

when my knee finally was declared healed. My season was brief that time: as if the quadrants of my body were going to take turns about this, my left hand was fractured in one of the first scrimmages. I suppose in the way Dad never had hesitated to swing back into a saddle after another of his near-destructions on horseback, it didn't occur to me not to try football again--although it did to Grandma, who loudly sounded her Gee gosh, you be careful now, warning.

4 As it turned out, on the field at the first practice a new coach was waiting, a chunky, sharp-eyed man in his early twenties. His name was McCarthy; he had grown up in the smelter town of Anaconda and gone through a small Jesuit college on a football scholarship. He told me, without ever having seen me before, that I would be his fullback. Given Valier's small enrollment and the lack of heft among the seniors, he had decided simply to field the four quickest of us as running backs, like dice flipped across green felt. You'll be the blocking back, since you're heftier than Butch or Vern or Glenn--at 155 pounds I actually was only the least featherlike--and we'll show these teams some footsteps.

We did. Ours was the fastest backfield in the conference, and the most fitful. On the first play of the season we scored on an 89-yard run, and went on to lose the game. When we managed to mesh ourselves--something less than

half the time--easy wins scatted onto our record. Other games, we simply whooshed up and down the field between the goal lines instead of across them, perpetually within a touchdown of stronger and more methodical teams and exasperating everyone except McCarthy, who seemed to enjoy our velocity for its own sake. ¶ The season of football was one of the least useful and most purely pleasant things I had ever done, a time taken out from life simply to run and roll, like a colt discovering his gallop.

no ¶ Perhaps it was a reward for my willingness to be an atomweight fullback for him, perhaps he simply liked to see a person spin free and be off to somewhere: McCarthy out of the blue asked my college plans, listened to my vague notion that I guessed I would aim for science or engineering, and told me that I should think about journalism.

¶ It may have been the first time I heard the word journalism spoken. But: you've read more than any kid I've ever seen, and if you've been paying attention in there to the Last Duchess--Mrs. Tidyman--like I think you have, you've learned something about the language. ¶ Here was advice which could have come from nowhere else in my life, for all her interest in me, Mrs. Tidyman could not have brought herself to single out one direction from her whirling compass of learning, and no one else I knew had ever offered more than the vague encouragement that with a head like that on your shoulders you ought to go on to college.

Throughout the autumn and start of winter, I sent off applications to colleges and took exams ⁱⁿ ~~for~~ any scholarship competition I could find. Mrs. Tidyman thirty years before had gone away to Illinois for summer courses at Northwestern University; I automatically applied there. I read somewhere that rich universities such as Harvard and Princeton admitted a proportion of moneyless students; off went my paperwork. And to a dozen others, according to no plan but hope. No one seemed to know another method besides my own of flooding mail out across the map; no one in either line of my family had ever gone beyond high school, and even Mrs. Tidyman could not recall the last Valier student who had attended an out-of-state college.

Amid it all, Eldo stopped me in the assembly hall and said he wanted to see me in his office. When I stepped in, he picked up the latest of my scholarship applications and shook his wide head. Ivan, all this isn't worth it. These eastern places you're applying to, a student from a school this size just doesn't have a chance. Make up your mind to go to the university at Missoula, and you won't let yourself in for disappointment. He held the application toward me. I don't feel I can put in any more of my time on these things.

From then, I knew that I would go to one of the far universities if I had to walk there on my knees and murder

to get in. Eldo was not a man for a goading strategy. In telling me that he was tired of the scholarship paperwork, he was simply reciting fact, and saying as well that he was weary of me and my beavering ambition. But writing me off was the one valuable thing he could have done for me. I went to my backers with his verdict. That's very interesting, Mrs. Tidyman said with deadly evenness; I think you should apply and apply, and I'll write any recommendations you need. Goddamn-that-Eldo-to-hell, Dad burred; you go on and get one of those scholarships just to show that scissorbill.

A winter of waiting, the babysitting winter. Then with the first of spring, a letter from Northwestern saying that I had been granted a four-year scholarship for full tuition. I had won that much. Now the question became how the rest of my victory could be afforded.

Dad and Grandma quickly went back to ranch work, now for a Two Medicine rancher named McTaggart. He was a high crag of a man, wintry, boulder-jawed, long-boned, who had been battling the northern plains for half a century and at last had edged far enough ahead of nature to own a ranch and a few thousand head of sheep. No one was deceived that McTaggart and Dad and Grandma made a ranch combination that could last long--We'll be lucky if we can put up with his guff through lambing time, Dad grumped--yet the three of

them somehow went week after week without igniting. ⁴ When I visited from the Chadwicks' on weekends, McTaggart in the evenings would fix himself by the hour on a topic such as my going off to Northwestern and recite his history around it in a nervous, twining style. He too had gone to Chicago as a young man, he told, spending some months there when he worked for a buyer who dealt in Montana ranch horses. We took 'em into Chicago to the 'yards for him, see.

There was one bunch they wanted for lead horses for the race track, see. Them hot-blooded horses, you know, they got to lead 'em in--that fella with the white pants and the red jacket and big hat, you know, he leads them in on some gentle cow pony, might be a Apaloosy or somethin'. I had these nine, ten ponies headed out for Washington Park race track, then old Bill caught up to me, says Oh, I made a mistake, we unloaded 'em the wrong place, you gotta take 'em out to ~~Chicago Heights~~ ^{Arlington Park} race track. So I just tailed them load of horses to one another and away I went down--there's a street, Halstead ^{Arlington} Street--went down that with them ponies about 35 miles to ~~Chicago~~ ^{Arlington} Heights. Had kids followin' me all the way. An' I made it, no trouble, they was gentle enough ponies. One of 'em I used to ride out here and he used to buck me off whenever he wanted, but back there he'd got on good behavior. First thing at the race track, he's so pretty, they give him a bath and put one of those

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muley saddles on, and I had to get on and ride him around the race track, show him off good and plenty. Oh, I been to Chicago, nnnhnnnn.

Dad said he could talk McTaggart into hiring me for the summer before I went to college. Grandma pointed out it would be our last time together before you go off so awful far away. But I still wanted my summer distance, and gave the one argument I thought was sure, that I could make more money at tractor work on a farm than on the ranch with them. You never done any of that work before, Grandma rallied. I said the unanswerable: I'll learn.

A few mornings after my graduation from high school, I hunkered atop the cleated treads of a Caterpillar tractor big as a locomotive and studied what seemed to be the control gadgetry for the entire solar system. With the farmer all but moving my hands through the patterns, I memorized the switchwork and the moves to start the Cat's rackety warming motor, ^{the control} ~~levers~~ inside the sheet-metal cab, then another battery of hydraulic levers to raise and lower the equipment being pulled behind the tractor. He rode with me a few rounds on the field, showing me the quick dance of brake-and-clutch to lurch the monster around corners, and said She's all yours. ⁴ I could see that the field corners were going to be the gauntlet: the Cat had to be sharply angled in its turn, kinked back on its own path until it swiveled

the wide harrow around behind it, instant calculation upon calculation to keep the roaring train of equipment from mangling itself.)

no 4 [In my first hour, I kinked the tractor through a turn an instant too long. The cataract of steel tread caught the hitch of the harrow, bowed and twisted it to taffy.

4 I shut down the Cat and stood looking at the tangle. I could read the Latin of whatever Caesar's farmers had done, but would I ever decipher this gigantic equipment of my own? Sick with failure, I drove into Dupuyer with the crumpled hitch. The farmer scowled at it, then saw my face. Well, don't get in an uproar over it. The kid I had last summer did this three times on his first day. Try not to beat his record. I'll forge 'er back into shape. He did, and in the hundreds of hours of field work afterward this summer, I ran the tractor and its caravan of equipment as faultlessly as if on rails.

That set of summer months, an even twenty years ago as I come to write this, stands out as a season in dream. Shuddered throb of the Cat, curved tines of harrow digging by the battalion behind me, marching chocolate lines of worked field, cold flame-peaks spacing the western horizon--everything of each day was rhythm, pulse, pattern, and within such propulsion, like a space traveler sledding through orbit, I could cast myself free into every luster

of my life to come. Four college years of reading how many books can that be? dozens and scores and hundreds perfect grades Dad saying: you're right up there with the best of them in the world now eyes of a girl inches away Carlton says it is like losing your breath over and over words of my own in print how to begin? Montana today is a land of far fields uncommon people a flow of money Grandma: I never knew they pay wages like that and then, then . . .

Then tugging of gravity, a letter in a long envelope. The last editorial I had written for the school paper had been noticed at the university in Missoula. The dean of journalism was asking if I would be interested in a scholarship there, and if he could come talk to me. ⁹ When I phoned Mrs. Tidyman from the cafe in Dupuyer, she told me the dean had been a Rhodes Scholar, an honor so vast I had heard of it. Early into the next week he drove to Dupuyer and was directed to where I was farming that day. Tall, trim, in white shirt and tie, he toed across the furrowed field to where I was pulling the armada of harrow behind the Caterpillar. As I stepped down from the Cat and dustily shook hands, he said, What is this, a discer? and I learned at once that Rhodes Scholars didn't know everything in the world. But he talked earnestly, seemed unbothered as he stood with the soft field dirt trickling into his lowcut shoes, and asked if I wanted, really, to be away from Montana.

For all the dreaming, that was the question somewhere in me, and his asking of it and the promise of a scholarship at Missoula made me rethink. One way and another, Dad and Grandma and I had survived much together. She now was sixty-four years old, and although she gave every evidence of enduring forever, I had begun to think of her age, and the sum that would go from my life when she did. Dad was fifty-seven, still a top hand but with his lifetime's worth of breakages in him.⁹ Even beyond the two of them, there were the decades of effort of the other Doigs and Ringers, a weight of striving in these Montana hills and valleys and prairies which added up to the single great monument my family line would ever have. For me to go from this would be a reverse trek, in a sense, from the immigration which had borne my people into the high-mountain West. Yet they had sprung themselves free of the past when they felt they had to, and that was my own urge.⁹ I took the decision to McTaggart's ranch the next weekend. Grandma brightened: That'd be closer to home, if you went over to Missoula. Chicago is such a long old ways away. Dad shook his head. You got to do the deciding, Skavinsky. We'll-back-you-to-the-limit-whatever-place-you-go.

The train to Chicago stood like an endless wall of windows. Each of the three of us snuffled in the September air, turned aside to swallow. Grandma's teary hug: as

ever, she had talked herself around to the conviction that whatever I had made up my mind to do was the only thing, you write us about it all and I'll do the like. Dad's clamping handshake: in awe of all the education awaiting me, You're away to a big place, son. ⁹¹Aboard, I had a minute of looking out the window to them, the one stout and erect and eternal as a pillar, the other handsome as glory under the perfect crimp of his stockman's hat. The train gave off sounds, and the depot platform rafted away behind me with the two of them.

Kin and clan. Son. Sire. The grand calved on in
grandson, grandmother. The words of all the ties of blood
interest me, for they seem never quite deft enough, not entirely
bold and guileful enough, to speak the mysterious strengths
of lineage. I admit the marvel that such sounds are carried
to us from the clangs and soughs of tongues now silent a
millenium into the past, calling on and on, in their way,
like ^{pulses} ~~points~~ of light still traveling in from gone stars.
But the offhand resonance of bobolink arrives that way too,
and sneeze and whicker and daisy and thousandfold words more.
What I miss in our special blood-words is a sense of recasting
themselves for each generation, each fresh situation of
kindredness, it seems somehow too meager that they should
merely exist, plain packets of sound like any other, and
not hold power to texture each new conformation with the
bright exact tones that are yearned for.

This example: here is a man and here a woman. In the
coming light of one June morning, the same piece of life is
axed away from each of them. Wounded hard, they go off to
their private ways. Until at last the wifeless man offers
across to the ^{daughter} ~~child~~-robbed woman. And I am the agreed barter
between them.

Not even truth brought down to bone this way can begin
to tell what I long to of the situation shared by my father

and my grandmother and myself during the years I call from memory here. For my father had to be more than is coded in the standard six-letter sound of father, he had also to be guardian-to-an-adrift-boy and as well, mate-who-was-not-a-husband to the daunting third figure of the household. In turn that figure, my loving thunder-tempered grandmother, who never had thought through roles of life but could don the most hazardous ones as automatically as her apron, had somehow to mother me without the usual claims to authority for it, and at the same time to treat with her son-in-law in terms which could not be like a wife's but seemed not much closer to any other description either. I believe that I inherited the clearest, most fortunate part in this, allowed simply to be myself-older-than-I-was, and to have the grant of a bolstered parent and the bonus of a redoubtable grandparent at my side as well. Yet even that lacks faithful wording: how can it be expressed that a boy's dreams of himself and his dream-versions of a threesome-against-life, yearnings so often drawn opposite each other in him, somehow were the same tuggings?

And less explicable yet: the materialized fact that at last, whenever it had happened that they found the habit of being together counted more strongly with them than the natures pushing them apart, my grandmother and my father had become some union of life all their own, quite apart from

the abrupt knot of bloodline they had made for my sake.

Memory is a kind of homesickness, and like homesickness, it falls short of the actualities on almost every count. In the end, I come to think of the wondrous writer Isak Dinesen when she was taken up in a biplane over the green resplendent highlands of Kenya and arrived back to earth to say, The language is short of words for the experiences of flying, and will have to invent new words with time. So do I wait for the language of memory to come onto the exact tones of how the three of us, across our three generations and our separations of personality, became something-both-more-and-less-than-a-family and different from anything sheathed in any of the other phrases of kinship.

IVORY

Dearest Ivan. Well dear time for another few lines to
let you know that Dad and I are both fine. And hope you are
to. And not working to hard with your studying. Is the
weather good where you are. We are haveing Indian Summer
but it gets cold nites. Dad and McTaggart are trucking hay
here to the ranch. Old McTaggart is such a silly old thing
about it he piles the bales way high. Yesterday the highway
cop caught him at it and they had to unload bales off to the
side of the road until the truck come down to legal wate.
It took them 2 trips after that to get all those bales hauled
what with the cop keeping his eye on them. Serves old McTaggart
rite the silly old thing but I feel sorry for Dad haveing
to handle the bales again. We're counting the weeks till
you come home Christmas. Well dear guess this will be all

for this time and I hope this finds you fine. So Bye with
lots of love and kisses as ever Your loveing grandma.

The kitchen of the high-rise dormitory stretched away like a bazaar of sheened serving counters, long stoves, giant square refrigerators. Gertie's cafe could have been set down inside it in a dozen different places. A pair of mahogany-faced cooks rattled to each other in a language I could not even guess at. Two black women were dabbing lettuce leaves into hundreds of salad bowls. I walked on through to the white-tiled dishroom at the far end and stepped into warm cottony air. A bald man with skin the color of coffee with rich cream in it was blasting a jet of steaming water onto mounds of dirty plates. He turned, stuck out a dripping hand to be shaken: Yo, you the new man? My name is Archie. I said mine was Ivan. Yo, Ivory. This here's what we do in here . . .

Small tight penciling at the top of the quiz paper:
Please see me after class. Above the words, like a cold half-moon hung over a battlefield, their reason: the grade of D, the first of my life. The history class went its hour with fear after fear sawing at the back of my mouth. Godamighty,
am I going to flunk out of here? . . . must have been a mistake,
must. . . what will I tell. . . what could I have . . .
how am I going to . . . After eternity, the bell rang, the

instructor walked me to his office. In a dozen steadying ways, he said a single thing: that memorized dates and facts would not carry me in college as they had in high school, I must think out essay answers now. When I at last stood to leave, his wide horn-rimmed glasses caught me like headlights. Don't let it throw you, Mr. Doig. You'll do better here than you've started out. Those first earthquake weeks of Northwestern, his was the one classroom voice to say such words to me. His course was the one I felt my way through to my first college grade of A.

Dearest Ivan. We are glad your getting squared away and that you like your board job fine. Thats a lot of dishes to wash every day and every day isn't it. Is the grub good there. I sure hope so. . . We're glad your getting to know your journalism adviser Professor Baldwin he sounds like a lot of help to you. Dad thought it was a good joke that he thought you would show up at colege wearing a cowboy hat. Dad says to tell you we can get you a pair of bat wing shaps and a lariat rope if it will help your studies. . . Your loveing grandma.

Trains began to calendar my life. In mid-September, the thirty-two hours eastward from Montana to Chicago. Three months and return west, now the prairies eider-white hour

upon hour out the panning frame of window. The eastbound again, usually on the day after New Year's in glittering open-skied weather. The abrupt round-trip in March, two and a half days' traveling to spend five or six days in Montana. And early June, the greenest journey west and the most unsettling, with its growing cargo of musings. ⁹¹ No time before or after in my life throbbed quite as those first-of-summer journeys did. Trains cross the continent in a swirl of dust and thunder, I would read at times from Thomas Wolfe, as if turning the manuscript pages of an oration as the words boomed from the orator himself--the leaves fly down the tracks behind them: the great trains cleave through gulch and gulley, they rumble with spoked thunder on the bridges over the powerful brown wash of mighty rivers, they toil through hills, they skirt the rough brown stubble of shorn fields, they whip past empty stations in the little towns and their great stride pounds its even pulse across America. ⁹¹ But: was the vital rhythm of this travel in pistons, or in the apparatus that was me? Even as my ^{— Wolfe's trains —} trains ate the distances of the middle-American prairie, I felt that I was hurtling separately, free of the given lines the machinery had to cling to. Already I had my habit of totaling up life, and in the train hours I could count the steps taken in the college year and those still to come: course upon course in writing and reporting, the adventuring into the Russian language as I had once followed

Mrs. Tidyman into Latin, the immensities of history and literature. I knew nothing of an eventual destination except that it would be somewhere that I could work at writing; for now, the adding-up to get there held its own wonder.

The train hours were the enforced pause in time when all this marshalled in my mind. When I stepped down again to a Montana depot platform, Dad or Grandma would ask, as ever, How was your trip? I would begin one telling or another-- There was a herd of antelope, forty-fifty of them, on the flats a bit ago or We were held up a helluva time in Miles City waiting for a freight--any answer but the private truth which said what a headlong striding time those journeys were.

When I returned to Montana in early June of 1958 for the summer between my first and second years at Northwestern, I came, for a change, into a season which was creamy with luck. Dad and Grandma still were at the McTaggart ranch, and as content for the moment as the pair of them were likely to be. I at once found a farming job, this time on the irrigated flatland near Valier. The farmer proved the easiest-going of men, interested in my college career and admiring me for it; the fields I worked sprung grain high and golden against the ripsaw-horizon of the Rockies; and a hailstorm, as we watched from the front window of the farmhouse like spectators at a race, went shaving past without touching a

kernel of crop. ⁴ And the evening, a week or so before my nineteenth birthday, when I hurried to Valier to cash my first paycheck of the summer and then drove on, slower now, trying to think through the steps of the matter, north into the oil-field town of Shelby. Years of rumor had rough-sketched the location of the house for me, but I found I couldn't pick it from among several along a hilly street. Swallowing back the flutters which winged up from deepest in me, I veered downtown, singled out the busiest saloon. Inside, I sipped at a bottle of beer, nervously and intently watched the crowd along the bar. When a burly drinker clopped away toward the toilet, I swung off my bar stool after him.

He already was spraddled at the urinal trough, humming purposefully, when I joined him. He looked over at me cheerily: Beer'll do it to you, don't it? I gulped what I hoped was grinning agreement--Sure slides through--and faked around at the front of myself until he zipped and turned away. My zipping a fast echo of his, I spun after him: Ah, say, I was wonderin' if you could tell me, ah, where the place up on the hill is. I don't know this town yet.

Oh hell yeah, buddy, he began: You take this street down to the corner 'n go left. . . I imprinted the directions on my brain like commandments as he mapped them in the air for me. . . 'n when you get there, there'll be a black gal, kind of a maid, she'll let you in 'n ask who you want. He paused

like a clerk switching lists of inventory: I ain't sayin'
this is your first visit, but if it happens to be, ask for
Estelle. She's got legs sweet as a preacher's dream, squeeze
the last ounce right out o' you. Estelle and her talent
branded in atop the street directions.

Thanks-buddy-Jesus-thanks, I breathed out, as if tons
had been swung off me, and tried to fumble a silver dollar
into his hand. Here, let me buy you a couple beers. . . .

Naw, hell. He pushed the mid-air money back to me as
if he were a croupier paying off. Spend it up on the hill.

Comin' through, Ivory, dishes comin' through! I snap
myself away from watching the co-ed in the silken blouse choose
her salad. Let 'er come, Arch. Grunting, ^{archie} he pushes rack after
rack of dishes into the metal tunnel of machine between us. change
Soap is fogged on, cogs lurch the cargo into drenches of hot
water; the last scald billows its dragon's-snort of steam
around me. The first rack jostles from the machine, breathes
heat from its eighteen dinner plates glistening upright in
twin rows. Do 'em pretty, calls Mister Hurd behind me over
the machine's watery roar. I fork my fingers, pull five plates
at once with my right hand, four in my left, flip them together
into a stack with a clattering riffle as if having shuffled
a giant deck of cards made of china, pivot and slap the fat
pile of dishware onto the cart behind me. My second grab

empties the rack, I send it scooting along the floor until it noses to a stop inches from Archie's ^{right knee} leg, where he can put a hand down for it without looking. ~~¶~~ More steam-wrapped racks, the swift double grab and flip again and again, the plate piles multiply as if uncoiling upward out of themselves. Across the dishroom at the sink where he washes the glassware, Mister Hurd is chanting a story, as much to himself as to Archie or me. He is a plump ball of a man, ^{somewhere beyond} ~~passing~~ middle age and as brown-black as rich farmland. Only weeks before, he rode by night bus from South Carolina, wife and children left behind until he can earn their way north as well, and Chicago comes as a giant wonder to him. Tell you, I's in a big store this mornin' and I see the talles' man in my life. I's behind him and, tell you, I's lookin' at him right chere ~~¶~~ jabbing a thumb to his right buttock. ~~¶~~ Archie eyes across at him, seems to make a decision, carefully sets his face innocent. What you doin' lookin' at him there for anyhow, Mister Hurd? Yo, Ivory? What's he doin' lookin' at that man there, you think? ~~¶~~ I decide too, before I can know I have done so: Tell you, Arch, he must just be seein' the sights all the time and all the time, hmmm? Mister Hurd giggles for minutes, so pleased at his first joshing in this ^{vast} ~~giant~~ new life.

Rank on rank along Sheridan Road past the Northwestern campus, deep-porched houses hung forth their sets of Greek initials, much as the vital gold pin of affiliation tendered itself out to the world on the angora jut of a pledge sister's sweater.

The university's preponderant "Greek system"--I never heard the words without the echo of the expression Dad and the valley men had for being deeply baffled: It's Greek to me--seemed to be meant to bin students into housefuls as alike themselves as could be achieved. It worked wonderfully; there were entire fraternities and sororities where everyone looked like a first cousin of everyone else. And the system's snugness paced itself on from there. Rush Week to Homecoming to winter proms to May Week and with keg parties and mixers betweentimes, residents of Greek Row could count on a college life as preciously tempoed as a cotillion.

By comparison, those of us in Latham House were like bandannaed gypsies grinning rudely beyond the terrace rail.

The first fact of Latham was that the university^{evidently} had not been quite sure what to do with the property, or for that matter, with those of us who lived there as financial-aid students. The building was a glum and aged three-story duplex which hunched by itself at the edge of Evanston's downtown area, as if too life-weary to grope across the street to the actual campus. Where Latham's exterior didn't show several

decades of urban soot, it had been blobbed with grayish paint. Inside, the same gravy-^{like}~~toned~~ cosmetic simply had tided across the doorsill and lapped on up every wall in sight. # Here the building's odd outer look of frailty and exhaustion quickly explained itself: a colossal incision, an air shaft some six feet across, all but sawed the place in half from back to front. Behind the thin streetside bay of facade, there were stitches of connection only at the front stairwell landing and at a passageway or two which bridged the halves of the house at its top floor. Except for these quick nips seaming it together, Latham House stood divided against itself like a decrepit frigate sprung open from ~~stem~~^{stern} to ~~stem~~^{stern}, or perhaps an ancient cliffdwelling cut apart by earthquake.

If Latham tottered as a single uncertain roof over two separate hives of rooms, it also sheltered some forty wildly distinct nooks of mind. Here is Votapek on his way to a concert career, coming in from each day's practice of Chopin to walk ritually to the ancient upright piano at the back of the house and tinkle the first bars of Nola: DOO de doo DE doo de doo. . . ? Here, Benjamin holding constant stage in the front hall, now spieling Shakespeare, now doing his impersonation of Wrigley Field--arms arced wide to be the outfield fences, eyes bulging to capacity, out of his mouth the ^{HH}~~hwaahh~~ sound of a crowd heard blocks away. The same again, this time in silence: his version

of an open date on the baseball schedule. Then Zimmerman, standing atop one or another of the steam radiators like a penguin on a snowbank, hands forgotten in pockets as he mulls through the visualized pages of his philosophy texts.

All of this, and vastly more, came with the mesh of tensions brought by us inside the walls of Latham. On many of us, family hopes rode heavily, perhaps as the first ever to have made it to college, or as the one to step to success in the place of a dead brother or lost father, or simply to bear the lineage out of one or another crimped corner of American life. Several--the Votapeks, the Benjamins among us--already had the fervors of artistic performance cooking in them. Almost everyone was under the gun of the high grade-point average needed to keep scholarship funds arriving.

Such pressures gave Latham House a charged, ozone-like atmosphere, at once intense and giddy. Strange fevers came and went among us. I think of the year of intra-mural sports dedicated to losing. It ~~always~~ was standing policy at Latham to scorn all campus activities. Homecoming alone rated a special gesture, usually rolls of toilet paper slung derisively out the front windows of the house. ^{However,} Because a number of us had come from small high schools where we had been encouraged into sports, intra-murals were the exception to the boycott. But ^{began to} ~~in my sophomore year we~~ fielded Latham teams of such ferocious hopelessness--in tag football, a cursing match and

then a brawl with the team from the Episcopal seminary; wholesale evictions in the first basketball game--that we decided to work on styles of forfeit. ⁴ Sometimes one or another of us-- or better, the gaudiest stand-in we could recruit from the nearby delicatessen-cafe-hangout called The Hut--would go in street clothes to present himself single-handed to the other team. Other times nobody would go at all, but the intra-murals office would be phoned to insist that the other team had arrived at the wrong place or the wrong time, and to demand that our chance to meet them--and forfeit--be rescheduled. We became phantom competitors in all available leagues, avidly posted the standings which showed us automatically winless. By the last of spring quarter, our softball zeroes daisy-chaining off the end of earlier forfeits, the Latham intra-mural program had perfected itself out of existence.

Latham House, if any single sum can be put to it, was a scuffed, restive, Aleutian-atoll of a place to spend one's college years--and every whit of it suited me. Friends from then tell me now, and the evidence of habit still is with me, that in the Latham gallery of behavior I was something of a machine-like student. I was asked a dozen times in my first two days ^{at Latham} ~~on campus~~ whether I had just come out of military service, so much beyond an eighteen-year-old freshman did I look and behave. In the year I roomed with Zimmerman, stubby and even more baldish than I was beginning to be, the pair

of us stood out like a pair of solemn veteran sergeants among green recruits. However gleefully I could join in epidemics such as the obliteration of intra-murals, I was careful about what went on in my head on a regular basis. College--learning--was a job I recognized I could do well, and I did it: typing up my course notes and working on systems of underlining and outlining until I had private, hand-crafted texts all my own; bearing down hardest where it counted most--the journalism curriculum, and history courses; chanting Russian verb declensions to myself as Archie plunged the rack-loads of dishes through the machine to me; and running a second, random-as-ever education for myself in offhand books alongside the coursework.

Northwestern was tagged at the time with the reputation of being a "country-club university"--an epithet as exotic to me as profanity from Mars; Greek Row was ridiculous, but not mandatory--yet it also had redoubts of famous professionalism in its schools of music, speech, and journalism. In the school of journalism I tapped luck one more time, drawing as my advisor a new faculty member named Ben Baldwin. A cherub-faced man with a passion for work, he had among the batch of students assigned to him a handful of us from the West, and recognized at once our small-town capacity for chores and perseverance. Again, as under Frances Tidyman's gaudy wing, I was given encouragement and answered with effort.

One thing further I gained from Latham House and Northwestern--

a room of my own, the first of my life. Throughout Latham's welter of odd-angled walls and random hallways were a few leftover pouches of space which had been made into single rooms, and in my junior year I qualified for The Shoe, a tiny room nicknamed for its shoebox dimensions. There was barely space to edge into The Shoe between the cot crowded against one wall and the dresser against the other. The metal clothes closet for the room stood outside the door in the hallway,

like a fat man thwarted by a narrow gate. *My first act of occupancy* The Shoe congested

was to congest the Shoe further; further when I saw the chance to swap its spindly desk for a huge, handsomely-shelved one down the hall. With the biggest

accomplice I could recruit, I emptied The Shoe of all its

furniture, dismantled as much of the *pirated* desk as I could, wedged

the rest into the room and across the far wall, and reassembled

the great piece it to bulk there like an oak galleon in a bottle. Alone and

thoroughly outfitted, I levered my grades up more, multiplied

my reading *began to* across the shelves of my vast desk, Dinesen murmured

beside Faulkner, Turgenev *to* tipped hats with Wilder.

Dearest Ivan. Just some lines to tell you we are counting the days till you come home for summer. I am at the Higgins ranch outside Ringling with Dad now. Cooking for the crew. Dad says he can get you on the crew here for summer. That way we can be all together for a while again there is a place upstairs in the cookhouse here for you to sleep. The job will

be haying mostly they put up a whole lot of hay. . . Your
loveing grandma.

Behind the bale stack, the pair of us sat waiting for the morning to inch on. Jeff swore steadily, like a sewer gurgling after a downpour: sparrowheaded sonofabitch him anyhow. . . 'll show the bastard, he can keep his goddamn stack fences and do the sonsabitches hisself. . . Jeff was burly, bright-nosed with decades of boozing, tobacco-stained at the corners of his mouth from the splatters he exploded to punctuate the cusswords. His forehead sloped back under his greasy hat, and his mind sloped off into hatreds and furies I could ^{scarcely} ~~barely~~ imagine. In the bunkhouse after breakfast, he had crossed tempers with the rancher as the day's work was doled out. It had been only an instant, Jeff going hardmouthed as quickly as he had flared. Now, the two of us sent out together to fence haystacks, he had been in eruption all morning, in one spate sledgehammering posts into the ground as if he were a fence-building machine, in the next plopping behind the haystack to curse some more. I know he's the world's bastard to work with, Dad had said, but he's an old hand on this place and if you say anything against him, there'll be hard feelings for all three of us. Stand the scissorbill if you can, will ye? I thought back to my farming summers at Dupuyer and Valier, alone on a tractor with the north mountains to sight on over the silent rich

pattern of fields, and began to count the time--July suck-egg sonofabitch August never seen such a jangled-up spread half of September brain like a bedbug--until I would step aboard the train toward Northwestern again.

Back from whatever chore had taken me into Ringling, I turned the ignition key to kill the motor of the pickup and stared with dread at the cookhouse. Then I stepped down and went in to say what had to be told. Dad quizzed me with a quick look. It's Angus, I said. I heard it in town. His horse fell with him while he and the boys were working calves. They've got him at the hospital in White Sulphur. My father whitened and whispered: Just-like-Jim. But there was to be a grim difference: this second brother of his to die off the back of a horse lay unconscious for more than ^{two} ~~a~~ year^s before the last life went from him.

Each trip to and from Northwestern hinged into a mid-morning wait between trains in St. Paul. I made it a habit to leave Union ~~Depot~~ ^{Station} and walk the neighborhood, nosing into a used-book store, dawdling over coffee in one half-awake cafe or another, and going at last back toward the depot along a hill street overlooking the Mississippi River, which I liked for its great, fjord-like channel gouging through the city. [#]The coldest of these mornings, as I stood at the river overlook

X death
X certificate

X OK
map

a last minute, a noise scuffed close behind me. I turned quickly to find two tan-skinned men tottering in broken shoes and wavery caps and dirt-stiffened blue jeans.

Buddy, the bigger and less drunk one began to recite, you ever heard of Ira Hayes? Ira Hayes was Navajo like us. Come off the Gila River Res'vation. Wait, buddy. Listen. You know about Iwo Jima in that war? Sonuvabitch island there in that war? When they put that flag up there on that Iwo Jima, Ira Hayes was one of 'em. Know that, buddy? An' he come home, big hero. An' one morning they find him dead on the ground. Like that. Drowned in his own puke. Passed out, choked to death in his own puke, buddy. Muscatel got him. Helluva way for dying, buddy. The second Navajo wobbled, tried to firm himself somewhere between dignified listening and the threatening hunch of his mate. I used the interruption, put a silver dollar in the air before me as I had ^{one} another time. This time, it was shakily grabbed.

The pitcher's mound at Wrigley Field swelled from the infield grass like the back of a giant turtle swimming in a dark green sea--and atop it, I was throwing as teeterily as if the turtle had caught the hiccups. My stride awkward on the curved height, a pitch to Grant in the batter's box would fly high and away from him, then the next one explode off the dirt.

Schulte, behind his camera tripod, began to look dismayed. The May morning was his--his idea to meet a course assignment in film-making with a quick reel of baseball instruction, his notion that because Grant and I knew something about baseball we would be his cast, his family connection with the management of the Chicago Cubs which ushered the trio of us into the empty stadium--and his film whirring away in frames of me firing baseballs to sky and earth.

I drew a breath, looked up at the colossal shell of grandstand roof above us, its high straight lines fitted onto the sky above the green-and-buff geometry of the baseball field. I grinned into the giddy expanse of it all, and got down to business, lobbing the ball now as tamely as if playing catch with a toddler. Grant timed the spongy ^{throws} pitches cautiously and smashed ground hits which went whopping in huge easy bounces into the outfield. Encouraged, Schulte, filmed busily.

What else do we show? he asked at last. I've got to fill five minutes of reel. I trotted to first base, poised myself a short three steps off the bag, broke for second with my left leg coming across to put me in full stride, splayed into a ragged hook slide. Twice more as Schulte shot. Then Grant fielded balls I rolled to him at shortstop, a bear scooping into the caretended dirt and pawing the ball across to an invisible first baseman. Each baseball gave off, an instant after expectation, a hard whunk as it ended its catchless

throw against the grandstand, as if the geometric gravity which drew such heaves into a first baseman's glove had broken down. Grant kept on, his barrage of pellets thwacking against a cliff of wood. ¶ Then I went to the outfield and caught balls Grant lobbed high for me, the dot-like white satellite diving to me with surprising dazzle down the backdrop of thousands of vanished spectators. My throws, on a single bounce across home plate, skidded through to make the eerie delayed whunk, more metallic now, against the foul screen.

At last Schulte doubtfully said he supposed he had filmed enough. Now, my wage in the bargain we had set. I carried a bucket of balls to home plate. Swinging a bat as hard as I could, I found I could mortar a ball to where the center fielder might stand and catch it with a casual saluting flip of his glove. ¶ I walked from the plate, around the high bubble of pitcher's mound, to second base. Standing over the square wad of canvas, I tossed, swung hard, and now the balls flew up to arc out over the ivy-dressed outfield walls, dropping into the bleachers in wild clunking ricochets through the empty seats. I hit bucket after bucket until my hands began to wear raw.

Dearest folks. . . Professor Baldwin has offered me a summer job here at college. I would be teaching and counseling in an institute they run here for high school students interested in journalism. . . It would be for five weeks, and I can

earn more than I can at Higgins' all summer. But it would mean I won't be able to come home until middle of August . . .

Dear son. . . If you want the summer job back there you ought to take it. Your Grandma and I will miss you and wish we could all be together again this summer, but it don't always work out that way. We will be happy to see you when you come home later on. . . With love, Dad.

Early in my senior year, when I had begun to write fillers for a magazine in Milwaukee and when an article of mine was the only one by an undergraduate in the glossy new quarterly being published by the school of journalism, Holden, my closest friend in Latham, squinted toward me through his steady fog of cigarette smoke and said: Damn you, Doig, you're just gonna be bigger than any of us, aren't you? I thought that over, as I did everything, and faced my judgment on myself: No, Thomas, not necessarily so.

As if arguing against myself, in the spring of 1961 I finished up my intended four years at Northwestern by being awarded a scholarship for a year of graduate study. I bargained a military deferment out of my draft board, and set to work again at the school of journalism. A pair of messages marked my completion of that year. When the last pages of my thesis

were handed back from their final reading by one of my research advisors, a note was clipped atop: Around 1836 and 1837, people used to stand on the dock in New York and wait for the latest installment of the Pickwick Papers. With something of the same anticipation, I've waited for and read the chapters of your thesis. The other arrived from Grandma: Dearest Ivan. Well dear one I have sad news for you. Mrs Tidaman that you liked so much at Valier died a couple days ago. I'll send you the clipping out of the Gt Falls paper when I get my hands on it. Gertie says in her letter that Mrs Tidaman fell at school and broke her hip and died somehow of that. I'm sorry dear I know she was a wonderfull person to you. . .

XCK-
BTman
letter

At dawn, the pewter sky beginning to warm to blue above the Castles across the valley, Dad and I already were stepping from the Jeep at timberline on Grass Mountain. Grandma had climbed out of bed when we did, given us coffee and sweet rolls, made sandwiches out of her thick crisp-crustured bread, saw us out the door with: Don't bring home more grouse than all of Ringling can eat. Beside her on the porch Spot stood planted in astonishment and alarm that he wasn't being invited into the Jeep with us. Dad hesitated: No, fella. Not today.

September frost underfoot, a testing frost, the lightest dust of white on the broad bunchgrass crest of mountain. Dad handed me the single-shot .22, then the small box of bullets

to put in my jacket pocket. I shook out a cartridge, barely longer than my thumbnail, clicked it into the breech. Carrying the light rifle underhand on the side of my body away from Dad, I started along the mountain slope beside him.

He had a hunter's voice, which could soften just enough not to carry far and yet be heard clearly. My own nose dived in and out of mutter as I answered him. He showed me herding sites remembered from three decades before, game trails angling up and across the summit like age-lines on a vast forehead, homestead splotches on the saged skirts of the valley far below us. In trade, I told him everything I knew of my half-year ahead, basic training at the Air Force base in San Antonio, a ^{technical} training school probably elsewhere in Texas for the rest of those months. The first grouse caught us both in mid-step as it flailed like a hurled wad of gray leaves into the air in front of us.

That must've been one of yours, I said.

And who's carrying the gun along like a crowbar froze to his hand? As ready and free a laugh as I could ever remember from my father. Ye could at least have throwed it at him.

In minutes, I shot the next grouse before it could fly. I handed Dad the rifle: Here, see if you learned anything from that. I put the bird in the sack he held out to me, followed it seconds later with the one he shot from the top of a log fifty yards away. I like to give mine a bit of a

chance, ye see, instead of sneakin' up till I'm standin' on their tailfeathers.

The rifle traded back and forth, we each missed shots, made more. At mid-morning and four birds apiece, we knew the hunting was over, but kept walking the mountainside. Right about over there, up over that little park ye see, Dad pointed. A time, there was a whole bunch, ten or twelve of us, ridin' back to the Basin from a dance at Deep Creek one night. Even Mrs. Christison, she was up in years, she was along with us. We got caught in a blizzard up here and all got lost off the road, the whole bunch of us goin' in a circle for about two hours. Finally we decided the best thing to do was just to sit down, wait and see if it'd clear up. We got off our horses-- it wasn't cold; snowin' like sixty, but it was warm--and sat down on a bank there. After awhile it let up and the moon come out so we could look around, and the whole damn lot of us were sittin' right square on the road.

At early noon, we sat on a silvered log and ate our sandwiches dry.

You leave . . . when, day after tomorrow?

Yes.

Scared any of the plane ride?

Some. You know I'm like Grandma on that, leery about heights.

Unh-huh. His instant slant of grin. As the fellow says,

what if you get up in that thing and it comes uncranked up there?

Thanks a whole helluva lot for the idea.

I was up in one once, ye know. Nothin' to it.

Disbelief as if he'd said he'd once been to Afghanistan.
When the hell was that?

When I was a punk kid about your age, at a rodeo or a fair or some kind of doin's. A guy had one of them planes with wings top and bottom, and he'd take ye up for a little ride. Angus and I bet each other five dollars about goin' up, and we're both so damn Scotch we didn't want to lose that money. I went first, I was the oldest. That guy turned that plane every which way, I'm here to tell ye. 'Well, how was it?' Angus says. 'If ye see my stomach up there,' I says, 'bring it back down with ye.'

You're a world of encouragement. I pitched a stone at a snag below us on the slope.

What about after this Air Force business? Are ye gonna be able to look for a job out here?

I faced around to him slowly, as if the motion hurt.
Dad, I don't think so. The jobs for me just aren't here.
I think I'm pretty much gone from this country.

I figured ye were. My father's straight, clean-lined face broke open in a tearful gulp, the wrenched gasp I had seen all the years ago in the weeks after my mother's death.

I helplessly looked aside, swallowed, pulled at my lower lip with my teeth. I heard the breech of the .22 snick open, saw Dad palm the tiny cartridge out and finger it into the shell box. His face was steady and square again. Don't say anything to your Grandma yet. She'll miss ye enough these next months without knowin' beyond that.

Listen up, you rainbows. . . Still in civilian clothes after five days of basic training, I stood rigid with the others in the motley chow line, as if we were the arrest lineup in a precinct station. The first day's cropped haircut seemed to have put years on me for every hair it lopped off. I was being called Old Man in the barracks, as if I were an ancient Sioux chief. . . You will be marched to draw military issue at zero-eight-hundred hours in the morning. That's uniforms, garbageheads, and you smell like you need 'em. . . The San Antonio weather was blistering, end-of-September days blazing hotter than Montana's July. Sweat had soaked in white stains across my shoes. . . Did I tell anybody in this here line to be at ease? Hah? Answer up, you bald dipstick. . .

October's fourth week, 1962. On Monday evening, 7 o'clock San Antonio time, someone in the barracks produced a transistor radio; a dozen of us hunched in to listen to the presidential speech announcing a naval blockade of Cuba until the Russian

missiles were taken from the island. ⁴ The next morning, even some of the training sergeants looked scared. Others looked ecstatic. On the rifle range, bothered with having to use a peep sight instead of the open sight I had grown up with, I shot worse than some of the recruits who had never touched a trigger before. A sergeant dressed down several of us with the most miserable scores: The only way you yo-yos are gonna git yourselves a Cuban is by chunking the damn rifle at him.

⁴ This day and the next, the rumors ran up and down the prism of possibility and off the ends. Straight skinny on this: Cuba was going to be invaded. Troops on the far side of the base already were clambering into planes destined for Florida. Got it from the First Sarge: Evacuation was coming. We would be trucked--no, planed--no, marched ~~out~~ of the giant missile bullseye that was Lackland Air Force Base. In the midst of the flustered reports, the base went to "condition three," the alert just short of war. ⁹ Thursday, on the obstacle course, a sergeant with a seamed face used our rest break to fill in you people on this Cuba. What's happened now, see, is this United Nations general who's got a name about this long-- spreading his hands three feet apart to estimate the mysteries of U. Thant--is proposed a parlyuhment to consider the situation. Pause. Myself, I hope they consider in a quick hurry and go in and mow over them spics. ⁴ Friday, as Khrushchev and Kennedy

bargained everyone's fate, we were marched across the base for vaccinations. Showing off in front of a dozen other platoons, our drill sergeant gave us by the right flank, MARCH! and watched in horror as half of us ricocheted left. His bleated helpless fury was almost welcome; at least it seemed the safest behavior of the past five days. ⁹ We went into the weekend, and came out with the world undemolished. The powers-that-were had decided not to push their final buttons. For now.

After San Antonio, the training school in northern Texas was like a half-coma, full of skewed hours and uncertain seasons and dodgy behavior. A snowstorm lashed in from the south; after a lifetime of Montana's blizzards from west and north, I could not have been more surprised if the snow had flown up out of the ground or sideways out of trees. A barracks-mate from Houston came beside me as I looked out the window to the fat fresh snow: Thet Yankee rain is startin' to pile up, ain't it? An article adapted from my thesis was accepted by a scholarly quarterly; after lights-out one night, I corrected the proofs for it in the latrine. The Air Force had scanned my college degrees in journalism and slotted me to become a propellor repairman. We marched off to a hangar to class before dawn, stood blearily behind our desks for the first hour or so to stay awake. One lanky

seventeen-year-old could doze standing up. I'm real sorry,
sir, he offered with a yawn when caught for the third time
of the morning. You're sorry, all right, the instructor
said in wonder, you're about the sorriest sumbitch I ever did
see. Each afternoon, we were adrift on the base. I found
the base library, discovered that sergeants who would have
stormed IwoJima with a cheese parer would not come near the
place. In Grandma's Christmas package ~~came~~^{arrived} a calendar from
her son in Australia. I cut out the fine color photo of
a wombat, pasted it inside my locker door, and explained to
puzzled young enlistees from the South that the fuzzy creatures
roamed the Montana hills, just like you have possums. My
daddy caught and tamed this one. We named him Grommet.
Yup, Grommet the wombat. Day and night, B-52's made their
slow roar over us, seeming to hang in the air like orbiting
battleships. I wondered by what miracle they were made to
climb into flight; I had not yet found enough efficiency in
the military to launch a silk handkerchief in a high wind.
The months crept. By instinct, I hung at the edges of the
system, dodged duties when I could and doubled down to endurance
when I had to. I was not a good soldier, nor a poor one: I
was the usual fuel of history's armies, the time-serving
soldier.

Ringling dozed in its late-March bath of mud. Except that Mike Ryan's store stood hollow and socketed with broken windows, and that Dad had built a plank sidewalk from the doorway around to the woodhouse and outhouse, the town looked exactly as when Grandma and I had begun unstacking boxes there a dozen years before. I stood at the kitchen window, looking downslope to the two-toned depot--gray and a deeper gray--where I had stepped from the train an hour before. Spot nosed my ankle for the thirtieth time, plunged into comfortable collapse beneath the table. I said, too casually: I think I'm going to take that Decatur job I looked at on the way back from Texas.

Grandma: Ohhh? Her smallest siren of disapproval.

Now Dad: Ye think so, son? What does something like that pay? One hundred twleve dollars a week; more than half what he earned in a month at ranch work.

Grandma: What'd you be doing there, then? Writing editorials. What are they, like Rose Gordon writes in the paper when anybody dies? I tried to explain editorials. Too deep for me, boy.

Dad: That's a better wage than you can get anywhere around here, that's for damn sure.

Nothing said for a minute. Then Grandma: How long of vacations do you get, to come home?

Decatur was a city of 80,000 amid the dark wealth of soil which the glacial era had buttered across central Illinois. Fat fields of corn and soybeans surged from the earth and overspilled every horizon--relentlessly lush-green crops which seemed to me the agriculture of another planet--and Decatur had made itself the merchant city for the farming-sea which surrounded it. Large enough to have a beginning of urban manners and woes but insular enough to know it could never outcrowd bigger Springfield to its west or Champaign-Urbana to its east, the community was a good training stop for young climbers. The Caterpillar corporation seasoned executives at the tractor factory there before moving them on and up, fledgling store managers mastered inventories at the local Woolworth and Penney's as the step to grander merchandising, earnest not-quite-yet-middle-aged ministers polished their repertoires before being called east to higher pulpits. And the Lindsay-Schuab newspaper chain which had its headquarters in Decatur held a reputation for working its newcomers thoroughly but fairly, giving them a bit of leeway to show talent, then losing them to bigger publications.

Which was my quick career there exactly. Somewhere I had read of a newsman who liked to preen that he could write faster than anybody who was better and better than anybody who was faster, and that skimming waterbug pace was where I pointed myself in Decatur. Our editorial page staff of seven

had endless call for our work--Lindsay-Schaub operated newspapers not only in Decatur but in the university towns all across central and southern Illinois, and the management saw itself in a sober, enlightened-gentry stance of responsibility--and after a few weeks I found that I could write four editorials a day, deft and unoffending skitters across Algeria-the Pentagon-civil rights-and-whatnot other issues of 1963 and early 1964, and still have time to do page layout, Sunday feature pieces, and study Dave Felts for lessons in Downstate elegance.

Before coming over to Decatur and ending up as editor of the editorial page, Dave had been a newspaperman in Springfield when Vachel Lindsay yet was writing and performing his poems there, and he could be counted on for occasional ironic thumpy recitations from the old rhymester: I brag and chant of Bryan, Bryan, Bryan/Candidate for president who sketched a silver Zion . . . This and all else was said in apparent easy contentment, and out of the most dimming affliction a newspaperman could suffer: for years Dave had been fighting blindness, and with operation after operation pushed it back until he could work as zestfully as ever, bringing our sheafs of editorial copy up close to his dizzying glasses, bending interestedly close over his desk to nick out an occasional word with his editing pencil.

Not least because he had his own abundance, Dave liked style in a person, he kept on a shrine-shelf in his office

the delicate martini glass of his predecessor, an offhand editorial wizard named Sam Tucker who was remembered for heading off to the backshop at each deadline, a dab of copy in one hand and scissors in the other, and by the time he arrived there would have snipped guest editorials from other papers until his own page filled exactly. My ~~own~~ stock with Dave Felts shot up when he learned that I was carrying on a courtship in Chicago, ~~180~~ miles away: One more grandeur of the big town, is she?

OK -
allas
may

I was convinced so. She was Carol Muller, whom I had met when we both worked in teaching-and-counseling jobs during summer journalism sessions at Northwestern a few years before. A trim, steady-eyed brunette of definite opinions and clean-edged talents, Carol now had traded in an East Coast newspaper job for a magazine editorship in a Chicago suburb. We re-met just as I had begun job-shopping beyond Decatur. I already was finding that I lacked instinct for the deep waters of newspapering. Amid the nightmare which began loosing itself in a November noon--the words Kennedy and shot seeping up from the hubbub of the lunchplace, the scrambling return to the newspaper building and the wire-service flood unrolling out of Dallas-- I noticed that I was both exhilarated and sickened, neither of which seemed the most professional of responses. On a day-by-day basis, I savored more the Dave Felts announcement of a new pope--the face angled in my doorway in blinking search, habemus papem enunciated in somber Downstate flatness--

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than I did the weekend-wire-editor's shift which presented ~~Paul VI~~ ~~John XXIII~~ in yards of words. Assessing myself, when jobs came open to me in New York and Washington newsrooms, I mulled briefly and would not make the step. What I did instead was to begin writing to magazine editors, and almost at once hit on an opening at The Rotarian--out of all the world, in Evanston, a few blocks from where I had entered Northwestern six years before.

I put first among the sheaf of writing samples asked for by The Rotarian editor what I had slammed out on the day of Dinah Washington's death: The lady sang the blues. And lived them. . . That, I considered, would be something for a gentlemanly service-club magazine to start a decision on. Rapidly, I was flown in for an interview and hired. In mid-1964, a few days past my twenty-fifth birthday, I became an assistant editor of a magazine of 400,000 circulation.

One person alone was the greater audience than that. I spent hour upon hour with Carol, and saw her in my mind the rest of the time. Our backgrounds could not have been more different--she had grown up in a turreted New Jersey resort town which seemed to me as antique and daft as I imagined Lichtenstein must be--yet friends remarked how much we were like each other. Alike, it turned out, down to the deepest exactnesses--in having been wary of the commitments of mating,

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in surprising ourselves now with the quickness of emotion for each other, in deciding promptly to be married.

Two pairs of lives now, half a continent and a time-zone apart. Carol and I mail to Montana the bylined articles we turn out, Dad thrusts them onto all visitors and Grandma eventually jumbles them into one or another of her makeshift albums. While Carol and I leave our Evanston apartment each morning on her commute to the Together offices and mine to The Rotarian, Grandma is clearing away the dishes after the breakfast she has put on the long table at the Higgins ranch. As I prop my feet on the desk to read manuscripts, Dad will be starting work in the calving shed, muttering his he's-yours-ye-walleyed-old-sister formula to make the cows mother their purebred calves. When I break for lunch, walking to whatever greenery I can think of to eat my sandwiches amid, Dad kicks off his overshoes at the cookhouse door, takes the cup of coffee Grandma is handing him, delivers his latest curses of that-goddamn-geezer-of-a-Jeff. As Carol works the phone to arrange the story assignment waiting for her in San Francisco or Atlanta, Grandma is setting the table for the ranch crew's lunch. As I dictate late-afternoon letters to authors, Grandma may be in her mid-afternoon round to gather the eggs, scolding Spot for his interest in a corral post. When I leave my office at the stroke of five, she has begun to cook supper

for the ranch crew, the color of the sage hills has begun to deepen.

The four lives mix richly in Carol's first visit to Montana. The first night in the house in Ringling, Grandma departs at bedtime to spend the night at the Badgetts'; Dad takes her place on the living-room couch, Carol and I take his in the bed in the tiny bedroom. Ah, burrs my father's voice through the quiet to us, as the fellow says, this is the place to be when night comes.

We wake in the morning to a bell jangling close outside the window. Carol starts: What's that? I ponder for her benefit. Mmm, could be sheep, or a goat. Or somebody's milk cow. Or a horse. Probably not a chicken, it'd have trouble dragging the bell around. She looks out the window: All right, it's a horse. She gives me a grin of love and disbelief. It widens as the front door is clattered open, Spot explodes in and instantly has his head onto the bed-edge ^{rapturously} lolling up at us, Grandma cheerily is announcing: Hi, you stay-a-beds in there getting up today?

And in the next year, the set of decisions which lifted Carol and me westward: that we had had enough of the mountainless Midwest, and of midway-up-the-masthead jobs we could do with

automatic skills. I had come to feel that if I was going to go through life as bookish as I was, I might as well bend with the inclination and become a professor. No sooner had I said so than Carol said: Let's go do it. ⁴ The University of Washington accepted me into graduate study. In the late summer of 1966, Carol and I arrived in Seattle, set out at once to walk its hills and shores and to explore into the mountain ranges scarped along the entire horizons east and west of the city. We were on new ground of the continent, and stretched gratefully to it. And then, as quick as this, we learned that now we were on another ground in life as well: my father had begun to die. ✓

A story more out of memory, heard from my father a hundred times, and never enough:

It was along about 1935. Your mother and I were herdin' sheep just then at the old D. L. place. Jobs was scarce in those days. You had to take anything you could get. Well, a damned bear got to comin' in to the ranch there, killin' sheep. Boy, he'd kill 'em right and left. He'd always wait till after the moon went down, till it got good and dark. All the neighbors, there'd be some of 'em there pretty near every night with me, to try get that bear, but we never could.

Your Uncle Paul, he came down there. The two of us were gonna spend the night in an old log barn there. The loft end of it was open, and we were gonna get old mister bear for sure. This bear now, he'd just kill his sheep and leave 'em lay, that's the way a bear does. They don't like fresh meat, they like it after it gets spoiled. So we got one of the first sheep he'd killed, up on the hill, and drug it down there, to bait him down there under that loft, ye see. We both swore we never slept a wink, but that night that bear ate the whole sheep within thirty feet of us, and we never knew it.

We went on not havin' any luck that way. Generally all we'd see would be the bear's eyes as he'd take off out of there in the dark. This one evening, Berneta--your mother, I

mean--and me and the neighbor, Mrs. Christison, were sittin' there in the front room of the house. It had big windows, and the house sat up on a knoll, we could see down to where the sheep were bedded in just below. We didn't corral 'em, we didn't dare, that bear'd get into 'em and pile 'em up and kill half of 'em at once. So I heard the sheep bells aringin' and I looked out the window, and here comes the whole band, right towards the house. That bear was after 'em.

I grabbed the rifle--didn't have a very good rifle, either, just an old broken-down one I had loaded and sittin' there--and went back through the dining room, through the kitchen, and sneaked out the back door. I got out behind the bunkhouse. Then there's a creek there with heavy willows, I was gonna get on the edge of them and sneak around behind the bear. I thought I'd sure fix that boy this time.

I got about halfway to the brush and I looked up and here he had a sheep cut out right against the house wall. There's a pole fence come up and nailed right onto the corner of the house, and he was trying to catch this sheep in there. The radio was agoin', and your mother and Mrs. Christison were standin' there in the window just like that, watchin'.

I cut down on him with that old rifle, and he went WOOF! I don't know if I hit him or not, but I changed his mind anyhow.

Well, he either had to come toward me or go right back through the middle of the sheep, so here he comes toward me. He got, oh, about sixty feet from me, and he was gonna head around the edge of the sheep then. I cut down on him again, and I know I hit him that time.

He let another WOOF! out of him, and he was mad now.

Here he comes. He had his old head turned sidewise. I could have counted his teeth there in the moonlight.

I never give it a thought to run. Anyhow, he got up, oh, pretty close, I'd say about here to that window, six feet or so. I was tryin' to shoot him between the eyes. He had his head turned a little bit, and I got him right--you know the way a bear's head is, his ears are up towards the top of his head--I got him right the side of the ear there. The bullet went down through his neck and all the way into his lungs.

That took the WOOF! out of him. Sat him back on his haunches, and he made a pass at me, and I ducked him as he come around or he'd of ripped me in four pieces. Just as he went by I jammed the gun against his ribs, right behind his shoulder there, and cut loose on him again. WOOF! he says again, and away he went.

~~That took the fight out of him.~~ He had to go about thirty feet there till he hit a brand-new four-wire fence

with cedar posts. He tore out about a hundred yards of that fence when he hit it.

He went across the creek into the brush, and boy, he was cuttin' up in there, groanin' and growlin' and tearin' up the brush. I looked up and here's Mrs. Christison and your mother, standing right on the bank above me. They'd been there all the time while I was shootin' at him. And one of 'em had a lantern. I don't know what they were gonna do with that lantern.

Mrs. Christison had this other old gun that was in the house. She says, You got any shells left?

I says, Yeah, I got some in my pocket--that'd been the last shell I had in the gun when I put it again him there.

Well, she says, Mrs. Christison says, let's go in and get him.

You can go in and get him, I says, I've had enough of him.

So we waited a little bit. It was all quieted down in the brush there, and I knew he's either dead or gone. So we went down the creek a little ways, there's a bridge there, and come up where the brush wasn't so thick.

He was layin' there in a heap of brush, dead.

I didn't get scared during it; never gave a thought to run when that bear was comin' at me. But I shook all night afterwards, after it was all over.

A hundred times told, and always that last lilt of wonder in his voice that he could have been both hunter and hunted.

ENDINGS

Split the tongue of the silence that beats in you when you first know that a parent is dying, and it will begin to recite everything unsaid across a lifetime.

Unsaid: that even in our most desperate time, when you were plunging into that wrongheaded marriage with Ruth and poisoning us away from the one you have come to call Lady, you somehow kept to the one great rightness as well-- the constant clasp of keeping me at your side, whatever the place or the hour or the weather or the mood or task or venture. So swiftly did you have me grown beyond my years that neither of us entirely understood the happening of it, but knew it to be rare, a triumph and terribly needed ...that it was you, in your burring troubador's way of passing to me all you knew of the valley and the Basin, who enchanted into me such a love of language and story that it has become my lifework...that I know, if have never

said, that as I stepped off from you to books and schools,
you somehow saw yourself riding free from the Basin home-
stead and so had not a word for me but in praise, encourage-
ment, proudness...that I know, and again could not speak it,
how drastically you turned your own life for me, choking
down pride as never before to speak the truce with Lady...
know too that when you risked that truce time upon time, it
was because you needed risk, needed somehow to sizzle
ordinariness by dropping danger into it now and again...know,
and could say least of all, the final fact of triumph that
you and Lady had made your way to a cherishing of each other
which went beyond family lineament.

Then the first and only words of this which would say themselves as they did now in my own voice: Dad, we've got to find the doctoring for you.

Late or soon, the siege of death-against-life must clamp itself around every family, and never the same for any two. I see now that ours had begun its queer quiet trenching some time before it could be recognized for all it was. There is this tremor, from the Christmas week of 1963, when Dad and Grandma came to spend the holiday with me in Decatur. Before their train trip back to Montana, I drove them north to Chicago for a weekend, at last to show them the Northwestern scenes--Latham House, the school of journalism, the cathedral-towered library, Lake Michigan

lapping beside it all like an unexpected ocean--which had filled five years of letters to them. ¶ Both of them were untiring sightseers, and the morning's saunter of the campus pleased us all, brought us proudly together in the accomplishment of having laddered me to such a place. We went next to our hotel in downtown Chicago, and in the snapping cold of the sunlit afternoon, a moment when I thought the city looked its ponderous best, I suggested we walk the surrounding blocks which offered the gaudy store windows of Michigan Avenue, the exotic bulk of ~~the~~ Art Institute, the skyline above the street canyons.

Grandma eyed everything with her mixture of suspicion and sharp interest, asking me explanations to why the sidewalks were so wide and the people so fast-paced. But Dad: I remember looking across at him in surprise, as if finding a stranger with us, when he suddenly said he had had enough, he felt short of breath. ¶ On the way back to the hotel he had to stand and breathe deep time after time, the three of us a knot of concern in the grain of sidewalk traffic.

Once he said, worry thick in his voice: How-long-is-this-damned-block? ¶ But inside the warmth of the hotel, as I was set to call for a doctor, Dad's chest eased at once, he became himself and made a joke about Chicago being too cold for a sane man to walk around in anyway. And like him, not knowing what more to find in it--often enough through his

life he had felt mild damp-weather discomforts in his lungs from the breakage of those horseback accidents and from his decades of heavy smoking--I wrote off the moment to the stabbing chill of the winter lakefront.

Then late in the next spring, weeks before I was to step into the editing job at The Rotarian, a bulletin from Grandma: Dearest Ivan. Well dear one I have to write you that Dad isn't none too good. He is in the hospital in Gt. Falls they told him he has to quit smoking or else. I am here with him but he's so awful weak and coughing so...

Phone calls told me that he was not in danger at the moment. The hospitalization indeed was to begin easing him away from cigarettes and out of the coughing spells that were becoming chronic. When I hurried to Montana between the end of my old job and the beginning of the new, he told me the rest himself. Once out of the hospital and at home in Ringling, he had laid one fresh pack of cigarettes on the end table beside his easy chair. When he could no longer stand it, he smoked a cigarette. Some days only one, other days two, but never more than two. When the pack had emptied itself, he took that as the moment when he had finished with cigarettes for all time. Hardest damn thing I ever did, ye know that? But I did 'er.

Dad's nerves jumped worse than ever now, which was saying much, and he looked like a thinner replica of himself.

but his appetite was gaining and he felt he soon could be doing some part-time work. Well, don't rush things, I said, uneasy with myself for feeling there was more that ought to be said. Yet the doctors were finding nothing alarming, Dad seemed merely--if that word was right for any trouble beneath the breastbone--a man who had got in the habit of oversmoking and needed to be weaned from its eventual dangers.

This quick braid of times together, then, before it came clear that my father was in serious illness. I finger apart their pattern here because these are the moment-strands each of us will think of afterward and wonder, Did I miss there some hint, some flicker of doubt or pain or incredulity, which told what was to come? And the greater wondering beyond that: If not, how can that skein of no apparent peril and the skein which followed it be portions of the same life?

For now calamity began to make itself known as rapidly as if it had been invented entirely for Dad: a man who lived on his feet, he was finding himself shorter and shorter of breath after each briefest stint of walking.

At first the doctors he saw suggested that he might have a kind of asthma. There was all the grief on earth in that verdict, with its convulsed echoes of my mother's agony. Yet Dad showed none of the wheezing attacks which so devastated her--his lung difficulty nagged less violently but more steadily--and the diagnosis shifted. It was

sometime late in 1966, the year Carol and I had arced our lives to the Pacific Northwest, that a word neither he nor I had heard before was uttered to my father: emphysema.

In my mechanical way I read all I could find about the affliction, and each word more brought its own gloom. Emphysema, it emerged, could become a torture of the body beyond even my mother's suffering or the holocaust of cancer itself. As the honeycomb of air sacs in the lungs was destroyed by it, breathing would become forever more labored, a constant struggle against a sensation of suffocating. The act of breath would deliver less and less oxygen to the bloodstream, overload the heart into harsher and harsher pumping. Until the recent past, emphysema usually had been confused with asthma or bronchitis, and it had the worst of those ailments--an increasing wheeze, congestion--as well as its own cycle of deterioration in the deeps of heart and lung.

Somehow through the null medical words--generalized overdistension, difficulty of exhalation, excess mucus--I came to picture the disaster happening in my father's lungs as a pattern like the splotched burning of a sagebrush fire. Perhaps it was the years of blue haze drifting up from his cigarettes that made me think so of smolder and slow flame-lick, for whatever reason, the image came to me of the black turf such a fire spreads in its steady searing

fan across the land, and the thought too that there would be no grass-bright greening in this fire's wake as time passed. Only char and more char.

And the role those words and that image spoke for me: For the dozen years since I had faced away from a storm-blasted band of sheep on the Blackfeet Reservation, this father of mine and this grandmother of mine unveeringly had shown me that they assumed I knew ^{for myself} what I was doing in life-- which was a tremendous assumption. Then too, by the books and schooling I piled up, I was granted to be the authority on the world outside Montana. If I happened to be on the scene when Grandma was writing one of her letters to her son in Australia, she still would ask me, as she had when I was eleven, how to spell some Down Under mystery such as kangaroo; if I had told her g-y-n-g-u-r-u, she would have thought it odd of the Aussies but certified correct because I had said it. When I wrote an article about rodeo and put in a few lines about Dad's own bronc-stomping days, he passed the marvel around to friends until the magazine wore out: That kid of mine can write, if I do say so myself, unarguably saying so. Beyond that, there was my becalmed temperament, amid the pair of theirs which swayed and whanged.

9 It all said that now I must truly become the authority in the family, this time on a matter beyond all of us. Here was the turn of time, sooner by a decade than I ever could

have imagined, when I must become father to my own father, and I feared the matter, and wrestled it, and began to do it.

I sent along to Montana the levellest words I could draw from what the medical journals and texts said of emphysema, and the two conclusions which I said demanded doing: winnow until we had the most expert diagnosis and advice we could find about this mystery licking its way inside Dad, and move him from the blizzardy isolation of Ringling nearer to medical care. ¶ The second of these, Dad himself took on as if snapped from a ~~trance~~^{spell}. Almost overnight he found and bought a small frame house in White Sulphur. Ungrand as it was, and carrying a sheaf of deeds which showed that it long had been a quick way-station for a procession of souls who couldn't afford better at the moment, the house nonetheless improved on the Ringling shanty in size and warmth and all else. ¶ Grandma was uneasy about the move: Don't we get by good enough as we are? Gee gosh, at our age, buyin' another house and all... I was the one to woo her from that. Carol said once: If you told her you were going to run an opium den, she would come around onto the side of opium dens. As promptly as I had Grandma persuaded out of Ringling, she flung into tidying and flower-bedding the new site, a month after she and Dad moved in, it looked as if the pair of them had lived there from time out of mind.

Yet one of them was not going to live any time at all unless care for emphysema could be found, and the next piece

of persuasion was to keep Dad from throwing himself under surgical knives. An operation he had heard of was claimed to lift the sensation of heavy breathing; already the pushing effort needed to make his lungs work was dismaying him. I'm not sure I've got anything to lose by trying that out, Ivan. By phone and letter, I found doctor after doctor against the surgery. Guardedly, carefully, I brought Dad around from the idea of the operation and to agreeing that he would come to Seattle to be examined at a highly-reputed clinic as quickly as I could arrange it. In his mind, I believe, glinted the hope that he could somehow be rescued into wholeness again as he had been on the operating table at the Mayo Clinic sixteen years before. In mine was simply the vague medical prayer that the emphysema could be slowed, eased; I desperately wanted him not to be savaged into the worst of what the disease could inflict.

He was scheduled for several days of tests at the clinic. The first morning, I noticed Grandma putting on her best shoes and said to her without thinking: I can stay with him down there, it'll be a long day. The iron tone I had heard so many times: I might just as well be there as setting around here like a bump on a log.

Each day and all day, the pair of us lobby-sat. I thumbed magazines, and tried without showing it to watch her beside me. She kept her eyes on the waiting patients, studying the ones who could hardly puff their way across

the room to the reception desk, who sat hunched with their chests swelling in and out for each windy breath, who toddled into the waiting elevator with a nurse balancing them at an elbow. ¶ When Dad appeared, there was the relief, a quick lifting in the both of us, of seeing that he was so much sturdier than the others, his ranchman's stride almost too bold among the gaspy shuffles. And again we would set off with him, up or down the identical floors of the clinic to the next probing test. ¶ Often he would come back to the reception area in surprise: That wasn't so bad, they just had me lay down under some machine. Could of had a nap except it was so damn cold. But other times, he arrived pale and grim and taut. They gave me one of those damn barium deals, and I heaved it right back up. Grandma would give her resentful Hmpf! against the clinic's dosing such torment into anyone, and I would try to talk him calm, keep him seated with us until the whiteness went from that handsome uneasy face. Then the three of us would move through the clinic once more, like a search party off to the next lair of apparatus for Dad to patrol into for us.

Eventually the tests were finished and adjudged. Dad and I waited in the doctor's office; this day Grandma had not wanted to come, had said I should be alone with him. The slim room was as neutral and toneless as if we were the

first visitors ever to have been sent into it, like newcomers into a vacuum chamber. But outside the one thin window and below the clinic's roothold on its hill, the towers of the city marched to the dockside, and then the blue of Puget Sound pooled, rimming far off at a shore of timber and glacier-whetted peaks. My father, my one closest pulse back into time, sat looking at the towers and the blue and the stabbing mountains. Finally he said, in the worrying burr I had heard fret over vanished sheep and surprise blizzards and much else: I'm just afraid of what he's gonna say, Skavinsky.

But the doctor spoke some surprise, more texture of hope in his words at least than I had been able to allow myself. Of course--the harshest first--the diagnosis was confirmed as emphysema. Yes, Dad's life would be more labored. Several times a day he would have to breathe deep into his lungs a medicine misted out of a machine. He would have to walk only in short stints, learn to pace himself. ¶ The doctor paused, went on if possible, Dad should move to a lower altitude, ^{the drier the climate, the better} sea-level would be best, and ~~as dry as possible~~. Dad: No, it isn't possible. I'm too far along in life for that. ¶ The doctor nodded as if he had known what that answer would be, went on with his medical judgments. Dad's heart as yet showed little damage, not yet the expected overwork caused by emphysematous lungs; it pounded in him as strongly as that of a man half

his age. His lung capacity still was considerable. His general health was remarkable for a person who had gone through his batterings.

Grandma demanded the news as quickly as we arrived home. I watched Dad to see how he would deliver it, how drastically the prospect of a hobbled life was going to veer him. He gave his cocked grin. This doctor now, I don't know about him. If I was in as good a shape as he says I am, I wouldn't be sick atall.

But when Dad and Grandma returned to Montana, his lungs soon enough gave trouble. He did learn to struggle more successfully with the emphysema, walk some uncertain line between too much activity and incapacity. But emphysema now brought an ally, bronchial infection which hit Dad again and again in the chill of the valley's autumn and winter. Now there were hospital stays for him, time upon time the 45-mile trip out of the valley and across the Big Belts to the hospital in Townsend.

A pattern began, like codes spoken by a people in war. Dad would suffer a new infection in his lungs. By telephone from Seattle, I would try to gauge how severe it was. If Grandma guardedly said, He's just none too good, in all likelihood he was ill enough to be hospitalized again. I would say You'd better let me talk to him, now hating the long moments it took for him to creep to the phone. Hullo, son, how are you? How am I. Leave that unanswerable, begin

my questions, calming, gentling. God, Ivan, I don't know what I better do. Now persuade him around to going to the hospital, tell him I will get free for a week to help out when he comes home. ¶ At last from him, All right, son, whatever you say. Whatever I say. I could say all in the world except the magic we needed: that if he did this certain thing, his lungs would heal, he would not gasp for every atom of air. He would not die this most grudging of deaths.

Yet it was not a time of steady gloom. I think that is the true grief of it--that the four of us could glimpse the richness of life available if the haunting gape in Dad's lungs did not return again and again. The one pastime-without-exertion left to Dad was trout fishing, and the valley, in its style of either withholding ruthlessly or proffering something ^{wondrous} magic, provided him with a friend who would wet lines with him from daybreak to midnight if he wanted. ¶ A railroad worker retired from tending the tracks which coiled between Ringling and Sixteen, Leo was a thick slab of a man whom it was uproarious to think of in the nickname of that job, a gandy dancer. Something--rumor said it had been a gassing on a World War One battlefield, although I counted years and couldn't find him old enough--had erased every hair on his head, including eyebrows. Out of that blank ball of head came a high crackling voice and an Oklahoma accent; when he and Dad were out on a creek

or lake, the vicinity jangled with Leo's sentences, as if broadcasts were shrilling in from some rim of space.

A For his part, Dad accepted with wryness his reliance on Leo--I'm wind-broke as an old nag, but that Oklahoman gets me to wherever there's a fish, don't think he doesn't.

Once Carol and I went with the pair of them to a favored lake, and as we hiked the hilltops circling their fishing water, Leo's voice racketed along with us as if he were at our elbows instead of half a mile below, Dad's murmur came in like a far purl of stream. I hold that exact scene like a photo, Dad and his bald bear of a friend in the yellow rubber raft at the lake's center, a cone of color in the dusky retina of water, while Carol and I listen to the steady crackle of fishing talk and grin down over the tassel-tops of sage.

In that first year or two of affliction, there were times even apart from his fishing outings with Leo when Dad could find periods of almost-unforced breathing. Seated in his big living-room chair in the White Sulphur house, his flat back and level shoulders square against the fabric, he could recline and talk with only a hinting rise-and-fall of his chest, as if he had just rapidly walked a block or so. A I'll tell ye a time, he might begin then if the nudge of encouragement came from me, or more likely from Carol's presence, for he found this new

daughter-in-law a dazzling bonus to the family. I was ridin'
out here for the Dogie, and I happened to look up into a
little park there in the Castles and saw a bunch of elk
going across. I counted five of them. As the Dutch fellow
says, as many as the thumbs on the end of mine hand. So
I thought, well, this ridin' can go to hell for a little
while, I'll just see about those elk. Dad no longer could
work at all, except to do the smallest repairs around the
house, but the loss of that fifty-year habit of effort
seemed to dismay him less than I had thought it would. He
spent time reading, watching Grandma as she fussed at
flowerbeds until she had a moat of color around almost all
the house, somehow making himself fit so mild a routine of
life. But in other ways, surprising disquiets might break
out of him now. Never a very political man and hardly a
sympathizer with the strange long-haired counterculture
which had begun to prance before him on the living-room
television set, Dad was furious and bitter about the
clubbings at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in
Chicago: Godamighty, I thought this was a country where
the police weren't supposed to beat up on people. The
war in Vietnam worked confusions on him. he wanted not to
see his country lose a war, and yet What the hell is it
we want over there anyway? It was as if with sickness
fastened into his own chest, he saw any sickness of the
nation all the more sharply.

Time was carving fast at one in that Montana household, and hardly at all on the other. In her oaken way, Grandma went on now as if age didn't apply to her. At the start of the summer of 1968, when Carol and I had come to White Sulphur for Grandma's 75th birthday, Dad declared: If I ever reach 75, she'll still be up and pushing me around in a wheelchair. ¶ Even now, she was bolstering his life in dozens of ways, tending, nursing, scolding, puzzled by whatever had taloned into Dad's lungs but automatically ready to do all that his situation demanded. And almost as if she had the impulse to push back against the grayness settling over Dad's life, she now began to turn out vivid quiltwork. ¶ Through her years of crocheting, Dad and I ~~had~~ ^{had} loyally made encouraging and admiring noises, and I often marveled that she could follow the tiniest intricacies of pattern. But I had never cared much for the frilly doilies and lacy tablecloths that flew from her needle, regarding them as something like her everlasting games of solitaire, played in thread. But the quilting flamed away any opinions of that sort. What Grandma turned out now, in the living-room as Dad watched from his haven of chair, danced with brilliant colors--snipped-and-sewn diamonds of ragwork marching and playing and jostling like a meld of rainbows, or some resplendent field of tiny flags from all the universe. To come out of our ungauzy family, this was an absolute

eruption of bright art, and I blinked in wonder at this gray-haired woman I thought I knew so entirely. For her part, Grandma simply produced each quilt, demanded Now then, isn't that pretty? and gave it to Carol and me or someone in her sons' families. When we all had quilts galore, she began selling them, and there are valley households now with ~~six or eight~~ ^{half a dozen} blazing in their rooms.

And across seven hundred miles, in Seattle Carol and I settled to our own changed life. Carol rapidly had maneuvered from one job to the next, and always up; within a year after our arrival, she had a professorship, teaching journalism at a community college. I was making my expedition through three solid years of reading and seminar work to the professorship of my own--one slog-step to the next, the only way I have ever known to get a thing done.

Along with that trudged the decisions needed for Dad. The dying of a parent is a time without answers, only anguished guesses, and I wished that I were an older and wiser guesser, able to come onto some angle of insight which would declare: Here, this is to be done. I wished a thousand useless longings, and amid them made whatever small tactics I could reason out. The main guidance I set in myself was that Dad should not be written off, not be allowed to write himself off, as an invalid. It may even be that in following this notion during his first few years of emphysema, not enough

allowances were made for his illness. But he was surrounded in the family by three of the world's dogged souls, and he himself had persevered through past health woes. [¶] Deeper than that lay the belief, also endlessly mulled in me, that it would be preferable for him to pace out an active but shorter life rather than an inert lingering. We could not talk about this in so many words -- a failing in our family, perhaps, yet none of us ever had seen much reason to say aloud what made itself plainly known -- but my father had ^{proclaimed} ~~said~~ as much with his ^{earlier} ~~life~~.

Occasionally my estimates of how much Dad could be encouraged to do would overrun his capacities. During one of their visits to Seattle, Dad and Grandma were taken by us across Puget Sound on a fine afternoon to a play given in an outdoor theater. I had known that the theater seats were spaced down a hillside, what I did not know was that there was a descent of ^{a few} ~~several~~ hundred yards before the topmost of the seating. [¶] Grandma was ^{perturbed} ~~alarmed~~, and fretful during the play. I had said, We'll get him out of here somehow, don't worry about it. Although Dad had continually said he was sure he could make the slope by taking it slow, he must have been edgy about it as well. Starting up, he at once went breathless. [¶] Carol and I looked at one another: he was going to have to be carried out. I went to the stage, borrowed a straight-backed

chair from the set. Seating him in it, Carol and I lifted the chair between us and started up the trail. ~~A~~ It made an awkward and severe load, which we denied over and over, and in our gritting paired exertion we took him out of there like a potentate. At the top, he could walk perfectly well on level ground. In double relief, I panted: Told you we'd get you out somehow. And the episode did prove that, if shakily.

~~And~~ one thing more soon was proved: that when it was needed, we could draw together the strongest of family thews, live as a single household. The main decision, as so many others by then, was mine, and I came to it reluctantly, believing so entirely in the independence of lives. But there was the greater belief that my father must be helped in whatever ^{way} possible to live, and so in the autumn of 1968 I arranged that Dad and Grandma would come to Seattle to stay with Carol and me until the following spring.

Neither of them wanted the move. It would uproot them from everything familiar. Yet they saw that it was as I said: Dad could not undergo another mauling winter of chest infection. ^{Seattle's} ~~The~~ mild coastal climate was the ^{needed} ~~only~~ measure against that. Reluctantly but on my word, they came.

When the pair of them had unpacked, I suddenly asked: What did you do with Spot? Leave him with somebody?

Grandma answered slowly. No. There was nobody right to

take care of him and we knew we couldn't bring him with,
so I...we had him done away with. The day before they
 left, she had asked Dad, Spot's lifetime foe and idol, to
 take the dog to the veterinarian. I'd rather have gone
through a beating, my father said now in my living-room,
 but he had done the task, petted the ^{old} bold head as the
 needle's sleep crept through the dog, had him buried care-
 fully on a ridge above the valley. ¶ I turned and walked
 to the bathroom, locked the door, turned a faucet full on,
 and wept. For a jaunty white-and-brown dog, for my beset
 family which could not be spared even this loss--for being
 able to meet grief only in my own company this way.

I think now that Dad and Grandma settled into our
 expanded household with less tension than I did. Not that
 there wasn't much for them to wonder at in the unpredictable
 new locale. Day and night, ambulances would howl along a
 street below us on their way to the hospital which treated
 burn cases. Carol and I had stopped hearing the banshee
 sound of them after our first few weeks in the house.
 Grandma heard every one, hmpfing each time to think of yet
 another disaster in this severe city-world. ¶ Nor did she
 ever accustom herself to the telephone's blat from the
 kitchen, each time it jangled, she started in surprise, which
 in turn twitched Dad's nerves. From him: What are ye
jumping about? From her: Gee gosh, I can't help it, and

what're you jumping about yourself? ¶ The telephone skirmish was daily, sometimes almost hourly, but betweentimes the pair of them passed the day more smoothly than could have been foreseen. Much of the morning they sat at the living-room table, Grandma playing her offhand solitaire, Dad pointing wordlessly whenever she overlooked a card to play, the both of them glancing every few moments out of the window to the city and its unending tributaries of traffic. A crew came to work on the railroad tracks nearby, and Dad studied their labors by the hour. He noticed that the heftiest of the workers arrived and went with great irregularity, and began an ironic game of foremanning him from the living-room. I would arrive home from the university for lunch and be told: My man was ten minutes late again this morning. I'm gonna have to jack him up about this bein' late all the time and all the time. The next noon, He's gettin' better, my man is. Only about five minutes late this morning. I'll get a full day of work out of him yet one of these times.

Dad had a grimmer game for himself each late afternoon. The doctor had ordered him to walk as far as he could every day. At first, he would come back from fifty yards down the street, desperate, out of breath: Godamighty, I can't walk any more than a baby. But the next day, he would try again. Grandma seldom went with him on these efforts, did