

WE'D SEEN HIM WALK

We'd seen him walk the coast. No man can pass this way without it being spread long before his feet step near.

Him more than others ... stopping to talk to all he saw. And knocking at every door, hey. Not that there's many to see or shanty house for him to rap knuckles at.

Specially when we're out to sea or jigging at good shots of rum. Having our fun, you know. We'd be starting our bottles between the breaking waves ... about when half our pots were hauled to hull.

Women and what kids weren't to salt is all he saw. Talked holy and we men wanted none of that wind. The gales enough to fight against, without having to be taught what's sin.

Well, word went about the harbor that this man had no place in setting our shore-folk to ways of his. And asking them for us to take to nets in hands opened anew.

Now who's a stranger to say to we what's been dragging for cod, hauling lobsters all these years? And often enough pulling one of ourselves from the deep, eyes swelled to drowned sleep.

We waited until he'd come to the Skull - a cliffside steep and treacherous to drive. It lay on his way to the next county and sure it was the only walk to take.

I took it on a bet and got myself all set. Came in early to shore and tipped some shot glasses dry. Then, soon as I seen him start that steep climb - jumped to the truck and took after his tail.

First I offered him a ride - a jug of wine we'd share. But no, he smiled and said god bless, he's to go on a way already laid.

Now you know that pulled on my hook a little too tight. I rammed up that hill with stones splattering from tires burning the road black. Turned at the top and finished a fifth. Let that clutch go with shouts of god damn and the radio ablaze.

Seeing him turning a curve, I just barely swerved to save my own bodily self. Him ... he got grazed. I could see him spin and roll to the rock.

Truck, I backed it fast and laughed from the cab above, asking him had he any words to say. Answered something of love and don't know if I got madder or scared of what I'd have to do to get done.

No stranger's walking my shore with words like those. Why they be mocking me at the docks as being but a bit of a man - one not fit to heave at any net with them. To say nothing of swigging at barwood ... our shoulders touching with heavy laughter and girls we share.

So sure, I backtracked to a turn. Floored the pedal till I felt my foot was burning as gas. Saw him just at the top, limping and bleeding ... an intruder what had to be cast from our lot.

And he stood just before my cab came to its crest. Held out both arms as if it was me he wanted to catch.

Course, now in thinking back, I'm sorry I did what got done. Not that the judge saw so much harm. Hadn't wanted him about as well — is what he said.

Just asked me to be more careful in taking those curves.

Now, as I walk the coast, I see his face at each bend. Give thanks for his blood that my feet can step near.