Day eleven

Above the two of us, the eagle glides a complete slow circle, as if studying from the corner of his eye our surprising plaid skins. Near enough he floats, perhaps a hundred fifty feet above Carol in her jacket of gray and yellow and black, me in my red-and-black, that we can see the scalloped pattern of feathers at the ends of his wings, the snowiness of head and tail that marks him as a bald.

One more silent exact noose of patrol, then the dark flier flaps off southeast across the bay. The Boston bird, Swan says the coastal Indians began to call the eagle after arrival of the first American trading ships, pale New Englanders aboard them with the glittering wide-winged image on their coins. Under this taloned hunter's glide now a fleet of swimming ducks crash-dives in fear, but they are not the target of the moment. When the eagle scrapes into the water, it is a fish that lofts away to doom.

We stand atop Dungeness Spit's rough spine of driftwood to watch the bald eagle and his meal vanish into the shore trees. From up here, all its bowed length into the Strait of Juan de Fuca—seven miles—Dungeness prickles into view like a gigantic hedgerow somehow weired atop the water. Age-gray drift logs tumble across each other to the height of a Dutch dike, fresher logs perpetually angle ashore, yellow and tattered from grinding across the gravel beach, to pile in turn onto the long heap. The rarity of Dungeness in all the dozen thousand miles of America's coastal edge speaks itself even in the dry intonings of scientists: longest natural sandspit in the United States; driest point on the West Coast north of San Diego. A thin hook of desert snagging the water, within walk of glaciated mountains and cool fir forests.
Swan, as said, sailed by here for the first time on a February morning of 1859, inbound for Port Townsend and his resumed western life. With his feathered name and that migratory nature, he was something of a Boston bird himself, testing new waters, fresh paths of glide. For the several years after his arrival to the Strait, Swan shows up time upon time at this sandy breakwater, usually portaging across the base of the Spit as the most direct canoe route between Port Townsend and the Makah settlement at Neah Bay. If he happened to journey by ship, the route went close past the site of the lighthouse which rises like a white candle at the far end of the Spit... **A keeper's house and a fine brick tower 92 feet high, he noted in that year of 1859, in which is placed a stationary light of the order of Fresnel.**

The Dungeness light tower is now white-painted concrete, and not so lofty. That original beacon proved to be so high it shined above the fogs that drift on the face of the Strait. But there is a Fresnel light even yet, not the one Swan describes but an 1897 version, an exquisite six-sided set of glass bulls-eyes which flings a beam of brightness eighteen miles.

Once Carol and I had the experience of being drawn the full length of the Spit, through the exact blackest center of night, by the focused blaze out of that elegant box of glass. I was to write a magazine article about the Coast Guard families stationed there at the remote end of the Spit's ribbon of sand, and Carol to shoot photographs for illustration. We arrived here to Dungeness about an hour before a November midnight and met a specter.

The bosun's mate in charge at the lighthouse had said he would drive in to meet us on the coastal bluff overlooking the Spit. He
wavered now out of the blackness like a drunken genii, clasping a hand to half of his forehead and announcing thickly that we had to hurry to keep the tide.

Wait a minute, we said. What exactly had gone wrong with his head?

Groggy but full of duty, he recited that when he judged the time had come to drive in above the tide, he traveled fast. Racing through a bank of spume, his four-wheel-drive vehicle bounded over a log the way a foxhunter's horse would take a hedge, and when man and machine plunged to sand again, his forehead clouted the windshield.

With woozy determination, our would-be chauffeur repeated that we would lose the tide if we did not hurry. I looked at Carol, some decision happened between us, and we climbed into the four-wheel-drive.

Headlights feeling out the thin route between driftwood debris and crashing waves, our Coast Guardsman ducked us through cloud upon cloud of spume sailing thigh-deep on the beach. That spin-drift journey was like being seated in a small plane as it sliced among puffy overcast. From that night I have the sense of what the early pilots must have felt, Saint-Exupery's blinded men aloft with the night mail above Patagonia, avid for "even the flicker of an inn-lamp." We had our ray of light, leading us with tireless reliable winks, but even it could not see into our foaming route for us.

At last at the lighthouse, with the engine cut, no next encounter between four-wheel-drive and fat driftlog having been ordained, the Fresnel lens wheeling its spokes of light above our heads; we breathed out and climbed down to the Dungeness sand for our weekend stay.
Two moments stand in my memory from that next day at the tip of Dungeness Spit. The first was seeing the lens itself, coming onto the fact of its art here on a scanty ledge of sand and upcast wood. What I had expected perhaps was something like a titanic spotlight, some modern metallic capsule of unfathomable power: not a seventy-five-year old concoction of magnifying prisms, worked by the Paris artisans to angles as precise and acute as those of cut-glass goblets, which employed a single thousand-watt bulb and stretched its glow across nearly twenty miles. The magnifying power from this small cabinet of glass was as pleasantly astounding as Swell's explanation of the aurora borealis glinting up from Eskimo camp-fires.

The second memory is of the mustached bosun's mate himself. With what pride he showed off his domain of Dungeness, not only the glass casing at the top of the lighthouse but the radio beacon apparatus and the foghorn and even the flagpole with a red storm warning flag bucking madly at the top. "The wind wears out about ten flags a winter," he said to impress us, and did.

Lighthouse life dimmed a bit when he escorted us in to talk with his wife, and the wife of the young petty officer on duty with him. Both were edgy about the Spit. Mrs. Bosun's Mate calculated out loud to when their oldest child would start school, which would take the family to land duty: "I WANT to move inland." Until that could happen, she was forbidding the children to leave the fenced yard around the quarters because they might injure themselves in the driftwood. The petty officer's recent bride, who lived in the rooms at the base of the lighthouse tower itself, was disconcerted to have in her living room one huge round wall
which emitted a night-long beamish hum.

The bosun's mate heard them out, evidently not for the first time, then led the pair of us off to see any further feature of lighthouse keeping he could think of. The day, blown pure by last night's wind, had its own magnifying clarity. Mountains rose in white shards far north along the Canadian coastline. Mount Baker lorded over the glinting horizon of the Cascades to our east, highest ice-flame among dozens of ice-flames, while the Olympic range crowded full the sky south and west of us. Dungeness seemed more astounding than ever, a gift of promontory grafted carefully amid the mountains and strait.

The knot on his forehead barely visible beneath his cap bill, hands fisted for warmth into his jacket pockets, the bosun's mate looked around at this ice-and-water rim of the Pacific Northwest in a quick expert glance, then turned to us. "I'm a true coastie," he announced as if introducing himself. "A shallow water sailor."

The Dungeness light has blinked through a number of hundreds of nights since then, and today in bright sun Carol and I casually prowl the inside shore of the Spit, around to where smaller Graveyard Spit veers off from Dungeness. In outline from the air, Dungeness and Graveyard together look like a long wishbone, Graveyard poking shoreward from near the end of Dungeness like the briefer prong of the forked pieces. Out there now just beyond where they join, the lighthouse and out-buildings sit in silhouette against Mt. Baker, a white peg and white boxes against that tremendous tent of mountain overtopping the skyline a hundred miles to the northeast.

I am watching for snowy owls. This is the fourth year of the
cycle which brings them this far south from the arctic, and we once saw one here, a wraith of white against the gray driftwood. Pleased with ourselves, we returned to Seattle to discover that another snowy had taken up a roost on a television antenna above a mid-city restaurant, and half the population had been out to see him. No owl today, nor the blue herons who often stilt along Graveyard Spit.

We stay with the inside shore, the one facing Graveyard. This is the wildfowl side, the commissary for migrating ducks and brant, as the outward shore is the lagoon for seals who pop up and disappear as abruptly as periscopes. Today's find presents itself here on the interior water: a half dozen eider ducks, making their kor-r-r, kor-r-r chuckles to each other, then, as if having discussed to agreement, all diving at once.

An edge of ice whitens the shoreline, a first for all the times—fifty? seventy-five?—we have come here. Mountains stand in all directions with the clear loveliness Swan observed during one of his early visits—unobscured by mist or clouds their snowy peaks shone most gloriously... Across the Strait at Vancouver Island, where we can see in miniature detail the tallest downtown buildings of twenty-mile-distant Victoria, Swan had marveled at the endless timber level as a field of wheat, following the undulation of the ground with a regular growth most wonderful for such a dense forest.

How cold the day, but how little wind. It balances out toward comfort. That is not always the case in this restless spot. Swan, on an excursion past the Spit on a day in May of 1862: ... stopped for
the night at the light house where Mr Blake, the keeper treated me very politely to a supper & a share of his bed. Next morning: Left the light house at 3:15 A.M., calm. Passed round the spit where a breeze sprung up which freshened into a squall with rain. A tremendous surf was breaking on the beach & we for a time were in great peril. But finally we managed to get ashore at Point Angeles where we found shelter.

Dark settles early, the sun spinning southwest into the Olympic Mountains instead of going down near the end of the Strait as it does in summer. We leave the Spit before dusk, heading back to Seattle to spend New Year's Eve in our traditional geographically diverse game of penny-ante poker. Baltimore--"Ballumer," she says it--will play her challenging, by-god-you're-not-going-to-get-away-with-it style. Texas, behind a cigar which would credit J.P. Morgan, contents himself until a strong hand, when he raises and re-raises relentlessly. Carol--New Jersey--is the steadiest of the bunch, and wins regularly from the rest of us. By way of Montana--me--comes an uncharacteristically fevered kind of style which can swathe through the game, devastating everybody else for three or four hands in a row, or obliterating my own stake.

Swan would approve the pasttime, if not our particular card-table temperaments. He once passed up a chance to come ashore to visit with the lightkeeper at Dungeness, because he and the others concluded to remain on board, devoting our energies to the successful performance of a game of seven-up, or all-four, or old sledge, as that wonderful combination of cards is variously termed.
Day twelve

The new year.

On Sunday, January 1, 1860, his first New Year's Day on the coast of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Swan opened a new tan pocket diary and inscribed on its first page:

May it be not only the commencement of the week, the month and the year, but the commencement of a new Era in my life, and may good resolve result in good action.
Day thirteen

Today Mr Brooks, William Ingraham & myself finished setting the posts for the main building of the school house and when we had all ready which was at noon, I told Capt John to call the Indians. Some twenty five or thirty came out and when Mr Brooks was ready I told John who then gave the word and the sticks were lifted into their places and the whole of the sills for the main building fastened together in about an hour. I told John that when the buildings were done Mr Webster would give them a treat to pay for the good feelings evinced on this occasion. They have been opposed to having the building erected back of their lodges and I have had a deal of explanation to make, to do away with the superstitious prejudices of the old men. But by the exercise of a great deal of patience I have succeeded in inspiring them with a confidence in me, which makes them believe not only what I tell them is true, but what we are doing is for their good.

The noontime came on the fifteenth of October, 1862, and the exertions which overtopped the cedar longhouses of the Makahs with the framework of a schoolhouse lofted more good for James G. Swan than he let his pen admit.

Precisely when his mind had become set on securing the job as teacher at Neah Bay, there is no direct evidence. But hints murmur up from the diary pages. Likely as early as those first visits to Cape Flattery in 1859 Swan divined that Henry Webster would try for the appointment as Indian agent when the Makah Reservation came into being. Even more likely is that Webster, noticing Swan's knack of getting along with the Indians, advised or asked him to seek a Reservation job.
Those discernments, and Swan's rummaging curiosity about Makah tribal life, were the pulls to Neah Bay. The push was that Port Townsend had not worked out well for Swan, and a fundamental reason seems to have been whiskey.

Once I happened across the lines of a diarying compatriot of Swan's, a Scot named Melrose who also had arrived to the Pacific Northwest—to Victoria, north on the Canadian coast of the Strait—early in the 1850's. The alcoholic atmosphere of the frontier enthused Melrose to near rapture. "It would almost take a line of packet ships," he wrote cheerily, "running regularly between here and San Francisco to supply this isle with grog, so great a thirst prevails among its inhabitants." He took care to note down how far his companions in thirst overcame their parching—whether each had become one-quarter drunk, one-half drunk, three-quarters drunk, or wholly drunk. Every so often, the Melrose diary presents the forthright notation: "author whole D."

Swan, I hardly need say, was not a man to record himself as whole D or any other degree of it. But that he was tussling with the temptation of the bottle is plain enough in his own diary even so.

Joined the Dashaway Club of Port Townsend—a group who took a pledge of abstinence and whom one unsympathetic editor dubbed a claque of "high-toned drunkards."

Cut my lip with a brush hook this evening in Gerrishes store in a scuffle with Maj. Van Bokkelin—Van Bokkelin one of Swan's closest friends and a pillar of community respect, and a scuffle hardly thinkable of a sober Swan.

Days later, Made a pledge... not to drink any more liquor for
two years from this date, the ninth of December, 1860.

That pact may have been as much with Webster, the gatekeeper to future employment at the Makah Reservation, as with himself. Whether or not, most of the next twenty-one months until Webster finally was able to pluck the appointment as Indian agent found Swan odd-jobbing in sobriety at Neah Bay. (And quartering at the Baadah Point trading post with Webster and whoever else happened to be on hand, in what seems to have been a peppery household: During the evening a skunk came into the kitchen to eat swill. Mr Webster fired at him with his pistol, cutting some of his hair off with the ball. The skunk made his escape but filled the house with his stench.) Some months more had to pass before Webster could enroll Swan on the Makah Reservation payroll as teacher, but then, the first of July of 1862, at last Swan having secured position and salary, immediate dignification sets in. Three and a half years of jotted doings in pocket notebooks leave off, and the first of Swan's ledger diaries, the pages long and officious and the handwriting scrupulously clear and margined, begins.

What is recorded for the first year and more has nothing to do with education, except that over this course of time Swan's classroom ever so slowly gets carpentered to completion. Instead, Swan spent the time lending a hand in the sundry chores of the little Reservation work force, especially the labors of the Reservation's farmer, Maggs, the earnest bearer of agriculture to damp Cape Flattery.
"Making the earth say beans instead of grass," Thoreau teased himself about his garden at Walden. At Neah Bay, the official notion was that the coastal soil ought to orate potatoes.

... We plow the land twice, Swan recorded, harrow it twice, then plow in the potatoes and harrow the whole over again. ... If what we plant grows as thrifty as the wild raspberry, currant, gooseberry and elder and nettles, cow parship and other rubbish grew we shall have a famous crop. There is a kind of Hibernian woefulness about this idea of remaking such a people of the sea as the Makahs into potato farmers. I think of the "potato Protestants" of Connaught in the Irish famine, forced to barter their religion for the meals of survival. (Credit Swan with having grave doubt about persuading the Makahs to trade canoe for plow:

Indians cannot live on potatoes alone, any more than the white men; they require animal food, and prefer the products of the ocean to the farina of the land. It will take many years, and cost the Government large sums of money to induce these savages to abandon their old habits of life and acquire new ones....I think they should be encouraged in their fisheries...) The Makahs, however, with seafood xoming at their front doors, were not at the edge of desperation, and so managed to make the best of the potato policy. As democratic eaters, they blithely claimed their spud allotments whenever a harvest was produced; but as uninspired agriculturalists, they conspicuously left most of the plowing and other field labor to Maggs and Swan.
Through 1862 and most of 1863, then, Swan dabbles beside Maggs or Jones in the potato field. Gathers lore from the Makahs. (Captain John is an ever-ready, if problematical, fountain of it: John as a general thing is a great liar, but he is well informed on all historical matters...)

Does sketchwork. Keeps the diary constant. And otherwise disposes of days until the carpenter hired by Webster at last whams the final nail into his schoolhouse.

Webster himself is absent from Neah Bay much of the time, now that he has Swan and the others in place there, so Swan fairly often finds himself standing-in as arbiter among the Indians. Peter came in this evening and had a long talk with me relative to his conduct since he came back from California. He promised to do better and said he hoped I would be friendly to him. I told him I always had been his best friend and was now, but his actions had displeased me and in particular the fact that he had not paid a debt he owed in Port Townsend to Sheehan the tinsmith... 

And sometimes the tumbleweed white population as well. Capt Melvin arrived in the schooner Elisabeth. He had been down on a trading voyage and had been trading whiskey among the Nittinat Indians in the vicinity of Barclay Sound... he assured me positively that he had not nor would he sell any liquor near the reserve. He however inadvertently showed me his account book and I saw that he had with his potatoes one barrel 33 gallons whiskey... I advised him to keep away from where I was for so soon as I had proof of his selling whiskey so sure would I complain of him.

Finally, in mid-November of 1863, the potato harvest was in, the schoolhouse stood roofed and windowed, I painted the alphabet on the blocks. Mr. Phillips made for me and tomorrow I intend to commence teaching.
This Neah Bay Swan, if you look steadily at him for a moment, a greatly more instructive person than the Shoalwater oysterer first met on this frontier coast. He has shown himself to be a fellow who likes to hear a story and to take a drink, not absolutely in that order; has 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 schoolhouse); can drily laugh—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 steady correspondence with Matilda, Ellen and Charles; hardly ever meets a food 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 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 next has 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 he may be consumption. The Makahs put on a raucous tamanoos ceremony to boost Jimmy's health, just as a gale rips across Neah Bay. Crows tip over Swan's rain gauge.
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 boomm and whoommm 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, 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 Albatross 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 1865: 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
a 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. Badgerlike, I hunch in
here at the typing desk and watch helplessly as the building
every so often imposes itself athwart the birds' paths, and
once in awhile kills them. 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, damnably 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 sheafed paper atop a tablecloth so Victorianly 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, probably come 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 frontier caliph, 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 nose.

A smatter 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,

Indian
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 hee-hawing, 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, a shape which could be pared and stretched a bit into my own, I notice. But 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 (\textit{A favorite white meerschaum pipe}, and fob. \textit{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 my eye and not quite willing to register. At last the 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, 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.

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.

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 strong 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 Tatooche 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.

Yowarthl 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 Towallanhoo 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 diarists habit something which surfaced out of instinct, the unslakable 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 generally at some moonstruck time of our lives. 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 now I make 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 I 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, however, 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 plague-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 is not merely maintenance, but more like architecture, the careful ungiddy construction of something grand as it is odd. Swan works at his pages 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 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.

But. 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—there Clallam Bay; within sight of Sekiu; then after fifteen final miles of dodgy road, Neah Bay—and each one tightly hugs some cove in the northern shoreline of the cape, 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 townsite.

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 would 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 canoeemen 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 Clallams, 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 Clallam chief who wanted to talk peace. The Clallam 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 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.

In evident inspiration, 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 Clallams. 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 Clyoquets 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 Arhosetts 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 Arhosetts held back to see what might be forthcoming from Neah Bay. Agent Webster suggested to the Makahs that they offer the Arhosetts 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 Arhosetts. Swan was nominated the Neah Bay plenipotentiary to go over to the Arhosetts and find out if they are willing to settle the affair by a payment to them of blankets, and if so the Arhosetts 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 Arhosetts 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 Arhosetts 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 Kiddekkubbut. 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 Kiddekujuibbut 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 was occurring 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.

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,
simply rests out there like a fat stepping stone off the end of the continent. The next foothold beyond it is Asia.

In the 1860's the Makah tribesmen told Swan that below these cliffs, in hours of calm water, they sometimes hunted seals. Caves drill back in very far at the base of the cliffs, and so a Makah would approach by canoe, swim or wade in with a lighted torch and a knife, and stalk back along the tunneled floor until he came onto drowsing seals. The blaze of the torch confused the animals, and the hunter took the chance of their confusion to stab them.

There was risk, Swan noted. Occasionally the torch will go out, and leave the cavern in profoundest darkness.

Profoundest darkness, and naked knife-bearing men who would wade into it. Even if you do not know that story, to stand atop this last rough end of the continent is to have it come to mind: what the dwellers of this coast could do before they found other, easier routes.
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 school-teacherly 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 looked into the icy mush. He shook his head and announced: "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 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: 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 which reminded 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 such 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 Keyattie's 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, Kyallanhook and 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 Kiddekkubbut. 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

Quinaults 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
every means of testing animation.

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 sliver 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, however, 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 the young chef 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 often 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 Jim's 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; I am 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 birthday 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.
webwork of more than forty sizable rivers emptying to the
coast. Amid this welter, the Olympic Mountains stand in calm
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
shoreline 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 fifty 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
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 is still original, 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-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, 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, 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, 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, rockweed, 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 swash 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 snuggest.

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 canoeway 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, there is no record of longboats rowing in to reconnoiter this unnerving rock-snogged stretch of shore. In July of 1785 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 are on our boots.

By now, this second of the twin prairies has a name, and some winsome history. Maps show the eyelet in the forest as Ahlstrom's Prairie—where, for fifty-six years, Lars Ahlstrom lived 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, thriftily but sturdily built 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 whap 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 bunkhouses 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 drink 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 walked 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 sudsy 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 strewn 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 find 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 makes me wonder, though, about this winter's effort at precision, my try at knowing as much as possible of him. 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 believe, for me 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 with that deft pen. I may know
what style coat he wore, but generally is going to make me guess one measurer ought to grant another.

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about the inside of his head. Which perhaps is as much as a deal

of sand blew out as a deal in every
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 hummingbirds. 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.

Till Mr Webster arrives 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 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; 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 was 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 potion 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, Webster and supplies. 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. . . At 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 Jones 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 leading 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.

(of 1865)

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 Katys 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; this man Swan is hour-eating company—already flown—I begin to learn this constant route of Swans'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 into 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.