

RA
y

IVORY

FCT

k Dearest Ivan. Well dear time for another few lines to let you know that Dad and I are both fine. And hope you are to. And not working to hard with your studying. Is the weather good where you are. We are haveing Indian Summer but it gets cold nites. Dad and McTaggart are trucking hay here to the ranch. Old McTaggart is such a silly old thing about it he piles the bales way high. Yesterday the highway cop caught him at it and they had to unload bales off to the side of the road until the truck come down to legal wate.

It took them 2 trips after that to get all those bales hauled what with the cop keeping his eye on them. Serves old McTaggart rite the silly old thing but I feel sorry for Dad haveing to handle the bales again. We're counting the weeks till you come home Christmas. Well dear guess this will be all

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

et

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

et

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

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

etk

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

etk

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

dt

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

APM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

One thing further I gained from Latham House and Northwestern—

a room of my own, the first of my life. Throughout Latham's welter of odd-angled walls and random hallways were a few leftover pouches of space which had been made into single rooms, and in my junior year I qualified for The Shoe, a tiny ^{top-floor} room nicknamed for its shoebox dimensions. There was barely space to edge into The Shoe between the cot crowded against one wall and the dresser against the other. The metal clothes closet for the room stood outside the door in the hallway, like a fat man thwarted by a narrow gate. ^{My first act of occupancy} ~~The Shoe congested~~
was to congest The Shoe further: further when I saw the chance to swap its spindly desk for a huge, handsomely-shelved one down the hall. With the biggest accomplice I could recruit, I emptied The Shoe of all its furniture, dismantled as much of the ~~desk~~ ^{tattered} desk as I could, wedged the rest into the room and across the far ² well, and reassembled ^{the great piece} it to bulk there like an oak galleon in a bottle. Alone and thoroughly outfitted, I levered my grades up more, multiplied my reading ^{8 =} across the shelves of my vast desk, Dinesen murmured beside Faulkner, Turgenev ^{to} tipped hats with Wilder.

et

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

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5

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

elt

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

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

etc

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

etc

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

throw against the grandstand, as if the geometric gravity which drew such heaves into a first baseman's glove had broken down. Grant kept on, his barrage of pellets thwacking against a cliff of wood.⁴ Then I went to the outfield and caught balls Grant lobbed high for me, the dot⁹-like white satellite diving to me with surprising dazzle down the backdrop of thousands of vanished spectators. My throws, on a single bounce across home plate, skidded through to make the eerie delayed whunk, more metallic now, against the foul screen.

At last Schulte doubtfully said he supposed he had filmed enough. Now, my wage in the bargain we had set. I carried a bucket of balls to home plate. Swinging a bat as hard as I could, I found I could mortar a ball to where the center fielder might stand and catch it with a casual saluting flip of his glove.⁴ I walked from the plate, around the high bubble of pitcher's mound, to second base. Standing over the square wad of canvas, I tossed, swung hard, and now the balls flew up to arc out over the ivy-dressed outfield walls, dropping into the bleachers in wild clunking ricochets through the empty seats. I hit bucket after bucket until my hands began to wear raw.

etc

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

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

et

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

EF

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

et

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You leave . . . when, day after tomorrow?

Yes.

Scared any of the plane ride?

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

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

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

Thanks a whole helluva lot for the idea.

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

Disbelief as if he'd said he'd once been to Afghanistan.

When the hell was that?

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

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

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

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

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

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

et

9A 6
8/8

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

et

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

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

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

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

It

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

seventeen-year-old could doze standing up. I'm real sorry, sir, he offered with a yawn when caught for the third time of the morning. You're sorry, all right, the instructor said in wonder, you're about the sorriest sumbitch I ever did see. Each afternoon, we were adrift on the base. I found the base library, discovered that sergeants who would have stormed Iwo Jima with a cheese parer would not come near the place. In Grandma's Christmas package ~~came~~ arrived a calendar from her son in Australia. I cut out the fine color photo of a wombat, pasted it inside my locker door, and explained to puzzled young enlistees from the South that the fuzzy creatures roamed the Montana hills, just like you have possums. My daddy caught and tamed this one. We named him Grommet.

Yup, Grommet the wombat. Day and night, B-52's made their slow roar over us, seeming to hang in the air like orbiting battleships. I wondered by what miracle they were made to climb into flight; I had not yet found enough efficiency in the military to launch a silk handkerchief in a high wind. The months crept. By instinct, I hung at the edges of the system, dodged duties when I could and doubled down to endurance when I had to. I was not a good soldier, nor a poor one: I was the usual fuel of history's armies, the time-serving soldier.

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

Grandma: Ohhh? Her smallest siren of disapproval.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

etc

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

mean--and me and the neighbor, Mrs. Christison, were sittin' there in the front room of the house. It had big windows, and the house sat up on a knoll, we could see down to where the sheep were bedded in just below. We didn't corral 'em, we didn't dare ~~8~~ ⁸ that bear'd get into 'em and pile 'em up and kill half of 'em at once. So I heard the sheep bells aringin' and I looked out the window, and here comes the whole band, right towards the house. That bear was after 'em.

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

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

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

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

(not) He let another WOOF! out of him, and he was mad now.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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