

Four-mile construction sprawl of incipient water barrier and
diversion tunnels.

Dozen towns.

Whole railroad.

Mid-air bridges.

Cat's-cradle lines of the electrical feeder system.

Pipeline on nearly a mile of strutting stanchions.

Boatyard. ^{teeming with fresh hulls}

The Gallatin herself.

Every detail colossal, and not a pore of it would ever have existed
at Fort Peck if it were not for the idea of an earthfill dam.

Even after his site inventory and double-checking his checklist,
Owen was taking his time. Actually, monumental what-ifs were taking his
time. What if they blew out the pipeline's flexible steel ball-joints
when they ran the pumps up to the pressure of sixty pounds per square
inch. What if they burned ^{up} ~~out~~ one of these fancy sonofabitching
superexpensive electric motors first thing. What if Owen Duff turned into

a puddle of worrysweat right here and now.

Fillmaster, was he. Then he had better master the goddamn fill.

"Give it the soup, Cal."

Calhoun told the operator to put on the power but for Christ's sake easy, and the seven-foot-diameter cutterhead ^{(, ponderously, /} slowly began to whirl. When its revolutions per minute came up to speed, the operator hit the boom controls, the massive A-frame boom at the nose of the dredge lowered the cutter shaft into the lip of the riverbank. The entire dredge, the size of half a street of houses, shuddered. Jesus Mercy Christ, Duff, indeed.

The 700-horsepower motor driving the cutter shaft, the 2,500-horsepower motors running the suction pumps in tandem, all of the dredging force bucked against the huge steel spud posts anchoring the dredge into place at the stern. The Gallatin thrummed with working machinery, none of which blew out, burned up, or caused fatality in Owen Duff.

The thirteenth of October, and they had done it: less than one year since the first axebites into the Fort Peck bottomland, its earth was being moved onto the axis of the dam.

Then they saw him, all of them, Charlene and Rosellen side by side

cheering along with the crowd on the bluff out back of the Ad Building, Meg tense with pride on the doorstep of the cookhouse, ~~Rhonda~~^{Kate} on tiptoes in the whooping bunch outside the Rondola Cafe when the word passed that the dredge was being started up, Bruce grinning like mad on the roof of the lever house of the next dredge being built in the boatyard, Neil watching in fascination while propped in his climber's belt twenty feet up a piling, Hugh bleak but intent at the foot of another piling: saw Owen come leaping ashore. Owen running. Sprinting along the dredgeline, then loping to save breath, then running as hard as he could again. He stopped beneath the last stanchion before the carrypipe, as close to the gushing cascade of water and muck as it was safe to go.

Harvested wheat, when it pours out of the spout of a combine, spews down in an exalted golden rain. To Owen, the muck falling from the carrypipe was that golden.

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DROP CAP "Honestly. You'll be playing house out behind here between coffee refills, next."

"Igloo, that'd need to be."

"Nhn. Rubbing noses."

"For a start. Eskimo kindling."

"And then make mad pash."

"A girl can hope."

The two young women laughed back and forth across their window-side table in the Rondola Cafe. Rosellen was having the chicken and dumplings, Kate the ham steak, and winter was having Fort Peck for supper.

"So you're over yours?" Rosellen kept matters going. "I wish to gosh I was."

~~"Ran enough irrigation through myself,
Irrigated myself enough, I ought to be,"~~ Kate offhandedly answered.

"Did I tell you Bruce right away wanted to know if he was going to come down with 'sisteritis or whatever it is,' too? I told him since I was out of commission, he might as well be."

The dry granular snow of a ground blizzard stung at the window beside them. Rosellen made a face out at the weather, and ^{Kate}~~Rhonda~~ warned her not to be teasing it that way. This time of day had become their own, shared, prized--dusk's bonus of traded confidences ^{that}~~which~~ had to be spent then and there. Rosellen coming off work at the personnel section in the nearby Ad Building and Kate about to go on shift here at waitressing, supertime was the perfect crisscross where the two of them could compare

newlywed life (Kate's extra few months of experience had immeasurably helped Rosellen when her own case of cystitis cropped up) and swap whatever else was on their minds. Right now, there was nothing else on Rosellen's mind besides Kate's confiding of lunchtime passion with Bruce. Kidding each other, leaning in to glean what the other one thought about this or that, not oblivious to the fact that they were the Rondola's main attraction, the two of them bobbed like corks, Kate the slim wine-bottle variety, Rosellen as robust as a brandy stopper.

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"Oh, did I tell you? Neil has off Friday night, he traded shifts with somebody. ^{Now we} ~~he~~ can go to the show with you and Bruce." Rosellen made another face in the weather's direction. "Probably be The Call of the Wild."

"I have to hand it to Neil, working in this," ^{Kate} ~~Rhonda~~ drew a finger squiggle on the wintry window.

Out in the early dark, whenever the snow-carrying wind stopped long enough to catch its breath, the lights of the diversion tunnel project constellated against the opposite bluff of the river valley. Determined to see what could be done under the nose of winter, the dam builders

were pouring concrete for the huge portals of the tunnels; so far, they had learned they could get away with pouring it at temperatures down to seventeen degrees below zero. Almost as audaciously, up beyond the diversion tunnels the spillway excavation had begun, a gouge a mile long into the winter-stiffened earth. Neil had latched on as a driver there; not of the beloved Ford ~~Double~~^{Triple} A but a drafty rattling beast of a dumptruck, on the four-to-midnight shift, colder than the inverse of Hell. Lifelong veteran of Fort Peck winters that she was, Kate shook her head at Rosellen over how miserable her hubby must be about now and said, "Not this kid. They'd have to tie me to the wagon."

"Where's that come from?" People, the thousand and one ways they talked, always ~~interested~~^{intrigued} Rosellen.

"It's a saying, is all. Didn't you hear me just say it?"

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When spring came, Neil was vowing, he would go back to his own trucking with never a murmur no matter how tough any hail turned out to be. Better to be master of his own coracle than a mate in this polar dumptruck fleet. The constantly gnawing wind, the snow which either flew around insidiously in the spillway pit as dry as salt or so fat

and flakey you could barely see the dumptruck ahead of you in line, the night always so black, hell, so bleak. Huh uh; no more winters of this. What he wished right now, if the truth were told, was that there was some way to bring into the freezing damned truck the warmth of being a newlywed in bed. He needed to wish beyond that, of course, for Rosellen to hurry up and be over with this whatever-itis in her plumbing. This on top of the monthly intermission which he'd known about, sort of. Women were surprisingly complicated.

 "Maybe that'd be the way to keep him on the wagon," Rosellen shifted to. "Our disreputable pa-in-law."

"You'd have to go some to find ropes thicker than he is thirsty," Kate evaluated.

"What do you suppose gets into a person, to go off and tie one on-- see there, you've got me doing it. To go off on the crazy ^{binges} ~~enders~~ he does, I mean."

"Beats me. Meg would be about enough to keep me on my good behavior."

What Bruce termed their nightly sessions of "blahdy blah" and Charlene

characterized as the pair of them being "as thick as thieves," the two young women viewed as necessary oracle sessions on the family they had married into. They raked patterns in the Duffs, and the next day, as if the night's wind had wiped everything fresh, they could start over again. Hugh, who was wintering as if alcohol was his personal anti-freeze, perturbed them both.

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When spring finally came, Hugh was vowing as he hoisted ~~yet~~ ^{stet} another drink in the Wheeler Inn, just then, he would try out Meg on finding work for themselves, any work, on farms down along the Yellowstone River valley. Owen's ilk hadn't got around to damming up the Yellowstone yet.

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"But maybe she's the other side of the story," Rosellen went farther afield than usual. "Meg and her, hm, opinions on life."

"That's supposed to drive him to drink?" Kate sounded skeptical as only she could. "Huh uh, I still say it's only ever a short stroll for him."

The window beside them shook so hard it chattered. "Listen to it bluster out there." In businesslike fashion Kate rubbed a peephole

in the frost as if to check on whether the river had blown away in that gust. "At this rate, it's going to be a while until skinny-dipping season."

"Oho! That's next on the mad pash list? Lunch at the old swimming hole?"

"Hey, why am I the skinny-dipping expert here?" Kate tossed off.

"It's the same river where you grew up."

Marriage and Neil and instructive joking with Kate quite often gave Rosellen the short-of-breath feeling that she was catching up on a lot about life but still had a ways to go. The rueful grin she ~~gave~~^{sent} Kate now outright admitted it. "See, though, you didn't grow up with Charlene for a boss."

Itals
After Charlene big-sistered herself off to commerce and romance in

- Bozeman, the Missouri River in an odd way took her place with Rosellen.

In the drabness of Toston, the loneliness of that scissor-simple Tebbet household, Rosellen often turned to the river for company, slipping away for hours at a time across the highway bridge to the opposite bank. There on the west bank, the ospreys nested high in the cottonwoods and fished the river with their talons; around town, they would be shot at as fish

thieves. Just under the osprey next^s, a particular eddy at a bend of the river always looked tempting for skinny-dipping, but Rosellen never quite gave in. She knew Charlene had been right about that much, the danger in the water, that swimming alone in this river was asking for it.

Rosellen's answer was to hug the Missouri as closely as she could without slipping into it. Telling herself she would go only a little farther,

trace the riverbank around one more bend, she always ended up following

its course all the way ^{upstream} to where it wound out of the ~~Horse Heaven Hills~~ ^{stony hogback hills}

a couple of miles ^{above} ~~from~~ Toston. They were the ugliest hills in Montana,

she was pretty sure (Charlene had been totally sure), but the Missouri

pranced out of them high, wide and handsome, its waters freshly braided

together from the Gallatin, Madison and Jefferson rivers at the Three

Forks headwaters. The steady-stepping river sought into the valley around

Toston as if just released, and while she did not yet know how to put it

into words, that was Rosellen, too.

end
ital

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"Uh huh. She's a little hard to outgrow, I suppose," Kate left it at. Whereas she did not ^{particularly} ~~really~~ dislike Charlene, she did not feel compelled to like her either. She figured there probably was not much

to be the year this dam took ^Pshake, big unmistakable goddamn shape.

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And then Bruce.

"Something's on his mind, besides the part in his hair," ^{Kate}~~Shonda~~

reported. "Can you always spot that, with Neil?"

"You better bet," Rosellen testified. "When he's hauling, I can tell how his trip went by how the truck pulls into the yard."

"Mm hmm. Whoops, I'm about on." ^{Kate}~~Shonda~~ gathered their dishes in

a professional pile and went behind the counter to start her shift.

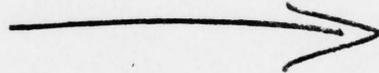
Rosellen assembled herself into heavy coat and overshoes and mitts and scarf and went home. They put away tonight and set course for tomorrow's talkative supper together, these happy two, who were holding back from each other hardly anything under the sun.



Bruce had been thinking about this all week, a span of concentration that had his head buzzing.

A kind of tingle built up behind his ears as he at last reached the point of telling himself ask, go ask, they can't any more than tell you no.

The minute his shift ended, he tromped up the gangplank onto the workbarge.



The barge boss, Taine, looked at him questioningly. "Medwick want something?"

"No, I do." Bruce swallowed hard and nodded toward the bow of the barge, where a man in a diving suit was descending into the water. "I want to be the next him."

"That a fact," said Taine with supreme neutrality. "Ever done any diving, and where?"

"Uh, not yet," Bruce said. "But I'm ready to ^{give it a} try, right here right now."

"Are you," said the barge boss. "And your qualifications are what?"

Bruce seemed genuinely affronted. "Doesn't being crazy enough to do it count for enough?"

Taine sized him up with more interest. "Just how old are you?"

"Twenty-two," Bruce vouched ^{unreliably.} "Like the rifle."

"All right, then, hot ^{shot.} I'll clear it with Medwick for you to report here in the morning. We'll try you ^{out} for a while as diver's tender

for Bonestiel. ^{Then} ~~If you still think you want to go under the river, Bonestiel can try convince you otherwise.~~ show you what crazy really is."

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Actually, Bonestiel, a Louisianan, was more than willing to show
 Bruce the ropes of diving. ~~he himself~~ ^{Bonestiel proclaimed,} was directly headed back, ~~Bonestiel~~
~~proclaimed,~~ to Louisiana's warmer waters, not to mention its warmer air,
 warmer earth, warmer food, and warmer women. ^{marked his first anniversary at Fort Peck by} And so Bruce began to
 apprentice ^{ing} in the underriver world as murky and slow as Bonestiel's
 accent.

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Meg acted as if she wanted to scold Bruce but couldn't figure out
 where to start on the size of the chore. Hugh announced ~~dramatically~~
 that he had lived too long, punished now by this spectacle of one of
 his own sons drawing actual money to parade along the bottom of a river.
 Owen was surprised to find himself for once proud of Bruce; diving was
 serious going. Charlene figured Bruce was as bull-goose loony as usual.
 Rosellen ~~felt partly extremely concerned for Rhonda's sake~~ ^{was torn between concern for Kate's sake} and partly
~~a guilty thrill at having~~ ^{for a} ~~guiltily thrilled to have a diver~~ brother-in-law. Neil only warned Bruce
 to keep his window shut in that diving suit.

~~Rhonda~~ ^{Kate} put it to him without any such preamble:

"So, are you trying to kill yourself?"

"Honeybunch, you know I wouldn't ever--"

Bruce paused. Beside him on the noon bed, ~~Rhonda~~^{Kate}, calm and lanky and thoroughly undressed, was looking at him as if she simply wanted to know, one way or the other. That was another thing that tickled him about ~~Rhonda~~^{her}. She didn't try to shoo him away from the interesting parts of life. ~~He~~^{# lay} laid back and searched the ceiling for some way to tell her the extraordinary feeling, the for-once right fit, that ~~the~~^g diving gave him. "It's better than about anything but you, hon. It's...scary."

She studied him sideways. Owen had pointed out to her that, in a diving suit with lead weights slung on him and the short tether of the air hose, at least there ~~was~~^{would be} no question of where Bruce was and what he was engaged in. ~~Bruce on a leash, though?~~

Waiting for him to say more, she finally recognized his silence for the confession it was. She propped herself up on an elbow and made sure:

"That's what's so good about it?.. That it's scary?"

"Uh huh. Is that too crazy?"

"It's up there pretty far. So you are out to kill yourself?

Have the diving do it for you, that's the idea?"

"Huh uh."

"What, then. If all you want is to get a kick out of scaring yourself, you could just walk ^a the trestle blindfolded."

Bruce ^{cast} ~~shot~~ her a look out of the corner of his eye, but otherwise stayed unmoving on the bed. "I better explain," he said, "before you get too excited about being the Widow Duff."

"That wouldn't excite me," ^{Kate} ~~Rhonda~~ said. "I prefer a husband alive."

"That's just it." Bruce's forehead furrowed in unaccustomed concentration. "See, that's kind of what diving is for me. It's spooky to have all your air coming through a little hose, and never knowing how strong the river current is going to be when you get down there, and then how you have to handle stuff real careful, not rip the diving suit--that's what I mean by scary. But ^{scary} in a good way. ^{can you savvy?} A way that says, ^{hey} hey, do this wrong and you're fish food, ^{but} but do it right, and you're Mister River himself. ^{See} See what I'm getting at?" He was up on his side, earnestly turned toward her now. "It's a mix, is what it is, scary and okay along with it. And not just anybody is cut out for that, you know?"

She was starting to.

~~Kate~~

~~Rhonda~~ took stock as Bruce's hand found its way to her thigh.

Of all of life's dangers, she was married to a man who was choosing the river. Third time in a row, in the line of ~~Dabney~~ ^{Milley} women. Third time lucky. She weighed the saying, wondering how it applied.

She touched him commensurately where he was touching her. "I should have married Neil. I'd only have to savvy a truck."

"Neil in his birthday suit here, instead of me?" Bruce's hand busied on her. "Talk about scary."

DROP CAP

Something approximating spring, at last, and as work at the damsite in 1935's first days of thaw, stirred, so did the towns.

For a place barely past its first birthday, Wheeler showed atrocious age-spots where ashes and dishwater had been thrown all winter, wrinkles of ruts in every street and alley, and the general dishevelment of a veteran tramp. Its sibling downstream from the dam, Park Grove, had just wakened to the fact that whole neighborhoods were going to be eaten by the dredges, but the rest of the scatter of ^{Fort Peck's} shabby suburbs were starting to hear the sing of hammers again. The ~~Fort Peck~~ workforce, talk had it,

was about to increase by another thousand wallets.

Second Friday of the month. Rosellen's day was rat-a-tat-tat
 at the oversize ~~Blickenderfer~~ ^{Blickensderfer} typewriter, turning out paychecks. Every
 maxim of the Lewis & Clark Business School applied. Her chin up. Her
 spine straight as could be but not rigid. Her backside ~~(which was~~ ^{(which, seated or otherwise,}
 thoroughly admired by the male contingent of the Ad Building) snuggled
 against the back of the chair. Fingers downpoised into "tiger claws,"
 as the L&C BS typing teacher sang out a dozen times every class. Steady
 rate of typing rather than fitful bursts. Kersplickety splick. Typewriter
 keyboard deliberately qwerted and yuioped by its inventor to slow down
 matters and prevent jamming, but Rosellen's fingers ~~fly~~ ^{flew} nonetheless.
 Dollar-sign number number decimal-point number number. Keynes crooning
 in the keys. The quick green wage jumps over the lazy Wall Street claque.
 Out the checks roll, deft translation by Rosellen's fingers of the Fort
 Peck Dam project into alphabet and dollars and cents, to be cashed at
 the New Deal Grocery or the Rondola Cafe or the Blue Eagle Tavern.
 J.L. Hill, wages for his percussive tunnel work...

~~The red-haired kid from Red Lodge, whose name so far means nothing~~

~~to Rosellen nor any of the other Duffs, wages for cutting down brush...~~

John B. Hinch, wages for dredgeline carpentry...

Charles S. Siderius, wages for resolution of land titles...

~~Rhonda~~ ^{Kate} slept. Night shift at the Rondola provided her ~~her~~ ^{the} schedule where she stayed in bed until noon when Bruce trotted home, scooted under the covers with her, they deliriously went at each other, then climbed ~~out and fended for lunch.~~ ^{for a bit of}

The dream she was having was an old one, out of that story of her grandmother. ~~Rhonda~~ ^{Kate} was on the ~~Carteret~~ ^{Fort Peck} ferry. The river kept moving past, the ferry was slow to go. The man she was with, who was not Bruce, told her he was sorry but she had to be tied up for her own safety.

Not both hands, ~~Rhonda~~ ^{Kate} told him. One hand then, Not-Bruce told her.

He took out a little rope like a piggin' string, such as was used to tie a calf's legs together during branding, and tied her wrist to the rail of the ferry. There, you can't fall off now, Not-Bruce said, like your grandmother. My grandmother never fell off, ~~Rhonda~~ ^{Kate} insisted. That 's because

she was tied up, he said patiently. But by now ~~Rhonda~~ ^{Kate} was looking down, into the river, and there was Bruce, walking along under the ferry.

Not in any diving suit, just Bruce as nature made him, walking along under the water as if he was having the time of his life. ~~Rhonda~~ ^{Kate} in her dream tugged against the hold on her hand--which in her sleep had got caught between the mattress and the beaverboard wall--and told herself, "These people. I could be down there walking with Bruce if this other gazink would only let me. Who does he think he is?" ~~Rhonda~~

~~Rhonda~~ ^{Kate} resentfully rolled over in bed and her hand popped free.

Charlene was madder than a wet hen or any other comparison that could be drawn.

This had been the day of the Colonel's wife's ^{social} ~~afternoon~~ get-together; just a little Kansas Street do, as it had been described to Charlene. She changed into her best frock and promptly at ^{ten that morning} ~~2~~ set off across the horseshoe to join ~~all~~ the other wives flocking into the King's House. It wasn't until they were seated, circled like a spruced-up wagon train in Mrs. Parmenter's acreage of living room, that Charlene realized ^{not all} ~~all~~ the other wives were ~~not~~ here. These were the Corps officers' wives, from along the east loop of Kansas Street: bing, bing, bing, a major's

wife, ~~another major's wife,~~ ^{a lieutenant's wife,} a captain's wife, you could go right down the roster of who lived ~~there~~ ^{where} in the row of Permanent Residences. Except for her. So, she was here solely by dint of Owen and his job rank as fillmaster, was she not, was she ever. Which, she knew in the loyal fathoms of her heart, ~~by rights~~ ^g ought to make her unstintingly proud. Instead it panicked her. Already, first bite into a mysterious pastry with goop inside it, she was aware of steep gradations, mountainous social contour lines, in this gathering.

"--My Raymond is staying with my sister back there. We hated so to have him change schools and come out here where--!"

"--No, we only hear from them at Christmas any more. Poor him, he was passed over on the last promotion list again. You know what they say, the feast of the ~~passover~~ ^{pass-over} is no diet for a Pointer--"

It pretty quickly grew apparent to Charlene that a prior existence in Kansas City, headquarters of the Missouri River Division of the Corps, favorably colored a person's status here. Intermixed with that, though, was West Point or not. If your husband's career lacked cadet gray, you probably sat resignedly like Captain Haugen's wife ^g ^g Minnie and brought

your petit point sewing with you. (In contrast, Colonel Parmenter having graduated from St. Alban's and West Point, and been a high-ranking Kansas City officer, Mrs. Parmenter sat there with an entire deckful of aces.)

And this was just what rubbed off from the men. There was a pecking order of the women's backgrounds, too. Being from the South, for instance, seemed to count for a lot.

"--Eula, did you hear that awfulness on Ma Perkins the other day?

The whole passel of them were caught out in a blizzard and the young man from the lumberyard, whose-his-toes, Lester I think it is, said right there on the radio, 'Ma, you ~~git~~ ^{walk} behind me and I'll break wind for you!' For two cents I'd write in to Oxydol and give them a piece of my--"

By watching feverishly and saying precious little, Charlene sorted out the basics of what was going on around her. Of all things, Calling-cards regulated the social cycle of these people. She had peeked when ~~a~~ ^{the} major's wife placed the major's card on the hall table with at-home hours for next Friday ~~afternoon~~ ^{morning} penciled in, and it did not take much to deduce that a captain's wife ~~then~~ would lay down the captain's card for the Friday after that. She was able to figure out, too, that the other engineers'

wives, such as Pam Sangster and Shirley Nevins, in all likelihood were going to be invited to these ^{next} Friday soirees one by one, like rotated orphans. Somewhere a list existed and she, wife of Owen Duff, had merely been plucked off first by Mrs. Parmenter. Worse, what ^{she} Charlene was beginning to suspect was that Colonel Parmenter had done the list-plucking, not stuffy Mrs. Parmenter at all.

Charlene, younger than the rest and more striking ^{in her sunflower-yellow frock} and as usual coiffed as perfectly as if it had been done with black lacquer, ^{thought she was coping} had fended ^{coped} reasonably well ^{cookie} guardedly until the ^{golden-and-sugared} pastry platter came around for the third time, at last favorably laden with Jarsala's cookhouse finest.

"I've always liked bellinacrunchers," ^{she} Charlene announced, glad of something recognizable to eat.

Not a full minute passed, however, before she heard Mrs. Parmenter say with enunciation too distinct:

"Wouldn't anyone like some more berlinerkransers?"

An hour ^s now after the so-called party, Charlene still had her mad on, and in fact was ^g busily expanding it from Mrs. Parmenter to the whole kit and caboodle of officers' wives. The big-shot Missourians acted like

they'd invented the Missouri River. Married to the elite of dam-builders, hooley; bunch of mud-daubers here. This brought a guilty twinge in her, for Owen's sake. He would know what she meant, though. The time Owen had taken her into the Blue Eagle, ^{one} when she'd said once she wanted to see ~~to show her what it was like,~~ he did that imitation of the Duke of Wellington entering Parliament: "I have never seen so many bad hats in my life." Well, this ^{morning} ~~afternoon~~ she, Charlene, had never seen so many bad heads of hair in her life. All those mopy old frumps who thought they were somebody; the when-we-were-in-Kansas-City attitude of the Corps wives still incensed her. Most of them, anyway. Minnie Haugen seemed nice, but you couldn't spend all your life talking about petit point, either.

She gazed at the clock. Two hours yet until Owen would be home.

Three or more years yet until Fort Peck Dam was done.

Face it, kiddo.

She sat herself down, beaverboard Temporary Residence walls around her, and for the next two hours did just that.

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Owen came home practically cross-eyed from the ~~fatiguing~~ calculations

on the fill ~~ratios~~ of four different dredges operating at four varied distances from the axis of the dam. Charlene met him with a kiss that included a heated dart of her tongue. He visibly perked up.

"If that's what's for supper," he said, going to hang up his hat,

"I have room for several helpings."

"There's something else, first."

Her tone alerted him, and he turned around still holding the hat.

"Why, what's up ~~now?~~"

Charlene drew a statewide breath and told him she thought the thing for her to do was to set up shop in Wheeler, as a hairdresser.

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Meg had plans for the house—with sunshine blasting in through the window this was the kind of ~~morning~~ ^{day} when you couldn't ~~help~~ ^{not} but have plans. Paint was a priority. She was pretty sure she could get Hugh to paint the house by threatening to ask Owen to do it. Flowers, the place screamed for flowers, color of any kind to break the prairie-and-shack monotony of the damsite and Wheeler. How soon now could she ^{start} put marigolds? ~~in columbine seeds?~~ Petunias, geraniums? ~~Tiger lilies, Snapdragons, zinnias, hollyhocks!~~

She sang a few bars of "Gammer Gammon's Needle" before catching herself at it and puckering up, amused at the day's menu of distractions. Resolutely she swept out the woodbox, not because it wasn't going to be used any more but because it would ~~not~~^{nit} be used quite as much, which today seemed a sufficient reason. The rest of the place required a general attack. Remembering that this was Friday, water day, she decided to splurge and set the pointer on the water card at ~~ten~~^{fifteen} gallons instead of the usual ~~five~~^{ten}, ~~plan~~^g on the extra for scrubbing this place down.

On ~~the~~^{her} way past from putting the water card in the window, she ~~briefly but~~ briskly confronted herself in the small square mirror hung above the wash basin. At least her complexion was back, now that her days were not spent in a wind- and sunburned alfalfa field. But she looked at herself beside the eyes and thought, Ouch. Is it possible for a person to catch wrinkles by just being around that face of Mr. ~~Jaraala~~^{Al}?

But after that first regret over the crinkles at the corners of her eyes, she ~~then~~^g decided she would not have repealed them even if she could, they were earned honorably enough. Charlene and Rosellen and ~~Rhonda~~^{Kate} could lead the skincreamed wrinklefree life if they wanted, but her generation had these stripes of life. People are said to have the

face they deserve at forty, and Meg Duff was forty-five.

Not nearly as old as the troubles of the world, she told herself and contemplated the diplomacy of paint again. If she knew Hugh, he would soon start a spring offensive, launch some idea about quitting Fort Peck. The way he had punctuated winter with sprees, after Neil went to trucking on the spillway cut, surely must be leading up to that, Meg more than half suspected. He'd had to do his spreeing only on any of his wages that he could squirrel away from her, though, and she'd firmly added and added her own wages, and any of his that she could retain into a stash safely hidden from him. If money indeed talked, Hugh Duff was going to have less of a say than he thought. ⁴ She smiled ~~(Smiling at herself,~~ [^] a plethora of sunshine, after a Fort Peck winter, put a deserved face on lots of things. ^g So, Hugh, his habitual self, and paint: ought she to wait until after they'd fought out Fort Peck one more time, or would it save time to tackle him sooner than--

She went to answer the knock, water delivery a trifle early, checking her apron pocket for enough coins as she opened the door. Not to the water delivery man. With the sun behind him, for an instant

until she could shield her eyes she thought the familiar long frame
was Hugh and could not understand why he ^{would have} ~~had~~ knocked instead of simply
coming in.

Oh Lord, the recognition flew into her. Darius. Oh no and oh yes.

Part Three

OTHER RIVERS

1935

You couldn't even believe a woman when she said hello, Darius Duff reminded himself.

He was seeing Meg now across a quarter of a century, the lines at the corners of her eyes mapping that length of time and maybe something beyond. After all that Scotland had done to him lately, it somewhat surprised him that there was any wear and tear left for the rest of the world, even on a woman who had chosen to marry his brother Hugh. But Meg still had the speculation in those eyes. The nurselike sense of attention, the way of peering at you as if clerking for God.

The Milnes of Inverley were that way from the Reverend on down, he couldn't help but remember: preacher and preacher spawn. They wore well, though, Meg the latest evidence of that--the set character of her face, as if certified for good and all by the nock in her chin. Not to mention the lithe build below.

And the voice, streambed of voice, deep and as dancing as ever, "Darius!" She gave his name the particular lilt, shiny crownpoint of emphasis atop the middle syllable, knowing how he hated ^a ~~the~~ flat-tongued saying of it as Derry-us. "Darius, welcome!"

Don't hear more than is there, he had to tell himself. Vast fool that you were those years ago, don't ever put yourself through that again.

"A while, Meggie," he spoke as if it was a discovery.

"At least that." Three lives' worth, if you really care to count.

Yours, mine, Hugh's. She still studied him in a kind of appalled thrill.

~~thinking back,~~ His eyebrows went up inquisitively, and she hurried toward manners. "Come in, come in. But what--you didn't let us know you'd be coming."

"I didn't much know, myself." That punctuating small ^{from him,} smile as

quick as if it was the last letter of the sentence, ~~was the same as she~~

~~remembered~~ Hugh without the gale-warning flags, this brother of his
 Which had led ^d to confusions before, she more than remembered.

Darius stepped into the house and halted as if hit.

"What in stone cold Hell--? Blueprints?"

He let his suitcase drop and strode on into the second room, to the blue-papered wall.

"They...help keep the weather out." He heard a swallowing sound from Meg. "Housing is a bit rough and ready here, as you see."

Rough, he could definitely see. The two-room hutch, shanty, shack, whatever American shambles it was, showed damp-stained beaverboard at the kitchen wall ^S where the blueprints did not quite extend, and the floor of unplanned lumber was stark except where Meg had managed to knit a rag rug for beside the bed. The bed in with the living room furniture made the room as crammed as the corner of a warehouse.

He felt a fury toward Hugh, putting ^{her} Meg in this hovel, ^{and} but with it a vindication. She could have done other. I made that clear enough.

But then the thought swarmed in that if ^{Meg} she had chosen him, she'd right now be existing out of the pasteboard suitcase at his side.

"Here, let me--we're still getting squared away," ~~she~~ ^{she} Meg said, quite near him now, as she swept a pile of clothes off a chair. "But sit yourself down, ~~Darius~~ ^{Darius} Please, do."

Instead ~~Darius~~ ^{he} waded through the clutter to the topmost roll of blueprint Owen had papered across the back wall. Fingers out as if finding Braille, he traced the white lines of the plan of the dam. Meg saw a frown come on him, his fingers pausing at the dam's midpoint and then moving professionally down to the lower right corner of the blueprint, the title block that revealed the scale of the dam.

"My God, they'll be moving dirt for an eternity!"

"That's what they intend, yes. Tons--well, tons of tons. Just how much, you'll need to ask Owen."

"I'll do that," he murmured as if to himself. "'Pyramids and tall memorials, catch the dying sun.'"

"Darius. What's brought you?"

"It came to seem time." He kept his eyes away from Meg's, restudying the walls of the shack. After a moment, he went on: "Scotland's used up ^{up} You and Hugh long since decided so, didn't you." His smile flashed again, showing the short square tooth, bottom ~~right~~ ^{left} that had been chipped off in a shipyard accident. Meg had thought at the time that nicked part

somehow made this smile of his even more appealing, gave him a dimple in his mouth, and she thought it again now. "You remember me, Meggie," she heard him say. "Takes some while for me to catch up with the way of things."

But when you do... she recalled, too. "You're here for good?" She couldn't keep the alarm out of her face.

Darius simply appeared amused. "I'm a pair of hands that knows tools, and they must need those here. Hugh, now, he's a man of the plow if there ever was one and they've even hired him, haven't they?" He was giving ^{her} ~~her~~ more gaze than she wanted. She took it as a relenting when he nodded toward the dam blueprint and asked: "And the rest of the family--Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are they all at this, too?"

"They are, yes. Even I am. I help the--I'm on at the cookhouse."

"Ever an ^{ambitious} ~~industrious~~ tribe, ours," Darius bestowed, and then was intently watching past her to the front door.

Hugh had halted in the doorway.

"Unfair," Hugh stated ~~to the shack at large~~ "I've just had a day that would curdle holy water, and now here's this."

itold

Courting Margaret Milne, he'd had his work cut out for him.

None of the situation (except the extraordinarily blue-eyed Margaret;

italo

Meg as she was becoming whenever conditions seemed to permit) suited Hugh Duff at all. The ^{manse}~~parish house~~ where even the doorknocker sounded basso profundo to a gawky young farm laborer coming to call. The dispiriting strictures of when and where courtship of a Reverend's daughter could be in session. And, vague but ever-near, the dousing personality that was the Reverend Milne himself. Those were only the start of the odds against Hugh, too. The Duff brothers were what was left of a railwayman's family, ^{whom}~~which~~ the Reverend Milne seemed to peg ~~even~~ lower on the social ladder than they already were. Stropky young man that he was, Hugh did not take well to being looked down on.

"Were I you"--counsel by Darius, more veteran in the ways of the world by an entire year, was never in short supply--"I'd stuff the poorbox in thanks for the old spouter."

"What're you talking of? The man will barely let us graze our eyes across one another," Hugh reported bitterly. "He's got his religions confused, thinks he has nunnery charge."

"What better way to convince her," Darius pointed out, "that you're worth breaking down all walls for?"

#

^{it's}
 Hugh ran in streaks, she had known that from early on. There
 would be all his obstinacy, such as the Gibraltar's worth it ~~had taken~~ ^{took}
 to withstand her father's campaign of discouraging him, then suddenly
 here would come a veer, so that you had to look twice to be sure this
 was the behavior of the same Hugh Duff. The differentiation made him
 a lively suitor, more so than Meg had ever quite imagined. Nothing in
 Hugh's life became him like the weaving of that romance. ^g (Meg's breath,
 and much of the rest of her self-possession, literally was taken away
 by ~~his~~ ^{his} ploy of enlisting Darius, lookalike from a little distance,
 to dawdle around within view from the Reverend's study window while
 Hugh and she were at the back of the house in extensive forays of
 kissing.

"This is--"

"--daft, I know," Hugh kissed the tip of her nose, then her cheekbone,
 then her chin. "Where were we?"

"You know perfectly well where," she murmured, presenting her lips
 for his again.

~~Remove~~
 This is daft, Darius ~~groused to~~ ^{groused to} ~~told himself~~, trying to appear ostentatiously

itals

nonchalant for the figure watching with suspicion from the leaded-glass window. Making a gawk of myself while Hugh is spooning her in like

dilly sauce.

"That father of yours--"

"--believes you are interested in my hand," Meg backed off a fraction from Hugh's latest exploration. "Little does he know."

The more her father pounded away about Hugh's supposed lackings, the more she thought Hugh needn't be all of one metal. That was the way her father was, after all; pure preacher in an impure congregation, the world, and she did not want to be fastened to that kind of absolute again. If Hugh Duff came with a dent or two already in, she told herself she didn't care; and she didn't, then.

#

itals

By the time of their marriage Darius was off on his own, ~~already~~

the shipyards along the River Clyde were more home to him than the farm-market town of Inverley had ever managed to be. Steel sang to him.

Roman
The longships find their harbor in the head, began the poem of the Clydeside he loved best, and Darius filled himself from the eyes in with the constant armada along the resounding industrial river. Great Britain was determined to

p. 262A follows →

ital

maintain a fleet that would overshadow Germany's. The Asquith government's Chancellor of the Exchequer, the fateful Lloyd George, had contrived a tax on estates: "Every time a duke dies," he crowed, "we can build a dreadnought." Those crammed years when the shipyards were at full boom, Darius had to make his start low, as mere bucket boy, and next came the testing stint as rivet-backer, that earsplitting chore within the hulls. Then, though, to riveter, and the riveters were the princes of the river, the canny hands at crafting the seams that held ships together and the bargaining voices that the others of the Clyde workplaces harkened to. And so for Darius Duff and his rivet gun, those years, the Clydeside work held results close to magical: the laying of keel plates, the curving rise of the hull, the cladding of steel onto structural skeleton; make one vessel and you could make any, you could rivet together any longship that could be imagined.

#

ital

Darius on frequent visits down from the Big Smoke, Glasgow, from his aeries of steel, was a Darius with even more spice to him, Hugh couldn't but note. Keener, more glinty; honed against those shipsides

of the Clyde, maybe it must be put. Not even to mention prospering.

Hugh knew he could tend oats on the MacLaren estate from now until next doomsday and never keep up with his brother's pay packet. Be that as it may. The land took a while, Hugh was always capable of telling himself, but it and he would be there when Darius was deaf and doled.

Yet would it. The day came, in the spring of 1910, when Hugh arrived home dazed with fundamental questions. He walked in to find Owen, barely past his second year, seated manfully at a tiny desk and chair, Meg laughing and Darius with a lordly grin.

"Worth a try at getting a scholar, don't you think, Hugh?" Darius knelt down to spiderwalk his hand across the desktop, Owen's gaze avidly following. Desk and chair were both exquisitely crafted; the lathes of the Clydeside shipyard were the world's finest, Hugh had no doubt. "It skipped us a bit," Darius was going on, "but you put together that lamented father of ours and the late great Reverend Milne in this lad's background and he's likely to be apt at turning pages, wouldn't you have to say?"

"We surely would," Meg gaily provided as she swept Hugh's tea-can

from him and kissed the vicinity of his ear. "Hugh, did you ever know you had such a lovely brother?"

"It's been generally well disguised ~~before~~,^{he}" Hugh said.

The only sound then was the pattyckake of Owen's palms on his ^{new} resounding little desk.

"Hugh," Meg said in a voice that did not quite waver. "What?"

What, yes. The radical acceleration of these visits from Darius since Owen's birth? The embedded suspicion in Hugh that Meg's choosing of him had been a close decision in the first place, and now down from Glasgow every fortnight or less was a fresh reason for her to rethink that decision? The firm recitation in Hugh that he could not, did not dare, believe she would ever actually toss him over for Darius? The accompanying fact that he could never quite remove the chance of that from his mind, either?

Hugh shook his head, to bring himself back to the day's blow.

"The MacLaren land. It's going to tenements."

Meg came to him without a word. What was spoken was pure Darius:

"This we can fix like that, Hugh." Fingersnap. Across the crown

of Meg's hair, Hugh looked at his triumphant brother. "There's every chance waiting for you on the Clyde. I only have to put in the word for you with the right somebody, Monday at the yard."

Were you Hugh, you knew in that moment that you were going to have to put an ocean between you and the Clydeside.

#

"You're as even-tempered as ever, Hugh," Darius let out with a smile and an extended hand as he crossed the floor of the shack. "Full steam all the time."

Hugh gave him a handshake, but during it ^{demanding} ~~asked~~: "What's behind this?"

"The times," his brother said evenly, "what else."

Hugh cocked him a look they both remembered. "You can't mean to tell me even ^{your} the blessed Clydeside is feeling the pinch."

"It's beyond pinch," Darius confessed.

"Darius, yes, tell us how things stand," Meg painted in, shooing the visitor toward the kitchen table and sending Hugh the Milne gaze that conveyed As a last resort you could try manners, Hugh Duff. "Sit, the both of you, and I'll--" she rapidly attacked the coffee pot and

end
itala

the firebox of the cookstove.

"The times, you were saying." Hugh ^Wcould not leave this alone,
 Darius ~~could see~~ ^{saw}. "They handed you yours?"

Darius fought back the risings at the back of his throat, the
 anger and the other. Do it as rehearsed, he made himself hear himself.

You knew this has to be got past.

"The Clyde ^{side} and I parted company, yes. Out the gate, and so
 I kept going. Knew a fellow. He was able to make me a place on a ship.
 And then--" Darius jerked his head in the general direction of the railroad.
 "Old habits die hard, Hugh. Family seems to be one of the incorrigible
 ones. Worse than a sweet tooth." He carefully kept looking his brother
 in the eye. "Hugh, ^{truth} truth to tell, I didn't know where else..."

"You've come late to see us at our best," Hugh said tautly. "When
 we had the farm--"

"Yes, I've seen that. Tidy. Tucked away like a swallow's nest,
 though."

Something came on in Hugh's eyes, then went out. Meg and untouched
 cups of coffee had joined the two men at the table. Darius knew it was

time to give Hugh the high ground.

"You were far ahead of me about America, Hugh, I'll say it now: I couldn't see past the Big Smoke. Although--" the smile suddenly in there "--wouldn't you know they have a Glasgow here, too." Such as it is.

Hugh took ^{this} ~~that~~ in carefully; admissions from Darius had never been frequent. He turned toward Meg a moment. The sight of her on the same side of the table with him seemed to give him heart. The weight of life is what holds us to this world, eh, Meg? ^{He} ~~Hugh~~ cleared his throat. "So you're not here as a ~~were~~ tourist, then."

"I haven't come as a charity case, either," Darius kept in tenor with.

"I'd put some money by, I'm not hurting on that quite yet." He made himself go through with it. ^{is} ~~This a tactical time, and you well know what these take.~~ Use the slow spoon, you've had to before. "A job of work is what I have in mind, if you happen to know anything about the hiring here, Hugh. If you could lodge a good word for me in the right somebody's ear, say."

Hugh shook his head, but then inclined it toward Meg. "She's your man on that, Darius."

—————

"We keep on, the whole payroll's gonna be Duffs."

Medwick shuffled through his ^{boatyard} shift roster. "Owen, you know Montana residents get hiring preference."

"Sure, Cece, everybody and his uncle knows that."

Medwick glanced up at the figure standing beside Owen in brazenly brand-new Mighty Mac ^{bib} overalls. "Where is it you been living, mister?"

"Helena," stated Darius with confidence but also with an un~~Montanan~~ long e in the middle. Seeing the wince on Owen, he tried again: "I've a cousin there, she's a ^{music} ~~school~~ teacher. Her name's Heleena. She lives in Helehna."

"Yeah, well, don't coincidences never quit." Medwick put a long look to Owen, then a longer one to Darius. "How long since you came across from the old country?"

"An age ago."

"You know how we are, Cece," Owen thrust in. "Anybody with the name Duff on him will work himself silly for you."

"Uh huh, Bruce was all the proof I needed on the silly part, at least." Medwick sighed, picked up a pencil and jotted on a roster. He

said sourly to Darius, "Welcome to the Montana navy."

#

"Cascade spillways, those're called. You can see, when we pipe

the fill up into the core pool then the waste water gets discharged

down those so we can control the level of...

"Bitumen spraying, they're doing over there. The sonofabitching

Bearpaw shale ^{turns soft and slick} ~~starts weathering~~ whenever it gets ^{really} wet, so when we uncover

an outcrop we give it a coat of...

"Trying out a three-blade butterfly valve here, see if we can

cut down on the clay plugging the dredging setup when..."

Owen's headlong, half-heard, nine-tenths baffling tour of the dam ^g
~~project~~ for Darius before delivering him to his shift at the boatyard
 had looped through nearly all of Fort Peck by now. This and that were
 pointed out with offhand pride as the biggest in the world, but Darius
 seemed most keen on sorting out the swarms of workers. "And these be--?"
 he asked persistently as Owen drove him past site after site of vast
 construction that he seemed determined to find unastonishing.

p. 268B follows

Okay, bloke from the Big Smoke, be that way, Owen thought with some amusement, and kept on going after they had crossed the temporary bridge over the river, heading the government pickup on into the hills beyond the east end of the dam.



Darius didn't ^{not} appear taken, either, with this bouncing tour of the countryside, to flatter it with that appellation. Ash heaps in the earth's backyard, these gray dumpy little hills more looked like as the pickup zigged and zagged along the road that threaded their maze. He rapidly gave up on the dismal scenery and studied Owen. However Hugh happened to come by him, this is a thorough one. Owen's profile still unsettled him. Darius felt as if he had fallen among some complicated tribe wearing mocking masks of past history. Bruce and Neil looked so much like a younger Hugh that it was truly unnerving--the aspects of Hugh in duplicate ~~while~~ while Owen alarmingly resembled both Darius's and Hugh's father and Meg's father, the memorable Reverend Milne. Wouldn't you think, Darius mused, life would ^{refashion} ~~reshape~~ us more than it does. The women at least weren't such a confusion. A set of inspections might have convinced him Charlene and Rosellen were sisters, but otherwise he wouldn't have known so ~~except~~ ^{without being} told. And cinnamon-stick ~~Rhonda~~ ^{Kate}, definitely one of a kind. But then there was Meg, who still looked like every expectation he'd ever had of a woman, and that was most complicated of all.

He suddenly felt the sideways scrutiny Owen was giving him.

Their composite Darius uncled in the dimmest back corners of the
 Duff sons' imagination, unstirring there for years at a time, until
 something from the direction of Scotland would trigger abrupt speculation
 or hearsay. The Christmas when the toy steam engine arrived from over the
 ocean, the younger two boys fingered at it with mouths open while Owen,
 eleven-year-old sprout, studied the machinery and asked: "Dad, what's it
 run on?" Hugh took a close look, squinted, then looked sharply again. "Alcohol," he had
 to intone, there in ~~1919~~ ¹⁹¹⁸ ¹⁹²⁰, the year ^{Montana voted itself dry} of Prohibition. A few years on from
 then, Bruce had come across the engine again in a box under the bed and
 fired it up for an incessant half-day of play, meanwhile pestering an
 outline of Uncle Darius from his mother. When Bruce abandoned the steam
 toy for adventure in the hayloft, that was the last time he'd given thought
 to the uncle in Scotland. Neil, after he had taken to teenage carpentry
 and someone remarked on his swift knack with tools, heard his father say
 once: "He comes by it sideways in the family--I've a brother with a canny
 hand that way." Only once; other times Hugh would say, "I don't know
 where he gets it." In the nephew trio, then, Owen alone in grown life
 had ever deliberately thought about the figure in the Clyde shipyard.

His junior year course Strength of Materials 321

~~Principles of Engineering II~~ had practically forced him to, with its

provocative

questions of steel against ~~sea strength~~ ^{seawater}; he had tried to picture the

shipwright life, another Duff life of the moment but across the flex

of the world. And then Owen's Panama voyage, his shifts as boiler fireman

in the cave of hull, where he could all but read his phantom uncle's trade

in the firelit lines of rivets. Now that Darius had ~~materialized~~ ^{sprung to life} in Montana,

in their net of attention to this family newcomer Owen's mesh was

the finest. He had noticed Darius's slight ruffle when Bruce, lately

in favor of universal matrimony, put the question: "We don't get an

aunt along with you, huh? Never married?"

Darius had seemed to take Bruce's measure for a moment, then smiled.

"Not so far. Applications are still being sought."

end tale

"Almost there," Owen ~~used to~~ ^{g d} ease his eyes off his uncle and

back to the anonymous hills. "How about a jag of jumping bean?"

full tilt
Driving one-handed, he groped under the pickup seat and pulled out

a thermos bottle of coffee. Every American whom Darius had encountered

so far was a caffeine fiend. "You get the cup first, you're the guest,"

Owen decreed.

While Darius mastered pouring an unwanted beverage in a ~~moving~~ ^{bouncing} vehicle,

Owen glanced sideways at him and asked:

"How'd you know to find us here?"

"Process of elimination. I found where you weren't, first." Darius took one sip of the coffee and pined for tea. ~~sipped at the coffee, wishing it were tea.~~ "The farmstead looked like just the place for Hugh. Somewhere private for him to pound the ground, make the earth say--what, not oats, some sort of fluffaloofa..."

"Alfalfa," Owen supplied.

Darius folded his hands around the thermos cup and watched Owen for the effect of this next:

"Someone's scavenging the place. The boards are torn off the buildings and stacked there."

"It's the Old Man," Owen said shortly. "And Neil. They take the truck--"

"My brother is scavenging his own farmhouse?"

"He didn't want to see it burned."

Darius was given no time to digest that. "You'd better toss that coffee into yourself or out the window," Owen was advising as he shifted into lower gear. "We go mountangoat here."

~~He~~
Owen veered the pickup off the road and straight up the tallest

gray hill, wheels spinning as Darius bounced like a ball beside him.

At the top, the Fort Peck country spread around them in ~~polar~~^{billowing} reaches. The ruffled land hid away even the dam project, and permitted the river out only in a single streak of glitter in the middle distance, the horizon beyond as sharp and far as the quit of a map. As Owen braked the pickup to a hard stop, a canyon gaped below Darius's side of the vehicle.

At once he took in the sawcut sides, the engineered taper ~~as~~^{of} the huge channel wedged between the set of hills he and Owen were on and a similar lumpy ~~set~~^{range of them} a considerable distance across the way. There in the ~~tremendous~~^{tremendous} trench-cut gap between, ~~an immense~~^a series of forms was under installation, concrete being poured into them by truckloads. Cranes swung bindles of steel through the air, legions of workers were erecting still more of the giant pillar forms. Owen, absolutely unable not to look pleased with himself, watched Darius watch the potboil of construction below.

"What's this, then--another dam?" Darius at last hazarded. "Do you practice building them, between every two hills?"

"It's the spillway."

To Owen's satisfaction, Darius at last registered astonishment. "But

it's to hell and gone, here, from your dam!"

"Three miles, that's true. But the water'll come here in no time.

The lake will back up out into the base of those bluffs." Owen indicated toward the disheveled geography to the south, then cut an arc under it with his extended forefinger. "It's just about a perfect natural reservoir.

And when the lake level reaches where we left the road down there, the spillway goes to work."

"Not at your dam itself, though, this spillway," Darius dwelt on.

"Why's that?"

"The dam can be just what it is, this way," Owen began as if savoring music. "See, Darius, we're dealing with water here that's about as changeable as the goddamn weather." Darius ~~as audience~~ watched him turn ~~become~~ as ~~intent,~~ intense, as ~~a~~ the small boy drumming on his new sounding-board of a desk in an Inverley cottage. "The Missouri's big on floods," Owen was ~~at now,~~ ^{saying.} "Exactly how big it can get, we don't even know because our records don't go back that far. What we do know is that there's a whole pot of things that can pour water at us here. A heavy winter. A late spring, thawing and freezing again all the time. Then how about,

say, a cloudburst up in the Rockies, just to get the run-off really running. That, my friend"--Owen tilted his head toward Darius a bit but kept his eyes on the immense spillway--"is what we call a hundred-year flood. The spillway, out here separate, takes care of that, and the dam doesn't have to do two things at once--hold back floodwater and let floodwater through. Integrity of the design, it's called." Owen caught himself. "But you'd know that from your own line of work, wouldn't you."

"Fancy," said Darius as if mostly to himself, and peered again down the canyonwall to where rocksaws screeched into the crumbly top layer of shale and the black fog of bitumen sealed the cutaway trench of unweathered Bearpaw bedrock beneath. "If you have all the room in the world to gouge around in, I suppose this is the sort of thing you can do." Owen was reaching to start the pickup when he heard Darius add:

"Can't say I blame you."

"Blame?"

"For not wanting water cavorting through the middle of your earthen dam, of course, Owen." Darius was giving him an understanding grin that Owen could have done without. "Concrete spillway or no, there'd still be moving water in the vicinity of your earthfill, wouldn't there. Water on the go, against even a dam such as yours--over time, I believe

water cuts almost anything."

"It does," Owen said after a few moments of regarding him. "That's why we're trying not to do this river any favors in the dam design."

#

DROPCAP

Somebody should write this down, she thought. You can't go a day around here without something new stewing up.

In the dredgelines, the earthfill gurgled and burped and sloshed. The winter-built dredges Jefferson and Madison had joined the Gallatin, the trio of them proudly towed upstream to designated borrowpit areas and, for Owen as fillmaster, 1935 began on the 15th of April. The dredging set-up was new and stiff, and its myriad equipment needed to be learned by crews of farm- and ranch-raised Montanans whose experience with electric dredges was not vast. Arguments were the Fort Peck anthem that April. Neil, of all people, locked horns with a tough High Line Swede on the pipeline trestle crew and had been lucky to come out of it with only a black eye, a cut eyebrow, scraped knuckles, and a sprained toe. After a terrible first couple of weeks, when Owen seemed to be everywhere trying to settle down men and machines, the heaves and staggers of startup ~~seemed to be~~ ~~were cured.~~ Each dredge's cutterhead ate into the riverbank or the bottom

of the Missouri and then water was mixed in, and the slurry was pumped through the 28-inch pipeline, and cascaded up onto the suddenly visibly growing ~~pyramid~~^{mound} of the dam.

This family is like nine radios going at once, it really pretty much is. Every Duff a different station.

Nobody liked dealing with the dredgeline's drain traps, where ~~chunks of driftwood~~^{river trash} and balls of gumbo accumulated and had to be periodically mucked out, until the first buffalo skull tumbled forth. The bone ~~visitants~~^{relics} came out like clockwork from then on, horned ghosts of some herd, herds, disgorged with every cleaning of the traps; the upstream borrowpit where the Gallatin was dredging must have been a disastrous crossing for the creatures. In no time, ~~varnished~~^{shellacked} buffalo skulls were a Fort Peck motif from one end of the shacktowns to the other; each of the four Duff households sported one over the front door, and Darius had his affixed as a hatrack above his bed at the barracks.

Look what it takes just to be a married couple. Then all the in-lawing on top of that. Family is a hard idea. Maybe we'd be better off just in herds.

~~first~~
 That ~~season~~ the dredging operation, now the wellspring of progress
 on the dam, sat for its photo virtually every day, ~~for documentation's~~
~~sake~~. Thus someone managed to click a shutter ~~in~~ ^{at} the exact moment
 during
~~of~~ the launch of the dredge Missouri when its long wall of hull displaced
 the riverwater in a rolling shove of wave, and the Fort Peck workers ~~five men~~ named Duff
 were posed aboard with their arms around each other like a file of sailors.

Aligned on the deck behind the hedgerow of water, left to right: Neil
 and Bruce in paired grins, dubious Hugh, Darius bemused, Owen with an
 anchoring grip on the structurework, riding the fourth and final dredge
 down the ways to its namesake river.

No, though. Who would want to go it alone in life if they had any
choice? The four of us who made ourselves Duffs by marrying Duffs--
and now there's this extra one from Scotland into the bargain--we're as
bad as they are for pairing off, choosing up sides, getting each other's
nose out of joint, patching it up until the next time. This family
seems to live on next times. That's something else that needs written.

#

The sheriff stood in wait, his Marlin .12-gauge shotgun resting

in the umbrella stand he had dragged over next to him.

Shouldn't be long now, he figured, and took another peek out front.

Keeson's gray head moved nervously, there behind the store counter.

The sheriff could see where the wire earpieces of Keeson's glasses

hooked down between cartilage of the ears and pompadoured gray hair.

He never had understood why jewelers didn't go entirely blind, squinting at all the little stuff they did.

"Hang tight, Floyd," he said softly. "This is what it takes, with these types."

"Remember, God darn it, Carl, I get to clear out of here."

"I've allowed for that, don't worry."

The owl-like shiftings of Floyd Keeson's head did not seem to signify any less worry. The sheriff pursed his lips and settled himself again against the backroom wall of the ^{Glasgow} jewelry store. Once in a great while the telephone was a wonderful thing, Carl Kinnick reflected. It had been nothing much to pay attention to, routine adjacent-counties report, when the store in Havre got knocked off during the noon hour;

fool kid of a clerk, for leaving the dressed-up guy who flashed a wad of cash and asked to see the high-priced stuff perfectly ~~alone~~ ^{at leisure} to scoop out the display case while the clerk was in back fiddling with the safe.

But then an hour and a half later, just the time it took to drive from Havre to Malta, the next sizable town east on Highway 2, the jeweler there got knocked off and knocked out as well, coldcocked when he bent down to reach something out of the display case for Mr. Jewel Bandit.

Next it was only an hour from Malta to Glasgow, and when the guy started to pull his stunt again in Keeson's Jewelry he was going to be in for a major surprise. Zipping along the High Line like he was picking berries, huh; we'll just see, the sheriff told himself. He glanced down at the Marlin shotgun waiting handy. Put Marlene to working on him, and the prospect of her load of lead would get his attention in a hurry.

"Carl, here--" he heard Keeson let out between clenched teeth.

"Shut up, Floyd," he whispered back, then heard the store door whisk open.

The sheriff listened hard. Really not much of a spiel the guy had.

Special girl...necklace'd be nice...something with quite a stone...

It evidently didn't take a hell of a lot to be a jewel bandit.

"--appropriate item for you in the back room," Keeson was saying, and in the next instant swept through the doorway curtain and past Carl Kinnick with never a glance and kept on going, out the wide-open back door as the sheriff had instructed him to.

The guy already had the display case jimmied open and was arm[#]deep among the wedding rings when the sheriff stepped out with the shotgun leveled.

Neither of them said word one as the sheriff moved around to the same side of the counter as the jewel heister.

The guy, though. The sheriff stared at him with growing disbelief. The guy was like a super dressed-up mannequin of the sheriff himself. Not the clothes, that wasn't it. The body structure, the bantamweight frame, the same doll-delicate bones. The guy was damn near a complete physical replica of him, Kinnick saw; small man's swift raccoon hands, characteristic on both of them, and their diminutive handtooled footwear would have fit one another. There in the jewelry store, two little lockets of men.

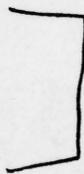
Then the jewel bandit grinned about how they matched.

The sheriff lowered the shotgun halfway. Utterly furious, he said in case Floyd Keelson or anyone else was within hearing: "That's a move you don't want to make," and simultaneously fired both barrels into the offender's legs.

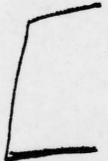
#

Bruce was speculating out loud that Charlene would be the mayor of Wheeler, next. Charlene was assuring him his hours were numbered if that ever happened.

The A-1 Beauty Shop stood two doors down from the Blue Eagle Tavern. The shop name offered itself discreetly on the front window. What could be read the length of Wheeler's main street, and then some, was the resounding black block lettering across the top of the storefront:

A-1
CatPERMANENTS

\$3.50 \$5.00 \$6.50



The Duffs stayed grouped outside the new shop, admiring the screaming sign and Charlene's sales philosophy behind it: that the wholly outlandish top price of \$6.50 made the \$3.50 hairdo sound like a bargain, and that when a woman felt like splurging, there in the middle beckoned the \$5.00

~~job that sounded like a relatively good deal.
bait which still seemed greatly cheaper than the Rockefellerian \$6.50.~~

"Owne, I'm going to borrow her to do the arithmetic on the truck payments," Neil acclaimed.

One thing puzzled Darius. "'Permanent,' though--why's this spasmodic hairfixing called that?"

"If you think I'm going to advertise that I'm selling 'spasms,' Darius, you have another think coming," Charlene handled that and the expression of mischief plastered on ~~one~~ ^{Rosellen} of the others at the same time. Grin all you want, Rosellen, but this isn't Toston warmed over.

The eye contact sobered her kid sister at least temporarily, and Charlene announced with a ~~proprietary~~ ^{proprietary} clap of her hands that the refreshments were waiting inside.

Owen handed around the bottles of beer while Charlene showed off the A-1's fittings, from shampoo sink to cash register. Meg applied herself to Hugh's drinking arm, Neil and Bruce clicked bottles and chorused Here's looking at you, Darius kept to himself his opinion that American beer tasted as if it came straight from the horse.

—————
Without letting on that she would keep watch on something of this

sort, ^{Meg}~~she~~ watched them come and go in the vicinity of ^{Kate}~~Rhonda~~. The

Duff men all, even Hugh by now, were taken with ^{Kate}~~Rhonda~~, like stags
acquiring a taste for a lick of salt.

—————
Bruce meanwhile had not been able to resist adding to Charlene's
agenda: "You get any rich widows in here, be sure and chalk them on
the back for Darius."

Darius managed as loud a laugh at that as any of the rest of them
and kept to his nominated role as bachelor curio, saying he'd found it
the safest policy to tip his cap only to himself. Interesting it'd
have been, though, wouldn't it, to tell them about Fiona and his years
of connubial imitation with her. After all, wasn't matrimony but a
sort of friendship recognized by the police? But his and Fiona's
arrangement did have an eventual drawback, too; in the end, Fiona had
pranced off with a Spanish anarchist.

No, ^g~~though, no~~ news of Fiona would not help his situation with

Meg any, would it.

—————
"Owen," ^{Meg}~~she~~ stage-whispered during Charlene's demonstration of the
croquignole permanent wave machine, whose dozen metal headrods and
snake-nest of electrical cords ^g~~was~~ ^{were} holding the Duff men in appalled

fascination. He stepped back out of the group and joined her at the front of the store.

"Owen," she said with intensity, "what times are available yet with Charlene?"

"Mother, I imagine they all are. Let's have a see." He turned the pages of Charlene's daybook for appointments. "Blank as Orphan Annie, so far. If you want, when Charlene finishes up horrifying us males, you can get together with her for sometime--"

"A regular time, is what I want. Right after work, ^{every other} Fridays.

Put me down for then, pretty please, Owen."

He picked up the appointment pencil as directed. "Paydays, yeah, those are always popular," he left the matter at, but glanced from ^{his mother} ~~Meg~~ Hugh stood to his father. At the edge of the clan over by the croquignole machine,

like a man with something on his mind, or, worse, like a man trying

not to have that something on his mind.

#

Kate and Rosellen conferred while setting out the covered dishes of potluck supper.

"At least it's a better name for the place than our mother's was,"

Rosellen said reflectively. "Toston Curly Cues." She shook her head.

Kate sampled a meatball in tomato sauce and licked her fingers.

"Talk about a family gathering. ^{Now} We're bringing them in all the way from Scotland."

"Nnhnn. He's kind of like Hugh with the bark off, isn't he."

Rosellen studied across the room at Darius, who was looking rapt as

Charlene explained the principle of the marceling iron. Beyond him,

Bruce uncorked a wicked wink which Rosellen at first thought was directed at her, but realized it was for Kate, of course.

"You two," she kidded Kate in the woman-of-the-world tone they always used when the topic of mad pash came up. "In a beauty shop, yet."

Kate couldn't help herself from wearing a goofy expression. "Guess what," she murmured back to Rosellen. "The family is on the increase, in more ways than just Scotch uncles."

"Katy, really?" Rosellen instantly had her by both forearms. "Oh, good, when? Have you picked out names yet? Aren't you going to tell the rest of the--?"

p. 286A follows

"Rosellen, if I cut in on Charlene's party with that news, you know I'll never get a decent hairdo out of her again."

~~_____~~
The sisters dealt with each other before starting on their plates of supper.

Charlene said under her breath, "It's on the tip of your tongue."

~~Rosellen.~~

Rosellen grinned recklessly. "It's all over you an inch thick."

~~Charlene.~~

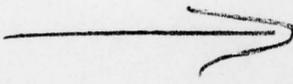
"What if I did say--"

"A million or so times."

"--you'd never catch me sliding around in--"

"Skating; you used to say, 'skating around in'."

"--skating around in hair the way they did." Charlene tartly checked ~~on~~ Rosellen for any further grinning. "There, does that satisfy you?"



"Some."

"You're certainly awfully interested in what I do, all of a sudden,"

Charlene let fall. "Are you by any chance jealous?"

Rosellen's eyes widened in a way that Charlene still did not know

how to read. "Can't I be just curious?"

#

"What happened was, the Swede called me a bunch of choice names,"

Neil was saying across the tableful of potluck to ~~Rhonda~~^{Kate}, "all of it over the best way to nail in a crossbrace..."

"I wouldn't want that responsibility," Meg was saying to Rosellen, "of having to hit the right typewriter key time after..."

"Are you characters about to get my pump boat done?" Owen was saying to Bruce and Darius. "Or am I about to have to bail out the core pool with a teaspoon?"

Darius said nothing, rather than say that the forty-foot pump boat would have been about twenty minutes' work on the Clydeside. Bruce, though, let Owen have:

"If you'd quit squirting water on your dam, Ownie, you wouldn't have that big puddle of water in the middle of it."

Owen managed to laugh, ~~although he had been at least half-serious~~
~~in asking~~ ^{and} with the question about the pump boat. The table talk moved on but

Owen, overseer by habit, was studying Bruce. Whatever canary Bruce had lately swallowed, he couldn't keep the feathers from flying out

tonight. Ah, well, hell. Maybe it's that peppy home cooking ^{Kate} Rhonda

gives him. Owen himself had been hot with pride all evening, watching

Charlene, taking pleasure from her intrepid battleplans on the ~~hair~~ ^{tresses}

~~needs~~ of Wheeler. Watch out now, world. Once again he ran his eyes

over her, ~~and except for the presence of so much family, would have~~

~~done so with more than eyes.~~ ^{she} Certainly Charlene was her own best

advertisement. Darius, he saw, evidently thought so, too. The two

of them were in thoroughgoing conversation.

"Hugh and I are the type they used to try to keep out of parlors,"

was confiding to her.

Darius ~~confided.~~ "Now here we find ourselves, in a beauty one."

"You're not the only one surprised at you," he heard right back

from Charlene. The woman was harder than dental enamel. "None of them

can get over it, you know, you with us this way. Fort Peck isn't an

easy jump from anywhere. You must have really wanted a change of scenery,"

~~she tried on him,~~ "to come here just like that."

"I suppose sometimes we want change and sometimes change wants us," he resorted to. "What of yourself, though? Where was it you derived from before here, dear?"

Charlene gave him a look, a substitute for the real reamer she wanted to unloose down the table toward Rosellen. Had the little snip been blabbing about Toston and the footsteps in the hair-strewn shop back there? Charlene had tossed Toston out of her chosen picture once, and could again.

"Bozeman," she bit out.

"Yoze-mite, ah!" Darius exclaimed with vast feigned interest.

"Seen pictures of it! Great towering cliffs there, haven't they, and some mountain thingy split half in two? I can see why you'd miss so grand a place."

#

"That uncle of yours is a strange duck," Charlene softly told Owen after they had taken their celebration home to bed.

"What's a family without at least one cracked uncle?" he responded, nuzzling her in a couple of ^{favorite} ~~remembered~~ places. He wondered, though, how

many Duffs at Fort Peck it took to amount to too many.

DROP CAP

"You do have to hope to Christ they don't erode a hole in it by staring at it," Sangster said tiredly.

Owen only nodded, abstracted. By now he hardly even noticed the tides of workers from elsewhere on the dam, tunnel muckers and shovel runners and carpenters and catskinners and all the rest trooping up onto the levee edges

of the fill at lunch hour or change of shift to stare and tell one another it beat anything they'd ever seen, a lake sitting on top of a dam.

The core pool--there was no getting around it: Owen Duff's ^{unusually} core pool--was ~~an amazement~~ ^{phenomenal} no matter how you looked at it. The dredged material ~~which~~ ^{that} was being spewed in to form the core of the dam needed time to settle, needed to have the water drained off it at a judicious pace, needed in other words this artificial basin in the top of the damfill. On a blueprint it could not have looked more clever and neat, a settlement pond ~~which~~ ^{that} gradually worked itself out of existence as more and more fill jelled in it. In reality, which was to say here under the noses of Owen and Sangster, the core pool was a wind-whipped, sloshing, leaky, fickle body of water half a mile long, up in the middle of the pile of earth which was supposed to become Fort Peck Dam.

"We have got to get--"

"!--that sonofabitching pump boat up here," Sangster chorused in with Owen. "I agree, you know. This isn't any too much fun, trying to sluice out just as much water as you keep pouring in." Sangster's ~~current~~ current specialty, a sluiceway to drain off excessive ~~water~~ water from the core pool, was busy draining all the time and still not quite doing the job, the water level kept creeping up, the three times a day a sounding was taken. ~~If you wanted to give an engineer a nightmare, this one~~ Owen hated even to think about ~~would do~~ what would happen if the water backed up enough to breach ~~one~~ of the levees of the core pool. ~~Owen~~ ^{He} had both this worry of a flood above the river washing a goodly portion of the dam down into the river, and ~~one~~ ^{all} of his own; His dredged material was staying soupy, taking longer it was supposed to. to consolidate into firm fill at the bottom of the core pool than planned ^{He} on the roof of the dam ~~one~~ They simply and utterly needed a way to regulate this mass of water more exactly.

his and Sangster's
The object of ~~their~~ irritation could be seen in the boatyard, most of a mile away: the white speck of pump boat which Medwick kept telling them was being built as fast as ~~he~~ ^{it} could, which wasn't anywhere

near fast enough for them.

"You've tried, I've tried," Owen mused. "I think let's sic Major Santee on Medwick."

"Oh, you bet. Why don't you toss a spitwad at Medwick from up here and do about as much good," Sangster expelled.

"I figured I'd sic the Colonel on the Major first."

Sangster chewed that over. "Go in to the Colonel and piss and moan about not being able to meet your schedule the way things are, you mean?"

"That's what I had in mind, yeah."

"Only problem with that is, you don't want to get them believing you're in too much trouble on the schedule."

with strain STET tightly
 "Max," Owen said tightly, "it's about half-true."

~~"If that's the case," prescribed Sangster, "you better sic away."~~

~~Darius~~

He went up onto the east bluff to watch the pump boat be moved to

the core pool. He had asked Owen how they were going to get this famous vessel up the considerable slope of the earthfill and into the core pool.

"We're gonna walk it," Owen had replied absently. And be damned if that wasn't precisely what they were doing. Fourteen bulldozers, the big

~~Americans~~
 crawlers that were called Caterpillars, were hitched by cables to the square bow and now the pump^fboat, the size of a respectable hotel, was going up the road behind its column of clanking Cats as pretty as you please. He shook his head. Americans seemed to operate on the principle that they could solve anything if they could ~~just~~^g get enough traction.

"Making it sail on dry land, aren't they." The unexpected voice made Darius spill a bit of the tea he was pouring from his thermos.

"Neil, sunbeam, I didn't know you were anywhere about."

"Had to come see what they're up to at Ownie's lake." The younger man helped himself to the other half of the little ^{shale} cutbank Darius was ^{sitting} on. "You too, huh?"

"The craft, there"--Darius nodded toward the pump boat still advancing up the side of the dam fill in a cloud of dust and clatter--"does bear my tool marks, you know." Crude a tub as it is. But there was no bringing the Clydeside and the true ships with me, was there. He glanced aside at Neil, who had not been a boatyard participant but was the one who showed up to witness this ^{odd crosscountry} ~~oddest longest driest~~ launching ^J ever. "Bruce's thumbprints on the bonny boat, too, of course."

"Mmm hmm." Neil had opened his black lunchbox and was doing fast damage to a peanut butter and honey sandwich. The sandwich was fine-- product of the cookhouse of Jaraala and his mother, it was better than that--but Neil wished he was having for lunch what Bruce usually had.

Rosellen's noonhour at the Ad Building, though, and his on the dredgeline trestle gang didn't quite work out right for ~~that~~ getting together.

Taking his tea sip by sip, Darius mulled the Neils and Bruces, the young men ~~who worked~~ ^{working} here by the thousands. Empires, armies, crusades had been built on lads such as ~~all~~ these. A willing set of hands, durability, availability--these were the pegs history made use of, if Darius knew anything about it.

"What was it like," he was suddenly brought to ^{Neil's voice} by the sound of ~~Neil~~ again, "being brothers back in Scotland?"

"In what respect do you mean, ^{Neil?} Neil?"

His nephew had to swallow ^{ed} away on the last of a second peanut butter

and honey sandwich before specifying:

"Fight much?"

"Mostly around the tonsils," Darius mused. "Your father likes a

good argument. And I suppose I'm not averse to one either, now and again."

It seemed to be Neil's turn to muse. "If you're kind of alike in that, how come you turned out so different? Him, over in this country, and Mother and us and all, and you staying the way you were?"

"Well, your mother hadn't a sister," Darius smoothed past that with his instantaneous smile, "and so I evidently was cut out to be bachelor uncle to the world."

Sudden ^{quiet} ~~silence~~ at the core pool made them turn their heads in that direction. The Caterpillars had been throttled down to lowest idle, a barely audible diesel throb. The pump boat was afloat in Owen's lake.

———
 "How you doing?" Rosellen always felt like an awed delegate to a maharani when she visited ^{Kate} ~~Shonda~~ these days.

"Pretty pukey," ^{Kate} ~~Shonda~~ reported. "I don't see why they call it just morning sickness."

"Nhn. When you say 'pukey,' though, is that sort of an all-over feeling you have or more of a stomach thing?"

"Both. Why? You taking a census on ways to throw up?"

"Hey, I don't even need to ask if an owly mood is one of the symptoms too, do I."

"Speaks for itself, I guess," Kate relented. "So does my middle."

"You're not showing much yet."

"On me, it doesn't take much."

Rosellen mildly pooh-poohed that, her mind obviously racing for ways to find out all about ~~pregnancy~~^{child-bearing} from the resident expert, peaked-looking Kate. "When do you start being a lady of leisure?"

"End of this week." Although what the Rondola's customers were going to do without her there to joke ~~about~~^{with} being bitten by a trouser worm or finding a surprise in the oven, she didn't know.

"Oh, already?" Rosellen let out without thinking.

"Listen, I don't care how they do it in ~~that book~~^{China}, I'm not." The part in The Good Earth where the woman worked in a rice field all day until it was time to pop into the house and have a baby was, according to Rosellen, certainly interesting. That was one word for it, Kate thought. She stated ~~now~~^{from experience thus far}, "Getting started on a kid is no picnic."

"At least you've managed to," Rosellen flared.

Kate drew up in surprise. Who's the owly one now? "If Bruce were here, he'd tell you it's just a matter of doing it until you get it right."

That only reddened up Rosellen even more. Quickly they changed the subject, and their squall passed. But Kate still wished she could take that back about practice making perfect, in a family way.

—



The day already had been about a week's worth of contentious hair.

In came a naturally curly, not too bad to start on although too much curl

will fight the set, and Charlene managed to push in enough wave, with

~~liberal~~
~~enough~~ use of the marcel iron, to make the woman's head of hair stay

reasonably calmed down. But then in walked ~~three~~^{two} women together whose

hair behaved like porcupine quills. It dawned on Charlene that these

had to be Cactus Flat residents, showing the effects of the sulphury

wellwater in that particular shantytown; and worse, the ~~trio~~^{duo} inevitably

wanted ~~just~~^{only} a wash and a wave. She forbore from informing them that the

only hope for doing anything at all with the broomstraw condition of

their hair was to chemical the bejesus out of it, and instead put it

that they were in luck, the A-1 was offering bargain permanents today.

Watching the ~~three~~^{pair} of them, happily permed, go out the door ^{several hours later,} Charlene

wondered what follicles she was going to encounter next. By now it was

interesting, though, what she could tell by her customers' hair. Who

used rainwater to wash in at home. Who was sickly even if they otherwise

didn't look it. Who had seen the latest Jean Harlow movie and who held

on to the creed that Theda Bara's was the hairstyle forever.

She hadn't even started on Meg yet.

Their two faces stared at each other from the oval captivity of Charlene's wall mirror. Meg spoke up first:

"Anything short of a scalping, please, Charlene."

"Meg, as it is, you always look...nicely put together." As she was saying so, Charlene's fingers exploratorily lifted a tendril of her mother-in-law's sunned-brown hair. Plenty of life to it, if not much snazz in how it was ~~being~~ worn. "Do you want to keep it that way, with just a wash and a wave? Or--"

"I want this," Meg stated with what seemed to be some difficulty, "to be a, a kind of treat for myself."

Charlene came around the chair. Directly in front of Meg, she put her hands on her knees and leaned down and in, looking in Meg's eyes and then around the verges of her face and the waiting frontier of hair. Halfway through her inspection, Charlene began to grow excited. "Meg," she blurted, "Let me give you the works."

"Whatever are...those?"

"This is going to sound like the dog's dinner, but it'll all fit

together on you, I just know it will." Rapidly Charlene outlined the plan of attack. First, a croquignole permanent. Building on that, a marcel wave swooping to one brow. For a finale, antoine pincurls down the side and back. "Meg, I guarantee you'll scarcely know yourself."

Meg peered past Charlene to the mirror again, as if to give her reflection a last say in this. After a bit, she announced: "Bang away, Charlene."

She confronted herself again in that mirror ^{when} ~~as~~ Charlene was fussily finishing up with the pincurls. Under Charlene's ministrations her hair now looked like fine-carved teak, its scrolls of perfect wave and curl making the little nock in her chin fit right in, sculpturally. If she did say so herself, Margaret Milne Duff looked like a new woman, royal make.

Charlene couldn't hold back a giggle at the thought. "Hugh is going to be thrown for a loop when you walk in that door tonight."

"No, he won't."

"Well, whyever not? Meg, take it from me, you look absolutely--"

"It's his time of the month," Meg said caustically.

Charlene's hands halted. After a moment, she went on with fixing Meg's hair, determined not to be dragged in to Duff family matters any farther.

#

"So, business lady, how you doing?" Owen greeted her when she at last managed to close up shop and deposit herself home.

"Busy says it."

"What you wanted, right?"

"Mmmhmm." She went directly over to the easy chair where he was ~~reading~~ tallying daily dredging timesheets, sat on the chair arm and hugged the crown of him to her chest while telling him, "This is the head I was wishing for all day."

"Hey, you do know some pretty interesting things to apply on hair," he answered comfortably as his head inclined there between her breasts. Charlene bit her lip, and did not tell him that his father was off on a binge again.

#

"Hnnfp? What're you--don't, mmpf--"

"Shh," came a soothing whisper, at odds with the hand clamped forcefully over Darius's mouth. "Don't wanna wake up the whole menagerie."

p. 299A follows →

The figure sitting on the edge of his bed seemed so dedicated to not disturbing the peace of the darkened barracks that Darius made himself lie there soundless. When the hand eased up a millimeter, he wrestled free from it and got his own heartfelt grip on the visitor. "Hugh, what to hell?" he furiously whispered. "What's this about?"

"Wanna give you a treat. Take you out on the town."

"I've already been somewhat on the town." The couple of payday beers Darius had downed after work seemed to have taken place innumerable hours ago, and the ~~black~~ blackness outside the barracks windows didn't scale down that estimate. "Entrails of Judas, man, what time is it?"

"Friday or Saturday."

"Hugh, listen, now." Darius tried to make himself sound more patient



than gritted. "You've had one too many. What you need to do is merely go home and find your own ~~tender~~ ~~sweet~~ bed and--"

"No. Gonna take my brother out on the town, if I have to skid you there."

In the abrupt stillness after that, they could hear the breath~~ing~~ of each other.

"That shouldn't quite be necessary," Darius answered at last.

"Remove yourself from the bedcovers, though, please, so I can at least put some clothes on."

#

Whatever the calendar said, payday always hung a full moon over Wheeler.

Traffic, afoot as well as automotive, was thick enough to be a hazard to the two men as they dodged across the main street. Evidently the clientele was beyond local. Up from chasing sturgeon in the dredge cuts, a fat fisherman in chest-high waders arrived at one of the saloons in front of them and stood, massive rubber bulge filling the doorway, for a moment. The flavor of Wheeler seemed familiar even if he had never tasted the town before, and he exultantly clopped on in.