capabilities and could gauge himself with some dispassion as
to whether he was living up to them. (That he had not much interest
in people who lacked either capability or gauge, his stand-off style
more than half-hinted.) What Melander was proposing, Karlsson doubted
he could fashion himself to.

"Right fit or not," Melander assured him, "you're the only fit."

And so Karlsson began to increase his frequency of visit to
the native village, and by lingering on after the other visitants,
to stretch each stay deeper into dusk. Eventually he was nudging
regularly against the second curfew, much to the discomfiture of
the night watchman at the gate of the stockade, Bilibin.

Bilibin was one of the longest-serving of the Russian indenturees
who had been funneled out through the Siberian port of Okhotsk and
"Oh, to be young and fuckin' twice a day again," he pronounced. He took notice of the impact of this on me. "Scuse my French, Jick. It's just a saying us old fools have."
prominently beckoning to him was kastell: prison. So Braaf became another in the 1851 contingent to New Archangel, and at once skinning knives and snuff boxes and twists of Kirghiz tobacco and other unattached items began to vanish from the settlement as if having sprung wings in the night. The Russians vented fury on the harborfront natives for the outbreak of vanishment, but the coterie of Swedes and Finns rapidly made a different guess, for Braaf was among them had set up shop as a kind of human commissary in the barracks. Because he was reasonable in his prices—interested less in income than in chipping the monotony of Alaskan life, which he found to be a rain-walled prison in its own right—and was diplomatic enough not to forage anything major from his own barrackmates, nothing was said against him.

How hard it would have been, anyway, to lodge a believable case against Braaf. At twenty, he displayed the round ruddy face of a farmboy—an apple of a face—and in talking with you lofted his gaze with innocent interest just above your eyes, as if considerately measuring you for a hat.

The morning after tea was taken outside the stockade of New Archangel by a pair or it was taken by a trio.

"Me?" Braaf murmured when Melander loomed over him and Karlsson appeared at his opposite shoulder. "No, I was just about to...Sorry, I must...Maybe the noon-break, I'll..."
I have long thought that the two commonest afflictions in Montana—

it may be true everywhere, but then I haven't been everywhere—are drink and orneriness. True, my attitude has softened somewhat since I have become old enough to practice the pair myself now and then, but back there on that mountain, all I could think was that I had on my hands the two worst of those representations, an imbibor I was responsible for and a cantankerous packhorse.
Swan next carried the matter of Swell's death to the federal Indian agent for Washington Territory. Met inconclusion there. Sent a seething letter to the newspaper in the territorial capital of Olympia... an Indian peaceably passing on his way home in his canoe, laden with white men's goods... foully murdered... agents of our munificent government have not the means at their disposal to defray the expenses of going to arrest the murderer... And at last canoed once more along the Strait to accompany Swell, still nailed up strong, for the hundred miles to burial at the Makah village of Neah Bay.

There, Swell's brother Peter came and wished me to go with him and select a suitable spot to bury Swell...

I did as he desired, marked out the spot and dug out the first sand.

And this further: He also brought up the large tomanawas boards—the Makahs' cedar tableaus of magic which would be the grave's monument—of Swell for me to paint anew...

That friend-of-the-family request for a man from Boston to trace fresh the sacred designs of a buried Makah chieftain came in one of the earliest of Swan's decades of winters along this frontier coast. I would wager much, however, that it will be not the last unlikely instant in so brim-full a life as this of his.

James G. Swan had hastened west in the same scurry as
It rained heavily across northern Montana the last day of May and again on the first day of June. Showers continued the next couple of weeks, and the country greened and greened, and the crop forecasts with it. Best wheat outlook in 20 years at Fromberg and Froid, Dutton and Wolf Point. Down on the Musselshell, wool sold for 22 cents a pound. On the sixth of June, one of Mac's fire guards saw cow elk on the move from Sun River across the Divide to their calving grounds on the west side, a good three weeks earlier than usual. On the 17th of June, the heaviest rains yet; snow fell in the Big Belts and Little Belts. At last it was "next year," the one Montanans had been waiting for all through the Depression.
I know it was more complicated than that. Anything ever is.

But if you could have got the two of them under oath, each Billed to the deepest of the truths in him, my father would have had to say something like this to Alec: "I don't want you making my mistakes over again." And Alec along this line to him: "Your mistakes were yours, they have nothing to do with me."
To reach any close understanding of Varick McCaskill, though, I believe you would have had to spend a full year at his side. Season somehow seems to bring out more about him than sketchwork does.  

Despite what the calendar indicates, autumn was the onset, the threshold, of a McCaskill year. School of course started then, which as far as Alec and I were concerned accounted for the next many months.

What people we would be if born with our schooling already in our heads, or could it all in a single avid stint of months instead of stint after stint filling twelve years, I don't just know. More independent of each other, possibly, and that isn't always to the good. But anyway, Alec and I passed into a different world when school began, one with English Creek and the Two only its edges. My mother with her notions of improvement I think looked forward to autumn as a time when Alec and I would get some of our summer habits corrected out of us, but I think my father just saw it as the point when his sons began a part-time sons. Sons on their way into their own lives, out of his.

Which may account for the way my father would rework the Two each autumn, almost as if making sure to himself that he at least had it left.  

Every ranger is supposed to inspect the conditions of his forest at
move the Paul Eliason question/story elsewhere, and have Dode ask about Alec still at the Double W. Dode then says he met up with Wendell Williamson in the Medicine Lodge recently:

He is an overbearing sonofabitch, I'll say that for him. Got to telling me the superiority of cattle over sheep. Finally I told him, "Wendell, answer me this. Whenever you see a picture of Jesus Christ, which is it that he's holding in his arms? Always a lamb, never a goddamn calf."

on p. 71, Dode's reference to "life is wide..." can then be applied to Alec (i.e., shd Alec change his mind about sticking with the Double W.)

mm on p. 73, as Dode leaves, insert remark about him heading down the mountain or face scalping by Midge when he got there...

--- about once a year, they built up to a battle Cherevick (make obvious during nods)

My father wagged his head as if he hoped so but was dubious.

Dode: Alec'll pretty soon figure out there are other people to work for in the world than Wendell Williamson.
Winter brothers, perhaps call them.

But Swan. What besides tireless ears did a domestic fugitive from Massachusetts have to offer Swell and the other Makahs? That answer emerges from these diary entries, in the remark of a sketch here, a carved gift there; clearest of all in the laconic and intriguing entry for an October day in 1859 that he had gone down to a sandstone cliff along the Neah Bay beach and carved a swan into the rockface.

Artistry. Right there, in the fact that virtually the only skill of hand lacking in Swan was the ability to clutch a dollar, was his ticket into the Makah community. Draw, cut stone, invent patterns of paint, produce creatures from within the covers of his books; he could perform a gamut of tasks admired by a tribe in love with ornament. What was more, not much daunted Swan: Went to Billy Balch's house and finished the Thunderbird. This was the hardest sketch I ever undertook. The lodge was dark and the board covered with smoke & grease and hid by boxes & baskets of food. The Indians removed these & washed the board with urine & then the only way I could decipher the painting was to mark round the drawing with a red crayon...

In fire and reek, as the storytellers of sagas would have said, and Swan blithely tracing. The Makahs met him at least halfway in rampant enthusiasm for picturing,

as Swan noted some years later when he wrote at length about his role as a frontier ambassador of art.

I have painted various devices for these Indians and have decorated their ta-ma-na-was masks; and in every instance I was simply required to paint something the Indians had never seen before. One Indian selected from a pictorial newspaper a cut of a Chinese dragon, and another chose a double-headed eagle, from a picture of an Austrian coat-of-arms. Both these I grouped with drawings of crabs, faces of men, and various devices, endeavor-
Alec was a little nervous, swinging his rope more than was necessary as he waited. But then I discovered I was kind of nervous too, jiggling my foot on the fence rail, and I had no excuse whatsoever...

The starter's little red flag whipped down, and the calf broke into the arena. It was Alec's luck that he drew a straight runner instead of a dodger. That calf went up the middle of the arena as if he was on rails, and Alec's horse gained ground on him every hoofbeat. I think if you could have pulled the truth from my father right then, he even he would have said that Alec looked like the way a roper should. Leaning forward, swinging the loop of lariat over his head strong enough to give it a good fling but not overexcited about it, either. Evidently there had been some practice done on Double W calves as Alec rode the coulees these past weeks....

Alec dabbed the loop onto the calf, and the calf gave out a bleahh as the rope choked its neck and yanked it backward. Then Alec was off and scampering beside the tight line of rope, and down gathering calf legs and pigging string....

The time—for Alec McCaskill—nineteen and a half seconds.
as Melander said, but the canvas carried them across the strait and
once more into a scatter of shoreline islands.

"Even this hardtack isn't as bad as it might be." Melander,
musing, their first day of south-paddling after wafting across Hecate
Strait. "A time I can tell you on the brig Odin, we had to break our
biscuits into our coffee and skim away the weevils as they came up.

No, not so bad, aye?"

Braaf, at the onset of their second day after: "I know what
Valhalla is now. It's where I never again hear Melander say,
'Tumbleip.'"

Wennberg, midway of their third day and yet another Melander
monologue: "Melander, I wonder you don't swallow your tongue sometime
for the savor of it."

"Good job of work done": Karlsson, startling them all as they
hefted ashore at the close of their fourth straight progressful day.

The river shoved through the land like a glacier of slate. Had
the surface been solid as its turbid appearance--one newcoming settler
Ray was as surprised and delighted as I was. How much is up?

he asked. I wasn't sure of the roping prize myself, so I asked up to the booth, and Bill Rinkin told me, Forty dollars, and

supper at the Sedgwick House.

Pretty slick, Ray admired.
"Melander, serve you a plate of fly shit and you'd declare it pepper," muttered Wennberg.

"And you'd lend me your soul as salt, aye, Mister Blacksmith? But we have deciding to do. We've been holed here too long. The water ahead of us doesn't shrink while we're here. I say we had better chance the next stretch today, wind or no. Karlsson?

"You're the sailor of us. But how much of this wind is between us and the next island?"

"I think six hours' paddling.

"Six hours, we can last. I say chance."

"Braaf?"

The thief glanced out into the white-capped water, then somewhere above Melander's brow. "Chance."

"Wennberg?"

"The only thing worse than that water is this waiting. Chance, Melander. Teach us how to eat the wind. May it sit better on my stomach than that last ration did."

For a change, luck puffed on them. Once the paddling men had struggled the canoe around the horn-tip of the beach, they came into a wind skewing directly across Hecate Strait. For the first time since their leaving of New Archangel, up went the canoe's small pole of mast and a lugsail. "Not much of a suit of sails, more like a kerchief,"
When I was out of eyeshot behind the catch pen at the end of
the arena, I gave Mouse a jab in the ribs that made him woof in
surprise. But I suppose my actual target was life, this situation
of being old enough to have notions occur and make themselves felt
but not yet old enough to know what to do with them.
three men, "Come look."

Within and around an opening in the forest they found other acrobat columns of gargoyles, some atilt as if peering more sharply down at the interlopers.

"What is all this?" Braaf asked.

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

"Don't give us your fiddles, Melander." Wennberg was reaching a hand up to inspect the joinery of the beak-piece onto the column seen first by Braaf. Rather, which first had seen him. In spite of himself, the blacksmith was tugged close by the serene craft of these goblin poles.

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

Until now, insofar as Melander and company could discern in their clamber down the precipice of coastline, not another human might ever have existed among these shore islands. Take the matter to truth, though, and their journey more resembled the course a late-of-night stroller might follow through slumbering neighborhoods. In tribal clusters of gaudy culture, Tlingits, Haidas, Tsimshians, Bellabellas, Bella Coolas, Kwakiutls, Nootkans, perhaps as many as sixty thousand residents peopled this long littoral of what would become British Columbia.
A few years before, when Alec and I still were attending the
South Fork school, Ed Heaney drove out from Gros Ventre one summer
to talk business with my father. And with him came his son my
age, Ray. I could see perfectly well what was intended here, and
that's the way it did happen. Off up the North Fork my father and
Ed rode to eyeball a stand of timber which interested Ed for fence
posts, and Ray and I were left to play together for the morning.

Living out there at the ranger station, I always was stumped about
what of my existence would interest any other boy in the world. There
was the knoll with the view all the way to the Sweetgrass Hills, but
somehow I felt that it might not hold the fascination for others as
that it did for me. Ordinarily there would have been horses to ride,
but Isidor Pronovost had every one of them in a packstring to a spike
camp of CCC tree planters. Matters were made no better by the fact
that Ray and I knew each other only by sight, given that I went to
school out here and he went in Gros Ventre.

So we were afoot with one another and not quite knowing what to do
about it, and ended up wandering the area around the ranger station,
with mutual boredom building up pretty fast in us. Finally I got the
was adapting. and Wennberg had

at least Braaf had adopted. When Karlsson returned to camp

who must lead

with Wennberg and the proposition was put to Braaf, it took the young

at all.
thief an instant to realize he was being polled. He blinked and said

as if it were common fact: "You've to do it, Karlsson. I can't read

the maps and Wennberg couldn't lead his shadow. You've to do it."

And at least there were the maps, the extra eyes needed to know

the intentions of this coast and ocean. Glancing to the bottom of

down from where Melander's tracing of route set off,

this fourth map, Karlsson saw that the coastline was shown as far as the

northmost tip of Vancouver Island. Cape Scott, Melander had penciled

in beside the ragged thumb of land. Karlsson remembered Vancouver

Island to be the third of the landforms, those where of their escape,

scratched into the dirt by Melander the day of last summer. The maps

southering next would bring Vancouver's shore and then the final shoreline

from the Strait of Fuca to Astoria.
As I remember, I held myself back admirably until he came out with
in admirable rein. That one did it, and I swung on Ray and caught him just
in front of the left ear. Unluckily, not quite hard enough to knock
him down.

He popped me back, alongside the neck. We each got in a few more
swings before the battle degenerated into a wrestle.
Only the top map of the lot had Karlsson ever seen, the one on which Melander's pencil route made its start at the square house-dots of New Archangel. That once, Melander was borrowing opinion, and here Karlsson's advice was traced, the canoe's side-loop around Japonski Island and then veering down and down, at last out the bottom of Sitka Sound.

Karlsson, the forest of a continent ten paces on one side of him and half a world of night-ocean thirty paces on the other, could scarcely credit it—that there had been time when he, when any of this canoe's adopted men, existed at that regiment of dots, answered work-call, dwelt in barracks, set honey east for a gate guard named Bilibin.

On the next map, the penciled line hugged the west shore of Baranof Island to Cape Ommaney, then, as if deflected by what waited south, strikes east to Kuiu. Because of Melander's simplified route-sketch in the dirt and the knowledge that their port of destination lay southward, Karlsson had supposed that they were going along the escape route much like men shimmying down a rope—a sidle of effort this way or that, but the total plunge all into one direction. It is a revolution in his thinking to see now that all the while they have been canoeing south they also have been sidestepping east.
When I started school in Gros Ventre in the seventh grade, Ray came over to me at recess the first day. He planted himself just out of arm's reach from me and offered: Applesauce.

I balled up both my fists, and my tongue got ready the words which would resume our creekside battle: Beaver tooth. Yet the direction of Ray's remark caught my attention: "horse apple" was pretty routine, especially from "turkey dink." For once in my life I caught on to a possibility. I held my stance and said back to him: Mud minnow.

Gumbo gopher, I said, just getting it out before we both laughed.

Within the week I was asking my mother whether I could stay overnight with Ray, and I was at the Heaneys' a lot all the time after that. Theirs was a family different from ours as crochet from oil cloth. For one thing they were Catholic, although they really didn't show it all that much—just through a grace before every meal, and by eating fish on Friday, which eventually occurred to me as the reason Ray had looked at me suspiciously there at the creek when I asked him about fishing. Their house was a two-story white one...
Dear "ancy--

Tom Stewart called with the news of Liz's father's death; the enclosed envelope is simply a note of commiseration. I know this aftermath will be a hard and frantic time for her, so the enclosed stuff can wait until things settle down for her, I think.

[Handwritten note: ]
He was a haunting kid to look at. His eyes were within long,

inset arcs; they, and the eyebrows over them, were sort of the

shape of an orange slice...

although I would see it thousands

of times in the years to come--

slice-lines cut his cheeks, all the way out opposite the corners of

his mouth, like a big set of parentheses around his grin. His lower

lip was so full that it too had a slice-line under it... And like

a lot of us, at that age, his front teeth were ahead of the rest

of him in size; there always was a lot of traded jibes of beavertooth

at school, but Ray's frontals really did remind you of a beaver.

(like carved pumpkin?)

I have seen grown men, guys who ordinarily wouldn't so much as spend

a glance at a boy on the street, stop and study that face of Ray's.

of here he was, thank you a whole hell of a lot, my guest for day at Big Cirk.
... One gain, Wennberg's a store these mornings. No knowing what's prowling in his head, but at least it's not jumping out his mouth. ...

Wennberg was fussing the breakfast fire to life. The

weather seemed to have cleansed itself the day before, now was
clear, but with the sun blanked by a high overcast. Braaf had gone
to the north [end of the island] to check the ocean horizon for lurking storm. Karlsson wanted them to be on the water by now, but even he had overslept, Wennberg's breakfast fire was a slow proposition, and new Braaf was dawdling at the end of the island.

"I'd better fetch him," Karlsson told Wennberg, and started off.

"If I had arms for three paddles, I could leave the little bastard there and yourself as well."

... Coming awake, is he? Depend on Wennberg, hammer for a tongue and the world his anvil.

Just then, Braaf came to sight. But stopped when he saw Karlsson, and beckoned.
Uh huh. Revelation, all 22 chapters of it.

Aw, the hell, Alec. I--

I was about to say that I had other things in life to do than fetch him whenever one of Leona's ex-boyfriends came sniffing around, but as I looked over at her she smiled and patted the car fender beside her. Alec touched the bay into motion while I was still in the middle of that look, and so I figured I had to go over.

'Lo, Leona.

Hello, John Angus. Which tangled me right at the start. I mean, think about it; the only possible way she could know about my high-toned name was from Alec, which meant that I had been a topic of conversation, which implied--I didn't know what. Damn it all to hell anyway, I merely was trying to have a standard summer, not provide word fodder for the entire damn Two Country.
Hi, Ray greeted as he climbed onto the fence beside me. The 
grin-cuts were deep into his face, the big teeth were out on parade:

Ray could make you feel that your arrival was the central event in 
his recent life. What've you been up to?

Oh--summary seemed impossible, so I chose neutrality—about the 
usual. You?

Pilot again. So saying, Ray held up his hands to show his calluses.

They were across the base of each finger like a set of knuckles...

I nodded in admiration. This made the second summer Ray was stacking 
lumber in his father's lumber yard—the pile it here, pile it there 
nature of the job was what led to the pilot jokes—and his hands and 
forearms were getting stronger than mine.
Just now Braaf was the one of them to speak that dialect called if.

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

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

In the dusk, eagle poised eternally atop bear. Whale stood on end in dive through contorted lesser creatures. One thing, possibly frog the size of calf, pranced merrily upside down. Every sort of winkless forest changeling, they goggled in unison at the backs of the retreating men.

Later, the others breathing their rhythms of night beside the fire, Melander could not find sleep. His memory was at a New Archangel market morning, hubbub of Sitka Kolosh and three or four dozen visiting tribesmen from somewhere to the north. Amid the newcomers hawking their wares squatted a seam-faced carver. Word had spread through the settlement about this man's daggers: blades of power with each hilt carved as the rising neck of some beast. The head topping a hilt-neck sometimes would be a bear with glinting abalone inlays of eyes and teeth, sometimes a long-faced wolf; always, angled and fierce and unforgettable.

The interpreter Dobzhansky tried to converse with the northern carver. Dobzhansky's first question received answer, then the native stayed silent. Melander inquired what had been said. Dobzhansky related that he had asked how many years it took to attain such skill.
We seemed to catch it from each other. Rob would page through Crofutt, asking me...

We studied and restudied the map of America's railroads...

Some of it might have been the brags of Manitoba and Alberta our compartment was full of...
Woman Peak south beyond it both stood in sun, as if the little square of
window had been made into a summer picture of the Alps. It still awes
me, how the mountains are not the same any two days in a row. As
if hundreds of copies of mountains exist and each dawn brings a fresh
one, of new color, new prominence of feature over the others, some
different wrapping of cloud or rinse of sun for this day's version.

I lit a fire and went out to check on the horses and
brought in a pail of fresh water, and even then he hadn't budged,
just was breathing like he'd decided on hibernation. The bottle
which had nursed him into that condition, I noticed, was down by
Between the Atlantic Ocean and Montana we saw more than our eyes could hold. At least I remember that half of our journey as if it was dream happening after dream, with a nightmare every so often.

New York was Edinburgh and Glasgow and then some

From the train Indiana and Ohio and those were like the plump farms of Fife. Then, after St. Paul, this big country America grew gigantic.

Nothing in Crofutt or any other book prepared a person for the horizons of the west of America.

Dickinson. The long low valley of the Yellowstone River. The Bozeman Tunnel. At last we were to Helena, and a bed, and out of our clothes for the first time in 00 days.

Helena. Helena looked as if it had commenced a week before and would be moved some place else next week.
and Tollie was declaring "We are just about to get the pumpkin rolling. Bareback riding will be our first event."

"Pumpkin?" questioned whoever it was in the chute society that was keeping tab of Tollie's excursions through the calendar. "Judy H. Christ! Now the whistledick thinks it's Halloween."

About all that is worth mentioning of the early part of that rodeo is that its events, a section of bareback riding and after that some steer wrestling or mauling or whatever you want to call it, passed fairly mercifully. Ray and I continued to divide our time snorting laugh/s over something either Tallie or the chute society provided. Plus our own wise-acre efforts, of course: Ray nearly fell off the corral from cackling one time when I speculated whether this much time sitting on a fence pole mightn't leave a person with the crack in his behind running crosswise instead of up and down.

You know how that is, humor is totally contagious when two persons are in the same light mood. And a good thing, too, for by my estimation the actual events of a rodeo can always use all the help they can get. Although like anybody out here I have seen many and many a rodeo, to me the arena events are never anything to write home special about. It's true that bareback riding has its interesting moments, but basically the ride is over and done with about as it's getting started. I don't know, a guy flopping around on the naked back of a horse just seems to me more of a stunt than a sport. As for steer wrestling, that is an absolutely phony deal, never done except there in front of a rodeo
Tom 00, the workman who lived farthest, always was the first to arrive—isn't that always the way?—and would murmur 00 to me. I liked it then, the couple of hours before true day. The ledger fat and open in front of me, the quill pen between my lips as I traced a finger along...
I could see the Zane boys were living verifications that the human head is mostly bone.

"That's past history," Alec was maintaining.

I punctuated that for him by popping the lid off the Karo can the gingersnaps were kept in. Then there was the sort of scrabbling sound as I dug out a handful. And after that the little sharp crunch as I took a first bite. All of which Alec waited out with the too-patient annoyance of somebody held up while a train goes by. Then declared:

"Leona and I ain't--aren't skim-milk kids. We know what we're doing."

My mother took a breath which probably used up half the air in the kitchen. "Alec. What you're doing is rushing into trouble. You can't get ahead on ranch wages. And just because Leona is horse-happy at the moment doesn't mean she's going to stay content with a ranch hand for a husband."

"We'll get by. Besides, Wendell says he'll boost my wages after we're married."

This stopped even my mother, though not for long. "Wendell Williamson," she said levelly, "has nobody's interest at heart but his own. Alec, you know as well as anybody the Double W has been the ruin of that Noon Creek country. Any cattle ranch he hasn't bought outright, he has sewed up with a lease from the bank--"

"If Wendell hadn't got them, somebody else would have," Alec recited.

"Yes," my mother surprised him, "maybe somebody like you. Somebody who doesn't already have more money than he can count. Somebody
A fairly quick winding down of this first chapter; they are on hand for Montana's statehood celebration in November; at year's end they get a few drinks in them and decide to have their photograph taken "to show them in Nethermuir what Montanians are". The photo provides a full description of both Angus and Rob, and concludes the chapter.
Angus's habit of addressing someone in his mind: Rob, Adam, etc.