The great river of my childhood flowed in the sky.
Not that other threads of current never took their way past my eyes. The valley's own dab of stream forever nosed and dithered along the flanks of the mountains, like a puppy shadowing its mother. And beyond the Big Belts and across a second valley from ours came coiling the storied Missouri, but so new and narrow from its headwaters that it too lacked the proportion to touch and turn a life. But overhead: there, mountain rim to mountain rim and stopless as the day-night blink of the earth's turn, ran the course of might beyond any other I wanted to imagine—the tidal force of weather shoaling in across the ranches of blue-black peaks, in blizzard and thundersquall and chinook and trembling heat.

The skewed rhythm of the year whirled down on the valley this way, I remember as if watching coastal waves comb in before me. Winter, long white winter. Then a pale quick sprig of spring. Then uneven too-hot-too-damp-too-dry summer. Next an overnight autumn, and suddenly the breadth of winter once more. And remember, too—such is the eddying but detailed power of memory—precisely the crinkled dance of air as July's sun snaked moisture up from green windrows of hay. And the dour slapping push of a gray afternoon's wind, which I dread to this day. And, more indelible even than the family storm breaking under our roof at the same time, the scenes out of the relentless ninth winter of my life, with its shadowless
The outlined islands held their dimension longer at dusk now.

Town streets glowing in the late twilight last and of the twilight.

It occasioned help from later seeming now one pacing me. Some knee

In the darkness, story telling, his pleasure at an image. Then part

mourned back the shadow a few feet for a moment after and passed into

the future. Once we went over a mound of the flat lawn

of bluffs looking at the remnants yet fitted for support. Once

we drove scrappily over the top of a grassy hill and knolls of it

where I saw my legs up to the rives, to the plains below, the creek, the

sounding between cliffs of worn fractures near the bluffs. Near possibly

green, with our snailish lingering out over the calm, the meandering

of the low country and near the plains and pitch, and pitch from the

mutter gates in the twilight. I had started to some extent,

the aware of the basin containing the hundreds gone.

The cove, I expected all visits come on me with a numera

under the.sea, rather as that roasting into the meat and browning the soul

with a current, gone on a yard, with the Grandfathers' all.

Back to phone later. Here on sun, feeling a growth

pay compensation. The twenty-fifth mile the cold, we breaking gone.
Dad drove with big turns of the steering wheel, keeping the front wheels grooved in the ruts while the rear end of the pickup jittered back and forth spinning snow out behind us. Sometimes the pickup would come to a halt. We would climb out and shovel away the snow in heavy chunks like pieces of an igloo. Then Dad would back the pickup a few feet for a running start and bash into the ruts again. Once we went over a snowdrift on the twin rows of planks another of the ranchers had laid for support. Once we drove entirely over the top of a drift without planks at all. Where the road led up to the little ridge above Badger Creek, we angled between cliffs of snow higher than the pickup. Near Battle Creek, with our headlights fingering out into the dark, Dad swerved off the road entirely and sent the pickup butting through the smaller drifts in a hayfield. It had started to snow heavily, the wind out of the Basin curling the flurries down to soft into the ruts. I watched the last miles come up on the tiny numbers under the speedometer as Dad wrestled the wheel and began his soft Scots cussing: Snow on a man, will ye? Dammit all to hell anyway, git back in those ruts. Damn the weather. Hold on, son, there's a ditch here somewhere... The twenty-fifth mile, the last, we bucked down
FIREWORKER

by Ivan Doig

Bending heat
pushes at my yearling stare.
The fireworker nods,
tongs the metal
to the glow's heart
and I hold slow
the bellows handle.

Outside, rain strews
quick lakes.
No haying today
nor mending fence
nor riding the sorrel mare.
So we come,
fireworker and boy,
to our private sun.

The forge edges us
in hotter light.
My hands tense the bellows
to a softening breath.
The fireworker flexes sinew
to mend
a tractor's metal bone.

Now fire flakes
from his measured clamor.
The anvil doubles all blows,
sends his hammer
stroking high again.
The fireworker,
huge over me,
joins heat and force
in their heavy dance.

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You are at the wilderness edges of my imagination.

As you chambered in this rock circle, you notice
what did this dust wind feel?
What did your children know?
What did your children sense?
What did your children have?

You were skins as if taking animals into yourselves.

How did the dust wind feel?

Did you measure time, like walls in me?

Did you do secret things?

Did you do secret things that never were written?

Did you do secret things only you knew?

Did you do secret things that nobody knew?

Did you do secret things only you knew?
newspapers. The Isaac-Meagher study was perhaps the most broadly-noticed of the many publications which flowed out of Station research in these years.

Points of tension also show up in a scanning of this Depression era. In March, 1934, researcher Axel Brandstrom presented a system called selective logging. Simply put, the Brandstrom formula called for logging out the trees of highest value and leaving the rest to grow into a future timber crop, a sharp break with the practice of clear-cutting entire areas. Brandstrom's notion in the next few years set off a dispute within the Pacific Northwest Forest Experiment Station and on into highest echelons of the Forest Service.

By 1936, Brandstrom and another Station researcher, Burt P. Kirkland, had readied a report titled "Selective Timber Management in the Douglas-Fir Region." Munger and Isaac objected to many points in the manuscript, particularly what they saw as wholesale conversion to partial cutting in the old-growth Douglas-fir forests. This, they argued, would lead to timber stands of uneven age, which were not the optimum development of the species. Kirkland and Brandstrom held the viewpoint that selective logging was efficient and economical, particularly with the advent of logging tractors and trucks which made for more flexible operations in the woods.

Here was an early round in the complex battle over clear-cutting and alternatives to it. Munger was especially perturbed -- although he termed it merely "muffled
The steady presence of the moon the past several nights has been a surprise to me. My father's stories of Montana often had the moon in them, a globe for many dramas. In this clouded climate, mine never do.
The Making of the Medicine Line

From the Pacific to the Rockies in 1858-62, the wilderness was parted with a boundary.

IVAN DOIG

The Medicine Line, the Indians of the northern plains dubbed it: the invisible stripe on the earth which held for the whites some magic —"medicine"—by which the ground on one side was patrolled by men in coats of red and on the other by cavalry troopers in blue. To cross across the line was to step into sanctuary—"a King’s-X place," as one historian said it. Or, better put, a Queen's-X place, for it was officers in service to the imperial Victoria who had come and, with their American counterparts, decreed an unseeable border across the width of the continent.

Surveyors are not heroic figures. They come later than the explorers, they douse with system what was once the
Cats drift through, like muffled-and-coated tourists. They do not seem very smart, or at least too easily astonished. One, a white and gray who vanished into the woods—I can imagine him standing astonished, one front paw up an inch from the ground, upon meeting a coyote—had a route from our yard, to our fence, across to where a section meets the neighbor's house, and then onto the roof. I once watched as white-and-gray made its way the full length of that roof when it was slick with rain or light frost. The cat slid perilously all the way, hindquarters going off on their own while the front padded cautiously, maybe obliviously, along. The cat took an erratic route, zigzagging up and down the roof, seeking firmer footing, but it never turned back, or even looked back to consider it. Thus, a constant route and peril of pitching off the roof, but ever onward. I could see the black rings on its tail as it twitched its way across.
year and the next ones to come, I learned to keep the pace
of piling eighty-pound hay bales all day long onto a moving
truck, of cocooning inside the roar and dust of tractors
crawling across wheat fields, of steadying a grain truck
beside a lurching combine to catch the harvested flow of
gold. The north country opened and beckoned for me as
the sage distances of the valley must have for Dad at my
age. Clock hours changed, stretched, in that summer light:
lunch happened whenever food arrived in the field, to be
eaten gratefully in the shaded dust beneath a tractor or
truck, supper came into the schedule when at last it was
too dark to do anything else. The Reservation's glacier
of slow weeks was left to Dad and Grandma now, to fend
with that and themselves however they could. In another
of the unspoken but obstinate bargains our household ran
on, I would help with the trailing of the sheep at the
start of each summer, and with the first week or so of
settling into the routine of the ridgeline, but then I
would go. I could be expected to visit whenever I had a
rare Sunday off from work, but all the other days of my
summers were my own now—and I meant to run full and swift.

I learned rapidly that I either had luck or had to
make it. My second summer of hiring out, I heard of a
job on a ranch somewhere far to the north of the Reservation,
near a point on the Canadian boundary called Whiskey Gap.
smothering snow across all the hills of the Sixteen country.
And, do those currents of the sky drum on and on in me, and, and ...