catch. I hop up on a chair to see.

Two dead mice somehow in one trap, clamped neck to neck in their permanent race for the bait of cheese.

"Charlie will never believe we're in here catching them two at a time."

"I know what. We'll just save the trap, the way it is, for proof, and show him."

Winona and my mother ruthlessly giggle.

What can account for my mother's high spirits at being back in this drafty mousy attic of Montana, the mile-high-and-then-some Big Belt country where sour winter stayed on past the spring dance?

I have stared holes into those mountains, those sage-scruffed flats and bald Sixteen hills, trying to savvy their hold on her and thus on us.

Oh, the ready answer is in the contours of community: friends and family, people with known routes of behavior; home is where when you gossip there, any hearer can take it in. Yet what a quantity of defeat in that gathering then, most of the places and persons in which my mother's past was restlessly boxed. The village of Ringling, its railroad future already
of her Moss Agate girlhood was the conviction that she could careful
behind it, was waning into whatever is less than a village. The town of White Sulphur Springs had been rough-handled by the Depression and the war, sagging ever farther from its original dream of becoming a thermal-spring resort. Out around in the valley the big ownerships still owned. Moss Agate was being borne down by gravity to that sole leaning barn of today. All the members of the Ringer family besides my mother were struggling with the armed forces of Japan or with themselves. My father's arena, the Doig homestead and the Wall Mountain rangeland, had fallen from family hands long ago. Looked at clinically, there was not much to come back to, after half a century of Doigs and Ringers hurling themselves at those hills.

Economics again, then? So few possibilities for people with a limited supply of money like ourselves to get anywhere in any kind of business, my mother wrote from the desert to her silent listener on the Ault. She saw corporate Phoenix and land vending Wickenburg plain: It might be better after the war but I think it will be worse. But there existed a ranching Arizona too, where they grew something besides blisters on dudes, and why didn't that draw my parents? For the second time,
the magic word would have been simply Prescott; not the charitable neighbors from the Sixteen country, but the comfortably western town of Prescott in the central highlands of Arizona. Up above Wickenburg and the hotbox summers of the desert but a bit lower than the Montana altitudes that had aggravated my mother's asthma, Prescott and the veldt-like just north cattle country to the east of it surely could have harbored us if my parents had wanted to find ranch wages in Arizona instead of Montana that spring of 1945.

So, no, the pocketbook by itself can't explain either why we came struggling back to precisely what we had abandoned. Sometimes it must be sensed rather than seen, the territory of such reasons: the earth of the heart.

Ivan and I were over to see Mom.

My grandmother could hmpf like a member of royalty. She is hmpfing in a major way to my mother, although not at my mother—Grandma's range of fire simply tends to take in the entire vicinity.

"At least I got letters from you, dear. I haven't heard from Paul
use in "heart earth" title section, about mystery of why people want to live where they do:

, moods deep and inscrutable as the keels of icebergs.
insert some reference to power, as mentioned in ch. 1, in the "heart earth" section; my folks choosing a life cogged by the seasons instead of machined...

membrane (between words?) (between heart/earth and heart is a single transposable letter)

membranes of a single...

cross-hatched with canyons, gulches,

(Wall Mtn?) looks like something out of the seven days of creation, half-formed, oo, probably mighty.

Contests of goblins. (limestone formations etc.).

rough-and-tumble country
insert into ch. 3 "heart earth" material, a "somewhere in our family ocean of askings" phrase to match up with the final lines of the book?
What can account for my mother’s gladness to be back in this geographic attic of the West, the mile-high Smith River Valley where sour winter stayed on past Easter, past the spring dance? The contours of life represented by friends and family are the ready answer, but those do not hold up under closer look. In one sense, the past was a shambles. Moss Agate was being borne down by gravity to what it is today, a single leaning barn. My father’s arena, the Doig homestead, had fallen from family hands. Ringling was waning from village to 00, White Sulphur Springs was roughened by the Depression and the war into take-it-or-leave-it. The Ringers were struggling with the Japanese or with themselves. (My grandfather is rediscovered in my mother’s letters)

Why wish to come back now: he is living in one end of a chicken house.) This, she wanted to come back to?

Because of the rhythm of the land. Harsh as the seasons were in Montana, they were a pattern she preferred to a rainstorm on Christmas. My parents’ world of ranchcraft rotated on those seasons, the lambing and calving of spring, summer baying, autumn shipping, winter feeding. They tried to snap off that life in Arizona Park, but it only bent, wouldn’t break.
This matter of place, of sitting ourselves, may be something like learning a second language: somewhere in the multitude of possibilities there is a possible fluency... (did I use this in some other book?)
matrimony/patrimony-like word for love of land:

naturmony; naturmonial

--(Am. Heritage root of "nature":
   from Latin natura, nature;
   "birth," from nascim, to be born)

--(Am. Heritage definition of matrimony:
   "The act or state of being married;
   the sacrament or rite of marriage")

--As (sacred) as matrimony is what might
be called naturmony: wedding yourself to
the natural (lure of the land)

Give it a coinage: naturmony, as sacred in its way (as matrimony)... wedding
yourself to the nature of a place.
What can account for my mother's gladness (to be back in Smith River country)? (back within sight of...

-use as intro to heart earth section.

--avoided hotbox summer of AZ; but there wd have been Prescott, not unlike MT.
the Dupuyer country:
I have come here knowing no one, am boarding with a family I never laid
eyes on until...

...and while the domiciles of my life still are just short of desolate,
I am at home (in'the land)...

Even yet, even yet (after setting the trilogy there) I would not move
there, as the grandson of vassals would not live as a squire.

the point: Rocky Mtn Front chimes with me, as "heart earth," the way
the Sixteen country did for my mother.
heart earth section: allude to the sheep deal, just glancingly;
perhaps as part of the point about Dad having risen to seasonal command,
as a hay contractor etc.
a measure of progress was going from kerosene lamp to Coleman lantern.
By whatever immigrant compass, the original Doigs from Scotland and for that matter the wandering Ringers chose the Big Belt side. Not much populated even yet, that roughcut set of horizons held pockets of ranchcraft for people as acquainted with work as my parents were. Grass Mountain itself, a pleasant upsidedownland with timber at its base and meadows across its summit, seems to have stayed with Charlie and Berneta Doig as a perpetually developing photograph, memory-composite of the album snapshots they clicked day by day of each other in that shirtsleeves-rolled-up summertime of herding--my mother slender as filament, my father jauntily at home at timberline.
So far the Big Belts have spat out two railroads--the turn-of-the-century Montana Railroad and in my own lifetime the C M St P which followed it into trackless oblivion.
the way. Finally the two of them simply defied the Depression's laws of gravity and in 1934, when she was twenty and he thirty-three, they married and went herding sheep.

Their honeymoon summer on Grass Mountain also wed them to a particular body of earth. Not an immediately obvious choice to be beloved country, this was a back corner of mountains—Grassy much the best of the bunch—where the canyoned Big Belt range gives off to the higher grander Bridger Mountains. The Bridgers stand placid guard over the fertile Gallatin Valley and the city of Bozeman, while the Big Belts rumple a Scotland-sized area of sagebrush and jackpine. By whatever immigrant compass, the original Doigs and for that matter the Ringers chose the Big Belt side. Not much populated even yet, that roughcut set of horizons, Bridgers to the south and Big Belts to the west and north, held pockets of ranchcraft for people as acquainted with work as my parents were. Grass Mountain itself, a pleasant upsidedownland with timber at its base and summit meadows, seems to have stayed with my parents as a perpetually developing photograph, memory-composite of the album snapshots they clicked day by day of their tent camps.
Baker, THE MONTANA RAILROAD, p. 26 on difficulty of building through Sixteen Canyon: "Fifty-eight bridges were to be built during the first eighteen miles."

p. 28--quotes Harlow on blding thru box canyon: "Trouble was the normal condition."

p. 48--spring of 1910, ice broke bridge piling in 16 Canyon: "...the fireman crossed on foot. (the engineer) set the throttle with just enough steam for the engine to cross the bridge, jumped from the cab, and let it go. After the engine crossed safely, the fireman hopped in the cab and stopped it."

pp. 55-6: the Milwaukee's 5 tunnels

p. 57: rr maintenance workers were issued snakebite kits; "hung snake skins on the barbed wire fences to further charm the passenters on the Olympian and the Columbian passenger trains."
work out Grass Mountain scene in conjunction with the "heart earth" scene in ch. 3.

--does "command a season" fit best here?

--possible use: According to our family diarist, the Brownie box camera, my mother's allegiance (to Wall Mtn.) was that of a convert.

--pic of her on horseback, mentioned in "stone rainbow" reference, was at Wall Mtn.

--Dad's allegiance was different; birthplace, pockets of ranchcraft. He simply knew that land as you know the n'hood where you grew up.

--use civil war of incorporation here?
The Big Belts refuse to pay much attention to each other, (in contrast to ranges such as Bridgers)

--I have stared years of my life away (at the Big Belts), trying to savvy their hold on her (or my family).

--The Big Belts are in the way. (Of the Missouri River; of travel; only 3 passes thru the range (?) east-to-west, and one of those the river has. Other 2: Deep Creek and Sixteen Canyon. Is there one from the Helena side to Diamond City?)

--Big Belt peaks don't go above timberline. (usually; check this in pics)

# Natures' way, coin it.
- Beldoch
- That pic (and book); it was 6-16 entry @ Wall, Mt.
Finally the two of them simply defied the Depression's laws of gravity and in 1934, when she was twenty and he thirty-three, they married and went herding sheep.

Their honeymoon summer on Grass Mountain also wed them to a particular body of earth. Not immediately obvious country to find delight in, this was a back corner of mountains—Grassy much the best of the bunch—
Is Sixteen Mile Creek the 1st tributary of the Missouri River?

--Don Baker, THE MONTANA RAILROAD, p. 23: "...so named because it was sixteen miles from where the Gallatin, Jefferson, and Madison rivers joined to form the Missouri."

--named by Lewis & Clark or not?
Strange country to find delight in. (as my mother did)

Prowlerish, though.

p. 24, change sentence to: Not immediately obvious country to find
delight in,

also on p. 24, possible add: Green hills of Africa, over there in
the Gallatin, compared to our sage-scruffed steppes.
Busy herding

The Big Belts haze the Missouri River along (like cowboys driving cattle)
being borne down by time to that sole leaning barn of today. All the
members of the Ringer family besides my mother were struggling with the
armed forces of Japan or with themselves.

The contours of community

True, the hotbox summer of the desert in Arizona

But we were back, shying away from the hotbox summer of the desert
in Arizona and not even trying the central highlands area of Prescott
felt the need for
which surely could have harbored us if my parents simply wanted a ranch
existence.
life rather than an aluminum assembly line one.

Yet we did just that: came struggling back to precisely what we
had abandoned. Shied away from the hotbox summer
When you get home from where you are now, you will pretty much know what you want from life, and if Hazel is one of them, and she can help give you the rest, that is your answer.

The road out here is mostly sand so not much danger of muddy roads.

There is a little white slickhaired dog strayed in here today, an old dog, hasn't been too well fed. Of course I let him in and fed him, you know me. Charlie says I'll be wanting to take him home with me.

Well, Wally, I'm getting cold, so guess I better go to bed.

Write whenever you can. Am always anxious to get your letters.
"One time they came to visit me, she and Charlie, down at Ringling, and I'd made myself a new brown skirt and a striped blouse and your mother just fell in love with them. I took them off and gave them to her and said I can make myself some more"

"She went for that blouse, she just loved it."

"never was sharp"

"always very gracious, and just a real good conversationalist... just an entertaining person, I mean just a person that was delightful to be around all the time"

"I don't know, I always enjoyed your mother so much."

"She must not have roused it enough, she probably didn't apply the stick..."

"I spent so many weekends with your folks. Just like, if I'd go to White Sulphur Springs I would always go to your folks's house, and practically every weekend it seemed like, that I went up to White Sulphur...

"There was always a dance there, if Berneta felt like it."

"Where'd you connect with this fellow?" (I asked her, abt Dick)

"Over here in the hills."

"His mother shoed him up to the dance at Sand Springs... and he never got away after that."
—"There was never a dull moment around him." (Dad)

—"People loved to dance."

—"To a certain extent."

—"I don’t know what you’d say"

—"I think we had a fuss over a skirt or something... (w/ Grandma); "I just decided it was time to..."

About Wally’s wives at funeral; wry: "Well, it’s nice to be so loved."

—AZ: "Your mother felt better down there...Going to pick up and go down there that fall."

—"You seemed to be all that they could take care of."

like that

(612) —"I must have been a good suspect or something, because you built right to me, and your mother was so surprised..."

—Dick: "You could get ordered to write" (in the service
"How much did the material set us back?"

"All of £4.63."

"Then your time. Nonie, I have to give you something for all this sewing."

"Like fun you will. It won't take me but an hour or so—" Another mortal whack of a mousetrap made them both jump a little. "My Lord, how many've we got by now?"

"So many I've about lost count." Berneta went to the trap under the sink, her turn to take the prey out to the garbage.

"I think this makes twelve."

She exclaimed. "Nonie, talk about mouse trappers, we're it!"

Ivan! Come see!" Already I was scrambling in from the living room. Winona and my mother were giggling at their catch: two dead mice side by side in the same trap, expired in their contest for the bait of cheese.

The women declare they'll save the exploit to show my father..."
add:

--the high school prom is a community dance

--Dad will take both women to the dance
possible use:
date of interview w/ Hazel: desc. upper Musselshell without naming it, say of H H "whose name is not Winona".
--Hazel & Dick are on H's parents' place (check this); muse on Wally there, out of my life of growing up.

I try to picture W here... Never.

mobile home, forty-plus miles from the nearest paved road. Her face is beyond wrinkled, rivuluted, but her eyes are still glamor-girl. I am stunned by her periodic wracking cough, ripping echo of my mother's lungs. But I must be an even more alarming figure to Winona: freckleface kiddo of forty-plus years ago now silvering like a tree snag, gray storm-mask of beard on me.

Writing has carried me to every nook of Montana, but this is the most antipodean yet. The land here was her parents', homesteaded by them, clung to somehow through the Depression. Winona has been married since 0000 to a wiry ranchman who patiently installed twelve miles of pipe to water their cattle. Ranching here is very nearly Australian-outback in its austerity, a mere 1h0 head of cattle specked across eighteen square miles of rangeland. "It's all like this," Winona's husband explains with up-and-down motions of his hand to show how the land stands on end, provides the cows lonely islands of grass amid the welter of clay cliffs.
Between cookie feasts we each tell Grandma our versions of Arizona.

Mine is heavier on cactus than my mother's. With her evidently bottomless capacity to think the sun rises and sets in me, my grandmother admires my telling of the desert even though she doesn't know a saguaro from an arroyo. She and my mother are on their third tank of coffee since we arrived, and I am intrigued that even more than my father dilutes his coffee with canned milk, Grandma drowns hers with cold water dippered from the sink bucket. I negotiate for a sip just to confirm that coffee that way is as awful as it figures to be. It is.

Out of nowhere, which is to say everywhere, suddenly comes this:

"I was afraid you'd gone for good," Grandma said in the words, to my mother.

"Charlie figured—we figured we had to give it a try," my mother defends
The visit has me restless. Not that I don't want to see the gray-haired woman my mother calls Mama; it is only that I love escapade the more. My father's minding of me when I am in the lambing shed with him is like his handling of livestock, canny yet a bit jumpy too. There is not the nerveless freedom my mother lets me have and this makes the outings with my father more interesting, gauging where the limits are.
But what was she doing in our lives?

Her life, then, was like ours: ricocheting, trying not to spend itself entirely before the next distance.
PS: You say some people would try
    to steal the salmon. Did that ever
    happen to you?

    Yes. Just once.
Having had Tom Ringer for a husband and Moss Agate for a home meant there was little of life's work that my grandmother had not done, one time or another. Fighting sage fires, stacking hay, rescuing bogged cows, stringing barbed wire, and still she had found time to pull on boxing gloves when her sons wanted to spar. And to coddle an asthmatic daughter.

Not that there weren't costs to this. In my grandmother's mind, simple life sorted itself into some big oversimple notions. You had to work to have any shelter or food or money at all, so you worked all the time, every minute of the day. When someone crossed you, you wrote off that person no matter who it was.
She would crochet items from doilies the size of saucers to entire tablecloths, fields of white loopwork.

"No matter how rough the domicile, they were snowflaked with doilies."

She crocheted while resting, drinking coffee, talking...

She couldn't multiply two and two one and one, but (she could play the piano by ear) and crochet intricately (the most intricate of crochet work) at hand)

She had fought time (with that crochet hook, when nothing else was around) and won a kind of truce.

She even relaxed by keeping busy; intricate crochetwork

Her arms and hands were scarred from every kind of barbwire work, yet hooking away at the most intricate of crochetwork. there she sat, even while talking to my mother, crocheting the most intricate

relaxing by keeping busy
No matter how
Never more than a sentence away in any of their gossip is the war.

The war has consumed Montana. Not in the roaring geared-up military factory fashion of Arizona, but in a stranger kind of mortal evaporation. Young men, and no few women, have been gone for years and in their place the ghostly clink of dogtags from the outmost corners of the world--striplings who have eaten at the table of my grandmother and danced with my mother and pranced me on a knee languish in prisoner-of-war camps in Germany, have perished in the Bataan death march, been wounded at Palau, fought in the Aleutians and the Marianas and Normandy. (Scant rural earth, ours, but as with any war that comes along, husky young Montanans were too proficient soldiers for their own good in World War Two. On a population base rarely over 800,000, the state has had 16,000 dead in American wars to date.)
Now that she has left him, and the bent-milkpail life of Moss Agate,

---not to mention

she has hired on as cook and housekeeper and gardener—for a

valley of the Shields River, an hour’s drive(?)

Norwegian widower, in the far Crazy Mountains country, 00 miles south

of Ringling. over the next horizon in the Norskie country.

Not everyone there in the upper Shields River Valley was Norwegian, but

they were certainly Scandinavian

in the upper Shield River valley

for years she had been working here as cook—not to mention housekeeper

and gardener—for a Norwegian widower. The pair of them live like

monk and nun as far as anybody can tell.

People, my father prime among

them, can’t seem to understand

the pair of them live alone
Their spat had bittered during the past year or so. Of all the time-hidden episodes before I was old enough to remember, this is the one I most wish I could retrieve, for all the consequences that my father and my grandmother were to have. Did the Arizona trip do it, with two sons gone to the war Bessie Ringer simply finding it the last straw that my mother was moving so far away? My in-the-dark guess is that notions of family were their cause of wrangle. My father of the school that you can't do anything about your relatives but you can choose your friends, and so he leaned toward friends; my grandmother miraculously after Moss Agate--because of Moss Agate?--convinced that the family was all.
My mother, veteran of the battles of Moss Agate, cleverly takes me along on the diplomatic mission to my grandmother. Grandma knows our visit is late (we have been back from Arizona 60 days) and assigns the correct reason (my father). (quote her letter to Wally?) She is also snorty that our visit is so short (overnight). Those points made, she smothers me in cookies and indulgence.

As ever, Grandma has a panting rotund dog around like an old lodger.

I am reading on my own, so Grandma can't get me on her lap by the bookhour the way she used to. Nor does this place have a suicide slope for me to plunge down as in my daredevil days. Tidy, here in the Shields River country. The Norskie bachelor she cooks for keeps a neater ranch than anything I am used to in the White Sulphur country.

We each tell Grandma our versions of Arizona; I suppose mine is heavier on cactus than my mother's. News of this one and that get volleyed between my mother and her mother. The war is everywhere in Montana, not in the geared-up-military-factory fashion of Arizona but in the ghostly clink of dogtags from the corners of the world. Frances Forkin is...

The twelve members of the Montana State College football team...one after another, the entire dozen were killed at 00, 00, 00, 00.
We had quite a tragedy in town yesterday. The school children were gathering scrap paper and rags and there were several guys helping haul it. Wicker was one. He had that big orange truck he used around town. There were several children with him, including his own. He figured they were all in, and started the truck. His little boy was just climbing up the wheel and of course he ran over him, killed him instantly.
Had a grand trip coming home.

Charlie is too tired for us to take in any nite life as long as he is working, until he gets stronger again. He really shouldn't be working, but then you know Charlie.

Ivan seems to be glad to be home. The 2 little Buckingham girls came to see him Easter Sunday right after church. Brought him an Easter basket and stayed several hours. I fixed them a little table and they had dinner together.
"At least I got letters from you," Grandma hmpfs. "I haven't heard from Paul in ages." (When she does, it will be news of his marriage to an Australian nurse and his consequent decision to take up residence in Queensland.)

to an Australian nurse and his consequent decision to take up residence in Queensland.) She switches back to us:
Shep, goofy with the thrill of having somebody to romp with, lavished me with his tongue. But dog slobber is no fun.

--my mother comes out in bib overalls to kill a chicken.

--first, have to catch a chicken (with miniature version of sheephook)

--color and atmosphere of squawking chickens in the farmyard; use telling detail(s)

Grandma's dog Shep, goofy with the thrill of having somebody to romp with, keeps giving me baths with his tongue. Dog slobber is limited fun.
"At least you wrote," Grandma hmpfs. "I haven't heard from Paul in ages." She switches back to us: "What'll you do this summer?"

"We don't quite know yet," my mother answers, although she has a pretty good idea of our destination and it isn't going to be one my grandmother will like.

Finally
Then the two of them get going on the populace beyond the family.

News of this one and that is remorselessly volleyed between my mother and her mother.

She is just as much of a scatterbrain as ever and of course was terribly abused in the Service. Had to work a little, something she isn't used to.

(Privately own service verdict
My grandmother has drawn her conclusion on Winona: (quote 3-4 lines)
December 25, 1962. Orange as an ember, the canyon plow sails onto deserted Highway 12 and skims west, grooving a pathway through the crystal-fresh snowfall. Now the noise of it, slow to come across the padding of winter.
When the German half of the war was taken care of, my father and mother and I were amid one of our usual changes. We have moved again, V-E Day finding us by radio at the far edge of the Bridger Mountains, lambing for Frank Morgan in my father's second season of sheepwork that spring of 1945. But this ricochet seemed to have more zing to it than our previous ones. Vim has risen in us all. Charlie is working like a beaver. He wrangles bunches, spends some time with the drop band, works in the lambing shed, in fact anything there is to do. Berneta herself was merely cooking for the Morgan crew of seven, prestidigitating all the variety she can into three meals a day still governed by ration books. (The infinity of pie is the savior of the ranch cook.) Within her health, so far so good: I've been having a little more asthma but not so bad.

The familiar work and the spring-green Gallatin Valley lull her: would be nice here for the summer... trees in the yard, a lilac bush out in front... As for me, at last I am outside again, hanging around with my father. From
The sheep deal was a masterpiece of a little bit here and a little bit there. Dad and his brother Angus went in together and bought the band of a thousand ewes and their new lambs from Frank Morgan, turned right around and sold them for delivery that fall to a livestock contractor. Shearing time came before that, so the wool money went to us and Angus.

But the summer range to run the sheep on needed to be rented from Morgan, at so much per head; on the other hand, Dad would ameliorate that charge by doing some herding and other work for Morgan—when everybody had taken every whittle they could out of the potential profits, up we went into the high country with the actual band of sheep.
The sheep deal was a masterpiece of a little bit here and a little bit there. Dad and his brother Angus bought the sheep from Frank Morgan, turned right around and sold them for delivery that fall to a livestock contractor. Shearing time came before that, so the wool money went to us and Angus. But the summer range to run the sheep on had to be rented from Morgan, at so much per head; on the other hand, Dad was to do some herding and other work for Morgan as needed. When nobody could figure out another whittle to take out of that band of sheep, up into the Bridger Mountains we went with them. Part of our part of the deal was to do some of the herding.
May 14 letter

The sheep deal was a cat's-cradle of reciprocal bargains. Dad contracted had bought the sheep from Frank Morgan, turned right around and sold them to a livestock buyer for delivery that fall, meanwhile would run them on Morgan's summer range at so much per head, the wool money though was Dad's free and clear—Morgan and my father and the stock buyer divvying a little here, a little there, until none of them could figure another whittle to take out of the grass-lambs-labor—work sum of...
The sheep deal was a cat's-cradle of reciprocal bargains. Dad contracted had bought the sheep from Frank Morgan, turned right around and sold them to a livestock buyer for delivery that fall, meanwhile would run them on Morgan's summer range at so much per head, the wool money though was Dad's free and clear—Morgan and my father and the stock buyer divvying a little here, a little there, until none of them could figure another whittle to take out of the grass-lambs-labor
the country went wild in a hurry. A twenty-nine-mile dirt road kinked its way up canyons and through creeks and around obscure mountains and buttes to eventually reach Ringling. Sixteenmile Creek scampered through the confused geography from almost every direction, south fork, middle fork, and then the main stream twisting down from the Wall Mountain country.
do the sheep deal explanation, in as short and compelling fashion as possible, here?
The sheep deal was a masterpiece of a little here and a little there.
(describe some of its terms from my mother's letter)

(Part of our part was to do some herding (but not all of it)).
contraband venison, either. Where we are, this start of June, is the extremity of the Sixteen country. Under those horizon-bumping views from this meadow, Sixteenmile Creek scampers through the confused geography from every direction, the main channel twisting down from the Wall Mountain basin in the north and skewing west to its eventual union with the Missouri River, joined midway by the Middle Fork sailing in from the east and the Ringling country through a sharp canyon. Then there is a last, orphan section of the creek springing from entirely different drainage. The stream streaking down our gulch is that offshoot, the South Fork of Sixteenmile Creek, the sly tether of the Big Belt Mountains to the Bridger Mountains. We are where, from countless spots in my parents' past, there was that eye-taking rough horizon of the Big Belts and the Bridgers butting up against each other. Behind us, Hatfield Mountain of the Bridgers sits like a mile-tall apartment building facing down on the savage rock alleys of the Big Belts. The Big Belts, though, have a last laugh in the isolation they inflict over the entire neighborhood. A forest ranger somewhere up toward the South Fork's headwaters and the Morgans' sheepherder some miles in to the west of us, and the cabined three of us, are Hatfield's only dwellers.
Here is a story of permanent fend ing.

To fend ing that way, forever finding herself able to do some chore she had never faced before, made her independent. Having Tom Ringer for a husband and Moss Agate for a home meant there was little she had not done. She had fought sage fires, stacked hay, rescued cows, strung barbwire, plowed ditches, and still found time to put on the boxing gloves with her sons.

Not that...

There were costs to this. In Bessie's mind, life sorted itself into big simple notions. You had to work to have any
No matter that the people were only a handful across

the flank of an entire mountain range, or that the heights walling

them in were weathered granite cliffs instead of brownstone walls,

homesteaders were immigrant, spoke dialect, had endless

children, and clutched together in narrow confines to try to

make a living. Like a ghetto, the Basin ran more on memory and

the pocketbook of the moment. Always

hope than onCKET. The backdrop of Scotland hung at the corners

of the settlers' minds, reminding that the overworked home country

could not provide job enough, household enough, change enough.

And in from those brain corners like sparrows trapped in a barn

came the hopes that this Montana land would bestow all those.
The Great Falls Leader sometimes was favored, because of its orange newsprint. I know a woman who, as a girl, hung around her father's drugstore, catercorner from the Mint Saloon in Great Falls; across the street, a vendor would stand and cry: Leader. Leader. Whadimp- whadimp-whadimp-whatAYY. Leader. Leader. How thankful I have been that I did not know that chant in those high school summers, could not imagine it.
or felt a quick regret of some sort. This time, the soft salute meant both those things. **Godamighty, Ivan, I did miss your mother.** That cannot begin to tell it. If it was Dad instead of Clifford who came to take me from the schoolyard, I stepped from the shadows of my mood into the blacker shadows of his. Years afterward and hundreds of miles from the valley, I was with him when he met a man in the street, backed away, and stared the stranger out of sight in wordless hatred. The man had worked at the ranch where my mother died, and a few days after her death had told Dad bluffly: **Hell, you got to forget her. That's the only way to get on with life: don't let a thing like this count too much.**

All that time and distance later, Dad still despised him for those clumsy words. Not until that moment did I entirely understand how severe a time it had been when he came for me after school in those earliest weeks after my mother's death and we would drive back to a borrowed room in a pitying friend's house.

Day by day as autumn tanned the valley around us, now with bright frost weather, now with rain carrying the first chill of winter, Dad stayed in the dusk of his grief. That sandbag mood, I understand now, can only have been a kind of battle fatigue—-the senses blasted around in him by that morning of death and the thousands of inflicting minutes it was followed by. He might go through the motions of work,
The drive home to Gros Ventre was one I have done any number of times, yet the country always seems fresh. The benchlands south of town tease a person, shunting the road in and out among themselves, hiding any views of the mountains, and just generally making a person feel he isn't getting anywhere. A story in our family is that my grandfather came into the Two Medicine country aboard a freight wagon, and if so, those benchlands must have seemed unpromising. But eventually the road rises, and rises some more, and suddenly you are in the gap between the highest benches, and the land opens up for a hundred miles ahead.
The shape of a young man's nose; the state of my father's appendix; had pivots are built into us. If Charlie Doig had been at full power, knocking down $000 a day until the end of the war, Alzona Park a place to shelter us as the money was socked away, the weeks then few until I had to start school and why not at the Alzona school, we were probable Arizonans.

Instead, back in Montana...

More to it than that, as the war is. (Heart Earth in'old?)
As an only child I blink at the choosing up of sides that goes on inside bigger families. Of my mother's three brothers, Bud, the middle one, maybe understandably was out of the running as a confidante for her—he too was beset by asthma, was at the start of a marriage that didn't last. Bud has more troubles than I do, she writes to Wally, and that seems to go for all the rest. But why not Paul, the oldest brother, nearest her in age? True, Paul was about to marry an Australian nurse, a step which would keep him in Queensland until his life ended there forty-five years later. Why, though, didn't he qualify to be the somebody she had to tell frankly, while Wally, who had been still a boy when my mother became a married woman, was her choice of shoulder—I'd-like-to-cry-on? My hunch is that Paul, who had levered himself to the start of college before the way, already was gone from my mother's territory of existence long before he spoke his vows in far Australia. It goes deeper than that: had all this turned out differently, my mother ultimately would have had to face the realization that Paul was a preview of me.
Quickly Dad was made a foreman—an able-bodied undraftable 43-year-old who knew how to run a crew was a premium commodity—and oversaw aluminum cutting. That was all he did know about the job.

My mother gave her days to me

Saturday stint of babysitting...littler children who interested me less than rocks

I knew enough of the general threat to us (not to leave her side)...

We all recalled Christmas as a rough spot on the calendar, (but now it was 1945) in fact, a matter of things to

So far, so good, which (always) of course means too soon to tell, too good to last.

my father, rising star of factorydom

twinclock life
settled into Jizona Park orbit
Dad grew tired of the clustering habit of the Ringer family
...eventually wearied of
of he kept my mather from it whenever he could.
Between macaroons we each tell Grandma our versions of Arizona.

Mine is heavier on cactus than my mother's. But then no matter what I say, Grandma is attentive—that bottomless capacity of hers to think the sun rises and sets in me.

Even more than my father dilutes his coffee with canned milk, Grandma sluices hers with cold water dipped from the sink bucket. I am astounded and ask for a taste just to confirm that coffee that way is as awful as it figures to be. It is.

"I was afraid you'd gone for good," Grandma said to my mother.

"Charlie—we felt we had to give it a try," my mother defends.

(Some night when I was asleep in the cabin on the desert, there was the conclusive debate about Arizona tomorrows. My mother rendered it to Wally in a last Wickenburg letter: ...Trouble is there are so few possibilities for people with a limited supply of money like ourselves...It might be better after the war, but I think it will be worse.) My parents avoided kissed away the postwar boom the juggernaut/my parents forfeited postwar opportunity: we ...)

My mother knows which of the panoply of reasons to feature in this kitchen:

"We didn't just like being so far away from everybody."

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September 26, 1987. I am in a Helena bookstore autographing my latest novel, while a buttergold Indian summer such as I never remember from Montana is lavishing sunshine into Last Chance Gulch. A loop of years has been made, the printed pages under my pen closing the circle that began here, above the Gulch, when I fashioned Angus McCaskill and Rob Barclay as they looked out from the fire tower over this same street in 1889. Montana was newborn then, and those two young rascals of my mind were rebirthing themselves from Scotland into the dawn over Helena. As it will, the wordpump in my head was starting up again, public duty be damned, the next McCaskills arriving to me in brainwhispers, the next novel already beginning to want out.
In from the luscious light a small gray wrinkled woman rolls through the bookstore doorway in a wheelchair, brakes to a halt in front of me, fires me a look of ferocious appraisal that clears away all wordsmith novelistic dreamdrift, and delivers:

"I could have been your mother."

It was evident she was speaking in seminal terms. Here you go, Mr. Hotshot Plotwriter, have a round of chromosome roulette for yourself.

All those decades ago when she was one of the eligibles of the Wall Mountain country, she and my father did some sampling of each other, did they.

We know how those young men on horseback are. Hang a dress on a sagebrush and they'll ride a circle around it all day. Except. Except by all reports, my father went head over cowboy bootheels for good when he met the one named Berneta.

A dance, of course, did it.