

CA 1949

Dear Murray:

As Ragsdale said about his letter, this manuscript is strictly "first draft". But I wanted your opinion of the way it's going before I do too much.

This would of course not be the first of the book, nor necessarily the second and third chapters. I think it could be completely rearranged after it was all written#, according to the carry-over of characters. The first chapter, it seems to me, should be written last; summing up what I meant to do, after I have done it. I probably won't be sure until I'm through.

However the third chapter is more the sort of thing I am after. I don't know what you will think of my having handled the girlhood in flashback, but I wanted a gap between the girlhood and the final depiction of character, and it seemed easier this way. Does it detract from the interest? Would the reader want to know something about her marriage to Black and her life with him? That didn't seem awfully important to me, but perhaps it is. The story of Brant, which I mentioned a time or two, comes out in the chapter about Billings, the president of the bank, and of course Sarah will be brought in, incidentally, there. Would it be better not to mention it at this stage? Or should the chapter about Billings immediately follow this? I awoke last night and thought of an anachronism in the Sarah piece. But I know you will call me on it.

The name of the town has not been decided upon. I called it, temporarily, Picket Rock, because the rock sets on the hill above the town and is covered with Indian writings, and is a mystery in that region. It's a pile of rocks, really, and many Indian Historians come to study it and to put forth theories. That it was one of the markings on the trail to the fabled City of Cibola. That it was the burial place of a chieftain. That it has religious significance.

The character of Joe Benton is one I think I can use to advantage. I plan not to give him any particular background, but simply to let him wander around through the stories, awed and impressed and curious. I think I have one very good place for him and think perhaps he is worth creating for that one purpose. He is the inevitable small boy in a small town, who, without any particular parental supervision, wanders about the town and knows what's going on, whether or not he understands it.

