

TUESDAY:

start with Angus sense of waiting--"Its voices were several", p. 157

--more about winter? work on the pace of ~~the~~ their winter together.

—————
So that is the sheep's-eye view of Gros Ventre. Although one

last jot of description does need to be added. A glance over the shoulder from there by the Sedgwick House and the Medicine Lodge and the Lunchery would readily provide it. The passage of a thousand ewes and their lambs through a town cannot happen without evidence being left on the street, and occasionally the sidewalks. Sheep are nervous enough as it is and being routed through a canyon of buildings does not improve their bathroom manners any. Once Carnelia Muntz, wife of the First National banker, showed up in the bank and said something about all the sheep muss on the streets. Ed Van Bebber happened to be in there cashing a check and, I give him full due, he looked her up and down and advised: "Don't think of them as sheep turds, Carnelia. Think of them as berries off the money tree."

—————

1

early versions of
ms chunks -
some written in Montana,
summer of '82

This time of year, the report from the
dust counties of northeastern Montana
customarily has it that Lady Godiva could
ride through the streets there without even
the horse seeing her. But even ^{over east this} ~~there the~~
spring's rains are said to have thinned the air
sufficiently to give the steed a glimpse.

--Gros Ventre Weekly Gleaner, June 1

That month of June swam into the Two Medicine country. In my

life until then ~~and only a time or two since~~, I had never seen the

sidehills

~~hills~~ come so green, the ^{coulees} ~~draws~~ stay so spongy with run-off. A wet

May evidently could sweeten the universe. Already my father on his

first high patrols was encountering cow elk drifting up and across

the Continental Divide to their calving grounds on the west side.

They, and the grass, and the hay meadows, and the benchland barley,

all were a good three weeks ahead of season. Which ~~accounted~~ of course

accounted for the fresh mood everywhere across the Two. ^{It's said} ~~They say~~ spring

sidehills

coulees

breed
down
of cow

written
up

early draft

How cold the day, but for little wind, in this restless spot
it balances out. Dark comes early, the sun setting south into the

A few years back, the report from down in
the Dust Bowl had it that Lady Godiva could
ride through the streets there without even
the horse seeing her. This spring's rains
have thinned the air sufficiently
are said to be sufficient to give the steed
a glimpse.

^{Weekly}
--Gros Ventre Gleaner, June 1

have
cleared
air?
thinned
air

land, when he takes and re-takes ruthlessly. Carol--New Jersey--

I am at the time now where I try to think what my life might
have been like had I not been born in this Two Medicine country and
How home ground
into the McCaskill family. Oh, I know what's said. Home ground
together and kin lay their touch along us as inevitably naturally as the banks of a
stream direct its water. But that doesn't mean you can't wonder.
Whether substantially the same person would meet you in the mirror
if your birth certificate didn't read as it does. Whether some
other place of growing up would have turned you wiser or dumber,
Here more contented or less. In my own instance, whether my years would
be pretty much as they are by now had I happened into existence in, say,
China or California instead of Montana.

place
people
was

all water
that comes
to it

site

inevitably
inevitably

Well, rain we had had

might
may
weather
may
daisy-
Rained.

rain in range country is as if someone is handing around halves of ten-dollar bills with the remainder promised at shipping time. And so in the sheepmen, the cowmen, the Forest Service people, the storekeepers in Gros Ventre, in just everyone that start of June, hope was up and would stay strong as long as the grass did.

Montana at last

*P.

Talk even could be heard that maybe we had seen the bottom of the Depression. After all, the practitioners of this notion pointed out, last year was a bit more prosperous, or ~~maybe~~ ^{anyway} a bit less desperate, than the year before. A ^{nice} close point of measurement which managed to overlook that for the several years before ^{last,} ~~that~~ the situation of people on the ^{out here} land had been purely godawful. I suppose I ought not to dwell on dollar matters when actually our family was

mean
right

a good
many

was after

scraping along better than ^{a good} many. Even though during the worst years the Forest Service did lay off some rangers--Hoovered them, the saying went--my father was ^{never} ~~not~~ among them. True, his salary was ^{jacked down} ~~chopped~~ from 000 to 000 a month and Christ only knew when it might ever go back up again, but we were getting by. Nothing extra, but getting by.

jacked
down

But it has always graveled me that stock market players who happened to lose their paper fortunes are the remembered figures of those times. The eastern professors who



write as if the Depression set in the day Wall Street tripped over itself in 1929 seem not to know it, but by then Montana had been on

The winter of 1919--some of the men my rocky sledding for ten entire years. ~~Hard times were delivered to the~~ father's age and older still just called it that sonofabitch of a winter--

was the one that delivered hard times to the stockmen. Wholesale.

As Dode Spencer, who had the ranch farthest up the south fork of English Creek, used to tell: I went into that winter '19 winter

with four thousand head of ewes and by spring they'd evaporated to

five hundred. Trouble never travels lonesome, so about that same time

livestock and crop prices nosedived because of the end of the war in

right along with that, Europe, and drought and grasshoppers showed up to take over the dry-land

It began to be a hell of a situation. at farming. Then when drought came back again ~~in~~ the start of the Thirties

and joined company with Herbert Hoover, bad progressed to worse. Year upon year in my own memory, to take just one example from a possible

many stateful, the exodus stories had been coming

out of the High Line country to the north and east of us, and down there on

the very highway which runs through Gros Ventre we saw for ourselves had seen the truth

of those tales, the furniture-loaded jitney trucks with farewells to Montana painted

across their boxboards in big crooked letters: GOODBY OLD DRY and AS FOR

HAVRE YOU CAN ~~REMEMBER~~ HAVE 'ER.

So it was time hope showed up.

Jick! Set your mouth for it!

Supper, and my mother. I remember that all



as they are by now had I happened into existence in, say, China or California instead of ^{northern} Montana.

Any of this of course goes against what my mother forever tried to tell the other three of us. That the past is a taker, not a giver. It was a warning she felt she had to put out, in that particular tone of voice with punctuation all through it, fairly often in our family. When we could start hearing her commas and capital letters we knew the topic had become Facing Facts, Not Going Around with our Heads Stuck in Yesterday. Provocation for it, I will say, came from my father as reliably as a dusk wind out of a canyon. Half a day at a time he might spend listening to old Toussaint tell of the roundup of 1882, when the ~~men~~^{cowmen} fanned their crews north from the elbow of the Teton River to the Canadian line and brought in a hundred thousand head. Or the tale even bigger and earlier than that, the last great buffalo hunt, Toussaint having ridden up into the Sweetgrass Hills to see down onto a prairie that looked burnt, so dark with buffalo, the herd pinned into place by the plains tribes. Strange, but I can still recite the tribes and where they pitched their camps to surround

those miles of buffalo, just as Toussaint passed the lore of it to my father: Crows on the southeast, Gros Ventres and Assiniboines on the northeast, Piegans on the west, Crees along the north, and Flatheads here to the south. "Something to see, that must've been," my father in his recounting to the rest of us at supper. come right back at him would say, "Varick, somebody already saw it," my mother would answer.

"What you'd better Put Your Mind To is the Regional Forester's Visit Tomorrow." Or if she didn't have to work on my father for the moment, there was Alec when he began wearing a neck hanky and ~~saying he was~~ ^{considering} ~~himself a cowboy.~~ going to choose cattle over college. That my own particular knack for remembering, which could tuck away entire grocery lists or whatever someone had told me in innocence a couple of weeks before, made me seem likely to round out a houseful of men tilted to the past must have been her final ~~stem~~ ^{the final stem on her load.} ~~straw.~~ "Jick," I can hear her yet, "there isn't any law that says a McCaskill can't be as forward-looking as anybody else. Just because your father and your brother--"

Yet I don't know. What we say isn't always what we can do.

In the time after, it was her more than anyone who would return and her thoughts return here to where all four of our lives made their bend. "The summer

when--she would start in, and as if the three-note signal of a chickadee had been sung, it told me she was turning to some happening of that last English Creek summer. She and I were alike at least in that, the understanding that such a season of life provides more than enough to wonder back at, even for a McCaskill.

"Jick! Are you coming, or do the chickens get your share?" I

chapter

know with all certainty too that that call to supper was double, because I was ^{then} there at the

age where I had to be called twice for anything. Anyway, that second

^{of hers} summons brought me out of the barn just as the pair of them, Alec and

Leona, ^{topped} ~~came galloping~~ into view at the eastern rise of the county road. That is, I knew my brother as far

as I could see him by that head-up way he rode. Leona would need

to be somewhat nearer before I could verify her by her blouseful,

~~those days~~ but ~~at that time~~ if you ~~never~~ saw Alec you were pretty sure to be

seeing Leona too.

———

If I was a believer in omens, the start of that next morning ought to have told me something.

The rigamarole of untangling out of our bedrolls and getting the campfire going and making sure the horses hadn't quit the country during the night, all that went usual enough. Then, though, my father glanced around at me from where he had the coffee pot heating over a corner of the fire and asked: Ready for a cup, Alec?

Well, that will pahhen in a family. A moment of absent-mindedness, or the tongue just slipping a cog from what was intended. Ordinarily it wouldn't have riled me at all. But all this recent business about Alec, and my own wondering about where anybody in this family stood any more, and I don't know what all else--it now brought a response which scraped out of me like flint: I'm the other one.

Surprise passed over my father; then I guess what is called conciliation.

You sure as hell are, he said. Unmistakably Jick.

———

Only the ^{very} northmost portion of the national forest actually has anything at all to do with the Two Medicine River, ^{or Two Medicine Lake.} It's up in that vicinity ^{where} ~~that~~ the forest joins onto the south boundary of Glacier National Park, fitting ⁱⁿ there between the park, the continental divide and the Blackfeet reservation like a big square peninsula on the map. The Two Medicine, the river that is, has its source up in the Rockies like all the ~~flows~~ water of this region, but cuts a distinctive canyon across the plains as it pushes east to meet the Marias River.... So, apparently it is just the ring of the words, Two Medicine, that has carried the name south all the way along the mountains to our English Creek area. The derivation as I've heard it ~~is~~ is that the Blackfeet made their medicine lodge two years in a row in the valley near the lake, and the name lasted from that. By whatever way Two Medicine came to be, it is a pretty interesting piece of language, I think.

The fracture of a family is not something that happens clean
and sharp, so that you at least know ~~from~~ that from here on it ^{will} begin
to be over with. No, it is like one of those worst bone breaks, a
shatter. You can mend the place, peg it and splint it and work to
strengthen it, and while the surface can be brought to look much as
it did before, it always remains a spot that has to be favored.

And if I didn't ^{grasp} ~~know~~ much, I at least knew that last night's rift
in our family
was nowhere near over.

8 1/2
did. & know
much, &
at last
never

1

Where horses were concerned, my father's imagination took a vacation. A black horse he invariably named Coaly, a blaze-face was always Star. Currently, though, he was riding a big dun gelding who, on my mother's suggestion when she first saw the dim-colored colt, ~~carried~~^{bore} the name of Mouse. I was on a short-legged mare called Pony.

Frankly, high among my hopes about this business of growing up was ~~get a considerably~~ that I would ~~get~~ a more substantial horse out of it. If and when I did, I vowed to give the creature as much name as it could carry, such as Rimfire or Chief Joseph or Calabash.

considerably

We also were leading one pack horse with us, to deliver some bolts and flanges and cable to the crew building a fire lookout on Billy Peak, after we did the sheep counting. That third horse was an elderly sorrel whom my father addressed as Brownie but the rest of us called by the name he'd been given before the Forest Service deposited him at the English Creek station ~~with~~^{to} Homer. Having Homer along was a cause for mixed emotions. One more horse is always a nuisance to contend with, yet the presence of a pack horse also made the journey seem more substantial; testified that you weren't just jaunting off to somewhere, you were transporting. Packstrings had been the lifeblood

of the Forest Service ever since its birth, the hoofed carriers of supply into the countless mountains of the west. I know for a fact that my father considered that the person most important to his job as English Creek ranger was not anyone up the hierarchy from him, the forest superintendent or the regional forester or any of those, but his packer, Isidor Pronovost. Probably the story my father told oftenest was of being with Isidor on one of the highest trails in this part of the mountains, where a misstep by one pack horse might pull all the rest into a tumble a few thousand feet down the slope, when Isidor turned in his saddle and called: Mac, if ~~was~~ we was to roll this packstring right about here, the bastards'd roll until they stunk.

Since the lookout gear and our food ~~only~~ amounted to a load for one horse, it hadn't been necessary to ^{hire} call on Isidor for this counting trip of ours. But even absent he had his influence as we ^{arranged} ~~arranged~~ the packs on Homer that morning, both my father and I total converts to Isidor's ^{perpetual} preaching that in ^{a horse,} packing, balance is everything. It took some finagling, say to make a roll of half-inch cable on one side of Homer equivalent to some canned goods on the other side of him, but finally my father

proclaimed: There, looks to me like we got it Isidored.

Some winters ago, Isidor and his brother Gabe, a noted packer in his own right, and my father brought out the

pilot and co-pilot ^{from} of the airplane ~~that~~ crashed above the north fork of English Creek. My mother and Alec and I heard that plane as it

buzzed past west of the ranger station, then when we heard the motor noise again we looked at one another, as if confirming that a machine ^{could be} ~~was~~ circling in the overcast next to these mountains, and then my mother spun to the telephone and rang the airport in Great Falls. All the passengers had been ^{taken}

off there because of ^{how} the weather ^{looked,} but they plane was ^{trying to go} going on to Spokane with the mail. Evidently its instruments went wrong, ^{for} because it ^{slammed} flew

^{east} directly into the ^{side} of ^{Spring} Mountain. The next day a National Guard search plane managed to spot the wreckage, and then a couple ^{more} of days

ensued while a postal inspector ^{trotted} ~~came~~ out from Spokane ^{to see} and saw to the salvage of the mail, and after all that was concluded it was up to my

father and Isidor and ~~George~~ ^{Gabe} to bring down the two bodies. Both ^{of course} were frozen stiff in the positions they had been flung into, so the packers wrapped them in a manti apiece as they were and slid the bundles ^{on the snow} down

the mountain to the trail and that night's camp. The intention was ~~in~~ ^{next} the morning to fold each body face-down across a pack saddle. That

could be

*twice
like a
propeller
with a
windmill*

night turned clear and cold, however, and ⁱⁿ the ~~next~~ morning the bodies
 couldn't be bent at all. Isidor proclaimed ^{that, by the God,} ~~that~~ of all the packing he ever
 had done, this problem was a new one on him. ^{He saw no choice} ~~There was nothing to do,~~

though, except tie both bodies on one horse, one ^{lengthwise} ~~on~~ each side. ~~But~~

And that is the way we saw them arrive, with that balanced cargo of
 what had been men, to the English Creek station where a hearse from
 Great Falls was waiting.

No thousand
 or more people

1

So the day was summed and we had dined on trout and the campfire was warmth and light against the night, and we had nothing that needed doing except to contemplate until sleep overcame us. My thoughts circled among Alec and my mother and my father--somewhat onto Leona, too--and what had happened last night. But mostly, I suppose because he was there next to me in the firelight, ~~because~~ it was my father at the center of my mulling.

I am hard put to know how to describe him as he seemed to me then. How to lay him onto paper, for a map is never the country itself, only some ink suggesting the way to get there. Season somehow seems to bring out more about him than sketchwork does, and so I believe that to come close to any understanding of Varick ^{Mc}Caskill you would have had to spend a full year at his side--

Despite what the calendar indicates, autumn was the onset, or threshold you could say, of a ^{Mc}Caskill year. The Two Medicine National Forest got reworked by my father each autumn almost as if making sure to himself that he still had all of that ~~kingdom~~ ^{zone} of geography. Of course every ranger is supposed to inspect the conditions of his forest at

the end of the grazing season. My father all but X-rayed the Two.

South Fork and North Fork, up under the reefs, in beyond Heart Butte,

the Two

day after day he delved ~~his forest~~ ^{the Two}. And somehow too when the bands

of sheep trailed down and ~~flowed~~ ^{streamed} toward the ~~ships~~ railroad chutes *streamed*

at Blackfoot or Pendroy, he was on hand there to look them over, talk

jackpot bets

join in the jackpot bets about how much the lambs would weigh.
with the herders, the ranchers, the lamb buyers, I suppose it was

the time of year when he could ~~bet up~~ ^{assess} his job, see right there on the

hoof the results of his rangers. In a man who sometimes seemed

doubtful whether his life totted up to what it should, that must have

been a necessary ^{inventory} season, autumn.

He never wintered well. Came down with colds, sieges of hacking

respir

and sniffing, ^{fissures} strange in a man of his size and strength. Had it not

he tutored Alec and me in,
been for the trapping, he might have gone through all those winter months

which in Montana could amount to five or six, like someone you would

think was a permanent pneumonia candidate. The trapping, though, was

an excuse to defy the season and put in hours outdoors. ^{(as well as being} ~~Also, it was~~

^{the family} ~~a way to add to our income, which never was too much.~~ At that time,

there still were plenty of beaver ~~in~~ in English Creek. Too many, in

the view of the ranchers who would find their meadows flooded. And

weasels were a considerable ^{creek} population, too, and occasional mink.

My father

~~He~~ never said so--again, not what you'd expect, because otherwise he

seldom minded talking--but the way ^{a trapped} ~~the~~ animal died must have bothered

him. However many gnawed-off feet it had taken to persuade him, by the

~~he was teaching Alec and me he insisted that we set~~
time ~~I knew anything of his trapping he was setting~~ spring poles on

at least the weasel traps; beaver of course are trapped at their hutches,

in such a way that they drown ^{promptly.} With a spring pole, the weasel or ^{mink} ~~or~~

would be snapped up off the ground and hung into the air to freeze to

death within an hour or so, rather than fighting the trap for days or
I suppose that my father's view was that a

gnawing its own foot off. ~~that~~ spring pole was not much mercy in a
cruel situation, but some.



Spring is the uneven season on the Two. You can't ever be sure when it's going to arrive, then if it happens to, whether it's going to stay beyond the next twenty minutes. More than a few times I have known mid-May snowfalls, the damp heavy ~~doughy~~ ones, to ~~hit~~ ^{blanket} this country, and I see in my father's day book that this particular year, the record wetness of May included one of those bread dough snows, on the weekend of the 20th and 21st. That these spring snowstorm are perilous to the lambs and calves but also are magnificent grass-bringers is your usual,

Montana situation of on the one hand this, on the other hand that. I sometimes think if ^{a person} you had third and fourth hands, there'd be some ^{damn soon} other hard Montana proposition on ^{those} them, too.

now

Anyway, my father seemed to green up with the country each spring. Paperwork he had put off all winter would get tackled and disposed of. All of the gear of the English Creek station got a going-over, saddles, bridles, pack saddles, fire equipment.

now

And from the first moment that charitably might be classified as spring, he read the mountains. Watched the snow ~~showed~~ hem along the peaks, judging how fast ~~the~~ the drifts were melting. Cast a glance to

English Creek various times of each day, to see how high it was running.

Kept mental tally of the wildlife, when the deer started back up into

the mountains, when the fur of the ~~oo~~^{would} turned from white to ~~oo~~^{gray},

how soon the first fresh pile of coal-black crap in the middle of

a trail ~~would~~^{ed} show that bears were out of hibernation. To my father,

and through him to the rest of ~~the~~^{us in} family, the mountains were their own

almanac, you might say. That being true, our specific chunk of the

Rockies, the Two country, seemed to us a special gold-leaf edition:

positioned as it was along the east slope of the divide of the continent,

its water and welfare touching out to the plains. ~~xx~~ In spring, with

the Two opening itself in newness and promise wherever you happened to

glance, I believe that my father could not imagine any better neighborhood

of the planet.

^{finally}
And ~~the~~ summer. Well, we were embarking on summer now, and how it

would turn out I truly could not imagine. Nor did it come any clearer

to me in ~~the~~^{that} span of time from supper until my father said See you

in sunshine and we both turned in.

in a big pile of crap

—————

1
Myself, I liked sheep. Or rather, I didn't mind sheep as such,
which is the best a person can do towards creatures whose wool begins
in their brain, and I liked the idea of sheep. ~~Maybe because sheep~~

now
True,
~~And while~~ sheep had to be troubled with more than cattle did, but
the troubling was on a smaller scale. Pulling a lamb from a ewe's
womb is nothing to untangling a leggy calf from the inside of a heifer.
And a sheep you can brand by dabbing a splot of paint on her back,
not needing to invite half the county in to maul your livestock
around in the dust of a branding corral. ~~Therefore~~ More and more in
life I ~~find myself favoring proportion, and~~
~~think proportion counts for a lot~~ sheep somehow simply ~~and~~

looked proper to me on those slopes of the two. To my notion, cattle
on the same pasture stick out like pepper on meringue, but sheep
blend with the country as sage or some other ~~natural~~ ^{normal} coloration would.
A kind of instant ~~perpetual~~ ^{natural} crop, sheep somehow are; under a strong-
eyed herder who has them in graze across a half-mile of wildflower
slope, sheep seem as if generations of them always have been right
there, cloudlike ~~but everlasting~~ ^{yet perpetual}, and the grass and the ~~blossoms~~ ^{flowers} just
now have been put in ~~under them~~ ^{under them} fresh for the year. ~~under them~~

[Handwritten signature]

Nor do I hold with the argument that sheep destroyed such pasture. Put enough white mice or ostriches or anything else on a piece of land and you can overgraze it. No, if sense was used, if the sheep were moved around adequately on the range and there weren't more of them than the grass could stand, there was nothing in this world wrong with pasturing sheep on a portion of a forest. Anybody who slanders them as "hoofed locusts" or "bleaters and eaters" can also explain to me a better way to transform wild grass into food and fiber.

As with any number of men of his age who had grown up around stock in our part of Montana, my father had worked with both cattle and sheep. Range wars were not ^{much} the Montana style, ~~and most particularly~~ ~~and most particularly~~ not ~~one~~ the Two Medicine fashion. Oh, there had been one early ruckus south on the Sun River, of some cowman kiying over to try kill off a neighboring band of sheep, and probably in any town along the mountains you could still find an occasional young hammerhead who proclaimed himself nothing but a cowboy and never capable of drawing breath as anything else, especially not as a mutton puncher. (Which isn't to say that most shepherders weren't equally irreversibly shepherders,

but somehow that point never seemed to need announcing as it did with cowboys.) By and large, though, the Montana philosophy of make-do, as practiced by our sizable ranching proportion of Scotchmen, Germans, Norwegians, and Missourians, meant that ranchers simply tried to figure out which species did best, sheep or cows, and often ended up with both.

And so sheep in those Depression years were the sustenance, the manna, of the Two country. For a month solid at the start of summer, a band of sheep a day would pass through Gros Ventre on the way north to the Blackfoot Reservation, Tommy Larson and Guy Miller each trailing several bands from all the way down by Choteau, and the Bartley brothers and Broadhurst Smith and Ira Perkins and the others bringing theirs from around Bynum and Pendroy, and even Charlie Farrell from here on English Creek took his three bands to the Reservation instead of up onto the national forest. That was a time on the Reservation when you could see a herder's wagon atop practically every rise: a fleet of white wagons anchored across the land. And off to the east, out of

view, the big sheep outfits from Washington were running their tens of thousands, too, and of course to the west here my father's forest pastured the many English Creek bands--sum it how you will, from the sides of the Rockies out onto the plains where the farming began, the whole country was sheep.

Canada Dan's ~~most~~ sheep were ~~sort of~~ bunched ^{in a long thick line} against a stand of jackpine. ~~There was~~ a lot of ~~blatting~~ ^{was} going on, ~~and~~ ^{as if there was} an uneasiness among them. A shepherd who knows what he is doing in timber probably is good in open country too, but vice versa is not necessarily the case,

and I remember ^{ed} my father mentioning that Canada Dan had been herding ~~on~~ ^{over} ~~the~~ by Cut Bank, ~~eastern Montana by Ingomar,~~ plains country. ~~the plains over by CO.~~ A herder new to timber ~~country~~ ^{terrain} and skittish

about it will dog the bejesus out of his sheep, keep them ^{band tight} together for fear of losing some. As we rode up, Canada Dan's ~~dog~~ ^{marked patch-colored sheepdog} looked weary, panting, and I saw Stanley study considerably the way these sheep were crammed along the slope.

"Been looking for you since day before yesterday," Canada Dan greeted us. "I'm goddamn near out of canned milk."

"That so?" said Stanley. "Lucky thing near isn't the same as out."

Canada Dan was looking me up and down now. "You that ranger's kid?"

I didn't care for the way that was put, and just said back:

"Jick McCaskill." Too, I was wondering how many more times that day

I was going to ~~have to~~ ^{need to} identify myself to people I'd had no farthest intention

of getting involved with.

Canada Dan targeted on Stanley again. bring along to Got to have a kid

*to
order to*

play nursemaid ^{for} to you now, Stanley? Must be getting on in years.

"I bunged up my hand," Stanley responded shortly. "Jick's been generous enough to pitch in with me."

Canada Dan shook his head as if my sanity was at issue. "He's gonna regret charity when he sees the goddamn chore we got for ourselves up here."

"What would that be, Dan?"

"About fifteen head of goddamn dead ones, that's what. They got onto some death camas, maybe three days back. Poisoned themselves before you could say 'sic 'em." Canada Dan reported all this as if an accidental passerby he was a bystander instead of being responsible for these animals.

Former animals, they were now.

"That's a bunch of casualties," Stanley agreed. "I didn't happen to notice the pelts anywhere there at the wag--"

"Happened right up over here," Canada Dan went on as if he hadn't heard, gesturing to the ridge close behind him. "Just glommed onto that death camas like it was goddamn candy. C'mon here, I'll show you." The herder shrugged out of his coat, tossed it down on

an accidental passerby



the grass, pointed to it and instructed his dog: "Stay, Rags." The ~~dog~~ ^{came and lay} on the coat, facing the sheep, and Canada Dan trudged up the ridge without ever glancing back at the dog or us.

I began to dread the way this was trending.

The place Canada Dan led us to was a pocket meadow of bunch grass, interspersed with pretty white blossoms and with gray mounds here and there on it. The blossoms were deathcamas, and the mounds were the dead ewes. Even as cool as the weather had been, they were bloated almost to bursting.

That's them, the herder identified for our benefit. It's sure convenient of you fellows to show up. All that goddamn skinning, I can stand all the help I can get.

Stanley did take the change ~~to~~ to get a shot in on him. "You been too occupied the past three days to get to them, I guess?" But it bounced off Canada Dan like a berry off a buffalo.

We all three looked at the sheep for awhile. There is not too much you can say about bloated sheep carcasses. After a ^{bit} while, though, Canada Dan offered in a grim satisfied way: "That'll teach the goddamn buggers to eat death camas."

"Well," Stanley expounded next. "There's no such thing as one-handed

4

✓

skinning. Which doubled the sense of ~~the~~ dread in me. I thought to myself, But there is one-handed tipping of a bottle, and one-handed dragging me into this campjack expedition, and one-handed weaseling out of what was impending ^{here} next and... All this while, Stanley was looking off in some direction carefully away from me. "I can be unloading the grub into Dan's wagon while this goes on, then come back with the mare so we can lug these pelts in. Guess I ought to get at it."

Stanley reined away, leading the pack horses toward the sheepwagon, and Canada Dan beaded on me. "Don't just stand there in your tracks, kid. Plenty of these goddamn pelters for both of us."

So for the next long while, I was delving in ewe carcasses, slicing the hides loose around the hooves and then down the legs and around the milk bag, and at last the big incision along the belly which, if ~~you ~~wasn't~~~~ ^{your jackknife} slipped just a little bit, would bring the guts pouring out ^{all over} into your project. It ~~all~~ had to be done, because the pelts at least would bring a dollar apiece for the Busby brothers and a dollar then was still worth holding in your hand. But that it was necessary did not make it any less snotty a job. I don't know whether you have ever skinned a sheep which has lain dead in the rain for a few days, but the clammy wet wool adds into ^{the} your situation the possibility

of wool poisoning, ^{that} so the thought of puffed painful hands accompanied ⁵

all your handling of the pelt. *That and a whole lot else on my mind,*

no # So I slit and slit ^{and slit,} tugging pelt off bloated belly and stiffened

legs. I started off careful not to work fast, in the hope that Canada

Dan would slice right along and thereby skin the majority of the carcasses.

It of course turned out that his strategy was identical and that he

had had ~~more~~ countless more years of practice at being slow than I did.

In ~~any~~ other circumstances I might even have admired the drama in the way

he would stop often, straighten up to ease what he told me several times was the

world's worst crick in his back, and contemplate my ^{scalpel} ~~skinning~~ technique ^{skeptically}

before finally ^{bending} getting back to his own. Out of his experience, my father

always testified that he'd rather work any day with shearers rather

than cowboys. You might come across a herder that's loony now and then,

but at least they aren't so apt to be such self-inflated sonsabitches.

Right about now, I wondered about that choice. If Canada Dan was

representative, shearers didn't seem to be any bargains of companionability

either. # Finally I gave up on trying to outslow Canada Dan and went at

the skinning ~~as~~ quick as I could, to get it over with.

Canada Dan's estimate of fifteen dead ewes proved to be eighteen.

Also, I noticed that six of the pelts were branded with a bar above

the number, signifying that the ewe was a mother of twins. Which

summed out to the fact that besides the eighteen casualties, there

6

✓

were two dozen newly mother less lambs who would weight light at shipping time.

This came to Stanley's attention too when he ~~came~~^{arrived} back leading the pack mare and we--or rather I, because Stanley of course didn't have the hand for it and Canada Dan made no move toward the task whatsoever--slung the first load of pelts onto the pack saddle. Guess we know what all that lamb blatting's about, now, ^{observed Stanley.} Canada Dan didn't seem to hear this, either.

Instead, ~~he~~ he turned and was trudging rapidly across the slope toward his sheepwagon. He whistled the dog from his coat and sent him policing after a few ewes who had dared to stray out onto open grass, then yelled back over his shoulder to us: It's about belly time. C'mon to the wagon when you get those goddamn pelts under control, I got us a meal all fixed.

I looked down at my hands and forearms, so filthy with blood and other sheep stuff ~~I~~ didn't even want to think about that I hated to touch the reins and saddlehorn to climb onto Pony. But I did climb on, for it was inevitable as if Bible-written that now I had to ride in with Stanley to the sheepwagon, unload these wet slimy pelts because he wasn't able,

ride back out with him for the second batch, load them, ride back in
and unload--seeing it all unfold I abruptly spoke out: Stanley!

Yeah, Jick? The brown Stetson turned most of the way in my
direction. All the ways to say what I intended to competed in my mind.

Stanley, this just isn't going to work out...Stanley, this deal was

my father's brainstorm and not mine, I'm heading down that trail for

home...Stanley, I'm not up to--to riding herd on you and doing the work

of this ~~dingbat~~ ^{wampus cat} of a sheepherder and maybe getting wool poisoning and--

but when my mouth ^{did} ~~moved~~ again, I heard it mutter:

Nothing, I guess.

After wrestling the second consignment of pelts into shelter under
Canada Dan's sheepwagon, I went up by the door to wash. Beside the basin
on the chopping block lay a sliver of gray soap, which proved to be so
coarse my skin nearly grated off along with the sheep blood and other mess.

^I
But ~~at~~ least felt scoured fairly clean.

Is there a towel? I called into the sheepwagon with what I considered
a fine tone of indignation in my voice.

The upper part of Canada Dan appeared at the dutch door. Right
there in front of you, he pointed to a gunny sack hanging from a corner

of the wagon. Your eyes bad?

I dried off as best I could on the gunny sack, feeling now as if I'd been rasped from elbow to fingertip, and swung on into the sheepwagon. The table of this wagon was a square ^{of wood} about the size of a big checkerboard, which pulled out from under the bunk at the far end of the wagon and then was supported by a gate leg which folded down, and Stanley had tucked himself onto the seat on one side of it. Canada Dan as cook and host I knew would need to be nearest the stove and ~~so would~~ sit on a stool at the outside end of the table, so I slid into the seat opposite Stanley, ^{going real} being careful because three people in a sheepwagon is about twice too many.

KEEYIPE! ~~some~~ erupted from under my inmost foot, about the same instant my nose caught the distinctive smell of wet dog warming up.

Here now, what the hell kind of manners is that, walking on my dog? He does that again, Rags, you want to bite the notion right ^{out} off him. This must have been Canada Dan's idea of hilarity, for he laughed a little now in what I considered an egg-sucking way.

Or it may simply have been his pleasure over the meal he had concocted. Onto the table now the herder plunked a metal plate with a boiled



~~Onto the table the herder plunked a metal plate with a ~~x~~ boiled~~
chunk of meat on it, then followed that with a stained pan of what
looked like small moth balls.

"Like I say, I figured you might finally show up today, so I
fixed you a duke's choice of grub," he crowed. "Get yourselves
started with that hominy." Then, picking up a hefty butcher knife,

Canada Dan slabbed off a thickness of the grayish greasy meat and

~~"You even got your wide choice of meat. Here's~~
toppled it aside. ~~"You got your choice of mutton."~~ He sliced off

~~more~~ another slab. "Or then again there's growed-up lamb." The

butcher knife produced a third plank-thick piece. "Or you can

always have sheep meat." ~~He~~ ^{Canada Dan} divvied the slices onto our plates

and concluded: "A menu you don't get just everywhere, ain't it?"

"Yeah," Stanley said slower than ever, and swallowed experimentally.

The report crossed my mind that I had just spent ~~an hour and a~~ ^{a couple of hours}

~~half~~ elbow-deep in dead sheep and now I was being expected to eat

some of one, but I tried to keep it traveling. Time, as it's said,

was the essence here. The only resource a person has against mutton

is to eat it fast, before it has a chance for the tallow in it to

congeal. So I poked mine into me pretty rapidly, and even so the

*mis
eat.
Here's*

last several bites were greasy going. Stanley by then wasn't much more than getting started ~~on his~~.

While Canada Dan forked steadily through his meal and Stanley mused

around with his, I finished off the hominy on the theory that anything into the digestive process you mixed with mutton was probably all to the good. Then I ~~looked~~ ^{gazed}

into digestive process

out the dutch door of the sheepwagon while waiting on Stanley.

The afternoon was going darker, a look of coming rain. My father more than likely was done by now with the counting of Dode Spencer's band. He would be on his way up to the Billy Peak lookout, and the big warm dry camp tent there, and the company of somebody other than Canada Dan or Stanley Meixell, and probably another supper of brookies. I hoped devoutly the rain already had started directly onto whatever piece of trail he might be riding just now.

Canada Dan meanwhile had rolled himself a cigarette and ^{was} ~~filled~~ ^{ing} the wagon with blue smoke while Stanley worked himself to the halfway point of his slab of mutton. "Staying the night, ain't you?" the herder said more as observation than question. "You can set up

11-

the tepee, regular goddamn canvas hotel. It only leaks a little
where it's ripped in that one corner. Been meaning to sew the
sonofabitch up.

"Well, actually, no," said Stanley. This perked me up more
than anything had in hours. Maybe there ^{existed fingernail of} ~~was~~ some hope for Stanley

after all. "We got all that pack gear to keep dry, so we'll just
go on over to that line cabin down on ^{Spencer's school section,} ~~Cooper's.~~ Fact is"--Stanley

here took the chance to shove away his still mutton-laden plate and
as if night was stampeding toward him--
get to his feet. "we better be getting ourselves over there if we're
gonna beat dark. You ready, Jick?

Was I.

as if night
was stampeding
toward him

##



Spencer's line cabin stood just outside the eastern boundary of the forest, through a barbwire fence. We had ridden more than an hour to get there, the weather steadily heavier and grimmer all around us, and Stanley fairly grim himself, I guess from the mix of alcohol and mutton sludging around beneath his belt. ~~He hadn't said a word nor~~

Once when I glanced back to be sure I still had him I ^{happened to see him} saw Stanley make an awkward lob into the trees, that ^{high-armed} exaggerated way when you throw with your wrong hand. So he had run out of bottle, and at least I could look forward to an unpickled Stanley from here on. I hoped he wasn't the kind who came down with the DTs as he dried out.

The whole way from Canada Dan's sheepwagon he never said a word nor even glanced ahead any farther than his horse's ears; didn't even stir when we reached the boundary fence. In a hurry to get us into the cabin before the weather cut loose I hopped off Pony to open the gate.

My hand was just almost to the top wire hoop when there was a terrific yell: GODaMIGHTy, get aWAY from that!

I jumped back as if ^{flung} ~~burned~~, looking around to see what ~~the hell~~ had roused Stanley like that.

"Go find a club and knock it open with that," he instructed.

"You happen to be touching that wire and lightning hits that fence,

I'll have fried Jick for supper.

So I humored him, went off and found a sizable dead limb of
jackpine and tapped the hoop up off the top of the gate stick with it,
and then used it to fling the gate off to one side the way you might
flip a big snake. The hell of it was, I knew Stanley was ^{out-and-out} right. A
time, lightning hit ^{Ed Van Belber's} ~~the~~ fence ^{up} across the road from the English Creek





station and the whole top wire melted for about fifty yards in either direction, dropping off in little chunks as if ~~you'd cut it up with~~ ^{it'd been minced}

~~by~~ fencing pliers. I knew as well as anything not to touch a wire fence

in a storm: why then had I damn near done it? ~~Why but for having~~ All I can say in my own

~~defense is that you just try going Stanley Meixell on my mind? ~~my~~~~ around with Stanley Meixell on your

mind as much as he had been on mine since mid-morning, and see if

you don't do one or another thing dumb.

was resigned by now to

I ~~knew~~ what was in store for me at the cabin, so started in on

right away, the it, ~~unpacking~~ ^{unpacking} the mare and Bubbles. Already I had size, my father's

long bones the example to mine, and could do the respected packer's

trick of reaching all the way across the horse's back ~~and ^{to} ~~unpack~~~~ lift

off-side those packs ~~off~~ from where I was standing, instead of going back and

forth around the horse all the time. I did the mare and then carefully

began uncargoing Bubbles, Stanley hanging onto the bridle and matter-of-factly

promising Bubbles he would yank his goddamn head off if he gave any

trouble. Then as I swung the last pack over and off, a hefty lift

I managed to do without bumping the pack saddle and giving Bubbles an

excuse for excitement, Stanley pronounced:

no 9

Oh, to be young and fucking twice a day again. # He took notice

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of the considerable impact of this on me. 'Scuse my French, Jick.

It's just a saying us old coots have.

Nonetheless it echoed around in me as I lugged the packs through the cabin door and stood them in a corner. By now thunder was applauding lighting higher up the mountain and the rain was arriving in earnest, my last couple of trips outside considerably damp. Stanley meanwhile was trying to inspire a fire in the rickety stove.

The accumulated chill in the cabin had us both shivering as we waited for the stove to produce some result.

"Feels in here like it's gonna frost," I muttered.

"Yeah," Stanley agreed. "About a foot."

That delivered me a thought I didn't particularly want. "What, ah, what if this turns to snow?" I could see myself blizzarded in here for a week with this reprobate.

"Aw, I don't imagine it will. Lightning like this, it's probably just a thunderstorm." Stanley contemplated the rain spitting onto the cabin window and evidently was reminded that his pronouncement came close to being was almost good news. "Still, you never know," he amended.

———
The cabin wasn't much, just a roofed-over bin of jackpine logs, maybe fifteen feet long and ten wide and with a single window beside the door at the south end; but at least was drier than outside. Outside in fact was showing every sign of anticipating ~~approaching~~ a night-long bath. The face of the Rocky Mountains gets more weather than any other place I know of and you just have to abide by that fact. I considered the small stash of wood behind the stove, mostly kindling, and headed back out for enough armfuls for the night and morning. Off along the tree line I found plenty of squaw wood, which already looked damp but snapped okay when I tromped it in half over a log.

With that provisioning done and a bucket of water lugged from a seep of spring about seventy yards out along the slope, I declared myself in for the evening and shed my wet slicker. Stanley through all this stayed half-propped, half-sitting on an end of the little plank table. Casual as a man waiting for a bus. His stillness set me to wondering just how much whiskey was in him--after all, he'd been like a mummy on the ride from Canada Dan's camp, too--and so before long I angled across the room, as if exercising the saddle hours out of my legs, for a closer peek at him.

At first I wasn't enlightened by what I saw. The crowfoot lines at the corners of Stanley's eyes were showing deep and sharp, as if he was squinched up to study closely at something, and he seemed washed-out, whitish, across that part of his face, too. Like any Montana kid I had seen my share of swacked-up people, ^{yet} but Stanley didn't really look liquored. No, he looked more like--

How's that hand of yours? I inquired, putting my suspicion as lightly as I knew how.

Stanley roused. Feels like it's been places. He moved his gaze past me and around the cabin interior. Not so bad quarters. ^{Not much} ~~No worse~~ peck rat palace, than I remember this place, anyway.

Maybe we ought to have a look, I persisted. That wrapping's seen better times. Before he could ^{walty} enunciate off onto some other topic I stepped over to him and untied the rust-colored wrapping.

When I unwound that fabric, the story was gore. The back of Stanley's hand between the first and last knuckles was skinned raw the sharp edge of where Bubbles' hoof had shoved off skin: raw and seepy and butchered-looking. ~~battered.~~

Jesus H. Christ, I breathed.

Aw, could be worse. I'll get it looked at when I get to town. There's some

180
bag balm in my saddlebag there. Get the lid off that for me ^{will you,} and

I'll dab some on."

Stanley slathered the balm thick across the back of his hand and I stepped over ^{again} and began to rewrap it for him. He noticed that the wrapping was not the blood-stained handkerchief. "Where'd you come up with that?"

"The tail off my clean shirt."

"Your ma's gonna like to hear that."

I shrugged. Trouble seemed lined up deep enough here in company with Stanley that my mother's turn at it was a long way off.

"Well," Stanley said, moving his bandaged hand with a wince he didn't want to show and I didn't really want to see. The Stanleys of this world do not show pain easily.

It seemed to me time to try get Stanley's mind off his wound, and to bring up what I figured was a natural topic. So I queried:

"What are we ^{going to} gonna do about supper?"

Stanley peered at me a considerable time. ^{Then said:} "I seem to distinctly remember Canada Dan feeding us."

"That was a while back," I defended. "Sort of a second lunch."

Stanley shook his head a bit and voted himself out. "I don't
just feel like anything, right now. You go ahead."

So now things ~~had~~ had reached the point where I had lost out even on my father's scattershot version of cooking, and was going to have to invent my own. After fighting the stove for awhile to get any real heat from it, I managed to warm a can of pork and beans and ate them with some slices of ~~uncooked~~ bread smeared with mayonnaise ~~because I came across it in the pack before I did the butter.~~ knew the butter would be down deeper in the pack with other unbreak-ables. Canada Dan's cooking must have stuck with me more than I was aware, though, as I didn't even think to open any canned fruit for dessert.

Meanwhile ~~The weather seemed to be getting steadily more rambunctious.~~ ^{grew}

Along those mountainsides thunder can roll and roll, and claps were arriving to us now like beer barrels tumbling down stairs.

In my head I always counted the miles to how far away the lightning had hit--something I still ~~was~~ ^{find myself doing--} so when the next bolt winked, some ~~was~~ ^{where} out the south window, I ~~began to~~ ^{began the formula:}

One, a-thousand.

Two, a-thousand.

Three...The boom reached us then, the bolt had ~~hit~~ ^{struck} just more than two miles off. That could be worse, and likely would be. Meanwhile rain was raking the cabin. We could hear it drum against the west wall as well as on the roof.

Sounds like we got a dewy night ahead of us, Stanley offered.

He looked a little perkier now. Myself, I was beginning to droop, the day catching up with me. The cabin didn't have any beds ~~such~~ as such, cobbled-together just a ~~double~~ bunk arrangement with planks where you'd like a mattress to be. But any place to be prone looked welcome, and I got up from the table to untie my bedroll from behind my saddle and spread it onto the upper planks.

The sky split white outside the cabin. ~~The~~ ^{That} crack of thunder I honestly felt as much as heard. A jolt through the air; as if a quake had leapt upward out of the earth.

I believe my hair ^{swept} was straight on end, from that blast of noise passing through. But Stanley didn't show any ruffle at all. "The quick hard of God, my ma used to say."

"Yeah, well, I'd just as soon it grabbed around someplace else."

I stood waiting for the next cataclysm, although what really was on my mind was the saying that ^{you'll} ~~you~~ never hear the lightning bolt that hits you. The ~~rain was~~ ^{rattled} constantly loud now. At last there ~~was~~ ^{came} a big crackling sound quite a way off, and while I knew nature is not that regular I told myself the lightning portion of the storm had moved beyond us, and I announced to Stanley, I'm turning in.

What, already?

Yeah, already--a word which for some reason annoyed me as much as anything had all day. I swung myself into the bunk.

Guess I'm more foresighted than I knew, I heard Stanley go on, to bring Doctor Hall along for company.

Who? I asked, my eyes open again at this. Gros Ventre's physician was Doc Spence, and I knew he was nowhere near our vicinity.

Stanley ~~had~~ ^{up} lanked himself and casually went over to the packs.

Doctor Hall, he repeated as he brought out his good hand from a pack, a brown bottle of whiskey in it. Doctor Al K. Hall.

—————

commotion

The night I suppose continued in ~~tumult~~. But at that age I could ~~have slept~~ ~~sleep~~ through a piano tuners' convention. Came morning, I was up and around--the nearest reef and the peak south beyond it both ~~were~~ ^{stood} in sun, as if the little square of window had been made into a picture from ~~the~~ ^{of} the Alps--while Stanley still lay flopped in the lower bunk. I lit a fire and went out to check on the horses and brought in a pail of fresh water, and even then he hadn't budged, just was breathing like he'd decided ~~on~~ hibernation. The bottle ~~was~~ ^{which had} ~~of~~ ~~him~~ nursed him into that condition, I noticed, was down by about a third. Telling myself he could starve to death in bed for all I cared, I ~~set~~ ~~about~~ ~~to~~ fashion breakfast for myself, heating up a can of peas and ~~more~~ ^{was} ~~or~~ ~~less~~ ~~toasting~~ some slices of bread by holding them over the ~~open~~ ~~fire~~ ~~stove~~ on a fork.

Eventually Stanley joined the day. As he worked at getting his boots on I gave him some secret scrutiny, but couldn't see that he ~~was~~ ^{assayed} ~~seemed~~ much better or much worse than the night before, Maybe he just looked that way, sort of absent-mindedly pained, all the time.

I offered to heat up some peas for him but he said no, thanks anyway.

At least he seemed ready for campending again, and I broached what was heaviest on my mind: the calendar of our continued companionship.

"How long's this going to take, do you think?"

"Well, you seen what we got into yesterday with Canada Dan.

Herders have their own quantities of trouble. Stanley could be seen to be calculating, either the trouble capacities of our next two herders or the extent of my impatience. "I suppose we got to figure that it could take most of a day apiece for this ~~next~~ pair, too."

Two more days of messing with herders, then the big part of another day to ride back to English Creek. ~~it~~ it loomed before me like a career. "What about if we split up?" I suggested as if I was naturally business-like. Each tend ~~to one herder~~ ^{one herder's camp} today?"

Handwritten note: "Tend to one herder's camp"

Stanley considered some more. You would have thought he was doing it in Latin, the time it took him. But finally: I guess that'd work. You know this piece of country pretty good. So, okay. Which yahoo do you want, Gufferson or Preston Rozier?"

I thought on that. Preston Rozier was a young herder in his second or third year in these mountains. Maybe he had entirely outgrown high-country of the sort the ~~mountain~~ whimsams Canada Dan was showing, and maybe he hadn't.

Handwritten note: "Rocky Mtn. hi country? timber? of sort"

Andy Gustafson on the other hand was a long-timer in the Two country probably and had been given the range between Canada Dan and Preston, ~~probably~~

for the reason that he was savvy enough not to let the bands get mixed.

"I'll take Andy."

"Okay. You know he's in west of here, probably about under the middle of the reef. Let's go see shepherders."

Outside in the wet morning I discovered the possible drawback to my choice, which was that Andy ~~and~~ Gustafson's camp supplies were in the pack rig that went on Bubbles. That bothered me some, but when I pictured Stanley and his bandaged hand trying to cope with Bubbles for At least in my father's universe matters fell that way. a day, I figured it fell to me to handle the knothed anyway. So I

worked the packs onto the mare for Stanley--she was so tame she all but sang encouragement while the load was going on her--and faced the spotty-nosed nemesis. But Bubbles

in horse

seemed no more snorty and treacherous than usual, and with Stanley taking a left-handed death grip ~~holding his bridle and~~ ^{again} on the bridle and addressing a steady stream of threats into the horse's ear, and with me staying well clear of hooves while getting the packsacks roped on, we had Bubbles loaded in surprisingly good time.

See you back here for beans, Stanley said, and as he reined north toward Preston's camp Pony and I headed west up the mountain, Bubbles grudgingly behind us.

I suppose now hardly anybody knows that horseback way of life on a trail. Even in the situation I was in, that morning was a scene to store away. Pointed west as I was, the horizon of the Rockies extended wider than my vision; to take in the total of peaks I had to move my head ~~through an arc~~ ^{as far as I could} to either side. It never could be said that this country of the Two didn't offer enough elbow room. For that matter, shinbone and cranium and all other kind, too. Try as you might to be casual about a ride up from English Creek into these mountains, you were doing something sizable. Climbing from the front porch of the planet up into its attic, so to speak.

And this was a morning I was on my own. Atop my own horse and leading a beast of burden, even if the one was short-legged and pudgy and the other too amply justified the term of beast. The twin feelings of aloneness and freedom seemed almost to lift me, send me up over the landscape like a balloon. Of course I know it was the steady climb of the land itself that created that impression. But whatever was responsible, before long I could look back out onto the plains and see the blue dab of Lake Frances, and the water tower of Valier on its east shore--what would that be: fifty miles away, sixty? Somewhat closer was the bulge

of trees which marked where Gros Ventre sat in the long procession of English Creek's bankside cottonwoods and willows. I liked to think I could ~~pick~~ ^{single} ~~out~~ ^a the tiny toothpick-point which was the top of the Catholic steeple there amid the Gros Ventre grove, but realistically that was mostly imagination.

I and my horses went up and up, toward the angle of slope beneath the center of the reef. Eventually a considerable sidehill of timber took the trail from sight, and before Pony and Bubbles and I entered the stand of trees, I whoaed us for a ~~look~~ last gaze along all the mountains above and around. They were the sort of thing you would have if every cathedral in the world were lined up along the horizon.

Not much ensued for the first minutes of the forested trail, just a sharpening climb and the route beginning to kink into a series of switchbacks. Sunbeams were threaded down through the pine branches and with that dappled light I didn't even mind being in out of the view for the next little while.

~~The constancy of a forest is an illusion, though:~~
~~One thing about a forest, though: trees too are mortal and they~~
 come down. About in the middle of one of the straight tilts of trail between switchbacks, there lay a fresh downed one poking out over our route, just above





~~There was a downed tree poking out over the trail, just above~~
the height of a horse. Because of the steep hillside it ~~was an~~ ^{made}
awkward place to ~~do~~ ^{try} any chopping, and I didn't have a saw of any

sort. Besides, I was in no real mood to do ~~any~~ trail maintenance

005+1

for my father and the United States Forest Service. I decided I'd ~~have~~ ^{need} to get off

and lead Pony and Bubbles through. But given the disposition of

Bubbles, I knew I'd ~~do~~ ^{damn well} better do it a horse at a time.

I tied Bubbles' lead rope to a middle-sized jackpine--doubling
the square knot just to be sure--and led Pony up the trail beyond

the windfall. "Be right back with that other crowbait,^{senofabitch}" I assured
her as I ~~looped~~ ^{looped} her reins ~~to~~ ^{around} the leftover limb of a stump.

Bubbles was standing with his neck in the one position he seemed
to know for it~~me~~, stretched out like he was being towed, and I had
to haul hard on his lead rope for enough slack to untie my knots.

Come on, churnhead, I said as ~~as~~ civilly as I could--Bubbles was not
too popular with me anyway, because if he ~~hadn't~~ ^{originally} kicked Stanley I
wouldn't have been in the campending mess--and with some tugging persuaded
him into motion.

Bubbles didn't like the prospect of the downed tree when we got
there. I could see his eyes fix on the shaggy crown limbs overhead,

and his ears lay back a little. But one thing about Bubbles, he didn't lead much harder when he was being reluctant than when he wasn't.

I had him most of the way past the windfall when somehow he managed to get a hoof ^{too close} ~~way~~ in against the hillside, where it brushed against a ~~broken~~ ^{dangling straight} broken branch ^{tree} hanging down from the trunk. The along that side of him and then branch whisked in across the front of his left hip toward his crotch, and Bubbles went straight sideways off the mountain.

He of course took the lead rope with him, and me at the end of it like a kite on a string.

I can't say how far downslope I ^{flew} ~~lit~~, but I was in the air long enough to get good and worried. Plummeting sideways as well as down is unnerving as hell, your body trying to figure out how to ^{travel} ~~go~~ in

more

And a those two directions at once. A surprising number of thoughts fan out in your mind, such as whether you are most likely to come down on top of or under the horse below you and which part of you you can best afford to have broken and how long before a search party and why you ever in the first place--

I landed standing up, though. Standing about shin-deep into the sidehill, which had been softened by all the rain.

Horse nostrils could be heard working overtime nearby me, and I discovered the lead rope still was taut in my hand, as if the plunge off the trail had frozen it straight out like a long icicle. What I ^{saw} ~~was~~ ^{saw} first, though, was not Bubbles but Pony. A horse's eyes are big anyway, but I swear Pony's

were the size of Lincoln Zephyr headlights as she peered down over the rim of the trail at Bubbles and me ~~all~~ all the way below.

all way below

"Easy, girl!" I called ^{up} to her. All I needed next was for Pony to get excited, jerk her reins loose from that stump and quit the country, leaving me down here with this tangled-up packhorse.

"Easy, Pony! Easy, there. Everything's gonna be---just goddamn dandy."

Sure it was. On my 1st outing I had rolled the packstring even if it was only a jughead 7/8 horse named B.

Sure it was. On my first individual outing I had rolled the inveterate packstring, even if it was only one ~~goddamn~~ jughead of a horse named Bubbles. Great wonderful work, campjack McCaskill. Keep on in this brilliant way and you maybe someday can work your way up to moron.

30

Now I had to try to sort out the situation. A little below me on the sidehill, Bubbles was floundering around ^{a little} and snorting a series of alarms. The favorable part of that was that he was up on his feet ~~not~~ not only up, but showing a greater total of vigor than he had during the whole pack trip so far. So Bubbles was ~~intact~~ in one piece, ~~I was intact~~ ^{seemed to be} intact, and the main damage I could see on the packs was a short gash in the canvas where something ~~had~~ snagged it on our way down. Sugar or salt was trickling from there, but it looked as if I could move a crossrope over enough to ~~close off~~ ^{pinch} the hole ^{shut}.

I delivered Bubbles a sound general cussing, meanwhile working along the lead rope until I could grab his bridle and then reach his neck. From there I began to pat my way back, being sure to make my cussing sound a little more soothing, to get to the ruptured spot on the pack.

When I put my hand onto the crossrope to tug it across the gash, the pack moved a bit. I tugged again in a testing way, and all the load on Bubble's back moved a bit.

Son of a goddamn sonofabitch, I remember was all I managed to come out with to commemorate this discovery. That wasn't too bad under the circumstance, for the situation called for either hard language or hot tears, and maybe it could be pinpointed that right there I grew out of the bawling age into the cussing one.

Bubble's downhill excursion had broken the lash cinch, the one that holds the packs into place on a horse's back. So I had a packhorse whole and ~~is~~ healthy---

and my emotions about Bubbles having survived in good ~~health~~^{fettle} were now getting ~~extremely~~^{radically} mixed--but no way to secure ~~the~~^{his} load onto him.

I was going to have to ride somewhere for a new cinch, or at the very least go get this one repaired.

Choices about like Canada Dan's menu of mutton or sheep meat, those.

Stanley by now was miles away at Preston Rozier's camp. Besides, with his hand and his thirst both the way they were, I wasn't sure he would be much of a repairer anyway. Or I could ~~get~~^{climb} on Pony, head back down the trail all the way to the English Creek station, and tell that father of mine to come mend the fix he'd pitched me into.

That second notion ~~had~~^{held} appeal of several kinds. I would be rid of Stanley and responsibility for him. I'd done all I could, it was in no way my fault that Bubbles had schottished off a mountaintop. Most of all, delivering my predicament home to English Creek would serve my father right.

Yet when I came right down to it, I was bothered by the principle of anyone coming to my rescue. There was that about this damned in-between age, too. I totally did not want to be in the hell of a fix I was. ^{Yet somehow} but I just as totally did not relish resorting to anybody else to pluck me out of it.

So I got to wondering. There ought to be some way in this world to contrive that ^{damn} cinch back together. "If you're going to get by in the Forest Service you better be able to fix anything but the break of day," my father said every spring when he set in to refurbish all

the English Creek equipment. ^{Not that I was} ~~I wasn't~~ keen on taking him as an example just then, but--

No hope came out of my search of Bubbles and the packs; any kind of thong or spare leather was absent. The saddlestrings on my saddle up there where Pony was I did think of, but couldn't figure how to let go of Bubbles while I went to get them; having taken up mountaineering so passionately, there was no telling where Bubbles would crash off to if I wasn't there to hang onto him.

I started in to look myself over for possibilities. Hat, ~~slicker~~ ^{joseph coat,} coat, shirt ~~no~~ help. Belt--though I hated to think of it, I maybe could cut ^{that} it up into leather strips. No, better, down there: ~~boots~~ my forester boots, a bootlace: a bootlace just by God might do the trick.

By taking a wrap of Bubbles' lead rope around the palm of my left hand I was more or less able to use the thumb and fingers to grasp the lash cinch while I punched holes in it with my jackknife. When accomplished I had a set of them on either side of the break, I threaded the bootlace back and forth, and at last back and forth, ~~and~~ tied it to make a splice. Then, Bubbles' recent uppermost in my mind, standard of behavior ~~occurring to me,~~ I made one more set of holes farther along each part of the cinch and wove in the remainder of the bootlace as a second splice for safety's sake. ~~I~~ ^{now} had a boot gaping open at the top like an unbuckled overshoe, but the cinch looked as if it ought to lift a boxcar.

Now there ~~remained~~ only the matter of getting Bubbles back up where he had launched from.

Probably the ensuing ruckus amounted to only about twenty minutes of fight-and-drag, though it seemed ~~some~~ hours. Bubbles would take a step and balk. Balk and take a step. Fright or exasperation or obstinance or whatever ^{other} mood can produce it had him dry-farting like the taster in a popcorn factory. Try to yank me back down the slope. Balk again, and let himself slide back down the slope a little. ~~Sneeze~~ Sneeze, then ~~another series.~~ fart ~~some more.~~ Shake the packs in hope the splice would let go.

I at last somehow worked his head up level with the trail and then simply leaned back on the lead rope until he exhausted his various acts and had to look around at where he was. When the sight of the trail registered in his tiny mind, he pranced on up as if it was his own idea all along.

I sat for awhile to recover my breath--after tying Bubbles to the biggest tree around, with a triple square knot--and sort of take stock. There's this to be said for exertion, it does send your blood tickling through your brain. When I was through resting I directly went over to Bubbles, thrust an arm into the pack with the canned goods and pulled cans out until I found the ones of tomatoes. If I ever did manage to get this expedition to Andy Gustafson's camp I was going to be able to

say truthfully that I'd had lunch and did not need feeding by one more shepherd. Then I sat back down, ~~my~~ opened two cans with my jackknife, and imbibed tomatoes. One thing about canned tomatoes, my father every so often said during a trail meal, if you're thirsty you can drink them and if you're hungry you can eat them. Maybe, I conceded, he was right once in his life.

—————

By the time I reached Andy Gustafson's camp my neck was thoroughly cricked from the constant looking back over my shoulder to see if the packs were staying on Bubbles. They never shifted, though. Thank God for whoever invented bootlaces.

Andy's band was spread in nice fashion along ~~and in~~ both sides of a timbered draw. If you

have the courage to let them, sheep will scatter themselves into a slow comfortable graze even in up-and-down country. But it takes a herder who is sure of himself and has a sort of sixth sense against coyotes and bear. Les Withrow claimed that the best herder he ever

had on the Two, prior to ^{Pete} ~~Pat~~ Hoy, was an irrigator he'd hired ⁱⁿ ~~one~~ of the war years when he couldn't find ^{body} ~~anyone~~ else. The guy never had

herded before and didn't even take much interest in the band of sheep;

What he did was ride the canyon and shoot at everything that was just
 a little suspicious. If it was black, a burnt stump, he'd have to blaze
 away at it. Tending his camp this one time, I happened to look up over
 onto the opposite ridge and I said, "Say, there's something over there
 that kind of resembles a bear." Jesus, he jumped for that rifle and
 BOOM! BOOM! After he got those touched off he stopped to take a look.
 "No," he says, "no, I guess it ain't, it didn't run." While he terrorized

anything shaggy ~~were~~ the sheep did pretty much as they pleased, and
 Les said that year's lambs ^{were just beautiful} came down from the mountains averaging ⁹¹ ~~85~~ pounds.

were
 just

These sheep ^{of Andy's} in contentment along this draw were going to yield the

Busby brothers some dandy poundage, too. They would need to, to offset

Canada Dan's ^{jumpy} band.

Andy Gustafson had no trove of dead camased ewes, nor any particular
 complaints, nor even much to say. He was wrinkled up in puzzlement for
 awhile as to why it was me that was tending his camp, even after I
 explained as best I could, and I saw some speculation again when he
 noticed me slopping along with one boot unlaced. But once he'd checked
 through ~~his~~ the groceries I'd brought to make sure that a big can of

coffee and some tins of sardines were in there, and his weekly newspaper as well--Norwegian shepherders seemed to come in two varieties, those whose acquaintance with the alphabet stopped stubbornly with the X they used for a signature and those ~~MEM~~ who would quit you in an instant if you ever forgot to bring their mail copy of Nordiske Tidende--Andy seemed perfectly satisfied. He handed me his list of personals for the next campending--razor blades, a pair of socks, Bull Durham--and away I went.

—



Where a day goes in the mountains I don't know, but by the time I reached the cabin again it was almost the end of afternoon. Stanley's saddle sorrel and the ^{black} ~~white~~ packhorse were picketed a little way off, and Stanley emerged to offer me ^{as usual} whatever left-handed help he could manage in unsaddling Bubbles.

He noticed the spliced cinch. "See you had to use a little wildwood glue on the outfit."

I grunted something or other to that, and Stanley seemed to divine that it was not a topic I cared to dwell on. He switched to a question:

"How's old Gufferson?"

"He said about three words total. I wouldn't exactly call that bellyaching." This sounded pretty tart even to me, so I added: "And he had his sheep in a nice Wyoming scatter, there west of his wagon."

"Preston's on top of things, too," Stanley reported. "Hasn't lost any, and his lambs ~~are~~ ^{just} looking real good." Plain as anything, then, on the Busbys' allotment there was one sore thumb up here and its name was Canada Dan. Stanley extended the thought aloud. "Looks like Dan's asking for a ticket to town."

name
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I didn't follow that. In all the range ritual I knew, and even in

no 4

the perpetual wrestle between Dode Spencer and Pete Hoy, the herder always was angling to provoke a reason for quitting, not to be fired. Being fired from any job was a taint; a never-sought smudge.

The puzzle ^{pursued me on into the cabin.} of what Stanley had said As Stanley stepped to the stove to try rev the fire a little, I asked: You mean Canada Dan wants to get canned?

smudge

Looks like. It can happen that way. A fellow'll get in a situation and try make it worse so he'll get chucked out of it. My guess is, Dan's feeling thirsty and is scared of this timber as well, but doesn't want to admit either one to himself. Easier to blame onto somebody else. Stanley paused. *Question is, whether to try disappoint him out of the idea or just go ahead and can him. I will say that Canada Dan is not such a helluva human being that I want to put up with an entire summer of his crap.*

This was a stiffer Stanley than I had yet seen. This one you could imagine ~~rearing out~~ ^{so richly} giving Canada Dan the rearing out he deserved. The flash of backbone didn't last long, though. But I guess he's the Busby boys' decision, not mine.

Naturally the day was too far gone for us to ride ~~down~~^{home} to English Creek, so I embarked on the chores of wood and water again, at least salving myself with the prospect that tomorrow I would be relieved of Stanley. We would rise in the morning--and I intended it would be an early rise indeed--and ride down out of here and I would resume my summer at the ~~English Station~~^{Creek ranger station} and Stanley would sashay on past to the Busby ~~bro~~ brothers' ranch and that would be that.

When I stumped in with the water pail, that unlaced left boot of mine all but flapping in the breeze, I saw Stanley study the situation. Too bad we can't slice up Bubbles for bootlaces, he offered.

That'd help, I answered shortly.

I never like to tell anybody how to wear his boots. But if it was me, now--

I waited while Stanley paused to speculate out the cabin~~at~~ window to where dusk was ~~just~~ beginning to deepen the color of the peaks. But I wasn't in any mood to wait very damn long.

~~"Well. I don't like to tell anybody how to wear his boots."~~

~~But if it was me ^{now} -~~

~~to speculate out the cabin window to where I waited while Stanley paused ~~for~~ work on his cup and the bottle.~~

~~to wait very damn long. But I wasn't in any mood for much waiting.~~

"You were telling me all about boots," I prompted kind of sarcastically.

"Yeah. Well. If it was me now, I'd take that one shoestring you got there, and cut it in half, and lace up each boot with a piece as far as it'll go. Ought to keep them from slopping off your feet, anyhow."

I did the halving, and the boots then laced firm as far as my instep. ^{high} The tops poched out like funnels, but at least ^{now} I could get around without one boot ^{always} threatening to slop off.

One chore remained. I went over to my bunk, ^{the} reached into my bedroll and pulled out my clean shirt. ⁵ The ~~tail of it was all but gone~~ remainder of the tail of it, I jackknifed off. Stanley's hand didn't look quite so hideous this time when we rewrapped it, but still was no prize winner.

Well, Stanley announced ^{now} you got me nursed. Seems like the next a thing ought ~~to~~ to be ~~another~~ call on the doctor. And almost before he was through saying it, last night's bottle reappeared over the table, its neck tilted into Stanley's cup.

Before Stanley got too deep into his oil of joy, there was one more major point I wanted tended to. Diplomatically I began, Suppose we ought to give some thought--

--to supper, Stanley finished for me. I had something when I got back from Preston's camp. But you go ahead.

It dawned on me that now that we had tended the camps the packs were empty of groceries, which meant that we--or at least I, because so far I had no evidence that Stanley ever required any food--were at the mercy of whatever was on hand in Stanley's own small supply pack. I dug around in it, ^{there} but about all I saw that looked promising was an aging loaf of bread and some Velveeta cheese. So I made some sandwiches out of that and mentally marked up one more charge against my father.

When I'd finished it still was only twilight, and Stanley just had applied the bottle to the cup for a second time. Oh, it looked like another dandy evening ahead, all right.

Right then, ^{though,} a big idea came to me. [¶] I cleared my throat to make way for the words of it. ^{Then:}

"I believe maybe I'd have ^{me} one, too."

Stanley had put his cup down on the table but was ^{resting his good} ~~hanging on~~ ^{hand over the top of it} to it as if there ~~was~~ was a chance it might hop away. "One what?"

had his hand over it

"One of those--doctor visits. A swig."

^{This} That drew me a considerable look from Stanley. He let go of his ~~own~~ cup and scratched an ear. "Just how old 're you?"

"Fifteen," I maintained, borrowing the next few months.

^{set hand} ^{make a change} "Well," [¶] Stanley did some more considering, but by now I was ^{chances were he wouldn't} figuring out that if he didn't say no right off the bat, he ~~probably~~ ^{at last:} ~~get around to saying~~ wouldn't say it at all. "Got to wet your wick sometime, I guess."

Stanley wags his head

Can't see how a swallow or two can hurt you." He transferred the bottle to a place on the table nearer ~~to~~ me.

Copying his style of pouring, I tilted the cup somewhat ~~at~~ at the same time I was tipping the bottle. Just before I thought Stanley ~~might~~ ^{would} open his mouth to say something, I ended the flow.

~~It is just remarkable~~ [¶] It is just remarkable how a little piece of memory can help you out at the right time. I recalled something I'd ~~heard~~ heard when I was in with my father once in the Medicine Lodge saloon and repeated it now in salute to

Stanley: "Here's how."

say back

said back
"How," Stanley ~~responded~~ automatically.

Evidently I swigged somewhat deeper than I intended. By the time I set my cup ~~back~~ ^{down} on the board table, I ~~was blinking~~ ^{had to blink} hard. ~~Stanley~~ ^{While I was at this,} meanwhile had got up to put ~~a stick in~~ ^{stove wood into} the stove ~~while I was at this.~~

~~inquired.~~
"So what do you think?" he ~~asked.~~ ^{inquired.} "Will it ever replace water?"

I didn't know about that, but the elixir of Doctor Hall did thaw my tongue. Before long I heard myself asking, "You haven't been in this country the last while, have you?"

"Naw."

"Where you been?"

"Oh, just a lot of places." Stanley seemed to review them, ^{on the cabin wall.}

Down in Colorado for awhile. Talk about dry. Half that state was chasing seemed to be blowing around in a chase after the other half. And

Wyoming. I was association rider in that ^{Cody} country a summer or two.

Montana here again for a while, Then back up here, over in the Big Hole Basin. A couple of haying

seasons there. He considered, summed: "Around." Which moved him to another ^{drag} drink from his cup.

I had one from mine, too. "What're you ^{d/} going back up ~~here?~~ ^{in this country?}

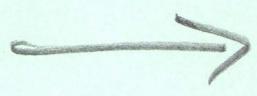
"Taking up a career in tending camp, as you can plainly see. Don't you know, ^{jack,} they advertise in those big newspapers for one-handed raggedy-ass campenders? You bet." they do.

they do.

He seemed sort of sensitive on that topic, so I switched around to something I knew would take him in a different direction. Are you from around here originally?

Not hardly. Not a Two Medicine man by birth. He glanced at me.

Like you. Naw, I--



Stanley Meixell originated in Missouri, on a farm east of St. Joe in Daviess County. As he told it, the summer he turned thirteen he encountered the down-row of corn--that tumbled line of ~~corn~~ cornstalks knocked over by the harvest wagon as it straddled its way through the field. Custom was that the youngest of the crew always was put on the down-row, and Stanley was the last of ~~the~~ five Meixell boys. ~~So,~~ ahead of him stretched a green gauntlet of down-row summers. Except ~~in~~ that by the end of the first sweltering day of stooping and ferreting for ears of corn, Stanley came to ^{his} a decision about further Missouri life. Within the week I was headed out to the Kansas high plains. If you're like me you think of Kansas as one ^{eternal} ~~big~~ wheatfield, but actually western ^a ~~Knsas~~ then was cattle country; Dodge City was ^{out} there, after all. ~~9~~ Four or five years of ranch jobs ensued for Stanley, and also a reputation for being able to cope. We were dehorning these Texas steers one time. There was one old ornery sonofabitch of a buckskin steer we never could get corralled with the rest. After so long the forman said he'd pay five dollars for anyone that would bring this steer in. Another snot-nose kid and I decided we'd just be the ones and bring him on in. We come onto him about three miles away from the corral, all by himself, and he was really on the prod.

Tried to drive him and couldn't. Well, then we figured we'd rope
him and drag him in. Then we got to thinking, three miles is quite
a drag, ain't it? So we each loosed out our lariat, about ten feet
of it, and took turns to get out in front of him and pop him across
the nose with that rope. When we done that he'd make a hell of a
big run at us and we'd dodge ahead out of his way, and he choused us
back toward the corral that way. We finally got him up within about
a quarter of a mile of the dehorning. Then each of us roped an end
and tied him down and went into the ranch and ^{hitched} ~~hitched~~ up a stoneboat
and loaded him on and boated him in in high old style. The foreman
was waiting for us with five silver dollars in his hand.

I was surprised at how interesting I found all this. As Stanley
talked ^{my} my cup had drained itself without really noticing. When Stanley
stopped to tip another round into his cup, I followed suit. The whiskey
was weaving a little bit of wooze around me, so I was especially pleased
that I ^{was able to} could dredge back from something I'd overheard yet another toast.

I offered it heartily:

Here's lead in your pencil!

That one made Stanley look at me sharply for a moment, but he said
only as he had the first time, How, and tipped his cup.

48

As happens, Stanley's story went on, something came along to dislodge him from that cowboying life.)

(noq) It was a long bunkhouse winter, weather just bad enough to keep him cooped on the ranch. I'd go give the cows a little hay two times a day and otherwise all there was to do was sit around and do hairwork. Each time he was in the barn he would pluck strands from the horses' tails, then ^{he went} back beside the bunkhouse stove to braid horsehair quirts and bridles and eventually even a whole ~~giant~~ damn lasso. By the end of that hairwork winter the tails of the horses had thinned drastically, and so had Stanley's patience with Kansas.

Toward the end of that hairwork winter [#] on the 17th of March of
1898, to be real exact, Stanley boarded the first train of his ^{life} life.
From someone he had heard about Montana, ^y and a go-ahead new town called Kalispell. Two days and two nights on that train. The shoebox full of fried chicken one of those Kansas girls fixed for me didn't quite
descended from the Rockies to
last the trip through. As the train approached the Flathead Valley
Stanley became curious as to what kind of country he was getting into.

Just in east of Columbia Falls I went out on the back platform and
stood there all the way to Kalispell, and you'd never believe it now, *pics,*
but it was solid timber across that valley, forest and more forest just
whirling past that train. Two or three times, I saw cabins in little
clearings. The sight is still clear in my mind because it was early
in the morning and each one of those cabins had a little thread of
smoke rising out of it, *having just got* *ed*
~~evidently~~ *people getting up and starting* *the*
day's fire.

In Kalispell then, you could hear hammers going all over ~~the~~ town.
the community.
 For the next few years, Stanley grew up with ~~Kalispell.~~ He worked mill
 jobs, driving a sawdust cart, sawfiling, foremaning a lumber piling crew.
Another spell, he even was a river pig, (explain)... during one of the log drives on the
north fork of the Flathead.
 Then in '02, a fellow came to me and wanted to know if I would manage
his outfit that winter. He had a contract for hauling lumber from
Lake Blaine into Kalispell. Had a bunch of four-horse teams, about half
Three four-horse teams and
a dozen of them, on this job, and the scissorbill he'd had in charge
was inclined to hang around the saloons and poker tables and let the
setup ~~generally~~ go to general hell. So right away I made it taw that

the drivers had to be at the barn at 6:30 every morning so as to hitch
 up and be on ^{that} ~~the~~ road by 7. It'd been their habit under the scissorbill,
~~see,~~ to get away from the barn late as 8 or 9 o'clock and then trot
those horses out about ten miles to Lake Blaine. Well, hell, by the
time they got out there to the lumber mill naturally they were all warmed
up and then would stand there and get cold during the loading and so of
course were all getting sick and losing flesh. All I did was to make
the drivers walk those teams both ways, and we hever had a sick horse
all that winter.

Teamstering, river pigging, foremanning: all this history of Stanley's
 was unexpected to me. I'd supposed, from my distant memory of him having
 been in our lives when I was so small, that he was just another camp
 tender or maybe even the association rider ~~in~~ back when this range was
 occupied by cattle instead of sheep. Then something else peeped in a
 corner of my mind. You said when we got here that you'd been to this
cabin before?

Lot of times. I go back farther than it does: I seen it being
built. We were sighting out that fenceline over ~~there~~ there when Dode
Spencer's daddy started dragging in the logs for it.

Being built? Sighting the boundary fenceline? The history was ^{skipping to} ~~getting~~
^{times of the Two} ancient now, and it and the whiskey together were compounding my confusion.
What, were you up here with a



This compounded my confusion. "What, were you up here with a Geological Survey crew or something?"

The look Stanley fastened on me ~~then~~ now was the levellest thing in that cabin. "Jick, I was the ranger that set up the Two."

Surely my face hung open so far you could have trotted a cat through it. It was part of all I could remember, hearing my father and the other Forest Service men of his age mention those original rangers, the ones who were sent out in the first years of the century with not much more than the legal description of a million or so acres and orders to transform them into a national forest. The forest arrangers, the men of my father's generation nicknamed them. Glen Smith down on the Custer National Forest, Ellers Koch on the Bitterroot, Brady Coover on the Libby, Joe Quisenberry on the Beaverhead; the tales of them still circulated, refreshed by the comments of the younger rangers.

wondering how they'd managed to do all they had. I could imagine that once, young officers in blue and gray had talked in similar tones about Grant and Lee. Everybody in the Forest Service ~~had~~ told forest arranger stories at any chance. But that Stanley

Al K. Hall, Meixell, wronghanded campjack and frequenter of Doctor ~~Al Se-hel~~, had been the original ranger of the Two Medicine National Forest, I had never heard a breath of; and ^{this} ~~that~~ was strange.

#