This Neah Bay Swan, if you look steadily at him for a moment, is a greatly more interesting and instructive fellow than the Shoalwater oysterer/loiterer first met on this frontier coast. He has shown himself to be a chap who likes to hear a story and to take a drink, not absolutely in that order; reveals a remarkable fast knack for friendships, among whites and Indians both; is as exact a diarist as ever filled a page and as steadily curious as a question mark; contrives not to stay in the slog of any job very long (although we shall have to see about this forthcoming profession in the Cape Flattery schoolhouse); can drily say, I thought that their friendship was of the kind that might induce them, should I give offence, to stick my head on top of a pole for a memento—or get a bit preachy—
I told Peter I always had been his best friend and was now, but--; long since has unwifed and defamilied himself yet maintains week by week steady correspondence with Matilda, Ellen and Charles; hardly ever meets a meal he doesn't like or a coastal scene he doesn't want to sketch; muses occasionally, observes always.

And now is about to offer more instruction yet. Mid-November of 1863, the potato harvest in, the schoolhouse at last roofed and windowed, I painted the alphabet on the blocks Mr. Phillips made for me and tomorrow I intend to commence teaching.
Day fourteen

Neah Bay pedagogy gets off to a stuttery start. The first morning, the seventeenth of November of 1863, a single student showed up; Captain John's ten-year-old nephew, Jimmy Claplanhoo. Swan chose a bit of guile. This evening I got out the magic lantern and gave Jimmy an exhibition of it as a reward. . . Within a few days four more Makah children edged into the schoolroom and were treated to Swan's picture show. By the end of the first week, Twenty children present today exercised them on the alphabet and then gave them a pan full of boiled potatoes.

Success in the schoolroom, discord in the world. Something here unusually sets Swan to brooding about the Civil War and its politics: I do not believe in the principles of the Republican party as enunciated by Greeley, Sumner, Phillips, Beecher. . . but I do believe that the country is in real danger and I believe at such times it is the duty of every true man to stand by his Government (no matter what the party) in saving this country and ourselves from ruin.

That out of his system, Swan goes on to note that the Indians' dogs killed two skunks in the lumber pile.

He was forced to take three days out to supervise the digging of the schoolhouse cellar, introducing the Makah laborers to the wheelbarrow, which they think a hilarious machine. Then a drain to carry the runoff from the schoolhouse roof needs to be finished. Jimmy Claplanhoo comes down with a cough so severe that Swan worries it may be consumption. The Makahs put on a raucous tamanoas ceremony to boost Jimmy's health, just as a gale rips across Neah Bay. Crows tip over Swan's rain gauge.
He sets to work on them with shotgun and strychnine. Makahs from the village of Waatch arrive for Swan to dispense potatoes to. One of the Makah men brings his two-year-old son to school to learn the alphabet and creates uproar by spanking the tot for not mastering it. A number of the Indians embark on a drinking spree which gets rougher as it progresses day by day. There are knife wounds and one combatant smashes three canoes with a stone before other partyers knock him out with a brick.

At risk here was more than a few cedar hulls.

This drunken frolic shows how easily these people can be excited to deeds of violence, Swan's pen scolds. We are powerless under the present circumstances either to prevent these drunken scraps or protect ourselves in case of an attack. But I have not the least apprehension of any difficulty if liquor is kept from them.

Now Swan catches cold; I have not felt so sick for a year certainly. Jimmy Claplanhoo's health mends and he arrives back at school. The agency's winter larder begins to be questionable: Sometimes we are very short of provisions and have to depend on our beef barrel, then again the Indians will bring in such quantities of fish and game that there is a surfeit. The agency cattle start dying. Cold damp weather holds and holds. On December 16 the most remarkable fall of rain I have ever known, gurgling to the top of his rain gauges twice, a total of nearly seven inches. A number of the Indians begin another drinking knockabout party. One participant is blasted in the arm with a dragoon pistol and another asks to borrow a shovel from Swan. He went to where old Flattery Jack Sixey's father had been buried and dug up one of his arm bones which was taken and bound on as splints to the arm of Sixey. The Indians
believing that the bone from the father’s arm would cure.

A weakened bull from the staggering agency herd has to be put in the basement of the schoolhouse for shelter. He takes out a window on his way in. Another party of Makahs from Waatch troops in to purchase a bride: They came in the house and rigged themselves up with masks and feathers and all went to Whattie’s house to make their trade.

Five weeks since Jimmy Claplanhoo inaugurated the schoolhouse, Webster at last sails into the bay with some supplies, and an audible sigh lifts from the ledger pages as Swan notes the coming of Christmas and the making of a plum pudding.
Day fifteen

The strop of this weather on the days, each one made identically keen, tingling. Rainless hours after rainless hours glimmering past, it has dawned on me how extraordinary is this dry cold time, as if I were living in the Montana Rockies again but without the clouting mountain-hurled wind. There is a bright becalmed feel, a kind of disbelief the weather has about itself. Other years, by now I might have shrugged almost without noticing into our regional cloak of rain and cloud, the season's garment of interesting texture and of patterned pleasant sound as well. "Rain again," a friend growls. "Right." I say and smile absently, listening for the booommm and whooommm of foghorns out in the murk of Puget Sound. But through yesterday morning the temperature hung below freezing for four days and nights in a row, the longest skein of its kind I can remember here at the rim of the Sound. I bury our kitchen vegetable scraps directly into my garden patch each evening as immediate compost and the shovel brings up six-inch clods of frozen soil, like lowest-grade coal.

But what speaks the weather even clearer is today's renewed presence of birds. This morning kindled into warmer sun than we have had and already, Carol minutes gone up the hill to teach her first class of the day, just to be out in the fresh mildness I have walked to the top of the valley. Clouds were lined low across the southern reach of the Olympics while clear weather held the northern end, the Strait country. The view west from me was banded in five blues: the water of Puget Sound in two shades, azure nearest me, a more delicately inked hue farther out; the
foreshore of the Olympic Peninsula in its heavy forested tint; the mountains behind their blue dust of distance; the clear cornflower sky. Such mornings shrug away time. Vessels on the Sound—freighter, tug harnessed to barge, second freighter, the ivory arrow that is the Edmonds to Kingston ferry—seemed pinned in place, and I had to watch intently before my eyes could begin to catch the simultaneous motion of them all, inching on the water. Then as I turned home, the flurry. Robins in fluster at the mouth of the valley, abruptly dotting suburban fir trees and frost-stiff lawns. Motion double quick, headlong. Airful of flying bodies, a vigor in orbit around fixed beauty of Sound and mountains.

Soon after, a jay cry, like rods of some terrible substance being briskly rasped against each other. Then framed in the desk-end window, popping from place to place along the bank beneath the valley slope's evergreens, a tiny brown flying mouse which proved to be a wren.

These past iced days I have tried to picture this valley's birds, up somewhere in innermost branches, fluffed with dismay and wondering why the hell they didn't wing south with their saner cousins. I live in this suburb for its privacy, the way it empties itself during the workday—people evaporated off to office, school, supermarket—and delivers the valley to me and the birds and any backyard cats. I suppose I could get by without the cats, or trade them for other interesting wanderers, maybe coyotes or foxes, but a birdless world, the air permanently fallow, is unthinkable. To be without birds would be to suffer a kind of color blindness, a glaucoma gauzing over one of the planet's special brightnesses. Bushtits must bounce again out there on the thin ends of
birch branches like monks riding bell ropes. A fretful nest-building
robin—we always have one or two nattering in the trees at either end of
the house—must gather and gather dry spears of grass until the beakful
bristles out like tomcat whiskers. Towhees, chickadees, flickers, juncoes,
(All the creatures of this world that do not know they have splendid
names.)
occasional flashing hummingbirds; seasonal grosbeaks who arrive in the
driveway and, masked like society burglars, munch on seeds amid the gravel.
Besides Carol and the pulse of words across paper there are few everyday
necessaries in my life, but birds are among them.

And Swan, with his name which the Indian woman at Shoalwater had
said is like our word Cocumb, a big bird: birds perpetually aviate
across his horizons. Time upon time I marker incidents of birds in his
pages. This forenoon, the tenth of July of 1865 at Neah Bay, I saw a
kingfisher fluttering in the brook and supposed he had a trout which
he could not swallow. On going to him I found he had driven his bill
into an old rotten stick with such force as to bury it clear up to his
eyes... hard and fast. I took him with the stick to the house and
called Jones & Phillips to see the curiosity. It was with difficulty
that his bill was pulled out again.

Two years previous, in the same week
of July: I discovered a dead Albuthes on the beach yesterday which had
a large dogfish which it had swallowed partially
but it was too large, and while the fish's head rested in
the bird's stomach, its tail was out of its mouth. Consequently
the bird was soon suffocated....I never met with a similar
instance of voracity. And the twelfth of February of 1863: Quite a
number of crows have been washed ashore dead. They have
a rookery at Waadah Island and probably the stormy wind
that has prevailed for several days with the thick snow
blinded them and they fell into the water... There is
marauds
catastrophe of that sort here as well, although

Fortunately not in bunches. This house I live in sits as

a glass crag in the birds' midst. Swan once tells of a canoe crew of
Makahs stopping for the night at the cabin of an Olympic Peninsula
settler; of how they swung the canoe mast wrong while stowing it and
crashed an end through the hard-bought one window of the homestead
cabin; of the settler's highest fury, as if they had shattered a diamond.
This suburban house of mine glints with fourteen windows; wobbly
mastbearers could pass none of my walls without creating crystal.

Badgerlike, I hunch in here at the typing desk and watch helplessly
as this building with windows to every direction and inclination imposes
itself athwart the birds' paths and every so often will kill one of them.
once in awhile the Grosbeaks have been the most frequent victims of headlong smash against a window. During one of their migrations, twice in two days I found corpses, flat on their backs and feet curled in a final surprised clutch, below the north window.

One bird outside these transparent walls is invincible: the stellar's jay. Jays attack their way through life like cynical connivers in a royal court. A stellar's will alight on the garden dirt, cock his head in disdain, scream
twice, burst off into the hemlock and set the lower branches dancing, almost before its blue sheen has blazed on my retina. What a vacancy a jay leaves in the air. The Makahs explained to Swan that the blue jay was the mother of a rascally Indian named Kwahtie. She had asked him to fetch some water, saying that she wished he would hurry, because she felt as if she were turning into a bird. Kwahtie ignored her and went on making the arrow he was at work on. While she was talking she turned into a blue jay and flew into a bush. Kwahtie tried to shoot her, but his arrow passed behind her neck, glancing over the top of her head, ruffling up the feathers, as they have always remained in the head of the blue jay. It seems to me as good an explanation as any for this sharp-hooded brigand.

And then the most arresting of Swan's notations, the one that halts me in dismay: During the spring, when the flowers are in bloom and the humming birds are plenty, the boys take a stick smeared with the slime from snails, and place it among a cluster of flowers....if a humming bird applies his tongue to it he is glued fast. They will then tie a piece of thread to its feet and holding the other end let the birds fly, their humming being considered quite an amusement.
That scene is doubly horrific to me. The doom of the
hummingbirds, and the knowledge that had I been one of the
Makah boys I would have had my own captive bird whirring
like a toy on the end of a tether.
Day sixteen

Swan as disclosed by the few, damvably few, photos of him.

In a portrait studio at age sixty-five, he sits wearing a small round-crowned hat, brim serenely without crimp, and has trimmed his snug white beard, toyed a chain and fob into precise place above the middle button of his vest, and primped a little show of handkerchief at the breast pocket of his jacket. His right hand, holding wire-rim reading glasses, rests amid books and sheathed paper atop a tablecloth so Victorian brocaded that it looks as if it would stand in place without the table beneath it. Just slightly he faces to the left of the camera, the photographer's experience evidently having been that dignity is an oblique matter. Angled as Swan is, a white wedge of collar stands out sharply between his high-cut vest and his left jawline. This stiff bright fence of fabric at his neck and the dark orb of hat exactly flat across his head make the portrayed figure startlingly like a priest of the era, shyly sidled in to pose while home on leave from some far missionary billet or another.

Five years later in a crowd scene at Port Townsend, his beard is fuller and he sports a derby with the brim making a dapper little swoop to his brow. Here he looks somehow... elfin; somehow not quite of the same world as the foursquare townfolk all around him.

Another shot, when I judge him to be perhaps fifty. Hatless this time, and his hairline arcing fairly far back. A comb has done careful work and scissors have tidied around ears and back of neck. White, or more likely gray, is wisping into the beard only at either side of his chin. According to what one writer of regional history has remarked, the dark cheek portions of beard and Swan's hair were brown, but I have no word yet
from any contemporary of his on that. One surprise: the corners of his
eyes are touched with only a few brief lines. I conclude that dry Montana
of this century, which early put a web of lines on the upper face of my
father and grandmother and made a noticeable start on me, is more erosive
than Swan's maritime frontier of a hundred years ago.

Next, Swan older again, and in high regalia. He wears a fez and
a broad sash, evidently trigged up for a convention of the Order of Red
Man, one of the several Port Townsend lodges he belonged to. As a fron-
tier chieftain Swan looks spendidly silly, and there may be a hint held in
around his lips that he more than suspects it. The new feature here, fez
and sash aside, is the clear profile of Swan's nose. For most of us the
nose is an open hinge in the center of the face, shaped to no discernible
purpose except revenge on us by forgotten ancestors. But Swan came off
rather well, a straight unfleshy version proportioned comfortably between
the wide set of his eyes and the emphasis of his barbered beard. A restrained

A matter of other scenes exists—one I particularly grin over,
Swan at ease in his Port Townsend office with a deluge of Indian regalia
covering every wall and shelf around him; the place looked as this writing
room of mine is beginning to with the copied heaps of Swan's paperwork
stacked around—but they do not offer further detail. Except one final pose,
unquestionably snapped the same day in the studio as the priestly portrait.
This time Swan perches on a queer chair-sized square of small notched logs,
evidently the photographer's notion of a rural setting, and with casual care
is holding a large canoe paddle slantwise across his body. If a flash flood
should sweep through the studio he will be ready atop his small square
floe. He has company in this photo, a blocky and strong-faced young Haida
named Johnny Kit Elswa. Wearing a suit jacket which his chest and shoulders threaten to explode, Johnny Kit Elswa stolidly stands just apart from Swan, also grips a paddle, and a fistful of arrows and a small bow as well.

Both men, one of Massachusetts and the other of the wild native coast of the North Pacific, are stiffly tethered by their stares to the camera's lens. But precisely between them breaks out a vertical riot of animated faces: a ceremonial Indian carving roughly the length and shape of the canoe paddles, agog every six inches with some fantastic wood-faced creature or another popping its eyes in the direction of the camera. Giddy, droll, mischievous, outright hawking, the carvings are an acrobatic ladder of forest imps. In this company the humans seem dry solemn stuff indeed.

Swan, then, in the entirety of his gallery of likeness. Slightly narrow-shouldered, with a tendency to build a bit at the waistline. Surprisingly long-armed: a 32½-inch sleeve when he orders a coat from Boston. An average chest: 37 inches, on that same garment. He is perhaps five feet eight inches in height and not heavily built: Batsie took me across the Waatch Creek on his shoulders, the diary discloses. Say, at his best-fed, perhaps 160 pounds. All in all the shape which could be pared and stretched a bit into my own, I notice. And his beard, with its regular, combed smoothness, is nothing like my copper-wire version. My bet is that he grew it aboard the Rob Roy, coming west to California in 1850: new life, new face. In the ceremonial pictures in his later years he seems to have begun shaving his cheeks along the top of his beard, declaring a definite border such as where department store Santa's whiskers begin. Which leads
to the thought that, like me, he may have been a touch overproud of a firm face of beard. A sack of hair from ear to ear may be less enhancing than we imagine.

Not an elaborate man, but with a small dressy touch or two. A ring with a stone there on the ring finger of the left hand; that chain (A favorite white meerschaum pipe, and tobi. A pocket watch which he tries, with no great success, to keep accurate with the precision clock of the Port Townsend jeweler.

Average vanities aside, Swan impresses as tidy; deft enough within his radius of interests; indeed, even painstaking about any matter he thinks sufficient to warrant it, such as presenting his face for the world to see. And yet in every pose more distance to him than merely the span from the camera's lens. An inward man, a winterer within himself as well as his far-frontier surroundings.

As I have fingered through the photographs Swan has seemed more than half familiar to me, the kind of visage seen from the tail of the eye and not quite willing to register. The tiny jungled planet that is the human head can be mysterious this way. Forest of hair and that sometime cultivation of beard, plain of brow, the twin seas of eyes, wrinkled country of memory and cunning and wonder and who knows what all you can look on constellations of heads all day long without fully seeing any single orb. (Unless you sense reason for comparison. I am interested that Swan seems never to have gone bald at the north polar region where I have, but his forehead began to extend into the farthest tundra country.) At last the exact resemblance clicks. Swan
looked more than a little like the history book portraits of the steel
king of the nineteenth century, Andrew Carnegie. Similar wide clear brow,
more white than gray,
same trim half-face of beard, with downward arc of mouth in it. Between
brow and beard, however, exactly there across the eyes and cheekbones,
entire difference arrives. Even as his most carefully benign, Carnegie's
scrutiny lances off the page at you as that of a man gauging just how
far you can be tantalized with the gift of a public library. Swan blinks
the middle-distance gaze of a fellow who would be in that Carnegie library
thumbing through the collected works of John Greenleaf Whittier all the
afternoon.
Day seventeen

Neah Bay, mid-January, 1864: a week of Swan' s winter.

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Sunday. Russian Jim came in this evening and requested me to intercede with his squaw who has recently left him and try and induce her to return. Jim told me that when any one came to my door at night I should always ask "Who is there" for the Skookums sometimes came to peoples doors and did mischief. I told him I was not afraid of the powers of the air at all. He said I had a skookum tumtum—a brave soul.

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Monday. This is my birth day 46 years old. Cleaned up the school house today, piled the lumber, and placed things in order. I shall be glad when the building is completed for the constant interruption I have and the various duties I am called on to perform prevent my giving that attention to the children I wish to. I have no time that I can call my own or in which I am not liable to interruptions except evenings and then I am generally alone but I can find but little time to write for my sight is getting too poor to attempt writing much except by daylight.

The Indians think I have a skookum tumtum to live alone in this great house. I do not suppose one of them would dare sleep here alone for anything they are so afraid of spirits. I think the spirits of the earth are more to be feared, both spirituous liquors and evil prowling Indians but I don't apprehend any dangers or alarms from any source and thus far never have been more peacefully situated.
Tuesday. Today took an inventory of Government property for Mr Webster. Billy Balch came in this evening and gave me a very lucid explanation why the spirits of the dead did not molest me. He says that it is because we have a cellar to the house and a floor over it, but in Indian houses there is nothing but the bare ground or sand. That when any of the Indians are alone in a great house and make a fire and cook, that the memelose or dead come up through the earth and eat food and kill the Indian, but he thinks they can't come up through our floor altho as he says he would be afraid to try to sleep alone here for there might be some knot hole or crack in the floor through which they could come.

Billy also related an interesting tradition. He says that at not a very remote period the water flowed from Neeah Bay through the Waatch prairie, and Cape Flattery was an island. That the water receded and left Neeah Bay dry for four days and became very warm. It then rose again without any swell or waves and submerged the whole of the cape and in fact the whole country except the mountains... As the water rose those who had canoes put their effects into them and floated off with the current which set strongly to the north. Some drifted one way and some another and when the waters again resumed their accustomed level a portion of the tribe found themselves beyond Nootka where their descendants now reside and are known by the same name as the Makahs...

Many canoes came down in the trees and were destroyed and numerous lives were lost.

There is no doubt in my mind of the truth of this tradition. The Waatch prairie shows conclusively that the waters of the ocean once
flowed through it, and as this whole country shows marked evidences of volcanic influences there is every reason to believe that there was a crust which made the waters to rise and recede as the Indian stated.

Wednesday. Very heavy surf during the night and this morning, showing there must have been strong winds outside the cape recently... At 8 PM Jackson & Bob came to the door and informed me that a vessel had run on the rocks on the north end of Waadda Island. I went out on the beach and saw a light in that direction, but after watching it some time I concluded it was as likely to be a vessel at anchor in the harbor as one on the rocks. The Indians refused to go off to ascertain, as the wind was blowing too strong, so I came back to the house and after going up to my room in the upper part of the turret, where I had a better chance to judge I concluded from the appearance of the light that it was the US Rev Cutter Joe Lane...expected here with Mr Smith the keeper of Tatooch Light.

Thursday. My surmise last evening proved correct, it was the cutter Joe Lane which arrived. Mr Webster came down and breakfasted with me and then went on board the cutter in a canoe with five Indians who afterward conveyed him to Baadah.

Yowarth brought one cord oven wood today. Paid him 12 buckets of potatoes.

Went to Baadah this PM Mr Webster gave me a letter to send to the Cutter, which I sent by Hopestubbe & Yachah, who carried it and delivered it safe. Wrote this evening...
Friday. 7:30 AM The Cutter got under way and stood out of the bay bound to Barclay Sound in search of Bark Narramissic, said to be lost or missing...

Saturday. Went to Baadah to pay off Indians. Peter says that a short time since a Quillehuyte Indian named Towallanhook came across by way of the Hoko river and from thence down on foot to Baadah where he arrived at night and reconnoitered Mr. Webster's premises and then passed on to Waatch. This may account for the Indians asking me if I was not afraid to be alone in this great house and also the reason why Russian Jim cautioned me not to open my door to any one without enquiring who was there, for the Indians say that the Quillehuytes have threatened to come here and attack the whites. This may or may not be true and may be only some scheme of these people to do mischief and charge it on the Quillehuytes.
Day eighteen

Swan's day-upon-day sluice of diary words: why?

Was the diarizing habit something which surfaced out of instinct, the uns lakable one that says in some of us that our way to put a mark on the world is not with sword or tool, but pen? Or did contents mean more to him than the doing of it—the diary a way to touch out into life as it flowed past him and skim the most interesting as an elixir? Either way Swan clearly was not using his pen nib merely to pass the time. So much interested him, inside the covers of books and wherever else his glance fell along this coastline, that boredom seldom seems to have found him. I do accept that the inked words helped to keep straight in memory what he was seeing or being told; Swan had a granny's passion for gossip, and a broker's fixity on exact sums and issues. But passions and fixities do not commonly last for forty years and two and a half million words by hand. Any of us serve summer terms as diarists, somewhere in the tumble of family items in a closet of this room is the five-year diary I began in my final year of high school. I lasted at the routine a few months and am now told nothing by it but a recital of football and basketball scores and journeys between my boarding place in town and the family's sheep ranch. That dry stick of a youngster tracing such items into my life, I can scarcely recognize. Almost twenty years passed before I undertook a diary again—oddly, the occasion was the same as that earliest eddy of Swan's torrent of paper, a time spent in Britain—and even yet I dodge behind the constant excuse that a page should be a hireling, not the field boss, to evade for days, weeks, at a time. This journal of winter face down into regularly because it must be kept, as a ship's log must.
To navigate by; know the headway. But Swan's diary plainly masters him. Pulls his hand down onto each day's page like a coaxing lover. How far beyond the surface of the paper he ever can be coaxed is yet to be seen. Swan's days and the land and people of them get scrupulous report; less so his own interior. Unlike that other tireless clerk, Pepys of place-time London, Swan does not confess himself every second sentence, gaily jot down who he last tumbled to bed with and is eyeing next nor repent every hangover nor retaste every jealousy. Much more assessor than confessor, is Swan. Yet, yet, his words do configure, make enough significant silhouette that I stare hard for the rest. No, the Swan style of diary-keeping--this dialogue of a man with his days--is not merely maintenance but more like architecture, the careful ungiddy construction of something grand as it is odd. Swan works at these pages of his as steadily, incessantly, as a man building a castle out of pebbles.

Castling his own life, I suppose, while I have the luck to look on in curiosity.
Day nineteen

In continental outline the United States rides the map as a
galleon carpentered together from the woodyard's left over slabs:
plankish bowsprit ascending at northernmost Maine, line of keel
southeast cobbled along Gulf shores and southwest border (Florida the Armada-
surplus anchor chain hung fat with seaweed), surprising long clean
amidship straightness of the 49th parallel across upper Midwest and
West. This patchwork ship of states is, by chance, prowling eastward.
Or as I prefer to think of it, forecastle and bow are awallow in the
Atlantic while great lifting tides gather beneath our Pacific portion
of the craft.

Trace to the last of this land vessel at the westernmost
reach of the state of Washington, to the final briefest tacked-on
deckline of peninsula. There is Cape Flattery, where the Makahs
of James G. Swan's years lived and where I am traveling today.

Towns thin down abruptly along this farthest-west promontory.
In the sixty-five mile stretch beyond Port Angeles only three--
Clallam Bay; within sight of Sekiu; then after fifteen final
miles of dodgy road, Neah Bay—and each one tightly hugs some cove
Olympic Peninsula, in the northern shoreline of the same as if grateful to have been
rolled ashore out of the cold wallowing waters of the Strait.

The tiny communities exist on logging and seasonal salmon
fishing, and as such places do, produce ample vacant time for their
citizens to eye one another. The man beside me this morning at the Sekiu cafe counter was working his way through hash browns, sunny side eggs, toast, sausage, coffee, and vehemence.

"That kid," he grumped across the room to the waitress, "that kid never did make much of a showing for himself around here. Glad to see him gone." An instant later, of someone else: "Never liked that lamebrained SOB anyway." As fork and tongue flashed, a close contest whether his meal or the local population would be chomped through first.

At Neah Bay, now at mid-morning, I am the one looked at, for my red beard and black watch cap. The Makahs of Neah Bay have been studying odd white faces in their streets for well over two hundred years. One story is that an early Russian sailing vessel smashed ashore at Cape Flattery and Swan believed that those survivors and probably other voyagers had left their genetic calling cards. (Some Makahs, he noted, have black hair; very dark brown eyes, almost black; high cheek-bones, and dark copper-colored skin; others have reddish hair, and a few, particularly among the children, light flaxen locks...) It is definite that Spanish mariners arrived in the late eighteenth century to build a clay-brick fort, which seems to have lasted about as long as it took them to stack it together. Every so often Swan and a
few interested Indians would poke around in the Spanish shards, and the midden would stir up righteousness in him: **How different our position from theirs. They came to conquer. We are here to render benefit.**

After a hundred and twenty years as a Reservation people under United States governance the Makahs might care to argue that point of benefit. Neah Bay meets the visitor as a splatter of weather-whipped houses, despite its age a tentative town seemingly pinned into place by the heavy government buildings at its corners: Bureau of Indian Affairs offices, Coast Guard enclave, Air Force base on the opposite neck of the peninsula. One building stands out alone in grace, a high-roofed museum built by the tribal council to display the finds from an archeological dig southward along the coast at Cape Alava. Despite the museum's brave thrust and the bulky federal presence, the forested hills which crowd the bay seem simply to be waiting until the right moonless night to take back the townsit.

I have brought with me the copied portions of Swan's diaries where he writes of Cape Flattery's place in the tribal geography of the North Pacific. Remoteness and the empty expanses of Strait and ocean could seem to insulate such a site, but that was not the case
at all when Swan lived among the Neah Bay villagers in the early 1860's. He found them carrying on a complicated war of nerves, and occasionally biceps, which would do credit to any adventurous modern nation. South, north and east, the Makahs looked from their pinnacle of land toward some tribal neighbor they were at issue with.

The slowest-simmering of these rivalries extended southward, about a day's canoe journey down the coast to where the Quillayute tribe lived. The Makahs suspected the Quillayutes of having killed one of their whaling crews which had been blown downcoast by storm. Time and again this tale reached Swan at Neah Bay, occasionally with the added note that the murdered canoemen had been seen as owls with shells hanging from their bills similar to those worn by Makahs in their noses.

Suspicion of the Quillayutes remained a matter of muttering, however. With the Elwha, Cowlitz, east along the Strait, the galling issue was their killing of Swell, and it rankled hard and often. In Swan's diary months Neah Bay jousts repeatedly with Elwha over the dead young chieftain. Early on, Swan and a Makah canoe crew returning from Port Townsend brought back with them a Cowlitz chief who wanted to talk peace. The Cowlitz breakfasted with Swell's brother Peter, everyone seemed to be
pleasant and friendly but the point was sledged home to the Clallams: It is generally understood that if they will kill... Charlie entire peace will be restored.

Weeks later, Clallams came to parley some more, to no further abruptly he was going to result. Months later, a Makah elder suddenly announced that he would set fire to Swell's monument because the white men had not arranged vengeance for his murder.

Of a sudden, inspiration evidently lit by that torching speech, the Makahs now scored a move: Today Peter stole a squaw from Capt. Jack, one of the Clallam Indians who was here on a visit. The squaw was part Elwha and Peter took her as a hostage to enforce pay from the Elwhas for robbing and killing Swell a year and a half ago.

The ransom fell through, one of the Makah tribal elders allowed the woman to escape. Peter came to me today with a very heavy heart in consequence of the squaw having absconded.

Just then the attention of the Makahs pivoted abruptly northward, across the Strait. Which customarily was the worst direction to have to expect trouble from: the northern Indians beyond Vancouver Island were numerous and powerful canoe people with a history of raiding almost casually down onto the smaller tribes of the Strait and Sound. The north could mean the Tsimshians and the Tlingits, and most dread of all, the Haidas of the Queen Charlotte Islands, almost to Alaska. Swan once had watched a canoe party of Haidas depart Port Townsend under the uneasy jeers of the local Clallams and Chimakums. For farewell, a Haida woman ripped a handful of grass and blew the shreds in the face of a Chimakum chieftain. That, she said: that is how easily our warriors could kill you.
This once, however, the threat did not come from the far-north marauders, but from a nearer and cousin tribe of the Makahs, the Arhosetts on the west side of Vancouver Island. A Makah and an Arhosett chief had wrangled about some trading goods: Sah tay hub getting angry because the Arhosett Indian would not agree to his terms, stabbed him with his knife.

Here was a bladed version of Swell's death, with the Makahs this time on the delivering end, and Swan records Neah Bay's jitters about the Arhosetts voyaging down on them in revenge: . . . a whooping and yelling all night occasionally firing off guns to show their bravery. No enemy however appeared.

Tension now on two fronts, and during a potlatch at Neah Bay a number of tribesmen from the outlying Makah villages said they wanted peace at least with the Chinooks. But Peter said that he would never be satisfied until he received pay in some shape for the murder of his brother . . .

Next, however, intelligence reached the Makahs and of course Swan's pen that the Arhosetts were having their own problems of pride. This forenoon Frank told me that he had just received news from his father, old Cedakanim of Clyoquot. It appears that the Arhosett Indians have been trying to induce the Clyoquots to join them in an attack on the Makahs . . . They offered 100 blankets and 20 Makah women as slaves provided they could catch them. Cedakanim and the other Clyoquot chief rejected this offer and demanded a steamboat, a sawmill and a barrel of gold. This difference of opinion came near resulting in a fight but at length old Cedakanim told them he would not fight the Makahs nor did he want any pay from the Arhosetts as he was much richer than they and to prove this
he ordered 100 pieces of blubber to be given them... This, said Frank, made the Arhoseyts so ashamed that the sweat ran out of their faces...

Perhaps deciding that it would be easier to negotiate with enemies than allies of Cedakanim's sort, the Arhoseyts held back to see what might be forthcoming from Neah Bay. Agent Webster suggested to the Makahs that they offer the Arhoseyts a peace settlement of, say, twenty blankets; the U.S. government would provide half the total.

Given the prospect of getting out of a possible war at the cost of only ten blankets of their own, the Makahs decided to preen a bit, find out just how much pride had been sweated out of the Arhoseyts. Swan was nominated the Neah Bay plenipotentiary to go over to the Arhoseyts and find out if they are willing to settle the affair by a payment to them of blankets, and if so the Arhoseyts were to be invited to come over and get them, but we were not to carry anything at first to them but merely to find out the state of their feelings.

As it turned out, the luckless Arhoseyts did not even have the face-saving moment of receiving an envoy from the Makahs. Swan peremptorily sent word to them through Cedakanim, the Clyoquot chief who had faced them down with his wealth of blubber, and eventually two abashed Arhoseyts arrived at Neah Bay to say they would settle for the blankets.

Peace ensued for two weeks, until the Elwhas protested that a cousin of Peter had wounded with a knife the brother of Swell's killer, Charlie. Peter responded that he was sorry, sorry that Charlie's brother had only been wounded instead of killed, for he would do it himself if he could get a chance.

Peter being Peter, the chance came. There is this ultimate entry by Swan:
Tried to get Indians to go to Pt. Angeles for Mr. Webster but all are afraid as Peter on his trip down killed an Indian at Crescent Bay. The Indian was an Elwha and some years ago killed Dukwitsa's father. Peter obtained a bottle and a half of whiskey from a white man at Crescent Bay and while under its influence was instigated by Dukwitsa to kill the Elwha which he did by stabbing him. Peter told me that after he had stabbed the man several times he broke the blade of the knife off in the man's body.

As might be expected, that stabbing invited battle. As might not be expected, the skirmish lines shaped themselves not between the Makahs and the Elwhas, but the Makahs and the United States. These years at Cape Flattery had been passing with remarkable tranquility between the natives and the white newcomers, as Swan was entirely aware: I have been reading this evening the report of the Comr. of Indian Affairs and it seems singular to be able to sit here in peace and quiet on this the most remote frontier of the United States and read of the hostilities among the tribes between this Territory and the Eastern settlements. Peter's knife punctured that state of affairs. Swan's daily narrative begins to show move, counter-move, counter-counter-move:

Mr. Webster arrested Peter this evening and took him on board the sch. A.J. Westen to be taken to Steilacoom, the territorial army headquarters.

... A canoe with a party of Indians followed the schooner and this evening it was reported that they had rescued Peter and conveyed him to Kiddekubbut. I think this report doubtful. But later... ascertained it was true... Old Capt. John and 16 others came this forenoon to make me a prisoner and keep me as long as Mr. Webster keeps Peter but when
they found that Peter had escaped they came to tell me not to be afraid. I said I was not afraid of any of them and gave them a long lecture.

John said I had a skookum tumtum.

... The steamer Cyrus Walker with a detachment of 33 soldiers under Lieut. Kestler arrived at Neah Bay about midnight of Tuesday. ... The steamer with Mr. Webster on board proceeded to Kiddekubbut and succeeded in arresting 14 Indians: Peter and thirteen others.

Peter now vanishes from the Neah Bay chronicle, to Swan's considerable relief. I have tried for the past three years to make Mr. Webster believe what a bad fellow Peter is, the diary splutters in farewell. A fiery enough record, these few years of Makah bravado and occasional bloodshed as chronicled by Swan. It might be remembered, however, that while this sequence of ruckus was occurring out on the back stoop of the continent at Cape Flattery, the United States of America and the Confederated States of America were inventing modern mass war at Antietam and Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. If it is a question as to which civilization in those years was more casual with life, the Makahs don't begin to compete with the Civil War's creeks and bayous of blood. Nor has their martial inventiveness kept pace with our own. Driving here from Seattle this morning, I stopped at the west end of the highway bridge which sweeps across Hood Canal on barge-sized concrete pontoons and looked along the channel to where a military base is being built for nuclear-missile-bearing Trident submarines. The killing capacity of Swan's tetchy Makahs compares to that of a Trident as a jackknife to bubonic plague.
Some hours in Neah Bay fitting its geography onto Swan's era—a breakwater, built in the name of World War II security, now stretches from the west headland of the bay to Waadah Island; the Bureau of Indian Affairs buildings top the eastern point where Webster's trading post stood—and I turn toward the ocean.

Cape Flattery is, as I have said, as far west as you can go on the mainland forty-eight states of America. But along its Pacific extremity there are thrusts of cliff actually out above the ocean; ultimate sharp points of landscape as if a new compass heading had been devised for here,
west of west.

From a logging road I climb down the forest trail to the tip of the Cape's longest finger of headland. At the trailhead the Makah Tribal Council has nailed up alarming signs... Rugged High Cliffs... Extremely Dangerous Area... enter at own risk. The final brink of the trail lives up to them by simply snapping off into mid-air.

There, some eighty or hundred feet above the Pacific, rides an oceanlooker's perch, an oval of white hardpack clay about twenty feet wide and twice as long. A clawnail hardness for this last talon of cliff.

I have clambered up all the great capes of this Northwest coast: Cape Disappointment at the mouth of the Columbia, to step to the Pacific horizon as Lewis and Clark did; Oregon's Cape Falcon with its howling fluency of wind, and south of it Cape Meares and Cape Lookout, and south from them Cape Blanco and Cape Foulweather and Cape Perpetual. But none of those, has the pinnacle-loneliness of this tip of Cape Flattery. Behind, on all sides, the continent shears away, dangles me to air and the rocky water below. "Those whales," a Makah tribesman has told me of the spring migrating pattern. "Sometimes they come right in under the cliffs. They scrape those barnacles off themselves on the rocks."

Surf pounds underfoot with surprisingly little noise but wind makes up for it. I crouch carefully, not to be puffed off the continent, and peer out the half-mile or so to Tatoosh, the lighthouse island here at the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. While at Tatoooche, Swan entered in his diary on July 18, 1864, I counted 18 vessels in sight.

Now machines instead of humans operate the Tatoosh light, visitors are none, and the tiny white cluster of lighthouse, residential quarters, water tower, and a collapsing shed give off visual echoes of emptiness. Tatoosh
Day twenty

Cape Flattery must have stood the neck hair on Swan a few times, too. This morning I find that in one of the several articles he wrote about the Makahs he listed in firm schoolteacherly style the superstitions of the tribe, then let burst from him this uncommonly uneasy language:

The grandeur of the scenery about Cape Flattery, and the strange contortions and fantastic shapes into which its cliffs have been thrown by some former convulsion of nature, or worn and abraded by the ceaseless surge of the waves; the wild and varied sounds which fill the air, from the dash of water into the caverns and fissures of the rocks, mingled with the living cries of innumerable fowl...all combined, present an accumulation of sights and sounds sufficient to fill a less superstitious beholder than the Indian with mysterious awe.

#

Yesterday's weather faded and faded, had gone into gray by sundown. This morning is delivering sleet, blanking the coastline of the Strait down to a few hundred yards of mingled sky and water and rock. A worker from a construction crew stepped from the room next to mine and squinted into the icy mush. He shook his head and declared: "I need this like I need another armpit."

#

The feel of Cape Flattery as an everlasting precipice of existence is strong as I repeat routes of Swan's here. When he established himself in the schoolhouse at Neah Bay in 1863, ready to reason the
peninsular natives into the white culture's version of education, he became in that moment the westernmost frontiersman in the continental United States. Jones, the Reservation farmer at the moment, moved briefly into the schoolhouse with Swan while his own quarters were being built, but it was Swan who nestled for good into the room atop the school's square tower. Away from the shared magpies'nest household at Webster's and out here on his pinnacle of the coast, he becomes now the Republic of Swan, newly independent. Population: one; Caucasian and male. Resources: ink, books, and an occasional newspaper off a passing ship. Languages: Bostonian, Chinook, Makah. Politics: Lincoln Republican, solder-the-Union-back-together-with-bayonet-steel. Industry: an exuberant light, allotted mainly to educational manufacture. Foodstuffs: a variety ranging from halibut-head chowder to something termed beef hash a la Makah. Flag: a river of words against a backdrop of black fir forest.

Delightfully situated as he now was, with windows facing the north, west, and east, and a glass door opening south, in a matter of months after the move to his schoolhouse aerie came news from across the continent winds-mind ed Swan how far he had flung himself. On the tenth of February, 1864:

...letter from my brother Benj L Swan stating that on Sunday Nov 29 my mother died aged 84 years 7 mos & 27 days and that on Wednesday Dec 2d my dear wife Matilda W Swan died of consumption.
The double deaths staggered Swan for days. As I read the lines, the same scimitar of bay before me as Swan stared to during the writing of them, his distress and realization thud and thud like a slow surf:

nearly paralyzed with grief

had fondly thought that I might once again go home and be joined with my dear wife and children, but it was ordered otherwise

aching, breaking heart

but little sleep last night went to bed at two and got up at six

Severe pain my teeth today. Sick in body and mind.
Day twenty-one

Sick in body and mind, and of all air and earth that touch the two. Any of us who have had much news of death know Swan's disorder, and its cure: routine. After some days of remorseful entries, probably whetted sharper by the memory of that permanent goodbye to Matilda in 1850, Swan turns to schoolroom worries again. Today, the fifteenth of February, quite a number of children were in attendance but David and some others came in about trade which I do not desire and frightened the children away. . . . I have been to Baadah every Saturday at Mr Webster's request to issue goods to Indians in payment for work done on the reservation. This has caused the others to think I am the trader and they continually come to me to sell oil, skins and blankets much to my annoyance.

Annoyance is a broad step up from misery, and as the months of 1864 pass, Swan's words brighten, the classroom perplexity ( . . . slow work teaching these Indians. They appear intelligent enough in most respects but appear to take but little interest in learning the alphabet) giving way to the glint of the Makahs themselves.

Julia and another squaw came up today, the tenth of April, and stated that the Hosett Indians had discovered that Kayattie one of the old men. . . . had caused the late spell of bad weather which has kept the Indians from fishing or whaling. A Squaw and a boy had overheard him at his incantations and had reported to the others, whereupon the whole village turned out and proceeded to Keyatties lodge and told him if he did not immediately stop and make fair weather they would hang him.
Keyattie promised to do so. John who told me the story very gravely added his belief that now we should have fine weather. I told him it was all cultus talk, but he said no, that the Indians in former times were capable of making it rain or blow when they pleased. There was one of the Kwillehuytes who made bad weather... during the halibut season and the Kwillehuytes hung him, and immediately the weather became fine.

Billy Balch, Kyallanhoo & the others who have been absent since Tuesday returned this forenoon, the tenth of June. They were blown off out of sight of land for one day, and afterwards made land at Oquiet, and remained till this morning. There was a large crowd of their friends and relatives collected together this morning thinking they were lost, and some of the squaws seemed sorry that they did not have a chance to howl.

The Indians told me this morning, the thirtieth of July, that Hadassub one of the best and quietest Indians in the tribe died suddenly last night at Kiddekubbut. I went down after breakfast on foot to the village and learned that he died of apoplexy. He had been very well all day and had joined in the dance at a potlatch given by Chekotte at Peter's house, and in the evening had taken part in a wrestling match and afterward partaken freely of rice and molasses. He had not eaten any molasses for a long time as it did not agree with him but on this occasion thought he would eat some... The Indians always attribute an unusual death to the operation of some bad Tomanawas, and as there is a party of them here I did not know but they might charge it upon them. I explained... the natural causes that would most likely have produced his death and strongly urged them in future not to bury any one until they had tried
In the autumn, Swan about to mark his first year in the classroom, school woes return to his daily pages. For one thing, he has worked out the appalling calculation that to keep the drafty schoolhouse warm will require 100 cords of wood—that is, a woodpile four feet high, four feet wide and eight hundred feet long, every slice of it needing to be wheedled from the Makahs by barter of buckets of potatoes. "For another, the attendance at School has been very meagre...and this afternoon I sent for Youaitl (Old Doctor) and had a long talk with him on the matter."

I told him that the Government at Washington had been at great expense to have this school house built, and now I wanted the children to come and be taught, and wanted him to let his second son Kachim come and board with me and be one of a class with Jimmy... That if a few of the boys took an interest to learn others would be induced to come, and finally all the children could be taught. I also told him that the old men were dying off and these boys would shortly take their places, and if they would come and learn now they could be useful when they grew up, and could better adapt themselves to the white mens customs, than the old men who were so prejudiced against the whites.

Old Doctor said my talk was "all good," "all good," and he would send the boy and talk to the other Indians...

Two days later Swan has in residence with him at the schoolhouse Kachim, Jimmy, and five other boys. They spend the day working on the alphabet and amuse themselves in the evening, and that night's diary
page exults that Today has been the first time that it has seemed like a regular school.

Soon after this triumph of regularity, Swan wakes a little after five in the morning to a houseful of smoke. I found George in the kitchen with a big fire in the stove... and a pot of potatoes on cooking and the smoke just pouring out into the room. As it created an atmosphere like that which he has been accustomed to in the Indian lodge, he thought it was all right and that he was doing finely. Swan opened the damper and commended him for his zeal but told him he need not get up another morning till day light.

George's breakfast smoke seems to hang on and on in Swan's pages, clouding the earlier sanguine estimations of the schoolboys' new diligence... the principal inducement at present is the novelty of the thing and the plenty of food I give them to eat. They can be influenced by their stomachs much sooner than their brains...

After more than a year of the effort to hold classes and compel attendance, two notations even more glum. The twenty-seventh of December, 1864:

My whole time is constantly occupied from early in the morning till ten and oftener eleven o'clock at night without an hour that I can call my own. Cooking, looking after the house, attending the sick, prescribing medicines and trying to teach, and the results are far from being in proportion to the great care and anxiety I feel.

The next day: John had a talk last evening in Russian Jims lodge about the school... and among others who spoke Jim said that he did not want his boy to learn to read and write for it would be of no use to him, he could not get anything by it, but if he learned to kill whales and
catch halibut he would have plenty of things. ... This attempt to form a school is the most unsatisfactory thing I have ever tried.
Day twenty-two

This morning, nagged by a murmur of memory, I finally found the entry, Swan's diary words of this exact date, one hundred thirty-nine years ago. The eleventh of January, 1860. Cloudy and calm. This is my birthday, 42 years old. I trust that the remainder of my life may be passed more profitably than it has so far. Self-investigation is good for birth days.

Tonight, after another coastal day back and forth between Swan's words and the actuality of Cape Flattery: "Some men and women are never part of the time they were born into," Carol's voice read to me as I hunched in the phone booth at Clallam Bay, "and walk the streets or highways of their generations as strangers... Reinforces our diminishing conviction that there is something special in American earth, in American experience and in the harrowing terms of American survival. Where there is no longer a house of sky..."

The words clatter back and forth between my ears. Never part of time they were born into...walk their generations as strangers...

The sort of thing I might write about Swan, restless in Boston, studious on the frontier, instead in the pages of the New York Times Book Review it has been written of me.
Day twenty-three

From places here at the outer corner of the Strait it can be seen clearest how abruptly close the Olympic range of mountains stands to this coastline: like gorgeously caped elephants about to go wading. Along much of the Peninsula south of the logging town of Forks, for instance, peaks of 4,000 to 7,000 feet rise within thirty miles of the Pacific shore, rather as if the Rockies were to begin at Philadelphia, or the Sierra Nevada just beyond the east alleys of Oakland.

Such rare brinking closeness between the earth's ice-tipped summits and its arcing horizon of water is even more pronounced toward Port Angeles and Port Townsend, where from one particular swoosh of this roller coaster Neah Bay road the Olympics look as if they are striding right into the Strait. Some shore sites back there—the best for this, as so much else, is Dungeness Spit—open so directly onto an overhead wall of white crags that you lose sense of any ground between. Wave slosh and caping forest, and that is all.

There is a kind of stolen thrill, something unearned and simply granted, about the presence of the Olympics. The state of Washington makes its margin with the Pacific as if the west of the Cascade Mountains had all been dropped heavily against the ocean, causing wild splatters of both land and water: the islands of Puget Sound and the San Juan group, streaky inlets everywhere, stretched stripes of peninsula such as Dungeness and Long Beach, and a
webwork of more than forty sizable rivers emptying to the coast. Amid this welter, the Olympic Mountains stand in calm black-green, tall files, their even timbered slopes like fur to shed the wet.

The region's history itself seems to step back and marvel at these shorelinen mountains. The coastal Indians seem not to have troubled to travel much in them. Why wrestle forest when the sea is an open larder? White frontier-probing too went into an unusual and welcome slowdown when it reached the Olympics. Although the range sits only some thirty miles wide and long, not until 1889 did a six-man expedition sponsored by a Seattle newspaper traipse entirely across it and leave some of the loveliest peaks of America with the curious legacy of being named for editors. Thereafter its terrific shaggy abundance of timber saved the range; giant fir sixty and cedar and spruce stood so mighty along its shorelines and foothills that the heart of the Olympics was not logged before National Park status came in the 1930's. Good fortune for the northwest earth that was, for where the early loggers did begin whacks into the Olympic Peninsula forest, some of them butchered the country: you can see it yet in places beside the highway, obliteration where the ancient stumps lie about like knuckle bones after cannibals had done with them. Those cut-out-and-get-out loggers had some excuse, not understanding or having to care that felling the timber that denuded the slope that lost the silt that clogged the stream would kill salmon runs and other interties.
of nature, and figuring anyway that the trees and salmon and
all else would last forever, but we know by now that America's
forevers tend to be briefer than the original estimates.

What remains, the Olympic peaks, rise to me when
I climb to the rim of our valley as the great Sawtooth Range
and other sharp horizons gnashed up to the west of my family's
Montana grassland. They were my first shore, those snow-topped
headlands which stop the flow of plains in the Montana I was
born to, and later, when I went back to write about that rock-
at last to savvy tipped land, I began to see the geography as a vast archipelago
of mountains and to remember how, like people in fast outriggers,
we traveled in pickups and trucks the valleys between the high
islanded clusters. Now it is Townsend, The Needles, Constance, Jupiter,
The Brothers, two dozen Olympic peaks alive in jagged white
rhythm like lightning laid lengthwise, that make the uneven
but steady skyline. From the instant I saw them a dozen
years ago I have felt exhilaration from these mountains like
a gust down from their glaciers. If they did not exist, I
think I would not live here; would need to be within sight of
some other craggy western horizon. As it is, over the years
I have hiked into all the main valleys of the Olympics except a few of the southernmost, and go time upon time upon time to places along the Sound and Strait where I have favorite views of peaks.

And today I have spent hours studying the Olympics rather than Swan's past. I don't much mind; Swan undoubtedly did the same. I find him writing once for the San Francisco newspaper, The great Sierra of the Olympic range appear to come down quite to the water's edge, and present a wild forbidding aspect. Other times, I find him tallying into the diaries a morning when the Olympics happened to be spectacularly sunlit. But I do not find him ever exploring into the so-near fortress of peaks. Enough of Boston evidently remained in him that he would admire mountains with his eyes rather than his feet.
Day twenty-four

The Pacific's sounds climb into the forest to meet us, minutes before Alava Island stands through the firs as a mesa in the ocean. Alava, first and biggest and namesake of Cape Alava's strewn collection of seastacks, reefs, isles, boulders. Of this pepper-spill on the coast's map which a despairing cartographer simply summed as The Flattery Rocks.

The rhythmic pound of tidal surge underscores the reputation that, all the fifteen miles down from Cape Flattery to here, and south from Alava for thirty miles more, this coast constantly dodges and tumbles. Boulder formations and landforms sprawl random and ajut as vast weapon heads. Drift logs lodge high on the beach like colossal ax-hafts tossed on a forgotten armory shelf. Each cape and bluff seems braced, banked for the turns of winter storm that flow in from the southwest. While Swan lived at Neah Bay, itself an outpost of the back of beyond, the tiny community here was considered the truly remote settlement of the Makahs. Hosett, it was called then.

Carol and I arrive the one easy way, overland from the east, and the route has become more "over" than I am happy with. Nearly the entire trail, three and a third miles from Lake Ozette to Cape Alava, has been built up into a boardwalk of cedar slabs, the size of stair steps and nailed onto hefty stringers. Wonk wonk wonk wonk wonk wonk, our boots constantly resound on the cedar, wonk wonk wonk wonk wonk wonk. The boardwalk's height from the forest floor puts my head at an elevation of seven feet or so, and I feel like a Zulu clogging along
in a Dutchman's shoes.

"Just like Asbury Park," Carol offers in joke as we wonk along. But this is not the New Jersey shore at the bounds of boardwalk, but a weave of coastal forest, and because the cedar walkway is damp enough to be slick my eyes are pulled down to it too often from their pleasure of sorting the wealth of green: salal, cedar, hemlock, deer fern, huckleberry, an occasional powerful Douglas fir.

We come onto the beach at Cape Alava amid a spring noon which has somehow drifted loose into mid-January. No wind at all, rare for this restless coast, and a surprise warmth in the air that denies knowing anything whatsoever about this morning's winter chill.

As we stride north the mile or so to the archaeological dig, we find that winter storms have made the Alava beach a stew of kelp, rock-weed, sea cucumbers and sundry unidentifiables. One ingredient is an ugly rotting bulb which we agree must be the ocean version of turnip. Gulls, turnstones and sanderlings patrol scrupulously along the tideline, while cormorants idly crowd the offshore rocks. Crows swagger now and again among the seaweed, right to ocean's edge. Some evolutionary instant from now the first one will scavenge in to join the gulls amid the surf and make the species seagoing.

The archaeological site has grown to resemble a tiny silver-strike town. Board houses and sheds dribble along the hillside, and then the laid-open ground where the excavation is underway. A difference is that the digging here is the most delicate of mining, done within two-meter squares of soil and performed by cautious hand-sifting. Five buried longhouses have been found on the site, and the contents of the
three opened to date have sifted out as a kind of archaeological miracle. The scholarly guess is that the Makah residents of some five hundred years ago felled too much of the forest on the bluff above, probably to feed their fires; the defoliated slope gave way and an avalanche of heavy clay soil sealed everything below it as instantly and tightly as if in a flood of molten glass. Washington State University archaeologists and their student teams have been at work here for ten years, and the trove of artifacts is to go on display in the museum the Makahs are building at Neah Bay.

The diggers are proud of the site. The young woman from a Colorado university who shows us around says it is known as one of the ten most important digs being done in the world. She tells us, too, details unearthed since our other visits here: that shells of some sixty kinds of shellfish have been found in the longhouses, testimony to the prowess of the Hosett Makahs in trading very far up and down this coast, and that belongings of a head man of a longhouse were found in one building's northeast corner, the farthest from the prevailing weather and therefore the snugest.

The dig deserves honor as a North Pacific Pompeii, an invaluable pouch of the Makah past. Yet I find as ever that I am stirred less by the treasure pit than by something almost invisible among the Alava tidal rocks. At low tide, if you know where to look amid the dark stone humps, a canoe-way slowly comes to sight, a thin lane long ago wrested clear of boulders by the Makahs so they would have a channel into the Pacific for their fragile wooden hulls.
This dragway is the single most audacious sight I know on this planet. Muscle made, elemental, ancient, leading only toward ocean and the brink of horizon: it extends like a rope bridge into black space. Mountain climbers, undersea explorers, any others I can think of who might match the Makahs for daring are able to mark their calendar of adventure as they choose, select where and when they will duel nature. But this hand wrought crevasse through the beach rocks was the Makahs' path to livelihood, their casual alley, and out along it with their canoes of poise and their sensations cleansed by rituals slid generations of Hosett whalers, lifting away into the glittering Pacific.

The archaeology student mentioned Swan as we toured the dig, saying that a good deal of what is known about the Makahs' whaling implements was learned from the descriptions he wrote. The words of his that interest me today, however, begin in his diary on July twenty-second of 1864, when he commenced a trip for Hosett and the lake said by the Indians to be back from Hosett village. As we retrace our steps inland to Lake Ozette we will be on Swan's route, and the Makahs of the time assured him that he was the first white man ever to see Lake Ozette.

That may have been native blarney, but the known history of the Alava coast vouches for it. In the journals of the sea going explorers I have found no record of longboats rowing in to reconnoiter this unnerving rock-snagged stretch of shore. In July of 1795 at the mouth of the Hoh River, twenty-five miles south of here, the Spaniard Bodega y Quadra did send in from his schooner a boat crew of seven men to fill water casks. The waiting Indians killed five, and two drowned in terror in the surf.
The Lake Ozette corner of the Peninsula was to remain undisturbed until white settlers came to its shores—inland from Alava, along the trail Swan walked thirty years earlier—in the 1890s. Their homesteads never really burgeoned and the lake even now remains remote, lightly peopled. Carol and I once hiked in to the southern end of Lake Ozette by a little-used trail to camp overnight. The solitude was total except for hummingbirds buzzing my red and black shirt.

Now, with a last memorizing look toward the beach and the Makah canoeway, to Ozette again. Swan's exploration on that day in 1864 we begin to duplicate with eerie exactness. The trail commences a short distance south of the village and runs up to the top of the hill or bluff which is rather steep and about sixty feet high. So the route still climbs. From the summit we proceeded in an easterly direction through a very thick forest half a mile and reached an open prairie which is dry and covered with fern, dwarf sallal and some red top grass, with open timber around the sides. The very grass seems the same. From this prairie we pass through another belt of timber to another prairie lying in the same general direction as the first but somewhat lower and having the appearance of being wet and boggy. This was covered in its lower portions with water grass and thick moss which yielded moisture on the pressure of the feet. Step from the boardwalk and drops of moisture from James Swan's pen were on our boots.

By now this second of the twin prairies was a name, and some winsome history. Maps show the eyelet in the forest as Ahlstrom's Prairie, where for fifty-six years Lars Ahlstrom led a solitary life
as one more outermost particle of the American impulse to head for sunset. Through nearly all the decades of his bachelor household here, Ahlstrom's was the homestead farthest west in the continental United States.

Originally, which is to say within the first few dozen days after his arrival in 1902, Ahlstrom built himself a two-room cabin close beside the Ozette to Alava trail. That dwelling burned in 1916 and he lived from then on in the four-room structure which still stands, thriftyly but sturdily erected with big tree stumps as support posts for its northwest and northeast corners, a few hundred yards from the trail.

Even now as Carol and I whip through the brush to this latter-day cabin, all signs are that Ahlstrom kept a trim, tidy homestead life. In his small barn on the route in, the window sills above a workbench are fashioned nicely into small box-shelves. At the cabin itself the beam ends facing west into the prevailing weather are carefully masked with squares of tarpaper. Inside, when Ahlstrom papered the cabin walls with newspapers, he wrapped around the pole roof beams as well, a fussy touch that I particularly like. Summers in Montana when I worked as a ranch hand I spent time in bunk-houses papered this way, and neatness made a difference. Always there were interesting events looming out at you—ROOSEVELT ORDERS BANK HOLIDAY or U.S. GUNBOAT PANAY SUNK BY JAPANESE—or some frilly matron confiding the value of liver pills, and the effect was lost if the newsprint had been slapped on upside down or sideways.

This rainbelt homestead of Ahlstrom's never quite worked out. Regularly he went off into the Olympic Mountains on logging jobs and other hire to earn enough money to survive the year. On the other hand, the homestead went on never quite working out for five and a half decades,
until Ahlstrom, at eighty-six, cut his foot while chopping wood and had to move to Port Angeles for the last two years of his life.

Here in the drowsing cabin I think of Swan and Ahlstrom, who missed each other by forty years on this mossy prairie between Alava and Ozette, and judge that if time could be rewoven to bring them together they would be quite taken with one another. Swan promptly diaries down the facts of the life of Mr Ahlstrom... arrived to America from Sweden at the age of 20 years... he and a neighbor have laboured to build a pony trail to the lake by laying down a quantity of small cedar puncheons... the rain here does not allow his fruit trees to thrive but his garden particularly potatoes grows finely... Ahlstrom, with his reputation for conviviality with travelers, pours coffee for Swan, watches to see whether he will take cream, Swedish style, or it black the way of the barbarous Norwegians. (Swan, resident of Neah Bay for a full two years before a milk cow arrived, takes cream whenever he can get it.) At slightest prompting, Ahlstrom entertains Swan with his story of coming face to face with a cougar here on the Ozette trail. I yelled to scare him. Instead it brought answer: the cougar snarled and I could see plenty of room inside there for a Swede. Ahlstrom spun and went away--It was no use to run--without looking back. The next day Ahlstrom returned carrying a long-tom shotgun and discovered from the tracks that when he retreated, the cougar had paced along behind him for a hundred yards and then lost interest in Swedish fare.

The trail again, Swan's and Ahlstrom's and ours. After crossing the second prairie we again enter the forest and after rising a gentle eminence descend into a ravine through which runs a small brook. Exactly
so. The little stream that dives under the boardwalk runs very loud, and sudsly from lapping across downed trees. Where the water can be seen out from under its head of foam, it ripples dark brown, the color of strong ale.

And now the lake, obscure and moody Ozette.

Here we found an old hut made in the rudest manner with a few old splits of cedar and showing evidence of having been used as a frequent camping ground by the Hosett hunters. An old canoe split in two was lying in front, and bones and horns of elk were strewed about. Now the premises which come into sight are a National Park display center and rangers' quarters.

At last at the lakeside, Swan had a curiously threatening experience.

It was nearly sundown when we arrived and I had barely time to make a hasty sketch of the lake before it was dark. We had walked out very rapidly and I was in a great heat on my arrival, and my clothes literally saturated with perspiration. I imprudently drank pretty freely of the lake water which had the effect of producing a severe cramp in both of my legs which took me some time to overcome, which I did however by walking about and rubbing the cramped part briskly. I said nothing to the Indians as I did not wish them to know anything ailed me, but at times I thought I should have to ask their assistance.

So he saved face, and evidently something more. What was it that struck at him with those moments of dismay in his legs? Uncertainty of how the Makahs might react to an ailment? That tribal habit of burying first and regretting later? The remoteness of Ozette itself,
like a vast watery crater in the forest?

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 to heavy fog. As I well knew that the fogs at this season sometimes last several days, I concluded that I had better return. Their return hike to Alava was memorably soggy. The fog and mist had saturated the bushes so that before I was a mile on my way back I was wet through and reached Hosett as well drenched as if I had been overboard.

Well drenched, and better pleased. 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 take some other opportunity when I might have white companions with me and make a more thorough survey.

Swan never did achieve that more thorough survey. But today, at least, he had the companions to Ozette.
Day twenty-five

I like about Swan that he has arithmetic in his eye.

When he and the Makahs dig around in the rubble of the
short-lived Spanish fort at Neah Bay, the clay tiles they
unearth are 10 inches long 5 1/4 wide & 1 1/4 thick. When Swan
visits the lighthouse on Tatoosh Island, the Fresnel lens
measures 6 ft across and is composed of 13 rings of glass
above 6 rings below. When he wonders how large the
clearing behind the Indian lodges at Neah is, he finds out
by pacing it off...235 paces long 60 paces wide this will
give at a rough estimate 2 9/10 acres.

If life cannot always add up for Swan, at least its
dimensions can.

He scares me a little, though, about this winter's effort at
precision, my try at knowing as much as possible of Swan. There
is that easy deceit of acquaintanceship; in the months since
This House of Sky was published I have heard again and again
from schoolmates and Montana friends, "I figured I knew you
pretty well, but..." (Echo: never part of the time they were born
into...walk their generations as strangers...) If I myself am
such an example of private code, how findable can Swan be in his
fifteen thousand days of diary words? Findable enough, I still
believe, for by now I have a strengthening sense of how it is
that some of those coastal paths which for so many years carried
him now hold me. But Swan does maintain boundaries, numerical ones,
with that deft pen. He may let me know exactly what size coat he wore, yet generally is going to make me guess about the inside of his head. Which perhaps is as much as one measurer can comfortably grant another.
Days twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight

The Neah Bay schoolroom once more, that wrestling site for Swan's tutoring and the Makahs' resistance to it. This morning after breakfast, the fourth of January of 1865, all the boys left without saying anything to me and have not returned all day.

Swan took the opportunity to do some housecleaning, inspect the trail being built from the village to the cattle pasture at Waatch Prairie, and spectate a real wrestling match in Captain John's lodge. The first who commenced were boys, stripped naked. They seized each other by the hair and twisted and wrung themselves about like snakes. Some were successful and threw their opponent while others after a spell of hair pulling had to desist. Some little girls also joined in the sport with the exception that they did not disrobe themselves. But in the diary he stayed in a huff about the absence of his students, and his powerlessness to stop them from passing in and out of the schoolroom like butterflies. I think best for them to stay away till Mr. Webster comes. I have said all I could and shall say no more. They seem to think they are doing me a great favor by coming and I want them to know that the favor is towards them and not me.

Mr. Webster arrived, was proving an elusive moment. The Indian agent's absence now counted up to two and a half months and the agency was running as low on supplies as on authority. The twenty-eighth of January: All hands out of work. Mr. Jones has been packing up his things to go home. Mr. Jordan has no lumber to work with, and Phillips--the blacksmith--no coal. I have no boarders, as I have nothing but potatoes to give them and they wont eat potatoes without something else. A few boys come in to warm themselves and will look at their books a few minutes and then leave.
I can scarcely call it a school...

The fifth of February, a rare open grumble against Webster: . . .

There seems to be some bad management in some quarter or another that detains him away so long . . . gone over three months and with the exception of a very short note sent from Port Townsend he has not communicated with the employees . . . almost entirely out of provisions, seven months pay in arrears, and no one to instruct or advise us how to proceed.

The next day Swan's mood was swinging from fulmination to reflection. My occupation is pretty regular every day. As soon as I get up, which is from half past 6 to 7, the Indians begin to come for medical treatment. Some who want prescriptions only I serve before breakfast but others who have sores to be dressed have to wait till I have done eating. Then it is 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 oclock & 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.

Of these eithers, the Makahs plainly preferred Swan as physician, and logical choice it was. Mending an ill was welcome enough; changing the tongues of the tribe's children was not. For rickety and fumbling though it may have been, as it was, this new white men's governance of Cape Flattery, with the plow and schoolhouse as its cutting tools, meant rip after rip through the Makah way of life. Swan himself once honed the metaphor. We have indeed caused the plowshare of civilization to pass over the graves of their ancestors and open to the light the remains of ancient lodge fires.
Many of the Makahs must have known the consequences as well as Swan—probably better—and the wonder is that the tribe did not stiffen harder against the demand that they surrender their sons and daughters to alphabet and agriculture.

Part of the answer must be in the beguilement that Swan and his paper and pen represented. The Makahs respected any potent ability, and Swan as the Reservation's deftest practitioner of paperwork had a right hand of magic. He it was who would provide a "paper" by which anyone who brought him an amount of firewood would be paid off in potatoes, would draw up a document attesting that a canoeman had helped rescue shipwrecked sailors and so deserved the favor of whatever white man was reading the words. (Or occasionally provide a somewhat more wan endorsement: Gave a "paper" to Shakaunt...that he is as good as the average but requires watching.) Out of his books would produce strange winged creatures and their stories. Swan had surveyed and mapped the Makah Reservation, taken its census, noted down whenever a whale was killed and who the harpooner was, made arithmetic of the very weather by measuring rain and wind and temperature and giving it a history in his tremendous ledger. All his perpetual counting and scrawling added up to something the Makahs weren't quite clear on, no more than we would be if a tribe came out of the sea to us and spoke green sparks which hung in the air, except that it carried power.

The Indians have a belief that I can tell by referring to my book containing the census of the tribe what becomes of any Indian who may be missing, so last evening a great many came to ask me to look in my book and tell what had become of Long Jim and the others who had gone for seals and had not returned.
I told them my book told nothing but it was my opinion that Jim and his brother who are young and strong would return, but as for Old George and the boy who were in a small canoe I thought they would not get back so soon...

His common sense prediction proved right, and the Indians now think that my book tells the truth and they have increased confidence in it.

Some other matters about Swan must have been as puzzling to the Makahs as his ceaseless writing hand. He rejected coldly their attempts to bargain payments out of him for letting their children attend his school, yet he would pay rewards to have mere seashells brought to him from the beach. He scolded about the drinking of whiskey, indeed questioned the Makahs steadily about its purveyors so that he could report them to Webster, yet at Port Townsend it was said that Swan had a weakness for putting the poison into himself. Over the years Swan had arrived and departed among the Makahs casually, but now he insisted their children must live steadily with him in the schoolhouse. (The boys will not come as day scholars, and there will have to be an entire change of things before the school will ever amount to anything.)

All of which is to say, here at this point in his winter diary of unease, that Swan, who even by frontier standards stood out as something of a drifter, was irony's choice to bring white grooves of routine to the natives of Cape Flattery.

At last, the twenty-fifth of February of 1865, after a three-month absence Webster arrives with supplies for the Reservation. Evidently Swan promptly made a fist at him about the gaping absence of
authority at Neah Bay the past three months. Before Webster's next vanishing act a few weeks later, he handed me a document which he had written placing me in full charge of the government property during his absence.

Swan and diary ease out of their winter ire. Some of the Indians have purchased umbrellas at Victoria and today there was quite a display on the beach. This is quite an innovation on their old style of warding off rain with bear skin blankets and conical hats. . . . Heard frogs singing this evening for the first time this spring. . . . Art work trimming shrubbery, training rosebushes and transplanting currants, blackberries and gooseberries. . . .

Then, the evening of the fourteenth of April, a reverberation set off at Appomattox five days earlier: . . . we heard several reports of cannon which proved to be the swivel at Baadah but as it was raining none of us cared to go to ascertain the cause although we supposed Mr Maggs had received some news from upsound of some great victory over the rebels.

And the next week the grimmer echo: Mr James brings the sad intelligence of the Assassination of President Lincoln. . . . Dreadful news. . . . The result will be that the north will be more united than ever and will crush out the serpent that has been nourished. . . .

The Reservation's potato field is planted. A day of fasting is observed in Lincoln's memory. Swan sets a hen on thirteen eggs in the schoolhouse basement.

The fifteenth of May, experiment by Swan's reading scholar. Jimmy took the tips of the Bulls horns which were sawed off yesterday and set them out among the cabbage plants. He had seen me set out slips of currant
& Gooseberries and thought if sticks would grow, the horns certainly would.

Three canoes of Clayoquot Indians, faces painted red and black, arrive from Vancouver Island to visit. At Hosett, a Makah canoe splits on a reef, and a woman and a girl drown. Webster persuades Swan to stand for a seat in the territorial legislature, and Swan is trounced. Swan sets another hen on another thirteen eggs.

The eleventh of June, a Sunday of frustration and retribution: Yesterday my cat killed all my chickens so this morning I shot the cat.

Webster sends a number of Makahs to the halibut waters aboard the schooner Brant, hoping to encourage them to learn shipboard fishing. The British gunboat Forward anchors in the bay overnight. On the Fourth of July, Swan hoists the flag at five in the morning and bakes a gooseberry pie.

The sixth of July, a bit of provisioning. Barker came from Clallam Bay this noon bringing some venison. I bought a hind leg... I strongly suspect it is our tame deer.

Swan spends a week in Port Townsend, buys two sets of underwear and a pair of pants. A few days after returning to Neah Bay he suffers a bilious attack. He goes to Victoria for a few days. School resumes. Annuities are distributed to the tribe's women: china bowls, bread, molasses, a chunk of beef and two blankets each.
The twentieth of August, the imaginative Jimmy once more. Jimmy had his ears bored yesterday and since then has refused to eat anything but hard bread & molasses and dried halibut. The superstition of the Indians being that if other food is eaten the ears will swell to an enormous size.

Then autumn, and unease among the Makahs. Capt John tells me that the Indians predict a very cold winter. There will be according to his statement, very high tides, violent gales, great rains, much cold and snow. The Arhosets predict rain from an unusual number of frogs in a particular stream at their place. The Oquiets predict cold from the fact that great numbers of mice were seen leaving an island in Barclay Sound and swimming to the mainland.

The natives and the mice and the frogs are promptly right. Nineteenth of November: The wind this morning blew open my chamber door which opens out from the south side of the tower, and slammed it against the flagstaff breaking out the entire panel work.

Next day: Gales of wind... accompanied by a tremendous surf and the highest tide that I ever saw in the bay. The water was nearly up to the Indian houses. The Indians were out with their torches saving their canoes & other property.

And the day after that: Gale... lasted till sundown doing considerable damage to fences, and unroofing Indian houses. Frequent lightning with distant thunder during day and evening... The Indians were badly frightened and brought their children to the schoolhouse for safety.

The eighteenth of December. Commenced snowing at 1 PM--6 inches
by six that evening.

The nineteenth. *Crust of ice on the snow.* ... The Indians have inquired of me frequently during the month when the sun would begin to return north. They say the fish are all hid under the stones and when the sun commences to come back, the stones will turn over and they will be able to catch fish.

This queer, jittery year bites through its last days. The diary entry for the twenty-ninth of December: *Katy was taken sick on the PM of the 27th and I gave her medicine and told her to keep in the house. But she went to the tomanawas & took cold.* Katy was a slave girl belonging to John's squaw and early in the year had begun to do household chores for Swan. He found her intelligent and competent. During the summer and autumn she cooked at the house of the Reservation carpenter, then in early winter became cook for Swan at the schoolhouse. *To all appearances a stout and remarkably healthy woman, her abrupt inclusion in Swan's running list of ill Makahs is disquieting.* Then on the 31st, in the final several hours of 1865:

*Katy died towards morning and was buried north of the schoolhouse near the beach.* ... The attack was sudden and her death unexpected....
Day twenty-nine

Seventy-nine pages later in the diary, this:

I found that the dogs or skunks have been disturbing Katy's grave and that the body is partly exposed and flesh gnawed from the bones. I spoke to John to have it covered up but as Indians are very averse to such work, I shall probably have to do it myself.

He then sawed up a plank, went out and protectively boxed in the grave.

I did this for the reason first that I wished to cover the body from sight, then, as she was a slave I wished to show the Indians that we considered slaves as good as the free persons, and lastly I wished to give the natives an idea how we made graves among civilized people.

Possibly. Possibly something more than that nervous rattle of reasons. The next day after noticing the grave had been disturbed, Swan planted daisies on Katy's mound of earth.
Day thirty

Year and year Swan's right hand shuttled on paper, pushing the quick daily threads into the pocket notebooks, the longer yarn across the broad ledger pages. In all his total of lines, forty steady years of them and tag-ends at either end of that, there is not as much typewritten material as I produce in a week. But more handwriting than I would beget in four hundred lifetimes.

Staring down into the diaries these weeks—a third of winter already flown; I begin to learn this constant route of Swan's pen hand. Rather, his pen hands, for the weave of words on these pages is not a constant tapestry: more like the output from some Hebridean isle of tweedmakers, steadily of a style but also of different and distinct wefts.

Pocket diaries: they generally are in pencil and the smallest several of them (1863 the size of a deck of cards) offer crimped little language indeed. One handwriting in these Swan simply tosses together of teensy stalactites and stalagmites. A word such as Webster jags along as if scratched onto the page with an icepick. This is Swan's casual—but-get-it-down hand, jab the day's doings in a place and sit down to supper.

His second handwriting is slightly smaller—the comb from my pocket covers five lines at a time when I hold it across the page as a measure—but immensely more legible; the clerkly Swan, this one. These diary days procession along as if stitched by a sewing machine.
Lastly, Swan has a scrawling hand, evidently for use in a canoe or other deskless locales, and it asks a bit of crypto-analysis. After a half minute or so of blank staring, something like Prov & rum! wood will seep through to me as Snow & rain. Fortunately, comparatively little wind S. Thankfully, there is none of this written mumble.

The notebook hands have rich cousins: the two handwritings of the Neah Bay ledgers Swan began in 1862. (That tiniest of pocket diaries, 1863, he elaborated into ledger entries as well.) The more prominent of these is done in lines about as high as the thickness of a pencil, and slanted on the page as rain is with a brisk breeze behind it. These are pretty pages, each headed with the year and month--Swan showed real flourish here; the M of March, for instance, will begin off in space with a loop that seems to be going nowhere but then swoops in to make the central pillars of the letter and next curlicues off into a smaller farewell barrel roll--and the day's weather entries. Hard to believe that weather such as Cape Flattery's could be made decorative, but Swan has done it. Each day's temperature readings at seven in the morning, two in the afternoon and nine at night are stacked within an elegant bracket which Swan draws beautifully, featherlike lines meeting in a precise pucker.

Rarely in these big pages is anything crossed out, and never do blotched. Quirks show themselves. Swan's alphabet tends to flip open at the top, an a or o only slightly more closed than his u: a d at the end of a word may have a quick concluding stroke away
from its top, so that it looks as if a musical note has dropped in from somewhere; commas, when they exist, are the briefest specks a pen can make, but overall this is a steady hand for which, again, the only word is clerkly.

His language is remarkably not out of date. He surprises me, for instance, by using pretty as loosely as any of us would: worked pretty constantly all day. The one off-word I trip over consistently is eat for ate, as when the schoolboys stay for supper with him: I boiled a shin of beef with potatoes...and they eat heartily and washed it down with cold water.

Swan's other handwriting in the ledgers, the fifth of the bunch, is simply more crouched than his standard ledger hand: about two-thirds in size. The reason could be in the deep springs of his psyche, Swan in these occasional pages showing some But my tightened mood. My guess is lamplight. That when Swan wrote at night, he hovered to the page more carefully to be within the narrow yellow puddle of light.

All in all, Swan the so-constant diarist puts me in mind of a story he once records, of meeting a seaman named John Johnson who had sailed aboard an American ship with three other Scandinavians of the same name in the crew and who told Swan I was called Johnson Number Four. All of these days of pages are the shared craft of Swan One, Two, Three, Four and Five.
Day thirty-one

Point No Point is the tiny peg of map line from which Puget Sound measures itself southward. Southward and southwestward, for the Sound at its farthest thrust begins to fringe toward the Pacific as if swept in a steady breeze. Those streamers of water extend the measuring considerably, because from here at the Point until the Sound has delineated its every last remote bay and channel, thirteen hundred and fifty miles of shoreline—the equal of the entire Pacific Coast from San Diego to Cape Flattery—edge the sprawling inlet’s outline.

Evidently in derision, Point No Point was named by the Wilkes expedition of 1841, when that American naval survey team sailed up to what seemed from a distance to be a promontory prowling boldly into the one more bold shoulder of the Northwest coastline, Sound, and isn’t. The forested ridgeline lies a few hundred yards back from the shore, and the flat acres intervening between the dark bluff and the water, plus the nubbin of beach which provides a perch for the lighthouse, proved to be the maritime sum of the site. But eminent or not, Point No Point marks the entrance to the great Sound, and nobody now remembers who Wilkes was.

Except for the four of us, Carol, me, Ann and Phil, good friends newly moved to the height above our valley, today’s visitors to the Point all are out on the water with salmon as their purpose: twenty-five small boats in a bright shoal around the lighthouse. Many of them are red rowboats from the resort nearby, with dashing white script on their sides proclaiming Point No Point. The fanciness reminds me of another prank of language, that when his Mississippi townsmen used to scorn Faulkner
as an overelegant scribbler they would call him Count No 'Count. Here is a site in scansion I can see that sly squire enjoying, out in one of the red rowboats with an antique bamboo rod and a flask of sipping whiskey, affirming to fellow anglers that yes, none other, he is Count No 'Count of Point No Point.

When the tide is down, as it is now, the beach can be walked for a few miles southward from the Point into long views of the forested rim of Puget Sound. In fact an angled look across the water to a particular patch of the quilled horizon on the Sound's eastern shore exactly reverses my usual line of sight along the gray plain of water: the view from the top of the valley which holds our house, across into this Point No Point corner of the Sound. Now, here on the western shoreline, bluffs sit in sequence along the Sound's edge like sterns of a moored fleet.

We begin to do the leisurely beach miles and the friends' gab that goes with them.

Ann performs a squinched-up impression which she assures us is an imitation of a tenpenny nail being driven: rigid stance, hands at side, shuddering winces as my knees buckle downward.

Phil gently informs us that neither has much career ahead as sea-life or spike.

Carol is first to see an inbound ship. Freighters entering the Sound pass close by the Point—indeed, emerging from Admiralty Inlet to round the bluff they give the illusion that they are going to carve away the lighthouse as they come—and this beach is one of the few sites where I can share in Swan's fixation on passing ships. Windships sail day on day in his pages, rocking into view with the hidden push of air against
their groves of canvas, whitely slicing the Strait's breadth of blue, the
very print of their names vivid enough to ferry the imagination horizon-
ward. Willamantic and Alert and Flying Mist and Naramissic. The Toando
Keller, the Lizzie Roberts, the Jenny Ford. Orion, Iconium, Visurgis.
Quickstep. Up from San Francisco, Nahumkeag. Aquilar de Los Andes, eagle
of the Andes and homebound to Santiago. Lalla Rookh and Wavelet and Jeannie
Berteux.

Nothing in our world is so richly, gaily named any more, unless
it would be racehorses, and the sails that come and go on these waters now
fill
are for pleasure rather than commerce. Saturday spinnakers instead of
daily broodsails. Swan would like it, though, that the region still is
water-mad, in its way. To walk down to the shoreline of any Puget Sound
community is to find mast filled marinas, natural as coves of cattails.
But schooners, barks, any of the working-canvas fleet that went past him,
sometimes several a day: no.

Our version of a Quickstep sheers past the Point No Point lamp light like
strap-iron passing porcelain, then steadies massively into the shipping
lane of the Sound. We try, and fail, to pick the name off the freighter's
bow with field glasses.

Ann tells of a handy powerful monocular her father carries with
him on hikes. A spyglass, it would have been in Swan's time.

As if the first freighter was the outrider, others now show them-
selves from behind the bluff regularly each half hour or so. The third
black ship cuts past just at low tide, three p.m. As we have walked I
have been watching a known place on the horizon for any glimpse of Mount
Rainier, where I will be at this time tomorrow, but a squall in the center of the Sound's prairie of water is intervening. Soon the squall line moves north, off Whidbey Island, and try as we do to convince ourselves it can't boomerang toward us, it comes.

The Sound and sky go to deeper grays, the lighthouse begins sending out dashes of light, and we start back to the Point as the day's fourth ship, edges erased in the rain, passes indistinct as a phantom.
Day thirty-two

As I carry groceries from the car to the cabin, the forest challenges me. Rawf, it barks, Rawf rowf roof. Rawf. While showing me routines of the cabin, doorkeys and woodpile and pots and pans, Trudy and Howard had mentioned that a neighbor's small brown dog is fond of visiting. We would be instant friends, Trudy assured me. Dog friend is advancing on me now from the woods with his five-note salvo like a sentry triggering off warning bursts.

"Hullo, Solo, hey, Solo Solo Solo," I offer and coax him into being petted. At once he wags ecstacy, devotion, worship. But as I step down the path from the cabin Solo moves to my heels and yammers steadily all the way to the car.

Before gathering the next armful of cargo I again Solo Solo Solo him, stroke his back until the hair threatens to fray off, scratch his belly and the place between his ears, seem to have sent him irretrievably giddy. He then rolls to his feet and yaps me every step back to the cabin.

People sometimes comment, surprised, that I am remarkably at ease with their pets, in the same way they occasionally congratulate me--astonished, here—that I am good with children. But they are seeing a kind of social sleight of hand. In either case my heart is not much in the good manners. All I hope for, from youngsters
or from the animals that seem to take their roles in many households, is respectful truce, whereby we gaze mildly at one another across some line fixed in the air between us. That of course is never the set of terms the other side wants. Solo evidently has seen through me at once to the secret agent against dogs and will bay the alarm through all eternity.

One more round trip we make, Solo yawning determinedly whenever my hand isn't stroking him. I face the issue.

"Solo, goddamned if I'm going to spend four days petting you. Go home."

He wavers, somewhere between another aria of barking and a demand for further ransom of petting.

"Get-the-hell-outa-here."

Off Solo scampers through the ghostly alders, looking faintly regretful about having overplayed me. The silence that arrives along his retreating tracks fills the forest, reaches instantly down from the upthrust of fir trees and the hover of the mountain, vast Rainier, somewhere above the unquiet weave. After the introduction, an avalanche of仍issence.

I am here for stillness. For pause in this winter at Swan's heels and, I suppose, in my own strides across time. Coming to this underedge of snow country is a brief reflective climb back to my first life in the West, the Montana life. I grew up in powerful winters of white, amid stories of even mightier ones: the
seasons which have swept western Montana each three decades
since the first of them was registered, to the everlasting shock
of the rangemen, in the late 1880s. 1919-20, which broke our
family homestead under its six-month burden of frozen snow. 1948-49,
when I watched my father struggle to save two thousand sheep, and
our future, on the blizzard-lashed ranch at Battle Creek. Now,
again, another thirty-year giant. For weeks Montanans have been
telling me by phone or mail of the deep lock of cold in the Rockies,
of snowdrifts across porch railings, concern for cattle soon to
begin calving. Sentences from a Missoula friend: "Anything bad
about this winter in Montana that you happen to hear, believe it.
It is the worst ever, and it started November 9. The ground has
been under snow since, and it hit -28 here on January 1, -50 in
Butte."

I have had an urge recently to return to Montana, go
there for the experience of the great thirty-year winter. It may
after all be the last to fall within my lifespan, and that ink
of Swan's will not drain away in spring runoff. But I would be
returning on tourist's terms, on whim and mere spectatorship, which
to me are tarnished terms for such an occasion. Any honesty about
dwelling tells me I have not earned this Montana winter by living
with the land's other moods there, by keeping my roots within its soil.
Half my lifetime ago I decided the point, although I did not then know
how long-reaching the decision would be, that the ranch-country region
of my grandparents and parents is no longer the site for me to work out
life. I could not divide myself, a portion to the words I wanted to make, another to the raising of livestock and coping with furious seasons. Not winters of white steel but the coastal ones of pewter, gray, soft toned, workable, with the uninsistent Northwest rain simply there in the air like molecules made visible, are the necessary steady spans for me to seek the words. Yet the white winters have not entirely let me go. A time or two a season, snowline will help me see the margins of what I am doing and I come to some place such as this, a white edge of the Northwest where I can sit above my usual life for a few days.

Hear what is being said in my skull. Watch mountain dusk draw down.

scrutinize

And game of deer, as I am now. The boldest of them wintering here is a doe which made her appearance as Trudy and Howard were leaving, and has ghosted back into the near-dark now. Black-tailed and gray-furred for winter she eases past this cabin a time or two and each evening, they told me, can be recognized by the nick in her ear. A wide screened-in porch rambles around three sides of the cabin, a pleasant half-hidden promenade up among the first branches of the trees, and from it she can be seen for several minutes on her route.

As I watch down from the porch the motion of the doe's each step seems to recoil slightly into her as if some portion of poise is being pulled back each time in reserve. This tentative grace of deer which stops them just short of being creatures of some other element, hoofed birds, perhaps, or slim dolphins of the underbrush. Who would have thought, on a continent of such machines of the wild as bison and elk and the grizzly, that it would be deer
to best survive? For once, the meek have inherited.

Before bed I look up Swan on deer. The blacksmith at Neah Bay was undertaking to raise one from a fawn. The twenty-sixth of January, 1865: Mr. Phillips' tame deer has been missing for several days and I strongly suspect the Indians have killed it in retaliation for sundry dogs which Phillips and Mr. Maggs have shot.

But the next day: The deer made her appearance this morning and much to my satisfaction...It is very tame, looks very pretty running about among the cattle.
Day thirty-three

New snow, two inches of dry fluff. The entire forest has been fattened by it, everywhere a broad white outline put onto all branches of trees and brush. The effect comes odd against yesterday's green and gray of the forest, like a white blossoming gone rampant overnight.

Time along the Nisqually River today, first at its freshly white bank and then atop its dike of small boulders which rises about half again my height. Even at winter pace the Nisqually rattled past faster than I could sprint. The sliding water measures about sixty feet across at this time of year, but in a flood past year its width bellied out to some hundreds of yards, which is the theory behind the dike. Howard described to me how the floodwater bashed open the predecessor wall of boulders and gathered into its flow nine vacation homes.

The lone survivor of what had been the rank of ten, a house brinked above the gravel-bottom scour where the river scooped past and looking still unimpressed from the thinness of its escape, I crunched by in my dike amble; and was reminded by it that Carol and I had traveled casually into the Sierra Nevada foothills where the gold towns had blossomed and found all rivers bucking in high white fury, with reports daily of rafting Californians drowning themselves. "Damn river is like Niagara Falls laid out flat," some California official or another complained to a newspaper reporter, and so the waters of the lode
country all looked, so the Nisqually must have loomed when it decided to do something about habitations crowding its banks. I was careful to tell the river, in my mind where its rapid keen burble kept asking, that I am only visiting.
Day thirty-four

I intend as mild an afternoon as can be spent aboard snowshoes. Whop around on the slope above the National Park buildings at Paradise, watch the weather seethe around the summit of Rainier a mile and a half above. When my thigh muscles make first complaint about the pontoons at the bottom of my legs, ease off the fluffy ridge, try to keep the car from becoming a bobsled on the white packed road down to Longmire Lodge and coffee and pie: then the forest's miles back to the cabin, and dusk.

But halfway above Paradise I wallow onto rodent prints stitching a path in and out of the stands of firs. Fate has jotted written in the snow. There is no choice but to become a tracker. Along tilts of slope, over drifts, up, down, across. After several minutes I glance back from the tiny pawprints to my wake in the snow. It is what a whale might churn up in hot pursuit of a minnow.

Shameless, I plow on, occasionally deserting the tracks for the pleasure of creating my own didoes in the white. I discover that the south face of every fir I pass is gray-white with ice: frozen melt at the very end of the branches, in fat cellular conglomerates sectioned by the green fir bristles. Grenades of ice. A sudden thaw would put me under bombardment. Doves of peace—no, gray jays ambling through the air to me, pausing just off my shoulder as if kindly offering to search
my pockets for any loaves of bread which might be burdening me.

The jays sortie off to elsewhere and time drifts out of mind after them, replaced by attention to the weather atop Rainier, lowering, rising, brightening, darkening. As though the mountain when it ceased being a volcano of fire became a cauldron for weather. Like all else in this region of the Cascades, this casual slope I am on, still not far above Paradise and its visitor center and lodge, points quickly up toward Rainier as if in astonishment at how it looms. I was surprised far back along the highway when I was arriving to the cabin, how the lift of the mountain made itself felt even there, the road suddenly jerking into rising curves.

Inventoried the arc of mountains which surround Rainier, themselves lofty but less than half the giant peak’s height, I come onto the thought that the geographical limits of my Northwest winter are Tatoosh and Tatoosh; Tatoosh Island offshore from the outermost perch at Cape Flattery, the Tatoosh Range of crags in view to the south here at the crest of the Cascades, jagging white up through the high-country fabric of forest. At Swan’s first mention of a visit to the Tatoosh lighthouse I looked into a place-names guidebook, found that the derivation could be from the Chinook jargon word for "breast" or the Nootkan word for "thunderbird." Divvy the deriving, I decide: give these cleaved profiles their due, let the thunderbird have the island.

Bulletins from below. Thighs are threatening open rebellion. Snowshoes still want more country. **Tatoosh-tatoosh tatoosh-tatoosh** the webs sing into the snow as I go onto a fresh drift.
Day thirty-five

Strange, to be again in a house of entirely wood. Under the rough brawn of ceiling beams and amid the walls’ constellations of pine knots. Almost two decades of suburban wallboard intervene from when ranchhouse and bunkhouse nightly surrounded me with board walls.

What is it about a cabin within a forest or beside a shore that sings independence from the common world of dwellings? Something more than hinterland site or openly-outlined strokes of beams and rafters; some natural stubbornness against ever being thought an ordinary house shouts through as well. Cabination or anti-domicility or some such rebellious shimmer of the atoms of wall-wood; a true surmiser of cabins would have the term. I simply know that cabin-y distinctness says itself and I step across threshold as if going into some chamber of a far year. The broad central room of this cabin, for instance, trades adamantly back and forth between the family who spend summers and weekends here and the abiding forest outside. A wallbeam aligns the china plates which sit on it as if they were droplets on a branch; beneath runs a long bank of mullioned window, the small panes fondling separate bits of the forest as if they were scenes on porcelain. On another wall is the cabin item that interests me most, a crosscut saw. Blazon of sharpened steal, the crosscut is a remarkably elegant tool to have inspired its epithets: "misery harp" the least profane description Northwest loggers had for it as, sawyer at either end, they ground
the blade back and forth through a Douglas fir or red cedar. Having
caught from Swan the winter virus of measure-and-count I've learned
by yardstick that this slicer of forests is six and a half feet long,
by careful finger that it has sixty-eight beveled sharpnesses
interspersed with sixteen wider-set prongs which make space for the
sawdust to spill away. A giant's steel grin of 84 teeth and as
innocent and ready in this cabin amid these woods as a broadsword on
a Highlands castle wall.

Sawed wood--firewood--decides my site when I am here inside
the cabin. I settle at the kitchen table, close by the cookstove
which must be fed each hour or so. (Howard has told me he will
harvest his own firewood when summer comes, from the stand of alder
woven within the mullioned window. A neighbor who owns a team of
workhorses will skid the downed trees in for sawing. I wish the
harnessed horses were there now, the leather sounds of their working
heft coming down the mountainside. Instead, if anything is out
there, it will be either Solo on reconnaissance to see whether I
have mended my anti-dog ways, or the slowly gliding deer.) Today
out of the mound of mail which has been building on my desk since
Swan's diaries moved into my days I finally have winnowed the
letter from Mark, in his faculty office in Illinois—we may be the
last two American friends who write regularly and at such length to
one another—and the quote which he found during his research on
mid-nineteenth-century frontier missionaries. The Reverend
John Summers, reporting from Benton County, Iowa, in July of 1852: