

1943

Chapter 4

LONELY AS A CLOUD

Deckhands cast off hawsers, bells rang and whistle blasted and engine labored, shuddering deck set my legs a-dancing. Screws churned cloud-gray waves to a turmoil of lime-green water and white ~~foam~~^{bubbles}, pushing the dock away, away, away. The oil-smooth lane between lines of lingering foam marked the path from land, land, land over the sea, the sea, the sea.

Leaning on the upper-deck railing I looked down to the boiling water stew (plunge basin of a mountain waterfall) and out the lengthening wake. Ferry slip grew smaller. Goodbye, little village of Edmonds. And goodbye, too, big city of Seattle.

Where will I unroll my sleeping bag tonight? Who cares? Not I. The day is as plan-free as my life, what's left of it. This moment I know, the coming 2 hours to Port Ludlow I can predict from memory. Tonight is a mystery, tomorrow a formless void, next week does not exist. Better so. Distant goals lead a roamer astray. Keep moving. Better not to know where.

Three hours ago I'd no notion how or where I'd spend the empty week between Spring Quarter finals and the start of Summer Quarter. In my basement room I listened to 80 feet pounding the other side of my ceiling, girls carrying luggage to taxis and parents' cars. By evening the ceiling would be silent, my below-ground cave still as a tomb.

Tomorrow, if I walked under the boughs of Greek Row horse-chestnut trees the half-block from Kappa Delta down 17th Avenue to 45th Street and crossed to the campus, I'd see no lovely lasses in the grasses. Squirrels and robins. And if I walked the two blocks down 45th to University Way, I'd see no Avenue sidewalks crowded with gorgeous girls, no restaurant-booth coveys of lemon-coke sippers. Elderly shoppers.

Abruptly I was in the Model A headed home. My folks' home, that is. You can't go home again, not with time and the river flowing. The world was my home now. Here and there I paused to camp. As at Kappa Delta.

And as, last fall, in the Geology Department. Dad accepted it after I convinced him geologists also had been fat and happy during the Depression, running transits with the engineers. He was content and I was reasonably so; if I had to make a living, rocks and glaciers were more congenial than Erector Sets. However, in dark and fearful Winter Quarter I envisioned the coming years (if any) with eye screwed to microscope and knew my love for raw wildland could not submerge my loathing for fossil worms.

Vincent Sheehan steered me on a new course, to my folks' chagrin. I decided to be a foreign correspondent, traveling remote mountains between affairs with exotic Eurasian beauties. But my Spring Quarter camp in the Journalism Department was brief. The advisor wore a bow tie. The Daily Shack girls were alien but not exotic. I found no glamor, only flash.

The University says everybody has got to be someplace. I moved to General Studies, where the advisor was as satisfied as I to look no farther than Summer Quarter. No need to follow the balanced diet of a prescribed curriculum. No need to grimly chew what's good for you. I could pick

and choose from the smorgasbord at my whim. In spring I'd tasted English Comp, Poli Sci, and Psych. In summer I'd sample Econ, Soc, and 17th-18th Century English Lit. Fall? If I lived so long, maybe 19th Century English Lit, ~~MUSIC APPRECIATION~~ Philosophy. Perhaps I'd take piano lessons.

Yes, I was free of the chains of life plans (and nearly of life). Good. Planning shrinks dreams. Planless dreams are infinite -- if not eternal. It's the difference between hiking a beaten trail and wandering cross-country, half-lost, as on my expeditions in Manning National Park.

A half-hour from Kappa Delta I turned off Aurora Highway on 165th Street, to home. Former home. Melancholy familiar, the 10 years vivid. Yet after 3 months of Sunday dinners only, strange-remote as childhood.

I stopped just long enough to pick up mountain gear. No explanations required. Nobody home. Mother was in Seattle repairing electric shavers, womanning the home front while GI Joe was away, earning so much that she and Dad had given up hamburger for black-market steaks (well, gray market) and would pay off the house in a year rather than squeezing out monthly instalments to unimaginably distant 1958. Dad was safe from the draft unless the Japs landed in Elliott Bay. Because of that, though in peacetime the Disston policy demanded a college degree as the ticket out of the proletariat, he'd escaped the shipping room and truck, was wearing the white collar he'd lost in the Depression -- and was selling ten times more saws and knives to lumber mills than the drafted college boy he replaced.

My folks were rolling in dough, easily could pay my way through the U if I wanted. I didn't. They thought me stupid to abandon free room and board in a cozy country home to live in a mildew-dismal basement and

waste 2 hours a day waiting table and washing dishes for 40 fancy females.

Yes, they thought me stupid. But yes, they understood. Dad was my age when, after graduating from Lowell High at 15 and spending a year in commercial school, he'd one day walked away from his desk at the bank and razzed off on his motorcycle to Boston to join the Navy and see the world. And Mother was my age when, after graduating from Lincoln and being assigned by elder brother to serve as youngest-daughter housekeeper to their aged widowed mother, she met the wise-guy gob with the funny accent and ~~and~~ ^{accepted} his offer of freedom.
~~she understood with him.~~

I didn't have to explain. Dad and Mother understood how it was for me nights in the quiet country, sitting at the same desk as in grade school, gazing out my bedroom window south to the distant sky-glow. They understood city days were tantalizing, that I yearned for city nights, for the Big Party.

Edmonds shrank to a smidgen in blue-green distance of mainland forests. I walked the open deck ^{to} ~~of~~ the ferry front (no true stern or stem on these double-engers) and looked down to the blunt prow cleaving the waves. Travèling the water road at a steady-throbbing 10 knots, we were leaving Puget Sound, entering Admiralty Inlet. To starboard lay Whidbey Island, the wave-cut cliffs of glacial till rising vertically from beach to green forest. To larboard lay the Kitsap Peninsula, the lighthouse-marked sand spit of Point No Point jutting from green forest. Ahead was Foulweather Bluff, concealing the openings to Hood Canal and Port Ludlow. The Olympics were cloud-smothered. No matter. Clouds are temporary, even as I.

Below on the vehicle deck was the jaunty royal-blue Model A, the sole car, not counting several routine trucks whose routine drivers were in the restaurant routinely coffeeing up. Where, this minute, were those thousands of jiggly-fleshed coeds? If they were smart they'd be here with me. But I was the solitary adventurer.

Always the water road had been the route to adventure. Ever since the ^{mosquito-fleet} Tyee Scout and Carlyle II and Virginia V carried me to Parsons. And long before that, when the Saturday-night ferry from Bainbridge Island to Seattle meant feasts in restaurants (two desserts if I wanted) and the Arabian Nights palaces where we saw America's top vaudeville acts and Hollywood's ^{latest} ~~newest~~ movies, including the new talkies.

Yet never was a voyage so exciting as this. Partly because I was, for the first time in my life, alone. Partly because I neither knew nor cared where I was going. Partly because when I awoke in the basement cave 6 hours ago I hadn't dreamed I'd now be sniffing cold salt wind, watching gulls ^{restaurant} gobble ~~squabble over~~ garbage tossed overboard, spotting a seal poke its dog-like face ^{from} ~~out of~~ the water to marvel at the huge noisy sea beast.

I was as excited as on the Tuesday morning a year ago March when my term of lowland exile ~~was~~ ended and Arild and I ^{threw} ~~packed~~ gear in his Model A and headed for a name on the map, Monte Cristo, reputed to be a ghost town in the heart of the Cascades. We fell short, blocked by snow on the new-built road following the bed of the old mining railroad. So what? We camped beside the South Fork Stillaguamish River, then climbed 2 steep miles to Heather Lake, 3800 feet above sealevel, 10 feet deep in snow, a mile deep in ^{clouds,} ~~fog~~. Romping in white snow and white fog, all the universe white but Arild and me, I glanced at my watch and realized our buddies were now in

Chemistry, doubtless baffled by the unexplained absence of the two rummy bombers. (No mystery, really. We worked weekends, ~~for money~~. To take a mountain trip we had to skip school.)

We laughed like maniacs, hearing invisible avalanches thunder down invisible cliffs, thinking of our friends drowning in a warm classroom while we held a snowball fight that ended in a wrestling match, rolling over and over down a slope of soft avalanche snow. Part of my laugh, the bitter part, was for the little dark-haired girl.

The afternoon of a winter day I'd just happened to drive my Model A to Lincoln she just happened to miss the Maple Leaf bus and it ~~summed~~ somehow came to pass that I gave her a ride home. And a night soon thereafter we were in the darkness of a theater and as I sat paralyzed by her nearness she sighed and dropped her head on my shoulder and I gasped at the close smell of female hair. But on our date last Friday night, when I told her I loved her, she flinched and wouldn't let me put my arm around her.

I'd considered pulling a Mallory -- not on Everest, on Mt. Rainier. In the winter of 1936 a youth seeking to build enough of a reputation to earn an invitation on the next American expedition to the Himalaya climbed alone to the summit of The Mountain. On the descent he slipped and died and for days was all over the front pages. Recalling his example, I wrote suicide notes that wrung my heart. But where was the pleasure in killing myself if I couldn't be around afterward to enjoy her remorse? More fun to skip with Arild, let her wonder for 2 days where I was.

Arild and I spent many a spring evening together. He'd drop by the house in his A and we'd drive to the beach, gather beer bottles from passion

to hear the satisfying
smash of breaking glass.

pits, toss them in the waves, and throw rocks ~~until they were busted.~~
When ~~we ran out of~~ ^{all} bottles ^{were busted} we'd walk ~~along~~ by the water looking
across to the Olympics and I'd tell of places we could hike come summer.

As weeks passed and I lost faith in God and capitalism and the little
dark-haired bitch, who wouldn't even go out with me anymore, we flew the
coop again, again aiming for Monte Cristo but by a different route. We
drove the North Fork Skykomish River road, where loggers were ripping into
the forest, and turned up Silver Creek, where virgin forest was unmolested.
A washout stopped the A and we hauled packs 3 miles to Mineral City, 2000
feet. Some city! A cabin and two ~~storage~~ sheds. We camped in the cabin
Tuesday night and ~~ventured~~ ^{crept} far into the spooky mine. Wednesday we plowed
⁴ snow [^] miles up Silver Creek, exploring more abandoned log cabins, more old
mines. At 3500 feet, sinking in snow to our knees and the slope steepening
for the final rise to 4500-foot Silver Lake, beyond which lay the fabulous
Monte Cristo, we quit. Another failure? No, another victory. During the
Tuesday-~~Wednesday~~ ~~of~~ wilderness I forgot the doom hanging over Thursday-
Friday. *Lincoln.*

On our third flight to sanity we were joined by Al, whose folks'
summer ~~home~~ ^{cabin} on the Miller River provided snug quarters. Next day we hiked
7 miles to the outlet of Lake Dorothy. Why Dorothy again? Not for the
beauty. Because it had put the hex on me and had to be confronted. The
whole 7 miles out, free of cane and pain, I laughed. No longer haunted,
in a few weeks I'd return in triumph to the high hills. I'd show Arild,
who'd never been in the mountains at all before Heather Lake, some high
times.

I didn't. A week after graduation he asked me to drive him downtown to the train station. Why? He'd enlisted in the damn Navy! Without a word of warning. I'd supposed his springtime glooms and frenzies were purely sympathetic. Engrossed in my own ordeal it hadn't occurred to me that he, a year and some months older than I, was draft bait the moment the principal handed him ~~his~~^a diploma. There was a worse shock. He'd not just joined the Navy, he'd volunteered ~~to~~ as gunner on a torpedo plane. God! The nation was still mourning Torpedo Squadron 8, wiped out at Midway. He'd gone mad. When he boarded the train the war was no longer ~~a joke~~^{for adults only.} I knew I'd never again see the square-jawed, red-headed Norwegian fool.

Port Ludlow, decades ago a noisy, smoky sawmill town, harbor jammed with lumber schooners, whorehouses and saloons roaring with sin, now was a cluster of rain-bleached, moss-grown frame buildings decaying into the silence of second-growth forest. Only a falling-down coffee shop-tavern retained a glimmer of life. The Model A rattled over ferry-slip planks ~~to~~ onto the dock, the land -- not Seattle-land, Olympic-land, a short seagull flight from the city yet well-defended from casual approach by the infrequency and slowness of ferries and ^{the} exorbitant fares charged by the pirates who owned the Black Ball Line.

I stopped at a gas station and bought 4 gallons, an A stamp's worth, a week's ration. The grease monkey took my 80¢ but -- unused to the rules after 6 months -- forgot to collect a stamp. Four free gallons, 80 free miles! Omens were good.

The junction with the peninsular^{ly}-circling Olympic Highway. A decision: right or left? A purely random twist of the wheel turned me right, toward the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the north slope of the ^{range.} ~~mountains.~~

The Model A settled into the comfortable long-distance pace of 28 miles per hour. At 35, a fun speed on city streets, the nimble-quick steering demanded close attention. At 45, good sport on country washboard, the stiff-sprung beast bucked and pitched like a rodeo bronco. At 55, to which I'd once floorboarded it in the mandatory ritual of "seeing what she'll do," I was more in the air than on the seat, only by a tight grip of the wheel kept from flying out the cloth-and-tar roof. At 28 the A drove itself. I could relax and simply ride. And think.

Why had reflexes turned me right? Because right was unknown. Left was down Hood Canal, past familiar side-roads to the Quilcene, Parsons, the Dose. My want today was for something other than a sentimental return.

I'd made the return last year. Dad and I drove the Dose road to the end at Constance Creek, scrambled up rock cliffs and tree-root ladderways the vertical 2 miles, gaining 4000 feet, to Lake Constance. Camped by the shore in alpine firs were two other hikers. Well, not hikers -- Mountain Troopers, all in khaki, with odd packs and queer boots, carrying ropes and ice axes. They were taking a "holiday" from training on Mt. Rainier for campaigns against Nazis in Norway and the Alps, conceivably the Japs in Alaska.

Sunday we climbed from the little cirque lake up a talus of limestones ^{by heat} metamorphosed into pastel pinks and greens, then through portals of

Dead Man Canyon. Two miles we ^{ascended the glacial} ~~followed this trough of an ancient glacier~~ between serrate summit ridges of Constance's east and west peaks, ~~stumbling~~ over moraines and rockslides, ^{by} ~~passing~~ walls of pillow lava, bizarre formations resulting from hot basalt erupting under the sea. At the canyon head we ate lunch by a rock-strewn scrap of bare ice, a 3-acre remnant of the glacier that once flowed all the way into the ^{ancient} Dome Glacier.

Dad was my lone companion of the summer. Arild was gone. Hal and Al were brushing trails and fighting fires for the Skykomish Ranger District of the Forest Service. Bob was putting in 6 and 7 days a week at the shipyards. Bill, never a hiker anyway, had moved to Kansas with his family.

The Olympic return was superb. Little less so were two investigations of the Cascades, mountains closer to home but for me mostly a White Space on the map, my knowledge of them mainly derived from trail descriptions in Dad's copy of the Ben Paris Fishing Guide.

One weekend we attained (a year late) some of the Foss Lakes -- Malachite, Copper, Little Heart, Big Heart, and Angeline -- filling tiny and enormous cirques scooped by Ice Age glaciers. Did I like the Cascades? I reserved my verdict. The country was grandly alpine yet not quite "home." Rather than Olympic shales and slates spiced with basalts, the rock was monotonous granite. Rather than rising brown and naked from scree, the cliffs were gray and patched by hanging jungles of scrubby trees. Rather than grass, the meadows were heather.

Another weekend we hiked up Surprise Creek, a tributary of the Skykomish River (as were the Miller, the Foss), to Surprise and Glacier Lakes. Then we followed the trail through granite barrens to the

heather-covered summit of Surprise Mountain, 6500 feet. Across the deep valley of Deception Creek stood a dead ringer for Mt. Olympus -- snow-gleaming Mt. Daniel, 7986 feet, highest peak in King County. Far south, dim in summer haze, was 14,408-foot Mt. Rainier. Far north was 10,700-foot Mt. Baker. And to my amazement, northeast was a third ice-white volcano I hadn't known existed, 10,500-foot Glacier Peak. *One might very well learn to like the Cascades.*

The Summer of the Return was a fulfilment. Yet without the anchor of those three weekends -- the days themselves and the remembering -- I wonder where I might ^{have} drifted those ^{often disgusting} ~~nightmare~~ months.

The day after graduation I walked into the warehouse of Washington Egg and Poultry ~~Co~~ Cooperative, on Elliott Bay, hit the foreman up for a job, and just like that was pushing a handtruck. What was the pay? He said 71¢ an hour. Did I hear him right? Yes. Not so incredible, actually. Bob was making 95¢ at the shipyards. And every Montana sheepherder had abandoned the woollies, and every Okie the Dust Bowl, and every Arkie the Ozark stills, and they all were at Boeing getting 60¢ ~~as beginner mechanics~~ building Flying Fortresses. It wasn't real money, of course. It was wartime counterfeit, ~~our own~~ American ersatz. By summer's end I was up to 89¢ and with overtime often took home \$40 ~~per~~ a week. In less than a month I saved enough for a University year and by September had stuffed my bank account embarrassingly full. I couldn't think how to spend such wealth. War was a good deal if you didn't have to fight.

The flood of money was obscene. So was the making of it. From a distance I worshipped the proletariat, heroes and heroines of WPA postoffice murals, and dreamed of leading the masses to the barricades. But face to

face in the warehouse, my nose recoiling from the reek of rum and Coca Cola, I had serious doubts they'd ever be sober enough to overthrow the government. Certainly exhorting them to revolt would be tough, ~~what with~~ ^{as it was} their vocabulary limited to profanity and obscenity and blasphemy. To be sure, I no longer winced to hear the name of the Lord taken in vain. And I realized man was an animal and "fuck" a synonym for "love." Still, much of the warehouse language -- words I'd never heard ~~before~~ or even seen on toilet walls, words whose meanings I didn't at first grasp -- upset my stomach.

If they weren't drinking and swearing they were screwing, and though I supported free expression of animal instincts and yearned to express my own, proletarian sex was repulsive. One morning a raw-boned broad-shouldered Wyoming cowgal detoured through the warehouse on the way to her job in the cannery. She winked at me and my ~~stomach turned~~ ^{gorge rose.} I wasn't so innocent I didn't understand the meaning of that jerk of the thumb. An answering wink ~~from~~ and -- at 6:30 in the morning, for God's sake! -- she'd run behind the stacked cases of Lynden Twistee Noodle Dinner and flop on her back. Offered the chance to get rid of my virginity, I almost threw up. not an exact synonym for love.

Manual labor was not ennobling. Yet there were worse degradations, as in fall I learned/at J.C. Penny, ~~in fall~~ clerking Saturdays and Monday evenings with other students, boys and girls. Every month the department manager fired and replaced three-quarters of his staff of several dozen clerks. I was puzzled to survive every purge, and puzzled too by how the manager knew so precisely which of the kids were stealing, which in his absence

were hiding from customers, being too busy trying to make out. Revelation came in January when he offered me a dime more an hour to be an informer. I was shocked by this flagrant example of capitalistic treachery, shocked to find many of my fellow clerks ~~had~~ had sold out to the bosses, and shocked most of all I should seem a worthy candidate for ~~firm~~ ^{stoolie.} I quit.

Sunset on Sequim Bay. Can of pork and beans heated on the fire and eaten with bread and margarine and a cup of milk. Sleeping bag spread under the firs. ~~Now~~ I sat on the dock end, legs dangling over pilings ²-slapping waves, the atmosphere suffused with pink.

I'd never been here before, had no intention of being here until I saw the sign marking the turnoff for Sequim Bay State Park, had no idea where I'd be tomorrow.

All was new. The highway (the A virtually ~~alone~~ the sole user) had climbed over rolling hills of second growth, wound along creek valleys by cows grazing bottomland pastures, descended to saltwater again at Port Discovery, ^{close under outermost} ~~at the foot of the first high~~ ridge of the Olympics, climbed another hill, the road bordered by white-and-pink blossoms of wild rhododendron, and dropped to Sequim Bay.

All was new. But old, familiar. Marmot Pass, Highlands dock, Richmond Beach -- in these past 5 years ^(5 summers with the length of 5 long winters) I'd seen (and felt) many an Olympic sunset. The Olympics are the Sunset Mountains. If they now were hidden behind me, if the view was out to the Strait of Juan de Fuca and faraway Vancouver Island, still it was another Olympic sunset.

Yet nothing was old, familiar. Because:

"Nobody knows where I am!"

At Heather Lake and Mineral City, Arild knew where I was. Even on explorations of Hidden Lake wilderness my folks knew approximately where I was. Should I be wanted now (except for my folks, by whom might that be?) there'd be no clue where to look.

Alone in Sequim Bay State Park. Alone in the world. For the first time in my life, truly alone. Not that it was entirely my choice.

I hadn't abandoned God. He abandoned me. He lost his right to exist by failing to acknowledge that I existed. Ah, with what cold, fierce glee, a year ago spring, I raced through the closing pages of Mark Twain's The Mysterious Stranger! With what exaltation I said aloud, "THERE IS NO GOD!" Christ it was thrilling. To be sure, I called myself a freethinker, shrinking from that word, that terrible scary lightning-inviting word, until the warehouse summer and H.L. Mencken's Treatise on the Gods. Then I at last unloaded excess baggage, embraced the cosmic loneliness, with dreadful pride accepted the name of atheist.

I hadn't abandoned Americanism. Americanism abandoned me. Mother's family had always been Republican because her father remembered a day in his early childhood when a rider galloped down the Pennsylvania road yelling, "They've murdered Lincoln!" Grandfather ran in the house and hid under the bed, knowing that now the Democrats had got Lincoln they'd be coming after him. Dad's family had always been Republican because in Massachusetts only Catholics are Democrats. I'd been for Hoover in 1932 (and a little Lowell Mick damn near killed me for saying so), had worn the Landon sunflower in

'36, ~~was~~ the Win With Willkie button in '40. But a year ago spring I'd begun to understand the meaning of our family history, starting on Bainbridge Island, my earliest remembered home, through the uprooting move to Seattle, the desperate week-long drive across the continent to Lowell, where Dad's father was tight with the bosses and able to get him a job, the bloody year-long battle of strikers and strikebreakers, and the despairing retreat across the continent to a shack in the country among the stumpranchers. When everyone I knew was poor, the only visible wealth in movies, my patriotism was staunch. But when I mowed lawns of the Blue Ridge estate and saw the Highlands mansions behind the Cyclone Fence I was enraged. A shift from Republican to Democrat would not suffice. All Roosevelt had done was preserve capitalism from the necessary revolution. I read Bertrand Russell's Proposed Roads to Freedom and renounced Americanism altogether.

I hadn't abandoned the Revolution. The Revolution abandoned me. Sheehan's Personal History of the Chinese Revolution converted me to Communism, a faith confirmed by Edgar Snow's Red Star Over China. Louis Fischer's Men and Politics modified my convictions to anti-Stalinism. Last spring I had high hopes for the Trotskyites and eagerly attended meetings of the Socialist Workers Party. (It is quite possible to despise the proletariat but ~~still~~ work for liquidation of the capitalists; they have it coming.) However, during discussion periods my every question was answered by a patronizing, "To get into that subject you must first study the dialectic." Finally I pinned down the star agitator and asked, "What the hell is dialectic?" He sold me a stack of pamphlets explaining the Lenin-Trotsky

line. I tried to swallow it. And decided if Marxism isn't bullshit there's no way to tell the difference with your eyes closed. I pretended an interest a while longer for the sake of three ravishing Trotskyite girls, confident that as revolutionary comrades we would practice free love. When I found the witches were married to ~~three~~ agitators in the Merchant Marine and had no free love for me I became a philosophical anarchist.

I hadn't abandoned my friends. They abandoned me. First, they stayed ~~unhappily~~ healthy. Second, they remained on Lower Campus, pursuing their Tinker Toy engineering, rather than following me to Upper Campus for a genuine education. I couldn't blame them too much. They lived in fear, were feeding their brains into a meat-grinder to obtain security. No security for me. The next Depression wasn't my worry, anymore than the war. The world is dangerous and there is no security. Last winter, briefly, the pain again. The cheerful campus doctor listened to my heart and gave me sulfa pills and told me always to wear a hat in the hot sun and go slow up steps. I staggered ~~zombie-like and~~ wobbly-kneed from the Health Center into the ~~blackest~~ bleakest ~~night~~ night since Creation, knowing I'd soon learn the truth about eternity the hard way. I sat by Frosh Pond staring at raindrop-dancing water, staring into the face of Death.

Sun warming the bag. Awake! Savor salt breezes off the bay. What ^{aromas} ~~flavors~~ will there be in the winds of tonight?

moccasins.

Crawl out. Pull on ~~moccasins~~ Stand up. What is that "crunch"?

Must've got a twig in the ~~moccasin~~ moccasin. Take it off, look for twig --

and see the ruins of my glasses, placed there last night for safekeeping.
Hell!

Blindness was no hindrance walking to the Model A. But the highway was a blur. Yes, I could safely follow the fuzzy yellow line, but only in rainbows do yellow lines lead to pots of gold. Whatever my day's destination might be, the route there certainly would be on narrow, twisty, dirt roads I'd damn well better be able to see.

Thirty cautious miles I followed the yellow line over the Sequim Prairie, through the ^{dairy-ranchers'} hamlet of Sequim, onward to Port Angeles, a mere ^{lumber-mill} village but even so the metropolis of the Peninsula. The dime store clerk was fascinated by a ^{downy-faced boy} ~~scruffy bearded~~ groping through the stock of glasses -- only poor old farm ladies buy dime store glasses. Apparently because poor old farm ladies go blind in a different manner from boys. I tried every pair in the store. None brought the world in focus. Very well. Not only do I not know my goal, when I get there I ~~won't~~ won't see it. There's adventure for you, Thomas Wolfe, there's bravery for you, Mr. Hemingway.

I studied the map. Within a highway hour or so were side-roads up valleys -- Dungeness, Elwha, Soleduck. Valleys obviously were the sane choice for June 12, the peaks ~~still~~ deep in winter. Yet there were two tempting roads (the only two in the entire range) climbing to high country. One led from the Elwha to Hurricane Ridge and Obstruction Point (a day's hard hike from the Lillian Glacier had not the 3-day blow blown in). That was well west of Port Angeles. The second, closer, led to Deer Park (where we'd have met the Big Red Truck). For the hell of it, why not try? Retreat to a valley was always open. I had a week.

The gravel road ran south from the highway over the flatland of Sequim Prairie, in a couple miles passing the last farm, promptly narrowing and roughening, and entering a small valley winding through second-growth-covered foothills. In another mile, ^{at} a lonesome stumpranch, a shack and a decrepit barn and 2 acres of creek-bottom pasture, my speedometer telling me Deer Park was 12 ~~miles~~ miles away, the up-and-down track tilted upward for good. I shifted down to second gear and blindly crept around blind corners, squinting to make sure the road wasn't washed out or windfall-blocked and that I was turning the A the same way as the road. Three creeping miles from the stumpranch was a sign, "Olympic National Park. Dangerous road. Proceed at own risk."

Wisps of steam curled ~~out~~ from the radiator. Stop. Listen to water boil. Once quiet, resume the grind. Again stop. Wait. Narrower the road, now on a sidehill, spindly trees to the right barely masking the plunge to blurry depths of Maiden Creek valley. My own risk! Steadily steeper the road; 10 miles of constant second ^{gear} from the stumpranch, 2 miles from the map-marked road-end, double-clutch down to low.

Stop again, this time by a waterfall. ~~Water~~ Water is just what I need. ~~Adjust hand throttle to racing~~
~~Leave the motor running,~~ wrap a hand in a rag and spin off the radiator cap, stand back from the geyser. Slowly add cold mountain water to the brim, idle the motor a while before shutting it off. Mustn't crack the block.

The road was scarcely wider than the A. Fir trees on the rocky ^{above} precipice [^] to the left were skinny and short and scattered. No trees guarded the brink on the right. There would've been a view if I could've seen it. Vaguely amid clouds to the west I made out Grand Ridge, north-side gullies full of snow. I took pictures so later I could see what I was looking at.

What lay ahead, above? According to the speedometer, a final mile. I'd not expected to come this near. But up in ~~the~~ ^{the} gray-white cloud, was that a pure white? Grind upward in low -- and yes, it was snow, a solid bank sloping from the cliff on the left out over the road, and in a hundred yards pushing to the brink. End of the line. Damn! I'd have been amazed to reach Deer Park on June 12, yet it was a shame to come so close and miss.

So I'd retreat to valley adventures. First, though, I might as well see (that is, point eyes and camera at) our ^{Ranger} goal of of 3 summers ago. I walked the road a quarter-mile up to a shoulder. On the far side would be the arctic landscape of the Olympics in winter.

Have I gone totally blind? So blind that snow looks green? No! On the far side of the shoulder, a vast meadow. Fog-dimmed and cloud-darkened ~~X~~ but green! On June 12!

Stupid of me not to suspect. I knew the boast of Sequim ^{farmers} ~~fact~~ that ~~the~~ ^{(they are forced to irrigate} because [^] annual precipitation on their prairie is a meager 17 inches, contrasted to 30 inches in Seattle and ~~200~~ a deluge of 200 inches on windward slopes of the Olympics 35 miles west. But I'd thought the rainshadow a lowland phenomenon, was unaware so little snow falls on the northeast Olympics that summer begins a month earlier than on Olympus.

Well, to call the scene "summer" was an exaggeration. ~~the~~ Instead say early spring. Conceivably I could make a tolerable camp in those snow-flecked, fog-swept meadows. However, that would require hoisting pack, leaving the A, and without that faithful friend (if man, a machine, ^{can be said to have} ~~was~~ a soul, so does the A) ^{lacking any} ~~having no~~ ally against the lurking menace of this cold wilderness 12 miles from the nearest other human being. I descended, glad to at least have glimpsed the land of faery, even if it presently

was too spooky for aught but goblins.

A curious thing I'd not seen before, all fuzzy-eyed. A shovel in the snowbank. Left by whom? For what? When? ~~But it was a curious thing~~ Curious. Even weird. I studied the shovel. Studied the 20 feet of snow-blocked road. Hell, I could try. I had a week.

In an hour I shoveled a lane nearly as wide as the Model A. But, of course, the farther inward I dug the deeper the snow. By the end of the second hour the distance between brink and snow equalled the width of the A plus a foot. I'd prefer 2 feet. But that would take until nightfall. Hell, take a chance. No need for the A in the approaching oblivion.

Start her up, go slow, slow, snubbing the left front tire against the snow wall, praying (to what?) the meltwater-mushy brink wouldn't collapse under the right tires, wondering if I'd have time to leap clear.

Past! And over the shoulder into meadows! Three years late the Lone Ranger has arrived!

Trembling with fear and joy I spotted a cabin on a spur road. Curiouser and curiouser. Well, no shivering meadow camp for me, exposed to evil spirits of night and fog. I parked the A, opened the door of the closed-in porch, noted with satisfaction the pile of dry firewood.

The cabin door opened. My hair stood on end. A creature leaned out, picked up a chunk of wood, and shut the door. Christ! So close I could hear her breathe and she didn't even see me. Am I invisible? Without noticing, did I die? Am I a ghost? Or is she?

I fled to the A. Footsteps followed. Hair again on end. I turned -- and was greeted by an indisputable human being, male, and eager to talk to a stranger after a snow-trapped winter with his wife. They were

skywatchers. Jap bombers from a task force off the coast would have to cross the Olympics. The watchers would radio a ^{half-hour's} ~~few minutes~~ warning to Boeing and the shipyards and the remnants of the Pacific Fleet being repaired at Bremerton.

The shovel was explained. He'd taken it down to the snowbank yesterday to dig a way through for his car (which I'd not seen in the closed ~~garage~~ garage) but decided ~~that after all these months~~ he wasn't in that much of a hurry to get to Port Angeles. He'd left the shovel, though. He laughed, "I sort of thought somebody like you might show up."

Alone in the night. Burrowed deep in clouds. Behind me, the interior of the ~~lean-to~~ lean-to -- a trail shelter until the ^{CCC} ~~road was~~ ^{the road} pushed up here some 8 years ago. Beyond the campfire, flickering-lit by flames, the edge of grassy meadows greening up for summer, Christmas tree alpine firs, white snowpatch, drifting fog.

I was not completely alone. ~~3000~~ Outside the shelter was the A. Other friends around me. On my body the garments of many trails, wool watch cap and shirt and pants (no cotton by God and no shorts -- I'd learned my lesson on Lost Ridge). Trapper Nelson and wool sleeping bag. Coffee can in which I'd heated (for old times' sake) a jar of Lynden Chicken Raviola. Tin cup and spoon. On the fire the Ten Can holding coffee boiled black as a woman's heart. (Yes, I'd yielded to the evils of coffee. I'd drink beer and wine and whiskey and rum, too, if ever I could get my hands on any. I was smoking a cigarette from the pack impulsively bought in Edmonds. What had it got me, being a clean-living boy? In my time remaining I'd have to rush

to sample ^{every} ~~all the~~ adult vices.)

Best friends of all, my boots, the Bone Drys. Extending high enough above the ankles to slosh through puddles and creeks and muck all day and never dampen my wool socks. I fondled the spike-studded soles. When I bought the boots last July I'd wanted tricounis. All gone to war. No slivers to be found either. Damned if I'd mess with caulks; Dad had the sharp little daggers in his soles and on trails had to stop every few minutes to pull off impaled leaves and bits of wood. But as I told the guy in the sporting goods shop, I couldn't climb the vertical trail to Lake Constance on smooth leather. He agreed (he had a German accent and seemed mountain-wise) and suggested golfers' spikes. A mountain climber would sneer, ^{Well,} ~~but~~ if I had to be careful climbing steps I sure as hell wouldn't be climbing mountains. For a hiker the spikes worked fine.

Not quite alone. Some old friends along. Where were the others? Arild was c/o Fleet Post Office, San Francisco -- but not, thank God, riding shotgun on a suicide plane. The malocclusion of that square Norwegian jaw saved him from his idiocy. He'd written, "Dammit, I didn't enlist to bite the Japs!" But the Navy said if you couldn't crack walnuts between your teeth you couldn't fly and had made him a floating weatherman. Bob was in an Army camp, yanked out of the University last spring. Bill, in Kansas, was awaiting "Greetings!" from President Roosevelt. Hal and Al were still in school, sweating out quarter-by-quarter engineers' deferments. Until Spring Quarter we gathered for lunch in Bagley Hall on Lower Campus. Now at noon I waited table and washed dishes. The last vestige of our cozy Lincoln society, 4 years ~~in~~ in the building, had been destroyed. Childhood had ended.

Yet does childhood ever end? Does one ever escape the phantoms?

Alone in silence of night. No river roar this high in meadows, no babble from the meltwater trickle of my water supply, no wind whisper in slow-drifting fog. Alone in darkness of night more deepened than dispelled by flames. I'd never been alone ~~before~~ in a mountain night.

Try to avoid memories of the Old Man of the Mountains, that Sax Rohmer Saturday Evening Post monster beside whom the unspeakable Dr. Fu Manchu was Santa Claus. Caught by night on a country road, I'd hear the patter of tiny feet behind me and know it was Them -- the hashish fiends, crazed dwarfs ^{bodies} drugged since birth by the Old Man, ~~stunted~~ stunted, minds enslaved ~~by~~ to know only dope and murder. I'd break into a run and so would they and I'd hear their nasty hoarse panting and the swishing of their little scimitars and I'd scream "MOTHER! MOTHER!" and in the nick of time she'd open the front door.

Hark! What is that "thump!" in blackness beyond firelight? Muscles tense. Scalp prickles. Heart pounds. Eyes Straining ~~into night~~ see only shifting shadows concealing hashish fiends.

Dear Lord! Two balls of hellish green fire burning in blackness!
The Old Man himself! ~~He is gone~~

Demon eyes float closer. I stand up to die on my feet. And the deer bounds off in night and fog, thumping, thumping, thumping.

Slowly, obeying the doctor, I climbed from the mile-high shelf of Deer Park toward the cloud-lost summit of 6000-foot Blue Mountain. Boots crushed new-sprouting grass sparkling with fog-drops, avoided white

blossoms, yellow blossoms, whose faces I knew if not the names. Meadows swelled in mounds, dipped to swales, the lush curving flesh of a great green woman.

How does one make love to a mountain?

For that matter, how does one make love to a girl? Last fall the YMCA-YWCA offered a Preparation for Marriage course and I'd heard guys in class sniggering about the Ten Basic Positions. Ten! What ~~gymnastics~~ gymnastics do Christian lovers perform ~~in bed~~? I could visualize three or four -- certain of the less obviously deranged drawings on toilet walls seemed plausible. But ten! Were there still others for atheists?

Not that knowledge of mechanics would have done me any good. An arm around the shoulder had been my farthest advance with the three Lincoln girls I'd dated and now one had left town, one had pledged a sorority and was forbidden to go out with white-jacketed houseboys, and the third was the little dark-haired girl, may she ^{roast} ~~burn~~ in Hell. Of the thousands of soft bodies in the District, 40 under the same roof as I, none was mine.

For a moment I thought they all were mine. As I was walking down the Avenue my first night at the Big Party, a girl walking up the Avenue smiled. Someone I knew from Lincoln, surely. I smiled, trying through myopia to make out her face. But when she came in focus I saw she was a total stranger. Cold-white with shock, ~~white~~ red-hot with shame, I stalked by with eyes straight forward. And as we passed she rammed an elbow in my ribs. Proper punishment for a masher. When the truth hit me and I turned she was a dozen feet away and not looking back. Should I run after, tap her on the shoulder? What then? What are the words?

I hadn't thought about the words so she got away. No matter. If this happened my very first night in the District it was going to be one hell of a Party. I didn't expect love, of course, not with a stranger. A doomed 17-year-old atheist Red would settle for a screw. You bet. Night after night, week after week, I walked the Avenue rehearsing the words and that was the only elbow, the only smile, ever.

Crap on girls. I'd love a mountain.

Meadows crested on the top of Blue Mountain, my first Olympic summit since Lost Ridge, and this ^{magic} ~~thrilling~~ morning lying in the front lines of the ^{battle} ~~war~~ between sun and storm. Below to the north, Sequim Prairie and Sequim Bay and Dungeness Spit were warm-bright, and Port Angeles and Ediz Hook, and the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Vancouver Island. Below to south and west, fog filled valleys of the Graywolf River and tributaries. Above the dark sea, skeleton-white peaks dodged in and out of black-^{souled} ~~hearted~~ clouds. I ~~took~~ ^{snapped} photos in which I might later see The Needles and Mt. Deception south, Grand Ridge and Obstruction Point and Lillian Ridge west. Though all the ^{mountain} world was a blurred twilight gloom, I could feel if not see how beautiful it was.

A cold ghost of cloud swirled me off in gray void. No Green Woman now, no forests and peaks, no saltwater and campus, no ^{girls} ~~women~~ and war, no past and future, no life and death. The universe was destroyed or not yet created and I was alone in a cloud.