

July 1946

Chapter 6

DARK WINGS OVER THE GRAYWOLF

(Ten fingers clawing and two heels gouging and ass muscles trying to grip snow in the crease...)

Three weeks had passed, 23 days with the strength of 23 blazing suns, and the sudden summer had driven from Camp Marion every memory of the long mountain winter and brief mountain spring. Powder-dry wood exploded at the touch of a match, quickly boiling our hoosh of noodles and tomato sauce and hamburger -- the hamburger being (not counting a couple onions) our last fresh food ~~for~~ for a week. A week! My longest wilderness exploration ever. Deep-needled duff under tall firs made a snugly mattress for sleeping. Mild night air carried no voices but those of man.

Of many men. On all my Parsons hikes together I saw only a half-dozen non-Scouts. Now the trail was solid fishermen the whole 9 miles from Constance Creek and three other campfires clouded the Marion forest with smoke. Expelled from the Dose turnpike by swarming humanity were the hostile ~~eyes~~ eyes of June, the wicked murmurs. Gas rationing was over, 6-day defense-plant^{work} weeks were over, and Johnny had come marching home.

And Arild, too -- still looking at trees as if he'd never seen one before, a part of him still sailing the Pacific on the Missouri, monotony

relieved by an occasional typhoon or kamikaze, by eating ice cream, by reading V-mail (including the running saga of a 4-F at the University) and eventually by surrender ceremonies in Tokyo Bay.

(Roaring of wind in ears and hissing-scraping-thudding of hurtling flesh...)

There'd been no question about the destination. The sign I'd seen 3 weeks ago was, for me, the finger of fate, and whatever the mountain man said was okay by the sailor. Not since 1942 had he left sealevel -- except when looking at snapshots I'd sent, reading tales of my alpine exploits.

The sign pointed into pathless meadows sloping steeply up from the Dose valley. I couldn't make out the exact location on the skyline of Graywolf Pass but the Mt. Constance quadrangle said it was 3000 feet ~~ms~~ above. Sky was spotless, sun brilliant, meadow hip-deep in blue lupen, pink Indian paintbrush, white daisy, orange tiger lily, red-yellow columbine, and a dozen flowers ^{of unknown} ~~whose~~ names, ~~I didn't know~~. On this Tuesday morning of July 23 in the first summer of peace I led Arild up up up to adventure.

(Bouncing high in air and slamming down on concrete snow...)

It was the sun that done me wrong -- the sun and the 50-pound stone. The one got hotter and the other heavier and they emptied my head of aught but the thought of paying the price of freedom, the 3000 feet, all in a rush. The map didn't show the trail but I knew if we climbed straight up the treeless mountainside we'd intersect or see tread once above lush low-valley greenery. A gully gave a welcome drink from a snowpatch trickle so looking neither left nor right I stuck with it in hopes of another.

The gully ran into a cliff. Now I took out the map and now I looked left and right and now I realized the damn trail didn't go straight up but apparently made a long zag downvalley before switchbacking to Graywolf Pass. We were a halfmile too far west. Shit! Between us and pass were cliffs forbidding a traverse. We'd have to give up a hard-won thousand feet, waste a gallon of sweat.

"Crap on that," said Mountain Man. The ridge crest was close and the gully sliced enticingly upward through the cliff.

Not a word said Sailor, barely getting land legs after years of decks.
(Snow and sky and peaks flashing by eyes in a merry-go-round whirl...)

The gully seemed a simple staircase. But each step ~~■~~ proved longer than the last, more treacherously littered with loose rock. I decided we'd better waste that gallon of sweat. And turned to go down and beneath boots saw the tiny thread of the Dosewallips River.

Vertigo spun head. Gully blurred. Handholds crumbled. Fumbling feet kicked off boulders in a crashing-smashing cannonade.

(This glissade isn't what I planned but I'd gladly keep it up all day considering what's going to happen at the end of snow...)

On top! When heart stopped pounding, chest heaving, eyes swimming, we saw we were on the 7000-foot summit of Graywolf Pup. Gloryosky!

Look west: over headwaters of Cameron Creek to Lost Ridge of 1940, Lillian Ridge of 1945, and peak upon peak to blue-icy Olympus. Look south: giddily down down down to the Dose, across the broad valley gulf to Wellesley Peak whose summit seemed unattainably high 3 weeks ago and now

was not so high as we, to Anderson of 1939, to The Brothers. Look east: over Graywolf Pass, 500 feet below, to craggy lava masses of The Needles and Deception, Mystery, Constance. Look north: 1500 feet down to the headwater basin of the Graywolf River, sun-guarded by Graywolf Pup and thus winter-snowy, and out to brown round ridges, among them Blue Mountain of 1943, standing above the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

There'd been no recriminations from Arild in the gully. Not once had ~~he~~ he unclenched grim-set square jaw. It was typically thoughtful and nice of him, now, to anticipate my apology by ~~saying~~ saying, "This is a lot better view than we'd have got from the pass. We'd have walked up here anyway."

While filling our eyes we filled a Ten Can with snow from a cornice remnant and soon could drain off cupsful of icewater to accompany a traditional Parsons lunch of cheese and chocolate and raisins. No Sailor Boy pilot bread for the sailor, however; the Navy had it all packed away in liferaft rations. We made do with rye tack, good fare for a redheaded Norwegian~~x~~ and a blond mongrel.

"What do you make of the weather, weatherman?" I asked.

Arild studied the blue-forever sky and said, "No typhoon today."

Plenty of time for leisurely inspection of the wilderness panorama. The descent to the basin, to a little green obvious-campsite oasis of alpine trees amid the white glare, would be a half-hour stroll.

Eagerly I surveyed the beginnings of the route of the coming week, the proud line I'd drawn on the map. For Arild's homecoming I'd planned not only his but my most ~~ambitious~~ ambitious exploration, even surpassing the Ranger

Hike to the Lillian Glacier, our way entirely cross-country until next Sunday, navigation solely by map and compass and Silver Marmot canniness. There, 2 crow miles away, was our pass through The Needles to Royal Basin. From that land of enchantment, unseen now, we'd cross a ridge to Deception Basin (1939), another ridge to Heather Basin, and climb to Del Monte Ridge (1938), only there joining trail for the return to the Dose.

(A dozen heartbeats more and bones will be snapping and flesh crunching and blood spattering an acre of mountainside...)

The call of the basin -- of soaking heads in cold creek and lolling in soft grass -- grew loud. A final eye-swing of horizons and we shouldered packs and boulder-hopped the ridge crest eastward toward Graywolf Pass.

Stop. The brink of a hundred-foot cliff. Arild was wrong. From the pass we never in hell could've climbed the Pup.

Screw the pass, then. We dropped directly toward the basin, slithering down loose-rock gullies and rubble-covered slabs.

Stop. Brink of a cliff with no bottom but the basin floor.

Jittering brain summed up: Cliffs barred us from the basin. Cliffs barred us from the pass. Blurred gully on the Dose side of the ridge barred retreat. Trapped!

(I know how it'll feel -- like the winter night I was cornered in the schoolyard and put up my fists and was hit between the eyes by a runaway truck, like the time in Lowell when I was 7 years old and the masked men and women armed with knives strapped me to a table and gassed me...)

Fight back panic. Avoid accusation in glum-jawed Sailor's eyes: the Japs didn't kill him but his old buddy would.

Not so! A boulevard of cedar shrubs allowed an ape-swinging traverse a hundred yards east to a finger of snow poking high in the cliffs, the white lane leading pretty as you please ^{down} to the basin.

Arild didn't share my joy. From the boulevard end he looked at the snow, unclamped jaw for the first time since ~~leaving~~ the summit, and spoke: "Long damn way down. Awful damn steep."

"Oh hell," said I, "On Parsons hikes we glissaded slopes like this all the time. Nothing to it. Just do everything I do."

I explained the Silver Marmot pack-sled-brake technique. To be sure, we weren't carrying Trapper Nelsons, but rather ~~the~~ steel-frame, conveniently many-pocketed Mountain Trooper Bergan^s, a \$25 value selling in surplus stores for a ~~not~~ ridiculous 50¢. However, I was confident Bergans would serve the purpose beautifully.

Between cedar thicket and snow was a deep moat, awkward to climb down in and out again. I'd take the more elegant alternative -- leap the moat, then unsling Bergan and assume sledding position.

(Death is here,
Death is there,
Death is busy everywhere.)

I land on my feet as neat as a cat. And realize I've made a terrible mistake. In afternoon shadows the noon-slushy snow has frozen hard and slick. Boots skate up in the air and just-like-that I'm whizzing toward the basin on my rear.

Embarrassing! Arild's teeth must be fusing together. I'll calm his fears by demonstrating the Silver Marmot recovery. Dig in heels and sharp

metal of tricouni nails bites the slope. Glad I am that trikes returned to the civilian market in time to install them on the new Bone Drys I bought last week.

Boots slow. But! No nails in my ass! Its speed does not decrease and therefore it swings into the lead. The first law of mountaineering is never lead with your ass. Lift heels, scramble to get boots downhill. With brakes off I accelerate. Never fear. Most Parsons glissades were thrilling but snow always flattens eventually, sooner or later stopping is automatic. At this pace I'll be at the green oasis in a minute, raving from exhilaration of my best run since Flypaper Pass.

But! What's that between me and oasis? Something non-white. Something sinister gray. Lord! Boots are aimed at a patch of scree melted from the snow!

Dig in heels -- boots slow and ass pivots forward. Lift heels and kick and grab to reverse the pivot -- speed increases. Dig in fingers -- they begin eroding off toward elbows. Faster, faster. Bouncing Bergan batters skull.

What I saw in Frosh Pond that dark night of January 1943, what I'd forgotten in following years of mountain wanders and city romps...

Here come the rocks.

Dear God, I didn't know I could die in the mountains.

Keep boots in front.

Mind abandons body, observes the turmoil from an outer calm. Clinically I observe, sentimentally I treasure, these final microseconds on Earth.

Boots meet rocks. Goodbye.

The Bomb explodes. I am within the mushroom cloud.

Gracefully I rise ~~flashes~~ into headfirst flight, arms spread wide, and soar through soft silent air, flapping wings. Out of dust cloud I fly into clean clear air. What a marvelous afternoon for learning how to fly.

Another Bomb, another cloud.

I somersault. I cartwheel. Amazing. As a clumsy kid I never could do these stunts. Now I'm agile as an acrobat.

I've stopped. No more loud noise~~s~~. No more-violent motion.

I've died and it didn't hurt a bit.

No, not quite dead. See the dome of Blueness arching over the picket fence of peaks which for 8 years have guarded the heart of my dreams. Hear heavenly water music. Savor snow-pure air. Merge into the One that remains while the Many change and pass.

A voice. Far far away, on the Other Side. Poor Arild. I'm Crossing Over, am safe. He must still endure. From high in cliffs he's watching me ^{go.} ~~die~~ Wish I could tell him it's okay, he'll like it.

The machine is a wreck and the matter shortly will be feeding beetles and flowers. ~~One final moment~~ ^{Briefly} the Me lingers in this perfect moment, the last of life for which the first was made. Then spin^s into sleep.

How do you like your blue-eyed boy, Mister Death?

Awake. Still here? Yes -- and the moment is lost. Damn! I can't die happy until I take a piss.

That requires, for openers, use of the right hand. Give the order. The message races from brain. Fingers wiggle. Send other messages. Wrist flexes, and elbow, and shoulder. The left assembly? It too obeys. Legs?

That ankle checks out, and the connected knee and hip. Also the other set. Surely the neck is broken? No, the head wobbles. The spine? I can sit up. I can stand up! Careful, sit back down. Almost spun out again.

An ugly scene. Scratches and gashes and abrasions. Doubtless concealed bruises and contusions and internal injuries.

There was blood on the rocks and blood on the snow,
The body was bloody from head to toe,
Oh pity this hiker all covered with gore,
He'll never go roaming the wildlands no more.

But I will! The machine works!

From this hour forward each breath of life is gravy.

Again a voice from far above. Arild. I forgot Arild. I didn't kill myself but I've killed Arild. Well, nothing I can do but await his fall, inspect the broken body, and carry back to the city the tragic news.

A dozen yards away in the scree is my pack, unwounded. Not surprising -- the Army designed these Bergans to withstand the shock of battle while roosting Hitler from his Alpine Redoubt.

Down to green oasis and at 5500 feet above sealevel collapse in flowers, lift eyes to see the sailor boy die.

Arild, however, was not cut out to be a star. I watched him disappear in moat and reappear on snow. That took a half-hour. Then he slowly kicked steps across the snowfinger to gentler slopes, kicked steps downward. That took an hour. I'd come down in less than a minute.

As he approached I yelled angrily, "I told you to do everything I did!"

"Bugger you!" he said.

He saw crusted blood on my hands and face and was alarmed. I assured him it was all in a day's work for a Silver Marmot.

"I thought so at first," he said. "You looked damn good on the snow. I was mad as hell -- the showoff son-of-a-bitch expects me to do that?"

It was the best camp of my life, even surpassing the meadow below the Lillian Glacier. From our snow-ringed island of Christmas trees and heather clumps and spring flowers we admired the massive menace of Graywolf Pup, close above us but behind us, and jeered the small-balls pussyfooting ~~along~~ the Dose turnpike. We'd crossed the divide to brighter blossoms, wetter water. Ashes on the knoll, flattened and leached by snows of many winters, told us nobody had camped here since before the war. We owned a whole valley. How rich can two guys get? Wounds began to ache -- I exulted in the pulse of pain, of life.

So recently nearly an angel, I rejoiced in the return to bestiality. Arild had brought home from the Navy an enriched vocabulary, particularly distinguished by a repertoire of belches that by variation of volume and pitch and timbre expressed ~~appropriate~~ opinions on everything from beauty of the scenery to filthiness of my jokes. Bowels being greatly gassy from a high-carbohydrate mountain diet, I answered belches with equally eloquent farts. Was this the first conversation of Neanderthals? Pleasures of the wilderness animal are largely alimentary, and so too his language. I remembered wise words on the headstone of an 18th-century grave in a Lowell cemetery:

Wherever you are let your wind blow free
 For holding it in was the death of me.

We set to work building our kitchen, delighting in exercise of brutish ingenuity. Arild scavenged the oasis knoll for silver-bleached sticks and logs, filled Ten Cans from the ^{short stretch} ~~far-fest~~ of creek running out from snow and under again. I restored the rock fire ~~ring~~ ring, chose a sturdy pole for the dinglestick and balanced the fulcrum on a boulder and with another boulder anchored the outside end. From its over-fire end I suspended one Ten Can for boiling up a thick soup of dried split peas and a fresh onion (to flavor the soup and fuel the evening conversation) and Spam, and ~~in~~ a second can for ~~a~~ constantly-stirred chocolate pudding.

Supper over, Ten Cans and cups and spoons scrubbed clean with sand, we sprawled in grass by our tiny inferno of entropy burning bright and hot within icebox chill of black wilderness. How clever of us to invent fire! Ten Can of coffee on dinglestick boiled steadily blacker bitterer better.

What was the year? 1946? Nonsense. 1942, of course. There'd never been a 1943 or 1944 or 1945. It was just last year we bedeviled the idiot busdriver, only a month ago we tied balloons to Chemistry classroom air jets and when they began exploding ran out in the hall yelling "The Japs are here!"

Belches and farts lagged. Eyelids sagged. We crawled in bags spread on soft turf. I was happier even than when I lay me down below the Lillian Glacier. And much warmer, snuggled in a down mummy bag, formerly the garment of nabobs, now \$5 at any surplus store and bringing ~~a~~ coziness within the grasp of every pauper.

No dreams broke my peace. Except... Once I awoke in a convulsion of arms and legs, saw stars, and before sinking back to sleep remembered the numbing shock of boots hitting rock.

In joyous sunshine of Wednesday morning, breakfasting on cocoa, stewed prunes, and oatmeal with brown sugar and canned milk, we'd no reason to suspect the coming night would be less carefree than the nights of Tuesday, Monday. We hoisted Bergans, now lighter by 2 days' food, and set out from the oasis to follow my map-line. The plan was to plug steps up gentle snow from our branch of the Graywolf to a 6000-foot saddle, drop to the branch heading at 7772-foot Deception, ascend to the foot of The Needles, and traverse under them to the 7000-foot pass through the crags to Royal Basin, our next home.

How could I have guessed the savagery of the gorge beneath The Needles? That the way down into it was a convex snowfield, the bottom unseeable? At the 6000-foot saddle my balls shrank. I drew a new line on the map. We'd take the long way around, detouring down "oasis creek" to ^{reach} ~~its junction~~ ~~with~~ the creek heading at the pass to Royal Basin.

Why didn't I have sense enough to retreat all the way to the oasis? Why did I try a shortcut? Another white brink. And a chill in the center of my soul -- because now at last I remembered.

I remembered how it really was on Flypaper Pass, the Lillian Glacier -- not exhilarating but terrifying. I remembered the pack-sled-brake never had worked, there wasn't any Parsons glissading technique, all my slides

had been jump-off-and-pray. Never having been killed convinced me I was an expert. Until yesterday.

In reality the shortcut snowfield was neither very steep nor very long, and actually the slide down was short and safe. But it didn't feel safe. I knew I'd never feel safe on snow again, would always see the sinister gray scree rushing to meet my boots, the broad-daylight embodiment of the nightmare from which I so often as a child woke up screaming.

We descended below snowline to forest trail. Trail. We weren't supposed to be on trail until Sunday. No boots had been here in years, yet boots had been here, and boots could pussyfoot along the umbilical cord from the city. The integrity of the wildness was ~~was~~ blemished. I was sad -- but glad -- and ashamed. At the 4500-foot junction of "oasis creek" and "Needles creek" we stopped for a somber lunch; afterward we must leave loathed-loved trail and I couldn't help thinking that if we ^{didn't, if we} followed the trail downvalley, we could entirely shirk adventure.

No shirking, not yet. An easy forest ascent led to "Royal Basin pass creek," which by luck we intersected exactly at a 5200-foot lakelet, a mere wide spot in the creek but with a spacious inlet delta ideal for camping. We were supposed to camp in Royal Basin. But I'd had enough for today. I needed time for my balls to grow back to size. Thursday thoughts were put out of mind by the routine of gathering wood, rigging dinglestick, and boiling Kraft Dinner, the new miracle macaroni (with cheese) that at this elevation didn't cook in the advertised 9 minutes but was edible in a half-hour, a sufficient triumph for technology.

Dark night. Dark tomorrow to come. Atop Blue Mountain twinkled the light of the fire-lookout cabin. Seven crow miles away someone was secure.

Not us. Tomorrow we must ascend the creek. We couldn't see the 7000-foot pass but above trees loomed black precipices of The Needles; impossible to believe they'd let us through. I studied the map and saw, as I hadn't in the city, that contour lines ran together at the pass in a ghastly smear of brown ink. No campfire conversation. Early to bed, Arild in the trees, I on the delta.

Graywolf. Synonym for fear. The Olympic wolf was said to be 10 or 20 years extinct. But were those wolves I saw on Lost Ridge 6 years ago? Were wolves here now?

Bits of charcoal on the delta said somebody had camped here long, long ago. Did they escape?

I lay in my bag looking into and beyond piercing-bright stars. I remembered my childhood horror of the night sky, my dread of infinity and eternity. The child was not extinct.

A Blackness obliterated a million stars. I lept to my feet -- or tried. Bag-trapped body managed only a fit. I shouted -- or tried. Fear-tight throat let out only a whimper. Arild silent. Did It get Arild? Am I now alone, as at Camp Marion 3 weeks ago?

Reason said it was an owl. Yeah, an owl as huge as a million stars...

Boots hit rock and I awoke.

Blue sky walled off the outer wilderness of stars never to be solved. Yet the Thursday sun was no Savior. We remained within a wilderness that could swallow us as irrevocably as on the beach at Parsons I gulped the raw oyster. How long did the slime live before drowning in stomach juices? Was the Graywolf to me as I was to the oyster?

That was no owl.

We must escape. But not via the doomful 7000-foot pass. How, then? Dear Lord, how? The map showed a pass at the end of The Needles, a mile or so distant. It also showed, however, dense brown ink between us and pass.

Silently spoon farina and sip cocoa, silently shoulder Bergans, and silently climb steep forest -- and shout! Laugh as we'd not since the oasis! Because there was a way through the brown ink on a ~~wood~~ shelf of shale ~~spindles~~ sprinkled with tiny flowers, oh such gorgeous flowers. Back there was the 7000-foot pass, a place of death but not ours. Back there too, receding in memory, was Graywolf Pup and the white wall and boots hitting rock. We were free of all that! Free to lope around the end of brutal basalt Needles to gentle humps of sedimentary Graywolf Ridge, to hop-jump-run down to a small cirque lake, half-frozen, and scramble to 6400-foot "safety pass."

Fill Ten Can with snow, eat ryetack-cheese-chocolate-raisins, belch and fart and enjoy Thoughtloose Thursday ⁴views of Woebegone Wednesday, Terrible Tuesday, the bad Graywolf days now gone forever. At the bottom of a simple 2500 feet of scree and meadows ran bright waters of Royal Creek. Down there was a trail. We were ready for a trail. We yearned for a trail. Wilderness contaminated by a thread of civilization was nice enough and would suffice.

Bergans on backs we left and skidded down a scree-filled gully, Royal Creek louder by the leap.

Stop. Again a brink. Oh God! Hear the Old Ones of the Graywolf cackle! They'd reached over the divide and just at the point we were safe had set another trap. Between us and meadows was a 40-foot cliff.

Reason said to return up the gully, find a better route. Panic said not to take a single step back toward clutches of the Pursuers, to somehow, anyhow, force a passage of the cliff, by sheer force of hope gain peace and safety of Royal Creek.

Was there a way? A dozen yards across the slab which formed the brink of the cliff was a tributary gully, an obvious staircase down.

"That looks good," I said. "Why don't you give it a try?"

Surprise in ~~the~~ Sailer's eyes, then embarrassment to see Mountain Man ^{as to yield the post of honor and duty.} brought so low [^] In a sitting position he crab-squirmed sideways over the slab and scrambled down the staircase. Delighted to be alive he began to laugh -- a laugh cut short.

Halfway over the slab my buttocks lost grip and I slid to the brink. With the clinical detachment of Tuesday I studied the boulder, 40 feet below, on which my head would shatter like a ripe watermelon.

To the brink. Not quite over. Friction of hands and ass held me to Earth. But at every sideways move the Bergan pushed me a half-inch closer. I warned Arild the pack and I were separating. The Norwegian fool who volunteered for a glory ride on a suicide plane thrust out maloccluded jaw at the 50-pound bomb, made a beautiful midair catch -- and the two of them tumbled down the gully.

Both survived. So did I. Really? No. On every Parsons hike we had a scare or two, that was part of the fun. Arild and I had faced three deaths in 48 hours, two by rock and one by snow. The joke had gone too far, wasn't funny anymore.

When ~~my~~ boots touched the Royal Creek trail my gleeful giggles barely covered tears. When boots took us in 2 fast upvalley miles to 5100-foot Royal Lake, ^{amid} ~~ringed~~ by subalpine trees and fields of flowers, I ^{felt} ~~felt expressed~~ no joy at being a half-hour stroll from the Royal Basin of Parsons legend.

Twilight was a bedlam of mosquitoes, our first bugs of the trip. Back and forth, this way and that, around and around, I half-ran through ~~the~~ meadows ~~pastland~~, seeking and not finding escape. There is no escape from the malice, ^{Wilderness is} ~~of wilderness~~. ~~It was~~ not intended for man, it abhors man, and ~~it~~ says so sometimes with the ~~open brutality~~ of storm or precipice, sometimes with the ~~diabolical harassment~~ of mosquitoes. They wanted my blood, they wanted my sanity, they wanted my surrender. They got them. In their maddening whine I heard the Old Ones, felt the hatred I'd seen in eyes of the bull elk and the grouse and the bear, the ultimatum of the rocks awaiting my fragile flesh.

This was to have been my finest exploration. With such a partner as Arild there were no limits to horizons of the Silver Marmot. Shit! I'd not even been able to find Graywolf Pass, much less brave a passage of The Needles. Since leaving the Dese trail my progress through the wilderness had been one damn stumbling blunder after another. The Graywulf did me in. Dead, finally dead, was the glad boy who on Lost Ridge joined his voice with ~~that of~~ the 3-day blow. My city-drawn map-line crossed the ridge (steep snow, steep rock) from Royal Basin to Deception Basin, crossed the ridge (steep snow, steep rock) to Heather Basin, traversed God knew what to Del Monte Ridge. I hated it. Hated wilderness.

There once was a hiker with no balls at all,
 No balls at all, no balls at all,
 A very short pecker and no balls at all,
 NO balls AT ALL.

The Silver Marmot spoke not in Friday morning sunshine and mosquitoes.
 Nor did the Sailor. We gulped ~~our~~ ^{harassed} bug-infested oatmeal and cocoa and
 slunk down the valley, away from long-dreamed-of Royal Basin, left unseen.
 I didn't want to see the fairyland. It would taunt me with memories of
 Deception Basin. We descended 8 safe miles of trail to Royal Creek's
 2700-foot junction with the Dungeness River, then ascended the river trail
 9 safe miles to 5000-foot Boulder Shelter.

The day gave small pleasures. (Small pleasures for small balls.)
 We'd last been in a low valley Tuesday morning and I'd forgotten trees
 could be so tall, brush so lush, rivers so roaring. And when we again
 climbed from deep woods to parkland I saw new colors in alpine blossoms, a
 new wideness of highland sky. And pounding 17 miles to the clanking of the
 Ten Can Band proved that chickens on snow and rock could be tigers on trail.
 And for me, 21 plus a week, there was poignance in recalling the lad of
 barely 13 who came here still radiant from the Marmot Pass sunset.

Heroism meekly forsaken, there should have been serenity in the night.
 But once the knife is in the vitals it must be twisted. In twilight we
 jerked alert, hearing a moan in shadows of small firs. A moan -- a ~~shrike~~
 choked scream -- a hoarse growl. It was here -- now there -- circling the
 fire. Naive Arild probably thought it was nothing worse than a grumpy bear,
 a crazed elk, a rabid cougar. We slept, or tried, in the shelter,

open on one side to the night and thus no real protection.

A deer with a bad cough. In Saturday morning sun we saw the wrecker of our sleep and laughed. Oh yes, in the day you can laugh. But laugh not too merrily, for night will fall. Yes, in the day believe if you can that what we heard was a sick deer, what I saw Wednesday night was an owl, that there is no wilderness-wide, cosmos-wide, infinite and eternal conspiracy. But remember, no matter how bright the day, night will fall.

In 2 groggy trail hours we dropped Bergans at 5400-foot Home Lake. Dull eyes dismissed splendors, wanted only to close. We crept under alpine firs to escape the heavy sun -- and I to escape consciousness. Brave I'd been atop Graywolf Pup despite the frightening gully, and brave still at the oasis despite boots hitting rock, and not quite an utter coward at Safety No-Safety Pass. Royal Lake? Renouncing Royal Basin? I'd left the Dose a rambunctious ridge-runner, would return tomorrow a craven trail-tramper.

^{Violent}
~~An explosive~~ cursing woke me. Arild was sitting up, wide awake and jaw hanging open. Not he cursing. Who? Me! Cursing Arild! Or so he thought. My mouth shut tight. Then, seeing his wide-eyed stunned mortification, I laughed hysterically. Until he also laughed, understanding it wasn't him I hated.

He slipped back to sleep. As did I, after a while. This time to peaceful sleep. Peaceful? Yes, for the dream was an echo of the Camp Marion dream, was not of the Graywolf but of the city. Yet after the Graywolf ordeal what was there in the city to fear, to hate? Each man

hates the thing he hurts but now that hate was going, would soon be gone.
 with recurring memory of the moment
 Gone, with much else, / when boots hit rocks.

A second awakening. Praise the Lord! Just see where we are! Beside Home Lake, a sparkling droplet of snowmelt beneath up-up-up-thrusting towers of mighty Constance, high above tranquil forests of the Dungeness.

Sun a-blazing and snowfields ~~and~~ a-shining and lake a-rippling. We tore off boots and socks, ^{blue jeans and} wool shirts ~~and~~ and cotton skivvies, dashed through flowers to the ~~at~~ shore, jumped in, screamed and howled, flailed to a rock island at the absolute limit of ~~strength of~~ icewater-paralyzed legs and arms. We baked until limbs regained mobility and swam to shore to bake again. Then again to the island. To the shore. And again. For variety, sit bare-ass in a snowbank and glissade to a splashing start.

The sun fell behind the ridge and swimming ended, firebuilding began, bodies all-over tingling and trembling. Let simpering saints be satisfied with pleasures of the spirit. We wild animals find our best pleasures in ~~our~~ our bodies -- gobbling a Ten Can hoosh, gulping foam from a creek, blowing nose with finger on nostril, ^{and letting} snot fly ~~off~~ off in the wind, taking a healthy crap, belching and farting. In wilderness the whole man lives, the whole man speaks.

As I cooked Krap Dinner I demonstrated to Arild the gestures and jigging with which I led songs at troop meetings. The tunes had changed.

One night while in O'Reilly's Bar,
 Listening to tales of blood and slaughter,
 Came a thought into my mind --
 Why not shag O'Reilly's daughter?

Diddly-aye-ee, diddly-aye-o,
 Diddly-aye-ee for the One Ball Reilly,
 Rig-a-jig-jig, BALLS AND ALL!
 Rub-a-dub-dub shag on!

No rest for us on the Seventh Day. With feather-light Bergans on backs we swiftly climbed gaudy meadows to Constance Pass, ran the naked crest to the 6500-foot summit of Del Monte Ridge.

No cloudsea this morning, as in that dawn when I canceled plans to sail a ketch around the world, no clouds marred hard-blue sky. Rough north wind had flushed summer haze from deep-green valleys and from horizons near and far, sharpening to crystal clarity views west to the Olympic wilderness we'd finally escaped, north to the Strait of Juan de Fuca and snow-flecked mountains of Vancouver Island, east over Puget Sound to the line of ice-cream-cone volcanoes from Baker to Rainier to Adams and St. Helens.

Look west to Mystery and Deception, hiding the valley of dark wings. Howl defiance: ~~Nya~~ Nya-a, nya-a, you didn't catch me! Only half of Time is night. For every wildland terror there's a wildland ecstasy.

A hollering hour we scampered over wind-loud ^{shale} plateau, ~~of shale splinters~~ ~~and boulders~~, then shouldered packs, faced Sunnybrook Meadows and far-below Dose, and commenced the plunge. Down we thundered through hundred-perfumed gardens, down through resin-reeking forest, down down down. We'd labored to gain this elevation but didn't need it anymore, were ready for slothful lowlands, for eating at tables and crapping on toilets and sleeping in beds. Yet we'd be animals still, would bring to city the crudeness of wilderness.

When we hit (with a thump) the Dese trail our knees were rag-doll floppy and mouths desert-dusty yet we ran by creeks loaded with delicious water taking nary a sip.

We tore off sweat-stinking clothes and dove in Constance Creek, shouting as foam shocked legs and froze balls, boiled over belly and backside, flooded nose and eyes and ears. But we did not drink, were careful to preserve the great thirst. Then, clean-dressed, we sprawled by the torrent and withdrew from waterfall the bottles that had awaited us these 7 days and flipped off caps.

Bubbles tickle ⁱⁿ nose and explode in parched throat, cold hop juice stuns ~~empty~~ empty stomach, alcohol shoots through dehydrated blood and churns ~~the~~ brain.

Seven days wild, twice nearly killed, nerves shot to hell. Sniveling cowards? Of course, but alive, and better than that, drunk!

I'd walked ~~the road~~ 7 days in sun and wind, flowers and trees, I'd slept 6 nights on duff and grass and gravel, with hard work I'd sweated poisons from mind, with danger I'd purged bile from soul, with fear I'd paid for sins, I'd been tortured and cleansed and would return to the city as pure as the boy who ran down Sunnybrook in 1938.

Built by Henry Ford in 1930, bought by me in 1941, the Model A was -- like Arild and me -- only entering its prime. Down the Dese road we bounced and jounced, trailing a storm of dust, swinging corners with rear wheels skidding ~~sideways~~, honking horn crazily, chasing picnic-bound Sunday drivers toward the ditch, maybe into the ditch -- who kept score?

I drove in the style of my famous Graywolf glissade, of the kamikazes who attacked Arild in the Pacific.

Rattling over planks of the ferry slip at Port Ludlow for the ~~long~~ voyage across the waters to a future both smaller and larger than a week ago, I annoyed tourists and embarrassed Arild singing:

I have been to Ludlow Fair
And left my necktie God knows where
And carried halfway home, or near,
Pints and quarts of Ludlow beer.
Then the world seemed none so bad,
And I, myself, a sterling lad.