

--review ranch filecards, especially rubberbanded packet of most promising inserts at front of category.

are a population all their own across Montana and the Dakotas and up into Canada, dwelling in their farm colonies of a hundred or so people and talking their German among themselves and following their Anabaptist religion. They keep their way of life by avoiding things of the world that might infect it--television, radio, public schools--and I'd always supposed supper clubs would be prominent on that list. But here were Hutterite men from near and far, trooping in and in. I'd counted almost sixty when I recognized white-bearded Jacob Stapfer from the Seven Block colony out east of Gros Ventre. "How's t'ings, Jick?" he sang out.

"How you doing, Jacob?" I called back. Jacob was plainly doing topnotch, cruising into the banquet area just as if a Hutterite in a supper club wasn't as unlikely as me in the Old Testament.

The thing the Hutterites are thoroughly modern about, though, is their agriculture and when I saw a couple of civilian guys in leisure suits pushing ~~audio-visual~~ ^{audio} equipment into the banquet area where the Hutterite legion was congregating, I caught the drift. Fertilizer salesmen or some such, come to preach the virtues of their product to an audience lured by a free supper.

"Those Hoots are a wonder, all right," I found myself saying as if the point was being argued. "If I could make a go of it on my place like they do farming, the ranch would be sitting pretty."

The oddest expression came over Riley's face. I didn't care, it wasn't my problem if he was antsy about me talking about the ranch.

Mariah brightly chipped in, "I'd sure never make it as a Hutterite--" She stopped hard, then finished the thought: "--wife." Another uncomfortable faceload overcame Riley, but Mariah had ^{hurried} ~~gone~~ right on: "Those old bearded coots run everything. All the women are in charge of are potato peelings and dirty diapers."

I fingered my own advancing set of whiskers, but then figured Mariah might not appreciate any crack about my future possibly awaiting in a Hutterite colony. Instead I observed, "They're tough sons of guns, Hoot men or women either one. They do stick to that way of life."

Riley got one of his gleams. "But you know how they've stayed who they are? By changing."

"Riley," I pointed a breadstick at him wishing there was some way to commit homicide with it, "what you could give me for my birthday is to lay off the goddamn riddles."

Riley was about to open his yap again--it'd be like him to have a whole treatise ready--but through the divider between us and the Hutterite-filled banquet area an amplified voice took over.

"Those of us at Biotic Betterment are just real happy that you swine people could join us here tonight and listen to our message and get a free supper out of the deal, too. Because we think our product is the most exciting thing to hit the hog business in a long time. What it is our bacterial additive does--and you are just not going to be able to believe this until I give you the arithmetic on how much healthier and heavier Biotic Betterment hogs are than plain old ordinary hogs in the tests we've run--what it does is use good bacteria against bad bacteria."

Riley I will say sounded more reflective than triumphant as he swizzled a breadstick in fondue and commented, "Pretty soon you're going to need to be a scientist just to run livestock."

"Don't laugh," I told him. "It's coming." The genetic mechanics already had come up with the splicing of a goat and a sheep. If I hung on with the ranch, one of the questions I'd face eventually would be whether to raise geeps, as these laboratory creatures were called.

"In just a minute here we're going to be showing you a video on what our bug can do for your hogs," the leisure suit voice was confiding. "But first we'll draw for the door prize we promised you gentlemen. Here it is, right here. This genuine centennial brass belt buckle, in the shape of the state of Montana. Billy, draw a name out of the hat, would you. There you go, thank you kindly, Billy. And the winning name is . . . Peter Zorn!"

There was a moment of collective contemplation among the Hutterites. Then a voice: "So, vich Peter Zorn is t'at?"

I had to grin. The microphone maestro, though, sounded unamused. "How do you mean, which?"

"Vell, I'm Peter Zorn from t'e Seven Block colony," the Hutterite voice answered.

"And I'm Peter Zorn from t'e New Alberta colony," another voice attested.

"And I'm Peter Zorn from t'e Kipp Creek colony," chimed in a third accented voice.

The bug prophets ~~maybe~~ ^{plainly} didn't know it, but the Hutterites get by with only a handful of family names. Of the sixty black-garbed men in the banquet room, probably twenty were Zorns, twenty were Stapers, and twenty were Liebknachts.

"Umm." The microphone voice could be heard to be thinking hard about the problem of the repeat Petes. "What I guess we better do is, umm, put the names of you three gentlemen and your colonies onto slips of paper and draw again."

"But t'at vill mean two Peter Zorns von't vin a belt buckle. And you said t'e winning name is Peter Zorn."

"Oh, for--Billy, go out to the car and get two more belt buckles."

Even Mariah appreciated that episode of Hutterite adaptability, while Riley all too plainly was ready to rant on some more. But before he could launch, it was video time.

"Swine diseases are ever lurking," the fresh blare through the divider got right down to cases. "Parasites, bacteria and viruses are always on the attack, and each and every pig in your swineyard is their battlefield. Erysipelas. . . leptospirosis. . . transmissible gastroenteritis. . ."

possible ch. 2 revise:

--open with Brrk brrk of phone ringing with Althea's call; ie., a jump cut from last scene in ch. 1.

--Jick has breakfast with Kenny and Darleen

--Jick tends sheep camp (Darleen having warned him of her war with the Merc). Include in this ruminative material about look of the country, future of the ranch.

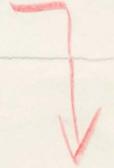
--Riley and Mariah arrive; they and Jick go to town for committee meeting; use the descriptive material that now opens ch. 2, sunset etc. (^{at 8:30} 8 p.m., meeting.)

--trim and shape the committee meeting into a scene of similar pace (although a bit longer if necessary) to the other travels, particularly Va. City.

This may mean cutting Nan Hill, cutting the historic newspaper material, and trimming Good Help a bit. In any case, keep up the momentum in this scene, either by quickening it or installing visual action.

four road hours away.

Maybe I would do that getting and maybe I just wouldn't. If Mariah had bothered to ask me my attitude by now about going on with this centennial traipse around the state, I would have given her a dependable answer: it depended. Depended on how much more of a diet of Riley I could stomach. And on whether I could face any more blasts of remembering. Nowhere in the original bargain was any understanding that I had to put up with such return episodes of myself, was there? I mean, just the won't-go-away idea of the might of memory was a bothersome companion as I carefully held the Bago away from the slidey gravel edges of the English Creek road. To the north where the Two Medicine River carves its canyon through the prairie of the Blackfeet Reservation, the long flat tops of benchlands stood out as if drawn fresh onto the sky with a yardstick and blackest inks. The furrows behind my brow seemed that same way, utter and basic. What was it that had hold of me, to make memory as intense as the experience itself?



parallel
even now

I tried to quit diagnosing and remind myself that any more travels with Riley and Mariah had also better depend on how the ranch was surviving

read me the list of provisions needed and I'd do the campending on my way home to the ranch that evening. Now the grocery boxes and I were progressing toward the site of my earliest remembering years, west along English Creek.

Jack Hart
Editor, Northwest Magazine
The Oregonian
1320 SW Broadway

as I reached the South Fork. Not usual, to come onto this upper end of the English Creek valley from the barren bench country south of it, but I had taken the back road from Pendroy, despite its wicked gravel and the half-mile tornado of dust the Bago was kicking up, for the sake of time. The view made me glad I had.

The Two Medicine country lay under the sunset outline of the Rocky Mountain Front in soft shadows and sharp horizons. Nearest, English Creek's miles of tall cottonwood trees threaded west through patches of hay meadow, until thinning to the willow lines of the two forks of the creek that curled down out of the mountains. On the horizon, north to where the namesake river of this region carves through the prairie of the Blackfoot Reservation, flat-topped benchlands looked as if they

Riley was listening in that sponge way he had, as if every word was a droplet he wanted to sop up. His eyes, though, never left Alec's grave.

"His stone," he said after a little. "It's--different."

By that he meant what was missing. No epitaph, no pair of years summing the sudden span of life. As though even the tombstone carver wasn't sure that Alec's story was over with.

"Yeah, well, I guess maybe the folks"--I indicated the side by side graves of my mother and father--"didn't feel they were entitled to any particular last word on Alec. What happened was, there was a family ruckus between them and him. He came down with a bad case of what he thought was love and they considered infatuation, but in any event, Alec was determined to give ^{UP} his chance at college and whatever else for it. The girl"--I swallowed hard, thinking of Leona and Alec, the couple too pretty to last in a hard-edged

world--"the girl changed her mind, so all the commotion was over nothing, really. But by then it was too late, too much had been said. It was just one of those situations that turned out bad for everybody concerned, is all."

spontaneous

crystallog
detail
something
3 sets
no date on
tombstone because
Alec's like that
is short that way

Jick, abt absense of dates on Alec's tombstone:

My folks always could face a lot. But I think they just could not stand to have Alec's life look so short on that tombstone.

insert after p 179

• ~~•~~ Of all the times I had been to

Berk's?

Marce's grave [this summer] I still didn't know which was worse, seeing
it raw and different from all the others, or watching it become like
them.

Jick spends day on ranch

--key the following "1959" section to Jick remembering Riley had asked him the lead-in question, early in centennial trip.

ch. 1?
or early ch. 2,
c. Jack's
porch
bedroom

How heavily
The shadow of our nearest years throws itself ~~heavily~~ between us

and other times. Because we are accustomed to more electricity
than we ~~need~~ ^{can use} and a car for everybody in the family and probably the

seldom
dog too, we don't see past such things to when they were not usual.

The ranches along English Creek, and of course the ranger station, I ~~believe~~

lived

~~lived~~
when we ~~first~~ went there had more in common with ancient times than

with now. Before Rural ~~Electricity~~ Electrification ~~arrived~~, eventually came in,

to travel the English Creek road after about ten o'clock at night

was to see not a spark of light, not a sign of a ~~people~~ ^{peopled} world.

^{night,}
Just ~~empty~~ night.

on the night of the escape, Melander continued, Braaf would gather them a few more. "Six, to be exact."

Braaf blinked rapidly at this and even Karlsson looked mildly surprised, but it was Wennberg who blurted: "Great good God, Melander, eight rifles altogether? We're going in a canoe, not a man-of-war!"

"Can you name me a better cargo, Wennberg? Do you think the ravens are going to feed us on this journey, and the bears will guard us with their kind teeth? We don't know what we'll face, but I want ball and powder to face it with. If you wish to come along naked, so be it."

Wennberg grumbled, then offered that if Melander was so fixed on muskets, he was willing to help out. A sentry's musket had been sent into the smith shop for a new buttplate. He could hold it back by saying he hadn't got around to affixing the buttplate yet.

Melander congratulated him gravely on entering the spirit of their enterprise. "There, Braaf, he's made you amends. You'll need to pluck only five muskets when the time is ready."

Braaf said nothing.

Karlsson too stayed unspeaking, but he had begun to have a feeling about Wennberg. There was something unreckonable, opposite from usual, about the blacksmith: as when the eyelid of a wood duck watching you closes casually from the bottom up.

Wennberg caromed on from the topic of muskets: "And you know

Then the highway delivered you into Gros Ventre in such a way that you wondered whether the place was anything but a collection of houses. No sign of a downtown appeared until the road kinked sharply to the right, and around that bend lay Main Street.)

memory comes to me clear. The Main Street of half a dozen blocks, with houses on the first and last of those blocks and then businesses joining the line-up, growing in both size and community weight to the central blocks, where the First National Bank of Gros Ventre holds one corner and on the cater-corner is the building of the English Creek Valley Stockmen's Bank.

the town its name is of course considerable. Yet Toussaint maintained that when Luke Barclay became the first postmaster--letters to come and go in care of his creekside hostelry--Barclay declared "Christamighty,

boys, The Middle is no kind of address to have; we might as well do

it up right" and with the memory ~~of the~~ fresh of the northern legend-

*that-
checked*

spieler and ~~the~~ ^{that} Frenchification of his tribal denomination of Big Belley,

chose Gros Ventre. At least such was Toussaint's version, and since

he was on hand in those days and the rest of us weren't, who could

say him nay?



Gros Ventre I suppose was a town like any its size, a place just big enough for rumor to thrive and damn near nothing to be known for sure.

of a moment. before reaching the shipyard just beyond Garrison's Castle, however, he went toward the stockade gate and the Kolosh village beyond, steps outside and along the wall, where his wool britches, and urinates. As he stands squaddish, Karlsson studies the Kolosh canvas, grows rigid in extension like the necks of fantastic horses, in their graceful rank along the beach. All of New Archangel, cathedral and Castle and bulks and the fifty or so square-foot buildings painted a pale yellow as though they were seaside cottages, are dwarfed by the towering Alaskan mountains. Virtually atop the town as the spike and dome crowned the cathedral, the peaks were precisely those a child would draw sharp tall pyramids of forest, occasionally a lesser summit round as a cannonball for comparison's sake. Topnotch of snow showed here and there, but the color everywhere else on these stretching peaks was the black-green which only a coastal fir forest makes. As Karlsson begins having done at the shipyard, Karlsson materializes at the southwesternmost extent of the settlement, beside the elbow of two schooner-bulks beached there. When Karlsson arrived to New Archangel and it rapidly became evident that he was not, as listed on one walllet, a shipwright, nor, as supposed on another item of record, a shoemaker, and first with any knowledge denied knowing how such misadventures possibly could have come about, a perplexed clerk assigned him to the reddest available job.

Those fourteen years, I would give anything to have added to my
time with Marcella.

Before starting the Winnebago, I faced around to Riley. "What
are you gonna write about ^{...}this--this cross stuff?"

"Maybe about what happens ~~when~~ to a place when it begins to
have more dead than living. Maybe the ~~winnebago~~ weight of a society
shifts some way." (go on into italicized excerpt of what he writes in column)

Or maybe it is my life, divvied between the two valleys, that makes it seem so. What equilibrium I have ever had, I connect to a summer day, what, a full half-century ago, there between the valleys where the shoulder of Breed Butte levels into benchland. July then too, and haying time; I was a shavetail kid in the crew of my uncle Pete

Reese, who yet was running this ranch then. Our tenth hay day there on Pete's benchland alfalfa, we were beginning to finish up. I was the scatter raker, and the first thing that morning I headed my horses, Blanche and Fisheye, to the southwest corner of that big meadow. We swooped and swerved over the stubbly field, dabs of stray hay accumulating five-eighths in the rake tines beneath me, and I suppose I was ~~half~~ off into a daydream as usual. Dode Withrow's hay crew was putting up a stack in the neighboring field beyond the fence, and before long the Withrow scatter raker was working the nearest end, like a reflection of my own raking. I began to watch how the Withrow raker went about his business, as who wouldn't. And saw it wasn't a him, but her. I remember, as exact as now, that I took a careful, careful look around to be damn good and sure none of our haying crew was watching before I waved to her. She waved

Back, we passed about a



blue sheet add after 197

possible add to Kenny scene: beaver dams

Jack takes shotgun to the dams?

--have Jick describe Gros Ventre (and the white rock letters GV)
on way to camp; thus there's a quick pace of scene-shifting later,
from the WW gate directly into the Medicine Lodge. ?

The sun was flattening down behind Roman Reef for the night as the grocery boxes and I arrived to the English Creek valley.

That daughter of mine and I had made a deal. Still wondering to myself what order of fool I was for turning the BB around with goat bait the way I had on the day previous, I'd deposited Mariah and her haywire companion back in Helena to finish up their research on mattress capitalism, as Riley called it. While they were at that, I could grab the chance to see how things were staggering along at the ranch. "I'll call you tomorrow morning and let you know what time to come get us, how about," Mariah put forth as if I was going to be in the next room instead of

my absence. My mind had not gained any rest on that score when I phoned my hired man, Kenny, before leaving Helena to ask if there was anything wanted from town and learned that, uhmm, well, actually there was--he hadn't gotten around to tending the sheepherder yet this week. I somehow managed not to give Kenny my full opinion of that, only told him aw, hell, read me the list of provisions needed and I'd do the campending myself on my way home to Noon Creek. Which I now was embarked on, at that pretty time between day and night. There at the first of evening

campending?

dark?

re-do this as fantasy by Jick, in reference to WW gate scene:

visit
(A)

night as I drove the Bago toward town. ^{*stunned,*} Nothing but blackness on either side until the high gateframe of the Double W came into the headlights. I flipped onto bright again, for all possible illumination for this, and stopped the Bago about 75 feet from the gateway, its sign and the skull under swaying slightly in the wind. I reached to the passenger seat where the shotgun was riding, stepped out of the motor home and went in front of the headlights to load both barrels of the gun.

The wind was picking up. The centennial ceremony at dawn was going to be real Montana, all right--contrary and unapologetic. *only*

I brought the butt of the shotgun to my shoulder and sighted upward. Was I imagining, or did the ~~swaying~~ steer skull seem to sway less, to quiet itself in the wind, as I aimed?

I fired both barrels at once, shards and chunks of the skull spraying away into the night. One eyesocket and horn dangled from the wire. Close enough. I climbed back in the Bago and headed for the town, ^{on toward} dump with a stop first at the dump to dispose of the shotgun.

When you think about it, Riley's last three stories had been about a socialist, a losing fighter, and a rebellious band of Indians. And Mariah's pictures were in the same tune--that head of Chief Joseph just above the wall of spikes, for example.

...

"So what do you think about Brother Griz?" Riley wanted to know.

"Well, I ain't one of the Three S guys who makes war on grizzlies." The policy of shoot, shovel, and shut up was the practice of some ranchers along these mountains when ~~the~~ protection of the grizzly became an issue. "But a sheep rancher doesn't have any reason to like the ^x goddamn bear, that I know of. ~~h~~ You ever see what one of them can do when he gets into a band of sheep?" Slaughter is the minimum word for it.

...

"Riley, I don't believe in things going extinct. But that includes me, too."

Riley grinned. "A grizzly couldn't have said it better, Jick."

"Then what the hell is supposed to happen, when the grizzly

and I come up against each other?"

"One of you bends or breaks. Ideally, you'd both bend a little bit, give enough space for one another. But usually one of you bends or breaks, and ^{our story} history goes on at a new slant from there."

^{still}
Lamb and wool prices were good in 0000, and something in me said

to take on all the sheep we could the next year. (Seems to me worth a

try,) I talked it over with Marce. (What do you think?) The girls were

^{yet}
~~still~~ small, we still had to pay off the ranch, but it only took her

^{we might as well}
a second to say, ~~Let's~~ go for broke. And so ^{we} I bought sheep by the armful. ^{living?}

a band of

We had been running a thousand ewes, but that spring of 0000 we lambed

took a deep breath and bought three thousand more
out two thousand, and in May I bought three bands more, of ewes and six-

their

week lambs. Five bands of sheep that summer, two on the national forest

and three on grazing leases on the Blackfeet Reservation; I don't know

when any of us slept that summer. KFBB in Great Falls broadcast The

Farmers Noon Hour, and the daily recital of livestock prices we listened

^{Marce did}
over our dinner dishes. ^{taste of risk never left my mouth until 1964 day of}
to, as if it was holy. ⁱⁿ September we threw the five bands together

to trail them to the railroad shipping point, ^{and} I almost couldn't ^{not} believe

the sight they made, a ^{walking cloud} of sheep. Thank god for 0000 and the other

carried us

good years, because they got us through a lot of bad ones. Marce's

father, Dode Withrow, always used to ask me, "Have they found a cure

yet for people in the sonofabitching sheep business?"

twice
last money

best
1st of
June to
middle
of Sept

the BB?"

Riley took a long gulp from his beer. "I told him we had something to finish first, naturally. The centennial series."

"Who's 'we'? You got a frog in your pocket?" It was the oldest of jokes, but the way Mariah said it, it carried all the seriousness in the world.

Riley gazed steadily back at her. "Mariah, my notion is for you to come too."

Why did that hit me so? Because of Riley, or because of California, or was it the two put together? I mean, Mariah was already gone from home, her life had been here in Missoula for a lot of years. Yet, the fact that she was in Montana felt to me as if she still was in the neighborhood, so to speak. California was another planet. Hell, Riley himself was another planet, one Mariah had already tried once and couldn't exist there.

I put my swissburger down on the plate and began wiping away the piccalilli I'd squeezed out all over my hand. "This is all getting pretty personal," I managed. "Do you two want me out of here?"

"Sure do, just like always," vouched Riley, in what was maybe

"You're not the issue," Riley answered me. "I am."

Whatever that meant, it kiboshed what I'd hoped would become of the ranch. Now here I was, hearing the old tune from a new mouth, Shaun Finletter's.

"I'll have to do some thinking about it," I told him now.

The Finletters all had something like an abacus in their head, a clickety-click and they had things calculated. "At least you're not saying no," Shaun said back. "Jick, if it's a matter of money, I can maybe jack them up a few more dollars an acre."

"That'd always be nice," I admitted. "The money isn't all of it, though."

She was Toussaint's grandniece, and the only one anywhere in the family who could steadily get along with him.

She and Pete had driven up to the Two Medicine River to pick him up this morning, and would deliver him back tonight...

Toussaint's father-in-law-to-be, Rides Proud

I believe if I'd had twenty aunts instead of just her, she still would have been the total ~~xxx~~ favorite.

Their son was born dead, and Marie nearly died too. They hadn't managed to have any children since, although Pete swore it wasn't for lack of trying.

that running chuckle at the back of the throat...

She was thin, not particularly dark; only her black hair, which she wore shoulder-length, brought out the Blackfeet and Cree ancestry.

The only resemblance to Toussaint was a similar music in her voice, and the same running chuckle at the back of her throat when she was amused.

→ Yet the human being is the world's most resilient damn creature.

I believe that it was no more than ~~two days~~ ^{three mornings} after Dode's funeral that

I rode across the Noon Creek divide to the Reese ranch to help Pete get ready for haying, and the summer once again changed direction.

~~The~~ ^{The} Reese ranch was a beauty for hay. Bottomland meadows of wild brome along Noon Creek, and the big field atop the Noon Creek-English Creek divide which grew dry-land alfalfa. In a wet year like this one, the alfalfa was soaring up to knee-high and that wide benchland field looked as green as they say the Amazon is.

[4] ^{ranching} As in so much of the west, in the

Two country hay is as necessary as air. The earliest stockmen ^{out here} didn't think so, believed they could graze their herds of cattle through a Montana winter. ^{Until} 1886 showed them that they hadn't yet ^{tasted} ~~seen~~ a genuine Montana winter. By that next spring ^{cow} carcasses littered this land, I suppose as the buffalo earlier had lain after one of the slaughtering hunts for hides. Some foreign traveler crossing the prairie ~~down~~ ^{northern Montana} there every decade or so then might have thought ~~it~~ an experimental site for killing four-hooved animals.

until
Township

~~seen~~

a mile
before
H-A Vol
were
at hand

narrative description of Gros Ventre

--the feel of "going to town"; Jick now attending school there in GV, 
but even so, there is lingering feeling of specialness of a town trip.

--explain pronunciation of Gros Ventre; summarize
origin of name?

--make the point that the town looked bigger than it is
because of width of main street: wide enough to turn a
freight wagon.

He had dug some ditches to irrigate those fields. That brought a threat from Wendell Williamson about taking Pete to law, but Pete knew it was only Wendell's usual bow-wow--the water rights of the Reese place were clear, dating back to when old Isaac bought the land.

use
5/10
returning
from mt. m.

use with Jack's memory
of '39 country trip & his
father?

As we rode--why I can recall something like this I haven't the shadow of a clue--we could see in outline on the west slope of Breed Butte a mare and her colt. I remember her as a blood bay, and the colt about the same but with white on both his forelegs.

✓ ✓

The Forest Service was new then. New and resented by a lot of the west, and trying to fend with that even as it set about to prove itself. The proving got a setback that summer of 1910 when it seemed as though Hell was erupting up through northern Rockies. District One suffered 1700 fires. In ~~the~~ the Bitterroot burn alone, flames blackened an area close to the size of Connecticut. After that summer of flame, you might say the Forest Service was like a young army that just had been badly bloodied.

~~edit~~
use of day

something
Being in-laws, they of course were more than friends and less

than blood relatives. In-lawry

there

their grounds of relationship

The ground of relationship between my father and Pete was actually

that muskeg which in-laws always find themselves on: they have to be
something more than friends but of course are less than blood relatives.

Still wondering to myself what brand of fool I was for turning
the BB around with goat bait the way I'd done, the next day I deposited
Mariah and the ever popular Riley back in Helena and into their centennial
stuff again. While they finished up their historical looking, I had
a day or so to reassure myself that the ranch had not gone to utter
ruination in my absence. Not that my mind gained any rest on that score
when I phoned my hired man, Kenny, to ask if there was anything wanted
from town and learned that, ^{uhmm} ~~yeah~~, well, actually there was--he hadn't
gotten around to tending the sheepherder yet that week. I somehow
managed not to give Kenny my full opinion of that, just told him to

can see him yet beside my father, rancher and ranger counting the
Withrow sheep through a vee of poles spiked onto pine trees in the
high summer pasture of the Two Medicine National Forest. Midge kept
Dode on the straight and narrow by means of an annual marital fight
so scalding that it made them be nice to each other for another year.

And the other South Fork couples. The Van Bebbers, Alice who had the
attention span of a hummingbird and Ed who was as blustery as a bullfrog.
The steady Hahns, Fritz and Greta, closest friends of my parents.
All of them peopling that common yet still unimaginable territory,
marriage, when I was a boy.

The North Fork, where I aimed the Bago now, was another matter.
In the heyday of homesteading, the North Fork became known as Scotch
Heaven from the several families who alit in here like thistledrift
from the old country. But during my own life time the little valley
with its twining line of creek has lain all but empty.

The rutted dirt road along the North Fork is not exactly engineered
for a motor home, and indeed it dawned on me to wonder whether one
had ever lurched and swayed its way up this remote cleft of country

in mind
a lot of
memory

before. It also crossed my mind to watch a little bit out, at the slope ahead where the roadtrack sidled up the shoulder of Breed Butte-- if I were to tip the Winnebago over, here fifteen miles from anywhere, that'd be just one fine hell of a mess. The thought of the Bago on its back unwelcomely reminded me of goddamn Riley and turtles all the way down, but I made myself concentrate on gauging the angle of the slope and the lean of the motor home, creeping slowly, slowly so as not to get the vehicle rocking from side to side, and at last^{breathed} free as we topped the rise. There I stopped to climb out and look, as I always had and always would at this exact site.

my mind

The Bago rumbled across the plank bridge of English Creek, its main channel and north and south forks like a handle and tires to uncover the past with. They were all in memory and nowhere else now, the English Creek people of my younger years. Marcella's folks, my in-laws Dode and Midge Withrow. Old Dode was a storied practitioner of what he invariably called "the sonofabitching sheep business." I can see him yet beside my father, rancher and ranger counting the Withrow sheep through a vee of poles spiked onto pine trees in the high summer pasture of the national forest. Midge kept Dode on the straight and narrow by means of an annual marital fight so scalding that it made them be nice to each other for another year. The other South Fork couples, Alice and Ed Van Bebber and Fritz and Greta Hahn, who peopled that common

yet still unimaginable territory, marriage, when I was a boy. The Withrow ranch is run by a son-in-law, the Hahn outfit by a third generation of that family, the Van Bebber place was bought some years ago by a fellow from South Dakota. Down the main channel of English

Creek all the way to Gros Ventre, the case is pretty much the same; new generations and newcomers keeping those eight or ten ranches bobbing along. The North Fork, where I aimed the Bago now, is another matter. Known as Scotch Heaven in the period of the homesteaders when several families alit in here like thistledrift from the Old Country, during my own lifetime the little valley with its twining line of creek has lain all but empty.

The rutted dirt road along the North Fork is not exactly engineered for a motor home, and indeed it dawned on me to wonder whether one had ever lurched and swayed its way up this remote cleft of country before.

land is not a whole lot of use to me--the Barclay place in particular

is way too high and dry to be anything but a dab of pasture; it makes

you wonder what was in the man's mind to site himself up there--but

I somehow wanted it. Maybe I was simply trying to erase that Hebnerized

look from my father's face, in the memories.

more?

During my boyhood, the North Fork's exception to emptiness was the creekside cluster of log buildings, darkest brown with age and sagging with disuse, below this west shoulder of Breed Butte. The Hebner place. The patriarchal slum of Good Help Hebner, so named because he was the utter opposite; no one had ever discovered the atom of work that Good Help was capable of except for siring children by the carload.

One of the scenes I carry is the stricken look on my father's face whenever his ranger duties took him past here. With a shake of his head as if bothered by a bee, he would briefly cuss in disbelief, then rein his horse away. For before the Hebners, it was the McCaskill place. The homestead of my grandparents from Scotland, the site where my father grew up. Seeing Good Help and his ever-growing brood there in tumbledown circumstances seemed to take the core out of my father until he could put the Hebner place from sight and mind one more time.

I know
now place
where a long
walk or boat

At least it is a McCaskill place again now. Mine, to be precise. I've never been able to justify the deal in dollars, but when the chance came a few years ago, I bought this original McCaskill homestead and along with it the old Barclay homestead on Breed Butte. This North Fork

Another McCaskill battleground of the heart. Here was where my
grandparents had homesteaded--Scotch Heaven, the little valley with
its twining line of creek became known as from the several families
who alit in here like thistledrift from the old country--and here
was where my grandfather

The Bago rumbled across the plank bridge of English Creek, and
as if that was the signal I spotted the sheep, fluffed out across the
nearest slope of Breed Butte.

"How old was he when--" Riley indicated with a nod of his head
Alec's stone.

"Twenty-two, a little short of twenty-three." I cleared my throat
and looked off to the sharp outline of the mountains against the dusk
sky. "Getting dark. You got the epitaphs you wanted?"

Riley glanced at the remainder of unread headstones, then at me.
"Enough for now," he said, and we left.

Those selfsame mountains of that other evening, Roman Reef and
Phantom Woman peak and Jericho Reef, stood before me now as I drove on
in search of sheep and herder. Maybe the mountains anchor the old thoughts,
the fleet of moments that is the past. In spite of ourselves, or because of

ourselves--I still do not know which--the family we had been here
at the English Creek ranger station never truly recovered from the
ruction between my parents and my brother when he declared himself
against college and the future they hoped for him, and in favor of
linkage with Leona, that summer of 1939. Fifty years ago now.

Centennials don't do us any personal harm, it's always a hundred years
since one thing or another happened. But the half-centuries, the

more?

We've
probably
had
some

fifty-year wedges that take most of our own lifetimes, those are the
killers.

*devastating
crisis.*

[Faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page]

"All I've ever been able to figure out, Jick, is that no job fits as well as a person would like it to, but some of us fit the job better than others do. That sorts matters out a little." That had been my father's reply, during our last English Creek summer, when I asked why he had ended up as a forest ranger instead of, say, a rancher.

"Jick, when people fall in love the way we did, it's--I don't mean this like it sounds, but it's like being sick." My mother's voice that same summer when I asked her why she married my father, for I was at that supreme pestering age, nearly fifteen. "Sick in a wonderful way, if you can imagine that. The feeling is in you just all the time, is what I mean. It takes you over. No matter what you do, what you try to think about, the other person is there in your head. Or your blood, however you want to say it."

There is a low wide bench of land between English Creek and Noon Creek,
a square-edged divide between their valleys. In boyhood ~~in~~ July,
I rode horseback across that benchland every morning at dawn to help
with the haying on the Reese ranch. When the sun rose out of the
Sweetgrass Hills and caught ^{my horse} Pony and me, our combined shadow shot a
couple of hundred feet across the grassland, a stretched version of us
as if the ground was a crazyhouse mirror.

improve
- south
had
substantly
expanded.
abruptly

The bear movers watched the grizzly dining on the carcass.

They talked over the wind direction, what kind of cover there was to be used in sneaking up on the bear, and so on. Then the ~~tall thin one~~^{biologist} got out the dart gun. "This is always a fun part," he said gloomily to us, and edged out slowly toward the grizzly with the shotgunner behind him.

I could hear Mariah's camera clicking and clicking, capitalizing on this chance to be so near the grizzly. Riley was alternating jotting in his notebook and tapping his pen. I wonder now how I was able to hear anything over the beating of my heart.

The fellow in the lead raised his dart ~~gun~~ rifle, leveled it briefly, then fired, a compressed air ~~whack~~^{pop} thwack. The dart hit the grizzly high in the hind quarters. He reared up behind, thrashed briefly, then lay there as the paralyzing drug gripped him. [The

bear movers timed the effect and gauged the bear at the same

the bear seemed, then moved in on him.]

desc
M
camera click

pop

Okay, so Mariah was uneasy about that memory. Hell, I was uneasy about it, even though I still believed that particular bear had to be gotten rid of. What was bugging her was ~~the~~ remembering of the excitement of the four of us, the family pride, over the killing of that bear. Somehow the proposition seemed simpler then.

Clearly the grizzlies had cause to believe matters were increasingly complicated: ~~was~~ the snared bear 00 yards away under a big cottonwood already was staring at the two state men and their pickups when ~~I pulled into the~~ ~~the motorhome~~ and the three of us entered the picture.

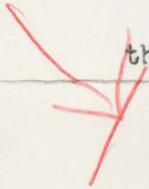
Riley knew the biologist, but the rest of us handshook and murmured our hellos, and the immediate next sound was Mariah's camera catching the stare of the bear. "How close can I go?" she of course asked.

Right
"~~About~~ where you are is close enough until we get him tranked,"

the biologist advised.

"Got ourselves a JD here," ^{as it asked.} ~~the~~ biologist explained that a ^{young} juvenile

bear like this one was really a lot like a juvenile delinquent, getting into trouble, no slot in life.



college
pic

.. yeah, 0
a 2-yr-old "

bear caravan circles back down Highway 89 over some of same route

they'd already been over that day, in returning the Yugo to Gt Falls.

Jick: Running in a circle maybe was a fitting summary of this centennial

stuff so far.

I don't quite know why I felt as if I was in an operating room,
watching surgery that made me queasy. ^{Maybe because of} The tranquilizer dart that had
conked out the bear, [anesthetic really.] Or maybe the operation itself
here, transporting something this wild and this huge. Yet I sure as
hell didn't want a marauding grizzly left alone.

as immobilized

twice
beats
beats
as if thinking
out loud.

"Got just what we want, a ^{live} ~~snoozing~~ ^{tranked} bear but not a dead bear," the biologist ~~tall thin one~~ reported. "Once in a great while the tranquilizer causes an overreaction that kills the critter."