about my father over the next years that I was the only one of
those predicaments that ever seemed to grow any easier for him.
Valley

The clockless mountain summers were over for my father.

Forty-four years old, a ranch hand, now a widower, Charlie Doig had a son to raise by himself. He needed work which would last beyond a quick season. He had to get us under a roof somewhere, choose a town where I could begin school, ask around in his own mind just how we were going to live from then on. It says most about my father over the next years that I was the only one that ever got any easier for him. He could find of those predicaments but didn’t, a way to handle.

Some Indians said to bring us back to old ground; his instinct, maybe, that we were lost enough without braving places he had never been. Ever since his legs were long enough to straddle

spent all but a year or so of his life riding a horse’s back, Dad had ridden out after cattle and sheep across the gray sage distances of the Smith River Valley and the foothill country hunkered all around it. Any ranch in sight could begin one of his stories: The winter of ’twenty-one, I helped that scissorhille feed his cattle. He had a team of big roans on the hay sled. Oh, they were dandies.... Now the two of us came into that remembered countryside like skipping rocks slid across a pond.

The first weeks we lived with one of Dad’s brothers, tucked into an upstairs spare room of his ranch house. Dad worked in the hayfield, while I was left at the ranch buildings to play with my three cousins. It was the unfairest proposition I could imagine. The only playmate I had ever known or wanted was the aloneness which spread open my days for whatever I could think up. Before, if I wanted to spend half the day face down over the creek trying to scoop my hand under tadpoles, I did it. If I wanted to play a pretend game by flipping rocks at a tree and making the kchew sound of shooting with my mouth, I did that.
My aloneness was dying, just as my mother had, and I was getting fed up with loss.

This curdled mood kept on when we moved in with Dad's oldest friend, Clifford Shearer. From Clifford's ranch outside the county seat was a few miles the town of White Sulphur Springs, I went off to school. Every morning there was the trip to town and the trudge up a wide road flight of stairs to a room where I would be cooped for the day with twenty small strangers, not one of whom had ever ridden a sawbuck packsaddle or shot an arrow in the Bridger Mountains.

There were only two little bursts of excitement. We went through a fire drill, learning how to line up and quick-march out of the old brick building if it caught fire, which gave me hope that maybe it would. And one morning when we were fanned out around the teacher for a reading lesson, the blond girl sitting next to me peed her pants and set up a sobbing howl as the rest of us backed off from her puddle and watched to see how school handled something like this. The teacher's handkerchief ended the tears, and a janitor with a mop sopped up the other. I sat with my feet up on the chair rugs for the next few days of reading lessons.
Even before the peeing, I wasn't impressed with lessons. I already could read anything the surprised teacher could put in front of me, and pretty quickly could add or subtract all the numbers she chalked on the blackboard. I had so much free time in my head that I could spend most of the day being lonesome for ranch life and its grownups and its times of aloneness. I moped off by myself every recess and lunch hour, then sulked some more after school until Dad or Clifford drove up for me. If it was Dad who came to take me from the schoolyard, I stepped from the shadows of my mood into the shadows of his.

Years afterward and hundreds of miles from the valley, I was with Dad when he met a man in the street, stepped away, and stared him out of sight in wordless hatred. The man had worked at the ranch where my mother died, and a few days after her death had told Dad bluffly to forget her, shrug off his sorrow, get on with life.
as a man ought to live it. All that time and distance later, 

Dad still despised him for those clumsy words. Not until then did I understand how hard a time it was when Dad would come for me in those earliest weeks after my mother's death and we would drive back to a borrowed room in an unfamiliar house.

of environmental concerns, and the burgeoning of science in the nation's everyday life.

--The bloodline of an agency is its people. The decades of research by a Leo Isaac yield not only a body of skills and data, but a model of human capacities. In the

I never knew when some sentence I would say, or some gesture

I would make in the way my mother had, would choke him into

---grief---

def他会 go through the motions of work, even talk a bit with Clifford, but any time

his eyes would brim and he would lapse off, wordless, grieving.
The some coaxing began to crack through to us. Mine came easiest. Some one instant -- the giggles of a game of tag, or
the arc of a swing going so high it looked good and dangerous --
must have pulled me onto the school playground, and into friendships.

When the first snow came, all the rocks I had thrown at trees in
the pretend games paid off. I could rifle a snowball hard enough
sixth
to make even the fourth-grade boys flinch. Whoever chose up sides
for the snow fort game we played began to choose me first or second.

Several of my classmates came to school with lunchboxes as I did.

We drew together to see which sandwiches or cookies anybody had
for swapping.

We congregated to see which sandwiches or cookies could be swapped,
and whether anybody had been lucky enough to get chocolate milk
in his thermos instead of white. The schoolyard no longer was a
jail to me.
And by luck, the teacher in that coop of a classroom was crafty.

She was a small, doll-like woman who somehow could keep twenty beginning minds running at their separate speeds. For me, she let me read on my own, put me to helping others with their reading -- anything to keep my eyes in touch, and all of it, as many as I could take in, stretched my telling me that here, in the words on paper, a new aloneness.

At the same time, Clifford was beginning to nudge Dad out of his sour haze. The two of them had been friends since before they could remember, left home together as teenagers to go off to town away out on the coast, knew and liked each other in the way that happens only a few times during life. Clifford had come out of a homestead family as poor as the shale slopes crowding in on their shanty cabins, he had never flinched from anything for very long ever since. Now he heard of a small ranch for rent at the south end of the valley, and somehow drew Dad into agreeing to look it over. The ranch never would amount to much -- too little water, too many scabbed hillsides of gray rock -- but it might carry a hundred or so head of cattle if a man knew
what he was doing. Better, Clifford knew, the work demanding
to be done there would elbow the grief out of Dad’s days.

Somewhere in himself my father steadied enough so he could
decide. He shook hands on the deal for the ranch. For the third
time in a dozen weeks, the pair of us ricocheted across the Smith
River Valley.

On the blustery fall day when we left the highway and drove
onto the clay road of the new ranch, we began to live out the
close of a story which had started itself eighty years earlier.

In the 1860’s, the first white settlers had fanned out into the
area of central Montana which came to be called the Smith River
Valley. If the earliest of them came on a day when the warm
sage smell met the nose and the clear air brought close the
details of peaks two days’ ride from there, what a glimpse of
glory it must have seemed. A new county bigger than some of
the eastern states, vacant for the taking. The home valley
of it all stretched flat in every direction like a gray inland
sea, held by buttes and long ridges at the northern and southern
ends, and east and west by mountain ranges. Let imagination loose,
and all the seamless miles checkered at once into pasture and field.
Yet if they had had eyes for anything but the empty acres, those firstcomers could have picked clues from the uplands that here was a somewhat peculiar chunk of country, and maybe treacherous. The hints begin along the eastern skyline, where the Castle Mountains poke high thin turrets of stone out of dark forest. From below in the valley,
the spires look as if they had been engineered up from the forest floor whenever someone had the notion, an entire mountain range of castle-builders’ whims, until the stone fingers were too thin in the wind and began to chink apart boulder by boulder.

Here, if the valleycomers could have sensed it, were measures of how wind and storm worked on that country, fraying down even the granite if it stood in the way.

Soon enough, the Castle Mountains’ eternal mood of wear and tear moved out in a silver strike town on the far slope of the range. That town of Castle roared with new money for a few years in the 1890’s, died overnight, and then began weathering apart as slowly and endlessly as the spired formations all around.

While the Castle Mountains make an eerie horizon for the sun, the range to the west, the Big Belts, cast their own troubles down to an unlooker in the valley. The highest peak of the range, Old Baldy, thrusts up a bare summit with a giant crater gouged in its side. Even in hottest summer, snow lies in the crater like a patch on a wound. Always there is before the time of man, this reminder that unthinkable forces broke apart the face of the biggest landform the eye can find from any inch of the valley, mountain before the time of man. Nature’s crankiness to the Big Belts did not quit there. The next summit to the south, Grassy Mountain, is oddly green, with a growth pattern upside down from every other mountain in sight. Instead of rising out of abrupt bunchgrass slopes which would give way to timber reaching...
down from the crest, Grassy is 

a prairie some thousands of feet

and opens into a wide generous pasture 
elong the valley floor the address goes on: The Smith

River turns out to be little more than a creek named by a near-sighted

optimist. It worms its way across the valley, forever kinking up

every three times the distance for each mile it flows and constantly

delivering oil along the way, clay-greased

putting one more willow thickets and sharp cutbanks than actual

water. On the other hand, the water that is missing from the

Smith River may arrive in some surprise gush elsewhere. The hot

mineral pool erupting at the north end of the valley eventually

gave the name to the county seat which built around the steaming

White Sulphur Springs.
But whatever the quirks to be seen in a careful look around, the valley and its walls of high country fitted the settlers held: an empty country to fill up. The Blackfoot tribes by then were pulling north, in a last retreat to the plains beyond the Missouri River. On the opposite slopes of the Big Belts, placer camps were flushing gold out of every gravel gulch. With the Indians vanished and bonanza gold drawing in the town builders, how could this neighboring valley ever miss out on prosperity?

The homesteaders seem to have had no more sense of the valley’s danger than I did as a six-year-old looking out across what seemed to be country from a picture book. Mountain range to mountain range, the hay meadows and fenced grazing land and winter wheat fields filled the countryside, a
broad peaceful deck of pattern between the high backdrops of summer pasture. Spring and autumn, bands of sheep and herds of cattle could be seen on the move all across the valley. The cattle made dark pools which you could follow from the moment they bawled past until they drew over a far ridgeline. Sheep were harder to sort from the landscape at a distance, just a soft gray patch which you had to squint at to find among the sage. The clearest signal was the white canvas of the herder's wagon, standing out against the valley color like an igloo.

What the eye could not pick up as it watched these tides of livestock was that the grazing herds and bands were not simply just on the move into the mountains or back to the lowlands: they were traveling between high country and higher. The weather in that area of Montara is mostly a matter of altitude, and the very floor of the Smith River Valley rests one full mile above sea level. The foothills homesteads were hundreds of feet above that. The cold, weather-making mountains climbed thousands of feet more into the clouds bellying over the Continental Divide. Whatever
the prospects looked like were trying
the eye said about prospects, the settlers had tried a slab of
high country which often would be too cold and dry for their crops,
too open to a killing winter for their cattle and sheep. It might take
a bad winter or a late spring to show this invisible

fact, and the valley people did their best to live with it. But
over time the altitude and climate added up, and even after a
generation or two of trying the land, a settling family could
look up and find that the most plentiful things around them still
were sagebrush and wind.
By the time I was a boy and Dad was trying to put together
a life for us, the doubt and defeat in the history of the valley
had come down to a single word. Anyone of Dad's
generation always spoke of the piece of land where some worn-out
family eventually had lost out to weather or market prices or
both as a place. Not a farm or a ranch or even a homestead,
just a place. Some point of stopover in the westward search,
some foothold which gave out. Even now you can find old-timers who could ride along fading roads through the sage
and call off past the empty clearings which ghost the countryside --
the McLoughlin place there by that butte, the Vinton place over
this ridge, the Kuhns place, the Burkey place, the Winters
tens of places, all the dozens of sites where families couldn't hold on,
and drifted off. All of them just places.

There was such a place where in our lives were compassed
from, and where the story we were living out together had its
first murmurings. Southwest out of the valley into the most
distant foothills of the Big Belts, both the sage and the wind
grow wilder and stronger.
distant foothills of the Big Belt. Far off there, beyond the
landmark rise called Black Butte and past even the long green pasture
hump of Grassy Mountain, a set of ruts can be found snaking
away from the county road. Born scarred by iron wagonwheels and
later by the hard tires of Model T’s, the track scuffs along
shale bluffs and through sagebrush flats and across willow-choked
creeks until at last it sidles around a hogback ridge. On the
broad grassy slope opposite this ridge, my father was born and
grew up.
This sudden remote bowl of meadow is called the Tierney Basin -- or would be, if any human voice were there to say its name. Here, as far back into the foothills of the Big Belt Mountains as their wagons could go, a double handful of Scots families homesteaded in the 1890's. Two notions seem to have pulled them all that distance into the hills: to raise sheep, and to graze them on free grass as much as they could. Cup your hands and look down your cupped hands, and there is you have into them, and you see a ready map of what the homestead families had in mind. The life lines and contours in your palms are the small creeks and gulches angling to the center of the Basin.

The main flow of water, Spring Creek, just manages to squirt out through the pass called Paddy's Run there where the bases of your palms meet. The settlers came down toward these comforting crinkles for sites close to water. Your thumbs and the upward curl of your fingers are the mountains and steep ridges all around -- and on all that rim of unclaimed territory, countless bands of sheep could find summer grass.
What

Dundee and carried them into the Montana foothills this way, there

is no knowing. Dad wrote it off to Scots mulishness: "Scotchman and
coyotes was the only ones that could live in the Basin, and pretty
damn soon the coyotes starved out." I only have the rough list of guesses from the

long westerling course of the American frontier: the push of poverty's push or

the pull of wanderlust, some word of land and chance as heard

from those who had gone earlier to America, or as read in the

advertisements of Firms whose business was immigration. Perhaps

some consternation within the family itself, the loss of whatever

livelihoods there had been in laboring on a laird's estate. Or

it may have been as simple as the family trait of stubbornness.

Some unordinary outlooks on life seemed to crop out in my grand-

father's generation, attitudes which might not have done well with

the old village way of life. Three Doig brothers and two sisters

are known to have gone off from Dundee to risky futures, and at

least two of them clearly went about life as if it was some

private concoction they had just thought up.
The eldest of those who packed up for Montana was David Lewis Doig, called D.L. The one clear fact about the route from Dundee is that a number of Scots came in succession, like a chain of people steadying one another across a rope bridge. Whoever arrived first, talked the next one into coming to file on a homestead, and the one persuaded after that was D.L.'s own brother-in-law.

So by 1890, D.L. had arrived with his wife and two children to work in Helena as a tailor until he could size up the country. He sized it up entirely backwards to the way his heirs have wished, passing over the valley land east of the Continental Divide to climb up into the Tierney Basin and buy a homestead from the claim of a homesteader who was giving up. D.L. settled into his new site on Spring Creek, expanded the family until it eventually numbered nine children, and by long years and clever grazing made his small sheep ranch prosper. As promptly as he had enough offspring and income to keep the ranch going, D.L. centered his life on a hobby. He began raising brown leghorn chickens. Before long, he had a bloodline of which were sleek glosses of feather and comb, and fiddly chicken breeders. The trophies won at fairs and expositions
covered most of one wall of the house, and D.L.'s wife sewed a
quilt from the prize ribbons. Until the Depression and old age at last forced him out, D.L. could be found there in the Basin, fussing over his prize chickens, sending someone down to the Milwaukee tracks to fetch the jug of whiskey delivered for him every week, and asking not one thing more of the world.
The other Doig remembered for doing entirely what she pleased was D.L.'s sister, Margaret. She is at the outermost edges of the family memory, glimpsed and gone in someone's reminiscences as remembered by someone yet again. Margaret was the one who went off from Scotland into the British Empire, alighting on some remote flood plain of India. The rememberers tell that as a teacher or missionary, no one now is quite sure which, Twice in her last years, the rememberers say, she came to visit the relatives in Montana, a brief ghost from Victorian days in her long black dress and the wooden shoes of India. She spent the rest of her life in India -- died there, was buried there -- and in her own way must have been as bemused with the existence that somewhere up the Ganges she worked out as her brother was with his champion chickens.

D.L. was followed into his chosen foothills by two of his brothers. The faintest of family stories has it that the one named Jack came to D.L.'s ranch in the hope that the mountain air would help his health, and there quietly waited out the year or so it took him to die.
The other brother, Peter Doig, somehow made his way from Scotland just after his 19th birthday. He had been a tailor's helper, and in the new land immediately began a life which had nothing at all to do with needle and thread. Instead, for several years he did the same jobs on sheep ranches that his son would do a generation later, and which I would do, a generation after that, as his son's son -- working in the lambing sheds, herding, wrangling in the shearing pens. There can't have been much money in the ranch jobs which drew my father's father in those first years, but there would have been all the chance in the world to learn about sheep -- and sheep in their gray thousands were the wool-and-meat machines which had made fortunes for the lairds of Scotland. This high Montana grassland rimming the Big the home country, Belts in fact had some of the look of Scotland, and had drawn enough Scots onto ranches and homesteads that they counted up into something like a colony, the burr of their talk to be heard wherever the gray tides of sheep flowed out onto the grass.

Between the promise of those grazing herds and that talk comfortable to the ear, it was a place for staying.
who would have known him then, not one thing to show him head-on and looking out at the world. What he did for himself is likewise known only in scantest outline:
Beyond the facts that he had countrymen and relatives in
the new land and that he was medium height, slim, red-bearded,
and had the throaty lowlands way of speech, nothing can be
known now of what young Peter Doig was like. Not a scrap of
paper from his own hand can be found, not a word from those
who would have known him then, nothing. What he did for himself

is likewise known only scrap, he met and married his sister's
sister-in-law, Annie Campbell, a Scotswoman who cooked
for ranch crews.

After the marriage,
a year or two Peter, one son born, they took up land a mile

west of D.L. Doig's ranch in the Tierney Basin.

This couple from Dundee and Perth were arriving in the

remotest corner of an unpromising country draped amid severe

mountain ranges.

That was simply the outer geography of their situation. Within

that came the fact that their fallow, open-to-the-sky Tierney

Basin was — although it can be doubted that anyone there knew

the word -- a ghetto.
But the bestowing was being asked in a hard place, and at a late time in the route of America's western settling. Those Scots families of the Basin -- Doigs, Christisons, Mitchells, a few who came later -- could not know it at first, but they had taken up land where the long-standing habits and laws of settlement were not going to work. The homestead staked out by Peter and Annie Doig lay at an elevation of 5700 feet. At first, the hill country did pay off with its summers of free pasture. In the and Februaries -- and maybe Marches and Aprils -- of hip-deep bargain, however, came Januaries and these feet snowdrifts. There was no help in law for the blizzards which carved through the Tierney Basin. Then the free range ended with the stroke of a government pen which decreed the high summer pasture into a national forest. Allotments for grazing began to go to ranches which already were large, and getting larger. No foothills, even if you beat the weather, homestead you built for yourself could head off a future of national forest boundaries and rich cattle companies.
All this was coming, but unseen. When Peter and Annie Doig took up land in the Basin, they were kept. They had other things in their heads than the days beyond tomorrow.

The young wife could hear the howling of wolves and coyotes—and worse, the splitting cracks of thunder when lightning storms cut down on the Big Belts. Near the end of her life, she said she never had gotten over those terrible sounds of the Basin, nor its isolation. The young husband was more the one for staying. A house was built of pine logs from a nearby timbered slope, and was fitted for—continually, the site

which qualified under a law for the taking up of "desert land"—

they managed to make a start over the next dozen years, a promising start was made in the sheep business and six more children were added to the family.
No matter that the people were only a handful across
the flank of an entire mountain range, or that the heights walling
them in were weathered granite cliffs instead of brownstone, those
homesteaders were immigrant, spoke dialect, had endless
children, and clutched together in narrow confines to try to
make a living. Like a ghetto, the Basin ran more on memory and
the pocketbook of the moment. Always hope than on assets. The backdrop of Scotland hung at the corners
of the settlers' minds, reminding that the overworked home country
could not provide job enough, household enough, chance enough.

And in from those brain corners like sparrows trapped in a barn
came the hopes that this Montana land would bestow all those.
Then, on a September day in 1910, a little past noon, Peter Doig stepped outside the log house. He had been spending time on errands — to the county fair the day before, where he had won prizes for his O0 and rewarded himself with a fine thorough drunk, this morning to his nearest neighbor's house on some small matter — and the ranch chores were piling up.

He strode down the path to the garden to begin digging the potato crop. Going through the gate, he clutched at his heart, fell sideways, and died. He was four months short of his 37th birthday.

Four mornings later, a lumber wagon with a casket roped in place jolted out of the Tierney Basin and set off on the day-long trip to the cemetery at White Sulphur Springs. Behind the rough hearse coiled a dusty column of riders on horseback and families in spring wagons, neighbors and kin. They buried Peter Doig, tailor's helper in Scotland and homesteader in Montana, and then rode their long ride home into the hills.
This is as much as can be eked out -- the land's setting, settlers' patterns on it, the family fate within the pattern -- about the past my father came out of. I read into it all I can, fair plot out logical guesses and follow blood hunches, and still the story draws away from all such mapwork, and into the boundaries of my father's own body and brain. Where his outline touched the air, my knowing really begins.
Deathday

Soon before daybreak on my sixth birthday, my mother's breathing wheezed more raggedly than ever, then quieted, and then stopped. Out of my father's retellings and the oldest shadows at the back of my own mind, this first necessary memory tries to come clear:

We began that last mountain summer in a cabin far up in the Bridger Range of Montana's southwestern corner. Alone in which could be reached only by the high air, on a timbered shelf reached only aboard saddlehorse, we eased through May and the first twenty-six days of June secure as nested eagles. Once a week, the camptender from the home ranch would climb the trail with our provisions. The blaze-faced sorrel he rode and the balky packhorse haltered behind would plod steeply and slowly up from the valley shadows which pooled at the bottom of our jackpine slopes, until at last the rider would swing down out of his stirrups into the cabin clearing and untie from the packsaddle the white salt sacks full of groceries and mail. Minutes later he would be resaddled and gone, and for his hat and shoulders began to show the next seven mornings again, until he came over the trail crest another time, only the three of us would beubbled away there in the clean blue weather of the summer mountain.
My father and mother were herding sheep. Before I was born, they had lived other summers this way. I have the few album pages they put together then; the box-camera photos snapped on the high meadows and ridge, my lone view of the pair of them in those distant seasons.

Two young strangers grin out into my eyes.

My father ... my father looks stronger than I ever knew him, and even more handsome, the straight broad lines of his face framed cleanly around the dimple-scar in the center of his chin. This dot of scar is the only flaw he shows, like a tool mark nicked in when his strong head was carved. One tiny flaw on my mind's half-whisper always adds, all his face, and inside, I tell myself in a half-whisper, the calamities yet waiting to happen.

But my mother; here in some summer of early marriage, she already seems frail, too slim a willow to be there so near timberline. Again, because I know what was to come, I believe myself into the notion that I can read it all gathering here.

I make the photos tell me with every detail the eroding sickness in this slender woman. It is all too easy to imagine that the pinch across her shoulders is saying she will never reach half a lifespan.
Always a forest at the backs of these familiar photoed strangers, and sunlight dappled down through the timber to their rough shirt fronts. The canvas triangle of their tent is angled grayly at the back of the day camp. Two black herding dogs, ears up in surprise, watch the lens. A pair of saddlehorses gawk long necks in from the grassy fringe of camp.

One creature in these early pictures does not fit -- the pet which is being stroked in my mother's hands. Throughout those first summers, my parents kept with them in their daily moves through the forest a large tomcat they had named Pete Olson.

Somehow, amid the horses and dogs and sheep, and the coyotes and bobcats which ranged close to camp, gray and white Pete Olson prowled and prospered, sassy thrived. Summer after summer, that big tom traveled the mountains with my parents by saddlehorse, cradled like a prince between somebody's lap and the saddle pommel as they moved camp each morning.

But in this season on the final mountain, the unexpected drifter easing through swags of pine branches on the back of a horse is me.

Later, my father never tired of telling what a cantankerous cantankerous My father's stories have told me what a crotchety and stubborn rider I made. Every morning he had to cinch onto my horse's sawback packsaddle, a rigging of crosspieces in the shape of a
a small sawhorse, and as rasp-hard to sit in for half a day at a time. Whatever my five-year-old reasons, I wanted no stirrups or snug curves of leather, but I would straddle that packsaddle as if it would take me to glory.

Except for other than this one borrowed dab of memory, I can see myself that summer only in specks of color and mood. Hair a dark rusty red, and the freckly pale skin to go with it. A dreamy mind from living always on remote ranches with only grownups and livestock around. Eyes which fixed on printed words; days ahead, I would begin to think of the comic books which would come in a tight-rolled bundle with the mail the camp tender brought up the mountain. And a sober cussedness about having my own way, which showed itself in the one small stunt I remember clearer than anything else. I had been given a bow and a few arrows, maybe an early gift for my birthday. When my shots missed the paper target tacked to the back of the cabin, I edged up until the arrow tip hung inches from the bullseye. I let go the bowstring, and the circle of paper ripped open with a hard snapping sound.

Of my mother's death, whatever I try, I recall almost nothing.

The album photos have imprinted in me that she was fine-boned, not much more than tiny, slight, with a roundish face where my own is quickly read. From
stories in my father's voice, I know everything about the doom which had been inside her since she was born, the asthma pinching off her breath. But those are rememberings secondhand. What I call back on my own is just this: my father touching me awake in lantern glow, his shadow thrown far up onto the wall, to say she is dead, your mother is dead, sobbing as the words choke him.

So: June 27, 1945, at the start of memory and its relentless workings. I became six years old, and my mother's life drained out at 31 years. Then in the first gray daylight, dully reining our horses away from that cabin of the past, my father and I started downslope toward whatever would come next.
Some embers of memory still live in me from the night my mother died, which was also the night of my sixth birthday.

My mother died soon before sunrise on my 6th birthday.

I have some embers of memory about my mother's death that night of my sixth birthday. Which of these farthest blurs at the back of the mind are my own and which ones were put there by my father's retellings, I no longer can be sure, but that is the way with memory.

The three of us [began] that final mountain summer in a cabin far up in the Bridger Range of western Montana. Alone in the thin air, on a timbered mountain face which could be reached only on foot or saddlehorse, we were remote as eagles. My father and mother were herding a band of sheep. Once every week or so, a rider sent by the rancher who owned the sheep might come up the trail with supplies, but [otherwise] we had for ourselves the primitive spill of meadows and piney ridges, all the green-and-buff slopes falling away below us to sudden valleys and then swooping high again to crest as a horizon of peaks. The clean blue weather of June [tinted] every sensation. [Meanwhile,] along the slants
Deathday

Soon before daybreak on my sixth birthday, my mother's breathing wheezed more raggedly than ever, then quieted, and then stopped.

Out of my father's retellings and the oldest shadows at the edge of back of my own mind, this first deep memory tries to come clear. We had begun that last mountain summer in a cabin far up in the Bridger Range on a公认 of Montana's southwestern corner. Alone in the high air, on a timbered shelf which could be reached only by saddlehorse, we eased through May and the first twenty-six days of June secure as hawks with wind under our wings. Hawks. Once a week, the camptender from the home ranch would climb the trail with our provisions. The blaze-faced sorrel he rode and the valley packhorse halted behind would plod steeply up from the valley shadows which pooled at the bottom of our jackpine slopes, until at last the rider would swing down out of his stirrups into the cabin clearing and untie from the packsaddle the faded white salt sacks filled with groceries and mail. Minutes later he would be resaddled and riding from sight. For the next seven mornings again, until his hat and shoulders began to show over the trail crest another time, only the three of us would be there in the clean blue weather of the summer mountain.
Soon before daybreak on my sixth birthday, my mother's breathing wheezed more raggedly than ever, then quieted. And then stopped.

Memory begins out of that new silence. Through the time since, I reach back along my father's retellings and around the urgings which would have me face about and forget, to feel into these oldest shadows within for the first sudden edge of it all.

It starts, early in the mountain summer, far back among the high spilling slopes of the Bridger Range of southwestern Montana. The first sound is hidden water—the south fork of Sixteenmile Creek diving down its willow-masked gulch. The stream flees north through this secret and peopleless land until, under the jackpine flanks of Hatfield Mountain, a bow of meadow makes it curl wide. At this interruption, a low rumple of the mountain knolls itself up watchfully, and atop it, like a sentry box over the sly creek and the prodding meadow, perches our single-room herding cabin.

Alone here on our abrupt tiny shelf, the three of us eased through May and the first twenty-six days of June secure
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Memory begins out of that new silence. Through the time since, I reach back along my father's tellings and around the urgings which would have me face about and forget, to feel into these oldest shadows for the first sudden edge of it all.

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The remembering begins out of that new silence. Through the time since, I reach back along my father's tellings and around the urgings which would have me face about and forget, to feel into these oldest shadows for the first sudden edge of it all.

It starts, early in the mountain summer, far back among the high spilling slopes of the Bridger Range of southwestern Montana. The single sound is hidden water—the south fork of Sixteenmile Creek diving down its willow-masked gulch. The stream flies north through this secret and peopleless land until, under the fir-dark flanks of Hatfield Mountain, a bow of meadow makes the riffled water curl wide to the west. At this interruption, a low rumble of the mountain knolls itself up watchfully, and atop it, like a sentry box over the frontier between the sly creek and the prodding meadow, perches our single-room herding cabin.

Alone here on our abrupt tiny shelf, the three of us eased through May and the first twenty-six days of June secure as hawks with wind under our wings. Once a week, the camp tender from the home ranch would come the dozen miles of trail to us. The blaze-faced sorrel he rode and the packhorse haltered behind would plod in from the shadows which pooled in our valley under the shouldering slopes, until at last the rider stepped off from his stirrups into the cabin clearing and unknotted from the packsaddle the provision boxes, dark-weathered in their coverings of rawhide,
Outline of Half-life, by Ivan Doig

By accident, in the space of a few hours in 1945 in which my mother died and I reached my sixth birthday, my life was veered into one of the twilight eras of the American west. My ranchman father kept me at his side for the next several years of saloon-hopping, cowboysing, sheep-raisin—seeing and hearing the last of a range generation, just before sawmills and agri-business arrived to obliterate that way of life in my home area of Montana. By a second accident, my father became so ill in the summer of 1950 that he thought he too would die, and leave me entirely parentless: in desperation, across years of antagonism between the two of them, he persuaded my mother's mother to live with us. The three of us as a family made a combustible mix which still roars in my memory—and which makes the other theme of the thirty-year story I am calling Half-life.

I estimate the book at 80,000 words. It is to have seven sections, crafted from material pried from my memory and tape-recorded from my family and studied out of the western land and its history. The first three sections, "Deathday," "Valley," and "Flip" comprise this sample and can speak for themselves. The fourth section is cooling for a rewrite. The final three sections are in the early drafts, and I'm working steadily at them. Beyond this trio of sample sections, the others will be sequenced this way:

"Lady" — My mother's mother enters, and the theme becomes the odd, tense, and rich mix of life in a household which spans three generations and three disparate personalities. A background narrative similar to the one about my father's youth in "Valley" will tell of my grandmother's coming to the west, and the hardscrabble life she had there.

"Facing North" — The scene shifts, in 1954, to the grasslands of northern Montana and to the nomadic life of the three of us as we followed the grazing sheep.

"I Am Ivory" — The period when I went off to college, and began to realize that I was an immigrant to urban America much as my father's parents had been immigrants to the Montana mountains. The period, too, when my father and grandmother came to terms with one another, and with the shortening spans of life left to each of them.

"Endings" — My father's seven-year struggle to his death in 1971; my turmoil in trying to slow the emphysematous erosion in him, and to cope with the reversed life where I had to fend for him; my grandmother's steadfastness—and, really, courage—in the face of all this and her own dwindling years, until her death in 1974 at the age of 81.
Between sections will be brief italicized pieces, prisms where I look at the process of memory in myself. Pages 6-7 are an example.

Having said all this about what the book will be, I feel as if I've said almost nothing. Unlike the three books I've done so far, this one seems to resist description and to reveal itself only as it's written. I know that the question for an editor is why anyone would read a memoir by a middle-level magazine writer who diffidently has tucked himself away in the northwest corner of the country. The manuscript sample is meant to begin to answer that, with the one answer I know: "Here is a rare story I will tell you..."
Memory is a set of sagas we live by, much as the Norse wildmen in their bear shirts did. That the thirty
years would seem blank, unfinished, without those familiar surges of memory. A certain turn in my desk chair, and the seat cushion must creak the quick dry groan of saddle leather under my leg--and my father's, and his father's. The taste in the air as rain comes over the city is forever a flavor back from a Montana community too tiny to be called a town. A man, the same college degrees after his name as mine, trumps in a debating point during a party argument, and my grandmother's words mutter in me that he grins like a jackass eating thistles.

Rote moments, these, mysteryless in themselves.

It is where they lead, and with what fitful truth and deceit, that tantalizes.

If, somewhere beneath the blood, the past must beat in me to make a rhythm of survival for itself -- to go on as this half-life which echoes steadily as a second pulse inside the ticking moments of my existence -- if this is what must be, why is the pattern of remembered instants so uneven, so gapped and blotted? I can only believe it is because memory takes its pattern from the earliest moments in the mind, childhood.

And childhood is a most savage and haunted time. Think how the world wavers and intones then: Parents behave toward us as if they are tribal gods, as old and unarguable and almighty as thunder. Other figures loom in, count coup on us with whatever lessons of life they brandish, then ghost off. We peek into ourselves and find devils
dancing there as well. Our first several years are the one season of life, for most of us, when we can kill emotionlessly—or worse, simply from curiosity, to see how the tiny mice prodded from their field nest are different, dead, from the tiny mice, alive, of an instant ago. Cruelty is new to us, and astonishing, yet we are at our cruelest to each other, mocking playmates home in sobs. Marauders, we are marauded, too. Darkness blankets down around a child as if the planet's caves have emptied all their shadows over him. Everything fights the child's ambitions—fences reach too high, streets too wide, days too short and too long. Imagination is the single constant friend, and even it can betray, soften itself into scaredness and doubt.

Just as does life blaze around us before we learn we are creatures of civilization. Just so, when childhood itself has passed into the distance behind me, does my remembering of the thirty-year story that begins with my mother's breath and entwines three peculiar lives go on the way it was recklessly shaped in me then.
of pasture the thousand ewes and their thousand lambs would ceaselessly browse, every munch of crisp grass promising firm weight on the stockyard scales in autumn.

Before I was born, my parents had herded sheep in this manner for several summers, distant seasons caught for me now in old photographs. The two of them look strangely pure in these pictures — hardy and assured, the easy grins seeming to confide that together they could roam anywhere, work as long as it was under the open sky, savor any livelihood. Always a forest at their backs then, with sunlight dappling across their pose. My mother, aside from standing slim as a willow, shows no hint that she will never reach half a lifespan. My father looks stronger than I ever knew him, and handsome, the straight planes of his face accented by the deep dimple-scar in the center of his chin.

The canvas corner of a tent angles across an edge of the photo. Usually a pair of black and white sheepdogs, ears up alertly, can be seen. Usually too a pair of saddlehorses and a doleful packhorse gawk long necks into the scene from the grassy fringes of the camp.

The one creature in these early pictures, the lone touch of elegance and whimsy, is my parents' gray and white tomcat. Throughout those first summers, that big tom would travel the mountains with them by horseback, cradled royally between somebody's lap and a saddleshorn whenever they moved camp, each day morning on a fresh morn.

But in this final season of timberline and hoof I write about, I was small, the odd drifter easing through swags of pine branches on the back of a horse. Stubbornly scorning stirrups or any pleasant contour of leather, I would ride only a pack saddle, which is about as comfortable as spending a day astride a sawhorse. My father would recall the three of us trailing
through the forest, he and my mother riding with the easy rhythm of veteran saddlehands while I straddled a rigging built to carry anything but the human body.

I see myself in that summer as a tiny distant figure, hair the color of redwood bark, making a world of the mountainside and the clearing around the cabin. An only child and a solitary one from living on remote ranches all my life. I remember that I had been given a bow and arrows and a paper target tacked to the side of the cabin. Frustrated by constantly missing, I edged nearer and nearer until the arrow tip was only a few inches from the bullseye, and at last unloosed the perfect puncture.

Of my mother, I recall little but the dusk of her death. Album photos point out to me now that she was fine-boned, slight, with a roundish face where my own is easily read. And of course I have been told the fatal fact within her -- the asthma which racked and rasped and finally clamped off all breath. Of her last night, I seem to see this: my father touching me in lantern glow to say she is dead, crying as he chokes out the words: "Here lies mom."

So: June 27, 1945. I became six years old, and my mother's life ended at 38 years. Birthday had gnarled into deathday, and in the next daybreak, dully reining the horses downslope from that cabin of the past, my father and I began our journey to whatever would come next.
My father and mother were herding sheep. Before I was born, they had lived other summers this way. I have the few album pages they put together then, the box-camera photos snapped on the meadows and ridge lines my dope view of the pair of them in those distant seasons.

Two young strangers grin out into my eyes:

My father ... my father looks stronger than I ever knew him, and even more handsome, the straight broad lines of his face framed cleanly around the dimple-scar in the center of his chin. This dot of scar is the only flaw he shows, like a tool mark nicked in when his strong head was carved. One tiniest flaw on his face, and as if it might be the first lightest scratch of all the calamity ahead.

My mind's half-whisper always adds, all the calamity waiting to happen.

But my mother; here in some summer of early marriage, she already seems frail, too slim a willow to be there so near timberline. Again, because I know what was to come, I believe myself into the notion that I can read it all gathering here. I make the photos tell me with every detail the sickness eroding in her. It is all too easy to imagine that the pinch across her slender shoulders, and the eyes which are almost too calm and accepting, are saying death — death soon.

Always a forest at the backs of these familiar photoed strangers, and sunlight spattering down through the pine boughs to their rough shirt fronts. The canvas slopes of their tent are triangled grayly at the back of the day camp. Two black herding dogs, ears up in
I have the memory, real or imagined, of my mother dying the night of my sixth birthday. We were living that summer in a cabin in the Bridger Mountains; my father had signed on for the summer on a big sheep ranch, and he and my mother were herding sheep as they had several summers in the dozen years they'd been married. I see myself in memory as a small distant figure, hair the color of redwood, making a world of the small clearing around the cabin. I had been given a bow and arrow and a paper bullseye target, and frustrated by forever missing, I edged nearer and nearer until the arrow point was only a few inches from the center of the bullseye and at last made the perfect puncture. Other details are hazy. I seem to remember my father waking me in the night or early morning to say my mother was dead, crying as he choked out words. It was not the first time he had seen death make a swipe at her. At Halloween of 1943, a year and a half earlier, she had had an asthma attack so severe he knew she had to be rushed to the hospital 45 miles away. He went out and found all the tires of the car flattened by pranksters, and the lost time made it a near thing for her. The next year they tried Arizona, to see if her asthma was better there. It was, and that winter of '44-'45 as my father quickly rose to a foreman's job in an aluminum plant they laid plans to stay for good. First would come a summer in Montana to tie loose ends there, but on July 27 I became six years old and she died at the age of 34.

So, on June 27 when I became boys age + my mother left life at 33.
Besides the alphabet and numerals, both rhythms of thought, our information systems have been shaped by the habitual rhythm we call times.

Remember my letter writing to the night of every moon to see my mother—

seen together, she had been sowing seeds to save the nation. She meant only to look at the present, when once it comes to the past, the present is lost.
Deathday

my mother died.

My mother died soon before daybreak on my sixth birthday.

Out of my father's retellings and the oldest shadows at the back of my own mind, this first necessary memory tries to come clear:

We began that last mountain summer in a cabin far up in the Bridger Range of Montana's southwestern corner. Alone in the high air, on a timbered shelf reached only on foot or aboard saddlehorse, we eased through May and the first twenty-six days of June secure as nested eagles. Once a week, the camp tender from the home ranch would climb the trail to us with groceries and mail. The blazefaced horse he rode and the reluctant packhorse roped behind would plod steeply and slowly up from the valley shadows which pooled at the bottom of our jackpine slopes, and at last the man would swing down from his saddle into the cabin from the packsaddle the white clearing and until the salt sacks full of provisions from the resaddled and packsaddle. Minutes later he would be gone, and for the next seven mornings until he crested the trail again, only the three would be cubbied away high country of us went anywhere there in the clean blue weather of that summer.
My father and mother were herding sheep. Before I was born, they had lived a number of summers this way. I have an album pages where they had summared with the grazing livestock, they put together about the high meadows and piney ridges, and studying the old photos is my attempt to the pair of them in those distant seasons. But because I know what was to come, I believe I fool myself into believing that I can read it all gathering there.

Two young strangers grin out into my eyes.

My father ... my father looks stronger than I ever knew him, and even more handsome, the straight broad lines of his face framed neatly around the dimple-scar in the center of his chin. That dot of scar is the only flaw he shows, like a tool mark nicked in when his strong head was carved. One tiny flaw on his face, and inside him, the small emotions which were yet waiting to happen.

But my mother; here in some summer of early marriage, she already seems frail, too slim a willow to be there so near timberline. I make the photos tell me the endless sickness in her. It is all too easy to imagine that the pinch across her thin shoulders already is saying she will never reach half a lifespan.
to sit in by the hour. No stirrups, no snug curves of leather, crossties in the shape of a small sawhorse and just as boardlike:

My father's stories have told me what an old and stubborn rider I made. I would climb onto a sawbuck pack saddle, a set of

But in this season on the final mountain, the small drifter

easing through swags of pine branches on the back of a horse is my camp each morning.

in the brush.

Throughout those first summers, cradled like

my parents kept them, a gray and white tom cat. Something unusual in these early pictures is the petting which ranged close to camp and the horses and dogs and sheep and the coyotes and bobcats amid the mountains.

by saddlehorses.

That big tom traveled the mountains with my parents for several summers, crawled like a prince between somebody's lap and a saddlehorn as they moved.

A pair of saddlehorses gawk long necks in from the grassy fringes, down through the timber to their rough shirt fronts. The canvas corner of their tent is angled grayly across one photo edge.

Two black harding dogs, ears up in surprise, watch the lens.

Always a forest at the back and sunlight dappling the backs of those familiar strangers.
but I would straddle in there like a knight out after dragons.

Other than that borrowed bit of memory, I can see myself that summer only in quick dabs, a few specks of color and mood. Hair a dark rusty red, and the freckly pale skin to go with it. An only child and a solitary one from living always on remote ranches. A dreaming boy who long since had learned to read, and was hungry for humbug comic books. And I remember clearest one small stunt. I had been given a bow and a few arrows, likely an early gift for my birthday. When my shots missed the paper target tacked to the side of the cabin, I edged up until the arrow tip hung inches from the bullseye. I let go the bowstring and the circle of paper ripped open with a hard snapping sound.

Of my mother’s death, whatever I try, I can recall almost nothing. Album photos point out to me that she was fine-boned, slight, with a roundish face where my own is quickly read. From stories in my father’s voice, I know everything about the doom which always had been inside her, the asthma pinching off her breath. But those are rememberings secondhand. What I can call back on my own is from her final morning, and is just this: my father touching me awake in lantern glow, his shadow cast huge on the far wall, to say
she is dead, your mother is dead, sobbing as the words choke him.

So: June 27, 1945, at the start of memory and its powerful workings. I became six years old, and my mother's life drained out at 31 years. Then in the first daylight, dully reining our horses away from that cabin of the past, my father and I started downslope toward whatever would come next.
Some embers of memory still hurt in me from the night my mother died -- the night of my sixth birthday. Which of these farthest
blurs at the back of the mind are my own and which ones were put
there by my father's retellings I never am sure, but that is the
way with memory and its knots of flame.

The three of us began that last mountain summer in a cabin
far up in the Bridger Range of western Montana. Alone in the thin
air, on a timbered mountain face which could be reached only on
foot or saddlehorse, we went through May and the first twenty-six
days of June remote as eagles. My father and mother were herding
sheep. Once each week or so, a rider from the home ranch several
miles away would swing up the trail with our supplies, but otherwise
only the three of us knew the high meadows and piney ridges, all
the green-and-buff slopes falling away deep below us to shadowed
valleys and then swooping high again to crest as a horizon of peaks.

The clean blue weather of June came again with each morning.
Along the slants of pasture the thousand ewes and their thousand blatting lambs would browse the days away, every crisp munch of grass a promising weight on the stockyard scales in autumn.

Before I was born, my parents herded sheep this way for several summers, distant seasons caught for me in old photographs. Two young strangers grin out into my eyes. Always a forest at their backs then, with sunlight dappling across their shirt fronts. I am always surprised that of the pair, my mother looks more as I expect. But [then] my notion of her face has always come from such pictures, not from life. Here in some summer of early marriage, she already seems [too] frail, too slim a willow to be so near timberline. I can imagine that the hint across her thin shoulders is beginning to say she will never reach half a lifespan. My father — my father looks stronger than I ever knew him, and handsome, the straight planes of his face framed around the deep dimple-scar in the center of his chin. The dot of scar is the only flaw he shows, like a mark nicked when his strong face was carved. The canvas corner of a tent angles across an edge of the photo. A pair of black and white sheepdogs, ears up alertly, watch the intruding lens. A pair of saddlehorses and a sad packhorse gawk long necks in from the grassy fringes of the camp. The peculiar creature in these early pictures, the touch of sass and impulse, is my parents' gray and white tomcat.

Throughout those first summers, that big tom would travel the mountains with them by horseback, royally cradled between somebody's lap and a saddlehorn as they moved camp each morning.
Suppose an Air Force sergeant, and dub him Sgt. Garble. In mid-October of 1962, I am struggling to march across the broiled landscape of south Texas in Sgt. Garble's group of basic trainees. The entire gaggle of 45 men, which the Air Force grandly calls a "flight", is stutter-stepping and wobbling along the streets of Lackland Air Force Base. Every shrill command from Sgt. Garble is a word game we puzzle over. In all the oral history of military dialect, Sgt. Garble is uniquely cryptic. He marches us with a set of commands which all sound alike. The knack of shouting commands to marching ranks is to trim the words into aspirants which can be barked from deep in the lungs instead of working the smaller capacities of tongue and mouth. The word march is huffed from the abdomen as harch.

A simple cadence count of one two three four is best blurted out as
But in this season on the final mountain, I was the small drifter easing through swags of pine branches on the back of a horse. I would ride only a pack saddle, a rig without stirrups or easy contour of leather and as severe a seat as spending all day astride a sawhorse. My father laughed to recall the three of us trailing through the forest, he and my mother riding with the rhythm of lifelong saddlehands while I stubbornly straddled a rigging built to carry anything but the human body.

I see myself in that summer as a faraway figure, hair the hue of redwood bark. An only child and a solitary one from always living on remote ranches. I remember clearest that I had been given a bow and arrows, likely an early gift for that birthday. Learning quickly that the paper target tacked to the side of the cabin wouldn't meet my shots, I edged up until the arrow tip was inches from the bullseye. I let go the bowstring and the vital circle of paper ripped wide, and I remember grinning.

Of my mother, I recall little but the dusk of her death. The album photos point out to me that she was fine-toned, slight, with a roundish face where my own is easily read. And of course I have been told the doom inside her -- the asthma which at last clamped off all breath. But these I know are memories secondhand; I never feel from them the burn where they happened. What I do seem to call back from her final night is this: my father touching me sometime in lantern glow to say she is dead, your mother is dead, crying as the words choke him.

So: June 27, 1939. I became six years old, and my mother's life ended at 32 years. Birthday had gnarled into deathday, and in the next daybreak, dully reining the horses downslope from that cabin of the past, my father and I began our journey to whatever would come next.
June 27, 1951 -- This summer we are on the Blackfoot reservation. Our range runs to the bluffs overlooking the Two Medicine River. We trailed the sheep from the Jensen ranch to here. The 45 miles took us 4 days on the trail.

We're living in a trailer house about 25 feet long. Dad and I share the bed across one end, and Grandma makes down a bed at the other. We even brought some chickens with us from the ranch. When we move every couple days, we have to catch the chickens with a long wire hook. We also have a gray tiger cat that we call Kitten. He's never around when we move camp, but he finds us either that night or in the morning.

I wanted to get a job this summer. I'm 15 now. But Dad has had me stay to help with the sheep. He contracted to build fence at a place at Sun River, and so Grandma and I herded the sheep by ourselves the first two weeks here. We had an awful time. Sheep get on their backs this time of year, and several died from that. I learned to skin the dead ones for the pelts. I watched Dad for as long as I can remember, but this was my first time to do the skinning myself. Also, our saddlehorse got away from us. All we had was the car, and we couldn't go much of anywhere we needed to in these hills with it. So we ended up herding the sheep on foot, and it was a job. Grandma got more worried and madder all the time whenever one of the sheep got on its back and died.

We'll be shearing in a few days. Another reason Dad wanted me to stay this summer was to help with the wrangling. He says I'm a good hand in the corral. It will be too late to get a job after shearing. Haying has already started.
My mother died soon after sundown on my sixth birthday.

From my father's retellings and the oldest shadows at the back of my own mind, the memory tries to piece itself together.

The three of us began that last mountain summer in a cabin far up in the Bridger Range of Montana's southwestern corner. Alone in the high air, on a timbered mountain face reached only aboard saddlehorse or on foot, we eased through May and the first twenty-six days of May remote as nesting eagles.

Once a week, a rider from the home ranch would swing up the trail with food and mail, coming steeply and slowly out of the valley shadows which broke the plunge of the jackpine slopes. But except for him, only we three knew those highest meadows and piney ridges. Only the three of us breathed fresh each morning in the clean blue weather of early summer.

My mother and father were herding sheep. Before I was born, they had lived a number of summers this way, distant seasons caught for me in old photographs. Two young strangers grin out into my eyes.
Always a forest at their backs then, sunlight dappling across their rough shirt fronts.

Every time I am caught by surprise:

Here in some summer of early marriage, my mother already seems frail, too slim a willow to be there so near timberline. The photos catch what is to come. I easily imagine that the hint across her thin shoulders is beginning to say she will never reach half a lifespan.

My father -- my father looks stronger than I ever knew him, and even more handsome, the straight planes of his face strongly framed around the dimple-scar in the center of his chin. That dot of scar is the only flaw he shows, like a tool mark nicked in when his strong head was carved.

The canvas corner of a tent is angled, the edge of one photo.

Two black sheepdogs herding dogs, ears up, alertly watch the lens. A pair of saddlehorses and a sad packhorse gawk long necks in from the grassy fringes of the day camp.

The strange presence in these early pictures, the touch of sass and impulse, is my parents' gray and white tomcat. Throughout those first summers, that big tom would travel the mountains with them by horseback, cradled like a small prince between somebody's lap and a saddlehorn as they moved camp each morning.

But in this season on the final mountain, I am the small drifter easing through swags of pine branches on the back of a horse. Later, my father would laugh softly \\textit{fizzzz} and say that I would ride only on a pack saddle, would have nothing to do with any saddle rigging but
For all the publicity which had been inspired and the followers who had been aroused, Owenism and Fourierism spent themselves by the time of the Civil War. Not until the last two decades of the 19th century could the next utopian era be glimpsed. For a generation or so, the tremendous industrialization of the United States probably had absorbed many of the laborers who might have tried a utopian venture in the giddy 1840's. Northern Europe no longer fizzed with the same religious and economic discontent which earlier had sent utopian legions packing off to this country. But an open clash of capital and labor and then economic depression in the 1890's, in America began with strikes and industrial strife in the 1830's and out of the historical turn of events came an Indian summer for utopia.

This third era, a somewhat wan revival in comparison with the utopian enthusiasm of the 1830's and 1840's, might be called socialist, anarchist, or, to splice ideologies a bit, socialist/anarchist. A rage for socialistic experiments followed the publication of Edward Bellamy's futurist novel Looking Backward in 1888. Such enthusiasts as the cooperative of Equality in the state of Washington and the California utopian group called Altruria set out to live on the terms of Bellamy's doctrine of Nationalism. Other utopias of the period tried out other fine-spun ideologies -- syndicalism and anarchism -- which never attracted the broad following such theories depended on. Whatever frail chances this spate of socialist utopias had were devastated in the first few decades of this century by a combination of anti-radical fervor among much of the public and the utopians' own factionalism and economic woes.

About the best that can be said of the handful of ideological
that one without stirrups or easy contour of leather.

In my own memory, I see myself that summer in quick dabs, a few specks of color and mood. Hair the hue of redwood bark. An only child and a solitary one from living always on remote ranches.

I remember clearest that I had been given a bow and a few arrows, likely an early gift for my birthday. When my shots never neared the paper target tacked to the side of the cabin, I edged up until the arrow tip hung inches from the bullseye. I let go the bowstring and the innermost circle of paper ripped wide, and I remember grinning.

Of my mother, I recall almost nothing but the dusk of her death. From my father's voice, I know everything about the doom which had always been inside her, the asthma crimping at her breath. But these are memories secondhand, because I never feel from them the burn where they might have happened. What I do call back is from her final night, and is just this: my father touching me sometime in lantern glow to say she is dead, your mother is dead, crying as the words choked him.

So: June 27, 1945, in the start of memory. I became six years old, and my mother's life broke off at 32 years. And in the next daybreak, dully reining the horses downslope from the cabin of the past, my father and I began our journey to whatever would come next.
groups which would perform specified kinds of work, each group a
part of a complex community structure which added up to a Phalanx of
between 1620 and 1800 persons. Eventually, he proclaimed, there would
be exactly 2,985,981 Phalanxes, worldwide.

Fourier could have been the original for the joke about the fellow
who frequently was wrong but never was in doubt. His faith was unkillable.
He lacked any money to try out his notions, but in the last years of
his life Fourier ran newspaper advertisements announcing that he would be
home at a certain time every day if any curious philanthropist should
want to visit him. Daffy as Fourier may seem, he had his effect on
utopianism. The endless precise details of his plan worked a magic
on his followers, An American named Albert Brisbane took up Fourier's
regular ideas, wrote a column on Fourierism in Horace Greeley's New York
Tribune, talked the utopian contingent at Brook Farm into trying the
Brook Farm's failure didn't dim other Fourierist hopes.
Phalanx life. The forty or so Phalanxes attempted in America between
1841 and 1858 were not frivolous tryouts, for amid the shotgun pattern
of Fourier's ideas could be found an intriguing concept. Fourier had
planned out a system of wages which paid most for the worst chores,
easier for less skilled labor, and provided special rewards for skill in any
work. At the North American Phalanx in Red Bank, New Jersey, the most
durable and impressive of Fourierist colonies, the system worked for
a dozen years.

It is no news that some core must hold a utopia together. From
Ephrata through Harmonie, that core had been unbending religion. Fourier's
contribution was to suggest that an economic core might also work
in utopia.
Some embers of memory still burn in me from the night my mother died -- the night of my sixth birthday. Which of these farthest burns
at the back of the mind are my own and which ones were put there by
my father's retellings I never am sure, but that is the way with memory
and knots of flame.

Come with the past, then: Three of us are beginning that last
mountain summer at a cabin far up in the Bridger Range of
Montana's southwestern corner. Alone in the thin air, on a timbered mountain
face which can be reached only on foot or saddlehorse we ease through
the groved and buff-grassed slopes plunging away below us into valley
and home ranch many miles away. The trail with our supplies, but
once more we know the high meadows and piny ridges, all
the young
and crisp eaves and their thousand blunting beams brose the days away, every crisp
to create as a horizon of crags. Each morning the clean blue weather
shadows and then swooping high again, off at the far edge of sight,
and my parents herded sheep this way for a number
of summers, distant seasons caught for me in old photographs. No young
of summers, distant seasons caught for me in old photographs. No young
I see myself in that summer in quick dabs, specks of color and disposition. Hair, even from afar, the hue of redwood bark. An only child and a solitary one from always living on remote ranches. I remember clearest that I had been given a bow and arrows, an early gift for that birthday. Learning that the paper target tacked to the side of the cabin wouldn't meet my shots, I edged up until the arrow tip hung inches from the bullseye. I let go the bowstring and the vital circle of paper ripped wide, and I remember grinning.

Of my mother, I recall almost nothing but the dusk of her death. The album photos point out to me that she was fine-boned, slight, with a roundish face where my own is easily read. And of course I have learned from family retellings the doom inside her -- the asthma which at last clamped off all breath. But these I know are memories secondhand; I never felt the burn where they might have happened. What I do seem to call back from her final night is this: my father touching me sometime in lantern glow to say she is dead, your mother is dead, crying as the words choke him.

So: June 27, 1945. I became six years old, and my mother's life broke off at 32 years. Birthday had gnarled into deathday, and in the next daybreak, dully reining the horses downslope from that cabin of the past, my father and I began our journey to whatever would come next.
time that of the pair, my almost-unknown mother looks more as I expect. But my notion of her face has always come from such pictures, not from life. Here in some summer of early marriage, she already seems frail, too slim a willow to be there so near timberline. I easily imagine that the hint across her thin shoulders is beginning to say she will never reach half a lifespan. My father — my father looks stronger than I ever knew him, and handsome, the straight planes of his face framed around the deep dimple-scar in the center of his chin. The dot of scar is the only flaw he shows, like a tool mark nicked in when his strong head was carved. The canvas corner of a tent angles across an edge of the photo. Two black sheepdogs, ears up, alertly watch the lens. A pair of saddlehorses and a sad packhorse gawk long necks in from the grassy fringes of the day-camp. The peculiar creature in these early pictures, the touch of sass and impulse, is my parents’ gray and white tomcat. Throughout those first summers, that big tom would travel the mountains with them by horseback, royally cradled between somebody’s lap and a saddlehorn as they moved camp each morning.

But in this season on the final mountain, I am the small drifter easing through swags of pine branches on the back of a horse. I ride only a pack saddle, insist on this rig without stirrups or easy contour of leather, a severe a seat as spending all day astride a sawhorse. Later, my father would always laugh softly to recall the three of us trailing through the forest, he and my mother riding with the rhythm of lifelong saddlehands while I stubbornly straddled a rigging built to carry anything but the human body.
some embers of memory about my mother's death on that night of my sixth birthday. Which of these farthest blurs at the back of the mind are my own and which ones were put there by my father's retellings I no longer can be sure, but that is the way with memory and its knots of heat.

The three of us began that final mountain summer in a cabin far up in the Bridger Range of western Montana. Alone in the thin air, on a timbered mountain face which could be reached only on foot or saddlehorse, we were remote as eagles. My father and mother were herding a band of sheep. Once every week or so, a rider sent by the rancher who owned the sheep might come up the trail with supplies, but otherwise we had for ourselves the primitive spill of meadows and piney ridges, all the green-and-buff slopes falling away below us to sudden valleys and then swooping high again to crest as a horizon of peaks. The clean blue weather of June tinctured every sensation. Meanwhile, along the slants
I have some embers of memory about my mother dying on the night of a summer's day in a cabin at the foot of a mountain in a valley of pine timbered mountain face which could be reached only on foot or saddle horse, the three of us began that final mountain summer in a cabin far up in the Bridger Range of western Montana. Alone in the thin air, on a timbered mountain face which could be reached only on foot or saddle horse, we were remote as eagles. My father and mother were herding a band of sheep. Once every week or so, a rider sent by the rancher who owned the town would come up the trail with supplies, but otherwise we had for ourselves the left-over spilt of meadows and piney ridges, all the green-and-buff slopes falling away below us to sudden valleys and then swooping high again to crest as a horizon of peaks. The clean blue weather of June pasture the thousand ewes and their thousand lambs would ceaselessly browse, each morn of dry grass promising firm weight on the stockyard scales in autumn.

Before I was born, my parents had herded sheep in this manner for several summers, distant seasons caught for me now in old photographs. The two of them look strangely pure in these pictures -- hardy and confident, the easy grins seeming to confide that together they could roam anywhere, savor any livelihood. Always a forest at their backs then, with sunlight dappling across their pose. My mother, aside from standing slim as a willow, shows no sign that she will never reach half a lifespan.
Sometimes what's missing is the information that a newsmaker is trying to influence the historical record. In the spring of 1951, the Special Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce was a sensation. One of the first big television news stories, the Kefauver hearings were broadcast live over a 50-station hookup. An estimated 50 million viewers watched as mob leader Frank Costello was grilled in the witness chair. What was lost amid the hoopla was the point that the Costello grilling was a setup; the committee already had his testimony, and was picking at him in the open for the sake of publicity. The hearings rather accidentally began drawing viewers when a few stations covered them, and by the time of New York, staff was well aware of publicity value.

First, Costello was not the mob kingpin the hearings made him out to be. Two of Kefauver's staff members later admitted that...
My father looks stronger than I ever knew him, and handsome, the straight planes of his face accented by the deep dimple-scar in the center of his chin. The canvas corner of a tent will angle across an edge of the photo. Usually a pair of black and white sheepdogs, heads and ears up alertly for any eventuality, can be seen. Usually too a pair of saddlehorses and a doleful packhorse gawk into the scene from the fringes of the camp.

The odd creature in these early pictures, the lone touch of elegance and whimsy, is my parents' gray and white tomcat. Throughout those first summers, that big tom would travel the mountains with them by horseback, cradled royally between somebody's lap and a saddlehorn whenever they moved camp.

In this final season of timberline and hoof, I write about, I was the odd drifter, easing through swags of pine branches on the back of a horse.

Stubbornly, oddly, I would ride only a pack saddle. Stubbornly scorning stirrups or any comfortable contour of leather, I would ride only a pack saddle, which is about as comfortable as sitting astride a sawhorse. My father would remember the three of us trailing through the forest, he and my mother riding in easy rhythm while I straddled a rigging built to carry anything but the human body.

I see myself in that summer as a tiny distant figure, a hair the color of redwood bark, making a world of the mountainside and the clearing around the cabin. An only child and a solitary one from living on remote ranches all my life. I remember that I had been given a bow and arrow and a paper bullseye. Frustrated by forever missing, I edged nearer until the arrow point was only a few inches from the bullseye, and at last made the perfect puncture.
Sometimes the missing perspective could be filled in even as the event is happening, but such media alertness is all too rare. If the media aren’t alert enough, the newsmaker gets away with his attempt to slant the historical record.

One of the first big television news stories -- the Kefauver committee hearings on organized crime -- were a staged show which newsmen, an item of pertinent information the consumer did not get from the extravagant coverage.

Rather accidentally,

Unexpectedly, the crime committee hearings under Senator Estes the chairmanship of Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee began drawing large viewing audiences when stations in New Orleans and Detroit televised committee sessions in those cities late in 1950. By the time the hearings got to New York in March, 1951, Kefauver and the committee staff were well aware of the publicity value. The New York hearings were a sensation, broadcast live over a 50-station network.

An estimated 60 million viewers watched as underworld figure Frank Costello was grilled in the witness chair, and newspapers and magazines flocked to the coverage.

But what was not pointed out was that the Costello testimony was a repeat performance. The committee already had questioned Costello in closed session a month earlier. As one of Kefauver’s staff men later admitted, the televised sessions which covered the same questions -- with Costello compelled to give the same answers or be liable for perjury -- was a way to pick at the wounds in the open.
Of my mother, I recall little but the dusk of her death. Album photos point out to me now that she was small-boned, slight, with a roundish face where my own is easily read. And of course I have been told the fatal fact within her — the asthma which wracked and ripped and finally clamped off all breath. Of her last night, I seem to see this: my father touching me in lantern glow to say she is dead, crying as he chokes out the words.

So June 27, 1945. I became six years old, and my mother's life ended at 33 years. Birthday had gnarled into deathday, and in the next daybreak, dully reining the horses downslope from that cabin of the past, my father and I began our journey to whatever would come next.
June 27, 1946 -- Today I am seven years old. I will be in the second grade this fall.

I didn't like school when I started. I didn't know anybody and at recess I sat on the sidewalk by myself. Except Susan Buckingham knew me from when Daddy put up her daddy's hay at the Loophole ranch and she made friends with me.

A gypsy boy was in our grade. When we had a party he couldn't have any cookies or chocolate milk. He went to a circus show. He lived down by the river in a trailer house.

We live on the Straugh ranch. The school bus comes from Ringling. Daddy or Wally drives me in the pickup to the gate to meet the bus. Sometimes we have to walk when the snow or mud is deep.

I go to town when Daddy does. He goes in the bars and drinks beer with his friends and I go with him. People buy me pop and talk to me. When I get sleepy I go to the pickup and lay down.

The first grade was easy except for coloring. I already know how to read. I have more funnybooks than any of the other kids. But coloring with crayons is hard. My pictures are cowboy and Indian fights. Mrs. Holmes says I don't do a good job of coloring out to the edges of the paper. I return the paper around and color the other way along the edges.

There are boys I play with at the ranch. Steve and Larry live on the ranch across the road. We play in the hills and the sagebrush and one day we saw an animal in the coulee behind our house. We threw rocks and yelled at it until it ran up into a tree. We told Daddy about it. He said it was a cougar and it could have ate all three of us. It was a scary thought.

It gets dark before 8 in the evenings and we have to be in bed by then. We can't go to Grace's house unless we're back before then.
Sometimes the missing perspective could be filled in even as the event is happening. If the media aren't alert enough, the newsmaker gets away with his attempt to slant the record. One of the first big television news events -- the Kefauver Committee's hearings on organized crime in March, 1951 -- was a staged performance. For all the colossal coverage, that item of pertinence was not passed along to the national audience by either the print media or the broadcasters.

A novelty in the early days of TV, the crime committee hearings under the chairmanship of Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee began drawing large viewing audiences when stations in New Orleans and Detroit put the committee sessions in those cities on the air in late January and early February of 1951. By the time hearings were held in New York in mid-March, Kefauver and the committee staff were well aware of the publicity value in focusing the camera lens on the underworld. The New York hearings were a sensation, broadcast live over a twenty-station hookup. An immense audience watched as gambler Frank Costello was grilled day after day in the witness chair, and newspapers and magazines focusing on the TV drama of the underworld chieftain with the nervous hands added to the coverage.

But the Costello testimony was a repeat performance, purely for the sake of fixing public attention on the committee's inquiry into organized crime in the U.S. The committee already had questioned Costello in closed session a month earlier. Hauled in again, this time before the television cameras, Costello had to give the same answers he had in private, or lay himself open to charges of perjury. As two of Kefauver's counsel later admitted,
My mother died soon after sundown on my sixth birthday.

From my father's retellings and the oldest shadows at the back of my own mind, the memory couples itself together:

The three of us began that last mountain summer in a cabin far up in the Bridger Range of Montana's southwestern corner. Alone in the high air, on a timbered mountain face reached only on foot or aboard saddlehorse, we eased through May and the first twenty-six days of June asleep as nested eagles. Once a week, a rider from the home ranch would swing up the trail with food and mail, coming steeply and slowly out of the valley shadows which pooled beneath the plunge of our jackpine slopes. Except for him, only we three knew those highest meadows and piney ridges. Only three of us breathed fresh each morning in the clean blue weather of first summer.

My mother and father were herding sheep. Before I was born, they had lived a number of summers this way, distant seasons caught for me in old photographs.

Two young strangers grin out into my eyes.

Here in some summer of early marriage, my mother already seems frail, too slim a willow to be there so near timberline. The photos have caught what was to come. I easily imagine that the hint across her frail shoulders already is saying she will never reach half a lifespan.

My father -- my father looks stronger than I ever knew him, and even more handsome, the straight lines of his face strongly framed around the dimple-scar in the center of his chin. That dot of scar
is the only flaw he shows, like a tool mark nicked in when his strong head was carved.

Always a forest at their backs then, sunlight dappling across their rough shirt fronts. [Also behind them] the canvas corner of their tent is angled across one photo edge. Two black herding dogs, ears up, watch the lens in surprise. A pair of saddlehorses and a sad packhorse gawk long necks in from the grassy fringes of the day camp.

The strange presence in these early pictures, the touch of sass and impulse, is my parents' gray and white tom cat. Throughout those first summers, that big tom would travel the mountains with them by saddlehorse, cradled like a tiny prince between somebody's lap and a saddleshorn as they moved camp each morning.

But in this season on the final mountain, I am the small drifter easing through swags of pine branches on the back of a horse. Later, my father would laugh softly and remember that I would ride only on a pack saddle, would have nothing to do with any saddle rigging which had stirrups or comfortable curves of leather.

Within my own mind, I can see myself that summer only in quick dabs, a few specks of color and mood. Hair the hue of redwood bark. An only child and a solitary one from living always on remote ranches. I remember clearest that I had been given a bow and a few arrows, likely an early gift for my birthday. When my shots wildly missed the paper target tacked to the side of the cabin, I edged up until the arrow tip hung inches from the bullseye. When I let go the bowstring and the circle of paper ripped open, I must have grinned
at my own deceit.

Of my mother, whatever I try I can recall almost nothing but the dusk of her death. Album photos point out to me that she was fine-boned, slight, with a roundish face where my own is quickly read. From stories in my father’s voice, I know everything about the doom which always had been inside her, the asthma crimping at her breath. But those are rememberings secondhand. I never feel from them the burn where they would have happened.

What I do call back, the scald fresh each time, is from her final night, and is just this: my father touching me sometime in sobbing lantern glow to say she is dead, your mother is dead, crying as the words choke him.

So: June 27, 1915, at the start of memory. I became six years old, and my mother’s life broke off at 32 years. And in the next daybreak, dully reining the horses downslope from that cabin of the past, my father and I began our journey to whatever would come next.
I have some embers of memory about my mother's death during the night of my sixth birthday.

Which of these farthest blurs at the back of the mind are my own and which ones were lodged there by my father's retellings I never am sure. But that is the way of memory.

The three of us began our final mountain summer in a cabin far up in the Bridger Range of western Montana. Alone in the thin air, on a timbered mountain face which could be reached only on foot or saddlehorse, we were remote as eagles.

My father and mother were herding sheep. Once each week or so, the rancher who owned the sheep would send a rider up the trail with supplies, but otherwise we held for ourselves the spill of mountai...
meadows and piney ridges, all the green-and-buff slopes falling away
below us into valleys and then swooping high again to crest as a horizon
of peaks. The clean blue weather of June came fresh with each morning.
Along the slants of pasture the thousand ewes and their thousand scattering
lambs would browse, every crisp munch of grass promising weight on the
stockyard scales in autumn.
to crest as a horizon of peaks. The clean blue weather of June came again with each morning. Along the slants of pasture the thousand ewes and their thousand skittering lambs would browse, every crisp munch of grass promising weight on the stockyard scales in autumn.

Before I was born, my parents herded sheep in this style for several summers, distant seasons caught for me now in old photographs. The camera's eye seems as foreign on that mountainside as the eye of a lynx watching a city street, but I would lose part of my history without these pictures.

The two young strangers look out from the paper image hardy and assured, their easy grins confiding that together they would roam anywhere, savor any work as long as it was under trees and open sky. Always a forest at their backs then, with sunlight dappling across their faded shirtfronts.

My mother, aside from standing slim as a willow, shows no hint that she will never reach half a lifespan. My father looks stronger than I ever knew him, and handsome, the straight planes of his face accented by the deep dimple-scar in the center of his chin. The canvas corner of a tent angles across an edge of the photo. A pair of black and white sheepdogs, ears up alertly, watch the alien lens. A pair of saddles and a doleful packhorse gawk long necks into the scene from the grassy fringes of the camp. The exotic creature in these early pictures, the lone touch of fancy and whim, is my parents' gray and white tomcat. Throughout those first summers, that big tom would travel the mountains with them by horseback, royally cradled between somebody's lap and a saddlehorn whenever they moved camp.

But in this later season of timberline and hoof, I was the odd drifter
easing through swags of pine branches on the back of a horse. 

Stubbornly scorning stirrups or any pleasant contour of leather, I would ride only a pack saddle, which is no more comfortable than spending all day astride a sawhorse. My father would recall the three of us trailing through the forest, he and my mother riding with the easy rhythm of veteran saddlehands while I straddled a rigging built to carry anything but the human body.

I see myself in that summer as a tiny distant figure, rambling away in scampers along the mountainside and in the clearing around the cabin. An only child and a solitary one from living on remote ranches since I was born. Hair the hue of redwood bark. Cowboy hat, broad and black, to shade me from sunburn. The clearest memory is that I had been given a bow and arrows and a paper target tacked to the side of the cabin, maybe an early birthday present. Quickly fed up with wide misses, I edged nearer and nearer until the arrow tip was only a few inches from the bullseye, and at last unloosed the perfect arrow.

Of my mother, I recall little but the dusk of her death. Album photos point out to me that she was fine-boned, slight, with a roundish face where my own is easily read. And of course I have been told about the doom waiting within her -- the asthma which racked and rasped and at last clamped off all breath. Of her final night, I seem to see this: my father touching me in lantern glow to say she is dead, crying as he chokes out the words.

So: June 27, 1915. I became six years old, and my mother's life ended at 32 years. Birthday had gnarled into death day, and in the next daybreak, dully reining the horses downslope from that cabin of the past, my father and I began our journey to whatever would come next.
I have some embers of memory about my mother's death during the night of my sixth birthday.

Which of these farthest blurs at the back of the mind are my own and which ones were lit there by my father's retellings, I never am sure. But that is the way of memory.

The three of us began our final mountain summer in a cabin far up in the Bridger Range of western Montana. Alone in the thin air, on a timbered mountain face which could be reached only on foot or saddlehorse, the three of us were remote as eagles.

My father and mother were herding sheep. Once each week or so, the rancher who owned the sheep would send a rider up the trail with supplies, but otherwise we held for ourselves the spill of
winter of 1846-7, an episode of desperation and cannibalism. The agony of the Mormons in the Rockies in 1856; the travail of John C. Fremont's expedition on its way to the Continental Divide in the 1848-9 winter.

But a far more surprising trap lay in the peaks of the Cascades in the first decade of this century, nearly twenty years after the railroaders thought they had conquered the West's last great barrier to track and timetable.

Train Number 27, the Great Northern's fast mail, eased to a stop at Cascade Tunnel about 5:30 the morning of February 23, 1910. Mail clerk Alfred B. Hensel later remembered that he peered from his mail car and saw snow coming down "like somebody was picking a chicken." It looked to Hensel as if the snow already was eight or nine feet deep. Where workmen were shoveling snow off the roof of a nearby roundhouse, the bank they were slicing away loomed well above their heads.

Ahead, on the same track with the mail train, sat Number 25, a passenger train of seven cars and a big twelve-wheeled locomotive.

Both trains were westbound. Since leaving
I have some embers of memory about my mother's death in the nightfall of my sixth birthday.

Which of these farthest blurs at the back of the mind are my own and which ones were lit there by my father's retellings, I never am sure. But this must be the way of memory.

The remembering: we began our final mountain summer in a cabin far up in the Bridger Range of western Montana. Alone in the thin air, on a timbered mountain face which could be reached only on foot or saddlehorse, the three of us were remote as eagles.

My father and mother were herding sheep. Once each week or so, the rancher who owned the sheep would send a rider up the trail with groceries and mail, but otherwise we held for ourselves the spill of
cold snow cap of Windy Mountain a long warm burrow filled with passengers and tired railroad laborers, was in its sixth night on the mountain.

The snow had changed to rain, and a lightning storm was crashing in the night. About one a.m. on March 1, about 500 feet above the trains along a line as neat as if cut by giant shears, the snow mass slipped loose.

Nearly a quarter of a mile wide, it surged down the slope, gathering everything in its path. Both trains went over the mountain ledge on the crest of the slide, then the vast bulk of the following avalanche were the passenger train, the fast mail, O'Neill's private car, a rotary plow, and more than 100 persons.

Henry White, asleep in a berth nearest the mountain slope, recalled that he was awakened "by the impact of the snow against the side of the coach and the sound of breaking glass."

Mail clerk Alfred Hensel, asleep in the mail train between the passenger train and the drop-off to Tye Creek a few hundred feet below, remembered:
In this final season of mountain and sheep

In this final season of mountain and sheep I call from the past, I was the one to furnish an unlikely horseback sight among the swags of pine branches. In some junior fit of bravado, I had decided I would ride only a pack saddle. Think of a small sawhorse rigged to a horse's back.

Of my mother, I remember almost nothing. Photos tell me she was small-boned, slight, and had a face where mine can be read. I know the most fatal fact of her -- the asthma which wrung the vitality from her.

In this final season of mountain and sheep I write about, I was the one to furnish an unlikely scene on the back of a horse. In a junior fit of bravado, I had decided I would ride only a pack saddle.

With mystifying bravado, I had decided I would ride only a pack saddle. Stubbornly

a stallion contraption - no stirrups, no strap - only a sawhorse
My father would recall: 37 as trails through forest, his mother like riders my a page of I straddled

Birthday had become deathday, & my father & I
that many of a day's stories won't have it. Notice that the political analysis by the authors from the London Sunday Times showed up in the most leisurely reporting form of all, a book - although it could have appeared in a background or interpretive story not governed by the pace of the day's events.
So: June 27, 1945. I had become six years old, and my mother's life ended at 33 years. Birthday had gnarled into deathday, and the next daybreak, dully easing the horses downslope from that cabin of the past, my father and I began our journey to whatever would come next.
In this final season of timberline and hoof I write about, I was the one to furnish an unlikely sight on the back of a horse. Stubbornly I would ride only a pack saddle, which with no stirrups and no contours is about as comfortable as sitting astride a sawhorse. My father would recall the three of us trailing through the forest, he and my mother like riders from a finely illustrated page while I straddled a saddle built for gunnysacks of food.

I see myself (in memory) as a tiny distant figure, hair the color of redwood bark, making a world of the small clearing around the cabin. An only child and a solitary one from living on ranches all my life. I remember I had been given a bow and arrow and a paper bullsye target. Frustrated by forever missing, I edged nearer and nearer until the arrow point was only a few inches from the center of the bullsye and at last made the perfect puncture.

Of my mother, I remember almost nothing but the dusk of her death. Album photos tell me now that she was small-boned, slight, with a face where my own is easily read. I know the most fatal fact of her -- the asthma which wracked the life from her. Of her last night, I seem to see my father waking me in lantern glow to say she was dead, crying as he choked out the words.

So: June 27, 1915, I became six years old, and my mother's life ended at 33 years. Birthday had become deathday, and the next morning, riding downslope from the cabin of loss, my father and I began a journey of
I have some embers of memory about my mother dying on the night of my sixth birthday. Which of these farthest blurs at the back of the mind are my own and which ones were put there by my father's retellings I no longer can be sure, but that is the way with memory.

The three of us began that final mountain summer in a cabin far up in the Bridger Range of western Montana. Alone in the thin air, on a timbered mountain face which could be reached only on foot or saddlehorse, we were remote as eagles. My father and mother were herding a band of sheep.

Once every week or so, a rider sent by the rancher who owned the sheep would come up the trail with supplies, but otherwise we had for ourselves the lofty spill of meadows and forested ridges, all the green-and-buff slopes falling away below us to twisted valleys and then swooping high again to crest as a thick horizon of peaks. The clean blue weather of June tinted every sensation. And down the long rugged slants of pasture the ewes and their lambs, ceaselessly browsed, each munch of dry grass promising a firm weight on the stockyard scales in autumn.
Before I was born, my parents had herded sheep in this fashion for several summers, distant seasons caught for, now in old photographs. They look strangely pure in these pictures — hardy and confident, the easy grins seeming to promise that the two of them together could roam anywhere, savor any livelihood. My mother, aside from looking slim as a willow, shows no sign that she will be dead before reaching half her lifespan. My father looks stronger than I ever knew him, and handsome, the straight planes of his face accented by the deep dimple-scar in the center of his chin. The canvas corner of a tent will show at the edge of the photo. And always a forest at their backs, with the sunlight dappling across their pose. Usually a pair of black and white sheepdogs, their heads up alertly for any eventuality, can be seen. Usually too a pair of saddlehorses and a dourly packhorse gawk into the scene from the edges of the camp. The odd creature in these early pictures, the only touch of elegance or whimsy, is my parents' gray and white tomcat. Like my mother and father, the big tom traveled the mountains all summer by horseback, royally cradled between somebody's lap and the saddlehorn whenever they moved camp.
I have some embers of memory about my mother dying on the night of my sixth birthday. Which of these scant blurs at the back of the mind are my own and which ones were put there by my father's retellings I no longer can be sure, but that is the way with memory.

The three of us lived that final mountain summer in a cabin far up in the Bridger Range of western Montana. In the thin air, on a timbered mountain face which could be reached only on foot or saddlehorse, we were remote as eagles. My father and mother were herding sheep, and the arc of range miles in all directions which the bands ranged over was ours alone.

The only outsider was the camp tender who at intervals brought in food by packhorse. My parents had spent several summers of their dozen years of marriage this way. Those mountain summers are caught in old photographs showing them in tremendous hats against the sun. They look strangely pure in these pictures, moving in a world of their own, always with a forest at their backs. The canvas corner of a tent; two black and white dogs; a cat.

They rode saddle horses, but in a junior show of bravado I followed them around on a horse with a pack saddle, like a small sawhorse cinched on the horses back.
I have embers of memory about my mother dying on the night of my sixth birthday. Which of these blurs of the back of my mind are my own and which ones have been put there by my father's retellings I no longer know, but that is the way with memory. That summer the three of us were living in a cabin far up in the Bridger Mountains of western Montana. It was as remote as if we were living in two centuries ago, for only horses and sheep could travel so far into the mountains. My parents rode saddle horses, but in a junior fit of bravado I would ride only a pack saddle, like a sawhorse cinched onto a horse's back. As in several summers of the dozen years they'd been married, my father and mother were herding sheep. Those mountain summers are caught in old photographs showing them in big hats against the sun of the thin air, a big tent behind them, two or three dogs at their sides, and sometimes the whimsical touch of a cat. They look strangely pure, hardy, moving in a world of their own, as if living out a legend of Old West life. 

I see myself in this summer of death as a small distant figure, hair the color of redwood barks, an only child and a solitary one from living on ranches where there were no other children.

always a part at the back - canvas corner tent
2 dogs - cat
like Bedouins - gallant
I have some embers of memory about my mother dying on the night of my sixth birthday. Which of these smoky blurs at the back of the mind are my own and which ones were put there by my father's retellings I no longer can be sure, but that is the way with memory.

The three of us began that final mountain summer in a cabin far up in the Bridger Range of western Montana. Alone in the thin air, on a timbered mountain face which could be reached only on foot or saddlehorse, we were remote as eagles. My father was herding sheep. Once every week or so, a rider sent by the rancher who owned the sheep might come up the trail with supplies, but otherwise we had for ourselves a sweeping arc of terrain which the ewes and their lambs would nibble away at until autumn.

Before I was born, my parents had herded sheep in this fashion for several summers, distant seasons caught for me now in old photographs. They look strangely pure in these pictures—the grins beneath their jaunty hats seeming to promise that the two of them together could go anywhere, do anything. My mother, aside from looking short and slim, shows no sign that she will be dead before her life is half over. My father looks stronger than I ever knew him, and handsome, his square face accentuated by the dimple-scar on the chin where a bottle fragment hit him. The canvas corner of a tent will show at the edge of the photo. Always a forest at their backs.

A pair of black and white sheepdogs are always posed with them, forepaws together in the marvelous patience of the breed. The odd creature in these early pictures, the only touch of elegance or whimsey, is my parents' cat.

A great gray and white tom, he summered with them in the mountains like a small lion gone back to wild origins. Like my father and mother, he traveled by horseback, regally cradled between somebody's lap and the saddlehorn whenever they moved camp.
I have embers of memory about my mother dying on the night of my sixth birthday. Which of these blurs from the back of my mind are my own and which ones were put there by my father's retellings I no longer can be sure, but that is the way with memory. Years scuff away the margins between recitation and reality. One way or the other, images from that final mountain summer stay with me. The three of us were living in a cabin far up in the Bridger Mountains of western Montana; we were as remote as eagles. My father and mother were herding sheep, as they had during several summers of their dozen years of marriage, and this rangeland in the timber could be reached only by horse.

I have some embers of memory about my mother dying on the night of my sixth birthday. Which of these scant blurs from the back of the mind are my own and which ones were put there by my father's retellings I no longer can be sure, but that is the way with memory.

During that final mountain summer the three of us were living in a cabin far up in the Bridger Mountains of western Montana, remote as eagles. My father and mother were herding sheep, as they had in several summers of their dozen years of marriage.

As in several summers of the dozen years they had been married, my father and mother were herding sheep.
DEATHDAY

Soon before daybreak on my sixth birthday, my mother's breathing wheezed more raggedly than ever, then quusted. And then stopped.

Memory begins to bunch itself there. All the time since, I have reached back along my father's retellings and into the oldest shadows within me to feel for this first remembered edge of myself. Life.

It starts, early in the mountain summer, at a cabin far up in the Bridger Range of Montana's southwestern corner. Alone on a high timbered shelf, we eased through May and the first twenty-six days of June secure as hawks with wind under our wings. Once a week, the camp tender from the home ranch would climb the trail to us. The blaze-faced sorrel he rode and the packhorse haltered behind would plod up out of the shadows which pooled in the valley under our jackpine slopes, until at last the rider would step down from his stirrups into the cabin clearing and unknot from the
packsaddle the provision sacks, faded white as tiny clouds, which bulged with our groceries and mail. Minutes later the camptender would be resaddled and riding from sight. For the next seven mornings again, until his hat and shoulders began to show over the trail crest another time, only the three of us would be there in the clean blue weather of the summer mountain.

Three of us, and the sheep scattered down a meadow slope like a slow, slow avalanche of fleeces. Before I was born, my mother and father had lived other summers this way, herding the sheep through the long still days until the lambs had fattened for shipping. They carried a box-camera those earlier summers, and I have the few album pages they put together of their campsites along the meadows and ridgesides. Now memory sidesteps in surprise, because off the stiff black pages, two young strangers grin out into my eyes.

My father looks stronger than I ever knew him, and even more handsome, the straight broad lines of his face framed cleanly around the dimple-scar in the center of his chin. His stockman's hat has been crimped carefully, sits on his head at a perfect angle. His shoulders line out level and very wide for a man five and a half feet tall, but this strength at the top of him trims away to a lower body slenier as a boy's. I remember that he was so slim down the waist and hips that the seat of his pants always would bag in, and the gongue of his belt had to flap far past the buckle. That dot of scar is the only flaw he shows, like a tool mark nicked in when his strong head was carved. A single tiny notch at the bottom of his face, as if it might be the lightest scratch of all the calamity ahead for him.
But my mother: my mother, here in some summer of early marriage, already seems frail, too slim a willow to be there so near timberline. Again, because I know what will come, I believe myself into the notion that I can read it all gathering here. I coax from the photos any detail which seems to tell the sickness eroding in her: The pinch across her slender shoulders, the eyes which are almost too calm and accepting what can they be saying but death, death soon?

Always a forest at the backs of these familiar photoed strangers, and sunlight spattering down through the pine boughs to their rough shirt fronts. The canvas slopes of their tent are triangled grayly at the back of the day camp. Two black herding dogs, ears up in dog surprise, watch the lens. A pair of saddlehorses gawk, long necks in from the grassy fringes of camp as if afraid any attention might miss them.

Only one creature in these early pictures does not fit -- the pet which is being stroked in my mother's hands. Those first summers of following the sheep, my parents kept with them in their daily sift through the forest a gray and white tomcat they called Pete Olson. Somehow, amid the horses and dogs and sheep, and the coyotes and bobcats which ranged close to camp, Pete Olson rationed his nine lives out in prowl after nightly prowl. Then as camp was moved each morning, he would be cradled like a prince between somebody's lap and the saddle pommel as the horses shouldered through the timber.

But in this season on the final mountain, the surprising
drifter ducking through swags of pine branches on the back of a horse is me. Later, my father never tired of telling what a cantankerous rider I made. Every morning he husk inch my horse into a sawbuck packsaddle, a rigging of crosspieces shaped like a small sawhorse and just as rasp-hard to sit in for half a day at a time. Whatever my five-year-old reasons, I wanted no stirrups or snug curves of leather, but I would straddle that packsaddle as if born into it.

Except for this one borrowed dab of memory, I can see myself that summer only in specks of color and mood. Hair a dark rusty red, and the freckly pale skin to go with it. Sky-blue eyes which never missed a printed word; days ahead, I would begin to think of the comic books which would come in a tight-rolled bundle with the mail the camptender brought up the mountain. A dreamy mind from living always on remote ranges with only grownups and imagination for company. And a sober cussedness about having my own way, which showed itself in the one small stunt I remember clearer than anything else. I had been given a bow and a few arrows, maybe an early gift for my birthday. When my shots missed the paper target which my father tacked to the back of the cabin, I edged up until the arrow tip hung only inches away. I let go the bowstring, and the bullseye ripped open with a hard snapping sound.

Of my mother's death, whatever I try, I recall almost nothing. The album photos have printed into me that she was fine-boned, hardly more than tiny, with a roundish face where my own is
quickly read. From stories in my father's voice, I know everything about the doom which had been inside her since she was born, the asthma pinching on her breath. But those are rememberings second-hand. What I call back on my own is just this: my father touching me awake in lantern glow, his shadow thrown far up onto the wall, to say she is dead, your mother is dead, sobbing as the words choke him.

So: June 27, 1945, at the start of memory, and its undermost workings. I became six years old, and my mother's life drained out at 31 years. Then in the first gray daylight, dully reining our horses away from that cabin of the past, my father and I started downslope toward whatever would come next.
Valley

The clockless mountain summers were over for my father. Forty-four years old, a ranch hand, now a widower, Charlie Doig had a son to raise by himself. He needed work which would last beyond a quick season. He had to get us under a roof somewhere, choose a town where I could go to school, piece out in his own mind just how we were going to live from then on. It tells most about my father over the next years that I was the only one of those predicaments that ever seemed to grow easier for him.

Some homing notion said to bring us back to old ground; his mood, maybe, that we were lost enough without braving places he had never been. Beginning when his legs were long enough to straddle a horse's back, Dad had spent all but a few years of his life riding out after cattle and sheep across the gray sage distances of the Smith River Valley and the foothill country hunkered all around it. Any ranch in sight could start a story: "The winter of 'twenty-one, I helped that scissorbill feed his worked cattle. He had a team of big roans on the hay sled. Oh, they
were dandies . . ." The two of us came into that remembered countryside like skipping rocks shied across a pond.

The first weeks we lived with one of Dad's brothers, tucked into an upstairs spare room of his ranch house. Dad worked in the hayfield, while I was left at the ranch buildings to play with my three cousins. It was the unfair proposition I had ever come up against. The only playmate I knew or wanted was the aloneness which had spread open my days for whatever I could think up. Before, if I wanted to spend half the day face down over the creek trying to scoop my hand under tadpoles, I did it. If I wanted to play a pretend game by flipping rocks at a tree and making the kchew sound of shooting with my mouth, I did that. Now my aloneness was dying, just as my mother had, and I was getting fed up with less.

We moved in next with Dad's oldest friend, Clifford Shearer. Clifford's ranch was a few miles from the county seat of White Sulphur Springs, where I had to go to school. School curdled me, too. Every morning came a too-quick trip to the schoolyard and the trudge up a broad flight of stairs to a classroom where I would be cooped for the day with twenty small strangers, not one of whom had ever ridden a sawbuck packsaddle or shot an arrow in the Bridger Mountains. Those early weeks in the first grade, there were only two little bursts of excitement. We went through a drill about how to line up and quick-march out of the old brick building if it caught fire, which gave me hope that maybe it would. And one morning when we were fanned out around the teacher for
reading, the blond girl sitting next to me peed her pants and set up a sobbing howl as the rest of us backed off from her puddle and watched to see how school handled something like this. The teacher's hankie ended the tears, and a janitor with a mop sopped up the other. I sat with my feet up on the chair rungs for the next few days of reading lessons.

Even before the peeing, I wasn't thrilled with lessons. I already could read anything the surprised teacher could put in front of me, and could add or subtract whatever numbers she chalked on the blackboard. I had so much free time in my head that I could spend most of the day being lonesome for ranch life and its grownups and its times of aloneness. Every recess and lunch hour I moped off by myself, then sulked some more after school until Dad or Clifford drove up for me.

If it was Dad who came to take me from the schoolyard, I stepped from the shadows of my mood into the shadows of his. Years afterward and hundreds of miles from the valley, I was with him when he met a man in the street, backed away, and stared the stranger out of sight in wordless hatred. The man had worked at the ranch where my mother died, and a few days after her death had told Dad bluffly to forget her, get on with life as a man ought to. All that time and distance later, Dad still despised him for those clumsy words.

Not until then did I understand how hard a time it had been when he came for me after school in those earliest weeks after my mother's death and we would drive back to a borrowed room in
a pitying friend's house. Day by day as autumn tamed the valley
around us, now with bright frost weather, now with rain carrying the
first chill of winter, Dad stayed in the darkness of his grief.
He must have had a kind of battle

lucius, one senses blasted around in him by that night of death
and all the torturing days it was followed by. He might go
through the motions of work, even talk a bit with Clifford, but
any time his eyes could brim and he would lapse off, wordless,
grieving. I never knew, either, when some sentence I would say,
or some gesture I would make in the way my mother had, would send
him off into grief.

Then coaxing began to crack through to us. Mine came easiest.
Some one instant -- the giggles of a game of tag, or the arc of
a swing going so high it looked good and dangerous -- must have
pulled me onto the school playground, and into friendships.
Several of my classmates carried a black lunchbox to school as
I did. We had to congregate to see which sandwiches or cookies
could be swapped, and whether anybody had been lucky enough
to get chocolate milk in his thermos instead of white. And when
the first snow came, all the rocks I had thrown at trees in
the pretend games paid off. I could chunk a snowball hard enough
to make even the sixth-grade boys flinch. Whoever chose up
sides for the snow fort game we played began to choose me first
or second.

The schoolyard no longer was a jail to me. And by luck,
the teacher in that coop of a classroom was crafty. She was a
small, doll-like woman who somehow could push twenty beginning
minds at their separate speeds. For me, she got out books of
her own, put me to helping others with their reading -- anything
to keep my eyes down into the pages, and all of it telling me that here, in as many words on paper as I could take in, stretched my new aloneness.

At the same time, Clifford was beginning to nudge Dad out of his sour haze. The two of them had been friends since before they could remember, left home together as teenagers to go off to a lumber town away out on the coast, knew and liked each other in the easy way that happens only a time or two during life. Clifford had come out of a homestead family as poor as the shale slopes crowding in on their shanty. He had never flinched from anything for very long ever since. Now he heard of a small ranch for rent at the south end of the valley, and somehow drew Dad into saying he would look it over. The ranch never could amount to much -- too little water, too many scabbed hillsides of gray rock -- but it might carry a hundred or so head of cattle if a man knew what he was doing. Better, Clifford knew, the work demanding to be done there would elbow the grief out of Dad's days.

Somewhere in himself my father steadied enough to decide. He shook hands on the deal for the ranch. For the third time in a dozen weeks, the pair of us bounced across the Smith River Valley.

On the blustery mail day when we left the highway and drove onto the gray clay road of the new ranch, we began to live out the close of a story which had started itself eighty years earlier. In the 1860's, the first white settlers had trickled into the area of central Montana which came to be called the
Smith River Valley. If the earliest of them wagoned in on a day when the warm sage smell met the nose and the clear air lensed close the details of peaks two days' ride from there, what a glimpse into glory it must have seemed. A new country bigger than some of the eastern states, vacant for the taking. The home valley of it all lay flat and calm in every direction like a gray inland sea, held by buttes and long ridges at the northern and southern ends, and east and west by mountain ranges. The Blackfoot tribes who had hunted the land by then were pulling north, in a last ragged retreat to the plains beyond the Missouri River. On the opposite slopes of the Big Belts, placer camps around Helena were flushing gold out of every gravel gulch. With the Indians vanished and bonanza gold drawing in the town builders, how could this neighboring valley miss out on prosperity? No, unbridle imagination just for a moment, and it couldn't help but checker all these seamless new miles into pasture and field, roads and towns.

Yet if they had had eyes for anything but the empty acres, those firstcomers might have picked clues even from the pretty uplands that here was a peculiar run of country, and maybe treacherous. Hints begin along the eastern skyline. There the Castle Mountains poke tall thin turrets of stone out of black-green forest. From below in the valley, the spires look as if they had been engineered up from the forest floor whenever someone took the notion, an entire mountain range of castle-builders' whims, until the fancy stone fingers wore too thin in
the wind and began to chink apart boulder by boulder. Here, if the valleycomers could have gauged it, was a measure of how wind and storm could work on that country, fraying down granite if it stood in the way. Soon enough, the Castle Mountains' everlasting mood of wear and tear took its effect on the area's first prospering settlement, a silver strike town across the far slope of the range. That town of Castle roared with new money at the start of the 1890's, died overnight, and then began weathering to pieces as slowly and endlessly as the spired formations all around.

While the Castle Mountains make a spookily horrific horizon for the rising sun, the range to the west, the Big Belts, cast some eeriness of their own down on the valley. The grandest peak of the range -- eminenced on maps as Mt. Edith, but always simply Old Baldy to those of us who had to live with it -- thrusts up a bare summit with a giant crater gouged in its side. Even in hottest summer, snow lies in the crater like a patch centered on a gaping wound. Always, then, there is this reminder that before the time of men, unthinkable forces broke apart the face of the biggest landform the eye can find from any inch of the valley.

Nature's crankiness to the Big Belts did not quit there. The next summit to the south, Grassy Mountain, grows its trees and grass in a pattern tipped upside down from every other mountain in sight. Instead of rising out of bunchgrass slopes which give way to timber reaching down from the crest, Grassy
is dark with timber at the bottom and opens into a wide generous pasture -- a prairie some few thousand feet higher than any prairie ought to be, all the length of its gentle summit.

Along the valley floor, omens go on. The Smith River turns out to be little more than a creek named by a near-sighted optimist. It worms its way across the valley, forever kinking up three times the distance for every mile it flows and delivering all along the way more willow thickets and clay-greased cutbanks than actual water. On the other hand, the water that is missing from the Smith River may arrive in some surprise gush anywhere else. A hot mineral pool erupting at the north end of the valley gave the name to the county seat which built up around the steaming boil, White Sulphur Springs.

But whatever the quirks to be discovered in a careful look around, the valley and its walls of high country fitted the one firm notion the settlers held: empty country to fill up. Nor could the eye alone furnish what was most vital to know about the tides of livestock which soon were in seasonal flow between the valley and those curious mountains. The grazing herds and bands were not simply on the move into the mountains or back to the lowlands. They were traveling between high country and higher, and in that area of Montana, the weather is uglier and more dangerous the farther up you go. The very floor of the Smith River Valley rests one full mile above sea level. The foothills homesteads were hundreds of feet above that. The cold, storm-making mountains climbed thousands of feet more
into the clouds bellying over the Continental Divide. Whatever the prospects might seem in a dreamy look around, the settlers were trying a slab of lofty country which often would be too cold and dry for their crops, too open to a killing winter for their cattle and sheep.

It might take a bad winter or a late spring to show this unseeable fact, and the valley people did their best to live with it. But over time, the altitude and climate added up pitilessly, and even after a generation or so of trying the valley, a settling family might take account and find that the most plentiful things around them still were sagebrush and wind.

By the time I was a boy and Dad was trying in his own right to put together a life again, the doubt and defeat in the valley's history had come down into a single word. Anyone of Dad's generation always talked of a piece of land where some worn-out family eventually had lost to weather or market prices or both as a place. Not a farm or a ranch or even a homestead, all those empty little clearings which ghosted that sage countryside -- the McLoughlin place there by that butte, the Vinton place over this ridge, the Kuhnes place, the Burkey place, the Winters place, all the tens of dozens of sites where families lit in the valley, couldn't hold on, and drifted off. All of them just places.

One such place was where our own lives were compassed from,
and where the story we were living out together had its first murmuring. Southwest out of the valley into the most distant foothills of the Big Belts, both the sage and the wind grew wilder and stronger. Far off there, beyond the landmark rise called Black Butte and past even the long green pasture hump of Grassy Mountain, a set of ruts can be found snaking away from the county road. The track, worn bald by iron wagonwheels and later by the hard tires of Model T's, scuffs along shale bluffs and through sagebrush flats and across willow-choked creeks until at last it sidles around a hogback ridge. On the broad grassy slope opposite this ridge, my father was born and grew up.

This sudden remote bowl of meadow is called the Tierney Basin -- or would be, if any human voice were there any more to say its name. Here, as far back into the foothills of the Big Belt Mountains as their wagons could go, a double handful of Scots families homesteaded in the 1890's. Two notions seem to have pulled them so far into the hills: to raise sheep, and to graze them on free grass as much as they could. Look down into your cupped hands, and you have a ready map of what these homestead families had in mind. The life lines and contours in your palms are the small creeks and gulches angling into the center of the Basin. The main flow of water, Spring Creek, comes down to squirt out through the pass called Paddy's Run there where the bases of your palms meet. Toward these crinkles, the settlers clustered for sheltered sites close
to water. The braid of lines which runs square across between palms and wrists can be Sixteenmile Creek, the canyoned flow which gives the entire area its name -- the Sixteen country.

Your thumbs and the upward curl of your fingers are the mountains and steep ridges all around -- and on all that rim of unclaimed territory, exactly the Scots families to one another; countless bands of sheep would find summer grass.

What had picked up the Doigs from a village outside Dundee and carried them into the Montana foothills this way, there is no knowing. Dad wrote it off to Scots mulishness: "Scotchmen and coyotes was the only ones that could live in the Basin, and pretty damn soon the coyotes starved out." I only have the rough list of guesses from the long westering course of this country's frontier: poverty's push or the pull of wanderlust, some word of land and chance as heard from those who had gone earlier to America, or as read in the advertisements of booking agents. Perhaps some calamity inside the family itself, the loss of whatever thin livelihoods there had been in laboring on a laird's estate. Or it may truly have been as simple as the family vein of stubbornness. Some unordinary outlooks on life seemed to crop out in my grandfather's generation, attitudes which might not have set well with a narrow village way of life. Three Doig brothers and two sisters are known to have gone off from Dundee to risky futures, and at least two of them clearly went about life as if it was some private concoction they had just thought up.

One was the eldest of those who packed up for Montana -- David Lewis Doig, called D.L. The one clear fact about the
route from Dundee is that a number of Scots came in succession, like a chain of people steadying one another across a rope bridge. Whoever arrived first, his letters talked the next one into coming to file on a homestead, and the one persuaded after that was D.L.'s own brother-in-law. By 1890, he had followed on with his wife and two children to work in Helena as a tailor until he could size up the country.

He sized it up entirely backwards to the way his heirs have wished ever since, passing over rich valleys to the west to climb up into the Tierney Basin, where a homesteader who was giving up would sell him his claim. D.L. settled into his new site on Spring Creek, by long workdays and clever grazing made his small sheep ranch begin to prosper, and fathered hard until the family—finally numbered nine children. As promptly as he had enough offspring and income to keep the ranch going, D.L. devoted his own time to the hobby of raising brown leghorn chickens. He proved to be one of the world's geniuses at chicken growing. Before long, he had a bloodline of brown leghorns which were sleek glosses of feather and comb, and renowned as prize breeding stock. The trophies won at fairs and expositions covered most of one wall of the house, and D.L.'s wife sewed a quilt from the prize ribbons.

Until the Depression and old age at last forced him out, D.L. could be found there in the Basin, fussing over his prize chickens, sending someone down to the Milwaukee Railroad tracks
to fetch the jug of whiskey consigned for him every week, and asking not one thing more of the world.

The other Doig remembered for doing entirely what she pleased was D.L.'s sister, Margaret. She is at the outermost edges of the family memory, glimpsed and gone in someone's reminiscences as remembered by someone yet again. Margaret was the one in the family who went off from Scotland into the British Empire, alighting on some remote flood plain of India as a teacher or missionary, no one now is quite sure which. The rememberers tell that twice in her last years she came around the world to visit the relatives in Montana, a sudden ghost from Victorian days in her long black dress and the wooden shoes of India. She spent the rest of her life in India -- died there, was buried there -- and in her own way must have been as bemused with the existence she had worked out somewhere under the backdrop of the Himalayas as her brother was with his champion chickens.

D.L. was followed into his chosen Montana foothills by two of his brothers. Another of the faintest of family stories has it that the brother named Jack came to D.L.'s ranch on a doomed chance that mountain air would help his health, and there quietly waited out the year or so it took him to die. The other brother, Peter Doig, somehow made his way from Scotland just after his 19th birthday. He had been a tailor's helper, and in the new land at once began a life as far away from needle and thread as he could get. For several years, he did the same jobs on sheep ranches that his son would do a generation later,