November 13, 1990

Dear Ivan,

I should have thanked you for Ride With Me, Mariah Montana long before now, and for the meaningful inscription that helps me relive your Ranch Romance evenings with Gen and me. I wish I had had your song of the Roadkill Angels to comfort me fifty-one years ago when I drove through Iowa to a farm Thanksgiving dinner:

Here on the highway
Where my wheels tread,
Mangled and bloody
Glisten the dead.

A soft, long-eared rabbit,
A cat, searching prey,
A long-legged chicken
That got in the way....

The other verses got off on the war in Europe. My so-called "poetry" is excellent only as an effective diary of my emotional reactions to a point in time. I remember the roadkills on that cold November day as I drove through the countryside in 1939.

Now about this new book of yours - I love it, Ivan! It was pretty hard on me to hear Jick tell of Marcella's death from lung cancer, though. I know how Jick felt; the analogy of the gutted trout is painfully accurate. Perhaps this book is closest to me because in it you portray so well the aging Jick and his memories of the past and uncertainties about the future. I was about to say that you are too young to be so aware of Jick's feelings as an older man, forgetting how many years have passed since Pat affectionately referred to you as "little Ivan"! You have lived with these characters so long that it is not surprising you can follow them somewhat (and not too much at that!) beyond your years.

I am looking at the page on which Jick equates loss with change, "until a healing, a scarring over, whatever works, can manage ~~to~~ to happen." It's the losses that are deeper than change that are hard to handle. "The gouge it tears through you" is always there, a sleeping volcano that intermittently has its private eruptions. How very much Pat would have loved this book; it grieves me to know this is the first one she did not have a small part in. She greatly valued your friendship and applauded your every success.

I know Pat would be impressed with the way you bring Jick and Riley and Mariah to life. The dialogue is so good that there are times when I'm glad I'm not cooped up in the Bago with them! My interest increases when Leona enters the scene, and when she asks, "Do you want to come with?" I smile in recognition of a locution my friends ridiculed me for when I came to Seattle years ago. Is it common in Montana, and do you know its derivation?

Ivan, I treasured this book from beginning to end, and speaking of the end, I'm so glad Jick escaped Althea! Thank you again for my treasured copy of Ride with Me, Mariah Montana.

Fondly,

Margaret

Margaret Svec

19 Nov. '90

Dear Margaret--

Have been trying to find time to write a few lines of thanks for your nifty letter about Mariah Montana. Glad--relieved!--that you liked the book. Carol maybe has told you that the most praising reviews have been by women--women writers of about Mariah McCaskill's age, mid-30ish, actually--and the couple of grumpy ones have been by middle-aging guys. I don't know what that says about the book or me, but there it is.

Good God, Margaret, how could two of us have composed "roadkill" verses, 50 years and half a continent apart? Great minds run in similar tracks (which have squashed critters in them, evidently)...

Leona's usage of "come with" simply came naturally to me, somewhere out of (a) memory bank and (b) the logic of the western/rural language I've tried to use as a palette for the trilogy. Lots of prepositions, in that lingo. One of my regrets is having had to cut from Mariah a passage where one of the Baloney Express guys was telling about having been a bulldozer operator when "the freeway was built up to Shelby". I knew that wasn't quite colloquially right, so I made it "built on up to Shelby." Nope, that wasn't quite the right ring of language either, and so I knew I finally had hit it when I had him say "built on up through to Shelby." Anyway, ~~yuuuuuu~~ your and Leona's usage of "come with" seems to me utterly legitimate, verified by usage; the magisterial Dictionary of American Regional English is full of colloquialisms etc. which are legitimized by citations of William Faulkner's work. Maybe eventually there'll be a "come with" entry, attribution Svec and Doig.

all best. My regards to the Ranch Romancers, too.