1.24 - wasn't Dap'mn memory - canning meat?
1.50 - make some of this dialogue by Mac?

ch 1 - Jick's exasperated
ch 2 - exhilarated
ch 3 - coping

counted on heavens yet,
- close to getting Mac's goal, so to speak (also showing 1/1100 sone)
- using the tails & multiply y one (at least they did - tell me)

Mony stuff (inc. Butte) in Jick's ride c packed up?
To 4th of July?
scene of Beth (remembered) during mini trip; after job/Mac supper.

540 - locate Noon Creek - meet through m. 7 Ege Creek
541 - meet dialog by Mac, on convert into dialog
444-442 "

55 - more on hay
57C - more dialogue?
45 - give the location?
49 - fish circles below (or to one side) 1 sheep
53 - more?

part (in Mac) no allows for compromise got left out of Alec

545 - went Noon Creek circular

George Sam Hoy because of Uncle Sam re/see on p. 59?

give: taking trip some apparent goal for grade? why do that?
p. 61-A? 5.6 - what his intention to gun Mac? Mac mentioned back
untent: Alec earthily showing offleasing in profound way -
how at clinic //arm

wound quiet by lunch

550 - went attribution for story to Dode, or not?

Mac - tells Dode o beams, etc. - sub-cont to Uncle Tom joking
show Mac's anger in reprieved? p. 27+?

as saying goes - fickle manner?

explain why fice does dink instead of Alec. (Alec mad'd?)
I am he. (I'm wounded.)

How many times did I hear... (a forest fire)

We got her to travel - Denmark, Scotland

magpie demain, Christ had 1 so of ours & I had to have one, too,

if she was sure she had kept an eye off Beauty

Eng. at Manor - what Zane had done failure

Dr. were in pull of names, but their quantity enhances - this

epitaph: 'dr. & Beth

conquer than weeds they will thrown into

Kelly a wing-tailed wonder
As mind drifts - sanity won't be able to tell

I'll say me for S, he stopped my mind from dwelling on / any cut or more Walter Kyle - Maile etc.

jerk the at back of Mac riding ahead - X-ray; see thru

jerkunless tests @ camp

imaginary conviction - Walter Kyle?

Walter, you'd make someone a godwife.

knew of o / piano, which we why he'd stayed a bachelor.

Not much out of / and y / (not blone) col be called getting

make clear what a courting trip is?

unint. can / def'n of Roman Reef?

Jack of Mac. No cut w/ Kyle's sheep. next day?

Jack, view of Mac ahead of him

t good glance around ... Yet I stil at inventory

spigol

So I wanted ... o / am, did I.

Bob - Hesthall - patron saint.
- dream of Mrs. walking from Dr. N. rescher
- H coming to - Teo in Sept.
ch. 1 total of units

4 lines, p. 23 = done
7 " p. 30
5 " p. 35
6 " p. 36
5 " p. 45
12 p. 71
10 " p. 30
3 " p. 26
3 " p. 36
2 " p. 36
3 p. 37
60 lines
10 p. 47
8 pp. 55-6 = 73
8 p. 68
86
68 10 87-71 = 154
5 p. 12
4 2 123
1 174 = 7 pp.
3 " p. 36
177

No. Changes subject
Now's Island and England

No. Contest
69 - confusion of sheep + weapons?
69 - were

69 Could cut at conclusion -
pick up w/ p. 72

73 - bled

74 - proclaimed - omit to Dole

77 - omit their friendship.
pick up last 3 lines of page.
392 - line 4 from 6, smokechases - "we're going to need fire chases."
393 - line 3 from 6, "telephoned"
394 - line 5

No 397 - line 4 from top, change "may sound" to "seems"?
No 398 - line 5, "brow" given

407 - helpful of acts each?
No 408 - line 1, "from" given

407 - line 5 from top, move "after supper.
408 - line 6 from top, change "said" to "responded", stipulated

411 - add "quick section - above last line?"
"of course my name come b, for some attention"
415 - line 3 from top, tell
416 - line 4, "hyper"

No 418 - line 12 from bot, he'd
419 - line 4, "last week", "last last week."
420 - line 5-6 from top, invent "a crew of to scatter"

421 - last last sentence

423 - line 7 from top, capitalize Danger, or get other fire rating?

431 - line 4, smokechases

432 - line 4 from bot, invent "a crew mattermost"
432 - line 6 from bot, invent "a crew material"

435 - line 5 from bot, c
435 - lost line, before?
436 - sub named?, c 10 a.m. policy.

438 - line 7 from bot, "12 from bot, here get?"
"c " "? or both smokechases?"
440 = line 12 from top, "pole?"
OK "" ""

→ 441 - line 3, "pole?"

442 - 1st line was
OK 445 - last line, "pole guard?,"

447 - change Battle to "minude?"
456 - line 9, "'day"
458 - line 5 from left, "telephone"
459 - line 9, "" ""at last"
457 - last line, "the to Homer"

458 - line 13, change to "You know what he told me?"

461 - line 2, "in"
- line 10, "a letter"

462 - want packing of supplies? - No
- line 9 from top, change "council"
- line 7 from bottom, "inspect to supervision"

463 - want packing of supplies? - No

→ 464 -
466 - line 7 from left, a story
465 - line 6, ""all to most?"
464 - line 5 from 7, change "council?"
473 - review fire/\'s in letters
   - sectors of fire line?
   - lodge pole?

478 - line 7, 1 \[?

475-6 check fire desc. pm against letter; can hear fire?

475 - line 3 from bot; flame ble.

477 - line 5 change to 13:10.

- from bottom, change to "be priests" 2 sentence

3:  "new 41

478 - line 7 from bot., 2.

479 - CCAs dine: pickup?

481 - line 2, \[? fire?
   line 4, 4

481 - can hear fire?
   - check fire line desc.

482-3 check fire behavior
   - line 9, lodge pole?

483 - fire crew "on watch"? - add "we can't fight don' ride 7:40:30."

484 - more fire desc. ?

485 - carbon old? OK

490 - insert "backing fire"

492 - check fire record

493 - "ema" crew to top?

494 - "explain back fire? - earlier in record c 5:400?"
   - line from bot., 4
   - change to "well past noon"
2406 - insert slowness of fire till then?

197 - leg S from top, 7 council - on whole phase?

- change back firing description done by 10?

- " bull pines

496-9 - check against letter
- " crew behavior

500 - Mac "stand by"

500-1 - what Slave be dark washing?

501 - from top, You r

- 3 - < "not, "bathroom" are?"

506 - check fire aftermath
- media camp?

507 - S? can get them?

508 - 10 from top, "law - in"

512 - cut "turnover mood..."

- 5 from top, told

512 - check "Wright" in Crazy MT no phone like

512 - have 2, not

515 - S remain?

- "wait "jerk"

60 - stop shooting CW

521 - change headline
348 - Line 3 e a l - triumph

347 - Line 7, a where'd

346 - Line 6, .75 guys have

347 - price of labor?

346 - another stocker, line 6

344 - line 7 change to "a stockman ought to be"

351 - check having letter

352 - rewrite scatter talking

ask Pete - 353 - didn't show me trip, instead of CCC?

355 - Line 4, fire guards?

355 - 9, incendiar

356 - check Salamanca material

354 - cut or move 10 a.m. policy? - in effect in '32?

357 - fire guards? Not mentioned.

354 - Line 10, "wind"

354 - line 3 from bottom, wind N/S, east?

360 - line 9 from bottom, cut 'tree that'?

NO 361 - WIND 10 O'clock policy?

363 - Line 9 from top 9

270 - 15 miles, danger

270 - Line 6 from bottom, Pete's lawn

381 - Write line 3-5 from bottom?

352 - 9 from bot, cut "e cluster"
3:17 - rejoice Reale
3:18 - R-7 - Lord of Mercy
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 1 lines 4-5 from top, change "was encountering" to "had encountered"

line 2, put "or anyway a bit less desperate" between commas

line 7 from top, insert "the" to make it "the Forest Service"

3 line 12 from top, boldface GOODBY OLD DRY and AS FOR HAVRE YOU CAN HAVE 'ER

4 lines 3-4 from top, change to "lengthening the stirrups again to account for how much I was growing that year,"

line 9 from top, delete "than last year"

6 line 4 from top, change "her load" to "my mother's load"

line 12 from top, change "were alike" to "are alike"

7 line 11 from top, change "allotments" to "permits"

8 line 8 from top, change "allotment" to "permit"

9 line 11 from top, change "had" to "held"

line 6 from bottom, change "this" to "in a"

line 3 from bottom, change "great exerting" to "mighty exertion"

11 line 10 from top, change "The Double W sees" to "The Double W makes sure"

line 11 from top, change "they don't have" to "we don't have"

13 line 8 from top, insert "on the national forest portion" to make it read, "the beaver population on the national forest portion of English Creek."

14 line 4 from bottom, insert "and" after "pleasantry" to make it read: "some pleasantry and then lighting up"

17 line 7 from bottom, insert comma between "cowboyifying" and "too"

18 line 8 from top, change "but" to "and"

line 10 from bottom, change "herding" to "running"

line 9 from bottom, change "would you?" to "is that it?"

19 line 1 at top, change "along this creek" to "along the creek here"

line 4 from top, change "in this whole goddamn state" to "in the whole goddamn state of Montana."
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 20 line 11 from top, change "took a count on" to "took a count of"
   line 8 from bottom, change "above the others" to "above the other forests"
   line 6 from bottom, change "that morning" to "this morning"

22 line 5 from top, change "a blaze face was always Star" to
   "a white one was always Snowball."

p. 23 lines 10-13 from top, delete; pick up with "As soon as my father"
   line 5 from bottom, change "his spyglass" to "Walter's spyglass"

p. 24 last line, delete "for whatever reason" to make it read "But I went ahead"

26 lines 13-16 from top, delete both sentences between "around our kitchen"
   and "Leona, Leona."

   line 7 from bottom, delete "Well," making the next line begin "Anyhow; with"

30 line 5 from top, insert "of the Two" to make it read "wind of the Two forever"
   line 6, beginning with "Someone like" delete the rest of the graf, making
   it read: "naturally wears on the nerves.
   The Two, I have been saying."

31 line 10 from bottom, delete "s" from "grasslands" making it "grassland."
   line 2 from top, insert "the Two Medicine" to make it read
   "but then the Two Medicine promptly cuts"
   line 5 from bottom, change "around" to "toward"

33 lines 8-11 from top, delete entire paragraph

   line 10 from bottom, change comma after "it" to period. Then delete
   the rest of the line and substitute: "Those kids have got to eat."
   line 9 from bottom, change "when he starts" to "when the lazy SOB starts"

35 first line, insert "round" to make it "In Dill Egan's round corral"

36 substitute revised p. 36

37 substitute revised p. 37
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 38 line 6 from top, delete all hyphens

lines 12-15 from top, delete everything between dashes, making it read: "Sanford rode double behind me and when we dismounted at the ranger station, he trudged"

40 lines 1 and 2 at top, change "upside-down" to "topsy-turvy"

line 11 from bottom, correct "happen" to "happen"

42 line 4 from top, insert "that" to make it "was that thirty years"

line 12 from top, change "Fort Leonard Wood" to "Camp Lewis"

line 13 from top, delete "Missouri" and insert "in the state of Washington" to make it read: "fists against chins in the state of Washington"

line 5 from bottom, change "Missourian" to "Camp Lewis"

p. 43 line 10 from top, change "and" to "or", making it "cattle or sheep."

44 first line, change "philosophy" to "doctrine"

45 lines 15-to bottom of page, delete

data entered

46 insert revised p. 46

47 line 7 from top, beginning at "And since" delete the rest of the paragraph.

line 8 from bottom, delete "Anyway, words" and substitute: "Stuff of that sort"

50 line 5 from top, change "cornerposts" to "braceposts"

line 7 from bottom, add "for him" to make it "college and engineering for him."

p. 44 line 3 from top, insert "lookout" to make it "fire equipment, lookout phone lines"

54 line 12 from bottom, change "bolts" to "eyebolts"

line 11 from bottom, change "flanges" to "turnbuckles"

line 9 from bottom, change "whose rope and hitch knots" to "whose lash rope and diamond hitch knot"
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 55-56  Beginning with last line of p. 55, "Packstrings of horses..." cut the rest of the paragraph. Pick up at line 8 of p. 56, "Since the lookout gear"

56  lines 9-10, substitute "one horse it hadn't been necessary to call on my father's packer, Isidor Pronovost, and his eight-mule packstring for this counting trip of ours."

P. 56  line 9 from bottom, after "on the other side of it" delete comma and insert "and then some light awkward stuff such as our cooking utensils in a top pack;"

line 5 from bottom, change to: "reefed down on the lash rope anyway, snugging my diamond hitch even further"

- line 4 from bottom, change "All tight as fiddlestrings" to "All tight as a fiddlestring."

line 3 from bottom, change "pack ropes" to "lash rope"

57  line 10 from bottom, insert "over in Missoula" after "Region One headquarters"

59  line 12 from bottom, change "first" to "great"

line 4 from bottom, delete "Prices and crops both had been so weak for so long,"

and substitute "Before WPA relief jobs and other New Deal help began to take hold,"

63 substitute revised p. 63

65  line 13 from bottom, edit one t from "pasttimes"

69  first line, after "across the lam" insert the sentence: "Roy Cleary's outfit up around Browning in itself ran 15,000 head of ewes or more."

line 4 from top, insert "were" before "working"

69-70-71  line 8 on p. 69, beginning at "Elminfold and tickle me" cut the rest of the page and pp. 70-71, picking up at top of p. 72, "At the counting vee"

72  line 3 from top, insert "double" before "handfuls"

lines 5-7, cut sentence beginning "Up at Palookaville" and ending at "counting corral."

lines 7-10, change this sentence to: "Here on the spread-out English Creek range the tally onto each grazing allotment was done through a vee made of poles spiked onto trees, the sheep funneling past while my father and the rancher stood alongside the opening at the narrow end and counted."

lines 11-12, change "to the front of the sheep" to "toward the leery multitude of ewes and lambs."
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 73 line 8 from top, delete "into the allotment."

p. 74 line 10 from bottom, delete "to him"

p. 77 substitute revised p. 77

p. 82 line 3 from top, change "5" to "four"

line 1 from top, insert after "pork and beans":
"and some buttered slices of my mother's bread,"

p. 83 line 10 from bottom, delete "above the South Fork"

line 3 from bottom, change "allotment" to "permit"

p. 84 lines 6 and 7 from top, change "flanges" to "turnbuckles"

p. 85 line 13 from top, change "young" to "younger"

line 9 from bottom, insert "northern" in front of Idaho, making it:
"Montana and northern Idaho"

and line 5 from bottom, change "opened the mail from Missoula" to
"opened his USFS mail"

p. 86 line 2 from top, delete "I recognize now that"

line 12 from top, change "allotments" to "grazing permits"

p. 87 line 9 from top, change "the cows" to "their cows"

line 12 from bottom, change "had an allotment" to "held a permit"

p. 88 line 8 from bottom, delete hyphen between "me" and "stuff"

p. 89 line 8 from top, delete "I can only describe it something like this:" and capitalize "that"

lines 10-11 from bottom, delete sentence "'Might have been,' after all, has within it 'might be.'"
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

1. 90 line 2 from bottom, delete "at all"
2. 95 line 1 from top, change "us" to "my father and me."
3. 96 line 2 from top, delete "back"
4. 100 line 7 from bottom, change "him" to "my father"
5. 103 line 9 from top, change "works on his sulking" to "works on being crabby."
6. 106 last line, change "that" to "this"
7. 107-108 substitute revised pp. 107-108
8. 109 line 6 from top, insert "lamb" to make it "the lamb number"
9. line 11 from top, insert "black" in front of "pack mare"
10. 112 line 4 from bottom, correct spelling of "Stanley"
11. last line, change "bridle" to "halter"
12. 115 line 8 from top, change "stood them" to "paled them"
13. line 11 from top, insert "left-handedly" between "was" and "trying," making it: "Stanley meanwhile was left-handedly trying"
14. 118 line 13 from bottom, change "where the sharp edge of Bubbles' hoof had shoved off skin" to: "where the sharp calk of Bubbles' horseshoe had scraped off skin"
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 118 line 7 from bottom, change "will you" to "would you"

120 substitute revised p. 120

125 line 8 from bottom, change "bridle" to "halter"

127 line 10 from top, change "30.06" to "30.30"

131 line 3 from top, change "hand" to "hands"

line 2 from bottom, insert "of the top pack" after "canvas"

132 line 7 from top, insert "of the diamond hitch" after "crossrope"

132 line 8 from top, change "the pack moved a bit" to:
"that top pack seemed to move a bit."

lines 9 and 10 from top, change "all the load on Bubbles' back moved a bit" to:
"the summit of the load on Bubbles' back definitely moved, more than a bit."

line 9 from bottom, change "that holds the packs into place" to:
"the lash rope ties into to hold the top pack into place"

135 substitute revised pp. 135-135A

138 line 3 from top, insert "work" after "a pair of", making it "a pair of work socks"

line 10 from top, insert "lash" before "cinch"

line 12 from top, correct spelling of "Stanley"

139 line 10 from bottom, change "an entire summer" to "a whole summer"

147 line 5 from top, delete "cup"

149 line 2 from top, delete "had"

150 line 12 from bottom, correct spelling of "companionship"

152 line 6 from bottom, change "Bitterroot" to "Gallatin"

line 4 from bottom, change "Flathead" to "Helena"

156 substitute revised p. 156

157 line 1, delete "shortly"
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 163 lines 2-3 from top, change "ride I had to make to check on Walter Kyle's place and helping Isidor load his pack string" to "week's other jobs"

line 11 from top, switch "ground" and "earth"

166 line 2 from bottom, change "one a-thousand, two a-thousand" to:
   "one, a-mile-from-here-to-there"

line 3 from bottom, change "each second" to "each five-second interval"

167 substitute revised p. 167

170 first line, change "lamb" to "wool"

line 4 from top, change "contract" to "consign" and "lambs" to "wool"

172 line 5 from top, insert "young" before "ranger"

line 10 from top, insert "from" after "off"

173 line 9 from top, change "principal" to "school superintendent"

lines 10-11 from top, change "on its school board" to "president of its board"

line 11 from bottom, new paragraph at "As usual"

175 lines 2-5, substitute: "Undoubtedly by democrat wagon, from the Reese place on Noon Creek all the way north almost to Chief Mountain, the last peak on that horizon."

176 line 12 from top, change "trees" to "cottonwoods"

177 first line, change "St. Mary's" to "St. Mary"

line 5 from bottom, change "departed" to "left"

line 6 from bottom, change "badger" to "porcupines"

line 9 from bottom, change "St. Mary's" to "St. Mary"

182 line 3 from top, change "St. Mary's" to "St. Mary"

184 line 6 from bottom, " " " " " "

185 line 13 from bottom, " " " " " "

line 6 from bottom, delete everything to bottom of the page

186 substitute revised p. 186
ENGLISH CREEK corrections and changes:

p. 187  line 7 from bottom, after "don't you" delete "that"
line 5 from bottom, change "that chapter" to "this chapter"

188  line 2 from top, change "long-gourd" to "red-headed"
line 7 from bottom, change "last of February (or March 1)" to "first of April"
line 2 from bottom, change "Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri" to:
"Camp Lewis, Washington."

192  line 10 from bottom, delete "blaze"
line 4 from bottom, change "something similar" to "in similar fashion."
line 4 from bottom, delete "evidently" and change "there is something" to
"there must be something"

194  lines 3 and 4 from bottom, delete entire sentence "He might as well
know there was an early limit on my aid to this visitation of his."

195  line 2 from bottom, change "ranger station" to "house"

196  line 12 from top, delete comma.

197  line 4 from bottom, change "them" to "those places"

200  line 13 from bottom, change "were" to "was"
line 9 from bottom, change "That" to "The"
last line, change "That" to "The"

201  substitute revised p. 201

208  top line, "and" should be "end"

209  insert revised p. 209

210  line 12 from bottom, change "Stott's" to "Staub's"

211  line 4 from bottom, beginning with "Nor varied", delete the rest of the page.

212  delete first 4 lines, pick up at first full graf.

212  line 5 from top, change "The" to "This"
line 7 from top, delete "of the east side"
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 215 line 2 from top, "she's" should be "she'd"
   line 13 from top, delete "south"
   line 9 from bottom, change "four" to "three"

218 line 12 from bottom, delete "back" from "got back on"
   line 10 from bottom, insert "creekside" before "park" and delete "around the park."
   line 7 from bottom, change "park" to "picnic"

220 line 6 from top, delete "among the trees"
   lines 10-11 from top, delete "seemed so unaccustomed that it"

223 line 6 from top, change "the garage" to "that garage"
   lines 8-10 from bottom, cut sentence beginning "I suppose"; then make the sentence in line 8 begin: "Girth and age and all, he still was"

229 delete the first line.
   line 1 from bottom, change "cinnamon rolls" to "corn muffins"
   line 2 from bottom, change "A lard pail of fresh donuts" to "An angelfood cake" and change "A gooseberry pie" to "A chocolate sour cream cake"

231 line 8 from top, change "get" to "jump"

232-3 substitute revised pp. 232-3

234 line 11 from top, change "bobwire" to "barbwire"

236 line 2 from top, insert "final" before "contentment"

238 line 1 from top, delete "of it."
p.9 - insert Montana
p.10 - "fruit"
   "this"
p.11 - Snowball
p.28 - mint "Walter's"
p.26 - will
p.31 - 2s from England
p.32 - Christomighty.
E7 E5 - 2 rhythms from shots
p.35 - 2 hit
p.40 - Toppy-Turvy
   hopper
   mint "that"
   camp Lewis
   doctrine
OK 46 - allotments?
   80 - tracent
   mint "for him"
Roy Cleary's outfit up around Browning in itself ran 15,000 head or more.
106 - this

108 - 1:30

109 - handling
  - Mack

110 - Stanley

113 - Walter

116 - stacked
  - left-handed

118 - I would

125 - Walter

No 125 - Change "agreed on"?

127 - " 30.06 to 30.30?"

No 130 - tried instead of went?

131 - handy

135 - work
  - back
  - Stanley

139 - a whole

147 - cup

150 - had

155 - company car
195 - line 2 from bottom, change "in stn" to "home."
197 - mid. of p., cut comma & after all, "way"
197 - line 4 from bottom, change "than" "those places" 
198 - any capitals in Beth's line?

No - line 10 from bottom, change "in" to "kitchen."
205 - mid. of p.: 2 lines of "still" 
         - "" mead was
         - in pan of water
         - 1/3 dr. p.; 3 asses of "Chal"
         - first line: change "that" back to "Chal"

207 - mid of p., meet "Rooster Man."
       - line 5 from bottom, "telephone"
208 - line 1, "end."

No 208 - change "turn traffic" to "side walk traffic."

209 - meet WPA newly room
       - 1210, in Scott's lane.

No 209 - end 3 from bottom, move "Chesne & Bynum & Penney."

210 - Gleaner typeface

215 - line 5 from top, change "The" to This
215 - line 7 ""," cut "of. east side"
215 - line 2 "", she'd
215 - mid. p., cut "south."
215 - line 9 from bottom, change 4 to 3

215 - mid. p., cut 2nd "back"

line 10 from head, change "park" to "creepride"

line 1 from head, change "park" to "picnic" 

220 - cut "line 6", cut "among trees"
       - meet deal?
       - work on "unaccustomed"? 

& shingles
No 162 - possible cut: "Here was a summer...

163 - add "a train patrol"

No 164 - change "hall" to "wood"

166 - 20 line from bottom, change thunder count

No 168 - add to make string?

170 - change "brick" to wood

171 - more description of Beth?

No 172 - "young" ranger

173 - real hurt?

174 - delete "board" - part of its board

175 - "As usual"

No cut for it?

178 - cut "part of mark"

179 - Brick are trans - collateral?

180 - St Mary's?

181 - change "wooden" to "porcupine"

184 - St Mary's?

185 - "hacksaw"

186 - "

187 - "

188 - "

189 - "

190 - "

191 - "

192 - "

193 - "

194 - "As might as well"
ENGLISH CREEK

ENGLISH CREEK crx and changes:

- p. 6 - my mother's
- p. 63 - change "and" to "or"
- p. 63 - take out "now"
- p. 233 - change "dead" to "extinct"
- p. 69 - look over for C's objection
- p. 185 - change "F. Leonard Wood" to "F. Leonard Wood"
- p. 446 - capitalize "But"
- p. 464 - hint that they ought to be in here this very minute.

No, even though it's instead of "while" other phrases stayed same.
No, p. 3 - can't have one word.
No p. 4 - make sure of title instead of "point".

- p. 9 - too many "rads" in "cowboy phase" sentence
- p. 9 - change "that yr." to "this yr." in "aca" sentence.
- p. 9 - " to " in "head for B's man".
- " Double W " makes sure " against that;"
- period after " you know, " a cut, a change to " I guess;"
- " change "along some east" to "along - Casc." (claims a "this")
- " to " whole column state of Montana."

- Stanley's gun a 30.30, Mac's a 30.06?
- add shooting shots to Jack's prairie ride?
- change to "count of " (too many "of")
- " answer me this! " to comma.
- " must in Depression in connection with Kyle?"
- " for whatever reason " or better 1/2 of p. - change last to " anyway,"
- or " yet."

No p. 26 - # somewhere on p.?
No p. 6 - 2 comma sentences end in "for" phrase.
- " line 2: must " but then. "Two Med"
- " toward. " Holman place most of " around."

No p. 3 - change "up limit" to "upper."
- p. 35 - add "round"
P.173—red ink
P.237—"
P.259—case of corn muffins
P.172—wife of "young" ranger
- warden off "from" station
P.150—change Thunder court, of underline
P.166-7 "" "
+ arithmetic
P.45—change to Camp Lewis
P.158—"
P.15—change met 2 priests
P.317—change street lines
P.327—change street lines
P.115—change thread to halter
P.158—" " " "
No 251 - Line 1, Change to?
251 - etiquette
254 - line 3 from bottom, cut "in an admez note
261 - lines 1-3, cut
   - line 9, renumber
   - last line, 9-16thual
265 - change "true post" to "true piece of iath" 
   - "not" : change whole sentence
270 - line 2, change colon to period 
   - I probably
291 - line 2, Silverstone
275 - line 2 from bottom
276 - " " top 3
   - line 10 " 
281 - 9
283 - other or catch
287 - cut lines 3-8
295 - change to "3 Zones at once"
312 - mean 4
No 297 - line 4 from 06/7, 2:00
296 - line 10 from 06/7, change "even less clear" to "not at all
305 - " 2 " " , meant "hospital b"
306 - " 7 " " , change "c a pod person"
312 - Silverstone
233 - line 6 from top, "that" "same"
- anchor "find" sentence: "How" he did it of his age & such =
  I never expect to

224 - backed?

229 - cut 1st sentence
- starts

231 - line 8, "get" to "jump"

232 - 3 - trim "make"

234 - mid p. "bean-wise" to "beanwise"

235 - line 2, "male" con't

236 - line 4, cut "of it."
- work on "The voice" "
  voice "better than you might expect."
- cut "meet"
- cut "on a hearing proof" - disregard your own advice
- change song names

240 - line 10 from bed, "Mae" to "Mary"

241 - line 8 

242 - line 6 from "Mae to Mary"

244 - line 7 "to", 2 hyphen - have - Day

247 - line 10 "it."

248 - cut last line?

250 - line 7 from bottom, change "an extended pause" to "his speech"
ENGLISH CREEK

p. 1  lines 4-5 from top, change "was encountering" to "had encountered"

p. 2  line 2, put "or anyway a bit less desperate" between commas

line 7 from top, insert "the" to make it "the Forest Service"

3 line 12 from top, boldface GOODEY OLD DRY and AS FOR HAVRE YOU CAN HAVE 'ER

4 lines 3-4 from top, change to "lengthening the stirrups again to account for how much I was growing that year,"

line 9 from top, delete "than last year"

6 line 4 from top, change "her load" to "my mother's load"

7 line 11 from top, change "alotments" to "permits"

8 line 3 from top, change "alotment" to "permit"

9 line 11 from top; change "had" to "held"

6 line 6 from bottom, change "this" to "in a"

5 line 5 from bottom, change "would be headed" to "would head"

3 line 3 from bottom, change "great exerting" to "mighty exertion"

11 line 10 from top, change "The Double W sees" to "The Double W makes sure"

12 line 11 from top, change "they don't have" to "we don't have"

13 line 8 from top, insert "on the national forest portion" to make it read, "the beaver population on the national forest portion of English Creek."

14 line 1 from bottom, insert "and" after "pleasantry" to make it read: "some pleasantry and then lighting up"

17 line 7 from bottom, insert comma between "cowboyifying" and "too"

18 line 8 from top, change "but" to "and"

10 line 9 from bottom, change "herding" to "running"

9 line 9 from bottom, change "would you?" to "is that it?"

19 line 1 at top, change "along this creek" to "along the creek here"

4 line 1 from top, change "in this whole goddamn state" to "in the whole goddamn state of Montana."
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 20  line 11 from top, change "took a count on" to "took a count of"
       line 8 from bottom, change "above the others" to "above the other forests"
       line 6 from bottom, change "that morning" to "this morning"

p. 22  line 5 from top, change "a blaze face was always Star" to
       "a white one was always Snowball."

p. 23  line's 10-13 from top, delete; pick up with "As soon as my father"
       line 5 from bottom, change "his spyglass" to "Walter's spyglass"

p. 24  last line, delete "for whatever reason" to make it read "But I went ahead"

p. 26  line 12 from top, change "for" to "as"
       line 13-16 from top, delete both sentences between "around our kitchen"
       and "Leona, Leona."
       line 7 from bottom, delete "Well," making the next line begin "Anyhow; with"

p. 30  line 5 from top, insert "of the Two" to make it read "wind of the Two forever"
       line 6, beginning with "Something like" delete the rest of the graf, making
       it read: "naturally wears on the nerves."
       line 11 from bottom, delete "a" from "grasslands" making it "grassland."

p. 31  line 2 from top, insert "the Two Medicine" to make it read
       "but then the Two Medicine promptly cuts"
       line 5 from bottom, change "around" to "toward"

p. 33  lines 8-11, from top, delete entire paragraph
       line 10 from bottom, change comma after "it" to period. Then delete
       the rest of the line and substitute: "Those kids have got to eat."
       line 9 from bottom, change "when he starts" to "when the lazy SOB starts"

p. 35  first line, insert "round" to make it "In Dill Egan's round corral"

p. 36  substitute revised p. 36

p. 37  substitute revised p. 37
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 38 line 6 from top, delete all hyphens

lines 12-15 from top, delete everything between dashes, making it read:
"Sanford rode double behind me and when we dismounted at the ranger station, he trudged"

40 lines 1 and 2 at top, change "upside-down" to "topsy-turvy"

line 11 from bottom, correct "heppen" to "happen"

42 line 1 from top, insert "that" to make it "was that thirty years"

line 12 from top, change "Fort Leonard Wood" to "Camp Lewis"

line 13 from top, delete "Missouri" and insert "in the state of Washington"

line 5 from bottom, change "Missourian" to "Camp Lewis"

p. 43 line 10 from top, charge "and" to "or", making it "cattle or sheep."

44 first line, change "philosophy" to "doctrine"

45 lines 15-to bottom of page, delete.

46 insert revised p. 46

47 line 7 from top, beginning at "And since" delete the rest of the paragraph.

line 8 from bottom, delete "Anyway, words" and substitute:
"Stuff of that sort"

50 line 5 from top, change "cornerposts" to "braceposts"

line 7 from bottom, add "for him" to make it "college and engineering for him."

p. 54 line 3 from top, insert "lookout" to make it "fire equipment, lookout phone lines"

55 line 12 from bottom, change "bolts" to "eyebolts"

line 11 from bottom, change "flanges" to "turnbuckles"

line 9 from bottom, change "whose rope and hitch knots" to "whose lash rope and diamond hitch knot"
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 55-56 Beginning with last line of p. 55, "Packstrings of horses..." cut the rest of the paragraph. Pick up at line 8 of p. 56, "Since the lookout gear"

56 lines 9-10, substitute "one horse it hadn't been necessary to call on my father's packer, Odor Pronovost, and his eight-mule packstring for this counting trip of ours."

p. 56 line 9 from bottom, after "on the other side of it" delete comma and insert "and then some light awkward stuff such as our cooking utensils in a top pack,"

line 5 from bottom, change to: "reefed down on the lash rope anyway, snuggling my diamond hitch even further"

line 4 from bottom, change "All tight as fiddlestrings" to "All tight as a fiddlestring."

line 3 from bottom, change "pack ropes" to "lash rope"

57 line 10 from bottom, insert "over in Missoula" after "Region One headquarters"

59 line 12 from bottom, change "first" to "great"

line 4 from bottom, delete "Prices and crops both had been so weak for so long," and substitute "Before WPA relief jobs and other New Deal help began to take hold,"

63 substitute revised p. 63

65 line 13 from bottom, edit one t from "pasttimes"

69 first line, after "across the land" insert the sentence:

"Roy Cleary's outfit up around Browning in itself ran 15,000 head of ewes or more."

line 4 from top, insert "were" before "working"

line 7 from top, change "almost all" to "most"

Tom 69-70-71 line 8 on p. 69, beginning at "Blimfold and tickle me" cut the rest of the page and pp. 70-71, picking up at top of p. 72, "At the counting vee"

72 line 3 from top, insert "double" before "handfuls"

lines 5-7, cut sentence beginning "Up at salookaville" and ending at "counting corral."

lines 7-10, change this sentence to: "Here on the spread-out English Creek range the tally onto each grazing allotment was done through a vee made of poles spiked onto trees, the sheep funneling past while my father and the rancher stood alongside the opening at the narrow end and counted."

lines 11-12, change "to the front of the sheep" to "toward the leery multitude of ewes and lambs."
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

73 line 8 from top, delete "into the allotment."

74 line 10 from bottom, delete "to him"

77 substitute revised p. 77

79 line 7 from bottom, after "trees" insert "and brush"

82 line 3 from top, change "5" to "four"

line 4 from top, insert after "pork and beans":
"and some buttered slices of my mother's bread."

83 line 10 from bottom, delete "above the South Fork"

line 3 from bottom, change "allotment" to "permit"

84 lines 6 and 7 from top, change "flanges" to "turnbuckles"

85 line 13 from top, change "young" to "younger"

line 9 from bottom, insert "northern" in front of Idaho, making it:
"Montana and northern Idaho"

and line 5 from bottom, change "opened the mail from Missoula" to
"opened his USFS mail"

86 line 2 from top, delete "I recognize now that"

line 12 from top, change "allotments" to "grazing permits"

87 line 9 from top, change "the cows" to "their cows"

line 12 from bottom, change "had an allotment" to "held a permit"

88 line 8 from bottom, delete hyphen between "me" and "stuff"

89 line 8 from top, delete "I can only describe it something like this:" and capitalize "that"

lines 10-11 from bottom, delete sentence "Might have been, after all, has within it 'might be.'"
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

P. 90 line 2 from bottom, delete "at all"

95 line 4 from top, change "us" to "my father and me."

96 line 2 from top, delete "back"

100 line 7 from bottom, change "him" to "my father"

103 line 9 from top, change "works on his sulking" to "works on being crabby."

106 last line, change "that" to "this"

107-108 substitute revised pp. 107-108

109 line 6 from top, insert "lamb" to make it "the lamb number"

line 11 from top, insert "black" in front of "pack mare"

112 line 4 from bottom, correct spelling of "Stanley"

115 last line, change "bridle" to "halter"

116 line 8 from top, change "stood them" to "tied them"

line 11 from top, insert "left-handedly" between "was" and "trying",

making it: "Stanley meanwhile was left-handedly trying"

118 line 13 from bottom, change "where the sharp edge of Bubbles' hoof had shoved off skin" to:

"where the sharp calk of Bubbles' horseshoe had scraped off skin"
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 118  line 7 from bottom, change "will you" to "would you"
120  substitute revised p. 120
125  line 8 from bottom, change "bridle" to "halter"
127  line 10 from top, change "30.05" to "30.30"
131  line 3 from top, change "hand" to "hands"
    line 2 from bottom, insert "of the top pack" after "canvas"
132  line 7 from top, insert "of the diamond hitch" after "crossrope"
    line 8 from top, change "the pack moved a bit" to:
    "that top pack seemed to move a bit."
    lines 9 and 10 from top, change "all the load on Bubbles' back moved a bit" to:
    "the summit of the load on Bubbles' back definitely moved, more than a bit."
    line 9 from bottom, change "that holds the packs into place" to:
    "the lash rope ties into to hold the top pack into place"

135  substitute revised pp. 135-135A
138  line 3 from top, insert "work" after "a pair of", making it "a pair of work socks"
    line 10 from top, insert "lash" before "cinch"
    line 12 from top, correct spelling of "Stanley"
139  line 10 from bottom, change "an entire summer" to "a whole summer"
147  line 5 from top, delete "cup"
149  line 2 from top, delete "had"
150  line 12 from bottom, correct spelling of "companionship"
152  line 6 from bottom, change "Bitterroot" to "Callatin"
    line 4 from bottom, change "Flathead" to "Helena"
156  substitute revised p. 156
157  line 1, delete "shortly"
160  line 7 from top, change "green hat" to "side-crimped dress Stetson"
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 163  lines 2-3 from top, change "ride I had to make to check on Walter Kyle's place and helping Isidor load his pack string" to "week's other jobs"

   line 11 from top, switch "ground" and "earth"

166  line 2 from bottom, change "one a-thousand, two a-thousand" to:
       "one, a-mile-from-here-to-there"

166  line 3 from bottom, change "each second" to "each five-second interval"

167  substitute revised p. 167

170  first line, change "lamb" to "wool"

171  lines 9-10, change "roundish jaw" to "attractive Reese chin"

172  line 5 from top, insert "young" before "ranger"

172  line 10 from top, insert "from" after "off"

173  line 9 from top, change "principal" to "school superintendent"

173  lines 10-11 from top, change "on its school board" to "president of its board"

174  line 11 from bottom, new paragraph at "As usual"

175  lines 3 and 7, change "St. Mary's" to "St. Mary"

175  lines 2-5, substitute: "Undoubtedly by democrat wagon, from the Reese place on Noon Creek all the way north almost to Chief Mountain, the last peak on that horizon."

176  line 12 from top, change "trees" to "cottonwoods"

177  first line, change "St. Mary's" to "St. Mary"

177  line 5 from bottom, change "departed" to "left"

177  line 6 from bottom, change "badger" to "porcupine"

179  line 9 from bottom, change "St. Mary's" to "St. Mary"

182  line 3 from top, change "St. Mary's" to "St. Mary"

184  line 6 from bottom, " " " " " " " "

185-6 substitute revised pp. 185-186
ENGLISH CREEK corrections and changes:

p. 187 line 7 from bottom, after "don't you" delete "that"
line 5 from bottom, change "that chapter" to "this chapter"

188 line 2 from top, change "long-gared" to "red-headed"
line 7 from bottom, change "last of February (or March 1)" to "first of April"
line 2 from bottom, change "Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri" to: "Camp Lewis, Washington."

192 line 10 from bottom, delete "blaze"
line 4 from bottom, change "something similar" to "in similar fashion."
line 4 from bottom, delete "evidently" and change "there is something" to "there must be something"

194 lines 3 and 4 from bottom, delete entire sentence "He might as well
know there was an early limit on my aid to this visitation of his."

195 line 2 from bottom, change "ranger station" to "house"

196 line 12 from top, delete comma.

197 line 4 from bottom, change "them" to "those places"

200 line 13 from bottom, change "were" to "was"
line 9 from bottom, change "That" to "The"
last line, change "That" to "The"

201 substitute revised p. 201

203 line 12 from top, change "on" to "in"
line 13 from top, change "day" to "week" and change "Hot and sticky." to "Each day, a little hotter and stickier."

208 top line, "and" should be "end"

209 insert revised p. 209

210 line 12 from bottom, change "Stott's" to "Staub's"

211 line 4 from bottom, beginning with "Nor varied", delete the rest of the page.

212 delete first 4 lines, pick up at first full graf.
line 5 from top, change "The" to "This"
line 7 from top, delete "of the east side"
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 215 line 2 from top, "she's" should be "she'd"
  line 13 from top, delete "south"
  line 9 from bottom, change "four" to "three"
217 line 7 from top, change "Stott's" to "Staub's"
218 line 12 from bottom, delete "back" from "got back on"
  line 10 from bottom, insert "creekside" before "part" and delete "around the park."
  line 7 from bottom, change "park" to "picnic"
220 line 6 from top, delete "among the trees"
  lines 10-11 from top, delete "seemed so unaccustomed that it"
223 line 6 from top, change "the garage" to "that garage"
  lines 8-10 from bottom, cut sentence beginning "I suppose"; then make the sentence in line 8 begin: "Girth and age and all, he still was"
228 lines 1-5 from bottom, change "was commencing." to "so far."
229 delete the first line.
  line 4 from bottom, change "cinnamon rolls" to "corn muffins"
  line 2 from bottom, change "A lard pail of fresh donuts" to "An angelfood cake" and change "A gooseberry pie" to "A chocolate sour cream cake"
231 line 8 from top, change "get" to "jump"
233 first line, change "dead" to "extinct weekly"
234 line 11 from top, change "bobwire" to "barbwire"
236 line 2 from top, insert "final" before "contentment"
238 line 4 from top, delete "of it."
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 238 lines 7-12 from bottom, change to:
"Their voices proved to be better than you might expect. The program, though, inadvertently hit our funny bones as much as it did our ears, because the chorus’s first selection was *I Cannot Sing the Songs of Long Ago* and then as if misstepthings they hadn't heard their own advice they wobbled into *Love’s Old Sweet Song*.”

240 line 10 from bottom, change "Mae" to "Mary"

241 lines 8 and 9 from bottom, switch "Augusta" and "Craig"

242 line 5 from bottom, change "Mae" to "Mary"

244 line 4 from bottom, change "Ben and Mae" to "they"

247 line 7 from top, delete hyphen from "Three-Day"

248 line 10 from top, change "larger" to "bigger" and delete "on it."

249 substitute revised p. 249

249 delete first 2 lines

250 line 7 from bottom, change "an extended finger" to "his forefinger"

251 line 10 from top, change "protocol" to "etiquette"

252 line 3 from bottom, change "on an admiring note" to "with"

264 delete first 3 lines

265 line 12 from top, change "fence posts" to "buckrake teeth"

266 lines 4-6 from bottom, change to: "the best solution to the situation, but the day before, Isidor Pronovost and some CCC guys had taken all the spare ones in a big packstring to set up a spike camp for a tree planting crew."
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 270 line 2 from top, change colon to period.
   line 13 from bottom, delete "probably"

271 line 2 from top, change "Philco" to "Silvertone"; do the same in line 6
   the

275 line 2 from bottom, change "with a current beau--they" to:
   "with a current beau tagging along. They"

276 line 2 from top, delete "in tow."

line 10, change to "Velma on her Fourth appearances was encased"

281 lines 12-18, delete entire graf

282 line 9 from top, mistyped part should read "After a fast catch"

287 lines 3-8 from top, delete rest of graf beginning with "Maybe"

289 line 2 from top, change "Zanebane" to "around three Zanes at once"

293 line 7 from top, new graf at "In truth,"

298 line 10 from bottom, change "even less clear" to "not at all clear"

300 line 4 from bottom, after "with her to" insert "the hospital in"

306 line 7 from top, change "with a pointed finger" to "categorically"

312 line 6 from top, change "Philco" to "Silvertone"

317 substitute revised p. 317

318 lines 6-7 from top, delete "Lord of mercy."

320 line 2 from top, after "know" insert "about timber"

322 line 9 from bottom, delete "grievously"
   line 6 from bottom, change "My inspiration" to "And my eventual inspiration"
   last line, delete "And"

327 substitute revised p. 327

329 line 7 from bottom, change "already" to "just"
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 332  line 2 from top, change "How much that economical punch of Alec's yielded" to: "That economical punch of Alec's produced plenty, though."

last four lines, trim to: "verse, every one a perfect piece of that day and now of the night; a set of hours worth the price of the rest of life."

line 10 from bottom, change "tall-grass meadows" to "wild meadows of timothy and wiregrass"

line 3 from top, delete s from "triumphs"

line 6 from top, change "they have in the Forest Service" to: "Forest Service guys have"

line 7 from top, change "where did" to "where'd"

line 4 from top, between "Mormon derricks" and "jayhawks" insert "two-poles,"

line 7 from top, change "as they come" to "as the ideal stackman ought to be"

line 9 from top, change to: "the fire guards and other smokechasers he would start hiring and stationing for quick"

line 9 from top, change "flammable" to "incendiary"

lines 8-12 from top, delete everything from "In those years" to "Actually", making it read: "An inferno has no thermostat. The rains"

line 11 from bottom, delete "smokechasers or"

line 10 from top, change "anything" to "any wind"

line 4 from bottom, after "bluebells" insert "shooting stars,"

line 9 from bottom, delete "then that"

line 12 from top, change "and smokechasers" to "to be smokechasers"

line 9 from top, delete comma

line 13 from top, change "15" to "a dozen"

line 7 from bottom, change "the barn" to "Pete's barn"

lines 3-5 from bottom, invert to: "Prominent behind, low in the middle, and loftiest at the front where Good Help again was dropping the loads softly, softly. Something new again in the history of hay, a stack shaped like a gigantic saddle."
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 383   line 9 from bottom, delete "and bluestem"

392 lines 3-4 from bottom, change "we need more smokechasers and fire guards." to:
   "we're going to need more smokechasers."
   line 3 from bottom, after "that" insert "east-of-the-Divide"

393 line 3 from bottom, change "phoned" to "telephoned"

401 line 8 from bottom, after "oats" insert "apiece"

407 lines 6-7, move "After supper" to before "I got to go"

410 line 8 from top, change "said" to "stipulated"

412 substitute revised p. 412-412A

413 line 13 from top, change "phone" to "telephone"

415 line 3 from top, insert hyphen in front of "table"

418 line 12 from bottom, "he's" should be "he'd"

425 line 4 from bottom, change "those last weeks" to "that last spate"

427 lines 5-6 from top, invert sentence beginning "A crew" so it reads:
   "We stood and looked and sipped and chewed, a crew about to scatter."
   last 3 lines, delete sentence which begins "And the"

429 line 7 from top, change "Extreme danger" to "Critical" (within quote marks)
   line 5 from bottom, delete "fire"

431 line 3 from top, correct "smokecashers" to "smokechasers" and delete "and fire guards"

   line 2 from bottom, after "table" insert "and think matters over"

432 line 7 from bottom, change "It goes without saying that" to "No,"

433 line 5 from bottom, correct "hopeless" to "hopeless"

436 last line, change "by" to "before"

438 substitute revised pp. 438-440

440 line 12 from top, change "lodgepole" to "timber."

441 substitute revised p. 441
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 442 first line, correct "waa" to "was"

447 line 2 from top, change "Galena Street in Butte" to "West Front Street in Missoula"

448 line 4 from top, change "last night" to "yesterday."

450 line 4 from bottom, after "community" insert "telephone"

455 line 9 from bottom, before "I heard" insert "At last"

457 last line, change "Brownie" to "Homer" and "a pack horse" to "the pack horse"

458 line 13 from top, change "You heard him," to "You know what he told me,";
and before "He said" insert "When"

line 14 from top, delete "There" and capitalize "At"

line 15 from top, delete "all" and before "time" insert "whole"

461 line 2 from top, change "flammable" to "inflammable"

line 10 from bottom, before "reminder" insert "later"

462 line 9 from top, change "council tent" to "fire chief's tent"

line 7 from bottom, change "inspection" to "supervision."

464 substitute revised p. 464

466 line 7 from bottom, insert "stew" before "boiler"

468 line 6 from bottom, change "all" to "most"

469 line 5 from top, delete "council" to "office"

473 substitute revised pp. 473-473A

475 line 7 from top, capitalize "Forest"; line 3 from bottom, change "flammable" to "combustible"

476 substitute revised p. 476

477 line 5 from top, change "Uh huh." to "Is he."

lines 9-10 from bottom, delete sentence beginning "This would"

line 3 from bottom, new paragraph at "It still"

478 line 7 from bottom, delete "that morning"

479 substitute revised p. 479
ENGLISH CREEK ms corrections and changes:

p. 481, 482, 483 -- substitute revised pp. 481-2-3

484 line 6 from top, change "Single spots" to "Hundreds of single spots"

489 line 9 from top, change "on" to "over"

490 substitute revised p. 490-490A-491

492 line 10 from top, change "over" to "down the gorge and around"

493 substitute revised p. 493

494 lines 5-6 from top, change "and show them where he wanted backfires lit" to: "and supervise them in lighting the strips of backfires."

line 10 from bottom, put question mark after "headquarters"

line 3 from bottom, change "almost mid-afternoon" to "well past noon"

498-8-9-500 substitute revised pp. 497, 498, 499, 499A, 500

501 line 11 from top, correct "You folks" to "Your folks"

508 line 10 from top, correct "law" to "lawn"

512 lines 1-2, delete rest of sentence beginning at "whenever"

514 line 1 from top, change "phone" to "telephone"

514 line 2, change "in" to "at"

514 line 8, delete comma after "Idaho"

515 line 7 from bottom, insert "Jick," after "nephew,"

521 line 6 from top, before "birthday" insert "84th" and change "February" to "April"

521 line 8 from top, change "'Leaped In' with" to "Has 'Fooled' the"

526 (acknowledgments) line 8 from bottom, after "and" insert "Raymond Karr and";

lines 8-9, change "public information section" to "information office"
This time of year, the report from the dust counties in the northeastern part of the state customarily has it that Lady Godiva could ride through the streets there without even the horse seeing her. But this spring's rains are said to have thinned the air sufficiently to give the steed a glimpse.

--Gros Ventre Weekly Gleaner, June 1

That month of June swam into the Two Medicine country. In my life until then I had never seen the sidehills come so green, the coulees stay so spongy with run-off. A right amount of wet evidently could sweeten the universe. Already my father on his first high patrols were encountering cow elk drifting up and across the Continental Divide to their calving grounds on the west side. They, and the grass and the wild-hay meadows and the benchland alfalfa, all were a good three weeks ahead of season. Which of course accounted for the fresh mood everywhere across the Two. As is always said, spring rain in range country is as if halves of $10 bills are being handed around, with the other halves promised at shipping time. And so in the English Creek sheepmen, what few cowmen were left along Noon Creek and elsewhere, the out-east farmers, the storekeepers of Gros Ventre, our Forest Service people, in just everyone that start of June, hope was up and would stay strong as long as the grass did.

Talk could even be heard that Montana maybe at last had seen the bottom of the Depression. After all, the practitioners of this
bottomed-out notion went around pointing out, last year was a bit more prosperous, or anyway a bit less desperate than the year before. A nice near point of measurement which managed to overlook that for the several years before last the situation of people on the land out here had been godawful. I suppose I ought not to dwell on dollar matters when actually our family was scraping along better than a good many. Even though during the worst years the Forest Service did lay off some people—Hoovered them, the saying went—my father, ranger Varick McCaskill, was never among them. True, his salary was jacked down a couple of times, and Christ only knew if the same wasn't going to start happening again. But we were getting by. Nothing extra, just getting by.

It gravels me every time I read a version of those times that makes it sound as if the Depression set in on the day Wall Street tripped over itself in 1929. Talk about nearsighted. By 1929 Montana already had been on rocky sledding for ten years. The winter of 1919—men my father's age and older still just called it "that sonofabitch of a winter"—was the one that delivered hard times. Wholesale. As Dode Withrow, who had the ranch farthest up the south fork of English Creek, used to tell: "I went into that '19 winter with four thousand head of ewes and by spring they'd evaporated to five hundred." Trouble never travels lonesome, so about that same time livestock and crop prices nosedived because of the end of the war in Europe. And right along with that, drought and grasshoppers showed up to take over the dry-land farming. "It began to be just a hell of a situation," my father always summed up
those years when he and my mother were trying to get a start in life. "Anyplace you looked you saw people who had put twenty years into this country and all they had to show for it was a pile of old calendars." Then when drought circled back again at the start of the Thirties and joined forces with Herbert Hoover, bad progressed to worse. That is within my own remembering, those dry bitter years. Autumn upon autumn the exodus stories kept coming out of the High Line grain country to the north and east of us, and right down here on the highway which runs through the town of Gros Ventre anybody who looked could see for himself the truth of those tales, the furniture-loaded jitney trucks with farewells to Montana painted across their boxboards in big crooked letters: GOODBY OLD DRY and AS FOR HAVRE YOU CAN HAVE'ER. The Two country did have the saving grace that the price for lambs and wool recovered somewhat while other livestock and crops stayed sunk. But anybody on Two land who didn't scrape through the early Thirties with sheep likely didn't scrape through at all. Cattle rancher after cattle rancher and farmer after farmer got in deep with the banks. Gang plow and ditcher, work horses and harness, haymow and cream separator: everything on those places was mortgaged except the air. And then foreclosure, and the auctioneer's hammer. At those hammer sales we saw men weep, women as stricken as if they were looking on death, and their children bewildered.

So it was time hope showed up.

"Jick! Set your mouth for it!"
Supper, and my mother. It is indelible in me that all this began there right at the very outset of June, because I was working over my saddle and lengthening the stirrups to account for how much I had grown in the past year, for the ride up with my father on the counting trip the next morning. I can even safely say what the weather was, one of those brockle late afternoons under the Rockies when tag-ends of storm cling in the mountains and sun is reaching through wherever it can between the cloud piles. Tell me why it is that details like that, saddle stirrups a notch longer than last year or sunshine dabbed around on the foothills some certain way, seem to be the allowance of memory while the bigger points of life hang back. At least I have found it so, particularly now that I am at the time where I try to think what my life might have been like had I not been born in the Two Medicine country and into the McCaskill family. Oh, I know what's said. How home ground and kin together lay their touch along us as unalterably as the banks of a stream direct its water. But that doesn't mean you can't wonder. Whether substantially the same person would meet you in the mirror if your birth certificate didn't read as it does. Or whether some other place of growing up might have turned you wiser or dumber, more contented or less. Here in my own instance, some mornings I will catch myself with a full cup of coffee yet in my hand, gone cold while I have sat here stewing about whether threescore years would be pretty much as they are by now had I happened into existence in, say, China or California instead of northern Montana.

Any of this of course goes against what my mother forever tried
to tell the three of us. That the past is a taker, not a giver. It was a warning she felt she had to put out, in that particular tone of voice with punctuation all through it, fairly often in our family. When we could start hearing her commas and capital letters we knew the topic had become Facing Facts, Not Going Around with our Heads Stuck in Yesterday. Provocation for it, I will say, came from my father as reliably as a dusk wind out of a canyon. Half a night at a time he might spend listening to Toussaint Rennie tell of the roundup of 1882, when the cowmen fanned their crews north from the elbow of the Teton River to the Canadian line and brought in a hundred thousand head. Or the tale even bigger and earlier than that, the last great buffalo hunt, Toussaint having ridden up into the Sweetgrass Hills to see down onto a prairie that looked burnt, so dark with buffalo, the herd pinned into place by the plains tribes. Strange, but I can still recite the tribes and where they pitched their camps to surround those miles of buffalo, just as Toussaint passed the lore of it to my father: Crows on the southeast, Gros Ventres and Assiniboines on the northeast, Piegans on the west, Crees along the north, and Flatheads here to the south. "Something to see, that must've been," my father would say in his recounting to the rest of us at supper. "Mac, somebody already saw it," my mother would come right back at him. "What you'd better Put Your Mind To is the Forest Supervisor's Visit Tomorrow." Or if she didn't have to work on my father for the moment, there was Alec when he began wearing a neck hanky and considering himself a cowboy. That my own particular knack for remembering, which
could tuck away entire grocery lists or whatever someone had told me in innocence a couple of weeks before, made me seem likely to round out a houseful of men tilted to the past must have been the final stem on her load. "Jick," I can hear her yet, "there isn't any law that says a McCaskill can't be as forward-looking as anybody else. Just because your father and your brother—"

Yet I don't know. What we say isn't always what we can do. In the time after, it was her more than anyone who would return and return her thoughts to where all four of our lives made their bend. "The summer when—" she would start in, and as if the three-note signal of a chickadee had been sung, it told me she was turning to some happening of that last English Creek summer. She and I were alike at least in that, the understanding that such a season of life provides more than enough to wonder back at, even for a McCaskill.

"JICK! Are you coming, or do the chickens get your share?" I know with all certainty too that that call to supper was double, because I was there at the age where I had to be called twice for anything. Anyway, that second summons of hers brought me out of the barn just as the pair of them, Alec and Leona, topped into view at the eastern rise of the county road. That is, I knew my brother as far as I could see him by that head-up way he rode, as if trying to see beyond a ridgeline in front of him. Leona would need to be somewhat nearer before I could verify her by her blouseful. But those days if you saw Alec you were pretty sure to be seeing Leona too.

Although there were few things more certain to hold my eyes than
a rider cresting that rise of road, with all the level eastern horizon
under him as if he was traveling out of the sky and then the outline of
him and his horse in gait down and down and down the steady slow
slant toward the forks of English Creek, I did my watching of Alec
and Leona as I crossed the yard to our house behind the ranger station.
I knew better than to have my mother call me time number three.

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

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

"Alec and Leona," I reported through a face rinse. "Riding like the
prettiest one of them gets to kiss the other one."

"You seem to know a remarkable lot about it," my mother said.
Actually, that sort of thing was starting to occur to me. I was fourteen
and just three months shy of my next birthday. Fourteen, hard on to
fifteen, as I once heard one of the beerhounds around the Medicine
Lodge saloon in Gros Ventre describe that complicated age. But there
wasn't any of this I was about to confide to my mother, who now
instructed: "When you're done there you'd better bring in that spare
chair from your bedroom." She cast the pots and pans atop the stove
a calculating look, then as if having reminded herself turned toward
me and added: "Please." When I left the room she already had rattled
a fresh stick of wood into the kitchen range and was starting in on whatever it is cooks like her do to connive food for three into a supper for five.

"Remind me in the morning, I could overhear my father say, "to do the rest of this Uncle Sam paper."

"I'll serve it to you with breakfast," promised my mother.

"Fried," he said. "Done to a cinder would suit me, particularly Van Bebbert's allotment. It'd save me arguing the Section Twenty grass with him one goddamn more time."

"You wouldn't know how to begin a summer without that argument with Ed," she answered. "Are you washed?"

By the time I came back into the kitchen with the spare chair which had been serving as my nightstand Alec and Leona were arriving through the doorway, him inquiring "Is this the McCaskill short-order house?" and her beaming up at him as if he'd just recited Shakespeare.

They were a pair to look on, Alec and Leona. By now Alec was even taller than my father, and had the same rich red head of hair; a blood-sorrel flame which several hundred years of kilts and skirts being flung off must have fanned into creation. Same lively blue eyes. Same straight keen McCaskill nose, and same tendency to freckle across it but nowhere else. Same deep upper lip, with the bottom of the face coming out to meet it in stubborn support; with mouth closed, both Alec and my father had that jaw-forward look which meets life like a plow. Resemblance isn't necessarily duplication, though, and I see in my mind's eye that there also was the message of that as promptly as my brother and my father were in the same room that evening. Where my
father never seemed to take up as much space as his size might warrant, Alec somehow took up his share and then some. I noticed this now, how Alec had begun to stand in that shambly wishbone way a cowboy adopts, legs and knees spread farther apart than they need to be, as if hinting to the world that he's sure longing for a horse to trot in there between them. Alec was riding for the Double W ranch, his second summer as a hand there, and it had caused some family ruction—his going back to cowboying instead of taking a better-paying job, such as driving a truck for Adam Kerz as my mother particularly suggested. But the past year or so Alec had had to shut off his ears to a lot of opinions my parents had about this cowboy phase of his. Last Fourth of July when Alec showed up in rodeo clothes which included a red bandanna, my father asked him: "What, is your Adam's apple cold?"

Not that you could ever dent Alec for long. I have told that he had a head-up, nothing-in-life-has-ever-slowed-me-up-yet way of riding. I maybe should amend that to say that on horseback Alec looked as if he was riding the world itself, and even afoot as he was here in the kitchen he seemed as if he was being carried to exactly where he wanted to go. Which, just then, I guess you would have to say he was. Everything was coming up aces for Alec that year. Beating Earl Zane's time with Leona. Riding for the Double W this green high-grass summer. And in the fall he would be headed for Bozeman, the first McCaskill to manage to go to college. Launching Alec to college from the canyon of the Depression was taking great exerting by our whole family, but his knack for numbers plainly justified it; we none of us held a doubt that four years from trained in now he would step out of Bozeman with a degree in mechanical engineering.
Yes, Alec was a doer, as people said of him. My own earliest memory of this brother of mine was the time—I must have been four and him eight—when he took me into the pasture where the ranger station's saddle horses were grazing and said "Here's how you mooch them, Jick." He eased over to the nearest horse, waited until it put its head down to eat grass, then straddled its neck. When the horse raised its head Alec was lifted, and slid down the neck into place on its back and simultaneously gripped the mane to hang on and steer by. "Now you mooch that mare" Alec called to me, and I went beside the big chomping animal and flung my right leg over as he had, and was elevated into being a bareback rider the same as my brother.

"'Lo, Jicker," Alec said across the kitchen to me now after his greeting to my mother and father. "How's the world treating you?"

"Just right," I said back automatically. "'Lo, Leona."

Leona too was a horseperson, I guess you'd call it these days. When Tollie Zane held his auction of fresh-broke saddle horses in Gros Ventre every year he always enlisted Leona to ride them into the auction ring because there is nothing that enhances a saddle pony more than a good-looking girl up there on his back. Right now, though, entering my mother's kitchen Leona's role was to be milk and honey. Which she also was first-rate at. A kind of pause stepped in with Leona whenever she arrived somewhere, a long breath or two or maybe even three during which everyone seemed to weigh whether her hair could really be so gold, whether her figure actually lived up to all it advertised on first glance. I managed to notice once that her chin
was pointier than I like, but by the time any male looked Leona
over enough to reach that site, he was prepared to discount that and
a lot more.

Anyhow, there in the kitchen we went through that pause period
of letting Leona's looks bask over us all, and on into some nickel and
dime gab between Alec and my father—

"Working hard?"

"Well, sure, Dad. Ever see me do anything different?"

"Just times I've seen you hardly working."

"The Double W sees against that. Y'know what they say. Nobody
on the Double W ever gets a sunburn, they don't have time."

— and an old-as-womankind kitchen ritual between Leona and my
mother—

"Can I help with anything, Mrs. McCaskill?"

"No, probably it's beyond help."

— until shortly my mother was satisfied that she had multiplied
the food on the stove sufficiently and said: "I expect you brought
your appetites with you? Let's sit up."

I suppose every household needs some habited way to begin a meal.
I have heard the Lord thanked in some of the unlikeliest of homes, and
for some of the unholiest of food. And seen whole families not lift a
fork until the patriarch at the head of the table had his plate full and
his bread buttered. Ours, though, said grace only once every three
hundred sixty-five days, and that one a joke—my father's New Year's
Eve invocation in that Scotch-preacher burr he could put on: "We ask ye
on this Hogmanay, gi' us a new yearr o' white brread and rane o'
yourrr gray."
Other than that, a McCaskill meal started at random, the only tradition to help yourself to what was closest and pass the food on clockwise.

"How's cow chousing?" My father was handing the mashed potatoes to Leona, but looking across at Alec.

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

When my father was a boy a stick of kindling flew up from the axe and struck the corner of his left eye. The vision was saved but ever after, that eyelid would droop to about half-shut whenever amusement made him squint a little. It descended now as he studied the meal traffic piling up around Leona. Then he made his reply to Alec: "It's all right."

I had the bright idea this conversation could benefit from my help, so I chimed in: "Counting starts tomorrow, Alec. Dode's sheep, and then Walter Kyle's, and then Fritz Hahn's. Dad and I'll be up there a couple three days. Remember that time you and I were along with him and Fritz's herder's dog Moxie got after a skunk and we both--"

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

Sprout? Evidently there was no telling what might issue from a person's mouth when he had a blond girl to show off in front of, and
the look I sent Alec told him so.

"Speaking of counting," Alec came up with next, "you got your beavers counted yet?" Here he was giving my father a little static. Every so often the Forest Service regional headquarters in Missoula— "Mazoola," all of us pronounced it my father's way, "emphasis on the zoo"— invented some new project for rangers to cope with, and the latest one we had been hearing about from my father was the inventory he was supposed to take of the beaver population of English Creek. "Christamighty," he had grumped, "this creek is the beaver version of New York City."

Now, though, with Leona on hand—this was the first time Alec had brought her out for a meal; the rest of us in the family recognized it as an early phase, a sort of curtain-raiser, in the Alec style of courting—my father just passed off the beaver census with: "No, I'm waiting for policy guidance from the Mazoola inmates. They might want me to count only the tails and then multiply by one, you never know."

Alec didn't let it go, though. "Maybe if they like your beaver arithmetic, next summer they'll have you do fish."

"Maybe." My father was giving Alec more prancing room than he deserved, but I guess Leona justified it.

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

"A Mrs. Pennyman," Alec reported. "From over around Havre."

"By now it's Havre, is it. If Wendell Williamson keeps on, he'll
have hired and fired every cook between here and Chicago."
My mother paused for Alec's response to that, and got none. "So?" she prompted.
"How does she feed?"

"It's—filling." The question seemed to put Alec a little off balance, and I noticed Leona provide him a little extra wattage in her next gaze at him.

"So is sawdust," said my mother, plainly awaiting considerably more report.

"Yeah, well," Alec fumbled. I was beginning to wonder whether cowboying had dimmed his wits, maybe driven his backbone up through the judgment part of his brain. "You know, it's usual ranch grub." He sought down into his plate for further description and finally proclaimed again: "Filling, is what I'd call it."

"How's the buttermilk business?" my father asked Leona, I suppose to steer matters off Alec's circular track. Her parents, the Tracys, ran the creamery in Gros Ventre.

"Just fine," Leona responded along with her flash of smile. She seemed to be on the brink of saying a lot more, but then just passed that smile around to the rest of us, a full share to my father and another to my mother and then one to me that made my throat tighten a little, then letting it rest last and coziest on Alec. She had a natural ability at that, producing some pleasantry then lighting up the room so you thought the remark amounted to a whole hell of a lot more than it did. I do envy that knack in a person, though likely wouldn't have the patience to use it myself even if I had it.
We still were getting used to the idea of Leona, the three of us in the family besides Alec. His girls before her were from the ranch families in here under the mountains or from the farm folks east of Gros Ventre. Nor was Leona in circulation at all for the past few years, going with Tollie Zane's son Earl as she had been. But this past spring, Alec's last in high school and Leona's next-to-last, he somehow cut Earl Zane out of the picture. "Swap one cowboy for another, she might as well have stayed put," my mother said at the time, a bit perturbed with Alec anyway about his intention for the Double W summer job again.

"All right, I guess," Alec was answering profoundly to some question of my father's about how successful the Double W's calving season had turned out.

How's this, how's that, fine, all right, you bet. If this was the level of sociability that was going to go on, I intended to damn promptly excuse myself to get back to working on my saddle, the scenic attractions of Leona notwithstanding. But then just as I was trying to estimate ahead to whether an early piece of butterscotch rhubarb pie could be coaxed from my mother or I'd do better to wait until later, Alec all at once put down his fork and came right out with:

"We got something to tell you. We're going to get married."

This kicked the conversation in the head entirely.

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

"How come?"

Even yet I don't know why I said that. I mean, I was plenty old enough to know why people got married. There were times recently, seeing Alec and Leona mooning around together, when I seemed to savvy more than I actually had facts about, if that's possible.

Focused as he was on how our parents were going to respond, the philosophy question from my side of the table jangled Alec. "Because, because we're—we love each other, why the hell do you think?"

"Kind of soon in life to be so certain on that, isn't it?" suggested my father.

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

"When's all this taking place?" my father got out next.

"This fall." Alec looked ready to say more, then held on to it, finally just delivered it in one dump: "Wendell Williamson'll let us have the house on the Nansen place to live in."

It was up to my mother to cleave matters entirely open. "You're saying you'll stay on at the Double W this fall?"

"Yeah," Alec said as if taking a vow. "It's what I want to do."

The unsaid part of this was huge, huger than anything I had ever felt come into our kitchen before. The financing to send Alec to Bozeman, my parents had been gathering like quilt pieces: whatever
savings the household managed to pinch aside, plus a loan from my mother's brother Pete Reese, plus a part-time job which my father had set up for Alec with a range management professor at the college who knew us from having spent time up here studying the Two, plus of course Alec's own wages from this summer, which was another reason why his choice of the Double W riding job at $30 a month again was less than popular—Christamighty, since my own haying wages later this summer would go into the general household kitty, even I felt I had a stake in the Bozeman plan. And now here was Alec choosing against college. Against all the expectation riding on him. Against—

"Alec, you will End Up as Nothing More Than a Gimped-Up Saddle Stiff, and I for one Will Not—"

More out of samaritan instinct than good sense my father headed my mother off with a next query to Alec: "How you going to support yourselves on a cow chouser's wages?"

"You two did, at first."

"We starved out at it, too."

"We ain't going to starve out." Alec's grammar seemed to be cowboyifying, too. "Wendell'll let me draw ahead on my wages for a few heifers this fall, and winter them with the rest of the outfit's. It'll give us our start."

My father finally thought to set down his coffee cup. "Alec, let's keep our shirts on here—" language can be odd; I had the vision just then of us all sitting around the table with our shirts off, Leona across from me in full double-barreled display—"and try see what's what."
"I don't see there's any what's what about it," Alec declared. "People get married every day."

"So does the sun rise," my mother told him, "without particular participation by you."

"Mom, now damn it, listen--"

"We all better listen," my father tried again. "Leona, we got nothing against you. You know that." Which was a bit short of true in both its parts, but Leona responded with a lower beam of smile.

"It's just that, Godamighty, Alec, cattle have gone bust time after time these last years. That way of life just has changed. Even the Double W would be on hard times if Wendell Williamson's daddy hadn't left him such deep pockets. Whether anybody'll ever be able to start off from scratch in the cow business and make a go of it, I don't see how--"

Alec was like any of us, he resisted having an idea pulled from under him. "Rather have me herding sheep up on one of your allotments, would you? There'd be something substantial to look forward to, I suppose you think, sheepherding."

My father seemed to consider. "No, most probably not, in your case. It takes a trace of common sense to herd sheep." He said it lightly enough that Alec would have to take it as a joke, but there was a poking edge to the lightness. "Alec, I just think that whatever the hell you do, you need to bring an education to it these days. That old stuff of banging a living out of this country by sheer force of behavior doesn't work. Hasn't for almost twenty years. This country
can outbang any man. Look at them along this creek, even these sheepmen. Hahn, Ed Van Bebber, Pres Rozier, the Busbys, Dode Withrow, Finletter, Hill. They've all just managed to hang on, and they're as good a set of stockmen as you'll find in this whole goddamn state. You think any of them could have got underway, in years like there've been?"

"Last year was better than the one before," Alec defended with that litany of the local optimists. "This one looks better yet."

I saw my father glance at my mother, to see if she wanted to swat down this part of Alec's argument or whether he should go ahead. Even I could tell from the held-in look of her that once she got started there'd be no stopping, so he soldiered on. "And if about five more come good back-to-back, everybody'll be almost to where they were fifteen or twenty years ago. Alec, trying to build a living on a few head of stock is a dead end these days."

"Dad--Dad, listen. We ain't starting from fifteen or twenty years ago. We're starting from now, and we got to go by that, not whatever the hell happened to--to anybody else."

"You'll be starting in a hole," my father warned. "And an everlasting climb out."

I say warned. What rang through to me was an alarm different from the one in my father's words--an iron tone of anger such as I had never heard out of him before.

"That's as maybe." Alec's timbre was an echo of the anger, the iron. "But we got to start." Now Alec was looking at Leona as if he was storing up for the next thousand years. "And we're going to do it married. Not
going to wait our life away."

If I ever get old enough to have brains, I will work on the question of man and woman.

All those years ago, the topic rode with me into the next morning as my father and I set off from the ranger station toward the mountains. Cool but cloudless, the day was a decent enough one, except for wind. I ought to have been in a topnotch mood, elevated by the anticipation that always began with my father's annual words, "Put on your mountain clothes in the morning."

Going along on one of these start-of-June rides with my father as he took a count on the sheep summering on the various ranchers' range allotments in the national forest was one of the awaited episodes of life. Better country to look ahead to could not be asked for. Kootenai, Lolo, Flathead, Absaroka, Bitterroot, Beaverhead, Deerlodge, Gallatin, Cabinet, Helena, Lewis and Clark, Custer, Two Medicine--those were the national forests of Montana, totaling dozens of ranger districts, but to our estimation the Two Medicine was head and shoulders above the others, and my father's English Creek district the topknot of the Two. Anybody with eyes could see this at once, for our ride that morning led up the North Fork of English Creek, which actually angles mostly west and northwest to thread between Roman Reef and Phantom Woman Mountain to its source, and where the coulee of the North Fork opened ahead of us, there the first summits of the Rockies sat on the horizon like stupendous sharp boulders. Only when our first hour or so of riding carried us above
that west edge of the coulee would we see the mountains in total, their broad bases of timber and rockfall gripping into the foothills. And the reefs. Roman Reef ahead of us, a rimrock half a mile high and more than three long. Grizzly Reef even bigger to the south of it, smaller Jericho Reef to the north. I don't know, are mountain reefs general knowledge in the world? I suppose they get their name because they stand as outcroppings do at the edge of an ocean—steady level ridges of stone, as if to give a calm example to the waves beyond them. Except that in this case the blue-gray billow up there is not waves but the Continental Divide against the sky. The name aside, though, sections of a fortress wall were what the three reefs reminded me of, spaced as they were with canyons between them and the higher jagged crags penned up behind. As if the whole horizon of the west had once been barricaded with slabs of rock and these were the mighty traces still standing. I must not have been the only onlooker this occurred to, as an even longer barrier of cliff farther south in the national forest was named the Chinese Wall.

The skyline of the Two... Even here at the outset the hover of it all always caused my father to turn and appreciatively call over his shoulder to Alec and me something like: "Nothing the matter with that." And always Alec and I would chorus, "Not one thing," both because we were expected to and because we too savored those waiting mountains.

Always was not in operation this year, however. My father did not pause to pronounce on the scenery, I had no chance to echo him, and Alec—Alec this year was on our minds instead of riding between us.

So our first stint on the road up the North Fork was broken only
by the sound of our horses' hooves or one or the other of us muttering a
horse name and urging a little more step-along in the pace. Even those
blurts of sound were pretty pallid, because where horse nomenclature was
concerned my father's imagination took a vacation. A black horse he
invariably named Coaly, a blaze face was always Snowball. Currently he was
riding a big mouse-colored gelding who, depend on it, bore the title of
Mouse. I was on a short-legged mare called Pony. Frankly, high among my
hopes about the business of growing up was that I would get a considerably
more substantial horse out of it. If and when I did, I vowed to give
the creature as much name as it could carry, such as Rimfire or Chief
Joseph or Calabash.

Whether I was sorting through my horse hopes or the outset of this
counting trip without Alec weighed more heavily on me than I realized,
I don't know. But in either case I was so deep into myself that I was
surprised to glance ahead and learn that Mouse and my father were halted,
and my father was gandering back to see what had become of me.

I rode on up and found that we had arrived to where a set of rutted
tracks— in flattery, it could have been called almost a road— left the
North Fork roadbed and crossed the coulee and creek and traced on up the
side of Breed Butte to where a few log buildings could be seen.

Normally I would have been met with some joke from my father about
sunburning my eyeballs if I went around asleep with my eyes open like that.
But this day he was looking businesslike, which was the way he looked
only when he couldn't find any better mood. "How about you taking a
squint at Walter's place?" he proposed. "You can cut around the butte
and meet me at the road into the Hebner tribe."

"All right," I of course agreed. And turned Pony to follow the ruts down and across the North Fork swale. Walter Kyle always summered in the mountains as herder of his own sheep, and so my father whenever he rode past veered in to see that everything was okay at the empty ranch. This was the first time he had delegated me, which verified just how much his mind was burdened—also with that question of man and woman? at least as it pertained to Alec McCaskill and Leona Tracy?—and that he wanted to saunter alone a while as he sorted through it all.

I suppose one school of thought is that I have an overdrawn imagination. Yet answer me this: how can the farthest reaches of life be gotten to except by way of the mind? I stop to say this because otherwise what I did next might sound odd. For as soon as my father had gone his way and I was starting up Breed Butte, I turned myself west in my saddle to face Roman Reef, tapped the brim of my hat in greeting, and spoke in the slow and distinct way you talk to a deaf person, "'Lo, Walter. How's everything up on the Reef?"

What was involved here was that from Walter Kyle's summer range up there in the mountains, on top of Roman Reef a good five miles from where I was, his actual house and outbuildings here on Breed Butte could be seen through his spyglass. Tiny, but seen. Walter had shown Alec and me this stunt of vision when we took some mail up to him during last year's counting trip. "There ye go," he congratulated as each of us in turn managed to extend the telescope tube just so and sight the building specks. "Ye can see for as long as your eye holds out, in this country."
Walter's enthusiasm for the Two was that of a person newly smitten, for although he was the most elderly of all the English Creek ranchers—at the time he seemed to me downright ancient, I suppose partly because he was one of those dried-up little guys who look eternal—he also was much the most recent to the area. Only three or four years ago Walter had moved here from down in the Ingomar country in the southeastern part of the state, where he ran several bands of sheep. I have never heard of a setup like it before or since, but Walter and a number of other Scotch sheepmen, dedicated bachelors all, lived there in the hotel in Ingomar and operated their sheep outfits out of their back pocket and hat, you might say. Not one of them possessed a real ranch, just grazing land they'd finagled one way or another, plus wagons for their herders, and of course sheep and more sheep. Away each of those old Scotchies would go once a week, out from that hotel with boxes of groceries in the back of a Model T to tend camp. For whatever reason, Walter pulled out of hotel sheep tycooning—my father speculated that one morning he turned to the Scotchman beside him at the table and burred, "Jock, for thirty years ye've been eating yourrr oatmeal aye too loud," got up and left for good—and bought the old Barclay place here on Breed Butte for next to nothing.

Pony was trudging up the butte in her steady uninspired way, and I had nothing to do but continue my long distance conversation with Walter. Not that I figured there was any real chance that Walter would be studying down here exactly then, and even if he was I would be only a gnat in the spyglass lenses and certainly not a conversationalist on whom he could perform any lip reading. But for whatever reason, I went ahead
and queried in the direction of the distant reef: "Walter, how the hell do people get so crosswise with one another?"

For last night's rumpus continued to bedevil me from whatever angle I could find to view it. The slant at which Alec and my parents suddenly were diverging from each other, first of all. In hindsight it may not seem such an earthquake of an issue, whether Alec was going to choose college or the wedding band/riding job combination. But hindsight is always through bifocals, it peers specifically instead of seeing whole. And the entirety here was that my father and my mother rested great hopes on my brother, especially given all that they and others of their generation had endured in the years past, years they had gotten through by constantly saying within themselves "Our children will know better times. They've got to." Hopes of that sort only parents can know. That Alec seemed not to want to step up in life, now that the chance at last was here, went against my parents' thinking as much as if he'd declared he was going to go out on the prairie and dig a hole and live a gopher's existence.

Walter Kyle had seen a lot of life, his mustache must have been sandy in his youth now was as yellow-white as if he'd been drinking cream from a jar. "What about that, Walter? From your experience, has Alec gone as goofy as my folks think?" And got back instead of Walter's long Scotch view of life my father's briefer Scotch one, his last night's reasoning to Alec: "Why not give college a year and then see? You got the ability, it's a crime not to use it. And Bozeman isn't the moon. You'll be back and forth some times during the year. The two of you can
see how the marriage notion holds up after that." But Alec wasn't about to have time bought from him. "We're not waiting our life away," ran his constant response. "Our life": that convergence of Alec and Leona and the headlong enthusiasm which none of the rest of us had quite realized they were bringing to their romance. Well, it will happen. Two people who have been around each other for years and all of a sudden finding that nobody else in history has ever been in love before, they're inventing it all themselves. Yet apply my mind to it in all the ways I could, my actual grasp of their mood wasn't all that firm, for to me then marriage seemed about as distant as death. Nor did I understand much more about the angle of Leona and—I was going to say, of Leona and my parents, but actually of Leona and the other three of us, for I somehow did feel included into the bask she aimed around our kitchen. I will admit, it was an interesting sensation, collecting an occasional gleam off Leona as if I'd abruptly been promoted beyond fourteen-year-oldhood. A battlefield commission, so to speak. Leona, Leona. "Now there is a topic I could really stand to talk to you about, Walter." Yet maybe a bachelor was not the soundest source either. Perhaps old Walter Kyle knew only enough about women, as the saying goes, to stay immune. Well, anyhow; with all care and good will I was trying to think through our family situation in a straight line, but Leona brought me to a blind curve. Not nearly the least of last evening's marvels was how much ground Leona had been able to hold with only a couple of honest-to-goodness sentences. When my father and mother were trying to argue delay into Alec and turned to her to test the result, she said just "We think we're
ready enough." And then at the end of the fracas, going out the door Leona turned to bestow my mother one of her sunburst smiles and say, "Thank you for supper, Beth." And my mother saying back, just as literally, "Don't mention it."

The final line of thought from last night was the most disturbing of all. The breakage between my father and Alec. This one bothered me so much I couldn't even pretend to be confiding it to Walter up there on Roman Reef. Stony silence from that source was more than I could stand on this one. For if I'd had to forecast, say at about the point Alec was announcing marriage intentions, my mother was the natural choice to bring the house down on him. That would have been expected, it was her way. And she of course did make herself more than amply known on the college/marriage score. But the finale of that suppertime was all-male McCaskill: "You're done running my life," flung by Alec as he stomped out with Leona in tow, and "Nobody's running it, including you," from my father to Alec's departing back.

Done running my life. Nobody's running it, including you. Put that way, the words without the emotion, it may sound like something concluding itself; the moment of an argument breaking off into silence, a point at which contention has been expended. But I know now, and I somehow knew even then, that the fracture of a family is not a thing that happens clean and sharp, so that you at least can calculate that from here on it will begin to be over with. No, it is like one of those worst bone breaks, a shatter. You can mend the place, peg it and splint
it and work to strengthen it, and while the surface maybe can be brought
to look much as it did before, the deeper vicinity of shatter always
remains a spot that has to be favored.

So if I didn't grasp much of what abruptly was happening within
our family, I at least held the realization that last night's rift was
nowhere near over.

Thinking heavily that way somehow speeds up time, and before I
quite knew it Pony was stopping at the barbwire gate into Walter Kyle's
yard. I tied her to the fence on a long rein so she could graze a
little and slid myself between the top and second strands.

Walter's place looked hunky-dory. But I did a circle of the tool
shed and low log barn and the three-quarter shed sheltering Walter's
\underline{Flying Cloud coupe,} old Reo just to be sure, and then went to the front of the house and took
out the key from behind the loose piece of chinking which hid it.

The house too was undisturbed. Not that there was all that much
in it to invite disturbance. The sparse habits of hotel living apparently
still were in Walter. Besides the furniture—damn little of that beyond
the kitchen table and its chairs of several stiff-back varieties—and
the open shelves of provisions and cookery, the only touches of habitation
were a drugstore calendar, and a series of coats hung on nails, and one
framed studio photograph of a young, young Walter in a tunic and a fur
cap: after Scotland and before Montana, he had been a Mountie for a
few years up in Alberta.
All in all, except for the stale feel that unlived-in rooms give off, Walter might just have stepped out to go down there on the North Fork and fish a beaver dam. A good glance around was all the place required. Yet I stood and inventoried for some minutes. I don't know why, but an empty house holds me. As if it was an opened book about the person living there. Peruse this log-and-chinking room and Walter Kyle could be read as thrifty, tidy to the verge of fussy, and alone.

At last, just to stir the air in the place with some words, I said aloud the conclusion of my one-way conversation with the mustached little sheepman up on the Reef: "Walter, you'd have made somebody a good wife."

Pony and I now cut west along the flank of Breed Butte, which would angle us through Walter's field to where we would rejoin the North Fork road and my father. Up here above the North Fork coulee the outlook roughened, the mountains now in full rumpled view and the foothills bumping up below them and Roman Reef making its wide stockade of bare stone between the two. On this part of our route the land steadily grew more beautiful, which in Montana also means more hostile to settlement. From where I rode along this high ground, Walter Kyle's was the lone surviving ranch to be looked back on between here and the English Creek ranger station.

The wind seemed to think that was one too many, for it had come up from the west and was pummeling everything on Walter's property, including me. I rode now holding onto my hat with one hand lest it skitter down to the North Fork and set sail for St. Louis. Of all of the number of
matters about the Two country that I never have nor will be able to savvy—one life is not nearly enough to do so—a main one is why in a landscape with hills and buttes and benchlands everywhere a person is so seldom sheltered from the everlasting damn wind. I mean, having the wind forever trying to blow harmonica tunes through your rib cage just naturally wears on the nerves. Someone like Ed Van Bebber, whose ranch lay up the South Fork of English Creek next to the ranger station, couldn't even be said hello to until he positioned himself with a building between him and the wind, and then Ed would cuss about how much of it was following him around the corner. Of course not everybody is that strung out by the wind. I like to think that I'm not. But I do believe it is incontestable that if that wind off the Rockies could be done away with, the Two would be a hundred percent more comfortable place of the world.

The Two, I have been saying. I ought to clarify that to us the term meant both the landscape to all the horizons around—that is pretty much what a Montanan means by a "country"—and the national forest that my father's district was part of. In those days the six hundred square miles of the Two Medicine National Forest were divvied into only three ranger districts, English Creek, Indian Head, west of Choteau, And Blacktail Gulch, down by Sun River at the south end of the forest. Actually only my father's northmost portion of the Two Medicine National Forest had anything at all to do with the Two Medicine River or Two Medicine Lake: the vicinity where the forest joins onto the south boundary of Glacier National Park and fits in there, as a map shows it, like a long straight-sided peninsula between the park and the Continental Divide and the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. So the Two Medicine itself, the river that is, honestly is in sight to hardly any of the Two country. Like all
the major flows of this region the river has its source up in the Rockies, but then promptly cuts a sizable canyon east through the plains as it pushes to meet the Marias River and eventually the Missouri. Burrows its way through the prairie, you might almost say. It is just the ring of the words, Two Medicine, that has carried the name all the way south along the mountains some thirty miles to our English Creek area. The derivation as I've heard it is that in distant times the Blackfeet made their medicine lodge—their place for sacred ceremony—two years in a row at a favorite spot on the river where buffalo could be stampeded over nearby cliffs, and the name lasted from that pair of lodges. By whatever way Two Medicine came to be, it is an interesting piece of language, I have always thought.

My father was waiting at another rutty offshoot from the North Fork road. This one had so many cuts of track, some of them dating from the era of wagon wheels, that it looked like a kind of huge braid across the grasslands. My father turned his gaze from the twined ruts to me and asked: "Everything under control at Walter's?"

"Uh huh," I affirmed.

"All right." His businesslike expression had declined into what I think is called dolor. "Let's go do it." And we set off into the weave of tracks around the Hebner place.

No matter what time of day you approached it, the Hebner place looked as if demolition was being done and the demolishers were just now taking a smoke break. An armada of abandoned wagons and car chassis and decrepit farm equipment—even though Good Help Hebner farmed not so
much as a vegetable garden—lay around and between the brown old buildings. A root cellar was caved in, a tool shop had only half a roof left, the barn looked distinctly teetery. In short, not much ever functioned on the Hebner place except gravity.

Out front of the barn now as we rode in stood a resigned-looking little bay mare with two of the Hebner boys astraddle her swayed back. The pair on the horse must have been Roy and Will, or possibly Will and Enoch, or maybe even Enoch and Curtis. So frequent a bunch were they, there was no keeping track of which size Hebner boy was who unless you were around them every day.

I take that back. Even seeing them on a constant basis wouldn't necessarily have been a foolproof guide to who was who, because all the faces in that Hebner family rhymed. I don't know how else to put it. Every Hebner forehead was a copy of Good Help's wide crimped-in-the-middle version, a pale bony expanse centered with a kind of tiny gully which widened as it went down, as if the nose had avalanched out of there. Across most of the left side of this divided forehead a forelock of hair flopped at a crooked angle. The effect was as if every male Hebner wore one of those eye patches shown in pictures of pirates, only pushed up higher. Then from that forehead any Hebner face simply sort of dwindled down, a quick skid of nose and a tight mouth and a small ball of chin.

The tandem horsebackers stared us the length of the yard. It was another Hebner quality to gawk at you as if you were some new species on earth. My father had a not entirely ironic theory to explain that: "They've all eaten so goddamn much venison their eyes have grown big as
For it was a fact of life that somewhere up there in the jackpines beyond the Hebner buildings would be a woolsack hanging from a top limb. The bottom of the sack would rest in a washtub of water, and within the sack, being cooled nicely by the moisture as it went wicking up through the burlap, would be a hind quarter or two of venison. Good Help Hebner liked his deer the same way he preferred his eggs—poached.

On the face of the law, one good search through those jackpines should have clapped Good Help behind bars. Yet that search never was made, either by my father or by the game warden, Joe Rellis. For if Good Help's use of the Two Forest as a larder was a known outcome, the question part of the equation was where the next square meal for the Hebner kids would come from if Good Help was shut away for his deer proclivities.

"Actually, I don't mind Good Help snitching a deer every so often," my father put it, "or even that he's so damn lazy he can barely breathe. But when he starts in on that goddamn oughtobiography of his—how he ought to have been this, ought to have done that—"

"Morning, Ranger! Hello there, Jick!"

I don't know about my father, but that out-of-nowhere gust of words startled me just a little. The greeting hadn't issued from the staring boys on the mare but from behind the screen door of the log house. "Ought to have been paying attention to the world so I'd seen you coming and got some coffee going."

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

"We'll do what we can to put it to good—" Commotion in front of the barn interrupted the voice of Good Help. The front boy atop the old horse was whacking her alongside the neck with the reins, while the boy behind him was kicking the mount heartily in the ribs and piping, "Giddyup, goddamn you horse, giddyup!"

"Giddyup, hell!" Good Help's yell exploded across the yard. It was always said of him that Good Help could talk at a volume which would blow a crowbar out of your hand. "The pair of you giddy off and giddy over to that goshdamn woodpile!"

We all watched for the effect of this on the two would-be jockeys, and when there was none except increased exertion on the dilapidated mare, Good Help addressed my father through the screen door again: "Ought to have taken that pair out and drowned them with the last batch of kittens, way they behave. I don't know what's got into kids any more."

With the profundity of that, Good Help materialized from behind the screening and out onto the decaying railroad tie which served as the front step to the Hebner house. Like his place, Good Help Hebner himself was more than a little ramshackle. A tall yet potbellied man with one bib of his overalls usually frayed loose and dangling, his sloping face made even more pale by a gray-white chevron of grizzle which mysteriously never matured into a real mustache. Garland Hebner: nicknamed Good Help ever since the time, years back, when he volunteered to join the Noon Creek cattlemen when they branded their calves and thereby get in on a
free supper afterward. In Dill Egan's corral, the branding crew at one point looked up to see Hebner, for no reason that ever became clear, hoisting himself onto Dill's skittish iron-gray stud. Almost before Hebner was truly aboard, the gray slung him off and then tried to pound him apart while everybody else bailed out of the corral. Hebner proved to be a moving target; time and again the hooves of the outraged horse missed the rolling ball of man, until finally Dill managed to reach in, grab hold of a Hebner ankle, and snake him out under the corral poles. Hebner wobbled up, blinked around at the crowd, then sent his gaze on to the sky and declared as if piety was natural to him:
"Well, I had some Good Help getting out of that, didn't I?"

Some extra stickum was added to the nickname, of course, by the fact that Good Help had never been found to be of any use whatsoever on any task anybody had been able to think up for him. "He has a pernicious case of the slows," Dode Withrow reported after he once made the error of hiring Good Help for a few days of fencing haystacs.

"Ranger, I been meaning to ask if it mightn't be possible to cut a few poles to fix that corral up with," Good Help was blaring now. The Hebner corral looked as if a buffalo stampede had passed through it, and translated out of Hebnerese, Good Help's question was whether he could help himself to some national forest pine without paying for it. "Ought to have got at it before now, but my back--"

His allergy to work, however, was the one characteristic in which the rest of the family did not emulate Good Help. They didn't dare. Survival depended on whatever wages the squadron of Hebner kids could earn by
hiring out at lambing time or through haying season. Then at some point in their late teens each Hebner youngster somehow would come up with a more serious job and use it as an escape ladder out of that family.

Alec and I had accidentally been witnesses to the departure of Sanford, the second oldest Hebner boy. It occurred a couple of springs before when Ed Van Bebber came by the ranger station one Friday night and asked if Alec and I could help out with the lambing chores that weekend. Neither of us much wanted to do it, because Ed Van Bebber is nobody's favorite person except Ed Van Bebber's. But you can't turn down a person who's in a pinch, either. When the pair of us rode into Ed's place early the next morning we saw that Sanford Hebner was driving the gutwagon, even though he was only seventeen or
so, not all that much older than Alec at the time. And that lambing season at Van Bebber's had been a rugged one, the hay was used up getting through the winter and the ewes now thin as shadows and not particularly ready to become mothers. Ed had thrown the drop band clear up onto the south side of Wolf Butte to provide any grass for them at all, which meant a tough mile and a half drive for Sanford to the lambing shed with each gutwagon load of ewes and their fresh lambs, and a played-out team of horses by the time he got there. With the ewes dropping eighty and ninety lambs a day out there and the need to harness new horses for every trip, Sanford was performing about two men's work and doing it damn well. The day this happened, dark had almost fallen, Alec and I were up on the hillside above the lambing shed helping Ed corral a bunch of mother ewes and their week-old lambs, and we meanwhile could see Sanford driving in with his last load of lambs of the day. We actually had our bunch under control just fine, the three of us and a dog or two. But Ed always had to have a tendency toward hurry. So he cupped his hands to his mouth and yelled down the hill:

"HEY THERE YOU HEBNER! COME UP HERE AND HELP US CORRAL THESE EWES AND LAMBS!"

I still think if Ed had asked properly Sanford probably would have been fool enough to have climbed up and joined us, even though he already had put in his workday and then some. But after a season of man's labor he had done, to be yelled at to come up and help a couple of
milk-tooth kids like us chase lambs; worse than that, to not be awarded even his first name, just be shouted to the world as a Hebner—I still can see Sanford perched on the seat of that gutwagon, looking up the slope to us, and then cupping his hands to his mouth the same way Ed had, and hear yet his words carry up the hill:

"YOU-GO-PLUMB-TO-HELL-YOU-OLD-SON-OF-A-BITCH!"

And he slapped his reins on the rumps of the gutwagon team and drove on to the lambing shed. At the supper table that night, Sanford's check was in his plate.

Sanford and that money, though, did not travel back up the North Fork to his Hebner household. When Alec and I headed home that night Sanford rode double behind me—I didn't think of it at the time but that must have been one more mortification, straddling a saddle behind a shavetail kid like me after he'd been a full-fledged gutwagon driver all spring—and when we dismounted at the ranger station, Sanford trudged into the dark straight down the English Creek road, asking at every ranch on the way whether a job of any sort could be had. "Anything. I'll clean the chicken house." The Busby brothers happened to need a bunch herder, and Sanford had been with them ever since; this very moment, was herding one of their bands of sheep up in the mountains of the Two. To me, the realization of Sanford's situation that evening when Ed Van Bebber canned him, knocking at any door rather than return home, having a family, a father, that he would even clean chicken houses to be free of; to me, the news that life could deal such a hell of a situation to someone about the age of Alec and me came as a sobering gospel.
"--Missus!" Having failed to cajole my father out of free timber, Good Help evidently had decided to settle for the manna we'd come to deliver. "Got something out here."

The screen door opened and closed again, producing Florene Hebner and leaving a couple of the very littlest Hebners—Garlena and Jonas? Jonas and Maybella?—gawping behind the mesh. Since the baked goods were tied in a dish towel on my saddle, I did the courteous thing and got off and took the bundle up to Florene. Florene was, or had been, a fairly good-looking woman, particularly among a family population minted with the face of Good Help. But what was most immediately noticeable about her was how worn she looked. As if she'd been sanded down repeatedly. You'd never have guessed the fact by comparing the two, but Florene and my mother went through grade school at Noon Creek together. Florene, though, never made it beyond the second year of high school in Gros Ventre because she already had met Garland Hebner and promptly was pregnant by him and, a little less promptly on Garland's part, was married to him.

She gave a small downcast smile as I handed her the bundle, said to me "Thank your ma again, Jick," and retreated back inside.

"Funny to see Alec not with you," Good Help was declaiming to my father as I returned from the doorway to Pony. "But they do grow and go."

"So they do," my father agreed without enthusiasm. "Garland, we got sheep waiting for us up the mountain. You ready, Jick?" My father touched Mouse into motion, then uttered to Good Help in parting, purely poker-faced: "Take it easy."
The route we rode out of the Hebner place was a sort of upside down L, the long climbing stem of ruts and then the brief northwestward leg of the North Fork trail where it tops onto the English Creek—Noon Creek divide. Coming onto that crest, we now would be in view of the landmarks that are the familiar sentries of the Two country. Chief Mountain—even though it is a full seventy miles to the north and almost into Canada, standing distinct as a mooring peg at the end of the long chain of mountains. Also north but nearer, Heart Butte—no great piece of geography, yet it too poses separate enough from the mountain horizon that its dark pyramid form can be constantly seen and identified. And just to our east the full timber-topped profile of Breed Butte, a junior landmark but plainly enough the summit of our English Creek area.

With all this offered into sight I nonetheless kept my eyes on my father, watching for what I knew would happen, what always happened after he paid a visit to the Hebner place.

There at the top of the rise he halted his horse, and instead of giving his regard to the distant wonders of Chief Mountain and Heart Butte, he turned for a last slow look at the Hebner hodgepodge. Then shook his head, said "Jesus H. Christ," and reined away. For in that woebegone log house down there, and amid those buildings before neglect had done its handiwork on them, my father was born and brought up.

Of course then the place was the McCaskill homestead. And the North Fork known by the nickname of Scotch Heaven on account of the several burr-on-the-tongue-and-thistle-up-the-kilt families who had come
over and settled. Duffs, Barclays, Frews, Findlaters, Erskines, and my McCaskill grandparents, they lit in here sometime in the 1880s and all were dead or defeated or departed by the time the flu epidemic of 1918 and the winter of '19 got done with them. I possessed no first-hand information on my father's parents. Both of them were under the North Fork soil by the time I was born. And despite my father's ear to the past, there did not seem to be anything known or at least fit to report about what the McCaskills came from in Scotland. Except for a single scrap of lore: the story that a McCaskill had been one of the stone masons of Arbroath who worked for the Stevensons—as I savvy it, the Stevensons must have been a family of engineers before Robert Louis cropped into the lineage and picked up a pen—when they were putting the lighthouses all around the coast of Scotland. The thought that an ancestor of ours helped fight the sea with stone meant more to my father than he liked to let on. As far as I know, the only halfway sizable body of water my father himself had ever seen was Flathead Lake right here in Montana, let alone an ocean and its beacons. Yet when the fire lookout towers he had fought for were finally being built on the Two Medicine forest during these years it was noticeable that he called them "Franklin Delano's lighthouses."

Looking back from now at that matter of my McCaskill grandparents I question, frankly, whether my mother and father would or could have kept close with that side of the family even if it had still been extant. No marriage is strong enough to bear two loads of in-laws. Early on the choice might as well be made, that one family will be seen as much as
can be stood and the other, probably the husband's, shunted off to rare visits. That's theory, of course. But theory and my mother together—in any case, all I grew up knowing of the McCaskills of Scotch Heaven was thirty years of homestead effort proved to be the extent of their lifetimes and that my father emerged from the homestead, for good, in the war year of 1917.

"Yeah, I went off to Wilson's war. Fought in blood up to my knees."

As I have told, the one crack in how solemn my father could be in announcing something like this was that lowered left eyelid of his, and I liked to watch for it to dip down and introduce this next part. "Fact is, you could get yourself a fight just about any time of day or night in those saloons outside Fort Leonard Wood. That my father's combat in the state of Washington had been limited to fists against Missouri chins seemed not to bother him a whit, although I myself wished he had some tales of the actual war. Rather, I wished his knack with a story could have illuminated that war experience of his generation, as an alternative to so many guys' plain refrain that I-served-my-time-over-in-Frogland-and-you-by-God-can-have-the-whole-bedamned-place. But you settle for what family lore you can.

My father's history resumes that when he came back from conducting the war against the Missourian saloonhounds, he was hired on by the Noon Creek cattle ranchers as their association rider. "Generally some older hand got the job, but I was single and broke, just the kind ranchers love to whittle their wages down to fit—" by then too, the wartime livestock prices were on their toboggan ride down—"and they
took me on."

That association job of course was only a summer one, the combined Noon Creek cattle—except those of the big Double W ranch—trailing up onto the national forest grass in June and down out again in September, and so in winters my father fed hay at one cow ranch or another and then when spring came and brought lambing time with it he would hire on with one of the English Creek sheepmen. I suppose that runs against the usual notion of the West, of cow chousers and mutton conductors forever at odds with each other. But anybody who grew up around stock in our part of Montana knew no qualm about working with either cattle or sheep. Range wars simply never were much the Montana style, and most particularly not the Two Medicine fashion. Oh, somewhere in history there had been an early ruckus south toward the Sun River, some cowman kiying over to try kill off a neighboring band of sheep. And probably in any town along these mountains, Browning or Gros Ventre or Choteau or Augusta, you could go into a bar and still find an occasional old hammerhead who proclaimed himself nothing but a cowboy and never capable of drawing breath as anything else, especially not as a mutton puncher. (Which isn't to say that most shepherders weren't equally irreversibly shepherders, but somehow that point never seemed to need constant general announcement as it did with cowboys.) By and large, though, the Montana philosophy of make-do as practiced by our sizable ranching proportion of Scotchmen, Germans, Norwegians, and Missourians meant that ranch people simply tried to figure out which species did best at the moment, sheep or cows, and chose accordingly. It all came
down, so far as I could see, to the philosophy my father expressed whenever someone asked him how he was doing: "Just trying to stay level."

In that time when young Varick McCaskill became their association rider there still would have been several Noon Creek ranchers, guys getting along nicely on a hundred or so head of cattle apiece. Now nearly all of those places either were bought up by Wendell Williamson's Double W or under lease to it. "The Williamsons of life always do try to latch onto all the land that touches theirs," was my father's view on that. What I am aiming at, though, is that among those Noon Creek stockmen when my father was hired on was Isaac Reese, mostly a horse raiser but under the inspiration of wartime prices also running cattle just then. It was when my father rode in to pick up those Reese cattle for the drive into the mountains that he first saw my mother. Saw her as a woman, that is. "Oh, I had known she had some promise. Lisabeth Reese. The name alone made you keep her somewhere in mind."

Long-range opportunities seemed to elude my father, but he could be nimble enough in the short run. "I wasn't without some practice at girling. And Beth was worth some extra effort."

The McCaskill-Reese matrimony ensued, and a year or so after that, Alec ensued. Which then meant that my father and mother were supporting themselves and a youngster by a job that my father had been given because he was single and didn't need much wage. This is the brand of situation you can find yourself in without much effort in Montana, but that it is common does not make it one damn bit more acceptable. I am sure as anything that the memory of that predicament at the start of my parents'
married life lay large behind their qualms about what Alec now was intending. My father especially wanted no repeat, in any son of his, of that season by season scrabble for livelihood. I know our family ruckus was more complicated than just that. Anything ever is. But if amid the previous evening’s contention my father and Alec could have been put under oath, each Bibled to the deepest of the truths in him, my father would have had to say something like: "I don't want you making my mistakes over again." And Alec to him: "Your mistakes were yours, they've got nothing to do with me."

My brother and my father. I am hard put to know how to describe them as they seemed to me then, in that time when I was looking up at them from fourteen years of age. How to lay each onto paper, for a map is never the country itself, only some ink suggesting the way to get there.

Which may be why the calendar of their lives, the seasons of the Two Medicine country, somehow seems to bring out more about this pair than sketchwork does. Yes, I believe that to come close to any understanding of Alec McCaskill or Varick McCaskill you would have had to gone through a year at the side of each.

Of course, until Alec graduated that May, the year as he and I knew it always had that long 9-month compartment in it, the school year. The first three grades, Alec went to a country school out west of Choteau; the Indian Head ranger station down there at the middle of the Two Medicine National Forest was where my father started in the Forest
Funny, what memory does. I have only a few beginning recollections of the four or so years we spent at the Indian Head ranger station down there at the middle of the Two Medicine National Forest, where my father started in the Forest Service. A windstorm one night that we thought was going to take the roof off the house. And Alec teaching me to mooch my way onto the back of grazing horse, as I have told about. But clearest of all to me is a time Alec and I rode double into the mountains with our father, for he took us along on little chore trips as soon as we were big enough to perch on a horse. How can it be that a day of straddling behind the saddle where my brother sat—my nose inches from the collar of Alec's jacket, and I can tell you as well as anything that the jacket was green corduroy, Alec a greener green than the forest around is—is so alive, even yet?

Anyway, after Indian Head came our move to English Creek and my father's rangering of the north end of the Two ever since. Now that I think on all this, that onset of our third English Creek life was at the start of Alec's fourth school year, for I recall how damn irked I was that, new home or not, here Alec was again riding off to school every morning while I still had a whole year to wait.

Next year did come and there we both were, going to school to Miss Thorkelson at the South Fork schoolhouse, along with the children of the ranch families on the upper end of English Creek—the Hahn boys, a number of Busbys and Roziers, the Finletter twins, the Withrow girls, and then of course the Hebner kids who made up about half the school by themselves. Alec always stood well in his studies. Yet I can't help but believe the South Fork school did me more good than it did him. You know how those one-room schools are, all eight grades there in one clump for the teacher to have to handle. By a fluke of Hebner reproductive history
Marcella Withrow and I were the only ones our age at South Fork, so as a class totaling two we didn't take up much of Miss Thorkelson's lesson time and she always let us read extra or just sit and partake of what she was doing with the older grades. By the time Marcella and I reached the 6th grade we already had listened through the older kids' geography and reading and history and grammar five times. I still know what the capital of Bulgaria is, and not too many people I meet do. And since Miss Thorkelson was a bearcat on poetry, parts of poems lodged in the mind then, too. The holiest of all holidays are those kept by ourselves in silence and apart. The secret anniversaries of the heart. As did the books she would read to us from, at the last of each school day. Squire Trelawney, Doctor Livesey, and the rest of these gentlemen having asked me to write down the whole particulars about Treasure Island, from the beginning to the end, keeping nothing back but the bearings of the island, and that only because there is still treasure not yet lifted, I take up my pen—I'll tell you right now, that Treasure Island is still one topnotch book.

Numbers, less so. But there Alec shined. Shined in spite of himself, if such is possible.

It surprised the hell out of all of us in the family. I can tell you the exact night we got this new view of Alec.

It had been paper day for my father, the one he set aside each month to wrestle paperwork asked for by the Two Medicine National Forest headquarters down in Great Falls, and more than likely another batch
wanted by the Region One office over in Missoula as well. The author of his sorrow this particular time was Missoula, which had directed him to prepare and forward—that was the way Forest Service offices talked—a report on the average acreage of all present and potential grazing allotments in his English Creek ranger district. "Potential" was the nettle in this, for it meant that my father had to dope out from his maps every bit of terrain which fit the grazing regulations of the time and translate those map splotches into acreage. So acres had been in the air all that day in our household, and it was at supper that Alec asked how many acres there were in the Two Medicine National Forest altogether.

Alec was twelve at the time. Which would have made me eight, since there were four years between us. Three years and 49 weeks, I preferred to count it; my birthday being on September 4th and Alec's the 25th of that same month. But the point here is that we were both down there in the grade school years and my father didn't particularly care to be carrying on a conversation about any more acreage, so he just answered: "Quite a bunch. I don't know the figure, exactly."

Alec was never easy to swerve. "Well, how many sections does it have?" You likely know that a section is a square mile, in the survey system used in this country.

"Pretty close to 600," my father knew offhand.

"Then that's 384,000 acres," imparted Alec.

"That sounds high, to me," my father responded, going on with
his meal. "Better get a pencil and paper and work it out."

Alec shook his head against the pencil and paper notion.
"384,000," he said again. "Bet you a milkshake."

At this juncture my mother was heard from. "There'll be no betting at the supper table, young man." But she then got up and went to the sideboard where the mail was lying and returned with an envelope. On the back of it she did the pencil work—600 times 640, the number of acres in a section—and in a moment reported:
"384,000."

"Are you sure?" my father asked her.

My mother in her younger days had done a little schoolteaching, so here my father simply was getting deeper into the arithmetic bog. "Do you want to owe both Alec and me milkshakes?" she challenged him back.

"No, I can do without that," my father said. He turned to Alec again and studied him a bit. Then: "All right, Mister Smart Guy. How much is 365 times 12?"

This too took Alec only an instant. "4,380," he declared.

"Why? What's that?"

"It's about how many days a twelve-year-old like you has been on this earth," my father said. "Which is to say it's about how long it's taken us to discover what it is you've got in that head of yours."

That, then, was what might be called the school year portion of Alec. An ability he couldn't really account for—"I don't know, Jicker, I just can," was all the answer I could ever get when I pestered him about how he could handle figures in his head like that—and maybe
didn't absolutely want or at least welcome. The Alec of summer was another matter entirely. What he didn't display the happy knack of, in terms of ranch or forest work that went on in the Two Country at that season of year, hadn't yet been invented. Fixing fence, figuring how to splice in barbwire and set new posts, Alec was a genius at; any time an English Creek rancher got money enough ahead for fence work, here he came to ask Alec to ride his lines and fix where needed. When Alec, at age thirteen, came to his first haying season and was to drive the scatter rake for our uncle Pete Reese, after the first few days Pete put him onto regular windrow raking instead. As a scatter rake, Alec worked the job for more than it was worth, trotting his team of horses anywhere in the hayfield a stray scrap of hay might be found; the regularity of making windrows, Pete said, slowed him down to within reason. That same headlong skill popped out whenever Alec set foot into the mountains. On our counting trips before this year, he perpetually was the first to see deer or elk or a hawk or whatever, before I did and often before our father did.

The combination of all this in Alec, I am sure as anything, was what inspired my father and mother to champion college and engineering. They never put it in so bald a way, but Alec's mathematical side and his knacky nature and his general go-to-it approach seemed to them fitted for an engineer. A builder, a doer. Maybe even an engineer for the Forest Service itself, for in those New Deal times there were projects under way everywhere a place could be found for them, it seemed like. The idea even rang right with Alec, at first. All through that
winter of his last year in high school Alec kept saying he wished he could go right now, go to the college at Bozeman and get started. But then Leona happened, and the Double W summer job again, and the supper ruckus about marriage over college.

Well, that was a year's worth of Alec, so to speak. His partner in ruckus, my father up there on the horse in front of me, can't be calendared in the strictly regular fashion either. Despite the order of months printed and hung on our wall at the English Creek ranger station, a Varick McCaskill year began with autumn. With Indian summer, actually, which in our part of Montana arrives after a customary stormy turn of weather around Labor Day. Of course every ranger is supposed to inspect the conditions of his forest there at the end of the grazing season. My father all but X-rayed his portion of the Two Medicine National Forest. South Fork and North Fork, up under the reefs, in beyond Heart Butte, day after day he delved the Two almost as if making sure to himself that he still had all of that zone of geography. And somehow when the bands of sheep trailed down and streamed toward the railroad chutes at Blackfoot or Pendroy, he was on hand there too to look them over, gossip with the herders, the ranchers, the lamb buyers, join in the jackpot bets about how much the lambs would weigh. It was the time of year when he could assess his job, see right there on the land and on the hoof the results of his rangering and give thought to how to adjust it. A necessary inventory season, autumn.

He never wintered well. Came down with colds, sieges of hacking and sniffling, like someone you would think was a permanent pneumonia
candidate. Strange, for a man of his lengthy strength and otherwise so in tune with the Two country. "Are you sure you were born and raised up there on the North Fork?" my mother would ask, along with about the third mustard plaster she applied onto him every winter. "Maybe a traveling circus left you."

More than likely, all of my father's winter ailments really were symptoms of just one, indoorness. For stepping out a door somehow seemed to extend him, actually tip his head higher and brace his shoulders straighter, and the farther he went from a house the more he looked like he knew what he was doing.

Does that sound harsh? It's not meant to. All I am trying to work into words here is that my father was a man born to the land, in a job that sometimes harnessed him to a desk, a typewriter, a book of regulations. A man caught between, in a number of ways. I have since come to see that he was of a generation that this particularly happens to. The ones who are first-born in a new land. My belief is that it will be the same when there are births out on the moon or the other planets. Those first-born always, always will live in a straddle between the ancestral path of life and the route of the new land. In my father's case the old country of the McCaskills, Scotland, was as distant and blank as the North Pole, and the fresh one, America, still was making itself. Especially a rough-edged part of America such as the Montana he was born into and grew up in. All my father's sessions with old Toussaint Rennie, hearing whatever he could about the past days of the Two Medicine country, I think were due to this; to a need for some
footing, some groundwork of the time and place he found himself in.

The Forest Service itself was an in-between thing, for that matter. Keeper of the national forests, their timber, grass, water, yet merchant of those resources, too. Anybody local like my father who "turned green" by joining the USFS now sided against the thinking of a lot of people he had known all his life, people who considered that the country should be wide open, or at least wider open than it was, for using.

And even within all this, ranger Varick McCaskill was of a betwixt variety. A good many of the guys more veteran than my father dated back to the early time of the Forest Service, maybe even to when it was established in 1905; they tended to be reformed cowboys or loggers or some such, old hands who had been wrestling the West since before my father was born. Meanwhile the men younger than my father were showing up with college degrees in forestry and the New Deal alphabet on their tongues.

So there my father was, between and between and between. My notion in all this is that winter, that season of house time and waiting, simply was one more between than he could stand.

When spring let him out and around, my father seemed to green up with the country. In the Two, even spring travels in on the wind—chinooks which can cause you to lean into them like a drunk against a lamppost while they melt away the snowbanks of winter. The first roar of a chinook beginning to sweep down off the top of the Rockies signaled newness, promise, to my father. "The wind from Eden," he called the chinook, for he must have read that somewhere. Paperwork chores he
had put off and off, now got tackled and disposed of. He and his assistant ranger gave the gear of the English Creek ranger district a going-over; saddles, bridles, pack saddles, fire equipment, phone lines, all of it. With his dispatcher he planned the work of trail crews, and the projects the Civilian Conservation Corps boys would be put to, and the deployment of fire guards and smokechasers when the fire season heated up.

And from the first moment that charitably might be classified as spring, my father read the mountains. Watched the snow hem along the peaks, judging how fast the drifts were melting. Cast a glance to English Creek various times of each day, to see how high it was running. Kept mental tally of the wildlife; when the deer started back up into the mountains, when the fur of the weasel turned from white to brown, how soon the first pile of coal-black droppings in the middle of a trail showed that bears were out of hibernation. To my father, and through him to the rest of us in the family, the mountains now were their own calendar, you might say.

And finally, spring's offspring. Summer. The high season, the one the rest of my father's ranger year led up to. Summer was going to tell itself, for my father and I were embarking into it now with this counting trip.

"--a gander. Don't you think?"

My father had halted Mouse and was swiveled around looking at me in curiosity. Sometimes I think if I endure in life long enough to get senile nobody will be able to tell the difference, given how my mind
has always drifted anyway.

"Uh, come again?" I mustered. "I didn't quite catch that."

"Anybody home there, under your hat? I was saying, it's about
time you checked on your packslinging. Better hop off and take a
lander."

Back there on the subject of our horses I should have told too
that we were leading one pack horse with us. Tomorrow, after we finished
the counting of the Kyle and Hahn bands of sheep, we were going on up
to Billygoat Peak where Paul Eliason, the junior forester who was my
father's assistant ranger, and a couple of fireguards were building a
fire lookout. They had gone in the previous week with the pre-cut
framework and by now likely had the lookout erected and shingled,
but the guywire had been late in coming from Missoula. That was our
packload now, the roll of \( \frac{1}{2} \)-inch galvanized cable and some bolts and
flanges to tie down the new lookout cabin. You may think the wind blows
in the lower areas of the Two, but up there on top it really huffs.

This third horse, bearer of the load whose ropes and hitch knots
I now was testing for tautness, was an elderly solemn sorrel whom my
father addressed as Brownie but the rest of us called by the name he'd
been given before the Forest Service deposited him at the English Creek
station: Homer. Having Brownie nee Homer along was cause for mixed
emotions. One more horse is always a nuisance to contend with, yet
the presence of a pack animal also made a journey seem more substantial;
testified that you weren't just jaunting off to somewhere, you were
transporting. Packstrings of horses and mules had been the lifeblood
of the Forest Service ever since its birth, the hoofed carriers of supply into the mountains of all the west. I know for a fact that my father considered that the person most important to his job as English Creek district ranger was not Paul Eliason, although Paul was a good enough assistant, nor anyone up the hierarchy, the superintendent of the Two Medicine National Forest or the regional forester of Region One or any of those, but his packer, Isidor Pronovost.

Since the lookout gear and our food only amounted to a load for one horse it hadn't been necessary to call on Isidor for this counting trip of ours. But even absent he had his influence that morning as I arranged the packs on Brownie/Homer under my father's scrutiny, both of us total converts to Isidor's perpetual preaching that in packing a horse or a mule, balance is everything. One of the best things that was ever said to me was Isidor's opinion that I was getting to be a "pretty daggone good cargodier" in learning how to fit cargo onto a pack animal. These particular Billy Peak packs took me some extra contriving, to make a roll of heavy guywire on one side of the pack saddle equivalent to some canned goods on the other side of it, but finally my father had proclaimed: "There, looks to me like you got it Isidored."

Evidently I had indeed, for I didn't find that the packs or ropes had shifted appreciably on our ride thus far. But I went ahead and reefed down on a rope or two anyway, snugging them even further to justify the report to my father: "All tight as fiddlestrings."

While I was cross-examining the pack ropes my father had been looking out over the country all around. Roman Reef predominated above us, of course. But just across the gorge of the North Fork
from it another landmark, Rooster Mountain, was starting to stand
over us, too. Its broad open face of slope was topped with an abrupt
upshoot of rock like a rooster's comb, which gave it the name.

"Since we're this far along," my father decided, "maybe we might
as well eat some lunch."

The view rather than his stomach guided him in that choice, I believe.

By now, late morning, we were so well started into the mountains
above the English Creek-Noon Creek divide that we could see down onto
both drainages and their various ranches, and on out to where the
farm patterns began, east of the town of Gros Ventre. To be precise,
on a map our lunch spot was about where the east-pointing panhandle
of the Two Medicine National Forest joins onto the pan—the pan being
the seventy-five mile extent of the forest along the front of the
Rockies, from East Glacier at the north to Sun River at the south.

Somehow when the forest boundary was drawn the English Creek corridor,
the panhandle route we had just ridden, got included and that is why our
English Creek ranger station was situated out there with ranches on three
sides of it. That location like a nest at the end of a limb bothered
some of the map gazers at Region One Headquarters. They'd have denied
it, but they seemed to hold the theory that the deeper a ranger station
was buried into preposterous terrain, the better. Another strike was
that English Creek sat nearly at the southern end of my father's district,
nothing central or tidy about the location either. But the Mazoola
inmates had never figured out anything to do about English Creek and
while the valley-bottom site added some riding miles to my father's job,
the convenience of being amid the English Creek ranch families—his
constituents, so to speak—was more than worth it.

My mother had put up sandwiches for us; slices of fried ham
between slabs of homemade bread daubed with fresh yellow butter. You can't beat that combination. Eating those sandwiches and gazing out over the Two country mended our dispositions a lot.

If a person can take time to reflect on such a reach of land other matters will dim out. An area the size of the Two is like a small nation. Big enough to have several geographies and an assortment of climates and an appreciable population, yet compact enough that people know each other from one end of the Two to the other.

A hawk went by below us, sailing on an air current. A mark of progress into the mountains I always watched for, hawks and even eagles now on routes lower than our own.

 Mostly, however, as my father and I worked our way through sandwiches and a shared can of plums, I simply tried to store away the look of the land this lush June. Who knew if it would ever be this green again? The experience of recent years sure as hell didn't suggest so. For right out there in that green of farmland and prairie where my father and I were gazing, a part of the history of the Depression began to brew on a day of early May in 1934. Nobody here in the Two could have identified it as more than an ordinary wind. Stiff, but that is never news in the Two country. As that wind continued east, however, it met a weather front angling down out of Canada, and the combined velocity set to work on the plowed fields along the High Line. An open winter and a spring of almost no rain had left those fields dry; brown talcum waiting to be puffed. And so a cloud of wind and topsoil was born and grew. By the time the dirt storm reached
Plentywood in the northeastern corner of the state the grit of it was scouring paint off farmhouses. All across the Dakotas further dry fields were waiting to become dust. The brown storm rolled into the Twin Cities, and on to Chicago, where it shut down plane flights and caused street-lights to be turned on in the middle of the day. I don't understand the science of it, but that storm continued to grow and widen and darken the more it traveled, Montana dirt and Dakota dirt and Minnesota dirt in the skies and eyes of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio. And on and on the storm swept, into New York City and Washington, D.C., the dust of the west fogging out the pinnacle of the Empire State building and powdering the shiny table tops within the White House. At last the dirt cloud expended itself into the Atlantic. Of course thereafter came years of dust, particularly in the Great Plains and the Southwest. But that Montana-born blow was the Depression's first nightmare storm, the one that told the nation that matters were worse than anyone knew, the soil itself was fraying loose and flying away.

In a way, wherever I scrutinized from the lunch perch of that day I was peering down into some local neighborhood of the Depression. As if, say, a spyglass such as Walter Kyle's could be adapted to pick out items through time instead of distance. The farmers of all those fields hemming the eastern horizon. They were veterans of years of scrabbling.
even Conrad, traveling from house to house offering a dressed hog he had in the trunk of his jalopy for three cents a pound. Believe it or not, though, those farmers of the Two country were better off than the ones who neighbored them on the east. That great dust storm followed a path across northern Montana already blazed by drought, grasshoppers, army worms, you name it. Around the time the CCC, the Civilian Conservation Corps, was being set up, my father and other rangers and county agents and maybe government men of other kinds were called to a session over at Plentywood. It was the idea of some government thinker--the hunch was that it came down all the way from Tugwell or one of those--that everybody working along any lines of conservation ought to see Montana’s worst-hit area of drought. My father grumbled about it costing him three or four days of work from the Two, but he had no choice but to go. I especially remember this because when he got back he said scarcely anything for about a day and a half, and that was not at all like him. Then at supper the second night he suddenly looked across at my mother and burst out, "Bet, there’re people over there who’re trying to live on just potatoes. They feed Russian thistles to their stock. Call it Hoover hay. It--I just never saw such things. Never even dreamed of them. Fencelines pulled loose by the wind piling tumblewoods against them. When a guy goes to drive a fencepost, he first has to punch holes in the ground with a spudbar and pour in water to soften the soil. And out in the fields, what the dust doesn’t cover, the goddamn grasshoppers get. I tell you, Bet, it’s a crime against life, what’s happening."
So that was the past that came to mind from the horizon of green farms. And closer below us, along the willowed path of Noon Creek, the Depression history of the cattlemen was no happier memory. Noon Creek is the next drainage north of English Creek, swale country without as much cottonwood and aspen along its stream banks. Original cattle country, the best cow-grazing land anywhere in the Two. But what had been a series of about ten good ranches spaced along Noon Creek was dwindled to three. Farthest west, nearest our lunch perch, the Reese family place now run by my mother's brother Pete, who long ago converted to sheep. Just east from there Dill Egan's cow outfit with its historic round corral. And everywhere east of Dill the miles of Double W swales and benchland and the eventual cluster of buildings that was the Double W home ranch. Dill Egan was one of those leery types who steered clear of banks, and so had managed to hold his land. The Williamsons of the Double W owned a bank and property in San Francisco or Los Angeles, one of those places, and as my father put it, "When the end of the world comes, the last sound will be a nickel falling from someplace a Williamson had it hid." Every Noon Creek cowman between the extremes of Dill Egan and Wendell Williamson, though, got wiped out when the nation's plunge flattened the cattle market. Places were foreclosed on, families shattered. The worst happened at a piece of Noon Creek I could not help but look down onto from our lunch site—the double bend of the stream, an S of water and willows like a giant brand onto the Noon Creek valley. The place there had belonged to a rancher who, on the day before foreclosure, told his wife he had some things to do, he'd be a while in the barn.
Where he tacked up in plain sight on one of the stalls an envelope on which he had written: *I can't take any more. I won't have my ears knocked down by life any more.* And then hung himself with a halter rope.

The name of the rancher was Carl Nansen, and that Nansen land was bought up by the Double W. "Wendell Williamson'll let us have the house on the Nansen place to live in," had been Alec's words about the domestic plan after he and Leona became Mr. and Mrs. this fall.

The thought of this and the sight of that creek S were as if wires had connected in me, for suddenly I wanted to turn to my father and ask him everything about Alec. What my brother was getting himself into, sashaying off into the Depression with a saddle and a bridle and a bride. Whether there was any least chance Alec could be headed off from cowboying, or maybe from Leona, since the two somehow seemed to go together. How my father and my mother were going to be able to reason in any way with him, given last night's family explosion. Where we stood as a family. Divided for all time? Or yet the unit of four we had always been? Ask and ask and ask; the impulse rose in me as if coming to percolation.

My father was onto his feet, had pulled out his pocket watch and was kidding me that my stomach was about half an hour fast as usual, it was only now noon, and I got up too and went with him to our horses. But still felt the asking everywhere in me.

No, I put that wrong. About the ask, ask, ask. I did not want to put to my father those infinite questions about my brother. What I wanted, in the way that a person sometimes feels hungry, half-starved,
but doesn't know exactly what it is that he'd like to eat, was for my father to be answering them. Volunteering, saying "I see how to bring Alec out of it," or "It'll pass, give him a couple of weeks and he'll cool off about Leona and then--"

But Varick McCaskill wasn't being voluntary, he was climbing onto his horse and readying to go be a ranger. And to my own considerable surprise, I let him.

We tell ourselves whatever is needed to go from one scene of life to the next. Tonight in camp, I told myself as we ended that June lunchtime above the English Creek-Noon Creek divide. Tonight would be early enough to muster the asking about Alec. What I was temporarily choosing, with silence, was that my father and I needed this trail day, the rhythm or ritual or whatever it was, of beginning a counting trip, of again fitting ourselves to the groove of the task and the travel and the mountains. Of entering another Two summer together, I might as well say.

#

Dode Withrow's sheep were nowhere in evidence when we arrived at
the counting vee an hour or so after our lunch stop. A late start
by the herder might account for their absence, or maybe it just was
one of those mornings when sheep are pokey. In either case, I had
learned from my father to expect delay, because if you try to follow
some exact time when you work with sheep you will rapidly drive yourself
loony.

"I might as well go up over here and have a look at that winter kill,"
my father decided. A stand of pine about a mile to the north was showing
the rusty color of death. "How about you hanging on here in case the
sheep show up. I won't be gone long." He forced a grin. "Think about
how to grow up saner than that brother of yours."

"This whole family's sanity could stand some thinking about,"
crossed my mind in reply but didn't come out. My father climbed on Mouse
and went to worry over winter kill on his forest.

I took out my jackknife and started putting my initials into the
bare fallen log I was sitting on. This I did whenever I had time to
pass in the forest of the Two, and I suppose even yet up there some
logs and stumps announce J McC to the silent universe.

The wind finally had gone down, I had no tug at my attention except
for the jackknife in my hand. Carving initials as elaborate as mine
does take some concentration. The J never was too bad to make and the
M big and easy, but the curves of the c's needed to be carefully cut.
Thanks to the tardy Withrow sheep I had ample leisure to do so. I
suppose sheep have caused more time to be whiled away than any other
creatures in the world. Even yet on any number of Montana ridgelines
there can be seen stone cairns about the height of a man. Sheepherders' monuments they are called and what they are monuments to is monotony. Just to be doing something a herder would start piling stones, but because he hated to admit he was out there hefting rocks for no real reason, he'd stack up a shape that he could tell himself would serve as a landmark. Fighting back somehow against loneliness. That was a perpetual part of being a sheep herder. In the wagons of a lot of them you would find a stack of old magazines, creased and crumpled from being carried in a hip pocket. An occasional prosperous herder would have a battery radio to keep him company in the evenings. Once in a while you came across a carver or a braider. Quite a few though, the ones who give the herding profession a reputation for skewed behavior, figured they couldn't be bothered with pastimes. They just lived in their heads, and that can get to be cramped quarters. Those religions which feature years of solitude and silence, I have grave doubts about. I believe you are better off doing anything rather than nothing. Even if it is only piling stones or fashioning initials.

In any event, that jackknife work absorbed me for I don't know how long, but to the point where I was startled by the first blats of the Withrow sheep.

I headed on down through the timber on foot to help bring them to the counting vee. A sheepman could have the whole Seventh Cavalry pushing his band along and he'd still seem glad of further help.

Dode Withrow spotted me and called, "Afternoon, Jick. That father of yours come to his senses and turn his job over to you?"
"He's patrolling to a winter kill. Said he'd be back by the time we get up to the vee."

"At the rate these sonsabitches want to move along today he's got time to patrol the whole Rocky Mountains."

This was remarked loud enough by Dode that I figured it was not for my benefit alone. Sure enough, an answer shot out of the timber to our left.

"You might just remember the sonsabitches ARE sheep instead of racehorses."

Into view over there between some trees came Dode's herder, Pat Hoy. For as long as I had been accompanying my father on counting trips and I imagine for years before, Dode and Pat Hoy had been wrangling with each other as much as they wrangled their sheep. "How do, Jick. Don't get too close to Dode, he's on the prod this morning. Wants the job done before it gets started."

"I'm told you can tell the liveliness of a herder by how his sheep move,"Dode suggested. "Maybe you better lay down, Pat, while we send for the undertaker."

"If I'm slow it's because I'm starved down, trying to live on the grub you furnish. Jick, Dode is finally gonna get out of the sheep business. He's gonna set up a stinginess school for you Scotchmen."

That set all three of us laughing as we pushed the band along, for an anthem of the Two was Dode Withrow's lament of staying on and on in the sheep business. "In that '19 winter, I remember coming in to the house and standing over the stove, I'd been out all day skinning froze-to-death sheep. Standing there trying to thaw the goosebumps off
myself and saying, 'This is it. This does it. I am going to get out of the sonofabitching sheep business.' Then in '32 when the price of lambs went down to 4¢ a pound and might just as well have gone all the way to nothing, I told myself, 'This is really it. No more of the sonofabitching sheep business for me. I've had it.' And yet here I am, still in the sonofabitching sheep business. God, what a man puts himself through."

That was Dode for you. Poet laureate of the woes of sheep, and a sheepman to the pith of his soul. On up the mountainslope he and Pat Hoy and I now shoved the band. It took a while, because up is not a direction sheep particularly care to go, at least at someone else's suggestion. Sheep seem perpetually leery of what's over the hill, which I suppose makes them either notably dumb or notably smart.

Myself, I liked sheep. Or rather I didn't mind sheep as such, which is the best a person can do towards creatures whose wool begins in their brain, and I liked the idea of sheep. True, sheep had to be troubled with more than cattle did, but the troubling was on a smaller scale. Pulling a lamb from a ewe's womb is nothing to untangling a leggy calf from the inside of a heifer. And a sheep you can brand by dabbing a splot of paint on her back, not needing to invite half the county in to maul your livestock around in the dust of a branding corral. Twelve times out of a dozen, in the debate of cow and ewe I will choose sheep.

For a person partial to the idea of sheep I was in the right time and place. With the encouragement of what the Depression had done
to cattle prices the Two Medicine country then was a kind of vast

garden of wool and lambs. Beginning in late May, for a month solid a

band of sheep a day passed through the town of Gros Ventre on the way

north to the Blackfeet Reservation, band after band trailing from all the

way down by Choteau, and other sheep ranchers bringing theirs from

around Bynum and Pendroy. (Not without some cost to the civic tidiness

of Gros Ventre, for the passage of a band of a thousand ewes and their

lambs through a town cannot happen without evidence being left on

the street, and occasionally the sidewalks. Sheep are nervous enough

as it is and being routed through a canyon of buildings does not

improve their bathroom manners any. Once Carnelia Muntz, wife of the

First National banker, showed up in the bank and said something about

all the sheep muck on the streets. I give Ed Van Bebber his full due.

Ed happened to be in there cashing a check and he looked her up and

down and advised: "Don't think of them as sheep turds, Carnelia.

Think of them as berries off the money tree.") This was a time on the

Reservation when you could see a herder's wagon on top of practically

every rise: a fleet
of white wagons anchored across the land. And off to the east, just out of view beyond the bench ridges, the big sheep outfits from over in Washington were running their tens of thousands, too. And of course in here to the west where we working Dode Withrow's sheep to the counting vee, my father's forest pastured the English Creek bands. Sheep and their owners were the chorus in our lives at the English Creek ranger station, the theme of every season and almost all conversation. Blindfold and tickle me, and through it all I still could have identified each English Creek sheepman by voice and tale. Preston Rozier, who had the ranch just down the creek from the ranger station: originally his parents had homesteaded not far south of Pendroy, and as in a lot of cases, growing up on a homestead sharpened his eyes for any other way of life. The summer when a surveyor crew arrived to run the route for the railroad to push north from Bynum to Pendroy, they boarded with the Roziers: "Probably the best crop our family ever did get off that homestead was those surveyors." When the railroad arrived in a few years it brought with it Pres's vision of his future. "I'd see those cowmen come into Pendroy when they shipped their stock, they'd be pretty sorry lookers, cook over a campfire and sleep under their wagons and kind of slink off home the next day. But sheepmen, hell, they'd arrive and ship their wool and then hang around and drink and whoop and raise general hell, maybe party for three or four days before they'd drive off in a fancy car of some kind. And a few months later they'd be back to ship their lambs and do it all again. Right then, I figured the money was in sheep."
Ed Van Bebber, with the first place up the South Fork: Ed had a harum-scarum way of going about things, but nobody ever questioned his knack with sheep. During lambing, for example, Ed never even hired a night man, just got up from the supper table and went out to take the shift himself. There in the shed he'd nap in his sheepskin coat until the cold woke him up, then go around and collect the fresh drop of lambs. Being his own night man gave him a lower payroll than anyone else on the creek—although nobody else figured the self-punishment was worth it—but as little as I ever liked Ed I do believe he did his double duty for more than love of dollars. "It's just got to be done, is all. In lambing it's the ewes and me against all the odds. Coyotes and scours and spring blizzards, they're a pack against us. Why give in to the son-of-a-bitch side of nature, I ask you?"

The Busby brothers, Bob and Ken: they grew up in Helena, and when they were big enough to be of any help their uncle, Guy Busby, imported them out here as summer hands. No small portion of their work was the chore of mending the ranch's barbwire gates every time Guy drove through them on the way home from a spree. "We were misfortunate enough to come out here to work for old Unk just after he bought his first car. A Model T. He figured it was a wonderful advance, you know. Any time he wanted now he could scoot in to Gros Ventre and get lit up." Old Guy gave out before the world's whiskey did—some say the notion of Prohibition sent his blood pressure soaring beyond what the human body can stand—and ever since, Bob and Ken had been trying to rebuild the Busby ranch. "Thank the Lord that Unk was into sheep instead of anything else. Not even he could entirely drink up the wool money before the lamb money came." Don Frew: possessed of a college degree
in agriculture and thus guilty until he could ever manage to prove himself innocent of a ranching community's automatic indictment—an educated fool. Don knew his stuff when it came to running a sheep ranch, but behind his back everyone imitated his perpetual response whenever he was asked when he was going to start lambing or haying or whatever: "That will take some thinking about." Charlie Finletter, a close manager, as was said both in admiration and not, who never left a herder more than three cans of vegetables a week for fear somebody would rob the sheepwagon. But then, having to live in the time of the New Deal was an extenuating circumstance for anybody with Charlie's view of finances. News of the WPA wages being paid during the building of Fort Peck dam over in the eastern part of the state convinced Charlie that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was making the world wobble on its axis: "I wouldn't pay any man fifty cents an hour. No man is worth that much." J. L. Hill: lank and pale and palsied but still pushing along, and still a man of high insistence about anything to do with his sheep, such as immediately firing any herder suspected of siccing the dog on them too freely. "Sheep don't eat with their feet, so running ain't ever going to fatten them." And of course Dode Withrow, of the moment, and Walter Kyle and Fritz Hahn, to be met up with on tomorrow's stage of this counting trip. Different as clouds, these English Creek ranchers in a lot of their ways. Yet they all were genuine sheepmen, all survivors of the annual war waged on them by Montana weather and the Depression, and from the flanks of the Rockies out onto the plains where the farming began, they and other men like them had made the Two country an empire of sheep.
At the counting vee my father was waiting for us. After greetings had been said all around among him and Dode and Pat, Dode handed my father a gunny sack with a couple of handfuls of cottoncake in it, said "Start 'em, Mac," and stepped around to his side of the counting gate.

Up at Palookaville, where the dozen bands had summered on the north end of the Two entered the mountains all at the same place, there was an actual counting corral. But here on the spread-out English Creek range the count was done on each allotment through a vee made of poles spiked onto trees, the sheep funneling through while my father and the rancher stood beside the opening at the narrow end and counted.

Now my father went through the narrow gate into the vee, to the front of the sheep. He shook the sack in front of him where the sheep could see it, and let a few cottonseed pellets trickle to the ground.

Then it came, that sound not even close to any other in this world, my father's coax to the sheep: the tongue-made prrrrr prrrrr prrrrr, remotely a cross between an enormous cat's purr and the cooing of a dove. Maybe it was all the rs built into a Scotch tongue, but for whatever reason my father could croon that luring call better than any sheepman of the Two.

Dode and Pat and I watched now as a first cluster of ewes, attentive to the source of the prrrrrs, caught the smell of the cottoncake. They scuffled, did some ewely butting of each other, as usual to no conclusion, then forgot rivalry and swarmed after the cottoncake. As they snooped forward on the trail of more, they led other sheep out the gate and started the count. You could put sheep through the eye of a needle if you once got the first ones going so that the others could
turn off their brains and follow.

My job was at the rear of the sheep with the herder, to keep the band pushing through the counting hole and to see that none circled around after they'd been through the vee and got tallied twice—or, had this been Ed Van Bebber's band, I would have been back there to see that his herder, on instructions from Ed, didn't spill some sheep around the wing of the corral while the count was going on, so that they missed being tallied into the allotment.

But since these were Dode's sheep with Pat Hoy on hand at the back of them I had little to add to the enterprise of the moment and was there mostly for show. I always watched Pat all I could without seeming to stare, to try learn how he mastered these woolies as he did. Some way, he was able just to look ewes into behaving better than they had in mind. One old independent biddy or another would step out, size up her chance of breaking past Pat, figure out who she was facing and then shy off back into the rest of the bunch. This of course didn't work with lambs, who have no more predictability to them than hens in a hurricane. But in their case all Pat had to do was say "Round 'em, Taffy," and his carmel-colored shepherd dog would be sluicing them back to where they belonged. A sheepdog as good as Taffy was worth his weight in shoe leather. And a herder as savvy as Pat knew how to be a diplomat toward his dog, rewarding him every now and then with praise and ear rubbing but not babying him so much that the dog hung around waiting to be complimented rather than performing his work. That was one of my father's basic instructions when I first began going into
the mountains with him on counting trips, not to get too affectionate with any herder's dog. Simply stroke them a time or two if they nuzzled me and let it go at that.

Taffy came over now to see if I had any stray praise to offer, and I just said "You're a dog and half, Taffy."

"Grass gets much higher up here, Jick, I'm liable to lose Taffy in it," Pat called over to me. "You ever see such a jungle of a year?"

No, I confessed, and we made conversation for a bit about the summer's prospects. Pat Hoy looked like any of a thousand geezers you could find in the hiring bars of First Avenue South in Great Falls, but he was a true grassaroo; knew how to graze sheep as if the grass was his own sustenance as well as theirs. No herder in all of the Two country was more highly prized than Pat the ten months of the year when he stayed sober and behind the sheep, and because this was so, Dode put up with what was necessary to hang onto him. That is, put up with the fact that some random number of times a year Pat proclaimed: "I quit, by damn, you can herd these old nellies your own self. Take me to town." Dode knew that only two of those quitting proclamations ever meant anything: "The sonofagun has to have a binge after the lambs are shipped and then another one just before lambing time, go down to Great Falls and get all bent out of shape. He's got his pattern down like linoleum, Pat has. For the first week he drinks whiskey and his women are pretty good lookers. The next week or so he's mostly on beer and his women are getting a little shabby. Then for about two weeks after that he's on straight wine and First Avenue squaws. That gets it out
of his system, and I go collect him and we start all over."

You can see how being around Dode and Pat lifted our dispositions. When the count was done and we had helped Pat start the sheep on up toward the range he would summer them on—the ewes and lambs already browsing, taking their first of however many million nibbles of grass would ensue on the Two between then and September—Dode stayed on with us a while to swap talk. "What's new with Uncle Sam?" he inquired.

"Roosevelt doesn't tell me quite everything, understand," my father responded. "We are going modern, though. It has only taken half of my goddamn life, but the Billy Peak lookout is about built. Paul will have her done in the next couple days. This forest is finally going to have a goddamn fire tower everywhere it ought to have one. Naturally it's happening during a summer when the forest is more apt to float away than burn down, but anyway." Dode was a compact rugged-faced guy, whose listening grin featured a gap where the sharp tooth just to the left of his front teeth was missing, knocked out in some adventure or another. A Dode tale was that when he and Midge were about to be married he told her that he intended to really dude up for the wedding, even planned to stick a navy bean in the tooth gap. But if Dode looked and acted as if he always was ready to take on life headfirst, he also was one of those rare ones who could listen as earnestly as he could talk.

"Alec still keeping a saddle warm at the Double W?" Dode was asking next.

"Still is," my father had to confirm.
Dode caught the gist behind the tight pair of words, for he went on to relate: "That goddamn Williamson. He can be an overbearing sonofabitch without half-trying, I'll say that for him. A while back I ran into him in the Medicine Lodge and we sopped up a few drinks together, then he got to razzing me about cattle being a higher class of animal than sheep. Finally I told him, 'Wendell, answer me this. Whenever you see a picture of Jesus Christ, which is it he's holding in his arms? Always a LAMB, never a goddamn calf.'"

We hooted over that. For the first time all day my father didn't look as if he'd eaten nails for breakfast.

"Anyway," Dode assured us, "Alec'll pretty soon figure out there are other people to work for in the world than Wendell goddamn Williamson. Life is wide, there's room to take a new run at it."

My father wagged his head as if he hoped so but was dubious. "How about you, you see a nickel in sight anywhere this year?" So now it was Dode's turn to report, and my father just as keenly welcomed in his information that down on the Musselshell a wool consignment of thirty thousand fleeces had gone for 22 cents a pound, highest in years, encouragement that could "goddamn near make a man think about staying in the sheep business," and that Dode himself didn't intend to shear until around the end of the month "unless the weather turns christly hot," and that--

I put myself against a tree and enjoyed the sight and sound of the two of them. All the English Creek sheepmen and my father generally got along like hand and glove, but Dode was special beyond that. I
suppose it could be said that he and my father were out of the same bin. At least it doesn't stretch my imagination much to think that if circumstances had changed sides when the pair of them were young, it now could have been Dode standing there in the employ of the U.S. Forest Service and my father in possession of a sheep ranch. Their friendship actually went back to before either of them had what could be called a career, to when they both were bronc punks, youngsters riding in Egans' big round corral at Noon Creek every summer Sunday. My father loved to tell how Dode, who could be a snazzy dresser whenever there was any occasion, would show up to do his bronc-riding in a fancy pair of corduroy pants with leather trim. "To look at him, it was hard to know how much was Dode and how much was dude. But he was the best damn rider you'd ever see, too."

By this time of afternoon a few clouds had concocted themselves
above the crest of the mountains and were drifting one after another out over the foothills below us. Small fleecy puffs, the kind which during the dry years made people disgustedly joke that "Those are empties from Seattle going over." This year it did not matter that they weren't rainbringers, and with the backdrop of my father and Dode's conversation I lost myself in watching each cloud shadow cover a hill or a portion of a ridgeline and then flow down across the coulee toward the next, as if the shadow was a slow mock flood sent by the cloud.

"--I hear nature calling," Dode now was excusing himself. He headed off not toward the timber, though, but to a rock outcropping about 40 yards away roughly as big and high as a one-story house. When Dode climbed up onto that I figured I had misunderstood his mission, he evidently was clambering up there to look along the mountain and check on Pat's progress with the sheep.

But no, he proceeded to do that and the other too, gazing off up the mountain slope as he unbuttoned and peed.

Do you know, even as I say this I again see Dode in every particular. His left hand resting on his hip and the arm and elbow kinked out like the handle on a coffee cup. His hat tilted back at an inquiring angle. He looked composed as a statue up there, if you can imagine stone spraddled out in commemoration of that particular human function.

My father and I grinned until our faces almost split. "There is only one Dode," he said. Then he cupped his hands and called out in a concerned tone: "Dode, I hope you've got a good foothold up there. Because you sure don't have all that much of a handhold."
By the time Dode declared he had to head down the mountain toward home, pronto, or face consequences from his wife Midge, I actually was almost in the mood that a counting trip deserved. For I knew that traveling to tomorrow's sheep, those of Walter Kyle and Fritz Hahn, would take us up onto Roman Reef, always topnotch country, and after that would come the interesting prospect of the new Billy Peak lookout tower. It had not escaped me either that on our way to that pair of attractions we would spend tonight at a camping spot along the North Fork under Rooster Mountain which my father and I—and yes, Alec in years past—considered our favorite in the entire Two. Flume Gulch, the locale was called, because an odd high gully with steep sides veered in from the south and poured a trickle of water down the gorge wall into the North Fork. If you had to walk any of that Flume Gulch side of the creek, you would declare the terrain had tried to stand itself on end and prop itself up with thick timber and a crisscross of windfalls. But go on the opposite side of the creek and up onto the facing and equally steep slope of Rooster Mountain, and you would turn around and say you'd never been in a grassier mountain meadow. That is the pattern the seasons make in this part of the Two, a north-facing slope bursting with trees, because snow stays longest there and provides moisture, while a south-facing slope is timberless but grassy because of all the sun it gets. Anyway, wild and tumbled country, Flume Gulch, but as pretty as you could ask for.

By just before dusk my father and I were there, and Mouse and Pony and Homer were unsaddled and tethered on the good grass of the Rooster Mountain slope, and camp was established.
"You know where supper is," my father advised. By which he meant that it was in the creek, waiting to be caught.

This far up the North Fork, English Creek didn't amount to much. Most places you could cross it in a running jump. But the stream was headed down out of the mountains in a hurry and so had some pretty riffles and every now and again a pool like a big wide stairstep of
glass. If fish weren't in one of those waters, they were in the other.

Each of us took our hat off and unwound the fishline and hook wrapped around the hatband. On our way up, before the willows gave out we had cut a pair of decent length and now notched them about an inch from the small end, tied each fishline snug into each notch so it couldn't pull off, and were ready to talk business with those fish.

"Hide behind a tree to bait your hook," my father warned with an almost straight face, "or they'll swarm right out of the water after you."

My father still had a reputation in the Forest Service from the time some Region One headquarters muckymuck who was quite a dry-fly fisherman asked him what these English Creek trout took best. Those guys of course have a whole catechism of hackles and muddlers and goofus bugs and stone flies and nymphs and midges. "Chicken guts," my father informed him.

We didn't happen to have any of those along with us, but just before leaving home we'd gone to the old haystack bottom near the barn and dug ourselves each a tobacco can of angleworms. Why in holy hell anyone thinks a fish would prefer a dab of hair to something as plump as a stack-bottom worm, I never have understood the reasoning of.

The fish in fact began to prove that, right then. I do make the concession to sportsmanship that I'll fish a riffle once in a while, even though it demands some attention to casting instead of just plunking into the stream, and so it pleased me a little that in the next half hour or so I pulled my 10 fish out of bumpy water, while at the pool he'd
chosen to work over my father still was short of his

quota

"I can about taste that milkshake," I warned him as I headed
downstream a little to clean my catch. Theoretically there was a
standing bet in our family, that anybody who fished and didn't catch
ten
his limit owed the others a milkshake. My father had thought this up
some summers ago to interest Alec, who didn't care anything for fishing
but always was keen to compete. But after the tally mounted through
the years to where Alec owed my father and me eight milkshakes each,
during last year's counting trip Alec declared himself out and left the
fishing to us. And the two of us were currently even-stephen, each
hook ten
having failed to limit just once, all of last summer.

"I'm just corralling them first," my father explained as he dabbed
a fresh worm to the pool. "What I intend is to get fish so thick in here
they'll run into each other and knock theirselves out."

The fish must have heard and taken pity, because by the time I'd
gutted mine here he came with his.

"What," I inquired as innocently as I could manage, "did you
decline to forfeit?"

"Like hell, mister. Ten brookies, right before your very eyes.
Since you're so advanced in all this, go dig out the frying pan."

Even yet I could live and thrive on that Flume Gulch meal procedure:
fry up both catches of fish, eat as many for supper as we could hold,
resume on the rest at breakfast. Those little brookies, Eastern brook
tROUT about 8 inches long, are among the best eating there can be. You
begin to taste them as quick as they hit the frying pan and go into their
curl. Brown them up and take them in your fingers and eat them like corn on the cob, and you wish you had the capacity for a hundred of them.

When we'd devoured 5 or so brookies apiece we slowed down enough to share out a can of pork and beans, then resumed on the last stint of our fish supper.

"That hold you?" my father asked when we each had made 7 or 8 trout vanish.

I bobbed that I guessed it would, and while he went to the creek to rinse off our tin plates and scour the frying pan with gravel, I set to work composing his day's diary entry.

That the U.S. Forest Service wanted to know, in writing, what he'd done with his day constituted my father's single most chronic bother about being a ranger. Early on, someone told him the story of another rider-turned-ranger down on the Shoshone national forest in Wyoming. "Trimmed my horses tail and the wind blew all day," read the fellow's first diary try. Then with further thought, he managed to conclude: "From the northeast." My father could swallow advice if he had to, and so he did what he could with the perpetual nag of having to jot his activities into the diary. When he did it was entirely another matter. Two or three weeks he would stay dutiful, then came a Saturday morning when he had seven little yellow blank pages to show for his week, and the filling in had to start:

"Bet, what'd I do on Tuesday? That the day it rained and I worked on Mazoola paperwork?"

"That was Wednesday. Tuesday you rode up to look over the range
above Noon Creek."

"I thought that was Thursday."

"You can think so if you like, but you'd be wrong." My mother was careful to seem half-exasperated about these scrawling sessions, but I think she looked forward to the chance to set my father straight on history, even if it was only the past week's. "Thursday I baked, and you took a rhubarb pie for the Bowens when you went to the Indian Head station. Not that Louise Bowen is capable of recognizing a pie."

"Well, then, when I rode to the Guthrie Peak lookout, that was—only yesterday? Friday?"

"Today is Saturday, yesterday most likely was Friday," my mother was glad to confirm for him.

When I became old enough to go into the mountains with him on counting trips my father perceived relief for his diary situation. Previously he had tried Alec, but Alec had the same catch-up-on-it-later proclivity as his. I think we had not gone a mile along the trail above the South Fork that very first morning when he reined up, said as if it had just occurred to him out of nowhere, "Jick, why'n't you kind of keep track of today for me?" and presented me a fresh-sharpened stub pencil and a pocket notebook.

It did take a little doing to catch onto my father's style. But after those first days of my reporting into my notebook in the manner of "We met up with Dill Egan on the south side of Noon Creek and talked with him about whether he can get a bigger allotment to run ten more steers on" and my father squashing it down in his diary to "Saw D. Egan about steer proposition," I adjusted.
By now I was veteran enough that the day came readily to the tip of my pencil. "Patroled--" another principle some early ranger had imparted to my father was that if you so much as left the station to go to the outhouse, you had patroled--"Patroled the n. fork of English Creek. Counted D. Withrow's sheep onto allotment. Commenced packing bolts and flanges and cable to Billy Peak lookout site."

My father read it over and nodded. "Change that 'bolts and flanges and cable' just to 'gear.' You don't want to be any more definite than necessary in any love note to Uncle Sam. But otherwise it reads like the very Bible."

So the day was summed and we had dined on trout and the campfire was putting warmth and light between us and the night, and we had nothing that needed doing except to contemplate until sleep overcame us. My father was lying back against his saddle, hands behind his head and his hat tipped forward over his forehead. Ever since a porcupine attracted by the salt of horse sweat had chewed hell out of Alec's saddle on the counting trip a couple or three years ago, we made it a policy to keep our saddles by us.

He could make himself more comfortable beside a campfire than anybody else I ever knew, my father could. Right now he looked like he could spend till dawn, talking over the Two country and everything in it, if Toussaint Rennie or Dode Withrow had been on hand to do it with.

My thoughts, though, still circled around Alec--well, sure, somewhat onto Leona too--and what had erupted at supper last night. But again the reluctance lodged itself in me, against outright asking
my father what he thought the prospect was where Alec was concerned. I suppose there are times a person doesn't want to hear pure truth. Instead, I brought out something else that had been dogging my mind.

"Dad? Do you ever wonder about being somebody else?"

"Such as who? John D. Rockefeller?"

"What I mean, I got to thinking from watching you and Dode together there at the counting vee. Just, you know, whether you'd ever thought about how he could be in your place and you in his."

"Which would give me three daughters instead of you and Alec, do you mean? Maybe I'll saddle up Mouse and go trade him right now."

"No, not that. I mean life generally. Him being the ranger and you being the sheepman, is what I had in mind. If things had gone a little different back when you guys were, uh, young. Were my age, was of course what was hiding behind that.

"Dode jaw to jaw with the Major? Now I know I'm going to head down the mountain and swap straight across, for the sake of seeing that."

In that time the regional forester, the boss of everybody in the national forests of Montana and Idaho, was Evan Kelley. Major Kelley, for he was like a lot of guys who got a big army rank during the war, hung on to the title ever afterward as if it was sainthood. The Major's style of leadership was basic. When he said frog, everybody better jump. I wish I had a nickel for every time my father opened the mail from Missoula and muttered: "Oh Jesus, another kelleygram. When does he ever sleep?" Everybody did admit, the Major at least made clear the gospel in his messages to his Forest Service men. What he prescribed from his rangers were no big forest fires and no guff. So far, my
father's slate was clean of both. In those years I didn't give the matter particular thought, but I recognize now that my father's long stint in charge of the English Creek district of the Two Medicine National Forest could only have happened with the blessing of the Major himself. The Pope in Missoula, so to speak. Nobody lower could have shielded ranger Varick McCaskill from the transfers that ordinarily happened every few years or so in the Forest Service. No, the Major wanted that tricky northmost portion of the Two, surrounded as so much of it was by other government domains, angered in a way that wouldn't draw the Forest Service any bow-wow from the neighboring Glacier Park staff or the Blackfeet Reservation people; and in a way that would keep the sheepmen content and the revenue they paid in; and in a way that would not repeat the awful fires of 1910 or the later Phantom Woman Mountain burn, right in here above the North Fork. And that was how my father was rangering it. So far.

"I guess I know what you're driving at, though." My father sat up enough to put his boot against a pine piece of squaw wood and shove it farther into the fire, then lay back against his saddle again.

"How come we do what we do in life, instead of something else. But I don't know. I do not know. All I've ever been able to figure out, Jick, is that no job fits as well as a person would like it to, but some of us fit the job better than others do. That sorts matters out a little."

"Yeah, well, I guess. But how do you get in the job in the first place to find out whether you're going to fit it?"
"You watch for a chance to try it, is all. Sometimes the chance comes looking for you. Sometimes you got to look for it. Myself, I had my taste of the army because of the war. And it took goddamn little of army life to tell me huh uh, not for me. Then when I landed back here I got to be association rider for Noon Creek by setting out to get it, I guess you'd say. What I did, I went around to Dill Egan and old Thad Wainwright and your granddad Isaac and the other Noon Creekers and asked if they'd keep me in mind when it came time to summer the cows up here. Of course, it maybe didn't particularly hurt that I mentioned how happy I'd be to keep Double W cows from slopping over onto the Noon Creek guys' allotments, as had been going on. Anyway, the job got to be mine."

"What, the Double W was running cattle up here then?"

"Were they ever. They had an allotment, in the early days. A hellish big one. Back then the Williamsons didn't have hold of all that Noon Creek country to graze. So yeah, they had forest range, and sneaked cows onto anybody else's whenever they could. The number one belief of old Warren Williamson, you know, was that other people's grass might just as well be his." I didn't know. Warren Williamson, father of the present Double W honcho, was before my time; or at least died in California before I was old enough for it to mean anything to me.

"I'll say this one thing for Wendell," my father went on, "he at least buys or rents the country. Old Warren figured he could just take it." He gave the pine piece another shove with his boot. "The ever-lasting damn Double W. The Gobble Gobble You, as the gent who was
ranger when I was association rider used to call it."

"Is that--" I had it in mind to ask if that was why he and my
mother were so dead set against Alec staying on at the Double W, those
old contentions between the Williamson's ranch and the rest of the Two
country. But no, the McCaskill next to me here in the fireshine was a
readier topic than my absent brother. "Is that how you got to be the
ranger here? Setting out to get the job?"

He went still for a moment, lying there in that sloped position
against the saddle, feet toward the fire. Then shook his head. "The
Forest Service generally doesn't work that way, and the Major sure
as hell doesn't. Point yourself at the Two and they're liable to plunk
you down on the Beaverhead or over onto the Bitterroot. Or doghouse you
in the Selway, back when there still was a Selway. No, I didn't aim
myself at English Creek. It happened."

I was readying to point out to him that "it happened" wasn't a
real full explanation of job history, when he sat up and moved his hat
back so as to send his attention toward me. "What about you, on all this
if-I-was-him-and-he-was-me-stuff? Somebody you think you'd rather be,
is there?"

There he had me. My turn to be less than complete. I answered:
"Not rather, really. Just might have been, is all."

An answer that didn't even start toward truth, that one was. And
not the one I would have resorted to any time up until supper of the
night before. For until then if I was to imagine myself happening to
be anybody else, who could the first candidate have been but Alec?
Wasn't all the basic outline already there? Same bloodline, same place of growing up, same schooling, maybe even the same bodyframe if I kept growing at my recent pace. Both of us September arrivals into the world, even--only the years needed swapping. The remarkable thing to me was that our interests in life were as different as they were, and I suppose I had more or less assumed that time was going to bring mine around to about where Alec's were. But now, precisely this possibility was what was unsettling me. I can only describe it something like this: that previous night at the supper table when Alec made his announcement about him and Leona and I asked "How come?", what I intended maybe was something similar to what my parents were asking of Alec. Something like "Already?" What was the rush? How could marriage and all be happening this soon, to my own brother? Yes, maybe put it this way: what I felt or at least sensed and was trying to draw into focus was the suggestion that Alec's recent course of behavior in some way foreshadowed my own. "Might have been," after all, has within it "might be." It was like looking through the Toggery window in Gros Ventre at a fancy suit of clothes and saying, by the Christ, they'll never catch me dead in those. But at the same time noticing that they seem to be your exact fit.

"Like who?" my father was asking in a tone which signaled me that he was asking it for the second time.

"Who?" I echoed, trying to think of anything more.

"Country seems to be full of owls tonight," he joked. Yet he was still attentive enough that I knew I had to come up with something that resembled an answer.
"Oh. Yeah. Who." I looked at the fire for some chunk that needed kicking further in, and although none really did, I kicked one anyway. "Well, like Ray. That's all I had in mind, was Ray and me." Ray Heaney was my best friend at high school in Gros Ventre. "Us being the same age and all, like you and Dode."

This brought curiosity into my father's regard of me. "Now that takes some imagination," he said. "Dode and me are Siamese twins compared to you and Ray."

Then he rose, dusting twigs and pine needles off the back of him from where he had lain. "But I guess imagination isn't a shortage with you. You maybe could supply the rest of us as well, huh? Anyway, let's give some thought to turning in. We got a day ahead of us tomorrow."

If I was a believer in omens, the start of that next morning ought to have told me something. The rigamarole of untangling out of our bedrolls and getting the campfire going and making sure the horses hadn't quit the country during the night, all that went usual enough.

Then, though, my father glanced around at me from where he had the coffee pot heating over a corner of the fire and asked: "Ready for a cup, Alec?"

Well, that will happen in a family. A passing shadow of absent-mindedness, or the tongue just slipping a cog from what was intended. Ordinarily, being miscalled wouldn't have riled me at all. But all this recent commotion about Alec, and my own wondering about where
anybody in this family stood any more, and that fireside spell of brooding I'd done on my brother and myself, and I don't know what the hell all else—it now brought a response which scraped out of me like flint:

"I'm the other one."

Surprise passed over my father. Then I guess what is called contribution.

"You sure as hell are," he agreed in a low voice. "Unmistakably Jick."
About my name. John Angus McCaskill, I was christened. As soon as I began at the South Fork school, though, and gained a comprehension of what had been done to me, I put away that Angus for good. I have thought ever since that using a middle name is like having a third nostril.

I hadn't considered this before, but by then the John must already have been amended out of all recognition, too. At least I can find no memory of ever being called that, so the change must have happened pretty early in life. According to my mother it next became plain that "Johnnie" didn't fit the boy I was, either. "Somehow it just seemed like calling rhubarb vanilla," and she may or may not have been making a joke. With her you couldn't always tell. Anyhow, the family story goes on that she and my father were trying me out as "Jack" when some visitor, noticing that I had the McCaskill red hair but gray eyes instead of everybody else's blue, and more freckles than Alec and my father combined, and not such a pronunciation of jaw as theirs, said something like: "He looks to me more like the jick of this family."

So I got dubbed for the off-card. For the jack that shares only the color of the jack of trumps. That is to say, in a card game such as pitch, if spades are led the jack of clubs becomes the jick, and in the taking of tricks the abiding rule is that jack takes jick but jick takes joker. I explain this a bit because I am constantly dumfounded by how many people, even here in Montana, no longer can play a decent hand of cards. I believe television has got just a hell of a lot to answer for.

Anyway, Jick I became, and have ever been. An odd tag, put on me out of nowhere like that. This is part of the pondering I find myself doing now. Whether some other name would
have shifted my life any. Yet, of what I might change, I keep deciding that that would not be among the first.

This breakfast incident rankled a little even after my father and I saddled up and resumed the ride toward the Roman Reef counting vee where we were to meet Walter Kyle's sheep at around noon. Nor did the weather help any. Clouds closed off the peaks of the mountains, and while it wasn't raining yet, the air promised that it intended to. One of those days too clammy to go without a slicker coat and too muggy to wear one in comfort.

To top it all off, we now were on the one stretch of the trail I never liked, with the Phantom Woman Mountain burn on the slope opposite us. Everywhere over there, acre upon acre upon acre, a gray cemetery of snags and stumps. Of death by fire, for the Phantom Woman forest fire had been the one big one in the Two's history except for the blazing summer of 1910.

Ahead of me, my father was studying across at the burn in the gloomy way he always did here. Both of us now moping along, like sorrow's orphans. If I didn't like the Phantom Woman neighborhood, my father downright despised it. Plainly he considered this gray dead mountainside the blot on his forest. In those times, when firefighting was done mainly by hand, a runaway blaze was the bane of the Forest Service. My father's slate was as clean as could be; except for unavoidable smudges before lightning strikes could be snuffed out, timber and grass everywhere else on the English Creek ranger district were intact, even much of the 1910-burnt
country restoring itself by now. But the awful scar here was unhealed yet. Not that the Phantom Woman fire was in any way my father's own responsibility, for it happened before this district was his, while he still was the ranger at Indian Head rather than here. He was called in as part of the fire crew--this was a blaze that did run wild for a while, a whole hell of a bunch of men ended up fighting Phantom Woman before they controlled it--but that was all. You couldn't tell my father that, though, and this morning I wasn't in a humor to even try.

When time has the weight of a mood such as ours on it, it slows to a creep. Evidently my father figured both the day and I could stand some brightening. Anyway it was considerably short of noon--we were about two-thirds of our way up Roman Reef, where the North Fork hides itself in a timber canyon below and the trail bends away from the face of Phantom Woman to the other mountains beyond--when he turned atop Mouse and called to me:

"How's an early lunch sound to you?"

"Suits me," I of course assured him.

Out like this, my father tended to survive on whatever jumped out of the food pack first. He did have the principle that supper needed to be a cooked meal, especially if it could be trout. But as for the rest of the day, if leftover trout weren't available he was likely to offer up as breakfast a couple of slices of headcheese and a can of tomatoes or green beans, and if you didn't watch him he might do the exact same again for lunch. My mother consequently always made us up enough slab sandwiches for three days' worth of lunches. Of course,
by the second noon in that high air the bread was about dry enough to
strike a match on, but still a better bet than whatever my father was
apt to concoct.

We had eaten an applebutter sandwich and a half apiece and were
sharing a can of peaches for dessert, harpooning the slices out with
our jackknives to save groping into the pack for utensils, when Mouse
suddenly snorted.

"Stand still a minute," my father instructed, which I already was
embarked on. Meanwhile he stepped carefully backward the three or four
paces until he was beside the scabbard on Mouse, with the 30.06 rifle in
it. That time of year in the Two, the thought was automatic in anybody
who at all knew what he was doing: look around for bears, for they are
coming out of hibernation cantankerous.

What Mouse was signaling, however, proved to be a rider appearing
at the bend of the trail downhill from us. He was on a blaze-face
sorrel, who in turn snorted at the sight of us. A black pack mare
followed into sight, then a light gray pack horse with spots on his nose
and his neck stretched out and his lead rope taut.

"Somebody's new camptender, must be," my father said and resumed on
our peaches.

The rider sat in his saddle that permanent way a lot of those
old-timers did, as if he lived up there and couldn't imagine sufficient
reason to venture down off the back of a horse. Not much of his face
showed between the buttoned-up slicker and the pulled-down brown Stetson.
But thinking back on it now, I am fairly sure that my father at once
recognized both the horseman and the situation.

The brief packstring climbed steadily to us, the ears of the horses sharp in interest at us and Pony and Homer and Mouse. The rider showed no attention until he was right up to us. Then, though I didn't see him do anything with the reins, the sorrel stopped and the Stetson veered half out over the slickered shoulder nearest us.

"Hullo, Mac."

"I had half a hunch it might be you, Stanley. How the hell are you?"

"Still able to sit up and take nourishment. Hullo, Alec or Jick, as the case may be."

I had not seen him since I was, what--four years old, five? Yet right then I could have tolled off to you a number of matters about Stanley Meixell. That he was taller than he looked on that sorrel, built in the riderly way of length mostly from his hips down. That he had once been an occasional presence at our meals, stooping first over the wash basin for a cleanse that included the back of his neck, and then slicking back his hair--I could have said too that it was crow-black and started from a widow's peak--before coming to the table. That unlike a lot of people he did not talk down to children, never delivered them phony guff such as "Think you'll ever amount to anything?" That, instead, he once set Alec and me to giggling to the point where my mother threatened to send us from the table, when he told us with a straight face that where he came from they called milk moo juice and eggs cackleberries and molasses long-tailed sugar. Yet of his ten or so years since we had
last seen him I couldn't have told you anything whatsoever. So it was odd how much immediately arrived to mind about this unexpected man.

"Jick," I clarified. "'Lo, Stanley."

It was my father's turn to pick up the conversation. "Thought I recognized that black pack mare. Back up in this country to be campjack for the Busby boys, are you?"

"Yeah."

"Yeah." Stanley's yeah was that Missourian slowed-down kind, almost in two parts: ye ·b-uh. And his voice sounded huskier than it ought to, as if a rasp had been used across the top of it. "Yeah, these times, I guess being campjack is better than no jack at all." Protocol was back to him now. He asked my father, "Counting them onto the range, are you?"

"Withrow's band yesterday, and Kyle's and Hahn's today."

"Quite a year for feed up here. This's been a million dollar rain, ain't it? Brought the grass up ass-high to a tall Indian. Though I'm getting to where I could stand a little sunshine to thaw out with, myself."

"Probably have enough to melt you," my father predicted, "soon enough."

"Could be." Stanley looked ahead up the trail, as if just noticing that it continued on from where we stood. "Could be," he repeated.

Nothing followed that, either from Stanley or my father, and it began to come through to me that this conversation was seriously kinked in some way. These two men had not seen each other for the larger part of ten years. So why didn't they have anything to say to one another besides this small-change talk about weather and grass? And already were running low on that? And both were wearing a careful look, as if the trail suddenly was a slippery place?
Finally my father offered: "Want some peaches? A few in here we haven't stabbed dead yet."

"Naw, thanks. I got to head on up the mountain or I'll have sheep-herders after my hide." Yet Stanley did not quite go into motion; seemed, somehow, to be storing up an impression of the pair of us to take with him.

My father fished out another peach slice and handed me the can to finish. Along with it came his casual question: "What was it you did to your hand?"

It took me a blink or two to realize that although he said it in my direction, the query was intended for Stanley. I saw then that a handkerchief was wrapped around the back of Stanley's right hand, and that he was resting that hand on the saddle horn with his left hand atop it, the reverse of usual procedure there. Also, as much of the handkerchief as I could see had started off white but now showed stains like dark rust.

"You know how it is, that Bubbles cayuse"--Stanley tossed a look over his shoulder to the gray pack horse--"was kind of snakey this morning. Tried to kick me into next week. Took some skin off, is all."

We contemplated Bubbles. As horses go, he looked capable not just of assault but maybe pillage and plunder and probably arson too. He was ewe-necked, and accented that feature by stretching back stubbornly against the lead rope even now that he was standing still. "A dragger," the Forest Service packer Isidor Pronovost called such a creature: "You sometimes wonder if the sunnabitch mightn't tow easier if you was to tip him over
onto his back." The constellation of dark nose spots which must have
given Bubbles his name—at least I couldn't see anything else nameable
about him—drew a person's attention, but if you happened to glance
beyond those markings, you saw that Bubbles was peering back at you as
if he'd like to be standing on your spine. How such creatures get into
pack strings, I just don't know. I suppose the same way Good Help Hebners
and Ed Van Bebbers get into the human race.

"I don't remember you as having much hide to spare," my father said
then to Stanley. During the viewing of Bubbles, the expression on my
father's face had shifted from careful. He now looked as if he'd made up
his mind about something. "Suppose you could stand some company?" Awful
casual, as if the idea had just strolled up to him out of the trees.
"Probably it's no special fun running a packstring one-handed."

Now this was a prince of an offer, but of course just wasn't possible.
Evidently my father had gone absent-minded again, this time about the
counting obligation he'd mentioned not ten sentences earlier. I was just
set to remind him of our appointment with Walter's and Fritz's sheep
when he added on: "Jick here could maybe ride along with you,"

I hope I didn't show the total of astonishment I felt.

Some must have lapped over, though, because Stanley promptly enough
was saying: "Aw, no, Mac. Jick's got better things to do than haze me
along."

"Think about morning," my father came back at him. "Those packs
and knots are gonna be several kinds of hell, unless you're more left-
headed than you've ever shown."
"Aw, no. I'll be out a couple or three days, you know. Longer if any of those herders have got trouble."

"Jick's been out that long with me any number of times. And your cooking's bound to be better for him than mine."

"Well," Stanley began, and stopped. Christamighty, he seemed to be considering. Matters were passing me by before I could even see them coming.

I will always credit Stanley Meixell for putting the next two questions in the order he did.

"It ought to be up to Jick." Stanley looked directly down at me. "How do you feel about playing nursemaid to somebody so goddamn dumb as to get hisself kicked?"

The corner of my eye told me my father suggested a pretty enthusiastic response to any of this.

"Oh, I feel fine about--I mean, sure, Stanley. I could, uh, ride along. If you really want. Yeah."

Stanley looked down at my father now. "Mac, you double sure it'd be okay?"

Even I was able to translate that. What was my father going to face from my mother for sending me off camptending into the mountains with Stanley for a number of days?

"Sure," my father stated, as if doubt wasn't worth wrinkling the dried brain for. "Bring him back when he's turned out behind the ears."

"Well, then." The brown Stetson tipped up maybe two inches, and Stanley swung a slow look around at the pines and the trail and the
moutainslope as if this was a site he might want to remember. More
of his face showed. Dark eyes, blue-black. Into the corners of them,
a lot of routes of squint wrinkles. Thin thrifty nose. Thrift of line
at the mouth and chin, too. A face with no waste to it. In fact, a
little worn down by use, was the impression it gave. "I guess we ought
to be getting," Stanley proposed. "Got everything you need, Jick?"

I had no idea in hell what I needed for going off into the Rocky
Mountains with a one-handed campjack. I mean, I was wearing my slicker
coat, my bedroll was behind my saddle, my head was more or less on my
shoulders despite the jolt of surprise that all this had sent through me,
but were those nearly enough? Anyway, I managed to blurt:

"I guess so."

Stanley delivered my father the longest gaze he had yet. "See you
in church, Mac," he said, then nudged the sorrel into motion.

The black pack horse and the light gray ugly one had passed us by
the time I swung onto Pony, and my father was standing with his thumbs
in his pockets, looking at the series of three horse rumps and the back
of Stanley Meixell, as I reined around onto the trail. I stopped beside
him long enough to see if he was going offer any explanation, or instructions,
or edification of any damn sort at all. His face, still full of that
decision, said he wasn't. All I got from him was: "Jick, he's worth
knowing."

"But I already know him."

No response to that. None in prospect. The hell with it. I rode
past my father and muttered as I did: "Don't forget to do the diary."