

Uptown and Down

1925

Up +
Down

scant hour

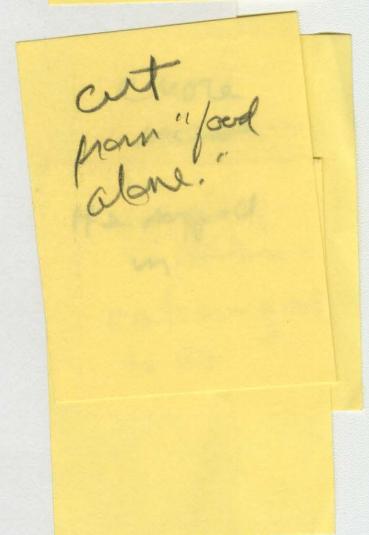
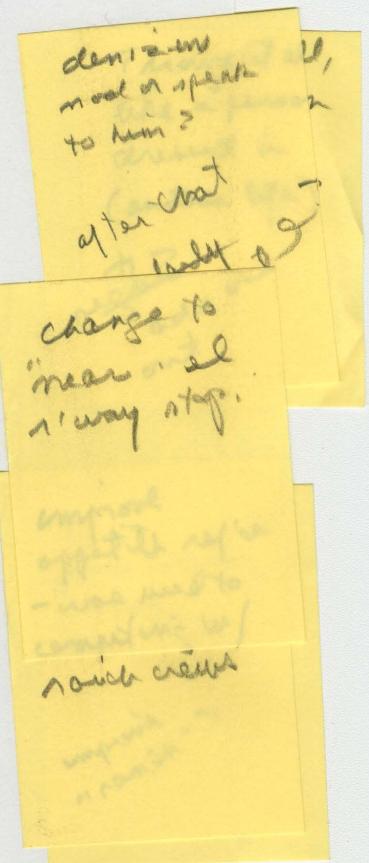
As usual by this hour of morning, Monty was out onto the street for the third time. Here or on the road, habit inconveniently left over from the Double W stirred him awake early to do the chores. *Catch up on sleep when they put the wooden suit on me.* The nature of the doing, however, had changed beyond recognition: his first excursion, embarked on while it was still too soon to tell what the pinch of sky between the rooflines held for the day, always was around the corner and a few blocks over to the public school and its playground space out back, where he cinched up the roadwork shoes and ran to keep his breath built.

Jawbone got me here, but breaking a sweat is what's going to keep paying the

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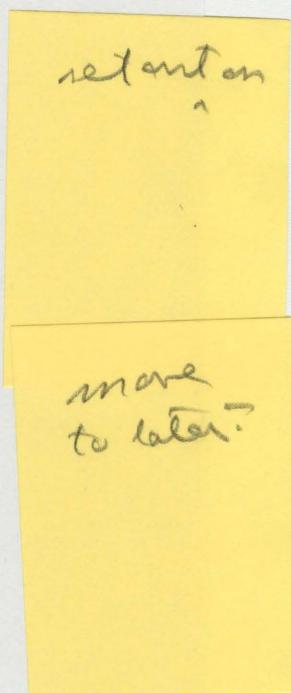
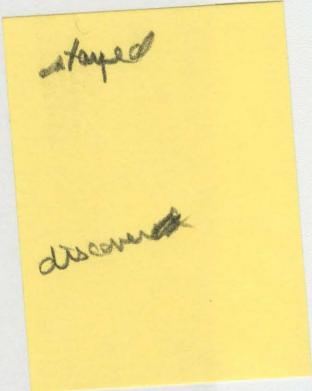
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rent. At that hour only a few of the more fly types--Harlem never seemed to have any shortage whatsoever of types--out early or in late on activities that did not bear inquiring about were around to levy looks at the heavy-shouldered man, long way from a kid, bounding across the skip-rope scuffs. By now even these denizens of dawn knew who he was, and he never felt any more at risk than, say, crossing a street when taxicabs were bearing down. Back to the apartment for a wash-up, then gratefully to his big feed of the day, breakfast. He took his meals by the month at the E & B 24-Hour Cafe over on Lenox; the Eat 'Em and Beat 'Em, if you could put away enough grub in the course of thirty days, and he had brought his appetite with him from the ranch. Ham and eggs to set him up for whatever might come--you never knew--and cornbread that made him damn a wasted lifetime of ranch biscuits. *Steak* and eggs, for two bits more, on concert days like yesterday; every time he stoked into a breakfast T-bone in good conscience, he reflected that this kind of life was almost worth it for the food alone. That and the gab. The things he overheard in the course of a day practically amounted to a world tour, by way of the gumbo accents of the cottonbacks up from the South and the lullaby intonations of the Caribs and the rounded declamations from the diction wallopers who were just a step short of being street preachers, even at



breakfast. *The Reverend Skypiece over there, ambassador hat on him--wouldn't know to hear him tell it that he delivers ice, would you. Or take the yam man, parks that pushcart out front, comes in and always sits next to me--close your eyes when he orders fried fish and rice and you'd swear he's somebody's sister from Spain.* He himself still was a bit shy in the ceaseless counter conversation and had figured out that was not a bad thing to be. It could be taken as dignified, he was pleasantly surprised to find, befitting the name he was making for himself, and besides, keeping a decent silence let him digest Harlem life to the extent possible.

But any of this, nourishment that it all was, only counted as appetizer to the outing he treated himself to every morning at about now, as he strode through Strivers Row toward where the brownstone stoops gave out and opportune storefronts suddenly lined up like they were clothespegged to the second-floor windows. *This feels like the day it'll hit.* Of course he did not have a whit of fact to back that up--luck doesn't let you know beforehand that it is about to change, like the generous weather--but the impression tingled too much to ignore. Maybe there was such a thing as odds mounting up to the point where they vibrated like bees in a hive, sending something off into the air. In any case, he



could not shake off the feeling of good fortune about to alight and start tickling him silly, did not want to even try to shrug that away; he had too many years of his life invested in reaching the vicinity of luck.

The street brimmed with morning-faced people now. Harlem, he had found, operated as if every little while some signal was given to open a floodgate and it became the turn of this ten thousand or that to pile out to go to work, to school, to church, to nightlife, to wherever there was maybe another rung on the climb from dun beginnings. Every one of those street-set faces, the astonishment still struck him, somewhere on the same prism of color as his. Oh, there were white countenances even here--harness-bull cops on the beat and bowtied owners of stores and theaters, mostly--but hardly any in comparison; white raisins in the dark plum cake, all they amounted to here. Monty figured he might eventually get used to being of the hue of almost everyone around him, but he didn't see how he would ever get over it. You could try to set yourself for a place like this in every way you could think of, and even so Harlem walked over you with the force of itself. Look around even for a second and who could doubt this was the bronze capital of America? Bronzed by the hellfire their race had been put through, was a good way of looking at it, but here the people of his own skin by the thousandfold

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durably were, uptown in New York City itself. He thought about this at some level even when he was thinking about anything else. Sometimes after breakfast he would linger on his counter stool just to watch through the big cafe-front window the start of the morning rush on Lenox Avenue, the domestics and elevator men and streetcleaners and dishwashers and myriad other doers of chores pouring into the subway in order to be on the job downtown when the white world there cranked open for business, and he had to marvel. Last year at this time he had been in their shoes, even if his came with cowboy bootees and milk-cow manure on them; and the goddamn Klan trying to cut his tracks, besides.

Now he put on a suit every day of his life, and the fanciest of black cloth to perform in at night, and was it any wonder he felt far enough up in the world to tingle when he took his morning constitutional along Strivers Row and beyond?

Still, there was something more that kept trying to register in him on this particular outing--*feels like the odds are saying to hell with themselves today.* But maybe it was just the atmosphere; Strivers Row, after all, knew its stuff about prosperity. This later crowd stepped smartly into the day according to Harlem's own clock rather than downtown's, and while he had clued in that this given neighborhood had a justifiable reputation for being snooty--it was swankily

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confident enough to joke of itself as being the home of America's leading second-class citizens--the evidence of the eyes was that this was indeed Harlem's Klondike, where the shared color was of a different luster than gold but at this time and place panning out just as nicely. He sipped at the spectacle every step of his route. Well-dressed men so dark of face that they made him look like a moonlight shadow nodded a respectful good morning to him and forged off to put fillings in people's mouths or plead their cases for them or align their voting habits. Kids dressed as spotless as little royalty flashed down tall sets of steps from the rowhouses and bounced one another in the general direction of their schoolday. Now and again a boy spilling over with mischief would skip in behind him and walk the cowboy way Monty did, toed in and just enough bowlegged to suggest horseback heroics, until the mother on sentry at a window called down in a well-modulated voice not to be pestering Mister Rathbun like that, hear? Monty knew better than to get spoiled by circumstances of the moment, but it gratified him every time to walk along here as recognized as a man chalked down the back.

His mind on all this and tonight's music as well, he nonetheless grew leery the instant he stepped across to where the shops started. Strivers Row could

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be as grand as it wanted, but the enterprises beyond were as forthright as a trapline. Even the fruit stands posted prices that seemed to want argument--the elocution-schooled wives from the rowhouses would be along to do their shopping any minute now, primed for debate--and somewhere on any block an apartment-room church with Eureka or Oasis in its name waited to reel in your soul and take it to heaven or Africa, and within a bottle's throw of those were cabaret speakeasies aswim with bootleggers, con men, cardsharps, touts of this or that, women with their hooks out, and other manner of lowlife ready to drain off what his singing was bringing in. Had to keep your wits about you along here or there were just all kinds of pockets they could fly off into.

Making sure to sharpen up his eyes, the way he used to start watching out for the Loomises as soon as he lit onto Clore Street, he arrowed ahead past all the diversions. Fortunately, within a couple of blocks his daily destination poked up like a smudged thumb out of all this concerted grasping, the newsstand where the ink of headlines practically obliterated the gray-napped proprietor within.

Exchanging greetings, Monty shopped the array of front pages the newsstand was wreathed in until he spotted the particular one he wanted today. The *World*; that ought to be ample enough. He handed the vendor the pennies for

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Back in his apartment, though, he took his time about that. He was still smarting from Boston, where he'd had a cold and his performance suffered accordingly. Some of the reviews there worked him over practically down to his *shoeshine. The crickets*, his manager J.J. said ^{of} the critics; *You leave the* *shoeshine* *as you are concerned,* [#] *and* *the crickets to me.* Good advice, impossible to follow. A person was always going to be curious about what was written about him; hell, half the people he'd met in New York lived on that precise curiosity. But he didn't have to let it smack him in the face this very moment. Before anything else he did his voice exercises. *Make that such a habit you'll feel absolutely undressed without it*, one of those precepts cross-stitched into him back at the North Fork and the Fort Assinniboine auditorium by you-know-who. Then he deliberately puttered a while--city living seemed to take an unbelievable amount of puttering--until, in the midst of bedmaking, he remembered that he still had yesterday's number slip in the dresser drawer, under his socks. He went over and wadded it into a tiny ball and put today's in its place. To tell the truth, he would not be surprised if the number never did hit. But it was a luxury he allowed himself, a dollar a day to play the numbers; as much as his month's wages had been on the ranch, and here he didn't even miss it. Other than that buck-a-day bet, he was staying so tight to the

"All right then." Her face lit, she ~~said~~ ^{sing} Now your turn.

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musicales of yours--tell all."

From there on their conversation kept jumping its banks. He told her about hobnobbing with the Rabiznaz, wanted to know how her own music was coming. She told him she was within shouting distance of the end of the operetta if the shout could be a better song than she had managed to come up with yet, and what were his living arrangements in Harlem like? They were back and forth at this a mile a minute until they heard a notifying cough. In the doorway of the parlor stood J.J. and Cecil, fluffy bathtowels over the arm of each.

"This is Miss Duff, my teacher I told you about," Monty said, reeling off the introductions. "Wasn't for her, the most I could look forward to would be changing sparkplugs every three months."

"Ah? Then the ears of the world are in your debt, Mrs. Duff," J.J. said with something between a nod and a bow. Cecil's wordless acknowledgment of her certifiably amounted to no more than a nod.

"It's Miss."

"Mizz Duff, excuse me all hollow." J.J.'s sibilant antic made Monty want to bat him one.

"Sorry to interrupt," J.J. swept on, "but we were just passing. We are off to the waters," meaning the Natatorium across the hotel grounds. "Cecil here needs to cook like an egg to thaw out from this Rocky Mountain air, he claims. We are told we will have a pool to ourselves." J.J. smiled as if at the wonder of that. "Which will then be drained after we use it, I gather the procedure is. Western hospitality is really quite something."

"We did give the world Monty, from out here," Susan offered as though it were a neutral observation. "We may be coasting a bit much on that."

"That was generous, I can't help but admit." J.J. fussily checked his watch against the parlor's grandfather clock as if two opinions were needed on the hour of day, then recited: "Keep an eye on the time, Montgomery, don't forget to catch some rest."

"It's as good as caught, J.J."

"Good day, Miss Duff. Been our pleasure."

Monty watched the pair of them go, shaking his head. "See what you and the Major got me into? They both know their stuff, but--what're you laughing about?"

"I just realized. Here you are in the Broadwater with a manager and an accompanist and Bailey and bruisers, all the trappings I could have dreamed of for you, and I've never even heard you in front of an audience."

"You have so. Not their fault they were pigeons. Toughest critics I've had yet, though."

Susan surprised herself as well as him by giggling. Monty chuckled at the scale-like run of that, which tickled her some more, and then they were both in helpless gusts of laughter, two Two Medicine ragamuffins carried up past Fort Assiniboine's pigeon poop and all other mires to make their marks on life by the glorious force of music.

Susan at last wiped her eyes. "Stop. Halt. Enough. I really should be going."

"Not before I put you to work a little." Before she could blink, he reached something out from behind his chair and rested it in his lap. "Do you mind? Wanted to show you a change in *Mouthful of Stars*---I think I misremembered how the Holy Rollers used to do the chorus of that." As he dug out the piece of music she saw that he carried the songsheets in a leather case embossed with the initials MR; cowhide had a different place in his life now. "I think it should go"--

at the back of his throat he deeply crooned down, then up, up, instead of up, down, up.

Susan hesitated. Was this something he needed done, or a pat on the head for her? He had not been the butter-spreading type before, but that was before. The question lasted no time before giving way to the spell of music in his throat and his hands. "Let's just see," she said, a bit out of breath, and was up from her chair and confronting the upright piano, its teeth yellow with age, that claimed a corner of the parlor.

Plinking until she found a reasonably reliable run of keys, she coaxed out an amendment to the tune, Monty at the end of the piano listening keenly. At her nod, he sang the chorus that way atop her playing. She knew she probably shouldn't--the justifiable wrath of his manager was somewhere between there and the Natatorium--but she plunged into the whole song, Monty's voice all but taking down the walls of the parlor.

"There, then." Past the ache at the back of her heart for more of this, she made herself quit, saying she would fix up the follow-sheet for his accompanist if he liked. Monty dug in his shirt pocket, came up with a stub of pencil. With great care she wrote in the notes, guided by her own hum now. One last thing and then

she would go. "Could I take a peek at the songsheets? It would be fun for me tonight to know the order of songs."

"You bet." He gravely handed her the little stack that represented all their work together. "That's how I've got it put together for here. Oh, and over Cecil's just about dead body, I always stick in the Medicine Line one wherever the program feels like it needs a lift."

"Why doesn't he want you to use that one?"

"Because he doesn't like it."

"So then why do you use it?"

"Because he doesn't like it."

That set them off riotously again. Susan sobered an instant before he did--
what am I doing, this man has a performance tonight-- and resolutely stood up from the piano stool. Monty was looking at her as if trying to remind himself of something. She cocked her head, waiting for whatever it was. Finally he said:

"You're wearing your hair down. It's nice."

"Trying to keep up. Speaking of hair, it's really time I get out of yours."

He gestured, as though he would change things if it were in his power.

"We have a rehearsal, after J.J. and Cecil finish their soak. I'd have asked you to come to that, but--"

"Monty, I would have turned you down flat. I'd be one too many irons in the fire there. Seeing you this way meant more."

All those other Saturday nights in town, and I never even made it through

exp

the door of this place. He moved back and forth in an arc across centerstage there in the Placer Theater, singing the two lines "*When I was young and in my prime, I dabbed my X on the Medicine Line*" over and over as he sought the spot where it

felt right to stand. *No way this was in the running with the Zanzibar, back then.*

Some of those scrapes, ow. It's a wonder I'm here with my guts still in me. He kept an eye on J.J., audience of one, who was prowling the empty seats, nodding

when the sound reached him just so, shaking his head when it was not so good.

Monty wheeled, tried it from closer to the lip of the stage. Took a step the other direction, cast "*When I was young....*" into the air of the theater from there as though flyfishing into promising water. Right from the start of this rehearsal he

had been feeling exceptionally fine, as loose and full of jingle as when he was a much younger man challenging the rodeo bulls. The stage manager stood off at

more: no
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+ reading, + stage
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stage left patiently plucking his sleeve garters until Monty called over, "I think I found it here."

The man came out and chalked an X where the toe of Monty's shoe was indicating. "I'll be right back with your music stand and we can see how the lighting suits you," he told Monty and disappeared backstage.

Cecil had been sitting in wait at the piano. Now that Monty's voice was not claiming the theater, he noodled at the keyboard of the Steinway, apparently without satisfaction. "They call this a piano in this burg?"

Monty and J.J. exchanged glances. They might have been concerned about Helena's taste in pianos if they had not heard Cecil make this same complaint about Boston's. Before J.J. could say anything, Monty observed: "Looks to me like it has all the keys, Cece."

"This new follow-sheet, man, I don't see why that chorus goes--"

"Because now it's right," Monty said easily.

Frowning, Cecil tugged at the cuffs of his tux and looked to J.J. for justice.

With a show of judiciousness the manager

~~J.J.~~ sized up the two of them. Poor Cecil, eagerly waiting for fame to

devour him. Monty was a different breed of cat. In off these wide open spaces.

Monty reminded him of the Senegalese, when they stood there blank and calm sharpening those three-sided French bayonets as the attack barrage poured down only yards away. And that damn woman, whatever she was about, had given him over readymade for stage work. "They're his songs, Cecil. Ours not to reason why if he feels better primping them."

[more: Monty's mood; notes details such as chandelier]

"Ready for your runthrough when you are," the stage manager called out.

[JJ's viewpoint as he listens? He's never had a talent who climbed so fast yet kept his head about him. Move the line about Susan having handed him over readymade to here?]

"Probably be an audience like an icebox."

J.J. smiled to himself. Monty had reached the trouper's point of courting good luck by invoking bad.

"You're sounding first-rate," J.J. said. "Could go a little light here, you know."

"Nothing doing. All out. Goes for you, too, Cecil. Don't be on bad terms with that piana, hear?"

some foreign custom, this diarying in the middle of the day. Siesta in reverse.

The role of woman of leisure did not come naturally to her, but she was working at it. Her hair was down--no pupils today, of course, and none in prospect until she could get the music school resurrected and a number of miffed mothers soothed--and the shawling effect on her shoulders was another sumptuous diversion from usual. As she read back over entry after entry, moments leaping out at her, she twiddled strands of the tresses she had let grow all her time at Scotch Heaven, idly judging their distance from gray. Getting to the point of doing that, was she. *Vanity, thy name is human.* Automatically she reached down a music sheet and jotted that in the margin in case it could be made to fit into the operetta somewhere.

Suddenly the pen had a mind of its own again: *What odd bits we remember,* she found herself resuming on today's marathon diary entry. *Monty's letter mentions Mrs. Gustafson's fearsome hotcakes--the plop of them hitting the griddle was in itself almost tough enough to chew--and I have thought back time and again to that X on the stage, to call it that, that first day at Fort Assiniboine. What a nerve I had, chalking that mark and letting on to him that standing right there would solve all stage woes. I recall him looking long and*

hard at it (and doubtless at the proposition of myself as teacher). When he stood his ground to that barn of an auditorium and my asking of him, I knew we would get somewhere.

Toeing the mark. Until just the other day she'd had to do that herself every hour of every schoolday at the South Fork. Eight grades: *Angus, how did you ever divide yourself that way for so many years?* She would not trade all the gold of Confederate Gulch for her teaching year at the South Fork, nor would the same sum persuade her to do it over again. Running up and down the stairsteps of lessons like the keeper of a mental lighthouse those months, she always came back to the mark of the presence she was standing in for. While she could never be Angus, she'd had no shortage of notions about how he would have done things.

And things have a way of ending on their own terms, not ours. Susan fidgeted the pen, rolling it contemplatively between the fingers of her writing hand, while she worked back to the page of that first day of scouring traces of cows out of the homestead house, the one about Scotch Heaven not amounting to much as a site but unbeatable as a sight. Did those words carry a whiff of epitaph even then? They would have had to be astral as comets to predict the final human

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well
know.

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sum of Scotch Heaven: Adair Barclay McCaskill and Susan Duff its last residents.

And Adair only until she had Christmased with Varick's family. At the new year

she had gone to Scotland on a visit that showed no sign of ending. Susan had

spent the full winter--fortunately an open one; only for a few nights had she put

up at the Hahns', nearest family to the schoolhouse--and the swift spring in a

Scotch Heaven that was as much apparition of its homestead decades as it was

creek and valley. Varick had not decided yet on the disposition of the McCaskill

homestead, ghostly indeed now without Angus and the sheep. For that matter,

she still was making up her own mind what to do with the lower end of the valley.

Ninian's land. With more than grass and hay attached to it.

B not

That decision would keep for now. She read back over what she had

written so far today. It constituted singing the scales, warming up one's voice.

With a considerable breath, she commenced to the next:

*Wes and I are like flighty children playing with matches. One of us
ignites... and the other in scaredy-cat fashion stamps it out. Then the turns are
reversed.*

She wrote in that vein until her hand began to play out.

Well, at least there was one of them who had life's ground solidly under him at the moment. She plucked up the review Monty had sent, for the sheer savor of reading it over, every blessed word:

Fate lent a hand, or in this case an appreciative ear, to the inspired program of "spirit" songs performed by Montgomery Rathbun at Aeolian Hall last evening. To this hearer, and an audience unanimous in clapping and stamping for encore after encore, the setting was as apt as if by divination: in Mr. Rathbun's wondrous presentation it is as if hitherto hidden songs have always existed just beyond us, tingling in the air, and through him they sing forth like windtunes through some great Aeolian harp.

This he achieves in a voice of dimensions that are hard to measure. His is not the welling bass-baritone of Paul Robeson, deep as the keel of a slave ship, but a built-from-the-bottom-up tone that casts long shadows and etches the ground of life under the travels of his restless songs, qualities that can perhaps be traced to his background as a man of the prairie. That repertory, be it said, is fresh, no mean feat in this heaven-sent-by-way-of-Harlem season of resurging spirituals, when almost weekly new arrangements of timeless field songs can sometimes resemble musical chairs.

The songs he brings are only an added gift, however. Montgomery Rathbun could sing the pages of the telephone directory and lift your soul. His is the latest and perhaps most phenomenal troubadour's role in the renaissance of "sorrow songs" heralded in the pre-war recitals of Harry Burleigh, enhanced when Roland Hayes added spirituals to his classical presentations, furthered by the innovative scorings of the piano-and-tenor duo of J. Rosamund Johnson and Taylor Gordon, and burnished to a luster now that the profoundly gifted Paul Robeson has turned from dramatic roles to musicianship. At the onset of

an earlier generous artistic flourishing, Ralph Waldo Emerson proffered to Walt Whitman: "I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere." Harlem's chorus of spiritual-singing virtuosos must similarly now pay their respects to Montgomery Rathbun, who stands forth as their latest compatriot and rival.

All that and the reviewer did not even have an inkling of how rocky that bottom had been. Reading back, finding the diary days when some bit of coaching or coaxing had worked and both of them felt another breathworth of soar in his song, Susan was starved all over again for that experience of the lessons with Monty. *Don't I wish there was another one where he came from.* Leading the South Fork schoolchildren in "Flow Gently, Sweet Afton" in preparation for *the program of*
all the were invited,
parents' night, there had been times when she thought she would break off into a maddened howl. Very well then, face up and admit it, she had been spoiled by the particularities of Monty's voice. At least she was not totally bereft of it. One more time she picked up the letter the review had come with. "*I did not pay the man to write this, honest.*" The handwriting, in pencil, was familiar from the brief greetings he sent from wherever he sang; they amounted to postcards mailed in envelopes, safe from small-town post office eyes. She could picture the jackknife-sharpened stub, the earnest crouch over the stationery--somehow the

"Whit's, too, while you're at it. You knew you're going to be honored with his presence, didn't you?"

"You must be kidding. He's setting foot off the place when there's no livestock involved?" It was on the tip of his tongue to say what next, the ghost of old Mister Warren showing up along with them tonight at the Placer Theater and growling out *I take it back, Monty, go ahead and blow your bugle, boy.* But her and the Major, as close or apart as rails of a railroad track, depending on when you squinted in their direction--right now she was really up on the doings of the

Williamsons, and he didn't want to tramp flatfooted into whatever that meant. He switched back over to his original intention. "I started to say, it's bothered the *daylights* living ~~hell~~ ^{cfd} out of me that you were where the Klan hoodoos could have got at you.

I know you wrote that the Williamsons made it too hot for them, but--"

"Scalding, was more like it." Departures in the night. Examples made by Whit and his ax-handle crew. Sheriffs and county attorneys suddenly rigorous. Wes and the influences he could bring to bear had taken the Klan out of the center of Montana like lice soaked out of sheets. "My neck never felt at risk, any of the school year," she maintained. "No excitement except the boys tipping over the girls' privy, and that's eternal. No, I've done my bit in memory of Angus and

helped Adair close up their place, and now I'm tucked back into the house here and the Double W cows get the North Fork." Susan made a gesture, that was enough of that. Looking across at Monty, she sent him a mock teacherly frown intended to let him know she was inspecting his progress. He had filled out somewhat, but solidly, no jowls or paunch. His nice gray suit would not give any of Wes's a run for the money--whose would?--but it had a tailor's touches. All along the line, so far as she could see, he looked as if New York life agreed with him. Still, he was here, not there. "Somehow I didn't expect to see you back, this soon."

"Denver is next on the tour." He grinned. "I convinced my manager this is practically on the way."

Susan's eyebrows were up. "I must have left geography out of those lessons of yours."

*'d have rather
eaten dirt but do it
want to do and you made me? The music stand.'* He had particularly wanted her

to know the audience problem was whipped. "Can't explain it, but I don't get choky with the songsheets right there, even if I never need them."

more
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thwarted
performance
to here
my manager

'd have rather

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Fifty blocks downtown, Wes was picking out railroads. He'd had a wall rack installed behind his office door with slots for all his passes, now that he was ^Ain the gandydancer fraternity, and as perquisites went, this one bemused him more than most. *A lifetime ticket or one to bankruptcy, depending.* Each elegantly printed pass entitled him to highest privileges--which was to say, a private car--when he traveled on the rails of his fellow moguls. And should any of his ampersand-endowed confreres from the Chesapeake & Ohio or the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul or the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe wish to ride the twenty-two miles of the Teton & Two Medicine, naturally he would be only too happy to reciprocate.

A rap on the door broke his cross-country train of thought, but still in a prime mood he moved aside and called out, "Open, Sesame, or Hilly, as the case may be." Hilfiger, his secretary, came in looking as if his Teutonic dignity had something spilled on it. "Major, I cannot at all account for this. But Mister Gardiner is downstairs with some new things."

"Now? I don't understand. You know I'm getting ready to go away."

"I somehow overlooked him when I cleared your schedule. Shall I tell him it will have to wait until after Montana?"

"Use your head, man. Whatever he's come up with will be gone by then. Send him in, but--" he looked pointedly at the wall clock. "And go ahead and make my arrangements, will you. I'll be taking the Pennsy to Chicago, and let's make it the Milwaukee on the next leg." It went without saying that Wes's own railcar and red-carpet treatment from the Great Northern Railway, which profited handsomely at the Montana end of things each time a trainload of Williamson cattle was shipped to market, were to be ready for him at the St. Paul depot as usual.

"Absolutely, Major."

"Oh, and Hilly, see if you can ring up--No, never mind." Monty might be sacked out; he was in the habit of resting up in the middle of the day, given the owl-like life of a singer. What was there to be said, anyway, welcome to the *World?* Wes wondered how he was taking that review. Lord, he should have picked up the phone to him first thing, but with all the commotion of putting house and family to rights for the summer... Too late now.

The only sound for a moment was the repentant slipslap of Hilfiger's soles as he hurriedly pattered down the stairs. The quiet was like a housewide trance, the machinery of mansion life stilled to only the occasional rustle of a distant maid. Making the most of the almost sinful spot of time, Wes virtually tiptoed over to his desk and sank into the lush silence. *Funny. The house has the best of it this time of year. We clear out, and the walls get to rest their ears.* By this time tomorrow the place would be like a ship frozen into an ice floe, sheets over all the furniture, inhabitants scattered to different latitudes. Just an hour ago Merrinell had left with the girls for her mother's summer place at Saratoga; time to break them in to that circle of society. Inasmuch as Merrinell's mother was a living refutation that a female could not be a pope, Wes had sympathy for his daughters in the immersion into parasol sodality ahead of them but nothing of real help. It was all he could do to keep his own head above water in the fathoms of family.

Gardiner padded in with his portfolio case, its leather as softly sumptuous as his manner. "Major, thank you for working me in."

"What's on offer today, Timothy?"

"A find, I can safely say. I think you'll be pleased with it."

Wes stayed expressionless, his guard and his hopes both up. This was not like Gardiner. As a rule, the rotund old dealer managed an elegantly diffident approach, as though strays from the orphanages of literature and history showed up on his doorstep. The longstanding arrangement was for Wes to have first look within the range of his interests, and if he didn't buy, Gardiner had merely to pop over a few blocks to the Morgan Library. But the item the dealer took out of his portfolio case now and lifted from its wrappings, he was handling as if it had come home to stay. The small buckram-backed journal he deposited on the desktop looked weathered from time rather than passage from hand to hand, and Wes felt an anticipatory tightness in his throat.

He studied the cataloguing slip. "Joseph Fields, Joseph Fields. Why do I know that name?"

Looking wise but saying nothing, Gardiner let it sink in. Wes's head snapped up. He threw away the first rule of haggling, he couldn't help himself. He asked as if wishing: "The one with Lewis? In the Two Medicine country?"

"You anticipate me."

Wes wiped his fingertips on the serge insides of his thighs, then drew the journal to himself and opened it ever so carefully. With astounding copiousness Lewis and Clark each had kept account of their expedition day-by-day, as did their sergeant, Gass. The enlisted men had been told to do the same, but evidently few had. Prepared for all manner of disappointment from desultoriness to illegibility,

Wes dipped into the age-crisped pages of ^{the} little journal, and there the words ^{stood} were.

Drewyer and self sent hunting for sage hens....Capt Lewis and Reuben let our

horses graize... Joseph Fields and his brother Reuben and the hunter-scout

Drouillard were with Meriwether Lewis on the exploration of the Two Medicine

country. About nightfall they encountered a small band of Blackfeet, gave

presents, and made wary camp with the Indians. Wes turned to July 17th, 1805.

In the tussle Reuben Fields stabbed one to death and Lewis shot one in the belly.

The vast one-day ride to the Great Falls of the Missouri came out of that. Wes

knew now that he held in his hands the eyewitness account to the first blood

spilled by American soldiers in the contest for the prairie. This had gone missing

for one hundred and twenty years. "How did you come by this?"

"Oh, things sometimes surface, Major."

Improve

began to
come -
meet themselves

~~Wes left~~
~~without~~
~~somewhere~~
~~along river~~

~~Meriwether~~
~~Lewis~~

words stood. "Drewyer and self sent hunting for sage hens....Capt Lewis & Reuben let our horses graize..." Wes stared into the slants of the ink as though seeing a map suddenly come clear. Joseph Fields and his brother Reuben and the hunter-scout Drouillard were with Meriwether Lewis on the exploration of the Two Medicine country. About nightfall they encountered somewhere along the river a small band of Blackfeet, gave presents, and made wary camp with the Indians. *We must wrisk the night with these people Capt Lewis told us & so we*

in co

decended to the river with them & formed a camp in the bottom where stood 3 ~~giant~~

solitary trees... Holding his breath, Wes turned the page to July 17th, 1805. *I was on post & laid my gun beside me to reach & wake Reuben when one of the indians slipped behind me and took the gun.* In the tussle that followed Reuben Fields stabbed one Blackfoot to death and Lewis shot one in the belly. The vast one-day ride to the Great Falls of the Missouri came out of that. Wes knew now that he held in his hands the eyewitness account to the first blood spilled by American soldiers in the contest for the prairie. This had gone missing for one hundred and twenty years. "How did you come by this?"

"Oh, things sometimes surface, Major."

A
treasure
Just before I went
Roberts return

persons
had us
know

- scandal
Capt L and
given a
medal to -

Wes realized he was breaching protocol front, back, and sideways.

Collectors at his level necessarily embraced the pretense that provenance was a region of France. "Forget I asked. How much are you going to hold me up for, on this?"

"I must tell you, Harvard has expressed an interest in it."

Wes steepled his hands together, then ever so slowly lowered them until they pointed directly at the dealer. "Speaking of telling, drop a word to Pearson from me"--making it plain that he was letting it bounce here on Gardiner first before it reached the Harvard keeper of collections--"that as a donor I don't appreciate his bidding up materials he's eventually going to get anyway, damn it."

"I'll see that your concern is made known," Gardiner all but trilled. In contrition, he quoted a figure twenty percent too high instead of the usual forty, Wes batted that down to a semi-reasonable asking price, and they reached the deal.

Gardiner still hovered over the journal with avuncular tenderness after Wes handed him the check. "Timothy? Is there something else?"
"I understand that you're pressed for time, but if you could spare a few minutes more--"

"Given the going rate so far today, I ought to call an immediate curfew."

"It's been on my conscience that I can't come up with that Cheyne item you asked for, some time back. But if you're interested in that period, I just happen to have a few interesting items with me."

"You just happen to." Wes smiled. He didn't believe in runs of luck, but fifteen minutes ago he wouldn't have had any faith in the existence of a Lewis and Clark Two Medicine journal either. "All right, lay them out."

A brief letter to a weekend hostess from Byron, standardly flirtatious. A set of poems in the hand of Wasson, the Flemish Romantic. Wes shook his head each time.

"This is rather nice," the dealer said. "An original of a verse by Pushkin. He must have copied it out fresh to look it over."

"Ladies' man, wasn't he?"

"Sufficient to get himself done in a duel over one, I believe, Major."

"Russian isn't quite Greek enough to me--I can make out the *f* and the *x*, but that's about all. How does it read?"

The dealer checked the accompanying translation.

"Not all of me is dust. Within my song,

Wes knew
my
~~collection~~
connection
as if it was
more
cyclic
by no
Gardner did
man know & what can

words even stood slow and careful on the paper--and found it even more rewardful that he thought she was worth the diligence. This letter was almost warm to the touch. "*Something, isn't it? To think that the spirit songs are having a heyday? And that the foreground, they call it, was the old wagonontrack where ↗ about made me run my legs off?*" She smiled a moment at his growing penchant for question marks--he seemed determined to make even his punctuation count as much as it could--and skipped on to the bottommost sentence: "*I hope the old town is ready for me?*" He was coming to Helena on his concert tour through the West. She circled the day on her calendar. Ahead of it by a week was the Xed-over set of days she was to spend with Wes in the Two Medicine country.

Under the highstanding sun the cattle were mothering up. Their mode of reacquaintance was repeating itself a couple of thousand times at once, every cow moaning anxiously and making sure with thorough sniffs that the calf trying to raid milk from her udder was entitled to it.

Next to Wes in the shade of the boss tent about a quarter of a mile away, Susan speculatively watched the bawling scene along the lakeshore. Hers was not the only appraisal of what was being done to a calm noon at Lower Two Medicine

Lake: around the reflecting rim of water, sphinxlike mountains with manes of timber seemed to draw in closer to frown down over the intrusion.

She glanced at Wes, still busy checking his tallybook before he and whoever was sent out from the Blackfoot Indian Agency counted the cattle onto this Reservation allotment, its rugged foothills practically in the lap of Glacier National Park. Simply by eye the massed cattle seemed to Susan an excess of livestock for any summer range, but mob of feeders though this might be, she knew it was only a portion of the Williamsons' growing Deuce W herd.

Thousands more were out in the coulees of Fort Assiniboine and the other outposts of the new ranch. Greater thousands than that were spread as usual on the home range of the Double W. The tallybook in Wes's hands had him knitted in study, flipping from one page to the next, back, further pages on into the black-and-white arithmetic of herds and necessary grass; it must be like trying to stay ahead of locusts, she thought. Next to everything the Bible had to say, the one saying she had grown up hearing was that the Williamsons always had more cattle than country. Wes, she was seeing for herself on this cattle drive, dealt not only in ranchland and beef on the hoof but the attic space of geography; nooks and crannies of pasture like this under the planet's eaves.

vegetation

A series of whoops and orders being shouted above the mooing drew Susan's attention back to the trail herd. Perhaps stuffing this many cattle this high into the timbered foothills of the Rockies went against the human ear and common sense, but she couldn't deny that it made quite a picture. Several day-herders now slouched in their saddles at strategic points around the milling herd while the main file of riders headed in, their roans and sorrels and pintos mirrored in the bowl of lake like rich dabs of color on a clear blue palette. As they dismounted around the chuck tent for the midday meal, the bearded cook directed the traffic of Stetsons and batwing chaps with an imperial ladle. She tickled behind Wes's ear to make him look up and take in the scene. "Even I admit it's like a Russell, except nobody is bucking a bronc through the pork and beans."

Wes gave an appreciative wisp of smile. "Charley apparently never met a horse that wasn't snorty at chow time."

"He portrays schoolmarm as a pernicious influence, too."

"While I think they are nature's highest achievement."

"Do you really? I'm afraid we have loftier rivals, right around here." She took in again the glacier-scarred mountains, augmented at this time of day by

puffy clouds with flat, gray bases as if they had been sponged against the earth on that side. "Doesn't it remind you of that time in the Alps?"

He swung around to look at her, losing his place in the tallybook. "We were never in the Alps together."

"Just testing how well you keep track. And your ability to tell me from a Heidi. And how many yodels you've never yodeled."

"Not to mention your capacity to tease the life out of me."

"I hoped I was teasing it into you, Wes."

"All right." He laughed as if to demonstrate he hadn't forgotten how.

"Guilty as charged. I'm more wrapped up in the travels of cows than I want to be. Whit has always been trail boss." At the moment Whit was in California, sorting out Wendell after some scrape frowned on by the college authorities.

Getting the bearer of the Williamson family escutcheon through Stanford was requiring increasingly strong doses of fathering. "I'll make amends," Wes promised while he reached and took Susan's wrist as though he were a penitent who just happened to have a glint of another sort in his eye. "What would you say to a basket supper and sunset at the upper lake, when I'm done with the

Agency people? Whit would never spoil you like that, but if he hears about it and takes my job away, so much the better."

Susan had to smile back at him over that. She was no expert on trail drives, but she knew Whit also would never have shoved a couple of thousand head of cattle a mile out of the way, as Wes had done the day before yesterday, to keep them from trampling the site of Camp Disappointment, and then spent the afternoon bumping over that prairie in the Deusenberg, navigating from one landmark to the next in the Fields journal with her in wonderment at his side and Gustafson peering over the steering wheel for badger holes. She had a diarist's feel for the quirks of opportunity it must have taken to set the Lewis and Clark explorations down onto pages, but an unearthed journal fresh from midtown New York still seemed to her as randomly propitious as lightning illuminating a safari map. She had tried to wheedle out of Wes the cost of such a piece of historical luminescence, but he wouldn't tell. "*Beyond price,*" was all he would say.

"*Like you.*"

"Supper that way sounds grand," she responded now, along with a return squeeze of his arm. "This is rude of a guest, but will you clear something up for me? Why are you putting cattle onto rough country like this, and for that matter

why isn't Whit having a conniption about it? These cows will have to work uphill for every spear of grass. Not to mention that the timber up here is full of blowdowns, and probably bear."

If her line of inquiry hit home, squarely in the tallybook, he didn't show it. "The Deuce W needs shaping up before we run the full number of stock on it," he said almost idly. "Some windmill watering holes, fencing to be done, that sort of thing."

"Short grass again, you mean."

"Your father's daughter." That drew him enough of a look that he hastily tacked on: "When it comes to grass. What was I thinking, trying that on you."

Suddenly serious as could be, he folded his arms on his chest and contemplated the herd already starting to munch its way up a slope that turned to timber just ahead of them. "If we ever have anything but a dry summer, we can quit being cow conductors. For now, these bossies are going to have to pretend they're mountain goats."

He paused, then returned to her question. "Whit will just have to put up with the fact that I no longer can buy acres as fast as he can buy cows. You're right that we'll be nicked on a lease like this. A considerable number of head will

end up inside grizzlies or at the bottom of gulches with broken legs. Probably more will end up in stewpots--we have to see that as a tithe." He gave a slight shrug.

Susan was surprised he could be that casual at the prospect of losing cows to enterprising Blackfeet. Rustling was rustling, wouldn't you think? Particularly if you were a Williamson?

"Speaking of fathers," she got in, still trying to follow his thinking, "let me be more rude yet while I'm at it. What would yours think of paying good money for land this time of year and then having to walk away from it in the fall?"

That turned Wes dramatically philosophical. "Why do you even ask?" He tossed a hand of futility in the air. "He would think Whit and I have taken screaming leave of our senses, as the old always think about the young. As Whit and I think about our own offspring."

"Oho. Old now, are we."

"It's only a masculine trait. Women grow more fascinating."

"Especially in a cow camp," she whittled that down. "Your riders look at me as if I have two heads." She mimicked a cowboy gape that was at once shy, sly, and apprehensive. "But you, oh no, you don't get that from them even when

you chase off across the prairie in the Doozy after Lewis and Clark. I hope, my dear Major Williamson, that doesn't mean they're used to seeing you with a woman who isn't your wife."

At first she thought he wasn't going to answer, but then as though it were a duty to report this sort of thing he told her: "They seem to expect something of the sort of me, actually."

"Really?" Susan's tone was as if she was taking a scientific sounding. "It has come to that? Where there's a rich man, there positively has to be a mistress tagging along?"

"For God's sake, Susan. You know there's more than that to it, with us."

"No, this interests me. Shouldn't I see myself as a kind of collectible, like that journal you can barely stand to put down? And you as the connoisseur of sufficient means I've been lucky enough to be plucked up by? Privilege has its rank, we both recognize that. If you were one of your cow chousers squatting around the bean pot over there, we never would have had the least chance at one another, now would we."

Wes studied her thoughtfully, then stepped over and kissed her for as long as it took.

#9 exd

Susan brought up a hand and ever so lightly ran a finger back and forth along the side of where their lips met, as if saving it to taste. Eventually she stroked free and drew a breath. "I suppose you think that's ~~the way to end an~~^a argument. It's not bad."

"High praise. I can hardly wait until we outright fight. Add that to supper, can we?"

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than she gave him a soft biff to the collarbone, as if to announce her readiness to trade love taps any time he wanted. Wes chortled, and stepped away to collect his tallybook. "I hate to cease hostilities. But I'd better go down and run through things with Petrie"--his foreman--"so we'll be ready when the Agency people show up."

"Wes. There's something on my mind--surprise, surprise, right?"

Reluctantly he pivoted to her and stood as if braced for the worst. Only to hear her say:

"How would it be if I let you have my piece of the North Fork?"

His face lit up, but she had anticipated that. Only in his eyes did she catch the flicker of the chain lightning of his mind.

"On lease, I mean," she stipulated. "This summer, and we could see about next."

She could see the calculations flying in him, cows into acres, acres into cows, the capacity of the North Fork as an ever-running watering hole, the tonnage of its hay--"Susan, it would help on the Double W herd. In a big way."

"I want you to put a fencing crew in there first. I won't stand for cows getting onto the McCaskill place from mine, I don't care if Whit has to sit out there himself shooing them away."

"I'll see that the fences are so tight not even a wee sleekit cowering
Wee am eager
tim'rous beastie could get through." He took a step toward her, although he knew better than to kiss her this time. Sticking to business if that was where she wanted to be, he vouched: "Of course we'll pay you top dollar."

"You'd better."
"I'll tell you what, I can bring the papers with when I come in for Monty's concert."

That wasn't her preference, but she held to the mood: "Two occasions for the price of one, why not?"

"On that. I'd like us as much together there as we can--you'll see, he's gotten astounding." Susan waited, knowing what was coming. Managing this was the one thing that seemed to throw him, and he was not much better at it than ever when he awkwardly asked: "You'll be able to come in the warm company of Mrs. Gus, won't you?"

"I wouldn't miss the chance for anything, even Mrs. Gus."

Looking buoyed, Wes went off to muster the cattle for counting. This time Susan didn't watch the panorama of herd and riders and wary mountains. She sat in the tent, distractedly leafing through the valuable journal Wes had given prideful place on his portable desk. *Beyond price. Like you.* Such woo from a Wes with infinite cattle on his mind. *I'll see that the fences are so tight not even a wee sleekit cowering tim'rous beastie could get through.* Passable Robert Burns from the man who ordinarily fumbled the Scottish tongue, no less. Where did he summon that from, even given his knack to perform up to what nearly any circumstances asked? She should know something about gauging that capacity in him, and it bothered her that she did not. Rehearsals were her field, but run those clinching sentences of Wes's over and over in her mind as she was, she could not decide whether he had rehearsed those lines.

sudden celebrity until someone said in near-awe "You've met Montgomery Rathbun then, what is he like?" and that quick it dawned. Word had spread from Milly Tarrant's father, the desk clerk, that the famous Mr. Rathbun had sought me out for advice on a point of music; the image of us meeting like heads of state of the musical world there in the parlor of the Broadwater would have bowled us over at Fort Assiniboine.

Of course every stitch of a performance night interests me, even the straggly processional of the audience sorting itself into place, and we were going in to our seats early when Mrs. G. looked back over her shoulder and said, "The misters are here."

There was a moon like a globe lantern as Wes and Whit climbed out of the big car. Summer on such an evening was slow to step down from the longest day, a week ago; dusk and warmth would linger as if night was temporarily postponed. Because of the time of year Monty's performance was set for 8:30 so people could do the necessary for their gardens and lawns, come in from fishing or porch-sitting, round up the musically inclined members of the family and stroll down Last Chance Gulch, men carrying their suit jackets carefully over their arms.

grownups, and off down Highland Street they vanished, leaving Susan with her next tableau.

"My, the brothers Williamson. Thinking of becoming a duet, are you?"

ed
"I'm need to co-sign," Whit for once kept himself to the minimum. *cypd*

She studied him as though wondering whether he was fit for such a task.

When she had him sufficiently unnerved, she turned toward Wes. "And Monty?

Any fresh word?"

Wes hesitated. "He's out of Presbyterian Hospital back there. J.J. has him in his apartment, a nurse with him. The medicoes can't tell about his voice yet."

Susan would rather have taken a beating than do the arithmetic of *yet*. A week after the drunken roper at Havre had done her such damage at her neck, her voice had begun to respond. It had been ten days now since Monty's clubbing.

Equivocation by the doctors at this point was worst news, she knew.

Wes ached to go to her. Which only would have postponed the next hard part. "I--we don't like to bother you with this. But another dry summer--Whit tells me tomorrow wouldn't be too soon to start watering cattle on the North Fork."

"Yesterday," Whit husked as if his own throat was parched.

Susan stood there ~~a little~~ ^{uncommonly} pale, as if keeping a moment of silence for Scotch

Heaven. After a few seconds, she murmured: "Then let's get it over with."

The signing of the papers didn't take time at all, it seemed to Susan. Whit had capped the pen and handed it to her with awkward gallantry when she became aware that Wes was studying her speculatively. "Now that we're past that," she caught up to what he was saying, "this came just as we were leaving the house."

He handed her a telegram.

MUST REACH MISS DUFF. PLEASE.

--JACE JACKSON

more?

Cecil had been sitting in wait at the piano. Now that Monty's voice was not claiming the theater, he noodled at the keyboard of the Steinway, apparently without satisfaction. "They call this a piano in this burg?"

Monty and J.J. exchanged glances. They might have been concerned about Helena's taste in pianos if they had not heard Cecil make this same complaint about Boston's. Before J.J. could say anything, Monty observed: "Looks to me like it has all the keys, Cece."

"This new follow-sheet, man, I don't see why that chorus goes--"

"Because now it's right," Monty said easily.

Frowning, Cecil tugged at the cuffs of his tux and looked to J.J. for justice.

With a show of judiciousness the manager sized up the two of them. Poor Cecil, eagerly waiting for fame to devour him. Monty was a different breed of cat. In off these wide open spaces. Monty reminded him of the Senegalese, when they stood there blank and calm sharpening those three-sided French bayonets as the attack barrage poured down only yards away. "They're his songs, Cecil. Ours not to reason why if he feels better primping them."

[more: Monty's mood; notes details such as chandelier]

"Ready for your runthrough when you are," the stage manager called out.

[JJ's viewpoint as he listens? He's never had a talent who climbed so fast yet kept his head about him. Move the line about Susan having handed him over readymade to here?] And that damn woman, whatever she was about, had given him over readymade for stage work.

"Probably be an audience like an icebox."

J.J. smiled to himself. Monty had reached the trouper's point of courting good luck by invoking bad.

"You're sounding first-rate," J.J. said. "Could go a little light here, you know."

"Nothing doing. All out. Goes for you, too, Cecil. Don't be on bad terms with that piana, hear?"

"You don't have to bust a gusset for these people just because you're back home, that's all I'm saying. They'll clap if you so much as step out there and clear your throat, you watch."

"Your Mister Bailey can take you back to the hotel until tonight."

Cecil was still steamed. "Jace?" He was the only person in the world who called J.J. that, particularly with a permanent question mark. "What goes,

"You don't have to bust a gusset for these people just because you're back home in ~~Mon-tan-i-o~~⁹, that's all I'm saying. They'll clap if you so much as step out there and clear your throat, you watch."

"Your Mister Bailey can take you back to the hotel until tonight."

Cecil was still steamed. "What goes, J.J.? I was kidding around about the piano. But messing with the follow-sheet without even talking to me about it, that's something else. He's a little too high and mighty since we got here. I know these are his old stomping grounds, but--"

"So let him stomp for the folks," J.J. said tiredly. "We'll sort all this out in Denver."

The bromide for the unspeakable is, 'Words fail me.' I vow they will not.

Susan was panting a little. When she caught up to realization of it, she drew a careful series of breaths to steady herself before writing the next. *Tracing in ink what happened last night is the only way I know to tell the world ahead how one thing followed another, each piece of time a shard streaking lightninglike to the*

next.

Montario
(more)

Jason?
Jace -
he was'
only person
in world who
called him
that . . .
"Jace?" He
was only
person in
world who
called off that,
partly w/ a
permanent
in mark.

grasp . . .
feel too hard,
pushing into
fingers +
it rested
against,

This night she had come upstairs in something like a daze of duty, the rhythm of obligation as insistent in her as the beat of her heart. Her hand was fixed to the diary page before she made herself pause and review everything that had danced out of place since the last time she seated herself there. The past twenty-four hours were a jumble, at every level. She blinked hard, barely staying dry-eyed, as it registered on her that Samuel's photograph had been toppled. Might she just now have done that herself, in her willed unseeing reach for ink, pen, and pages to testify on? Or--? Whether or not it was her own doing, she picked the photograph up off its face, stood it where it belonged, and now put herself for all she was worth into her pen hand.

Mrs. Gus and I had arrived to the theater together, bookends that don't match but surprisingly few people seem to notice. An audience huge for Helena was pouring in and the lobby was a crisscross of former pupils of mine grinning at me as if they had good sense and mothers on the warpath about my absence the past--dear me-- year and then some. I fended as well as circumstances would allow, promising probably too many of them that I now would be giving lessons again and if they dreamt of their child one day filling a theater this way, lo, that chance awaited in my music parlor. I could not account for why I was such a

again

for

Whit, though, lodged a complaint to the night air that seemed to have come in on a tropical tradewind. "Damnedest weather. Still feels like the middle of the afternoon."

"Is there any weather you do like?" Wes inquired, genuinely wondering, while he gestured that Whit's tie was riding cockeyed. "You came back from ten days of California sun complaining it didn't give you anything to get your teeth into."

"This is about as balmy as it was there, and you can't tell me that's natural. Gus, I need to fix my choker. Would you--?" As Gustafson held the door of the Deusenberg open at an angle that provided enough reflection, Whit bent down and used the car window as a mirror to adjust his white tie. Wes took the chance to scan the street and was reassured to find the policemen posted where they ought to be, just conspicuous enough. Whit was in the Knights of Columbus with the Helena chief of police, and it had been decided that any dregs of the Klan who showed up with picket signs were going to find themselves charged with spitting on the sidewalk. Privately Wes believed last summer's crackdown had sent any of them who counted slinking off to safer climes, tails between their legs, but an extra shift of police should make Monty's entourage

feel better. Right then a lantern-jawed man stepped out of the lobby, took a look around, and nodded to him. One of Bailey's. They probably were unnecessary too, but wouldn't hurt either. "What do you think then," Whit was asking as he gave a last tug at his tie and straightened up, "will Monty add '*The Palm Trees Sway When You Say I May*' to his list tonight?"

Wes looked at his brother in surprise. Whit getting off a thigh-slapper over a song of the day was about as likely as Rudy Vallee making a joke about Herefords. But Whit himself would have been the first to say he was an improved person since the North Fork was offered up. For his part, Wes had stuffed the lease papers into his attache case before they left the ranch as if the document was any other transaction. Which, pretend to himself as he was trying, it in no way was. He would feel better after he and Whit met with Susan in the morning and signatures were on dotted lines. When they pulled up in front of the theater he had glimpsed her there in the lobby and would be aware of her during every moment of Monty's performance and it still seemed beyond reckoning, that a bumpy encounter in France had led all the way to this. And Monty at the heart of it. In tribute to that he started into the theater, but Whit rerouted him with a shoo of the hand.

? he knew
wh. we
to reacting
+ honestly to
than he was;

pretend to
way
he was

? - they
two
of them -

"Let's hold on out here a minute--we're in for more culture than I can usually sit through. Condemned man always gets a chance to roll a last one, doesn't he?" He pulled a tobacco pouch and pack of rolling papers out of the pocket of his evening wear, did a judicious sprinkle and licked together a cigarette.

Wes stood looking around at the confluence of so much. People kept filing past.

Whit let out a silent whistle of smoke as he studied the theater placard studded with the most glowing phrases from the review in the *New York World*. Half the newspapers in Montana had picked up that review. He shook his head at having had so famous a choreboy. "Do it all over again, would you?"

Wes chose to misunderstand. "What, every particle of my life? "You get to pick," Whit invited.

"What's turned you philosophical?" "Ahh, who knows. Told you it's funny weather." Whit tossed down the runty stub of his cigarette and demolished it under his patent leather shoe. "All right, let's go get music in our ears. Here's hoping his Montana debut turns out better than his mother's."

unpaid

Wes said flatly, "It's bound to."

You can sometimes tell what an audience is like beforehand. This one was curious, perhaps a bit anxious. Monty's songs would be as new to them as an underground stream. My sense was that they wanted Monty to be the real thing, to be someone who had made it to on high, from their midst.

imprint:
details

There was the curtain motion, the flutter, that happens not long before a performance.

"Five minutes, Mister Rathbun," came the call and short rapid tattoo of rap on his dressing room door that seemed to be delivered by the same set of vocal cords and knuckles in every theater in the land.

"Be right there, thanks," Monty responded and quickly checked in the mirror one last time. Meeting there a version of himself so fitted out in distinction and determination that the apparition looked primed to perform the concert from that spot in the dressing room and be heard in the dusk-curtained canyons of the Rockies all the way to the Two Medicine country. Out across the reach of prairie, bounded only by the moon, to Fort Assiniboine. Into the winding country of memory, where his mother lifts from her laundress chores and prepares herself to sing at the statehood celebration, in a yesterday that never came, three dozen years

he grinned

ago. If he had to say so himself, the personage he viewed in the looking-glass seemed singled out to show the world how to sing history as well as music, this night.

Exultant, he went on out to the back of the stage and around to the wing and the stage manager's roost. He still didn't care much for the feel of backstage, it amounted to about the same as the chute area in a rodeo: you hoped nobody did anything back here that would have untoward consequences to you out front. But he thought again about how Susan loved every guy rope, dust mote, and gizmo trunk of it, and could have kicked himself for not working it out to invite her to watch from the wings tonight; could have asked the Gustafsons and she'd have been included as if attached to them, that would have been the way. *Can't get it all right all the time.*

J.J. was at his usual perch, a high stool within range of the stage manager, like a natty hawk. A figure planted in the shadows beyond J.J. and the stage manager and a couple of stagehands was as unmoving as a costume mannequin, but the set of its hat identified it as Bailey. Monty knew that one of the bruisers was stationed at the back door, and if all this didn't reassure J.J. and Cecil he didn't know what the hell would.

unmove
hawk

on hell

"Good house tonight," J.J. recited to Monty as he always did, whatever
the audience size.

Monty stepped out onto the curtained stage far enough to see that his
music stand was on the mark where it ought to be, then made a beeline for the
stage manager's peephole.

J.J. was not stretching it tonight; a sellout crowd, packed from the front
row to some standees along the farthest wall. What seemed to be Clore Street
intact filled one entire balcony. He spotted Susan beside the Gustafsons. A row
behind and a few seats over, the Major and Whit Williamson were side by side,
honoring the evening
with their presence
drawn by the same hand.

"One minute," the stage manager called, nervously watching Cecil who
was still fussing with his music sheets in the rack for them on the piano, moving
them an inch one way and then the other, although Monty seriously doubted
music racks differed very much from piano to piano. But as he always did, Cecil
sashayed over into the wing alongside the rest of them with seconds to spare and
as if the world
could not without his elevating presence
~~stood, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, ready for the curtain to rise, the first bow of~~
deliciously
the evening his.

?Honoring
. evening
w/ the
presence.

*To my taste, the accompanist sopped up applause somewhat overlong,
bobbing like one of those toy birds that dips its beak in a glass of water. But then
Monty made his appearance, and the real applause started.*

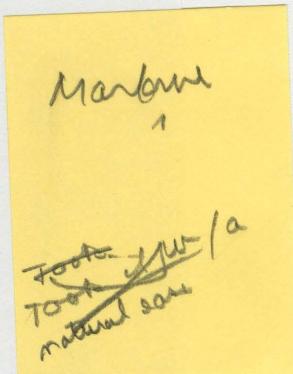
*As he came out I saw that he had been right to resist my attempts to cure
his walk--that cowboy saunter of his lets the audience know this is a person who
has come an extreme way to reach this point. He handles himself notably in every
other way that counts, too. It has been long years since I sang on the Placer stage
myself, but I thought I remembered its particularities, and Monty did me proud
when he took his mark just where I had guessed. As if the stage belonged to him.*

As if he had inherited it from, say, Chaliapin.

The applause poured over him until he steepled his fingers in a gesture of thanks and readiness. He had decided against saying anything first, just hit them with the first song. Now he nodded ever so slightly to Cecil, who piously unclasped his fingers from his lap as if raveling out a prayer, and the piano music began with a parade-ground prance.

"When I was young and in my prime--"

Monty held the note on the last consonant, setting it up to chime with the even more resounding one in the next line--



They heard a rain of glass as windows rattled to pieces. As they ran the obstacle course of backstage, the building seemed to think it over, whether to settle back from its restlessness or curtsy to the mastering earth.

*We came out in the sidestreet. The quake seemed to have shaken the clock
 as if we had passed through
 mechanism of the universe, it had been only minutes yet it was like some entire
 off
 season of life.*

J.J. and Cecil were there to lend a hand when they flooded out the door. Wes halted everybody when they were safely out of range of the theater. Except for the population out in its streets, downtown Helena at the intersection a block away from them appeared remarkably unchanged. "Gus, if the car is in one piece, bring it around here, quick," Wes directed. Bailey said the same to his man, then sprinted up to the corner to see if the streets were passable out of the Gulch.

The cluster of them stood waiting there, dressed like aristocratic refugees amid the tipped ashcans and broken windowglass. The night was warm. "Earthquake weather," Whit accused, from his California upbringing. "Damn it, I knew it was up to no good."

Monty numbly stared around at the city pocketed now in the moonlit mountainscape. *What does it take,* the thought came at him from every direction,

more

a million tries? Rodeo getup or tuxedo, this place was determined to leave him in the dirt. Two more shakes and every one of them would have been buried in bricks, all because he had been determined to put the postponed anthems of his family into the air here.

So far Susan had held back, but J.J. edged up to her and whispered, "Can you do anything with him?"

more

"Monty, you can't let this get you down," she heard herself saying, something they both knew the words to. She rummaged for anything that might count as consolation. "Caruso was in San Francisco in that earthquake, and he went on to--"

"I'm no kind of a Ca--"

Just then the Deusenberg nosed into sight, Bailey riding its runningboard. He jumped off before the car drew to a complete halt.

"The *Herald* man has been on the line to his office," he reported. "Most of this was around Three Forks, Sixteenmile Canyon, in through there. Streets look okay." While ^{Bailey spea} he was talking, Gustafson climbed out and stood by a fender, ^{planted firmly behind} evidently wanting his feet on the ground until the other car got there and things were sorted out.

ext

more

Whit turned to Wes. "Maybe we've lucked out. This far away, any aftershock shouldn't amount--"

"Harm!" Gustafson shouted, startling them all. He broke from beside the car, making a run at the danger he could not name.

The man had come out of a unlit doorway across the street. He targeted Monty before the others saw him as anything but a blur detaching from the dark, swinging the ax handle with both hands, like a baseball bat. Monty tried to duck while Bailey kicked at the assailant.

The wild backswing caught Monty across the collarbone and throat. He fell backwards to the street with one hand splayed toward where he had been hit.

"Ned recognizes him," Bailey said, shaken, "hanger-on who didn't even make it into Potter's bunch. He's the kid brother of somebody Whit's boys gave a going over. I guess that's why an ax handle instead of a gun."

The hospital was a nightmare. Miraculously few were injured by the quake, but there were hysterics. Wes prevailed

"We'll be taking him back to New York, Major. Had enough hospitality out here."

"My rail car is in the yards over there."

*change?**more
diminut
cogn*

"That would help."

I--

Susan stopped writing. Downstairs, the snick of a key in a lock, the sound of the front door opening and then quietly shut.

She knew it would be Wes.

The train howled out steam, white whistle blast beneath the plume of locomotive smoke, at the latest cattle that had broken through the right-of-way fence. Cecil took such shrieking personally. "Can't they train those cows to keep off the railroad, like dogs are housebroke?"

J.J. trimmed him to silence with ~~one~~^{a single} glance. To him too this prairie seemed to go on forever, and heifers or whatever they were roamed in shocking freedom. But in his considerable experience grumbling had never been known to make a train go faster.

Cecil vamoosed to the front of the Pullman to read his breviary. J.J. went back to the paneled-off sleeping compartment to look in on Monty, not that looking helped much either. The doctor that the Williamsons had sent with them, Walker, told him at the start: "The collarbone, that's nothing. I've set hundreds of

them on rodeo riders and ranch hands. But that business with the throat--all I can do is keep him quiet and turn him over to somebody who knows what he's doing."

Monty and the doctor both were dozing, the one in the bunk half mummified with the cast across the upper part of him, the other in a chair with his head propped by an arm in a way doubtless learned by waiting for babies to come.

J.J. had stepped in here steeled, but the sight of sleep as the only ^{relative} truce that life let anybody have made him wilt as much as it had during the shooting war in Europe.

The catch in his throat he recognized as the fear he had carried through the Argonne forest of hell: of the kind of wound that would cost him eyes or testicles or a leg or an arm. He hadn't even thought of the voice. ^{afq}

Feeling the train slow a notch and then another and another, he backed out of the sleeping compartment to watch what happened at this stop.

It started at Harlem, the Montana depot version of it. Some railroad magnate had gone goofy, J.J. had noticed on the way out, and slapped names on the stops along the tracks the same as real places of the world--Malta, Zurich, you'd think you were on a royal tour instead of some flat ass prairie train. He and Cecil had razzed Monty about that particular little burg, asking why he'd figured

he had to go all the way to Strivers Row when here was a Harlem in Mon-tan-i-o,

just look, it even had a skyscraper--the grain elevator taller than the main street

^{zophem}
~~they thought was funnier than anything~~
was long ~~made them hoot with laughter.~~ This time when the train made its quick

actd

stop at the tiny town, there in the shadows by the telegrapher's office waited an

overalled man nearly as dark as the shadowed area he was standing back in: the

depot swamper, pushbroom in hand. In Glasgow, the same by a church

congregation of ten or a dozen; there was no mistaking the preacher with the

dignified wool under his homburg. J.J. realized that stop must be a division

point on the railroad, to account for such a number, and from that he figured it

out. The porters. The ones on this train somehow kept the word spreading ahead.

^{-scared}
~~wanted less than~~ ~~of saw that~~
Wolf Point, the sign on this town ~~unroyally~~ said, and this time it was a

actd

colored family, probably the only one in a place so small, presenting itself on the

^{part the Great Northern coaches}
depot platform, the father pointing to the Teton and Two Medicine railcar and

actd

saying something to his children in a tone obviously hushed.

Back at Glasgow the first newspaperman had been waiting too, and J.J.

knew there would be packs of them at the big-city depots ahead. By now he

hoped he had worked out how to say it. "What happened to Montgomery

Rathbun is one more form of lynching. How long is America going to let the neck

of the Negro be the target of every hater? If he is never able to sing again, his silence will be a stain on this country that will not go away."

moral

Why didn't that sonofabitch just kill me and get it over with?

Somewhere around Minot, Monty came more or less awake again. He felt as if something heavy was sitting on his windpipe, with its claws dug in. Not to mention his collarbone aching all the way out to the point of his shoulder, and the skin under the cast starting to itch. None of it pained as much as his despair.

Some hoodoo like that is always going to try to pull me down. That's the way it's always going to be, because that's the way it's always been.

That lasted about as long as it took him to think it. Hovering over him the same as the last time he had opened his eyes was Doc Walker, after him to take some soup down. Monty started to shake his head, and found out what a bad idea that was.

"Goddamnit," the doctor reasoned, "if you don't want to eat for your own sake, do it for mine. How's it going to look if a patient of mine starves to death?"

To get Doc Walker's spoon out of his face, he opened wide enough for a sip of the soup. It hurt all the way down.

"All right then, Mrs. Quinton," Susan pasted on her best expression again, "we will resume Lily's lessons. I regret that I had to go away for that while, but Lily is so much mature now that we'll make up for that bit of interruption in no time." One version or another of this she had recited five times already today, and she was almost prayerfully grateful for the rescuing knock on the front door.

But when she answered it, what the threshold held was Wes. *Keyless?*
And if so, why? her eyes interrogated before a rustle of impatience at the side of him manifested itself as Whit.

"Sorry to intrude, we thought you would be done by this time of day,"
 Wes put forth a politeness that carried like perfume toward Mrs. Quinton and her daughter. "Really, our business matter can wait if--"

"Not at all," Susan interjected, her eyes still working him over and delivering a few swipes at Whit as well. "We were just finishing off ours. Come in out of the summer."

Mrs. Quinton simpered past the man who would have been governor and his cattle king brother, Lily managed to look everywhere except at the gauntlet of

feel +
dull as
bad

Even smile
· might @
· Marlowe -
· going thru
· motion

"I dabbed my X on the Medicine Line."

As he hit that note, round and perfect, the chandelier above the crowd began to sway.

He froze, the cut-glass constellation in motion even more now. Cecil shot him a confused look, trying to decide whether to keep playing so Monty could pick the melody back up or wash the tune out and start over--and then his hands halted on the keys as if a message was coming up through them. The music stilled, the only sound now the tinkling of the chandelier. Then a rumble, like thunder down in the ground.

The crowd came to its feet and started piling toward the doors, not a stampede yet but definitely a clogged surge.

An earthquake gives a person a jolt in more ways than one. It causes your basic assumption of life, the ground on which you exist, to quiver. I had been through one before, the time I took Samuel to Yellowstone Park. But there we

were outdoors, the sway of the trees like fishing rods in truth rather interesting.

Here the question was whether the theater would shake to pieces with us in it. I thought something already had fallen and bruised my arm when I realized it was

Mrs. Gus's grip on me.

gentle
tingling

in Y.tone

Willing his bad leg to match his good one in the effort, Wes was up and clambering into the next aisle, fighting past eddying audience members to reach Susan and Mrs. Gustafson. He saw Susan, with a vexed expression that seemed to wonder why people needed to be so contrary, trying to make her way toward the stage, and his instinct supported that. "The stage steps. Out that way." He muscled a path for the women to follow him. Whit and Gustafson, each puffing harder than the other, caught up with them.

At the first ripple of motion under the stage Monty had bolted for the shelter of the nearest wall, in case the roof was coming down. He hung on there, peering out into the pandemonium of the theater, in spite of Bailey tugging at him and J.J. and Cecil shouting at him from the backstage door. When Susan and the rest of the group came stumbling up the steps he grabbed her by her free arm, and between them he and Wes and Bailey somewhere in there too half-shielded half-levitated her in a crablike scramble.

*It is the nearest I will experience to traveling by sedan chair. Behind me
Mrs. Gus was similarly scooped up by Whit and Gus and the bruiser.*

A chunk of plaster the size of a garage door fell and shattered on the stage.

lights
went out

in dinner

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Mrs. Gus's grip on me.

Willing his bad leg to match his good one in the effort, Wes was up and clambering into the next aisle, fighting past eddying audience members to reach Susan and Mrs. Gustafson. He always hated pandemonium, he would rather take his chances in a shellhole. Now he banged over seats until he was beside Susan, a vexed expression on her that seemed to wonder why people needed to be so contrary, as she tried to make her way toward the stage, and his instinct supported that. "The stage steps! Out that way!" As he yelled the words, the Marlow Theater gave another shudder [under them] and the lights went out. In the sudden interior dusk, plaster dust making them all cough, he muscled a path for the women to follow him. Whit and Gustafson, each puffing harder than the other, caught up with them.

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w reach of

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and J.J. and Cecil shouting at him from the backstage door. When Susan and the rest of the group came stumbling up the steps in the dimness he grabbed her by her free arm, and between them he and Wes, and Bailey somewhere in there too, half-shielded and half-levitated her in a crablike scramble.

It is the nearest I will experience to traveling by sedan chair. Behind me Mrs. Gus was similarly scooped up by Whit and Gus and the bruiser.

A chunk of plaster the size of a garage door fell and shattered on the stage.
They heard a rain of glass as windows rattled to pieces. As they ran the obstacle course of backstage, the building seemed to think it over, whether to settle back from its restlessness or curtsy to the mastering earth.

We came out in the sidestreet. The quake seemed to have shaken the clock mechanism of the universe, it had been only few minutes yet it was as if we had passed through some entire season of life.

J.J. and Cecil were there to lend a hand when they flooded out the door. The rumbling and shaking quit as abruptly as it had started and that was disorienting too, not knowing when the earth's case of the quivers might start up again. They clambered in a group away from the back of the theater, Wes counting heads as they skittered out into the sidestreet like a handful of dropped

marbles. He halted everybody when they were safely out of range of walls that might crumble. Dazed, they looked around as if surprised that the moon still hung in place, that there was the same air to breathe as before the thundershake of the earth. Except for the population out in its streets, most of whom would spend the night in their cars, downtown Helena at the intersection a block away from them appeared remarkably unchanged. "Gus, if the car is in one piece, bring it around here, quick," Wes directed. Bailey said the same to his man, then sprinted up to the corner to see if the streets were passable out of the Gulch.

No one else moved much, as though the surface under them was delicate. Susan had taken to gripping Mrs. Gustafson's considerable bicep reassuringly rather than have that muscle applied to Mrs. Gustafson's gripping of her. The cluster of them stood waiting there, dressed like aristocratic refugees amid the tipped ashcans and broken windowglass. The night was staying warm. "Earthquake weather," Whit accused, from his California upbringing. "Damn it, I knew it was up to no good."

all white,

Monty numbly stared around at the city pocketed now in the moonlit mountainscape. *What does it take*, the thought came at him from every direction, *a million tries?* Rodeo getup or tuxedo, this place was determined to leave him in

the dirt. Two more shakes and every one of them would have been buried in bricks, all because he had been determined to put the postponed anthems of his family into the air here.

J.J. had been watching the look on him with apprehension. He edged up to Susan and whispered, "Can you do anything with him?"

No longer holding back, she was at his side in an instant. "Monty, you can't let this get you down," she heard herself saying, something they both knew the words to. She rummaged desperately for anything that might count as consolation. "Caruso was in San Francisco in that earthquake, and he went on to--"

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Just then the Deusenberg nosed into sight, Bailey riding its runningboard. He jumped off before the car drew to a complete halt.
"The *Herald* man has been on the line to his office," he reported. "Most of this was around Three Forks, Sixteenmile Canyon, in through there. Streets look passable." While Bailey was speaking, Gustafson climbed out and planted himself beside a fender, evidently wanting his feet on the ground until the other car got there and things were sorted out.

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"Harm!" Gustafson shouted, startling them all. He broke from beside the car, making a run at the danger he could not name.

The man had come out from behind the lilacs here on the residential side of the street. He targeted Monty before the others saw him as anything but a blur detaching from the dark, swinging the ax handle with both hands, like a baseball bat. Monty tried to duck while Bailey pushed Susan out of the way and kicked at the assailant.

Wildly the ax handle swished in the air as the man bulled in on Monty like a crazed woodchopper. Just before Gustafson barreled into the attacker and upended him, a backswing caught Monty as he tried to turn his head away, the wood striking across the base of the collarbone and that side of the throat with a terrible whap. He fell backwards to the street with one hand splayed toward where he had been hit.

The other men boiled around the pinned-down attacker as Wes knelt over Monty and Whit chuckd his rolled-up tuxedo jacket beneath his head for a

crunching sound

pillow. There over them, Susan stared, sickened, at the Williamsons with all their powers and Monty prone in his own blood.

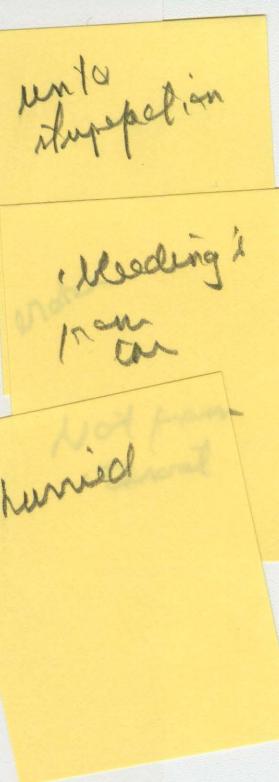
Wes looked up at her when he had Monty's shirt open. "The collarbone, tore some skin there. He's not bleeding from the throat."

J.J. and Cecil and Bailey came over to help lift Monty to the car. Bailey's men frog-marched the assailant off to turn him in to the police. "Ned recognizes him," Bailey said, shaken, "hanger-on who didn't even make it into Potter's bunch. He's the dimwit brother of somebody Whit's boys gave a going over. I guess that's why an ax handle instead of a gun."

The hospital was a nightmare. Miraculously few were injured by the quake, but there were hysterics, and it took some doing to make it understood that we had a man out in the car who had been beaten with a club. Wes prevailed, of course, and a doctor and stretcher crew went out for Monty.

In the hallway of the hospital after the patient had been installed in a room and was being examined, J.J. came over to Wes to make the matter clear. "As soon as he can be moved we'll be taking him back to New York, Major. Had enough hospitality out here."

"My rail car is in the yards over there. It's yours."



"That would help."

Nightmare does not begin to say it, about this. People wake from nightmares. That creature from out the dark could not have hit Monty in a more severe place if he had sighted in with a rifle. I-

evently,
t
him

Susan stopped writing. Downstairs, the snick of a key in a lock, the sound of the front door opening and then quietly shut.

She knew it would be Wes.

The train howled out steam, white whistle blast beneath the plume of locomotive smoke, at the latest cattle that had broken through the right-of-way fence. Cecil took such shrieking personally. "Can't they train those cows to keep off the railroad, like dogs are housebroke?"

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Wolf Point, the weather-scarred sign on this town less than royally said, and J.J. saw that this time it was a colored family, probably the only one in a place so small, presenting itself on the depot platform, the father pointing past the

Yoot-Yoot

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Great Northern coaches to the Teton and Two Medicine railcar and saying

something to his children in a tone obviously hushed.

Back at Glasgow the first newspaperman had been waiting too, and J.J. knew there would be packs of them at the big-city depots ahead. That was the only good thing about this, he thought grimly, and set to work on his statement about the one more form of lynching that would be on the conscience of this country if Montgomery Rathbun was never able to sing again.

Why didn't that sonofabitch just kill me and get it over with?

Somewhere around Minot, Monty came more or less awake again. He felt as if something heavy was sitting on his windpipe, with its claws dug in. Not to mention his collarbone hurting like fury all the way out to the point of his shoulder, and the skin under the cast starting to itch.

Christamighty, is there just no end to--

“Here,” the gruff voice was back. “Just try some.”

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a
sewagly
merclessly

Hovering over him the same as the last time he had opened his eyes was Doc Walker, after him to take some soup down. Monty started to shake his head, and found out what a bad idea that was.

"Goddamnit," the doctor reasoned, "if you don't want to eat for your own sake, do it for mine. How's it going to look if a patient of mine starves to death?" To get Doc Walker's spoon out of his face, he opened wide enough for a sip of the soup. It hurt all the way down.

All lyrics seemed leaden to Susan, in the days after, and she hastily abbreviated the rendition of "*When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder*" that the redhead girl had been proudly prompted into her mother.

"I can take it on faith that you kept her voice up, Mrs. Quinton," Susan pasted on her best expression again. "Very well then, we will resume Lily's lessons. I regret that I had to go away for that while, but Lily is so much mature now that we'll make up for that bit of interruption in no time." One version or another of this she had recited five times already today, and she was almost prayerfully grateful for the rescuing knock on the front door.



But when she answered it, what the threshhold held was Wes. *Keyless?*

And if so, why? her eyes interrogated before a rustle of impatience at the side of him manifested itself as Whit.

"Sorry to intrude, we thought you would be done by this time of day,"

Wes put forth a politeness that carried like cologne toward Mrs. Quinton and her daughter. "Really, our business matter can wait if--"

"Not at all," Susan interjected, her eyes still working him over and delivering a few swipes at Whit as well. "We were just finishing off ours. Come in out of the summer."

Mrs. Quinton simpered past the man who would have been governor and his cattle king brother, Lily managed to look everywhere except at the gauntlet of grownups, and off down Highland Street they vanished, leaving Susan with her next tableau.

"My, the brothers Williamson. Thinking of becoming a duet, are you?"

"I'm needed to co-sign," Whit for once kept himself to the minimum.

She studied him as though wondering whether he was fit for such a task.

When she had him sufficiently unnerved, she turned toward Wes. "And Monty? Any fresh word?"

Wes hesitated. The side of his face could feel the press of Whit watching him at this. "He's out of Presbyterian Hospital back there," he kept it to. "J.J. has him in his apartment, a nurse with him. The medicoes can't tell about his voice yet."

Susan would rather have taken a beating than do the arithmetic of *yet..* A week after the drunken roper at Havre had done her such damage at her neck, her voice had begun to respond. It had been ten days now since Monty's clubbing.

Equivocation by the doctors at this point was worst news, she knew.

Wes ached to go to her. Which only would have postponed the next hard part. "I-we don't like to bother you with this, honestly. But another dry summer--Whit tells me tomorrow wouldn't be too soon to start watering cattle on the North Fork."

"Yesterday," Whit husked as if his own throat was parched.

Susan stood there uncommonly pale, as if keeping a moment of silence for Scotch Heaven. After a few seconds, she murmured: "Then let's get it over with."

The signing of the papers didn't take time at all, it seemed to Susan. Whit had capped the pen and handed it to her with awkward gallantry when she became

bash

aware that Wes was studying her speculatively. "Now that we're past that," she caught up to what he was saying, "this came just as we were leaving the house."

He handed her a telegram.

MUST REACH MISS DUFF. PLEASE.

--JACE JACKSON

Down and Up

1925

Why give them another run at me? The pencil point nearly pierced the paper as Monty jabbed the question mark onto that. Behind the angry fuse of line was [the] explosiveness tamped tight by [that] ax handle. [Layers of frustration that he could push pencil lead into until his exhausted hand fell off and the bottom of them still would be deeper than he could reach. Simply to start with, what was he supposed to do against the apparently fundamental fact of life that it took only one loony to pop out of a doorway swinging a club and leave him like this, beaten halfway to hamburger and rooked out of his singing career just when he had it made and more than likely headed back to an existence the equivalent of milking

cut?

cows? She and the Major and J.J. and all the other well-intentioned of the world could tell him over and over that the Klan was a lower form of life than grew out of the cracks of rocks and that the way to overcome the dunce-cap clucks was to persevere--dodge and rise, practice and perform--up past their spasms of hate, but hadn't he tried that at Fort Assiniboine and been pounded into the pavement at

Helena for it? Wasn't there going to be some hoodoo somewhere around to

knock his ears down like that no matter what effort he made? And wasn't it

always going to be that way, because that's the way it had always been? He

turned the tablet around and shoved it across the table to her as if they were

trading turns in a furious grudge match of tic-tac-toe.

change
from
questions

axd

Susan leaned to the table again, trying not to let her apprehension show as

she took in the writing. The tablet traveled on the veneer with a sandpapery

whisper each time Monty whipped it over to her. She held back for a few

moments, as if waiting for the paper to quit rasping, before she spoke. "You

can't just let them wreck you. You certainly don't have to worry about another

run at you from that cretin with the ax handle--the Williamsons will see to it he'll

be in the penitentiary until he comes out in his coffin." Monty was grabbing the

tablet back to himself, pencil at the ready. "I know," she tried to head off the

agitated scribble, "that doesn't put you back to what you were. But *he's* going to be out of commission from now on and there's every chance that *you're* only out of commission until you heal up."

The tablet scooted back toward her as if of its own accord. *You don't savvy*, it read, *it hurts to even breathe deep*. Before she could respond, he swung the paper again and jotted: *& I sound like death warmed over, you heard that yourself.*

There, she would have had to admit under oath, he had chisel-hard truth. Her ears still were trying to recover from when she stepped into this stuffy apartment with Jace Jackson and heard like a croak from the crypt: "Why'd they have to bring you back here?"

"Such a greeting," she had forced out, for once in her life certifiably scared. "Are you supposed to use your voice yet? I don't think you should." In disgusted answer he brandished the writing paper. She had stood rooted there, trying not to stare at the purple splotch of bruise that was the side of his throat, and below that the turtleshell of plaster cast showing through his dressing robe. A sleeve of the robe hung empty, that arm sling-fixed in front of him to immobilize

off

~~was fleeing~~
the shattered collarbone. By then J.J. had fled to the kitchen with the excuse that
he had to tend to business by phone.

"Monty," she tried again now, "all I am saying is that when the doctors decide it's all right for you to try your voice, we can see how it handles music. I helped with that once, I may as well again." Whatever the medical prognosis turned out to be, the mood she was seeing across the table showed no sign of hope. "Don't be down on life," she felt she had to resort to, "what happened back there was a chain of bad luck. If we hadn't all been shaken out of our boots, Bailey and his men would have been able to keep that creature off you. That's behind, now, and when we get you so you can sing again and audiences flock to hear the man who withstood the idiots of the world, life will even out."

He shook his head, slight movements that still looked as if they hurt like fury. He held up his hand as if to say wait a minute, then set to work on his next message.

She sat there trying to dab her wrists and brow into some semblance of dry. The living-room of the apartment--rented furnished, she could tell; Monty would not likely have smothered the couch and every stuffed chair with matching magenta antimacassars, nor invited in the retired-looking piano that took up more

• pencil,
+ twisted in
his fingers
as if he
cd - wait to
stab out her
end of
argument
-
You have
every rt
to be
on

you've
got to
put it
behind
again!

space than anything else in the room--was close and dense as a coop on a day like this. What she remembered from her first time around in New York as a heatwave haze, a gauzy coverlet on top of the blanket of humidity, lay over the city. She felt doped with the heat, and more than a little rocky yet from the three-day train ride that had deposited her at the Pennsylvania Station that morning.

Within what seemed seconds after each swipe of her handkerchief, perspiration

came back. ["Miss Pickford does not sweat," she knew the tale of the leading

man who chastised a cameraman for pointing out that the star was sweating under

the lights, "Miss Pickford glows." Susan registered to herself as sweaty and

alight both.] "Could we have a bit of air, do you think?"

Monty lifted his pencil long enough to gesture impatiently that he did not care one way or the other, although the upper part of him must have been sweltering under that cast.

She shoved the window up as high as she could. The air of Harlem felt only marginally less hot than the incubating apartment. Nonetheless she pushed aside the lace curtains and stood at the window trying to will the atmosphere into some cooling motion. What she got was commotion. Iron-wheeled clatter of a knife-grinder's cart going by, along with a chant she could not understand a word

From her NY
she remembered
the remembered
emo,
which col. guy
over. ity
prodays.

moved up

of. Peppering in and out of that was the rackety putt-putt of an ice truck.

Background to both was the pervasive locust hum of automobile traffic over on the avenues and main cross-streets. The steady clamor it took a mammoth city to produce, and she was fifteen years out of date at coping with its energies and mystifications. Had Jace Jackson lost his bearings, gambling that she was the right medicine for here? Somewhere down the block she could hear a water-rush that must be a gushing fire hydrant, and she drank in the sound of that cataract as if it were the North Fork in spring spate.

When she turned around to Monty, bracing herself for the treatise, he was sitting back as if spent. Slowly he sent the tablet her way.

*Miss Susan--I am taking your name in vain, but I need to make the point
as strong as I can--I know you think you can fix anything but the break of day.
But this isn't anything a music stand or running to keep my breath up or anything
else will help. The man who beat me is only one of who knows how many, and
that's what there is no cure for. You know and I know that I didn't pick out my
skin, like it was the one suit of clothes I'd ever get. Yet that's how it is. The*

*singing does not work out for someone like me, we have to face up to that. I'll
under the elevated
maybe end up swamping at the cafe ~~over on Lennox~~, but at least I will be in one*