Through the Rearview Mirror, and other related stories

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The University of Montana

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THROUGH THE REARVIEW MIRROR
And Other Related Stories

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Political Science

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THE DIFFERENCE

--a story

When you're in Montana, the best solid connection with the outside world is Jonny Chance on the NBC Nightly News. Jake was situated in front of the color tube in a wall-to-wall-glass-facing-the-lake nouveau riche palace and it was the right time for the program. Timing being what it is in Montana, bad for virtually everyone and the fact that in his life the teeth in one gear were always misplaced. As a matter of record that WAS his life in Montana. He anticipated someone or something interrupting the news. He was not to be disappointed. Soon, he heard a car brushing through the driveway trees and just as Carl Rowan was reporting from the capitol in Washington, D.C., he heard the garage door rise remotely and the Torenado slip in.

Bathrobed and lolling the spring dusk away in a recovered love seat, Jake was listening to Jonny's dismal reporting of the numbers for the previous month, consumer price index, productivity, rise in the wholesale prices and the rising rates of prostitutes in Shanghia. But it was not to be. For NBC is no match for a redneck, small-town, teenage snow queen breaching hard in the vicinity of fifty with some heavy bitching on her mind. Jake knew he was to be the reluctant recipient as well as the wrong horse in the corral.

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Kicking a pair of one-hundred-and-seventy-five-dollar Italian leather boots, rather badly mauled by the weather, terrain and neglect onto the rug, she announced while seating herself on a nearby rocker, "You know I'm not very happy with you, Jake. What do you think of that?"

"I don't find anything too unusual about that. It sounds pretty goddamned normal to me." That ought to hold her long enough for Jonny Chance to get one thought into my mind. He was wrong, of course.

"Normal? Jake, there's nothing normal about anything you do."

"I hope not," he muttered.

"You don't have anything to do. You're never busy."

"You're a hellish, barn-burning whirlwind of productivity, though," he retorted as he stuck his nose into the collar of his bathrobe to avoid the smell of her feet. Chemical warfare doesn't know what it's missed, Jake thought. The Pentagon should have her on the pad.

"I'm retired and a widow," she declared.

"You've been retired since you were twenty and a widow since the day you got married. Your husband was married to a grocery store and you loved the cash register," Jake snapped.

"But I have standards," she admonished.

"Which you pay a lot of lip service to and honor in the breach rather than the observance." That shut her up for several minutes and Jake resumed the news, however her feet did not stop percolating.
David Brinkley was doing a close-up segment on the sudden outburst of bank robberies in Manhatten. He was interrupted by a pitch for Sara Lee frozen desserts.

"Those look so good. I want some," she said, "and I just finished dinner."

"You're suppose to. That's the way advertising works. Sub-LIM-IN-ally," Jake syllabicated.

"Then why don't you want some cinnamon rolls, too?" she pursued.

"I'm watching the news not commercials. I don't pay any attention to the commercials. I don't want any of that stuff. Anyway, I've seen all these commercials. They don't have any effect on me," Jake responded.

"They work on me and I'm hungry. What are you hungry for, Jake?" she said with a sly smile.

"Nothing that I haven't already had," he replied.

"There are all kinds of things I want. I see something new everyday."

"I'll bet you do," he observed.

"I need all kinds of things. I need to be loved. Paid attention to and talked to. Do you hear me, Jake," she demanded.

"What you need, to be loved, you abuse and manipulate because what you want is to be important which you can't seem to figure out how to do on your own, so you use those who love you to aggrandize yourself. As for attention, demanding it seems to be your professional career. As a
matter of fact, it takes a lot of energy to ignore you. This fifty-year-old teenager routine of yours needs some updating. Your Miss Me, Give Me Mine, aren't Me funny, ain't Me cute act, don't make the nut."

"I'm not like that. I never do that."

"The hell you don't. Whenever you want something you do it, which is about fifteen times an hour."

"You're just not like us, Jake."

"I hope you're right."

"I just need someone to talk to."

"You don't want to talk. You speak to me, I respond. You hate what I talk about."

"That's RIGHT, Jake. It makes my head hurt and confuses me," she said with a trace of pout laying on her lower lip.

"That's called thinking, lady. It's a form of work, occupation and business and if you don't start doing some, at least a little, of it you are going to be on your ass."

"I don't want to talk about hard things. I want to talk about what happens to me in this town and about other people."

"That's commonly known as gossip, which you somehow over thirty or forty years have gotten confused with knowledge. You need information and the way you get it is to gossip and that's your work."

"That's not true. I just like to know what other people are doing. It's fun."

"So that you can use it against them if it serves your purposes. That's a bitch and it ain't no fun."
"You just don't think like me, that's all."

"I hope not. You don't think." He got up and drifted into the bathroom.

When he returned to the den, she said as he was reseating himself, "The news is over. You missed it. See, you should have stayed and talked to me."

"Ah. . .um," Jake grumbled.

"You know Chris and Jim at the Viking are going to Las Vegas for a week," she proclaimed only to add, "I don't get to go. It's not fair."

"Who EVER told you there was anything fair about life," Jake demanded.

"It's just not fair. If I can't go, they shouldn't be able to. If I had someone to go with me, it would be all right."

"Have you ever heard of envy?"

"It's not envy. It's just not fair."

"A simple solution is to tell them you'd like to go with them and in all likelihood they'll ask you. That's the way adults act."

"No, I can't go alone."

"You won't be alone. You'll be with them," Jake stated incredulously.

"No, you have to come."

"Wrong. I'm not going to the corner with you."

"Then I won't go even if they beg me. I'm not going alone. I got too much pride."
"Yes you do, and no guts," Jake added.

Jake got up from the love seat and started towards the doorway.

"I'm not going, you know," she said adamently.

"Oh, really. Where is it you're not going to?" Jake replied.

"I'm not going to Las Vegas," she gritted the words out. "You don't do what I want."

"I know. I do what I want. It's called living."

"If that's what it is, then I don't like the way you live," she hissed.

"No one asked for your approval as I remember."

"Well, I've got lotsa money and security and I don't like that you don't do what I want."

"If you're so secure why are you afraid to leave?"

"I need someone to be with me. I need a MAN!" she declared.

"From here, right?" he asked.

"Not necessarily," she replied.

"Well, then, where are you going to meet this HIM?" Jake demanded.

"Somewhere."

"Somewhere in your head," he said. Someplace between your pride and your memory, on some avenue called despair, on some corner called delusion, directly above a gutter known as ignorance.
Jake went back into the bathroom, took a shower and while shaving saw eyes in the mirror which did not seem to be his. He spoke to them, saying, "How can I get anything through to this woman? I've never taught the fifth grade."

After putting his bathrobe back on, he walked down the hallway to his bedroom. He got into a pair of jeans, a long-sleeved blue shirt, and after putting on a clean pair of white socks slipped into a worn pair of cowboy boots. Blow drying his hair, he thought, what a dead end, trick bag, they put you into. If you don't submit, you're not a man or so they say, however if you do submit they never let you forget that either. Crabs in a barrel. If one tries to get out, one of the others pulls him back in. They oppress and impede themselves, never understanding that the barrel is an illusion. Ignorance is such a glorious passion, bestowing the license upon the bearer to do anything to anyone and then claim innocence as an absolute defense.

"Jesus H. Christ," he swore to himself. My first inclination, he thought, is always to protect them, when it should be to protect myself FROM them. What "should be" is always a bunch of shit anyway, ignorant tongues looking for Babel.

He walked back in the room with the television. He sat back down in the same chair. She hadn't moved.

"You hate me. Don't you?" she said.

"I don't like you much," he responded.
"You hate me then."

"No, I resent what you stand for and believe in. And when I get real outraged I hate those patterns in your life."

"What do I stand for?"

"Redneck bigotry."

"What do I believe in?"

"Anything green, with 'In God We Trust' on one side and the portrait of a president on the other."

"That's not fair. . . ."

I know that, he thought. "But it's true."

"You don't understand. I like security and I don't like poor people."

"I understand completely. First, money is not security. It's false security. I'd say the world's fresh out of security and has been for a long time. The only security that I've ever found in it is insecurity, the ability to adapt on an instant's notice, the foresight to be able to anticipate change. Have good radar and make sure you know which way the wind's blowing."

"Rich people don't have to do that and poor people are too dumb."

"Bullshit. They both do it all day long. The only security I know of is death and thanks-but-no-thanks for me as the price is too steep, but you'd probably like it."

"I wish I were dead. Why'd he have to leave me all alone. He shouldn't have left me to worry about money and becoming poor."
"You are poor. Your assets will never do you any good. You're afraid of it and are too dumb to be able to use it. And the reason he's dead is because he was almost twenty years older than you are and he was plain worn out."

"You're just envious of my money, Jake. You just wished you were me."

"You'd be dead without HIS money and you're just as dead with it. Why would I envy you? You are one of the poorest people I've ever known, regardless of how much money you have or think you have."

"You don't know anything, Jake. You don't have any money."

"I may not have any money, but I'm not poor. I've done more in thirty years than you'll do in your whole life. I'm not a lower middle-class small town housewife spending forty-two hours a day trying to convince people that I should have been Doris Day."

"Well, I didn't have the advantages that you had, Jake. I didn't get to get out of here to go to school, to travel, to work in the city. . . ."

"I didn't either. I didn't have any money, patronage or support. I just said, 'Fuck-you-very-much, but I don't care for the menu,' and did it."

"I can't do that."

"No one's asking you to."

"Yes, you are. I just can't do it."
"You've got more money than you can spend between now and the end of your life and all you've got is time. You've got nothing to do the rest of your life. You're gonna run out of time before you run out of money. And you're never going to get any courage listening to the folks in this town."

"It's too late for me, Jake."

"It's too late for all of us, but that's no reason to quit. I'd love to quit, especially when I'm in this town where these primitive people tear your heart out without even realizing they're doing it. I don't know how... How to quit and still live. I like to live and I'm getting better at it. And the goddamn tragedy of people like you is really the tragedy of Puritanism, affluence. You never learn to live, instead you break your ass or someone else's, usually both, making a living, EARNING a living and then when you've made it, you're fucked because you don't know how to live with the bread or without it. All you know how to do is make everybody work."

"I don't want to live. I just want to see my children happ. I want to die. I wanted to be a Merry Widow until you started yelling at me. Now, I don't."

"You're not a Merry Widow. You're a Black Widow. Stop feeding on those kids, those girls. They're all married and have their own children. Stop trying to live through them. You're dying here already and just don't know it. You can't compete with them. You're in a completely different league. You're not twenty years old, anymore."
"I know but I wish I were."
"Time betrays everybody, honey."
"I need somebody, Jake. Can't you understand that!"
"Everybody does. But not to hide behind. You want the money, the power, the influence, the position, the status? Then you gotta take the weight. The responsibility."
"You don't take any responsibility for anything, Jake."
"I also don't want the money, the power, the influence or the position. I don't want the shit. Never have and I hope, never will."
"You should."
"That isn't the problem. What you want me to do is take the responsibility for what YOU do while you make the decisions."
"I think that's a good idea."
"No day. No way. There are bright four year olds who'd turn down that proposition."

Silence. Jake lights another smoke, exhaling in mind-numbing disgust.
"You're not like me at all. You don't fit into this family very well," she said.
"I hope not. You're a flock of goddamn sheep looking for a goat to follow."
"We need a daddy. Someone we can depend on."
"As well as boss around," Jake added.
"I don't like to make decisions," she stated.
"I don't make too many myself," Jake replied.
"You should make the decisions I like."

"You like power and the ability to control. Don't you," Jake declared.

"Yes," she replied.

"Then why can't you understand that making decisions is power and vice-a-versa," Jake moaned.

"If that's the way it is then I don't want to have power," she replied.

"But you still want others to THINK you're powerful and treat you like you were."

"Yes, I like that and I'm going to keep it."

"What you are is a professional dependent and all the rest is only so much small town nonsense, so much psychological, mind-fucking manipulation."

"If you say so then that's what it is. But I still like it," she said indignantly.

"That's an unmitigated lie," Jake snarled.

"No, it's not. I like being taken care of," she declared.

"I've had to listen to you piss and moan and bawl for fifteen years that you don't get to do this, and can't have that, and will never get to go to, yeah, Las Vegas. I don't believe you. You don't want to be taken care of. You want to dominate those whose function it is to take care of you. Look, you're fifty, fucked and fading. If that's what you want, I suggest a rest home."

"I'm only forty-eight," she stammered.

"Going on twelve," Jake added.
"You just don't understand what I want."

"I'm beginning to."

"What is it?"

"Control. But for you to be happy, I have to believe that I'm in control, when in fact it is you who is in control."

"I'm not like that," she quickly retorted.

"You're right. You are that."

Scene by scene, sequence by sequence, frame by frame, some old Randolph Scott movie gallops across the screen, through the smoky silence of the room. The back of Jake's head was about to come off by the process of implosion.

"Jake, you don't care what anyone else thinks of you and it makes you free. I have to care what they think. I have to submit to what they think and conform. And so do you."

"Like hell I do and neither do you. All you have to do is leave this no-name, pick-up truck town. But you can't do that unless you can take half of it with you."

"It makes me feel comfortable."

"Your security is a prison. You're a slave to your own, blatantly false notion of security. You're miserable. Get the fuck out of this town, and stop telling me I have to do this, that and the other thing to make you feel more comfortable. We've been doing that all our lives and you're still miserable. Spread your honey on another table. Go be the Queen Bee someplace else."

"You're mean, Jake."
"Occasionally."

Riding right at me is old Randy Scott in FIGHTING MAN OF THE PLAINS, made before I was born, Jake thought, and here I am a bit player in THE TAMING OF THE SHREW. Maybe I should write a novel about it. Call it, The Man Who Love Cat Crapping. At least I'd get to be the protagonist.

"Why do you come to Montana, Jake?" she asked breaking the congealing silence.

"You're so goddamn emotionally dishonest, I shouldn't answer one thing you ask me. But I will for the sake of cheap conversation and to add a glimmer of civilization to this place. My people are buried in this ground. I come to do what I have always done here, to travel up, over and around this land. I come here to chase ghosts and I'll be doing it after you're long dead."

"But you don't have any money."

"Since when did that become a crime in Montana. If it were half the residents would be under indictment and on their way to jail."

"You can't live without money, Jake."

"And YOU can't live with it."

"What do you want, Jake?" she asked.

"If you can't figure out what you want and the ridiculous desire to have everyone at your disposal is not going to make the cut, how in the hell are you ever going to grasp what I want?"

"You should be what I want you to be," she retorted.
"I am never going to be what you want me to be, for the simple reason that what you want me to be is NOTHING, which is precisely what you are and you don't want anyone pointing that out to the public at large."

"Jake, that's not true. If you'd have done what I told you, you would've have gotten to my position in a few years."

"Bullshit, that's just a carrot-on-a-stick game you play with the young people in this town. I was at your position fifteen years ago. It's not something I'm trying to live up to or grow into. It's something I'm trying to overcome."

"Well, I don't think I'm so bad," she hissed.

"Compared to whom."

"If I could get you to move out of this town on your own, you'd quickly find out that you're a fifty-year-old woman who talks baby talk when she wants something and breaks balls like a strike breaker when she doesn't get it. And that outside of this town, the world hasn't bought that routine since people were saying 'Twenty-three skidoo.'"

"I'm not going, Jake. That's final," she yelled.

"No guts, no glory."

"I won't be humiliated by those uppity city people. They're not nice."

"They don't have to be. They're competent. As for the humiliation, it's better than death."

"They won't do what I say."
"Neither does anyone here. Wake up. You don't get along with people by dominating them, but by cooperating with them."

"No!"

"A small town snob is nothing but an individual petrified by fear."

"I am afraid. You should help me."

"I am. You want to be free. I'm trying to make you independent. You're trying to tell me you want to be a dependent, MY dependent. I support if I were trying to make you that you'd want to be INDEPENDENT."

"That's right. I decide."

You ignorant, arrogant bitch, he thought. "Then decide. Do decide. Don't tell people including me that you decide. DECIDE."

"You threaten me, Jake. You shouldn't do that."

"Nonsense. You write checks with your mouth that your ass can't cash. I just make you produce by calling your bluff. Call it emotional poker, if you like," Jake smiled.

"I don't like it. I run things."

"The only thing you run is your mouth."

"This is MY town, MY lake and MY house, Jake."

"Show me the titles to those properties and I'll believe you."

"You work for me, Jake," she screamed.

"I don't work for anybody. First, I don't work for things I don't believe in. Secondly, you don't have any
business except between your legs. And finally, I don't even work for myself. About ninety percent of the time I'm working AGAINST myself."

"You're no good, Jake."

"I'm good enough to beat you anyday of the year."

"You'll never have anything."

"Wrong. I've already had more than you can imagine. What you think is everything is nothing to me. We're playing in separate ballparks."

"You just don't know what livin' good is."

"I know the difference between living and existing. I know that there's more to life than eat, sleep, shelter and sex. And that you don't get to be anything unless you step out now and then and try your ideas out on the world. And that no man ever got to be much by staying home and doing as his daddy told him. All the good ones are prodigal sons."

"And what are the rest?"

"Old men before their time. Errand boys castrated by the edge of a twenty-dollar bill."

"Why can't you live like we do. Just do what you're told."

"I'm not a domestic animal."

"You could be."

"No, I couldn't."

"Why?"

"I'm not an animal. I'm a man."
She shook her head. Jake moved toward the television. He pushed in the ON-OFF button. Randolph Scott slowly dissolved, as his image became lines rapidly reduced to dots. The rugged West was having a bit of a problem with General Electric and one of its prized customers, Jake thought.
I never shave at night and I never write during daylight. However, as I draw an aged Trac II up my neck through the hot foam bearing my face, I have to admit to my oldest running mate, the man in the mirror, never is a long time and I was gaming myself if I thought that at the moment I wasn't doing a complete shave and a partial rewrite encompassing my face, my mind and my life. What else has a man? From the Jacuzzi, to the pool, to the shower and now riding this plastic tool over my throat, shaving in Scottsdale where the sun makes most look better than they are. I brought them, the sad-eyed lady with her silent love and her beautiful son, here to Scottsdale—a dream of the late Jimmy Hoffa indulged by the Mid-Western States Teamsters' Pension Fund, finally hammered out by a truckdriver's ego—years ago. Salvation was the goal. Safety was the need. When the world commences to banging my brain and I choose to give it nothing more than money (which is nothing to me), I come to the heat of the grinding dessert sun and love, that of those I try to save. I get fully dressed about three times a week.

Rubbing the heavy, brown terry-cloth across the face I choose to not face, the mental writing machine throbs on and beyond. #4711 after-shave is a gin-and-tonic for your face.
A lime for your chops. Cheers. Slipping into worn red gym trunks monogrammed with the name of a private California university I never attended, demonstrating once more that you can take the American male child out of college but don't ever try to take college out of the child as he may realize he's the governed rather than the govenor. Once more I would have to explain to the woman and the child that yes, I had come once more and no, I could not stay. Reaching for a blue velour robe, I reminded myself that morally polishing one's heart was exceedingly dangerous usually requiring numerous stitches. The contemporary moral being it's hard to repair an emotional clock with a machete, taking the form of my tongue.

It's hard to leave a well-lit bathroom with American Airlines on your mind but there is a cheap flight every night at midnight from Phoenix to SFX. It would soon carry my troubled bones back to the bay. The madness of the moody mountains drove us to the living desert and sent me onto the affluent urbanity of the last ocean, the Pacific. Climbing into bamboo-webbed thongs, I have to admit that is the ballpark I have and do play in. Homeplate is in my head. A citizen of the world at best. Put my feet down on any street and I can walk it without being accompanied by laughing children and smiling dogs. At worst, a resident of the republic of letters. I live in books and couldn't live in Montana.
Smack dab in the middle of a townhouse emeshed in a suburbanite's dream of Eden. The books, the coordinated tans and browns, the stereo, the records in which my generation's lifes are chronicled, the colored Sony, all once mine and the chrome furniture with the mandatory climbing vines. Lost money coupled with love-among-the-ruins. A wild-child hipster of the sixties lost in an episode of "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman." But it's not all that bad. She was my home and now, they are my home. Nothing exceedingly high about it, people have been doing it a long time, only recently with persistent failure. The season of the witch creates divorce and dissolution.

"How you doin', honey?" I bent over kissing the blond of her head as she reclines on the burnt-brown, light specked curving couch where I have spent fully half of the good moments of my life. Kiss the girls, make them cry and the men die.

"Fine." She doesn't say much. She doesn't need to. Her voice lives in my heart.

"Do you want a drink?"

"No, I'm going to have a Coke," I answer. Opening the refrigerator, I grieve for the Chinese, yellow peril notwithstanding. Another billion Coca-Cola addicts just like me, coming up. Maybe they'll all move to Atlanta to be closer to the source. Yellow mama-papa-baby bears come to adolescent America only to be stuck inside of Atlanta with the heavy
"Give-me-a-Coke!" blues, again. Bert Lance, Federal Coke Czar, loaning one hundred dollar bills on the loading docks. I close the cheeseburger-pepsi door.

"Where's Mike?" I know where Robert Mitchum is. He's doing FAREWELL MY LOVELY in living, technicolor right before my eyes. Bless you Samuel Goldwynn for purveying the dream we share communally. What should America be without the collective unconsciousness your movies have given us? HBO is more than just a channel to me. It's a communal bond. Hollywood carried L.A. into the 21st Century. Hotel California is based on images K.O.ing prose, fluidity (floating) beating out community and fantasy molding reality. Is it not easier to go to a movie than to write a novel?

"He's reading in bed," came out as she smiled. "He does lots of things you do." Sitting down next to her, I tell myself he's a good kid. "He's the best. He deserves better." Don't we all. Maybe if we became better, conditions would do likewise.

"Do you think he believes that?" one-eightying her head into my lap.

"What?"

"Do you think, Mike, believes that?"

"I don't know."

Bob Mitchum and Charlotte Rampling, all over my eyes. Phillip Marlove once again showing that it isn't the crude and the brutal who turn the farm into a system of Dante's
hell. It's those who are intelligent and corrupt. May I buy you a drink, Raymond Chandler? Wherever you are, have a good belt, a double shot of earlier times.

"What are you thinking about, John?"

"Montana. Thinking about either booze or the movies will take me to brooding over Montana, nine out of ten times. The contemplation of both is a Montana automatic, in the skull of my soul."

"It's another place, another era, another time. Why think about it?"

"Why not," as if I had any control over what burns in my mind.

"Does it bother you that much?"

"Yes."

"Can you shake your hatred of it?"

"If I can break it. Not my hatred. Montana."

"You can't and you know it. No one can break a state."

Me and Sancho Paza, ramblin' down the freeway in the fast lane passing every exit anywhere near a Holiday Inn. Montana's mythological and physical estate or my state (or lack thereof) of mind (ditto). Fielder's choice, babe.

"Tell that to Turgenev."

"There's another way for you to work it out. I don't know what it is, but you do." A good lady. The best. She deserves better.

"Do you know that?" I inquire.
"Yes," she smiles. "John, heroes and martyrs are puppets. When their dance is over, someone cuts their strings. I cannot let that happen to you."

"Listen, you dear thing, I've done it the hard way every time. I apparently don't know any other way. I can't go with them because I don't give a damn about rules or going through channels. On the other hand, I can't sit down. I've got to run at them. Fuck, they're running at me. I might as well initiate the charge and at least have some control over what the hell happens."

"You put those poor people in a box and then sit on the lid. You won't let them accept you and you won't let them reject you. What the hell do you want them to do?"

"Change. Be better. Be bigger. Be something other than yahoos, yo-yoes, yahoohs and bimbos."

"On your terms?"

"On any terms."

"John, listen to me," as she sat up, placing her hands on mine. "I've loved you a long time and know things about you no one, including you, knows. Most people are programmed to go up and down and waste most of their lives trying to convince those around them that the objects they've mortgaged their souls for magically confer status on them and that they are moving UP. I knew there was something wrong in this process and you told me what it was. You told me, they have no contract with their community and have to base their well-being on status, and that it actually was a form of advertising."
"What's the point you're trying to make?"

"John, you move laterally. You have great social mobility, figuratively as well as geographically. Most people are stuck. You just glide away."

That old Memphis slide alwayas leaves them saying, well, he was here just a minute ago. "And I leave people, is that what you're saying?"

"No, I'm saying that you return. You can show-up anywhere at anytime. It spooks people. It makes them envious and resentful towards you, because they cannot get a handle on what you're doing or what you are."

"And I do this to you, is that your point?"

"No. That's precisely what you don't do with us. No matter where you are. You're here all the time. This apartment is filled with you and so are we. You brought us here and it's a good place for us and our lives are better. . ."

"What?"

"I got lost," she said smothering her lips with a hand. "The point that I wanted to make is that in the city, you're occupied and active and make money and spend it. And are REALISTIC as hell, by reflex if nothing else. When you get out in the hinterlands, you get to dreaming and scheming and start to see things that could be where there is nothing. And it makes you crazy."

"Well said." There goes the myth of Romantic women.

"Oh, honey," she said, "you can't take on a whole civilization."
"That's what it it's not. It's not an independent republic. It's not a culture and it's not a civilization. It's a cult, a clan. It's what the outlaws left."

"You can't do it."

"For my grandfather's soul, my grandmother's Irish wisdom, my mother's misery and for many little people like Mike who'll grow old early in a graveyard of hopes, I can try."

"You can't reconcile yourself to Montana. They'll kill you, in one way or another, and I can't have that. Let it be. They don't deserve you."

"I said, 'I can try,' and that's all I can do. Who's got whom in a box? You tell me."

Bob Mitchum has a full-tilt Phillip Marlowe Hollywood roll going with the judge's wife, Ms. Rampling and I'm selling hot dogs at the dog pound, under the blank sky of a mid-eighties desert night. The stars apparently don't care.

The lady then said, "No!"

A drink from the coke I had yet to touch and long kiss from the lady I could not drink, drink with or be consumed by. "Please go to bed," I whispered. "I'm sorry I disturbed you. It's an occupational hazard."

Rising she asked, "Are you going to finish the movie?" "No, I've seen it three times this week."
"Please don't sit out here and kick yourself around," she admonished.

"No, I'm going to talk to Mike for a few minutes if he's still awake. . .I'll be there in a minute."

The hot dog vendor makes a sale to the lady psychiatrist. Sounds like a grade-B, fifties sit-com starring Doris Day and James Garner, PUPPY TALK.

Show me a man who knows what will happen internationally next week or who can tell me how to get down this dark hallway and I'll show you a fool. Entering Mike's bedroom is like entering the president of the Phi Delt house at Stanford's room. Books, bags, balls and rackets. Equipment chic. The gear is the social baggage he has to carry from My life. The books on the plain board shelf are bags history has checked on his flight ticket.

"It's getting kinda late to be reading, isn't it?" says the man who goes to sleep at 6:00 a.m. and hasn't seen noon in five years. "I'm glad you're still awake. I want to talk to you."

Buried beneath a blue goose-down comforter to counteract the temperature of his waterbed with a companion, a recent issue of Outside magazine. Mike gives me his thoughtful though not beaming attention. I wonder if anyone ever asked him if he likes to live this way so that those of us who lay this number on him can make peace with their children? Mea maxia hot dog vendor.
"Hey, are you really going to lay seige to Montana again?"

How old is this kid? Forty-three? "Mike, you got long ears for a young guy."

"I'll be fifteen in November."

Color those eight years, gone. Black-out bingo every night for eight years. Seven was what he was when I carried him from the living room rug in Great Falls to his bed. He always liked to stay up with us (with me, that's all night), but he could never stay awake.

"I don't know yet about Montana. You got to make it up as you go along. It's an adventure. Live it and live with it."

"Shine 'on 'em. They're no fucking good."

The metaztacize of urban dilemma to suburbia has been accompanied by the frenetic magnetism of the cinematic Bobby DeNiro. The each-against-all urban ethic moves to the suburbs. MEAN STREETS gets a carport. Christ, if you can be Al Pacino in the ninth grade maybe Idi Amin will have to move over for a twenty-year old.

"Maybe, Mike." Maybe that's the embattled, humanly isolated code of the West. Fuck off. The result of this code on a social level is likely to be social deprivation.

"Thanks for the new books and the magazine subscriptions. Omni is outrageous." That's the word, my dear man.

"Good, I'm glad you liked them."
"Look, make it easy on yourself. I know you want to tell me something and don't know where to start. Take a book off the shelf and start with it. Books were always your best props."

A proposition I could not deny. Now, one has to be misguided at best and more likely bent to send a fourteen-year-old boy a James Baldwin novel, but there it is, If Beale Street Could Talk, was and I pulled it into my open hands. My only defense being, time is tight.

"You haven't read this yet. Have you?" I asked.

"Not yet."

My fingers and eyes fled through the book and I was once again home.

"To do much is to have the power to place these people where they are, and keep them where they are. These captive men are the hidden price for the hidden lie; the righteous must be able to locate the damned. To do much is to have the power and the necessity to dictate to the damned. But that thinks, Fonny, works both ways. YOU'RE IN OR YOU'RE OUT. OKAY. I SEE. MOTHERFUCKERS. YOU WON'T HANG ME."

"Listen to this, Mike."

"From my chair, I looked out my window, over those dreadful streets. The baby asked, IS THERE NOT ONE RIGHTEOUS AMONG THEM?"

"All I could do was wait. UNTIL MY CHANGE COMES."

"You like that writer, James Baldwin. Don't you?" he observed.

"Respect, not like," I answered.

"Why?"
Jimmy Baldwin is to prose what Sam Cooke was to a ballad. But he would not know who Sam Cooke was, so I replied, "He's a very dangerous man."

"And like him, are you?"
"Only to myself, Mike."
"I don't know really what you mean."
"But do you know what HE means? Did you understand what I read you?"

"I don't understand what HE has written. But I'll think about it for a few days and it will come to me. What I do understand is what you mean and what you try to do for me as well as tell me."

He actually thinks I know what I'm doing. "What is it I'm trying to give you?"

"A grasp on life. You move me and make me want to go on. No matter what happens. And that to be alive, you can't sit around with your head up your ass."

"And why books, conversation, discourse, plays, movies?"

"Because if someone doesn't say it, no one knows they know it!"

"Do you get tired of all these words, Mike?"
"No, I get tired of silence and boredom and bullshit. I also get tired of the way it feels when you're not here."

"Mike, you weren't listening. You've got to remember. That's what it's all about. I'm here. I'll always be here. I just can't ALWAYS be here. I think about you all the time and I know you are here."
"What makes YOU think that we don't need you to be here?"

"If you can do life with me, then you can do it alone. And if you can do it alone, then you don't need me. You've got to find something in yourself that you can draw on, that if necessary you can withdraw to and live on until whatever form of pestilence the world is handing out that year passes. I'm talking about strength, a real strength that has nothing to do with lifting weights. On that level, all the really tough guys are either dead or in prison. You gotta have a life that goes on inside you that no storm can stop, that goes on when the world says it shouldn't, that finally becalms the storm itself. And that's what you do for those you love. You make them strong and in doing so you become strong."

"Does Baldwin do that for you?"

"Yes. But they all do it. Every guy who lives in the library. It's their job as well as function. They are the body guards of your heart."

"But he's not here. It's only a book."

"If the book weren't here, he won't be here. But the book will be here longer than he will and in that way he too will be here longer. Look, if you got something good, find a way to give it to someone and if they have given it to you, don't return it to them. Get what you can from it and give it to someone else who NEEDS it. Pass it on."

"Why do you give these things to me?"

"I love you."
"Are you afraid of us?"

"No, I'm afraid for you, and would be more afraid for you if I stayed. You're safer without me. I would bring you more trouble than help."

"I'm glad you love us."

"So, am I."

"It's a good thing."

"And it'll get better."

"Don't think I'm mad at you. I know you'll come back. And I'll think of you while you're gone, so that you'll be here."

Absolution. To be able to forgive as a child is magic. "Good night, Mike." Call him Ike, Micky or Mike but remember that his true name is Ishmael and you'll be able to count him at the end. I turn out the light, and the hot bulb dies.

Traversing the hallway, I hear her rumbling across her bed, deep in sleep. The bed I had yet to get to. I never did know when to go home. Sliding open the glass doors, I walk out onto the astro-turf patio. All castaways love the night. I was no exception.

Throwing the robe on a folding chair, I kick the thongs into the grass enfringing upon the pool. Dangling my feet in the warm water. While dangling, the illusion is that my feet are not where I inserted them. The water circles my legs and I search the sky for a flight, any flight. The
pool lights belie the depth of the water and even I perceive that you can't swim without getting wet. Alone with my feet in the water, I watch the black-and-blue sky in the hope that the stars are looking as well as looking out for that American Airlines flight. If not tomorrow night then the next night, those stars will be watching that flight with me aboard. Dragging some unsung spirit as well as spiritual, some dynamic of my life, some need back to the coast to reconnoiter, to scheme, to belabor the indecipherable, how to dynamite Montana out of my soul. To be better than the life you lead. A friend used to say of Montanans, "You can wipe the cow shit off their boots, but you can't wipe it out of their hearts." There may be a pile of truth in his graphic adage and if it is THEE point then we're all damned. Some day soon I'll go to Montana and either make that point or get the point. That may be another story, or maybe it's the same story. I have to walk home to bed. Rising, turning and returning. There's nothing to it.
PIECES OF YESTERDAY'S CHILD
--a story, in four parts

I. The Light and the Unreconstructed Catholic

The green light swayed on the end of the far away dock. As Jake Morris sat on the end of the dock his feet soaking in the lake water, the bobbing, beckoning light demanded that he grab it even though it was far away. So close, he thought, the light is always so close, seemingly within our reach but when one reaches out one grasps only darkness. After ten thousand ideas and a thousand ideals, after years and miles (the miles being the more wearing), the present reality of his daily life was that of the infinite number of petty hatreds of those he was visiting in this small, resort community where he had once lived. Private lives becoming exclusive, and small-town people growing smaller. Each a speck in a whirlpool of private malice accompanied by the rustling of lawyer's papers. He felt surrounded if not suffocated by private life as domestic squalor. But it goes on, he thought, as it always has and always will. Life imitating bad art, the soaps. Everyday another episode of "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman," Fernwood, Montana. Every player a star. Every individual IMPORTANT because what they are involved in is CRUCIAL. And also forgotten
by the next day. Jake asked himself in the dissolving daylight, who would want a formula life with contrived melodramatic highs? The bland and the bored, he mused. The same folks who like Wonder Bread, watch re-runs of My Three Sons and adore Velvetta Cheese for its taste. He kicked he feet in the water.

"A bottle of Bud for your thoughts, Senor?" Laurie said playfully as she moved down the dock. She was twenty-eight, married to a Burlington Northern brakeman, had two sons, had spent one year at Kinman Business College and lived in a development in the woods off of Highway #40. A beneficiary of the small town, All-American triple play sweepstakes, high school graduation, pregnancy, marriage.

"Thinking?" the dying sun framed her blonde-summer-gone-to-white bobbed hair as she handed him the beer.

"Dreaming, I guess," Jake answered.

"Writing, aren't you," she smiled.

Taking a good draw on the beer, Jake pursed his lips, "Being a writer is basically a dubious proposition. But a writer who doesn't write is a very dubious proposition."

"You write all the time," she responded from her seat on a large piece of plastic astro-turf nailed to the deck, "you just don't know it."

"How's that?" Jake was genuinely curious.

"Why do you think people here think you're crazy? They don't know what the hell you're talking about. That's
crazy to them. You're saying what you write."

"What?"

"You're saying it to them instead of writing it. You've shortened the process. You're reading to them aloud what you haven't written. You're testing your material on them because you know they don't read."

"I know they don't read," Jake adamently replied.

"So you're doing it for them. What you don't understand is that your words frighten them. They're foreign, literary and sound like they're from a book."

"They are. From many books. I'm literate," Jake interrupted.

"You sound like a book to them," she continued.

"I suppose I do," Jake said before raising the Bud.

"Don't you realize that you sound like Norman Mailer and that these folks think they're reading when they pick up TV Guide," she admonished.

"Amen, Sister," Jake chorused.

"The people in this town learn to talk by listening to those around them. That's why they all sound the same. They don't talk like you do. They gossip. They don't care what you're talking about. Their world's not that big," she said evenly.

"Yes, it is," Jake replied just as evenly.

"They don't believe it is and they don't care about the world."

"They live in it."
Rising while draining the last of her beer, "No, they don't," she declared as if she were going to stamp one foot. "Maybe they don't, but I sure as hell would like to see them live in it."

"Jake, they don't want to. They want to live in their own little world."

"They do, honey," he said looking up at her. "They don't like the world. They like where they are," she persisted.

"They are in and a part of the world," he declared. Folding her arms across her bare midriff as if there were a cool breeze on this hot, still evening, she flatly said, "No, they are NOT."

As Jake swung his body around on the dock after removing his feet from the water, he stood up saying, "Let them eat TV, then." Jake silently moved several steps away from where she was standing, waiting. No, they're not--No, they're not, careening through the catacombs of his mind. Gyrating through his head sped the notion that maybe, just maybe, she's right and they aren't. But I sure as hell am and I intend to be until the moment I die. How can people live, he wondered, who do not believe that they are part of the world? How can they function? How can they create a way, a culture, that enables them to continue? Folkways and fantasy, he told the setting sun.

Turning into her determined face, Jake appraised her beauty. She is pretty, he thought, and thin, and
tanned, and determined, and bright and maybe even right.
She was exasperating, but just all right.

"Loli, you are something ELSE," Jake started. "I loved
you when I wasn't sure anyone else did. And I still love
you even though many others now do. Don't get angry. I
hear you, but when I look at you I only see my features, a
reflection of myself."

"I am you, Jake, or at least part of you," she said,
her face softened. "You're my brother."

"No, I'm not dear. Your dead father was not my father
and your mother, the fifty-year-old prom queen up there
in the house, is not my mother. What I am is your oldest
admirer and a true but long lost friend from the pathetic
past."

Bowing her head a little, she responded, "Jake, I love
you, too, and I think it's crazy for you to be so sad."

"Thank you and I appreciate your concern. The depression
comes from this town. It has always depressed the hell out
of me. As for the sadness, that comes from a long time ago,
long before I knew you, long before I was born. It's the
gift from my childhood. The past sent it," he finished
softly.

Lifting her head with brighter eyes, she said, "Jake,
you're only thirty years old."

"...and drinkin' in some honky-tonk," he sang.
Smiling, he said, "I was forty when I got here."
"No, you weren't. There's lotsa time to undo the hurts and mistakes of the past. You can do it. I'll help you," she volunteered.

Moving across the dock, he draped his arms around her and then softly kissed her soft hair. "I'll bet you can," into her head he whispered the lie.

Knowing as he held her on the end of the dock that there is always deceit in love and that understanding and truthfulness never were able to hold hearts together. Floating on a dock next-door to nowhere in what appeared to be a drowning world, he asked his god, "What is a little love amongst such madness?" Why should I not have to give? She gives. This type of deceit is a form of giving and let the new as well as old Puritans be damned. The truth of which, it struck Jake, was a very flexible thing and that the hurts and hidden scars of his lost childhood couldn't, shouldn't and can't be denied. And whatever he was those hurts and memories were part and parcel of the man. Maybe, just maybe, the memory will make us have a little mercy, some compassion, some empathy, some caring, some desire to be deceitful enough to be able to love each other enough so that each can continue to live, which is the point of it all, to live. In spite of the fact that we are all flawed, have faults, vices, insufferable virtues and are, in a word, failures. That, honey, Jake thought, is why even you can't help to make my hurts, my pain, my anguish, my past or my life go away, and why I can't tell you. And also,
why you can't remember. So forgive me for occasionally
telling you how to live. For Jake knew she had hurts, too,
and perhaps, just perhaps, there was a chance to mitigate
and offset those. That's risky and that's life.

"Jake, it's getting cold. The sun's gone down."

"It's always cold out here, dear. But don't worry about
the sun, he'll be around again." Jake lifted his cheek
away from her head and steering her towards the long end of
the dock said, "Let's go inside."

I watched them walk, his arm around her narrow, bare
shoulders, towards the shore. I lost sight of them as they
jumped the few feet to shore. But I heard their bare feet
scrambling on the clattering pebbles. And I could be mis-
taken, but I thought I heard Jake laugh before they slammed
the door behind them. Standing on the end of my dock, I
switched off the green light.
There they were, God's Own Drunks, blasted beyond recognition. Tired, sore, hungry, dirty, pancake make-up still clinging to their gleeful mugs and drunker than eight thousand dollars. Seated at a picnic-table-type apparatus at Moose's Saloon, Kalispell, Montana, part pizza parlor, part Chinese food-to-go joint, part warehouse, part rodeo arena, part wrestling ring, part barn and all bar, were Jake, Bobby Kellough—a photographer cum bartender and a younger Randy Newman just out of the Air Force on his way back to college to study drama, with full glasses and several different dying pitchers in various stages of decay spread before them.

After slurping from one of the diluted, half-and-half pitchers of beer and tomato juice, "Montana Daquiris, Sheepherder Champagne and Barley Burgers for all which I'll gladly pay you for on Tuesday. Drink up you film fools we got to hunt down another of those movie monsters, tomorrow. Which is today. Get your rifles ready, boys, we're goin' on a genuine safari," Bobby yelled. "Surfin' Safari for me you mad dog. Don't wanta chase no movie monsters. I wanta' float on a board in the sun." Jake mumbles, his head down on his outstretched arm. "Bobby, how many hours we got in this week?" he queried. "Hours, days, years, miles. What difference does it make. Show business is my life," Bobby
yelled, to the hysterical response of Jake and Randy. "Hey, let's get those ladies over there?" Randy suggested pointing where he was not looking, across the maniac, indoor picnic grounds.

Jake, stretching, directing his words to the phoney chandelier, "Where we gonna take 'em? To bed in the back of Bobby's Toyota? When are we gonna take 'em? You're workin' at the zoo now. What the fuck time is it?"

Standing and waving a wet bar rag around and around over his head, Bobby was ready to wail, "The Riddler strikes again. Jake, I say Jake! It's one o'clock. Do you wanta rock? Michael Cimino's got nothin' on me. I'm the one and only, the original Deer Fucker," sitting down like a hundred pounds of old potatoes hits a cement floor. "My wife, is gonna love, I mean be delirious with me when I get home, IF I ever get home." Bobby's father was a corset manufacturer in Minneapolis and Bobby had every right as well as need to be funny. "We're havin' some fun, now, by five a.m. we'll be paralyzed lookin' for the medic in beautiful, downtown Moose City, Montana, one leg in Canada, 'Piss on You, Pierre!' and one leg in shit-kickin' Montana. And our balls caught-up in Michael Cimino's barbed-wire war games."

Jake threw the contents of a glass of beer into Bobby's face, but as he was throwing up and Bobby was falling over, the target was missed. A very unhappy young lady at the next
table, ungraciously received the beer. The three screamed with laughter.

"Ya' know, if this bar were in Moose City where there ain't no bar, it would be the capital rotunda of Cimino's kingdom," Jake observed almost to himself.

Laughing, Randy started, "Jake, you're crazy."

"You're just al'right, though," Jake responded, a la repartee. His hand now over his face, peering through the slats between his fingers, Randy wanted to know, "Why the fuck are we doin' this anyway? Why is Cimino doing this mad movie about cattle wars in which there are no cattle and class betrayal when nobody's got any class and there isn't anything in the flick worth betrayin'!"

"Art, money, kicks, business, Oscars, madness, moonshine," Jake hazarded.

Lifting his head up from the bend to above the table level, Bobby viewed the others through heavy metal framed glasses, behind which swam marble, pie-eyed blue stones, "Bullshit, all bullshit, bullshit born, bullshit bred, and tomorrow, bullshit dead. I'll tell you why we're Cimino's immigrant army of some sad yesterday. No one, I repeat NO ONE else is crazy enough to do it," and he laid back down.


"I'm goin' to get some more beer," Randy belched. "Anybody got any money left?"
"Money, we don't gotta show you no stinkin' money. We're livin' in Hollywood. Cimino's killed me three times this week in three different wardrobes. The dead don't play. They rule," but as he said it, his eyes drifted to the rear entrance, Jake could not believe what was coming in. A dark haired fellow with a Frito Bandito mustache in a tuxedo, black tie with a vented white shirt with his arm around a small town beauty in an orange evening gown. Rich, he thought, here we are in redneck heaven where all the old softball players come to roost, lookin' like the Dawson Gang wallowing in tired, beery, hysterical, tapped filth and in come two off the set of LOVE STORY. I hope to Christ Bobby is asleep and can't see.

Wrong. Dead-ass, I'm-sorry, Yes-you-are-a-sorry-bastard, Oh-my-achin'-ass-wrong. Bobby was up in an instant, Summer Games style, and had shuffled through the people standing around the bar and was on top of them. Jesus, Jake thought, talk about movies. These folks have walked into a horror show and don't know it. Whatever happens, my gut is going to hurt from too much laughin'. Jake could see Bobby rippin' their brains out, with his left arm outstretched towards them as if it were in a plaster cast. Bobby then placed the wet, white bar cloth over the imaginary cast and placing his right arm behind the girl's waist was guiding them towards our table. That bastard, Jake mused. When Bobby got them near, still rappin' he escorted them to the table adjoining ours. Jake could hear him.
"A table by the sea with a lovely view just as I've promised you. I'm Don Ho, your headwaiter, call on me for anything. You've got the best table in the house," and with a dignified bow towards Jake and Randy, who'd returned with yet another pitcher of Colorado piss, he continued, "And these two gentlemen are the band, I'm the leader and we're known as the Beach Bums."

Howling with misplaced merriment, Jake poured beer in Bobby's glass as he slid back to the table while Randy tossedled Bobby's blond hair with a beer-wet hand. "You are fuckin' crazy, Bobby," Jake conspired.

"I'm a pro," Bobby beamed.

"Well?" Randy said.

"Well," Jake chorused, "if it's the best table and one by the sea, then we're going to give 'em a little ocean. Surfs up you bums." Jake wheeled around and was quickly pacing back and forth in about a ten foot area yelling, "I'm the rip tide and this is what makes me red," downing his half-empty beer.

Randy jumped away from the table and started whirling around the couple, screaming, "I'm the undertow and I'm here to steal your women."

Bobby, falling out of himself, laughed loud as he was able, "I'm Neptune, King of the Goddamn Sea," making strange whoooshing, shooshing, gooshing sounds. "I'm the man that makes the real WAVES." A one man special effects department.
"I'll bet Moose's never had an ocean, INSIDE this place before," Jake commanded as he was slidin' and trying to get back to the table.

Bobby was still working his wave machine and Randy was still doing the dervish and right quick, Jake was standing on one of the benches, hangin' the proverbial, the mystical BIG TEN, moving across and around the bench as if he were on a surf board.

"Montana Malibu," Jake screamed. "Wrap up the babies and grab the old ladies. I'm gonna kill this curl. Look out." Then Bobby whoosin' like a geyser jumped up on his end of the table and like a seesaw the other end came up and he slid off, buckling and laughing on the wet sawdust floor. Jake letting the surfboard bench do the wave work while he pounded his knees laughing at Bobby rolling in the sawdust. Tear-eyed Randy held his arms up V-ed fingers pointing to the roof and did a little Nixon schtick, "Showtime, showtime, showtime. Showtime is over. I am not a show. This is the end. That's all folks."

"Let's go," Jake said trying to breathe some sobriety. "We'll miss the call."

"Beer to go did somone say," Bobby mumbled as he rolled towards the fireplace only to be stopped by a beam pole.

"This circus is goin' to the zoo. Grab everything on the table and let's get out of here," Randy said shoving a pitcher under his nylon windbreaker, convinced as only someone drunk can be that no one can see.
The young couple were of course somewhat miffed and somewhat mystified.

Dredging himself up off the floor, sawdust clinging from shin to widow's peak, and shaking wood chips out of his mane, Bobby yelled, "We can't miss the fucking call. We are the goddamned call. Can't make a movie without crazies."

The three had another good laugh on that while the surrounding drinkers shook their heads and stroked imagined long, greying beards.

"Jake," Randy whispered or at least through he was whispering towards one of Jake's ears, "I think they burned the Welcome Mat in this joint. Let's take 'em to Missouri. Shit, it's almost two anyway. When do we have to be there?"

"Two," Jake laughed. Damn funny evening, he thought. Good for your soul. It shows Grendel you're not afraid of his silence. You gotta make your own fun here in the rugged West. One sad monkey don't stop the show. Just as one funny monkey can make the show.

Weaving towards the rear exit, Bobby yelled back to the couple et al, "I think Tombstone's a dead town. I'm . . . the Beach Bums are going to Dodge." The silent hot summer night received, as it had conceived, them and they were gone from Moose's, pitchers, glass mugs and all. Destination--catch the bus to Moose City.
Somehow, someway, possibly by the grace of St. Jude, the three, as a joint venture, drunkenly navigated some streets of Kalispell until they turned Bobby's little pick-up onto Highway #93 and then let the automatic pilot take them three miles South to the White Forest Christmas Tree Warehouse which was their not-so-mobile dressing room, where their wardrobes hung.

Checking in, of course, was a beggar's bedlam. It couldn't have been anything else. The shooting day had been wrapped at about 7:30 when they started to lose the light and they'd gotten back to the warehouse about 10:30. The call for the next day was 2/2:30/3:00 (depending on your I.D. number) and here it was. Every last soul in the building was madly, insanely, hysterically inebriated, someplace between a Klu Klux Klan picnic and Halloween in San Francisco.

"The Whitefish Mafia," yelled Bukka Brooks, a musician, who was handing out vouchers. "You guys are in rare form." When Bobby got to Bukka, "Give me voucher. I'm the movie monster."

"B.B. Kellough, what's your number?"

"Number 1. I'm King Kong."

"You got the wrong show," Bukka laughed.

Randy still had his pitcher and he poured some beer into Bukka's waiting mouth. "No, he's not," Randy screamed. Randy
got a voucher without too much hassle. When Jake gave his number to Bukka, Bukka asked, "Who are you tonight? Van Morrison?"

"Naw, I'm the invisible man. Once we get to Moose City, you're not gonna see me," Jake replied.

"What have you guys been doin' tonight?"

"Surfin' at Moose's," Jake said. Randy tried to explain but it didn't make any sense to Bukka. There were others, also drunk, waiting for vouchers so they moved further inside where the clothes were hung.

It was like a barracks at war's end. Yellin', screamin' and the knocking over of pilfered drinks in To-Go cups, one of Montana's amenities. Jake was sitting on a bench, head in hands while the others did an Emet Kelly routine attempting to get into their immigrant rags that United Artists had saved from a thousand other productions.

Jake was thinking about where he was, which he realized he did a great deal, place having a lot to do with what those who write, write as well as think. As a child, for several years he had lived on a ranch south of Kalispell with his real mother and step-father. The ranch was three miles south of Kalispell and abutted Highway #93. A hobby ranch, 29 acres, too small to work, too expensive to keep unless one were a doctor. Jake looked up at the exposed beam and told himself
that this warehouse wasn't on this property twenty years ago. He was and the land beneath his feet was a stud pasture in which they kept a palomino Quarter Horse called Dime, as he could stop on one. But a dime even a good one which ol' Dime was, wasn't enough. The dollars won. The stock was sold. The ranch was lost. "Jake," Bobby yelled, "let's get on the bus and take this drunken, sorry army up the North Fork."

"Fuck it. Let 'em go to hell," Jake replied.

"That's whre we're goin'. Cimino'll be there and it's gonna be hell."

Jake got up slowly and had to laugh at Bobby and Randy was ready, quickly pouring some more beer down Jake's throat. Then the three Surf-Kit-Tears, beach bummed their way onto the bus.

Going to the back where it was easier to sleep, they worked their way through a helluva crew. Guys emphatically gesturing to make some obscure drunken point with their outstretched hands, to which were connected plastic six-pack rings holding waiting Buds. Mickeys, pint bottles, joints floated up and down the aisles, while the off-duty cop/moonlighting as a bus driver gunned the engine.

A heavy-set short fellow with a full-length rough wool overcoat got on the bus with a half-empty, half-gallon jug
of rum clenched in his fist. Randy yelled, "Hey, Polish Santa (what he was called) tonight you look like a Polish Pimp."

Bobby, starting to nod towards Morpheus, said, "O.K., I'm easy. What's a Polish Pimp? Do tell. . .do . . .tell. . .do . . .run. . .run . . .da . . .do."

"A guy who pays the whores, who work for him," Randy bellowed. They all laughed. Smart joke, black humor, ironic as hell, thought Jake and a Polish joke to boot.

The Polish Santa/newly ordained pimp raised his jug saying, "Gud Morgan," crumbled in the aisle and immediately fell asleep. The three, exhausted and drunk (along with everyone else on board) fell asleep quickly to combat booze dreams of Cimino, American as well as Polish pimps, manhood missed because of malevolent paternalism, whores, celluloid, prose, still frames, winning, losing and doing both simultaneously. Ravishing, rabid, rapacious, starving, sterile dreams, better known as Rocky Mountain jazz. The driver turned the interior lights off, put the bus in gear, turned up the redneck blues and pulled away from the warehouse. Jake, asleep, still had a can of beer someone had given him in his hand. The bus left the ranch and Jake was definitely on the bus.
III. A LITTLE HEART

Jake Morris was sick and in bed, reading. It was spring and the western breeze carried birth and regeneration and carried away winter's dearth. He'd read one hundred seventy-six books so far that school year, spent at a rural two-room school house which he had to walk to, about a mile, every school day. The school was a far cry from the finishing school his mother had attended on Long Island in Great Neck. He was on one hundred seventy-seven, one about the Trojan War, but there was hope as he knew that the flu doesn't last forever and there were some streets in the world he intended to walk down. City mouse in the country and country mouse in the city. It's one of the oldest American sagas, as well as tragedy. The city kid wants a horse and a steer to chase and a Wyatt Earp to look up to saying that's me, if not tomorrow then the next day. In effect, he wants to be a cowboy until he realizes he's idolizing yesterday's dreams. Just as the kid from the wheat fields has a subconscious love of the urban gutter and will get there, the wheat savage comes to jungleland, some to stay, some to visit, sooner or later usually through the military experience. Until one or the other if not both fates befall him, Jake was less than content and read everything in print he could get home.

He read, went to school and gave orders to various assortments of horses, Hereford cattle, Suffolk sheep, goats, rabbits and a dog. He didn't care about the garden or the
twenty acres of alfalfa. Which is a pretty good position to
be in, your own kingdom, when one considers the alternative
of writing, not being in school and taking orders.

In the warmth of his bed, snuggled tight with his
sickness, his book and a golden cocker spaniel, Bucky, who
drooled, was a bit of an air head and a source of joy, he
was learning. Learning to use those books, that book, each
book, rather than to be used by them. His reading was not
so much escapism as an escape passage and a release valve.
He was starting to realize that he had no social tools,
nothing with which he could grasp a hold of his own life, and
that he was far away from anyone who did and that they were
even further away from him that the longer he stayed with the
rural damned the closer he came to their probable end, serfdom
and a life plagued by harsh winters and emotional chaos. He
knew the tracks ran through the farm across the highway,
but that one never saw a train, like a dead spur the tracks
hung from the heel of mens' land. His task was to find and
catch the Midnight Express, the Great Northern's Empire
Builder, and ride that midnight special out of and away from
this backward, no man's land in the hope that he could gain
more than he had to lose. And that the books he grasped in
his small hands were going to be his ticket on that train.
He would pile them one on top of another until he could
climb them, up, out of, and above the human conditions of
the lost people he seemed to be surrounded by. Reading,
he at least vaguely understood, arouses suspicion in those who don't read. Like some kitchen drinker, Jake had books stashed around, in the barn, their barn as well as others', in the tack room, at school, in the car and in the grain shed. He aimed to read and read and rise and look back on living three miles from town, a quarter of a mile from the highway and walking in the mud in genteel poverty.

What Jake didn't know was that wherever there is someone willing to take a chance; there's the chance of promise, inherently a magical proposition, and the taking of the risk indicates the presence of promise. Where there is a chance, there's hope, the hope that aspiration no matter how beleaguered or circumscribed will lead the elevation and grand expectations. With grand expectations comes action casting oppression aside and where this action will lead, NO ONE EVER KNOWS.

Dangerous people come from all types of cultural backgrounds and experiences, however the most dangerous are those, regardless of the geographical location of "home," class, race, sex, religion or intelligence, who come out of books, for what they root out is the radical notion that God is a failure and like priests or clergymen so writers cannot possibly be anything but failures. Soon these book people begin to subtly cultivate the astonishing belief that all things are possible for themselves as well as others and possibly for all. Gloriously romantic, desperately dangerous, infinitely expensive,
blasphemous enough to guarantee the flames of Lucifer, but none-the-less quite simply true. What this perception finally does is raises people from kneeling supplication to upright movement, striding all over God's green pastures for as long as they live. These are folks, to paraphrase the Western idiom, who turn their horses loose before they die. And what Jake did not yet realize was that he too wanted to turn his horses loose, to run free.

"How you feeling? Better of course," his mother said as she stuck her head into his room. A pretty woman by any standards. Her name was Rita. She held to rather a peculiar notion about illness which was that one brought it upon one's self and that conversely one could cast it off. In a nation which worshipped doctors and payed them accordingly, she disdained them, believing that they were totally unnecessary. Her self-righteousness caused Jake no limit/high stakes frustration but was to later save him from doctor's bills. The flaw in her reasoning as he was later to realize was that every aspect of the human condition was seen through her eyes as a disease, be it wealth or poverty or joy or despair. Ironically, it was she who the doctor, a bible-breaking, witch doctor who worked on people's heads. Her notions came from and came under the heading of a religion called Christian Science.

"I'm fine," Jake said trying to shake her off.

"Then get up," his mother replied.
"I'll be up to go to church on Sunday. Don't worry about that," Jake sighed. "Can't you practice your religion on someone else?" Jake remonstrated.

"Yes and I do on everyone else," she replied having now entered the room.

"So I'm told," he said turning over.

"It's all in your head, Jake. Heal your mind and you'll be well," she declared.

"I wish it ALL were in my mind," as he would like to have had it be at age twelve.

"It is," she declared only to realize too late at something past sixty that she totally, in her zeal, overlooked the heart of the matter, the human heart. And as a result of this incredible error became an ultraconservative ecclesiastical bigot.

"You know you don't study and practice Mary Baker Eddy. You try to be Mary Baker Eddy," he offered.

"I am her or as good as if not better," she promptly replied.

"You're obsessed, Mom," Jake would like to have concluded.

"No, I'm not. It's my religion and I practice it. On you, on myself, your step-father, on everyone," she said emphatically.

"You're not practicing a religion. You're making one up," Jake said softly.

"I heard what you said, Jake, and it's not a bad idea. The Mormons have done quite well, I would say."
"You just did," Jake replied.

"Don't you get smart with me Jake Morris. I'll have your step-father tan your hide. I like the Mormons. I think they've got the right idea. A truly American religion. Start it here and forget about the Vatican and Dublin."

"You won't join unless they let you run it," Jake yelled.

"That's right," she snapped.

"Haven't you ever heard of humility or wisdom?" he asked.

"Yes, I have. I'm humble and I'm wise. They're both good qualities in their place."

"So you say," Jake mumbled. The dog jumped down and wandered around the room, swinging his gaze from one to another, of the combatants.

"So God says, Jake Morris," she commanded.

"I'm glad you heard from him. He hasn't had much to say to me lately," Jake replied his head throbbing.

"He doesn't speak to me. He speaks through me," she announced, "and he would speak through you if you would let him."

"I'd be totally satisfied if he'd just speak to me occasionally," Jake replied.

"He's too busy," she retorted.

"You'd know." Too busy talking to you, Jake thought.

"Yes, I do know. I'm his messenger and I'm here to save you from your own mentality," she pleaded.

"For Christ sake, let me first get a mentality," Jake entered a plea.
"Enough of your swearing and lying. Leper rise!" and with that she tore the covers off the bed and his back. Bucky started barking and on his hind feet, pawing the air. Lazurus got out of bed and stumbled into the bathroom and puked. Damn poor way to observe a religious miracle, Jake thought as cumulous clouds swirled through his head. Got to get to the barn or at least outside.

"Stop that, Jake," she said peering into the bathroom drowning his claim that he was TRYING. "I'm going down to the mailbox. You get dressed and get out there to do your chores. I'll fix dinner when you come in. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you. I can't hear anyone else including myself," Jake replied, his head still in the toilet bowl.

She left. As he got dressed, he realized that it had gotten dark outside. He must have read a long time as he thought it was about two o'clock.

When he got inside the grain shed which was the back of an old step-up van, he opened a garbage can which is what they used for grain bins. This one had rabbit chow in it. Sure enough, he saw two mice eating their way to their maker. He slammed the lid back on and turned to look for a couple of empty, margarine containers which is what they used for grain scoops. Jake usually caught a mouse between two containers and then held them up for the dog, who would bark and dance in anticipation of the sport as well as the
chase to follow. Jake would then talk to Bucky about the mouse until releasing it in mid-air at which point the dog would go over the brink and run wildly around the shed until the mouse escaped or the dog got it. Then he realized that the dog was not with him and that there would be no such sport today.

One of the double doors was open and the Suffolk ram had his front hooves up on what was once a rear bumper. Jake banged him on the head to chase him away, saying, "Ramisees, if you butt me in the ass," as it was his favorite trick when one was bent over, "I'm gonna break your neck." As he spoke, his mother's station wagon came screaming up the driveway, throwing gravel in most directions. She got out screaming with her hands upon her temples. He could not hear. He was sick and his head felt like Styrofoam soaked in kerosene. He ran across the sheep pen, climbed the fence, all ninety-two strands of sheep wire and ran over to the car. She was crying hysterically.

"Bucky got hit by a car," she sobbed drawing some breath. "It was dark. I couldn't see where he was. The driver couldn't see him. It was terrible. Jake, you shouldn't have let him out. He should have been in the house with you."

Insanely furious, Jake screamed at the bewildered woman, "Is he hurt?"

"No. He's dead."
Opening the car's front door, Jake said frantically, "Did you bring him home? Is he in here?"

Looking into his startled eyes, she said, "He's down on the highway in front of the mailbox. I was afraid I'd get hit by a car in the dark if I tried to move him."

Walking in circles around his mother, tears streaming down his face, Jake was hysterical. "You get my dog killed. I love that dog, you bitch. And you tell me you're afraid." He ran over to the car, placing his head on a front fender while banging his fists on the hood.

"Jake, it's your fault. You let him out."

"He's always out," Jake cried. "This is a farm. That's where dogs are. OUT!"

"You shouldn't have let him out. He could have stayed in your room," she said solidly, having stopped sobbing.

"You take MY dog down to the highway and he gets KILLED and it's my fault?" Jake yelled incredulously.

"No. He's not dead. We don't believe in death, but he's gone, passed away. And yes, it's your fault."

Starting down the driveway to the road to get to the highway, Jake screamed at his mother, "Passed away! I'll pass you away and shove horse shit down your goddamn throat. Kill my dog and never even say you're sorry he's dead."

"When he got to the road and turned towards the highway," he heard her cry. "He's not dead, Jake, just gone."
Still crying, more with pain than anger now he screamed back with a negative motion of his arm, "Well, I'm gone, too, then. Goodbye, you kill-joy."

He walked down that dusty, rutted road, found the dead dog in the headlight beams of passing cars, picked him up and carried him back to the farm house. Later that night, his step-father dug a hole while Jake held the flashlight and kicked the stems of tomato plants which had yet to sprout through the surface. Bucky'd gone to the garden and Jake never had another dog, nor wanted one. I think that garden's still there and Bucky's still there growing tomatoes, whereas everyone else at least Jake, his mom and step-dad, is gone from the place. Bucky got to stay on the farm and Jake not too many years later caught the midnight. As for the violent sheep, they were sold with the rest of the stock.
IV. THE CHILD'S A BOY

The garage was a family museum. Weathered, beaten, one main door refusing to open, the other refusing to stay shut and never used as Jake's grandmother had never learned to drive and had no use for a car. Spools of baling wire, old branding irons, paint, burlap bags whose bottoms held nails, screws and fending staples, cans of varnish, and portions of cards, a fender, a bumper, several headlamps (which Jake believed some big bug had misplaced), a one-piece, solid back front seat, momentos from his dead grandfather's ordeals with the automobile, and an old wagon seat with the hooped springs still attached to it. It was dark and hot in the old garage which was about twenty feet from his grandma's back door, which he thought was great, because it was hot, brilliantly bright and still outside where there was nothing to do but watch the rutted road which didn't like cars and didn't have too many, and throw rocks at the Hereford bull when he came near the fence on the other side of the road.

Jake didn't read very well which didn't matter because all his grandmother had were old Reader's Digests, a cat who didn't like Jake, a radio, a rocking chair in which she sat. Really about all there was for him to do, which he liked to do was go to Mark Haines' Store and charge pop, cookies and pies when he received the mail. He liked the old train station but it was too far way, down where the
town used to be, now a ghost town, and his grandmother wouldn't let him walk that far, alone. What he really liked was the way the phone worked. It didn't. There was an operator, Mrs. Beers, but no one had a phone except her, so when you got a call her son would run over to your house or drive if you were out on a ranch and then you'd run over to the Beer's place to answer the call. Sonny liked it for two reasons, one it usually happened after dark because the rates were cheaper and his grandmother was very old and couldn't run, consequently he got to run around after dark.

Jake tried to pull down some long, dry, deeply cracked team reins that were hanging on the wall. They were attached to some rings on two, dusty, dilapidated horse collars that were hung on rungs. He finally gave up, the collars wouldn't give and the reins wouldn't come down. He climbed through the dust, the junk, and over the bumper. Finally he got his bottom down on the old wagon seat, braced himself, took the imaginary reins in his small hands, two in each, and sshed and haahed the two black horses hooked up to the "T", pulling the wagon which wasn't there. He drove the team around the garage three or four times, but the horses were too much for his arms as he was not much of a teamster being from Seattle where he never saw a horse, he lost control and very quickly the seat of his blue jeans, his first pair of blue jeans, was no longer on the dry, board wagon seat. The wagon seat was still squatting in its springs on the floor and Jake was on
the floor as well. He dove on his head and fortunately only banged the back of it on the plank floor but he quickly, rolled and thrashed his way out of the way of the wagon and the pounding hooves of the black horses. He rolled into some loose, clattering, metal barrel bindings. His eyes were tightly closed, anticipating the horses' hooves but he felt a cool, jagged piece of narrow metal come horizontally across his forehead, followed by a quick, slashing prick. When he got his eyes open, he felt a little twirly and couldn't see anything in the dust. His head didn't want much to do with the rest of him, as his body seemed to be going one way while his head was tilting another. He stumbled toward the light. The bright sunshine of August hit his cat's eyes as he strode down the garage gangplank approach. He shook his head and began to see. Licking his lips he was glad he hadn't bit his tongue that always tormented the devil out of him. He wiped his forehead with his hand which seemed to have grown and came back with blood on his fingertips.

While rocking, Grandma Goughler thought she heard something. Where's that scaleywag, she thought. I haven't seen him all morning. I'll bet he's into something. At seventy-five, I'm too old to be having my grandchildren in my care, she told herself. Looking towards the ceiling of the living room, she asked, "Why did my children wait so long to have theirs?" She waddled through the kitchen, passing the bottle of Mougan David
on the counter, the old wooden stove and the new General Electric. She kicked away the throw rug before she opened the door leading to the back porch. Once is enough to break your hip, she told herself. She finally got the porch door open, stood at the top of the crumbling wooden steps, and saw Jake near the garage with the door that wouldn't close down on his haunches like an Indian before a smoldering, smokeless campfire, his head on his hands. Lurching down the steps, she yelled, "Jakey, Jakey, what's wrong?" As she got closer to him, he stood up holding his hands up, in a shrug. She could see the blood on his hands and forehead. With her arm around the back of his small head, another hand on his chin, she quickly tilted his head back saying, "Hold still. Hold still. Let me see." Jake closed his eyes as the noonday sun was bright. His grandma moved her hand on his chin to the area of the wound. "Does that hurt?" she said running her fingertips over the hairline cut. "Now, it does," Jake said as he winced. "Hold your head back and we'll get inside where I can do something," his grandma said. Like a mobile sight gag, they, the short and the broad, the old and the young, the withered and the sprouting, the miniscule and the sage, the sand of time and the whole beach, moved across the dry, burned lawn, fifteen blades of grass and much dust, towards the back door.

With a clean wash cloth dampened in the kitchen sink, she swathed the top part of his hair. A seamstress looking for
an invisible tear, she peered from behind ancient glasses. "My eyes ain't so good, Jake, but I don't think it's too bad."

"Get some new glasses," Jake said.

"Hush," pressing the cloth on the cut she said, "You could do with a couple of stitches but there's no car and no doctor in Judith Gap. I think the bleeding will stop in a minute, then we'll put a patch on it," she smiled.

"Why do you drool, Grandma?" Jake asked.

"My mouth doesn't know any better, I guess," she replied, distractedly.

I'm lucky it works at all, she thought. My only grandson and he doesn't know he's about thirty or forty years late for what we had in mind for him. We were never much on timing in Montana. I guess the world went one way and we went another. God only knows what I'll do with this child. "Does it hurt? I don't see any tears."

"No! It don't hurt. I'm a little ashamed."

"What were you doing?"

"Driving the wagon," Jake replied.

"And?" she mused.

"Got bucked off, Grandma."

She had to chuckle as she'd heard it most of her life, but as well as she could recollect it had never before happened in a garage. "What were you doing in the garage?" she asked.
"Searchin' ." 

"For what, Jake," she continued. 

"Somethin' to do," he replied. 

"You should have been outside. It's warm and sunny. You were in there dreaming. Why do you brood?" 

"Is that where chickens live?" he asked. 

"Sometimes, Jake," she replied. 

"I wasn't in the chicken house. I was in the garage, ridin' the wagon."

"O.K.," she nodded, "now you hold the cloth on your head and I'll get a bandage for it."

It seemed to Jake, she was gone an awfully long time and his neck started to cramp so he straightened his head up. Bein' a cowboy sounds terrific, he thought, but this livin' in Judith Gap doesn't show me much.

As his Grandma trudged into the kitchen, he moved toward her as she entered the room. She took the wet cloth away from his hold, wiped the surface of his forehead with her hanky and pressed the large band-aid against his forehead. "There, I think you'll be all right. We'll change it every-day. You may have a little scar there because you didn't get no stitches, but you'll survive."

"What's a scar?" Jake asked. 

"It's a little line that grows where you once got cut. It's there to remind you not to get hurt again," she replied and kissed him wetly on the top of his head.
"Sounds like a tattoo, to me," Jake observed.
"Well, it doesn't go away if that's what you mean," she said.
"I like things that don't go away," Jake said. "Will I like a scar?"
"Oh, you'll brag about it for awhile and then you'll get tired of it and wish you didn't have it," she answered. Thinking to herself, that's what we all do with most everything. "Come on, let's sit down in the front room. I want you to rest for awhile."
She in her rocker and Jake on the couch. "Don't you ever get tired of this town? Dusty, boring," Jake asked.
"I sure do, Jake, but I'm used to it. Been doin' it a long, long time."
"Was it boring when my grandpa was alive?" Jake asked.
"How long's he been dead?"
"Two or three years. It wasn't much different, Jake. Your grandfather wasn't much for staying home."
"You think I'll be like him?" he asked.
"I suppose so," she nodded.
"Was he ever alone?"
"Most of the time, Jake," she smiled.
"I like to be alone," Jake volunteered.
"I imagine you do," she responded. I hope you do, she thought, because I can't stay much longer with you.
THROUGH THE REARVIEW MIRROR

-- a memoir --

It's late, much later than even I believe it to be, and certainly much too late to go home. Now, home is where your head is but if you don't yet adhere to that viewpoint and still believe in some mysterious correlation between your heart and a given geological formation, then we must soon talk of an enormous and sparsely populated national park currently masquerading as the State of Montana.

If one assumes the recollections of a given place are in large part remembering specific persons and what you did with as-well-as to them, and conversely what they did to you, then places are, for richer or poorer, people, as it and they were. Leading me quickly then to the mentality (a horrid neologism but one that must do) of Montanans.

James Baldwin likes to contend that our homeland is misnamed and until indication otherwise, it should be referred to as "These yet to be united states." A point well taken. Look closely. The blacks are a country, as Leroi Jones eloquently argued during the contested sixties, the Indians are currently a country and possibly the only legitimate one on the property, the corporate slaves are certainly OUT in the country in exurbia, and the young of course have their own territory (where it specifically is has always alluded me but, as a touchstone, it
seems to be often rather high like Sun Valley/Aspen or gutter-low as in urban ghettos -- somewhere between Michael Ritchie's THE DOWNHILL RACER and Martin Scorcese's MEAN STREETS -- and the plutocracy a la the Rockefellers, the Kennedys, Stewart Motts, messiers H.L. Hunt, John Paul Getty and Howie Hughes unfortunately all of late, of course own the goddamn place so they too have a country, called Most of the Country. Montana too is a country, populated by inarticulate, semi-literate, ignorant people who make those who are not pay for being so. A cowboy country. Montana is a good meal, beef of course, gone bitter on your palate. Start with a basic John Wayne steak, add a little Charles Bronson and Clint Eastwood for contemporary seasoning, Dub Taylor and Merle Haggard for humor and music (sound is a better word.) And I guarantee that in addition to an infinite number of dreams being slaughtered someone will get murdered, probably choked to death. Cowboys chase cattle and kill those things that bother either cows or cowboys. Basically an unhealthy way to go about life.

Montana is a bright song, the sound of which eventually dies on your ears.

Montana to most, be they in it or out of it, is in large part a delusion, populated with visions of N.Y. steaks-on-the-hoof and the smileless, weather-beaten faces of the sons and grandsons of Gary Cooper chasing a maniacal barbed-wire dream for reasons of pride and romance. Montanans suffer from an affection and concomitant affectation of the past for commercial and
nostalgic reasons. The rub being, anyone who wants to return to a previous period in time (history) is a stone-cold reactionary, making this obvious affection an act of cowardice. The result has been the transformation of the status quo from something to be transcended and overcome into a secular god to which one must pay tribute. I am very close to what I want to say of Montana. At best it is a legend and at worst it is a religion. Like most legends it had grown out of some willful distortion of truth, which over time became "fact" even though it did not occur. And as a religion it is practiced in a far from benign manner, more Klu Klux Klan style than anything else. And in between these two dreams, wander the people.

Somehow in the blood and hysteria of two-hundred years this wandering, this hopeful searching, first on horseback, then in wagons, onto automobiles and now aboard helicopters and airplanes, emerged as misbegotten zealotry over the region. Since I learned the difference between a raucus river and a country road with craters masquerading as pot-holes (of which Montana has many of the earth's,) I have heard Montanans call their domicile and region "God's Country." They give it top billing. It is not stated facetiously. When one pauses for a moment and reflects upon the immensity of the world as a planet, and only one of many planets in His creation, it is easy to realize that this is no small contention. And like all theology, it must be accepted on faith alone. And with faith comes the true-believers' mission, spreading the faith. And with many believers comes the crusade.
Perennially being the heretic in Sunday school, a professional skeptic, a non-joiner, and most of the time a neurotic, indifferent observer making mental notes for articles and pieces never written but gladly given over cold beer as anecdotes, and in heart and soul a lost Jew who spends most of his days arguing with an imaginary companion, My Principles, I don't care for crusades. For if they are successful they not only destroy people such as me but tend to declare illegal and immoral the manner in which I live. I keep the faith, spreading it evenly, but I don't believe a word of it.

Being a child of the sixties I had the dubious honor watching America's moral bankruptcy/going-out-of-business sale the spring of 1970 from the oval at the University of Montana. We watched the invasion of Cambodia, the murders at Kent State and were blessed (and years later with Watergate cleansed) with the hatred of Spiro Agnew, John Mitchell and of course the dirtiest dick of all, Nixxon. I graduated from the University of Montana in June of 1970. I did not go to commencement. I went to Amsterdam. Operating on the definite knowledge that no matter where I went I would be safer than I would be if I stayed home. The moral of this experience is that when you start murdering your children no matter how slow witted they are, they sense something is wrong and go down the road, as in away.

You've thrown the worst fear
That can ever be hurled
Fear to bring children
Into the world
For threatening my baby
Unborn and unnamed
You ain't worth the blood
That runs in your veins

-- Masters of War, B. Dylan, 1963

Let me put you in a much smaller bag. Over the years in Montana, I have been called a Communist, a fag, en embezzler, a punk, a prince, an animal, a left-wing lunatic, a loser, a spoiled rich kid, a poor kid from a working-class background with a chip on his shoulder large enough to replace Mt. Rushmore, a man of courage, a coward, very cheap, generous, warm, malicious, a big liver, a dead inside, dead wrong, dead right . . . I'm sure you see. All of which are untrue and mean little, except that I was there a long time, knew many people and got a little mud on my face. I no longer live in Montana. I live on a house-boat in Sausalito, California. In the former I made waves as I would do again, in the latter I lived on them. In which does the everybody-makes their-own-bed moral. But the major advantage is that one gets so little mud thrown in his face.

I left Montana some years later than 1970 for essentially the same reasons I wanted to leave and left (if ever so briefly) the country immediately after graduation. I felt exactly the same way. I knew what I had been and did not like it. I knew what I wanted to do and be, and didn't think it likely that it would happen, in Montana or anywhere else for that matter. I had a notion of what I was going to become, which didn't appeal to me either. While doing this emotional calculating around me I am
watching, almost to the man, the people I know being blocked in their development, not as Robert Cohen in Hemingway's classic study of arrested development *The Sun Also Rises* but actively participating in regression. Choosing to return to what they were rather than taking a chance and becoming what they might if they dared. The key is the word, "chance," which indicates a risk and sends people running back to their dark corners. In which lies THE difference between people. One becomes or one stays.

There is a microscopic prairie town half-way between Lewistown and Billings where the idiot wind blows the snow and the heat (depending upon the season) and next-to-nothing grows. Officially the population is about one-hundred-and-seventy, but to substantiate this number, one would have to adopt members of the Yellowstone Country Club in far away Billings. About fifty people live in Judith Gap. My maternal grandmother was one of them for about five-hundred years, or so it seemed. My grandfather, long dead, practiced law there. I learned to ride a bicycle there, which is no small accomplishment when you realize there is only one paved road in this outpost and that is the highway. I also picked up some much-needed roots. From my childhood experiences in this god-forsaken place, I acquired the legitimate notion that my people had been here an exceedingly long time and the rather romantic delusion that the mortgage on the property had been paid with years of bad times and extended periods of profuse sweating, frost-bite and misery upon which no interest
had accrued. Abstractly, this emotion and attachment is known
as a proprietary interest. In the hard rain, it's nothing more
than squatters' rights. If no one else wants it, you can stay
on. You plant the cotton and someone else takes the crop.

What makes $150 a week a "decent" wage? I suppose it is
"decent" if you are paying it rather than receiving it as well
as trying to live on it. You should have been a prince. Instead.
They've turned you into a nighthawker, riding someone else's horse,
taking care of cows you don't and never will own, getting good
and goddamn wet, while circling yourself in the dark rain waiting
for a dawn that isn't likely to show anything new.

I am not an elected representative and have never been
enclothed to speak for anyone other than myself. There may very
well be an "us," if not now then later, but there is no "we"
(royal, hospital, editorial or otherwise.) There is only "me"
and "you." And when you do not find yourself in the company of
an identifiable "me," then you are alone, as you probably are
now. In addition, I have no allegiance to anyone, including
myself, beyond a base survival level. I, a living eye, a wild-
eyed critic as opposed to a good ol' boy joiner, simply say what
I see. These predictions proved a severe disadvantage from the
fall of 1970 until June of 1971, during which I attended the
University of Montana Law School, through whose passages pass
not only the best lawyers in Montana, but nearly all the lawyers
(as it is the only law school in the state.)
One of the worst possible things to have happen to you is
to be ahead of your times (I suppose another is to be behind
your times.) Given how backward Montana is, it is not extremely
difficult to be ahead of the times. Montana is a time-warp, at
least four years behind most of the West Coast and anywhere from
five to ten years behind San Francisco and Los Angeles. It's
19-never in Montana, an opinion which did not sit too well in
the chauvinistic craw of those who administer the University of
Montana Law School.

The University of Montana Law School is not so much a professiona.
school as it is a seminary in which a peculiar social sacrament and
the mantle of authority (economic power which quickly translates
into political power) is handed down to the chosen and a few of
the persevering. A literary description which is not all hyperbole,
in that if one has a good altar-boy (perferably rooted in Butte)
/undergraduate degree from Carroll College background, one may
find that the dean and the almighty have arranged what is known
in the D.A.'s office as a "fix."

I hold to a peculiar notion, that you gain absolutely no
insight into a person by allowing him to flacidly and hypocritically
feign agreement with you. You read people in argument, for it
is then that the facade fades. Consequently I tend to provoke
people. I was branded "controversial" which I quickly learned is
the kiss of death in Montana as well as in the University of
Montana Law School.
On the other hand those administering this law school tend to believe that silence is courage. A notion I suggest that one gets from watching too many Randolph Scott westerns. Silence has always struck me as an indication of fear and stupidity. Thought demands debate and discussion, and in the four-posted ring of psychological warfare, you silence one to stop him from thinking, for himself as well as others. This school seemed to me to have a fixation with obedience and conformity, respective euphemisms for submission and acquiescence, which would be fine character traits to enforce if they were training dogs. What kind of values are these? Sadly, they are those you indoctrinate children with, and if you honor these mechanical virtues in adults you are rewarded with scandals such as Watergate which at root is a lawyer's scandal.

Why is no homage paid to virtues such as character, self-respect, self-reliance, individuality, independence and integrity (which some two-bit Freudian usually does a hatchet-job on by labeling "Ego" only to quickly wipe the allegedly-foul word from his lips?) They have been branded "inoperable" (suspended) primarily because those who possess them are difficult to manipulate. They not only march to the beat of the proverbial different drummer but are often the drummer as well as the marcher, and are usually slandered as flag-burning, bomb-throwing, pinko-activist drummer. Now Thomas Jefferson was no Buddy Rich, but I am instructed he played a mean fiddle. He was not only known to enjoy the company of blacks but went so far as to free them
(only his own of course.) He not only had strong opinions but was known to be tenacious and unyielding in his maintenance of these ideals. If, hypothetically, he had been a student at the University of Montana Law School, he would have been labeled a "Communist sympathizer," a disturbed young man," and "not very nice," and promptly shown the door. The country would have been denied a father, Virginia would have been denied the tax-paying owner of Monticello, and the Declaration of Independence would never have seen print. All because a single bureaucratic administrator was offended (frightened) by a young man's spirit and boldness. A bonifide tragedy. And tragedies are made in the hell of travesty, which is what the University of Montana Law School does and is, albeit professionally.

In passing, I find it quite singular that whenever someone bothers you, he is labeled "disturbed," when in fact and effect it is you who are disturbed. He is distributively, the disturber, generically, a disturbance. When he has been silenced and stopped, he ceases to be a disturbance. But you continue to be disturbed (he has done his job well.) A rather obvious syllogism which effectively evaded the perspicacity of the rulers of the University of Montana Law School in my case. Which on second glance is an acceptable analysis of not only how but why one finds a scapegoat, for all fear cries for a pound of flesh and the blood the act of taking it leaves in the dirt. As a warning.

Lawyers are essentially and functionally chauffeurs for power
entities, wards of big money, mouth-pieces and flak-writers for corporate gangsters. It didn't need to be this way, but it is this way. And how did it get this way? At the turn of the last century, lawyers as a profession made themselves unnecessarily indispensible to the function of government, which is not handing out money but governing, as well as to commerce. In practice, this means every piece of raw sewage which comes down the drain must be handled by an attorney before it enters the next section of pipe. Creating quite a simple formula, as long as there is new shit and many sections of pipe there will be "work" for hungry attorneys to handle. Needless to say the whole process stinks and at the end of the day there are few clean hands.

Half of the people I attended law school with, who went on to practice, will become prosecutors and finally judges, in the loosest sense of the word. Reminding me of an exchange I had recently with a quite proper, Brooks Brothered, J. Press tied, San Franciscanic attorney. I said I thought the legal profession had become a base profession, preoccupied with money and only. To which he haughtily responded, "That is not their responsibility. That is what the judge is for." To which I asked rhetorically, "Have you ever met a judge who wasn't an attorney?" He forgot to answer, "No."

And when these prosecutors and judges hear the minions and rabble cry, "Give Us Barabas!" in their malingering they will yield. And something (as well as someone) will once again be
lost, proving we have learned nothing with time. I can tell you precisely what will be lost. When the people I went to law school with run this state (ten to fifteen years from now), you can strike "liberty" from your dictionary. Never having experienced it they will not recognize it while destroying it. And if I were there I would be forced to either shoot them for the ambitious, self-serving tyrants they are or kill myself to avoid having to watch their self-righteous, self-satisfied tribal dance of malfeasance. All of which I can do without. I am a steadfast believer in a literal interpretation of freedom, no order — no structure. When Joni Mitchell wrote the lyric, "We love our lovin' but not like we love our freedom," she was exceedingly close to the American ideal, which is highly professed and seldom practiced.

If what I have stated offends your gentility, I'm afraid you'll have to be emotionally disheveled. The truth is always treacherous as well as impolite thus insuring the embarrassment of the hypocrites as well as the liars. It be's that way sometimes.

Americans of the whole have an identity problem. They don't know who they are and consequently assume others do know. Prompting them to submit and acquiesce too quickly and readily. Resulting on one hand in servitude as a result of false authority and on the other with authority as a direct result of lies by omission. In the individual case, the problem is one of perceiving reality
(same problem, other side of the coin.) We close our eyes to reality (which means nothing more than real life) in an effort to protect ourselves from what in fact is purely an extension of ourselves, daily life. What are we protecting? Our delusions, false assumption, prejudices and illusions about one another, all of which comprise the rubber stamp of orthodoxy of mediocrity. I know of no better place to document this practice than Montana, where the people are extremely homogenous but in which nearly everyone believes his neighbor, or child, or husband to be so different.

Montana is a good metaphor and breeding ground for terminal romance. The first step toward recovery is to stop seeing what you are told is there, for it never was there. Tell what you see, no matter how dimly it may be perceived for the truth does not come in black and white. It is live, in-color and always a bit opaque and nebulous. Don't tell what you're told to see, for that makes you a tool, not a personage, in someone else's dream. Romanticism, and that is what we're talking of, is not the act of viewing the world, by seeing it reflected off a broken mirror. But rather the dilemma of being the broken mirror.

Years later while at the University of Montana I often argued that I had no interest in being a good little student, a good little employee, a good little citizen or a good little customer of Montana Power Co. To which someone would invariably parry, "Well what are you going to do?"
"I'm going to live here as well as I possibly can and when the time comes I'll die here."

Followed by the incredulous "Why?" which is seldom a question and usually an objection tainted with envy, going something like, "How come you get to do that?" with the (while I don't) implied.

To which I responded, "My blood runs in this ground," which is a sententious means of saying, "Stop pullin' my chain. The bill is paid. My grandfather paid it a hundred years ago."

After making argument in various forms for several years, people started saying things to me such as "You'll go far in this world," which sounded more like exhortations and possibly invitations than positive reinforcement. It's an old process. Primitive tribes often ostracize those they can't force to conform. When you refuse to leave is the point at which it gets dirty, for the next option is martyrdom. Being very susceptible to pain, I take extremely good care of my person and regardless of principle or cause I don't let anyone destroy that person. As some point I decided someone might turn my "blood in this ground" stand into "my blood runs INTO this ground," which which when put upon forces you to take it lying down, often permanently. I abhor torture which by definition makes me a poor Christian. It was at this point that I forsake the argument as well as my fellow arguers, and sorely questioned the faith.

The last hurrah for me in Montana was a summer I spent in Missoula reading and doing little else during which I watched the bare, dark brown necks of Montana's version of the counter-culture
turning hard and crimson under the collars of cowboy work shirts. When the hippies became cowboys, I knew all my friends, sooner more likely than later were going to become strangers. And to steal a line from the not-so-great bicentennial candidate Ronald Reagan, I voted with my feet, as in down the highway. Which is far from an original idea when you reflect upon how this area of the world was settled and developed.

What happened is, simply, I took issue with my god. He stayed in his "country," Montana, and I went down the road. He kept his land, which I would wisely return to the Indians in that at least they knew how to keep it without destroying it. I kept a Dopp kit, four turtleneck shirts, four pairs of Levis, a typewriter, some memories and my life. From a beleaguered vantage point, it was a decent arrangement, possibly a bargain.

I regret little of my experience, relationships and ravings in Montana. But ironically the little I do regret, I regret intensely which I'll get to in a moment. On the whole I feel about Montana the way I now view the Vietnamese War. Every outrageous contention I made about it has turned out to be an understatement, which is to say, I was wrong. It wasn't that bad. It was a great deal worse.

Montana should be the Kuwait of the Pacific Northwest. Enough wealth in oil, gold, silver, timber, and cattle (soon coal) has been siphoned from Montana to support all those in California, twenty-five-million humbly anxious souls for twenty years. No
small piece of change. But what is Montana's per capita income? If it has climbed to $5,000 I would be surprised. And how are these rural ghetto standards rationalized. One is told income is "not important" (by those who think of nothing but profit), for you are allowed to luxuriate in a "unique way of life." Who tells you this? The Montana Highway Department which is the public relations arm of the state government and operates in the best of Mad Avenue tradition -- if you can get them to buy the dream, they'll pay for the junk. And the Montana Power Company which is the single greediest utility in the nation (which is no small indictment given the voracity of most private utilities, spelled monopolies). Quickly, I can show you what's unique about your lifestyle. Look in your wallet. You've been robbed. You are sitting above, historically, one of the wealthiest tracts of land in North America, which by some monstrous perversion of good human intentions has become little more than a tax write-off for Jack Nicholson, Warren Oates and Peter Fonda.

Having been the accident, I would like to leave you with two disclaimers and a brief statement of dissatisfaction and dissent. Montana had my first twenty-five years. My indentured servitude is over. Montana and I are at a point vis-a-vis one another which is much heralded but seldom seen. It's called even. She doesn't ask for alimony and I don't pay it.

Sour grapes? My grapes have always been sour. From the starting gun I did not like the track, the jockey or the purse.
After stumbling, nearly falling and failing to finish in the money, I liked the scene even less. And if on some mythical afternoon I do win, place or show something other than stamina I will still loathe the players and the purse. And to belabor the metaphor, I have never believed the players or coveted their winnings. I merely wanted to run, to raise as much dust as possible and to enjoy the chaos which occurs when a 40-1 outsider runs well and refuses the roses. All of which is to say, this ain't no auction. I did not come to be bought or bought off. I came to run.

The lives of most Montanans are at worst an eighty year exercise in institutionalized failure or at best, Babbitt mediocrity raised to a Parson Weems art form. And while I was there I was no different. When you have eaten more of this artificial sustenance than you can spit out, watched too much hypocrisy in the name of God, flag and bum lambs, and witnessed (biblically as well as literally) the cynical suppression for commercial reasons of all that you believe to be, at the risk of sounding hokey, good as well as important. And after tears of rage which hide behind the banner of "sensitivity," all you feel is the crippling weight of a long distance runner. Then you can do precious little. When you have carried it as far as you possibly can then it is time for you to lay it down and move over as well as on, saying, "I'm not running with you, baby. I'm way over here."