An hour or so of this and we would be at the first of the sheep camps, McGrath plunging the pickup off into a rough sweep for the herder and his band. What mood we would find when the herder at last showed himself, his saddlehorse and dogs eyeing us with twice the interest he was, had always to be a gamble.

I can think of only one—who seemed to thrive on the life—Louise, a tall soldierly man with a German accent. He owned a pair of tiny binoculars which snapped open like a case for eyeglasses, and spent his time peering for wildlife on the mountain slopes. Yesterday a black bear came up over there. I watched at him all morning. But the others had the common herder's affliction, the mind sprung by the weight of the silences against it. One I remember hated to say anything when we arrived at his camp; he would stand half-sideways with his eyes darting to the timber until gradually he would face around at last and begin to make sentences. We were deeply trapped in their homeland language. When McGrath blared and chortled at him, Finnigan could only shake his head slowly as an ox and clack some mystery back at him. Karl the Swede was another uncertain talker, his shy throaty sentences so low they seemed to come out of his shirt collar instead of his mouth. But however slowly, there always would be news from a herder: a coyote seen on a hillside, a ewe gone lame or ripped by a snag, a porcupine treed by his dogs as they suicidally tried to get their faces full of quills. Dad would smoke and chat until the herder began talking,
the area of forest economics he long had watched: "Of the
20 largest lumber producers, 8 disappeared through mergers,
3 went out of business, and 1 became a cooperative." He
pointed out, too, that never was the lumber industry a

Munger might have had his own initial research in mind
when he insisted on carefully-plotted expenditure of time
and effort. In 1908, not quite 25 years old, he had been
sent from Forest Service headquarters
in Washington, D. C., to study the encroachment of lodgepole
pine on Ponderosa pine in the Pacific Northwest. Since
Munger's Forest Service career at the time amounted to the
assignment was, as Munger later understated it, "rather presumptuous." But it served
two months and he had never laid eyes on either
class of two months and he had never laid eyes on either
species of pine in his life, the assignment was, as Munger
later understated it, "rather presumptuous." But it served
to get the young New Englander to the Pacific Northwest; the
brief project into the pines led to a full career in this
1929 to work on the forest survey just then getting under
cowall had been drawn to the Department Station in
improved timber species

interested in the production of better tree seed and
and research
the Forestry School of Oregon State College, and research
years. Now facilities were obtained at Corvallis through
and in Thornton Munger's test site plantings in the next few
in the establishment of the Wind River Arboretum in 1912
research had begun well before the station itself, back

1919, had been one of his professors in graduate school.
William B. Greeley, who headed the Forest Service from 1919
to 1928, earned his master's degree in the Yale forestry
program a few years before Munger did likewise. And Munger
not only knew Gifford Pinchot, the storied and flamboyant first
Chief of the modern Forest Service, but was on hand the
then only nod and ask enough to keep the flow coming. McGrath's style was to blurt at the man until he set off on some startled telling or another, the two of them building to full exasperation. Then abruptly, an instant before the herder was ready to fling the job in McGrath's face, we would wheel around to move the sheepwagon to a new meadow site.

The sheepwagon was a child of the prairie schooner. With its rounded white canvas top and high spoked wheels, a first glance could be seen to be.

as a drifting brig on the grass ocean. It was built for one man to bide through the months in, and that single life only.

Inside the wagon, it felt to me as if space, air itself, had changed, somehow tidied and tamped itself. Nowhere else had the compactness, the very air, had the sense of shrinkage, as if a house had shrank and shrank until it came down just above your head and past your fingertips. Storage bins doubled as places to sit, the table hinged daintily down from a wall when wanted, every built-in cabinet had a tiny firm clasp snuggling its door. The bunk bed fit across the inmost end of the wagon as properly as a blade into a jackknife.

To let the herder see out more easily to the sheep, the wagon had a Dutch door; with its bottom half closed, I could teeter out and feel far up on a lookout across the pasture of summer.
But the very size and abundance of Pacific Northwest timber was deluding. Such forests were thought to be inexhaustible. The notion prompted logging practices which

Richard McQuade would rise to be Chief of the U.S. Forest Service. Thornton Munger would oversee test plots of selected Douglas fir stocks which have been yielding valuable reforestation information ever since.

Just so do yesterdays count up into today. Just so does the story which opens with a single curious passerby flex itself into a history of Forest Service research on the timber and range resources of the Pacific Northwest.
In place, the wagon was a kind of ship's cabin for the herder, tidy, buttoned, comely. But during the move to the next site, it became only a floating bin. Everything loose must be packed away in the wagon's nooks, then onto the floor is piled whatever firewood the herder has chopped, his fuel oil can and likely a creamery can full of drinking water, sacks of salt for the sheep, and last of all the small front steps for the doorway. Because a sheepwagon sits so high on its running gear—the floor nearly chest high to a man on the ground—it moves across rough country with a staggering top-heavy gait. A successful move of a sheepwagon is one that doesn't topple the straw or leave it to be searched out of a few miles of roadside brush. At the new site, there is leveling to be done. A cup of water is put on the table to see how the wagon tilts, then small holes are dug for the wheels to drop in, or a stout stick is shoulder under a corner of the wagon box to lift it into steadiness for another week.

Such, at least, was how a sheepwagon was properly moved. McGrath in his headlong way was apt to tow it as if dragging a stump. More often than not, he would forget to fasten the cabinet doors, and a flour can would fly out and explode snowily over everything, pots and pans then avalanching out of the oven and likely a can of lard or jar of jam leaping in after. Credit him, McGrath always seemed genuinely surprised
which bristled mile upon mile, mighty trees often a height
of two hundred feet and more.

The beginnings of scientific research into this trove
of timber make savory reading — adventurers onto a strange
shore plucking off the odd specimens everywhere around
them. On a voyage with Commander Vancouver in 1792, a
Scottish surgeon and naturalist named Archibald Menzies
went up the Columbia River 100 miles by longboat and
collected twigs, needles, and cones along the way. Menzies' jaunt gathered in specimens from the Douglas fir, Sitka spruce, western hemlock, and western red cedar — the four great timber species in the ecosystem west of the Cascades.

Then in mid-October of 1805, the Lewis and Clark expedition arrived at the Columbia River in what is now southeastern Washington. Continuing westward to the mouth of the river, the Corps of Discovery would spend a total of 196 days in the country of the Columbia, and the journal entries by Captain Meriwether Lewis diligently recorded flora and fauna. As the introductory quotation shows, the big tree now called Sitka spruce mightily impressed diarist Lewis. "this timber is white and soft throughout," he wrote, "and rives (splits) better than any other species which we have tryed."

Another species, one which would become the mainstay of generations of Northwest logging, took its name from a visitor two decades after Lewis and Clark. In 1825, David Douglas
to fling back the door and find the gooey wreckage. For a minute or so he would dab at it doubtfully, firing pots and pans back into the oven and kicking flour out the door in tiny puffs, then would snort The hell with it, a shepherd's got more time than I have, and off we would buck to the next sheepwagon move.

We spent more than two years on the Camas, the seasons milling into one another like the fitful sheep themselves. Dad and Grandma steadied the ranch with their work, but had less luck with each other. Ours was a drink of a family, the two of them at sudden edge with each other, then calming again. In the winter months I lived in town, staying either with one of Grandma's sons or some family friend, parceled some place or another a month or so at a time across the cold center of the school year. When Dad and Grandma came to take me to the Camas for weekends with them, the mood seemed to me as chancy as among McGrath's wild shepherders. But as the third winter of this was about to begin, something vaster to judge came along. McGrath had made a proposition.

He was giving up the Camas, and instead had leased a small ranch two hundred miles to the north. He was going to put two thousand ewes on the place; would Dad run the sheep for half the profit?

None of us had been to that region of Montana, and naturally McGrath's prospects were as unpredictable as the country. But Dad was for going...
Coast was rain. But anyone familiar with the dousing which impressed this coast, will know with more precision how high in the reports of the earliest European mariners who cruised this coast, no islander would agree that rainfall should have been of the seasons might agree that rainfall should have been.

As soon as the astronauts are ready, we've a planet to discover. It's the fifth biggest in the large system of satellites around the central star, its mean distance from the sun is the order of 93 million miles. On it there is a firm soil for the sowing, whether he's doing it on Riverside Drive, in a thicket town up the Northern Valley, or Clinton, N.J. for getting a foot in. We've a planet to visit.
He took me aside and talked out his reasoning: Ivan, I think I'll take on those two bands of sheep for McRath. He's a bearcat to work for, but the son-of-a-buck knows livestock and he knows how to **turn** money **going up north**.

I think it's a chance to take. **But I don't know now, how do you feel about changing schools?** Eight weeks earlier I had started high school, with the classmates I had known since we had come away from the mountains after my mother's death. The school, the town, the valley made all the lifestream I knew anything about. I swallowed and gave my father the answer he wanted, and perhaps I secretly did too: I feel okay about it.

Grandma, he rehearsed to me a dozen arguments he would put to her, and when the time came said simply: **This damn valley has never got us much of anywhere, Lady. All either of us has to show for our lives here is a helluva pile of hard work. I say we ought to try out new country.** She was silent a long while—but a thinking silence, not a perturbed one. At last: **All right then. When can we be gone and get it over and done with?**

The two of us watched, struck silent, as she honked into a handkerchief and **clout**ed pots and pans onto the counter for the next kitchen chore. She was truly **corded to us now**, and the fact was a triumph and a wonder.

**And somehow, a concern.**
The Son of Horatio Alger

Once upon a time there was a young man named Horatio Alger who lived in a country suffering under a Great Depression.

Times were terrible. Horatio couldn’t find a job. He had to share a run-down flat with 10 other unemployed bums. They wore old, cast-off clothes. They had no soap, no razor blades, no privacy and not much hope.

And all they had to eat were beans, bagels and broiled rutabagas — day after day.

“But I shall persevere!” said Horatio grimly, “I shall persevere so that my son will have a better life. He will have a decent home, decent clothes, decent food and a decent job. He shall never have to live like this.”

And Horatio persevered.

HE FOUND A JOB lifting bags and toting bales for 20 cents an hour, 12 hours a day. He suffered. He persevered.

He formed a union. He called a strike. The police clubbed him on the head. The Establishment scorned him as “an anarchist” and “a troublemaker.” He suffered. But he persevered.

“I must do my part to reform society and make this a better world,” he said. And he did.

Thanks in part to his efforts, times changed. Minimum wages, old age pensions, unemployment insurance and the eight-hour day came into being. Prosperity gradually returned.

At last Horatio’s suffering and perseverance were rewarded. Like most of his generation, he now had a decent home, decent clothes, decent food, a decent job, two cars in the garage and chicken every Sunday.

And he had a son, Horatio Junior.

“It was all worth it,” said Horatio proudly and happily as he watched the lad grow up, “to know that we will never have to undergo what I underwent.”

Junior, as sons inevitably will, grew up. “What, Dad,” he asked one day, “should I make the goal of my life?”

“Why, son,” replied Horatio with some surprise, “the goal of life, of course, is to get a decent job so that you can have a decent home, decent clothes, decent food, two cars in the garage and chicken every Sunday.”

“But I’ve already got all that,” said Junior. And a week later he dropped out.

JUNIOR JOINED A commune and lived in a run-down flat with 10 other unemployed bums. They wore odd, cast-off clothes. They had no soap, razor blades or privacy and, in conformity with their Zoroastrian religion, they ate nothing but beans, bagels and boiled rutabagas — day after day.

The police clubbed them on the head. The Establishment scorned them as “anarchists” and “trouble-makers.” But Junior persevered.

“I must do my part,” he said, “to reform society and make this a better world.”

“But why, son?” cried Horatio, wringing his hands.

“Why?”

“The trouble with you, Dad,” said his son sadly, “is that you don’t understand the finer things in life.”

MORAL: Cheer up. Our grandchildren will be just like us.
FLIP

Let me call her Ruth here.

She came to the ranch on one of the first pale days of spring, hired to cook for us during calving time, and stayed on in our lives for almost four years. Living womanless had left us wide open for Ruth. To me, she was someone who might provide some mothering again. Not much mothering, because she kept a tight, careful mood, like a cat ghosting through new tall grass. Ruth’s life of sight through life would always center on Ruth. But patches sewed on the knees of blue jeans, fruit and fresh cookies added to my lunchbox, even a rare open grin when I found an excuse to come into the kitchen — all were pettings I hadn’t had recently. And for Dad, Ruth must have become a chance to dodge the past, a newness to pull him from what he had been through in the months just behind us. Someone undead to think on.

It happened faster than any of us could follow. This man who had spent six careful years courting my mother now married the young ranch cook he had known only weeks. Ruth, Dad, only the loins could have decided such a pairing. For the sake of the both of them, my struggling father and the woman who had stepped
inside my mother's outline, I hope that there were times in bed
before the lightning marriage, and that something close to love
kindled then. Because all too soon, the war between them had begun.

Even now Ruth is mysterious to me, and her time in our lives
dusk and half-seen silhouettes,
a strange season all mist and glimpse. I have to puzzle to bring
Nothing of her -- photograph,
back exactly what she looked like. No photograph of her, no written
written line, keepsake --
line, not one keepsake has survived. It is as if Dad scoured
Ruth
trace of her from our lives. But in the crevices of memory,
I glimpse her. I see best the eyes, large and softly brown with
what seemed to be some hurt beginning to happen behind them -- the
depth, trapped look of a doe the instant before she breaks for
cover. The face was too oval, plain as a platter, but those
madonna eyes graced it. Dark-haired -- I think, brunette;
slim but full-breasted; and taller than my mother had been, nearly
as tall as Dad. A voice with the grit of experience in it, and
a knowing laugh twice as old as she was. Never entirely
pretty, this taut and guarded woman, but close enough to earn
second looks.
Even how she came to be there, straight in our path just after Dad turned our lives toward the valley, seems to have no reason behind it. Never before or since did I see anyone like her on a ranch. Ranch cooks always seemed to be stout spinsters or leathery widows, worn dour and curt by a life which gave them only the chore of putting meals on the table for a dozen hungry men three times a day. Cooks usually had such a sameness that the men didn't bother to learn their names, simply called each one Missus. But Ruth wasn't Missus, she was Ruth to everybody. Those eyes were the kind which caught your glance on the streets of Great Falls or Helena, where young women went to escape to a store job and the start toward marriage and a life they hoped would be bigger than the hometown had offered. Yet here Ruth was in the valley, passing the syrup pitcher along the table, and for all anyone could tell, she seemed ready to stay until the eyes found whatever the man she was looking for.

Already Ruth had misread twice -- two marriages failed, and still she couldn't have been much older than 25. And Dad must have known about the husbands before him; the valley kept no such secrets. Yet somehow they came together, moths bumping one
another on the way to flame. I would give much, now, to know the arguments they had used on themselves for that marriage. All too soon, I was hearing every argument either could think of against it.

When the two of them began to carve at one another, I don't know for sure. But I remember that it was before we left the ranch, several months after the wedding. The ranch itself was hard on everyone's nerves. Every sprinkle of rain, the road puttied into a slick gumbo, and the pickup wallowed at helpless angles.

Yet the ranch was too dry for good hay or grain, and too shaley up in the hills where the cattle had to graze. A goddamned rock pile," Dad began calling it, the surest sign he was beginning to talk dropping himself into the share-lease. Ruth probably was ready to leave after the first night of howling coyotes, of a cougar edging out of the Castles to scream down a gulch. Cooking on the big open expanses out in the heart of the valley was one thing, but slogging away there in the rough foothills was another. I can hear across the years what she would have said:

"Her mouth could fire words those soft eyes must have been afraid of."

I can hear across the years what she would have said: 
Charlie, I don't have to stay here, I didn't marry this
hellforsaken ranch... I got places I can go, Charlie... Places,

Charlie!... Charlie... Charlie...

When Dad and Ruth gave up that ranch, they turned toward White
Sulphur and did the one last thing in the world anyone would have
expected of either of them: they went into the cafe business.
The Grill, a small cafe straight across the street from The Stockman,
had come up for rent. It was the third and smallest eating place
in a town which had not quite enough business for two.

Somehow Dad and Ruth, this pair who had never been around a town
business of any sort and who already were finding out that they
flinted sparks off one another all too easily -- somehow they
talked one another into trying to run a cafe together, and somehow
they turned out to be good at it. With her years of cooking for
crews, Ruth could handle a kitchen. From all the ranches behind
him, Dad knew something about purchasing, and better yet, he knew
the valley and its people. He put up new hours for the Grill:
it would stay open until after the last saloon had closed. There
at the last of the night and the first hours of morning, The Grill
found its customers. Truckers on their runs through the pitchy night, ranchers headed home from late business in Helena or Great Falls, some of the Rainbow crowd trying to sober up on black coffee and T-bone -- the night travelers began to 

gypsies

and the few booths. Steaks and hashbrowns covered Ruth's stove, stools and the few booths. Steaks and hashbrowns covered Ruth's stove, and Dad dealt platters of food until his arms ached.

too. Just then in its history, White Sulphur was seeing the last of a generation of aging shepherders and ranch hands. Several of them, I remember, had nicknames of a style which would pass when they did: Diamond Tony, who had a baffling Middle European name and an odd, chomping accent to go with it; Mulligan John, named for the meal which had become a habit for him in thealoneness of solitary sheep camps; Hoppy Hopkins; The Swede. Three or four dozen of these men, gray and gimpy and familyless, made their rounds downtown, coming out for a few hours to escape living with themselves. Any time after dusk, you found them in the saloons in pairs
or threes, sitting hunched toward one another, nodding their heads
as parsons
wise as they reheard one another's stories. The Stockman, where
the kind of fellow

Pete McCabe was known to be a man who would set up a drink even

when the pension check hadn't yet come to pay for it, drew most

of these oldtimers, sometime in the night, sometime in the week.

Now, over across the street, Dad was good for a meal as well. How

many times did I hear one or another of them, joking so as not to

seem begging, ask for a meal "on account" -- on account, that is,

of being broke? However many, it was very nearly the same as the

number of times, in the weeks and months and even years afterward,

that the men would stop Dad on the street and say, "Here's that

Grill money I've been owing you."
Ruth, I think, **quiet** never objected to those meals Dad would jot
on the tab. Out in the valley ranches, she too had seen, in those
crews trooping in to the supper table, the men growing too old
for the work they had done all their lives, and soon too old for
anything but those lame rounds of Main Street. Age was making that
same wintry push on the one person Ruth steadily loved, too. She
had been raised by her grandmother -- her family so at war within
it had shunted her off there -- and regularly she went across the Big Belts
to see the old woman. Several times she took me with her on those
visits. Creased and heavy, stiff

in the legs and going blind, the grandmother was the most ancient
woman I had ever seen, and her house the shadowiest and most lifeless.

entirely

She spent her days in the kitchen, finding her way by habit. She
would sit and talk, eyes and legs going lifeless in a body not yet
willing to die, and Ruth, listening, would be a different person,
softer, younger.
But whatever Ruth took from those visits stopped at our own doorsill. Time and again, she and Dad faced off, and the house went silent for a day or more.

Or worse, one would be silent and the other would claw on and on.

They both had a habit of storing things up against one another.

The last time that you ... I told you then ... There was a calendar of combat, and either one would refer as far back as could be remembered.

If they had fought all the time, the marriage might have snapped apart quickly and neither would have been severely hurt. But they bickered in seasons -- weeks, maybe months, passed in calm, then a blast of argument, of not talking, sulking. Sometimes Ruth would leave. Sometimes Dad would tell her to leave, and she would refuse.

Behind the bickering, each had a fear. Dad would not admit to his mistake; not look a fool to the valley. He was wrong there; the only mystification anyone seemed to have was why he kept on with a hopeless marriage. Ruth would not face up to another split; would not let one more marriage break up entirely.
wife. There she was wrong, as it would turn out. Each time, one or the other would make a truce until Ruth felt restless again or Dad's despair twisted in him again. If nothing else set them at each other, there always was the everlasting argument about

our small herd of cattle, which Dad was pasturing in the foothills of the Big Belts. He drove out each morning to pitch hay to the cattle, then came back to work in the cafe from 11:30 mid-afternoon until closing. Ruth suspected, accurately, that Dad had not given all intentions of up-ranching. Dad suspected, just as accurately, that neither of them could keep up the pace of the cafe work for long, and that our living soon was going to have to come from livestock again.

In the meantime, we were town people, and I began to learn more of White Sulphur than its saloons.
The plainest fact, so plain I never thought of other possibilities, was that the town lived on livestock. All the places I liked best had the sounds and smells and feels which came one way or another from the herds and flocks out on the summer slopes of tan grass. In the creamery where Dad bought milk and butter for the cafe, the air hung so heavy with the dampness of processing that it was like walking against pillows, and everyone talked loudly out of the sides of their mouths to be heard over the rumble of churns. Nearby, the grain elevator took a noise like that and tripled it, the roaring clank of conveyors carrying off wheat and barley and oats somewhere into the tower. At the railroad shipping pens, the noises came directly from the livestock. Sheep go through life in a near-panic anyway, and their frenzied bleating as they were wrangled up the chutes into boxcars grew to a storm of sound. The cattle could be heard all over town when they were pastured near the pens a day or so before shipping -- a constant choir of moaning, like wind haunting into ten thousand chimneys at once.
White Sulphur was as unlovely but interesting as the sounds of its commerce. Sited where the northern edge of the valley began to rumple into low hills -- by a settler who dreamed of getting rich from the mineral water bubbling there -- the town had grown in the design of a very wide T. Main Street -- the top of the T ran east and west, with most of the town's houses banked up the low hills on either side of the street at its eastern end. To the west lay the sulphur slough, the railroad and shipping pens, and the creamery and grain elevator. The highway, in its zipper-straight run up the valley, came in there like the leg of the T onto Main Street. Much of the traffic, then, was aimed to this west end of town, while all the saloons and grog stores and cafés -- and the druggist and the doctor and the two lawyers, since it took two to make a court case -- were at the east end.

This gave White Sulphur an odd, strung-out pattern of life, as if the parts of the town had been pinned along a clothesline. But it meant there was an openness to the town, plenty of space to roam and to see on to the next thing which might interest you. Even the school gave off this sense of open curiosity, because it had been built down toward the leg of the T where two of the town's main attractions for a boy had also ended up -- the county jail, and the sulphur slough.
Since the nine saloons downtown fueled a constant traffic of drunks, the jail was kept busy, and most schooldays we had a fine clear view of the ritual there. Just a few dozen yards from the work-up diamond where we played softball, the brick jail building stood atop a small embankment. Just in from the edge of this embankment, a wire clothesline looped between two fat posts. Right there, the prisoners would have a morning recess at the same time as ours. They had been sent out to beat their bedding on the clothesline and beat some cleanliness into it — and, I suppose, to huff some of the alcohol out of themselves. Shepherders who had come in from the mountains for their annual binge, the regular winoes from the Grand Central who were tossed in jail every few months to dry out, once in a while a scuffed-up cowboy from the big Rankin ranch — there they would be, on the embankment like performers on a stage.

Most of the men I could recognize from my nights downtown with Dad. But one morning a single inmate came out, a slender man I didn't know but whose face I seemed to have seen before. The softball game stopped entirely as we all puzzled at that strange familiar face. The instant before any of us figured it out, one of my classmates rushed to get his words into the air first: \textit{Hey, that's my Dad!} His face was the same as the man's, but skewed into a pleading grin, his eyes sick as he looked from one to another of us. One more time he said it -- \textit{That's my Dad!} -- before we faced around, shame heavy in the air, toward the next batter.
At the bottom of the slope from the football field, as if it had seeped down from the limed yard lines and the overflow off the prisoners' bedding, lay the sulphur slough which gave the town its name. On cold days, the slough steamed and steamed, thin fog puffs wisping up from the reeds, as if this was where the valley breathed. Any weather, the slough stewed out an odor of rotten eggs.

At the slough edge nearest the school stood a gazebo, a rickety scrap from the town's days as a resort. Either for decoration or to ward off bird droppings, the gazebo sheltered a small hot spring.

A corroding cup hung on one pillar of the gazebo, and if you dared to touch it, then you could dare the taste of the sulphur spring water.

One of my classmates, Kirkwood, downed the water as if it were lemonade. His grandfather, a nasty character who indeed gave every sign that he might live forever, had convinced Kirkwood that the stuff was an elixir for a person's insides. After Kirkwood had slurped down a cupful, I would reluctantly sip away. What bothered me even worse than the nausea taste was the look of the spring. Sulphur water has a way of layering its minerals into a kind of
putty on stones and clay and even underwater grass, and the spring always was coated with this sickly whitish curd, as if something poisonous had just died in it. And yet, nowhere else had anything like it, and so the slough and its ugly water drew us.

I thought that nowhere else had anything like the giant carcasses of buildings which White Sulphur boys could poke into, either.

its wrecks. Late in the last century, when the town had thought it might amount to something, a few grand buildings had been put up, and they had not yet fallen down entirely. Near the sulphur slough stood the remains of the Springs Hotel, a long box of gingerbread-work and verandahs which had been built for resort-goers who were taking the waters. I seem to remember that whatever was left of this building was so treacherous none of us would set foot inside; you could fall through the sagging floorboards to some bleak awfulness below.
But across town loomed a huger wreck, probably just as risky but much too inviting to pass up. This one was called the Old Auditorium -- a sad comedown from its original name, The Temple of Fun -- and it had been built in the 1890's by a bedazzled group of local businessmen who totally misjudged the town's need for a structure of that size. Probably there never had been enough people in the entire county to fill the place, even if they all had been herded in for culture's sake at gunpoint. Built of brick, with a shingled dome rising from the middle of the roof and a forest of chimneys around the edges, the temple had never been finished by its exhausted backers, although it was complete enough to use for school recitals and graduation ceremonies by the time the 1925 earthquake shook it onto the condemned list. The great red elephant of a building, it collapsed little by little for 30 years or so after the earthquake; now the remains stood over us, roofless, ghost-like, magical.

I think it must have been not only the size and gape of the place, but the glacial spill of red brick that attracted us. Only a few buildings in our clapboard town were made of brick, and here was the largest stack of the reddest brick we could imagine.
We could prowl in -- windows and doors had vanished long since -- and in the clattering emptiness walk the old stage, study out from the dilapidated walls where rooms had been. Echoes flew back at a person as if the auditorium had stored the sounds in its cavern of history. It stood as a kind of lighthouse for a few of us, a place where you could go into an expanse of both space and time.

One other large brick building graced White Sulphur, and if the old auditorium was a cave to be sought out, this other was a man-made mass you could not avoid. You came to it -- the Sherman Hotel -- as you walked up Main Street: three massive stories of brick and cornicework snouting out into the thoroughfare as firmly as a thumb crimping into a hose. At the very start of White Sulphur's history,
there had been a dispute about where main street would run. The doctor who held the land at the west end of town banked too heavily on the notion that some judicious slough drainage and timber road-bedding would route the road along his holdings. A rival laid out a plat east of him, complete with the 25-foot jog away from the direction of the slough. In some wink of confusion or bribery, the jog-plot was accepted by the county commissioners, the town grew up along the misjointed plat lines, and for the next 60 years the biggest hotel sat halfway into main street.
In the hotel lobby, a wide high window had been installed near the outer edge of this prow-like jut to take advantage of the outlook.

It made a pastime, and the town didn't have many.

For some reason I can't summon back, once in these years Dad and I checked into the Sherman Hotel for a night. The room in the Sherman Hotel. It was worse than we had expected, and worse even than its reputation. A bare lightbulb dangled over a battered, squeaking bed; I think there was not even a dresser, nightstand, or chair.

The bedsprings howled with rust; Sometime in the night, Dad said Call this a hotel, do they? I've slept better in sagebrush.
One last landmark from those years, the gray stone house called The Castle. It sprang up from the top of the hill behind the Stockman, a granite presence which seemed to have been there before the rest of the town was ever dreamed of. Actually, a man named Sherman had built it in the early 1890's, out of the money from a silver lode. He had the granite blocks cut and sledded in by ox team from the Castle Mountains, and from a little distance, the three-story mansion with its round tower and sharp roof peaks looked like one of the sets of fantasy pinnacles which poke up all through those same mountains. So in name and material and appearance, all three, old Sherman built for himself an eerie likeness of the mountains which had yielded up his silver fortune.

If the outside was a reminder of whim, the inside of the Castle was Sherman's new money doing some prancing. It was said he had spared nothing in expense -- woodwork crafted of hardwoods from distant countries, crystal dangles on every chandelier, a huge water tank in the attic which sluiced water down to fill the bathtubs in an instant, a furnace which burned hard hot anthracite coal shipped in from Pennsylvania. All this was known only by rumor as I would circle past, because Sherman had been dead for twenty years and the Castle stood with boards across its windows and swallows' mud nests clotted onto the fancy stonework.
At that time, White Sulphur had a population of about a thousand, with a second thousand persons dotted out on the ranches from one far end of the county to another. Of all those twenty hundred faces, the one clearest to me now is a madman's.

What had torn apart Virgil's brain -- defect of birth, some stab of illness or an accident -- I have never known. But he was everlasting there at the edge of town life. His parents, old and made older by the calamity which had twisted their son's mind, would bring Virgil to town with them when they came for groceries. Slouched in their pickup or against the corner of the grocery, Virgil grimaced out at us like a tethered dog whose mood a person could never be entirely sure of. He was able to recognize friends of the family, such as Dad, and make child's talk to them -- innocent words growled out of a strongman's body. Somewhere in the odds and ends of his mind he had come up with the sure way to draw people to him. He would gargle out loudly what could have been a plea or a threat: YOU god uh CIGuhREDD? No one would deny this spectre a cigarette, and Virgil would puff away with a twisted squint of satisfaction, his eyes already hunting along the street for his next donor. Dad, who was uneasy around any
affliction but was fond of Virgil's family, always lit the cigarette carefully and said a few words, while I peeked up at the rough man.

All through my boyhood, I can pick out again and again that scene of poor clever lunatic Virgil, and a town uneasy under his glare.
In those years I looked up into three other faces which were strange to me -- the black faces of Rose Gordon, Taylor Gordon, and Bob Gordon. The Gordons, I know now, were one of the earliest families of White Sulphur. Rose and Taylor and Bob all had been born there after their parents came in during the town's short heyday of mining wealth. But to me then, they could have been newly come from the farthest end of the world, where people were the same color of night. They were very black -- Rose in particular had a sheen dark as ink. Their faces were unlined, not crinkled at the corners of the eyes as Dad's and the other ranch men's were. And their voices chimed amid the burrs and twangs of everyone else downtown. Taylor was a singer. Once in a while he would perform at the high school auditorium, singing the spirituals he had heard from his mother as she worked at her wash tubs. His voice could ripple like muscle, hold like a hawser across the bass notes: *Swinging* low, sweet *chaaarriet*... The strong, sweet sound had carried him to New York once, where he sang in concert halls and on the radio. He also had gone through money back there as if he were tossing confetti, and when the Depression hit, he ended up back in the valley herding sheep.

He brought with him New York stories such as no one in the valley had ever heard or dreamed of. Of his writer friend Carl Van Vechten:
He was a big Dutchman, he had very buck teeth, rabbit teeth like, and weighed about two hundred pounds, let's say, and was six feet tall. But he wasn't what they called a potbellied six ...

He liked sometimes to wear a phantom red shirt, reddest red I ever saw. He wore rings, y'know, exotic rings, something that would stand out, or a bracelet, somethin' like that. Bein' a millionaire he could do those things.

I remember one night we went to a party. Carl and I was dressed as in Harlem, dressed in kind of satire. Some man gave both of us a sam hill. He said, You got somethin' to offer the world. You don't have to do anything out of the ordinary, just be yourselves. Carl laughed and said, Well, can't we have a little fun?

Of a black man he said had a magic with words and deeds:

When everybody was broke, a lot of people would go to Father Divine and get the best meal in the world for thirty-five cents, see. And you'd be surprised -- white, black, blue, green and the other, they'd eat in Father Divine's, because you could get a meal you couldn't pay two dollars for downtown for thirty-five cents, including ice cream dessert. And he had 'em lined up, you'd thought a baseball game was goin' on.
Of how people in Harlem could tell where a man was from by the scar on his face:

In Harlem they can tell what section of the country the fellow came from by the brand that was on him, y'see. They could tell where he'd been in a fight. If you were shootin' craps, you more or less would be bendin' down when you got cut and that way you'd get it across the forehead here. Whereas if you were playin' poker, you were more apt to be settin' up, they you'd be apt to get this one here across the cheek. Then if you were playin' what they called 'skin,' why you'd apt to get this other. So y'see, if a fella was cut here, he was from Geechyland, if he was cut this other way he was from Selma, Alabama, and so on and so on.

Now, either Taylor or Bob owned the building the post office was in, and the pair of them lived on the second floor. Taylor came and went in a bold erect style, always with some new plan for singin' in New York again or making a fortune from somethin' he had invented. He also took pride in being the one writing man the valley had ever had. Taylor was a talented storyteller — it was as if his voice could put a rich gloss on anything it touched — and while he was in New York singing at society parties, he met white writers who urged him to put down his stories of early-day White Sulphur. They steered him to a publisher and illustrator, and shepherded his memoir into print as a book with the title Born to Be. That book with his name
on it naturally impressed Taylor into thinking he could do another. This time there was no help, and no publisher. The failure must have worked on his mind for years; eventually he saw conspiracy. The man who published his first book became John Steinbeck's publisher as well, and for the rest of his life, Taylor would tell anyone who would listen that Steinbeck and the publisher had pirated his second book idea and made it into The Grapes of Wrath.

While Taylor built that phantom scheme in his mind, Bob crashed back and forth between street and room, a desperate drinker even by White Sulphur standards. I would see him sometimes when I went for the mail, off somewhere in his plodding stagger. I remember that he wore suspenders, one of the few men in town who did, and the straps made a slumping X across his big back as they slid down his shoulders. Brothers indeed, Taylor and Bob, in desperation as well as skin, the one daydreaming of New York and second fame, the other fumbling for his next bottle of whiskey.
Rose lived apart from her brothers, in both place and behavior. She was the one in the family who had chosen to be jolly toward the white faces all around, and a time or two a week she came along Main Street with her constant greeting, How do you do? And how are you today? Rose had faith in words and manners. The death of any old-timer would bring out her pen, and a long letter extolling the departed. She was especially fond of two groups in the valley’s history, the Scots who had homesteaded in the Basin and the Indians who had worn away before the tide of settlement.

I was very old, I understand. Her passion for the Indians, was understandable enough. fellow sufferers for the shade of their skin. They were the first ladies of this land, she would say of the Indian women she had seen when she was a girl, and the saying of it announced that Rose Gordon knew ladyship from personal experience. But the transplanted Scots, my father’s family and the others who had never seen black faces before and in all likelihood didn’t care much for them when they did? It was their talk. The lowlands burr, the throaty bawl which came out their mouths like low song, captivated Rose. She was as entranced with the spoken word as Taylor was with the written, and the oration she had given when she was valedictorian of her high school class

of eight students -- that oration given on the stage of the old auditorium, a large American flag fastened square and true along the back stage wall -- had been the peak of her life. When I had become a grown man, she astonished me once by reciting the climax of that oration sixty years before:
I gave my address on the progress of the Negro race. I ended, I said: The colored soldiers have earned the highest courage, and they won unstinted praises by their bravery, loyalty and fidelity. They have indeed been baptized into full citizenship by their bloodshed in defense of their country, and they have earned the protection of that honorable emblem, the Stars and Stripes.
While Rose held those words in her memory as if they were her only heirloom, other voices plaided White Sulphur life the way I remember it. The Missourian twang, gritting out of Lloyd Robison. The twang which gritted out of Lloyd Robison and the other Missourians: You could of talked all day long and not said anything.

that... Seen that long-geared geezer who was gonna break that gelding for me?

In June, mosquitoes would come in clouds off the Smith River, and the mosquito stories would start; Bastards are so big this year they can stand flatfooted and drink out of a 50 rain barrel... saw one of 'em carry off a baby chick the other day... yah, I saw two of 'em pick up a lamb, one at each end... Any time of year, the muttering against Rankin and the way he ran his vast holdings in the valley: That goddam Rankin's so crooked he couldn't sleep in a roundhouse... so tight he squeaks... so mean the coyotes wouldn't eat him... One rancher or another proud of a new woven-wire fence: Horse-high, bull-strong, and hog-tight... was the color and quality of mud: No, by God, she's more of a kind of tansy-wood, the color of cat's paw...
by damru. Christie in The Grill in early morning coffee: I

lit up like a church last night. Went home and threw my
the door
hat in first. It didn't come back out, so I figured I was safe...

always, always,
And the two voices which went at each other just above my head.

Ruth, where the hell you been? If you think you can just walk
off and leave me with the cafe that way, you got another think
coming.... Mister, I didn't marry you to spend all my time in any
damn cafe. Where I go is my business. The
look from one of the
in my direction,

then: Better leave us alone, Ivan. But the voices would go on,

through the walls, until one more silence set in between my father
and my second mother.

How many silences there must have been in those few years.
The silences stretched tauter until a day sometime in the

autumn of 1948, when The Grill and our town life came to an end.

Dad and Ruth could agree on one thing: the hours of cafe work

were grinding them down. They gave up the lease on the Grill

and now bought a few thousand head of sheep and arranged to pasture

them at a ranch on Battle Creek, not far from the Basin where Dad

had grown up. The two of them would try a winter truce. Out where

they were going lay the
What happened next was a winter trance. Dad bought a few thousand head of sheep and arranged to pasture them at a ranch on Battle Creek, not far from the basin where he had grown up. It was the emptiest corner of the county, just as it had been when Peter and Annie Doig came there to homestead and as it is whenever I drive its narrow red-shale road now. Gulch country, spare, silent.

Out there in the rimming hills beyond the valley, 35 miles from town, Dad and Ruth would have time alone to see whether their marriage ought to last -- could last. Whatever either had expected,

of the testing winter, the unlooked-for happened: the worst weather of thirty years blasted in, and Dad and Ruth found themselves in a contest not with each other, but with the white wilderness outside.

As bad winters like to do, this one came early and fast. Snow fell, drifted, crusted into gray crystal windrows, then fell and drifted and crusted gray again. Dad and his hired man pushed the sheep in from the pastures to the ranch buildings: nothing could root grass out of those that had snow. Ruth helped the man pitch hay to the sheep. The county road began to block for a week at a time. Winter was sealing the Battle Creek country into long gray months of loneliness.

In town, I was bounding about with relatives of Ruth's, the Cartwright family.
One of the things that had surprised us about Ruth was that although she was not from the valley, she had a scad of relatives there. All of them seemed to be bony, hard-creased people who looked as if they were trying to calculate where their next meal was coming from. The only difference the Cartwrights showed from the others was how long and hard they worked. Fred Cartwright was a fireman on the branch line railroad which snaked from White Sulphur to the main route of the Milwaukee Road at Ringling. The locomotive was a belching old barrel engine, and the rails wavered and dipped along on top of rotting ties and sagging roadbed. It was a grindstone of a job, and Fred came home at uneven hours of the day and night, black with coal dust and so weary he could hardly talk. In her own way, Harriet Cartwright looked just as worn -- rimless glasses on a face too busy for makeup, hair bunred severely, hands perpetually in bread dough or dishwater.

The Cartwrights and I had a lot of time that winter to see how each other lived.

Dad had said he would come to town for me each Friday night and take me to the ranch for the weekend. As soon as winter started, six weeks passed before I saw him or Ruth.
At the Cartwrights, I was living for the first time with other children. There were two boys and a girl, thin copies of one another. The older boy, **Eric**, homely and giggling and friendly as a puppy, was my age, and we slept in the same bed and snickered at each other's jokes in the dark. Characteristically, Dad had left me plenty of pocket money and told the Cartwrights to let me go around town as I wanted, go to a movie any time, even on a weekday night. Sometimes that winter, my few dollars of pocket money probably were more than Fred and **Harriet** Cartwright themselves had on hand, and my habits clearly were looser than anybody else's in the household.

It could not have been easy for Harriet Carter to have me come blearing home in the cold dark with a headful of celluloid scenes, like some drunken dwarf idling in from a night of sin long after her own children were safely asleep. They weren't, of course; they were lying up there in the dark waiting to hear me retell the movie.

Worst of all, I seemed to thrive on such loose living. I never had any homework to do, while her own children stared away their evenings into schoolbooks. I could do arithmetic in my head faster than she or her husband could on paper, and the worry lines over her eyes wrinkled in puzzlement when this happened.
The winter weeks passed. I learned to like to use honey for sweetening, the way the Cartwrights did; sugar was a luxury they never bought. Eric and I walked to school together, came home for snowball wars with the boys next door. One night smoke was smelled in the house. Somehow a light bulb had dangled too close to a pile of blankets and quilts in an upstairs bedroom. Fred Cartwright ran for the stairs, shouting to Eric and me to turn on the water in the bathtub. We clambered to the tub and hit a plumbing problem. Hot water would roar out of the Cartwright bath spigot, but the cold drizzled out in a trickle. We could only fill the tub faster with hot water, but would hot water put out the fire, or would it take cold? Overhead we could hear the commotion as Fred gathered the smoldering bedding and started down to douse them in our still-empty tub. Panicked, we did the one thing possible, we turned on both spigots full blast.
At last, late on a Friday night when I had given up hope again, Dad appeared. He couldn't take me to the ranch with him then; he had spent ten hours fighting his way through the snow, and there was the risk that the countryside would close off entirely again before he could bring me back to town Sunday night. But if I would do the extra schoolwork needed, he could come in next Friday and take me to the ranch for two whole weeks.

All week I stayed in at recess and worked ahead in every text. Before school was out on Friday afternoon, Dad came to the door of the classroom for me. The highway was bare, a black dike above the snow, as he drove the pickup to the turnoff toward Battle Creek. The snow stretched in front of us like a lake whose waves had suddenly stopped motion and hung in billows and peaks against the sky where the wind had lashed them. The very tops of fenceposts, gray cedar heads with rounded snow caps, showed where the road was buried. Between the post tops, a set of ruts had been rammed and hacked by Dad and the few other ranchers who lived near Battle Creek. The pickup growled into the ruts.
Dad drove with big turns of the steering wheel, keeping the front wheels grooved in the ruts while the rear end of the pickup jittered back and forth spinning snow out behind us. Sometimes the pickup would growl to a halt. We would climb out and shovel away the snow in heavy chunks like pieces of an igloo. Then Dad would back the pickup a few feet for a running start and bash into the ruts again. Once we went over a snowdrift on the twin rows of planks another of the ranchers had laid for support. Once we drove entirely over the top of a drift without planks at all.

Where the road led up to the little ridge above Badger Creek, we angled between cliffs of snow higher than the pickup. Near Battle Creek, with our headlights fingerling out into the dark, Dad swerved off the road entirely and sent the pickup butting through the smaller drifts in a hayfield. It had started to snow heavily, the wind out of the Basin curling the flurries down to the ruts. I watched the last miles come up on the tiny numbers under the speedometer as Dad wrestled the wheel and began his soft Scots cussing: Snow on a man, will ye? Dammit all to hell anyway, git back in those ruts. Damn the weather. Hold on, son, there's a ditch here somewhere.... The twenty-fifth mile, the last, we bucked down
a long slope to the ranch with the heavy wet flakes flying at us like clouds of moths. Dad roared past the lighted windows of the ranch house and spun the pickup inside the shelter of the shed. Done, damn ye! he said out into the storm.
Battle Creek was not living up to its name and

To my surprise, Dad and Ruth were getting along better together.

It may have been that there simply was so much work to be done,

feeding the sheep, carrying in firwood, melting snow for water

when the pump froze, that they had no energy left over for argument.

Or perhaps they had each decided that the winter had to be gotten

through, there was no route away from one another until spring.

Each morning,

Ruth stood at the window sipping from a white mug of coffee,

watching as Dad and the hired man harnessed the team to the hay

sled; then, if Dad had said they needed her that day, she would

go out and drive the horses while the men forked hay off

the sled to the sheep. Dad helped her in the house, the two of

them working better at the meals and dishes than they had when

they were feeding half the town in The Grill. The pair of them

even joked about the cold journey to the outhouse which started

each day. Whoever went first, the other would demand to know

whether the seat had been left good and warm. It damn well ought

to be, the other would say, just part of my behind is still out on it.

Or: Sure did, I left it smoking for you.
If we care only about our biological child, he may feel he has value, but not value others.

If we care only about children who are like us and in our area, he may acquire these same values.

If he has a child of another race as a brother, both will be better prepared for the future when they must live together—and so will our neighbor's child, for having a Negro as classmate and friend.

And, they will be better prepared, not only for having learned to live in this way with other people, but because they have found a way that enables them to do so.

Given in Ann Arbor, Michigan
October 1967
Clayton H. Hagen, Supervisor
Adoption Unit
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota
The ranch house had been built high with its living quarters on the second floor, well above the long snowdrifts which duned against the walls. A railed porch hung out over the snow the full length of the house, and from it the other ranch buildings were in view like a small fleet seen from a ship's deck. The lambing shed, low and cloud-grey and enormously long, seemed to ride full-laden in the white walls of winter. Most of the time, the sheep were corraled on the far side of the shed, their bored bleats coming as far as the house if the wind was down. Not far from the lambing shed stood the barn, dark and bunched into itself, prowling up out of the stillness higher than anything else in sight. A few small sheds lay with their roofs disappearing in drifts, swamped by this cold ocean of a winter. Battle Creek flowed just beyond those sheds, but the only mark of it was a gray skin of ice. In this snow world, Dad and his hired man skidded back and forth on the hay sled, a hayrack on a set of runners, low wide sled pulled by a team of plunging workhorses. I rode where their reins hung, hanging tight to the framing above the horses' heels chuffed into the snow. When the men talked, their puffs of breath clouded out in front of their faces. Our noses trickled.
Dad put a mitten against my face every once in a while to see that
my cheeks weren’t being frostbitten.

Afternoons, I would climb the slope behind the house, to where

A long gully behind the house stretched to Battle Creek, and
lay packed so full of snow that I could sled down over its humps
for hundreds of feet at a time.

and dips. Trying out routes, I flew off a four-foot shale bank
and in the crash sliced my right knee on the end of a sled runner
as if I’d fallen against an ax blade. Blood sopped out as I
hobbled to the house with both hands clamped over my leg wound,
and Ruth shook as she snipped away the dark-stained pants leg.

The cut was long but shallow and clean, and dressings took care
of it.
The winter sprang at us again and again. Our dog crashed through the ice of Battle Creek, and the wind carried the sound of his barking away from the house. We found the shatter where he had tried to claw himself out before the creek froze him and then drowned him. A two-day blizzard pushed against the back wall of the house. Outside the snow flew so thick it seemed there was no space left in the air, just an endless crisscross of flecks the white ness of goose down. Dad and the hired man would disappear into the storm, swallowed, thirty feet from the window where Ruth and I watched.

The two weeks passed in surges of that winter weather, like tides flowing in. On the last morning, no snow was falling, but Dad said so much had piled up that we would get to town only by team and sled. Ruth said she wanted to go with us. Dad nodded.
Dad and the hired man had taken the rack off the hay boat and put on a cutter seat which fastened above the rear pair of sled runners. Inside that seat, blankets piled thickly onto the heavy coats we wore, we sat buried in warmth, almost down in the snow as the horses tugged us along. Harness buckles sang a ching-tink, ching-tink with every step the team took. Dad slapped the reins against the horses' rumps and headed us toward the hayfields along Battle Creek. The clogged road would be no help to us, drift humped onto drift by now. We would aim through

The greyness stretching all around us baffled my eyes. Where I knew hills had to be, there were no hills. No sagebrush, in a countryside forested with its clumps. The cold overcast had fused land and sky together, one gray sheet over and under and around. Even our sleigh was gray, weathered ash moving timidly through ashen weather.

Dad headed the team by the tops of fenceposts when we could see them, and where the snow had covered them, by trying to pick out the dark hedge of willows along the creek.
I peeked out beside Ruth, the two fogs of our breath blowing back between us as the horses found footing to trot. More often, they lunged at the snow, breaking through halfway up their thick legs.

Dad talked to the horses every little while. Their ears would come straight up when they felt the flat soft slap of the reins among the chink in the neck, and heard Dad’s voice, and they would pull faster and a we would go through the snow as if the sled was running a creature carrying us on its back.

The twin cuts of our sled tracks, the only clear lines the snow had not yet had time to hide, traced away farther and farther behind us. Except for the snorting of the horses and Dad’s words to them, the country was silent, held under the weight of the snow. In my memory that day has become a set of instants somewhere between life and death, a kind of eclipse in which hours pass, but time and sound did not echo, color had washed to a misty nothingness and distance swelled away beyond any counting of it.

We went into that winterscape at one end of Battle Creek and long after the snow came out at the other, but what had happened in between was measureless. If it was any portion of existence at all, it did not belong to the three of us, but to that winter which had frozen all time but its own.

After that ghostly trip, I stayed with the Cartwrights and Dad and Ruth went on with the struggle against the weather. Then,
In late April, Dad saddled a horse and plunged off through the drifts to a neighboring ranch to borrow a bottle of whiskey. Probably the winter had been relentless, and perhaps the truce with Ruth was breaking down. He sat in the kitchen, drinking coffee with Mrs. Keith, the rancher's wife, while waiting for the men to come back from feeding the cattle. As he talked with the woman, Dad watched a large snowdrift on a sidehill near the house. Suddenly he shouted:

"It's broke! It's broke, it's broke!" and ran to the door. The winter at last had broken; a chinook was warming the air and melting the snowdrift even as he burst into the yard. The men of the ranch had gone out on the hay sled that morning thickly bundled against 20 degrees below zero, and now they were coming home in shirt sleeves, with their mittens off.
When the winter ended, so did Dad's marriage to Ruth. It took several months, but they were months of steady wrecking, of the two of them trying to fling each other out of their lives. Ruth announced she was leaving, this time for good. Alone with her later, I asked her not to go. My asking didn't cure things as it would have in the storybooks. Ruth gave me her tough grin, shook her head and said she had to leave, because she Your dad and Dad would never get along together and me are never gonna get along together again.

Dad now would not even say Ruth's name. Instead, he took up a taunt provided by one of the women of the town: The town, of course, could not resist choosing up sides in such a squabble, and the woman coming to Dad's defense reached for a phrase contemptible enough for the deceiver who had married him. At last she spluttered: Why, that ... that little flip! For whatever reason, that Victorian blurt of disgust captivated Dad, put him in the right in all the arguments he was replaying in his mind. From the moment the taunt got back to him, he would talk of Ruth only as Flip, that damned Flip.
On the other hand, the more a person tries to find himself in his race, the less adequate he feels as a man, for his race isn't him—it only describes him.

The fourth consideration is that we must find confidence in what we do, and believe we are able to do what needs to be done. We need to feel that we also are persons of value, if we are to convey value to others.

It seems that our generation finds it so difficult to be proud of what we have done. We are heavily and severely criticized for the mess the world is in, for problems such as air and water pollution, congested cities, materialism, hypocrisy in civil rights, and making a superficial, plastic world. And we agree and admit our guilt and shame. We should of course face up to our problems, but it seems we should also feel our own value, and take pride in what we have done if we are to convey value to the next generation. And we have good reason to do so, for our generation, more than all before, has been concerned and involved with other people. We have fought a major war, not to acquire land, but because we believed others should not be deprived of their value. Even the present conflict in Vietnam is based on our belief that people should not be ruled by force, although we debate the wisdom of our involvement. We have taken our father's dream of a League of Nations and improved it to the United Nations, admittedly not perfect, but yet a structure and method to prevent wars which have plagued mankind throughout history. Our grandfathers believed that no man should be a slave, and men from Michigan and Minnesota died to implement that belief. Our generation, after recovering from the agonies of the depression and war, began to
Ruth went, and Flip stayed, a poisoned word which was all that was left of two persons' misgess about one another. I have not seen Ruth for twenty years, nor spoken to her for twenty-five. But her life straightened after those few warring years with my father, like a piece of iron seethed in fire for the anvil. She married again, the marriage lasted, there was a son. I am curious about him: was he taken by Ruth to see the grandmother blinking back age and blindness? Did Ruth stand with him, white mug of coffee in her hand, to watch snow sift on a wind from the Basin? But the curiosity stops there. When Dad and Ruth at last broke apart from one another, the one sentiment I could recognize within me — have recognized ever since — was relief that she had gone, and the two of them could do no more harm to each other.
For the next year, Dad and I simply followed the seasons up and down the valley. He went to one ranch as foreman of the haying crew, on to another to feed cattle during the winter, to a third for spring and the lambing season. He rented a cabin in White Sulphur, and when he could not be there or I could not be at a ranch with him, I lived with Christie and his wife and walked across town to school. When the summer of 1950 came, Dad bought a herd of cattle, and we moved them and ourselves to a cattle camp on Sixteenmile Creek.

Now our life was holding a steadier pace than I could ever remember. The two of us lived in a trailer house, the only persons in several square miles. Dad taught me to shoot a single-shot .22 rifle, using as targets the tan gophers which every horseback man hated for the treacherous little burrows they dug. We shot, rode into the hills every few days to look at the cattle, caught trout in the creek, watched the Milwaukee Railroad trains clip past four times a day. Then I had my eleventh birthday -- five years since my mother had died -- and it seemed to trigger something in Dad.
One evening, after he had been silent most of the day, he told me a woman would be coming into our lives again. It was an astonishment.

Ruth had come and gone without much effect, except for the scalding mood Dad showed whenever he had a reason to mention her. But this time the woman was my mother's mother, and our lives were going to change as if a new planet had come under our feet.
As the Irish fellow says, this place must be the back of the
neck of the world. For once, my father's damnation of a new ranch
was underdone. We had come in the night, and as Dad puzzled his
way through the dark along ever-thinner scruffs of prairie road,
forebodings began to creep in on us. Before we were halfway, Grandma
suddenly demanded: Gee gollies, aren't we never gonna get there?

Dad notched his chin ahead another full inch. I tried to stare
shapes out of the blackness, but could find only an occasional jackrabbit
racing in the net-edge of our headlights. At last, Dad gave a
start, began to brake the car down a long carven of slope, and
the headlights fingered onto a squat white building. By gee, at last.
That was Grandma; not a word out of Dad. Where is the place, where down
in a hole like this? More silence from him. As we stumbled
from the car toward the house of the Jensen Ranch, the white walls too
seemed to hold back from us in the dark, ghostly and telling nothing
of themselves.

Daylight did all the telling, in tones as stark and alarming we
could only try to joke to keep from gulping. Tying doors, we found
ourselves locked off from all but the back three rooms of the house--
a small bedroom for Grandma, one not much bigger for Dad and me, and

I'll warrant you,
a cavern of a kitchen. McGrath's doings, Grandma announced rightly:
he had euchred himself a bargaining point of some sort with the Jensen
family by allowing them to store their belongings in the front rooms
of the house. We studied the sad living space left to us, and the
single narrow envelope of view out the kitchen windows— to a dilapidating
bunkhouse, the outhouse, and a bit of the brown treeless ramp of slope
running up to the benchland. Grandma and I went out to peer in the
windows of the denied rooms, to confirm McGrath’s treachery. I glanced
around toward the silver-boarded sheepshep which squatted hugely across
the yard from us. At least, I tried in what I thought was an entirely
grown-up way, old McGrath got us scads of room for the sheep. But
Grandma’s attention had hit on the bleak benches

of land rimming above us in every direction. Hmpf. House in a hollow
makes the weather follow, she recited, slammed away into the back
of the house, and wouldn’t speak to Dad for the rest of the day.

Dad and I walked around the outbuildings. The sheepshep was big
beyond belief, bunkered along the base of a slope for a full forty yards,
then eeling off into the coulee for another forty, then closed around
with a high board fence like a stockade. Moose of a damn place, Dad
said as if trying to shrink it. Weathered and dour as a fortress,
the sheepshep looked to have crouched on its site eternally.

Every other building in the ranch yard, however, reared from open
ground to open sky as though they had been dumped into place only an

instant before. Nothing larger than a spear of grass, not even a
fluff of sage, backed the buildings; the only two trees on the entire
ranch hunched at the front of the house, trying to cower in out of
the wind. McGrath had told us the Jensen ranch began as a homestead, which meant that people had lived here at least forty years before earlier. How had they never managed to make the place look less stark? From where we stood, a machine shed yawned with disuse on one side of us, and a granary shed answered on the other. Between the pair loomed a barn built of notched logs, and its brown streak only made the sheds look all the more frayed. Everything in sight—ground, barn, sheds, a rusting windmill—was aslant, as if the impact of the giant sheepshed at the bottom of the yard had teetered the entire ranch toward it.

It was when Dad noticed that he hadn’t yet found one place on the ranch where he could stand without one foot lower than the other that he pronounced the Irish fellow’s lament on our new home. Then he said:

Skevinsky we might as well

Aw the hell, anyway, let’s go see what the grass looks like, and the two

even to a peace gesture toward in Grandma’s direction yet—

of us—neither willing to approach Grandma for the moment—drove back

up the long face of benchland in front of the house.
We came up over the crest to a steel-blue army of mountains, drawn in battalions of peaks and reefs and gorges and crags south to north as far as could be seen. The view rocked us to a stop. The Smith River Valley had had mountain ranges all around; this high-set horizon thrust itself twenty miles to our west was as if all those past ranges had been tumbled together and then armored with rimrock and icefield. Across the clear lane of distance, we could read where forests wove in under

<signature>
the cliffs and back into the plummet of canyons, we could make out the rough
spills of scree beneath the columned walls of rimrock. And along the
uncountable summits, all the eighty miles of gashing skylines, new snow
was draping down. Dad and I had lived our lifetimes beneath western weather-
making mountains, none of which had tusked up into the storm clouds
as this Sawtooth Range of the Rockies would. Both of us knew what cold hell
might be ahead when winter came down out of these mountains, yet for
the moment, to have grandness anywhere near this spavined ranch,
neither of us cared.

it turned out, this north country stretched

Out
Down from the mountains as well, there was a land of steady expanse,
of crisp-margined distances set long and straight on the earth.

All the obliques of our valley life seemed to have been erased and redrawn
here as ruler-edged plateaus of grassland, furrowed panels of grainfield,
arrowing roads, creeks nosing quick and bright from the Rockies. The

clean lines of this fresh landscape everywhere declared purpose and capacity,

seemed to say: Here are the far bounds, all the extent anyone could need.

Now live up to them. Dad stepped from the pickup, slid his hands into
his hip pockets and looked into the distances north and south and east.

Dandy country, he said. As the fellow says, just dandy fine. Let's go
tackle that Lady situation.
Dad by now had learned a considerable trove about handling Grandma—the remainder of his problem being that there seemed to be some dozens of troves yet to be figured out about her—and he had hit on what was needed to get her mind off the alarming ranch. We got to figure some place for Ivan to stay for school. These roads are gonna be too much to drive every day when winter sets in this country. What do ye think we ought to do? The perpetual problem of basing me somewhere roused her. Well, we oughta go into what's-its-name, Dupuyer, and see what's what, ought'n't we? Criminentlies, that seem to me how to do...Now she looked Dad full in the face. Don't it to you?

It did, and we drove the nine dirt miles north to Dupuyer, luckily a briefer route than the bramble of roads we had come in by from the south. Dupuyer lay tucked along a broad band of brush which marked briefly its creek; off from either side of the highway, which doubled as the main street, a few dozen houses and buildings lined away, like a Ringling which had been ordered to close its ranks and spruce up its sidings.

The first business we came to had one sign advertising it as a gas station, and another calling it a cafe, entirely as if the enterprise hadn't been able to make up its mind and decided to try both jobs. While Dad and I searched out someone to put gas in the car, Grandma marched into the cafe side of the building and asked the woman behind the counter if she knew anyone who would board a high school boy. The woman stood in front of her and thought, until finally she said, No, nobody comes to mind. I guess most people aren't willing to take in someone they don't know like that. Grandma fastened

with her steadiest look on the woman: Well, how about you? then?
The Seacoast of Despair

-- Joan Didion

I went to Newport not long ago, to see the great stone fin-de-siécle “cottages” in which certain rich Americans once summered. The places loom still along Bellevue Avenue and Cliff Walk, one after another, silk curtains frayed but gargoylets intact, monuments to something beyond themselves; houses built, clearly, to some transcendental point. No one had made clear to me exactly what that point was. I had been promised that the great summer houses were museums and warned that they were monstrosities, had been assured that the way of life they suggested was graceful beyond belief and that it was gross beyond description, that the very rich were different from you and me and yes, they had lower taxes, and if “The Breakers” was perhaps not entirely tasteful, still, où sont les croquet wickets d’antan. I had read Edith Wharton and I had read Henry James, who thought that the houses should stand there always, reminders “of the peculiarly awkward vengeances of affronted proportion and discretion.”

But all that turns out to be beside the point, all talk of...