

and started to turn away.

"Wait," Hugh called. "Wait, wait."

He considered the cleanly sliced shaft of sapling. By comparison ~~the~~ his array of stumps ~~around him~~ looked like an assault by beavers.

"Maybe," Hugh suggested, "you could show me the doing of that?"

#

Thereafter Hugh worked devastation on his area of thicket, once Birdie Hinch had taught him the knack of bending a sapling into tension and then giving it a clip with the axe. The gossip mill promptly provided Hugh the derivation of Hinch's nickname: arrest and conviction for stealing chickens. ("Buggers think they're funny," Birdie drawled without rancor. "Just because a man draws a little hoosegow time for trying to feed himself.") Hugh also discerned that, aside from Birdie's knack with an axe and possibly with poultry, he was an absolute flub at anything requiring manual dexterity. Birdie could barely work the cork in and out of the waterbag. Hugh wondered about Birdie Hinch's prospects at Fort Peck once they were done slaughtering timber. For that matter, Hugh wondered about Hugh Duff's.

At quitting time, ^{he} Hugh and Birdie trudged together to the crew

truck. They met up with Neil and Bruce, both full of bounce.

When Hugh introduced Birdie, the hawknosed man peered at the younger Duffs ~~quizzically.~~ ^{inquisitively.}

"Be you twins, or brothers?"

The pair wrinkled their noses at each other as if making faces in a mirror, then laughed.

Neil was the one who said, "We're guilty on both counts."

stale
Two more sons at once, before noon on a bright September day in 1914, had multiplied Hugh Duff beyond any prior estimate of himself.

Giddy with pride, he carried the twin bundles around the kitchen table as if he couldn't wait to start these dazzlers going on the world. Father of three, just like that. His own father, blusterbox though he was, had only managed two; and Hugh's younger brother Darius back in Scotland ~~had none to show.~~ ^{his total had} ~~didn't even have any.~~ ^{be none} (At least he'd better ~~not have--the~~ ^{scamp} ~~scoundrel~~ ^{had never married.}) No, this was family-founding with no doubt about it,

Hugh Duff-style, Missouri River-style, he and his would fill this valley before they were done, work this fresh Nile to a perfection. It dizzied him, the complete turnaround from only a few years ago: this alfalfa-seed farm, sons in triplicate now, and Meg there in the bedroom having come

through the birthings fine, a bit peaked but fine.

One of the babies began to squall, and that set off the other one.

Hugh hooted with pleasure at the duet. Out of the bedroom swooped the midwife Mrs. Austin, chiding him with a scowl. Before yielding the

treasures over to her, though, he admired down at one's yelling technique,

then the other, and ^{he} asked Mrs. Austin, "Who's the older of these opera singers?"

"Can't say." This was the point of the September baby season where she always got disgusted, blaming men and December when they didn't have enough to do outdoors. "I lost track, which one came first."

"But that's frightful, Mrs. Austin," Hugh half-pulled away from her in mock reproach, bundle of noise still held in the crook of each arm. "How will we ever know, then," ^{he} Hugh peeked from one to the other with delicious exaggeration, "which ~~one~~ to call Pete and which ~~one~~ Repeat?"

For something else to do, ^{he} Hugh started toward the bedroom to look in on Meg again, then remembered. He swung around, out onto the porch, and called:

"Owen! Come see! Something in here for you!"

After a moment the boy materialized from the mouth of the coulee west of the house. ~~Honey-haired,~~ ~~Dark-haired,~~ alert. Even across this distance, however, Hugh could see he was pinched with worry. Hugh ~~motioned~~ ^{ing} urgently for the boy to come to the house, ~~then~~ ^{he} hurried back in to pluck the twins away from Mrs. Austin again. He did not know quite everything about this multiple fathering yet, but he was determined to be the one to show Owen the amazing little brothers.

Mrs. Austin was clattering at the cookstove and his father was sitting in the armchair gently bouncing a wrapped-up baby in each arm when Owen slipped in from outside. Two! Nobody had warned him there would be this many!

"Brothers for you, Ownie. ~~Two~~ ^{A pair} for the cost of one, what do you think of that?"

The boy considered the newcomers. He drew enough breath for honesty, then told it out:

"They look like mice."

"Eh?" With Mrs. Austin in the same room, Hugh chose to mishear.

"Yes, they do look nice, don't they. Best babies ever. Why don't you

trot on in and tell your mother you think so."

In the bed, his mother looked tired, tireder even than after washday, and she turned her head toward him as if even that was a lot of work.

"Ownie, did you see your brothers?"

His worried "Yes, Mama" was barely above a whisper.

She whispered back as if it was just their secret: "Aren't they funny little monkeybunnies?"

Owen's heart raced with relief. She knew! Now he wouldn't need to point out to her, as he'd tried to with his father, these babies' pink-all-over, squinchy, general balled-up helpless kind of look. His mother knew they were an awful disappointment, why had he ever been afraid she wouldn't?

"Ownie, they'll take some getting used to," his mother kept in a whisper.

He certainly didn't doubt that. "Uh huh."

"Sometimes they'll be a real handful for me," she whispered on.

"You know there are times when your daddy has to be gone. That's when I'll need you to--to be my help, with your brothers. Will you do that

Roman

for me?"

In the kitchen, Mrs. Austin walloped some food onto a plate for Hugh, ~~having~~ decided to try to get him fed and out from under foot in the house, so that she could pat the situation of the new mother and twin babies into place. To look at him, you would think Hugh Duff had just invented parenthood. Yet she had seen this ~~man~~ ^{in town} drunk as a skunk ~~on the street of Sandusky~~ ^{town} not a month ago. Which meant that his pregnant wife and the little boy Owen were here home by themselves while he was ~~in town~~ getting himself soused. True, at the time he had been at his ~~democrat~~ wagon loading his groceries with the concentration of a clockmaker--no one ~~can be~~ ^{is} as overly serious as a drunkard--but Mrs. Austin gave him no marks for heading home while it was still daylight; if he hadn't he would be a brute on top of being a spree hound.

Her civility was in short supply, then, when she observed to Hugh that twins were no simple newcomers to a household. "The mother can't help but feel done in, for a while. I can send our girl Cora to help mind the babies and their brother some afternoons. I'd think your wife would like that."

~~Hugh Duff~~

~~He rounded on her so quickly it scared her a little. All celebration~~
~~was gone from Hugh Duff's face as he confronted the meddling woman.~~

"You're a doubly adequate midwife, Mrs. Austin," he told her softly.

"But you don't know thing one about Margaret Duff."

encl
itals

#

Neither of them was ever able to pass up a mirror. And neither wanted to see any twin exactness reflected back.

Hugh and Meg Duff's double helping of sons were not identicals, that was never the question. Naturally they'd had all the mysterious pacts that twins start out with. As toddlers, Bruce and Neil, Neil and Bruce, prattled away in their private language for everything from the spoon in their mush to petting the dog. As growing boys, they were possessed of that spooky knack of always knowing what the other one was up to, even when out of sight. (Owen sometimes speculated whether they navigated off each other like bats in the dark.) But by something like instantaneous mutual decision, at about thirteen they'd had enough of being a matched set. (Their father, they already knew, was eternally going to see them that way, as two halves of the one thing--his ^{prize} ~~workhorse~~ ~~team.~~ ~~pair.~~ Their mother, they equally sensed, could always catch them at

p. 82A follows

their differences before they themselves could.) Bruce let the world know so by his war paint. Neil came out of the wallpaper at you.

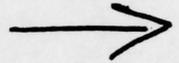
The truth of the looking glass, though: there was no total cure for being twins. At Fort Peck they still habitually ~~liked to tag~~^{ged} around with each other after-hours, to see what that might provoke; while at the same time you could not have paid them enough of a wage to make them work side by side. By keeping some distance between them on the job, they at least could avoid the name mix-ups. Neil and Bruce, Bruce and Neil, ~~grudgingly accept~~^{ed} that they shared a resemblance, but for the life of them they didn't see how anyone could think either of them was the other.

———
DROP CAP

Winter came early to Fort Peck that year--~~there~~^{were} those who claimed it did every year--and, at least to the Duffs, felt oddly welcome.

Birdie Hinch and other out-of-staters for whom this was the first Montana winter thought it was cold when the temperature sank to zero or so, and the Montanans laughed at them and ~~bragged~~^{maintained} that this was an open no three-day blizzards, winter, next thing to shirtsleeve weather. Maybe so, but the route from Glasgow to the dam site, dim excuse for a road in any season, now had

ample windshield-high snowdrifts to create work for squadrons of shovelers (Bruce among them, although Neil had been picked as a carpenter's helper in the setting^fup of the boatyard), Teams of horses were called into use to pull out stuck trucks (briefly giving Hugh something he could handle the reins of) and to draw haysleds carrying massive construction timbers, apparitions in harness trudging their load across snowy prairie to this most modern of dam sites. In Glasgow, though, winter was simply the white calendar outside the windows while officework kept on furiously as ever (Owen, ~~perpetually~~^{and} closeted with blueprints) specifications, and ~~and~~



~~e~~ tolerances, would have told you it blizzarded inside all that winter, ~~too~~),
 as did the round-the-clock feeding (Jamaala, Meg was pretty sure, had
 actually smacked his lips after tasting one of her dozens of batches of
 dough for cookhouse Christmas cookies) and other necessities to keep up
 with the Fort Peck project's constant spasms of growth.

#

Eight-thirty, Saturday morning, December 23rd, Charlene worked the
 pair of nightlock keys to let herself in the big double doors of Cunningham's.
 A nice fresh inch of damp doughy snow squelked beneath her overshoes; on
 that entire block of Main, about a good snowball fight's worth. Just
 enough to pretty the street, put a holiday cap of white on downtown Bozeman.
 She hoped, ~~however~~ ^{though}, that the man sleeping ~~it~~ off behind the steering wheel
 of the muddy Ford coupe (doubtless one of the hick bachelor ranchers from
 the gumbo country around Maudlow, her Toston prejudice said) parked at
 the curb hadn't frozen to death during the night. Probably not; the
 coupe's windows were merely fogged up, not iced over; serve him right if
 he had, though.

She went on into the department store and turned on a side-aisle
 bank of lights, so she could see her way up to the cloakroom. While she

still had her coat and scarf and overshoes on, she really ought to go back out and wake up the swacked-out sleeper in the car, she knew. She considered leaving him for one of the younger salesgirls, Aggie or Wilma, when they came in at nine. Tell them there was a readymade boyfriend waiting for them outside, just needed a little thawing out. Oh sure, and if the snoozehound froze stiff in the meantime...Charlene giggled; ~~or~~ in any other part of himself...

As she opened the ^{store} door and stepped back out onto the snowy sidewalk, the window of the coupe rolled down and Charlene Duff realized she was looking at another Duff.

"Bru--Neil! Isn't it?!" She crossed the sidewalk while the breath of her words still hung in the air.

"Yeah, hi, Charlene." He accomplished the feat of yawning and smiling at the same time. "Didn't know just where you lived, so I--"

Owen! The world fell around her. Owen had drawn Christmas duty ⁵ in his job, but was coming down next weekend to spend New Year's with her. Something had happened-- ~~but now he'd been the victim of--what?~~ Something so awful that they couldn't resort to a telegram, had to send a member of the immediate-- Charlene

stared, glared, at Neil. She ~~now~~^g understood why olden peoples killed messengers who showed up with bad news.

"Owen's good," Neil recited, still a little sleepily. "Or was, when I left yesterday forenoon."

"Then what--why're you--" Charlene knew that her mouth was hanging open, and when other people did that she asked them if they were catching flies. "Neil, tell me what your being here--what this is about."

"Came to see if I could take you up north."

Charlene's silence seemed to fill the street. Neil fidgeted behind the steering wheel.

"I figured I'd give Ownie a kind of a Christmas present," he said, suddenly shy. "That's if, you like the idea[^] too."

She ~~understood~~^{saw} immediately what Neil had put into this. She could

~~just see it.~~ Talking somebody into working a double shift to cover for ~~him~~^{at the dam,} ~~in his dam job,~~ having to pay it back later. Borrowing somebody else's car; probably that would need to be paid off, too, with extra work. Then coming all this way, presenting himself on her doorstep. Even ~~dumber,~~^{wackier} on the department store's doorstep.

"There's one thing, though." Neil seemed reluctant to say it.

"I drove all of yesterday and most of last night getting here. If I play out, can you drive some?"

This was dopey. To the utmost. Owen's kid brother needed his head examined, breezing in here to cart her off to Glasgow and Fort Peck as if--

Charlene ~~broke off that thought when she heard herself saying,~~

"I can drive lots."

———
"So, do you mind?" she whispered, her fingertip playing at his earlobe.

"I sure as hell do," he murmured. "This having to keep the noise down cramps a person's style. Hotel rooms might as well not even have walls."

"I meant my showing up. Out of nowhere."

"Out from under Neil's hat, more like. That goddamn milk-calf kid anyway." Owen laughed, Charlene joining in, the bed shaking. "What did you think, when he hung his face out that car window at you?"

"I thought he was crazy. Sweet, but crazy--"

"Huh uh. You want crazy, that's Bruce."

"--and then I thought, maybe he has something there."

"Sweet, huh? That the kind of guy you go for?"

"I go for Bozemaniacs, you may have noticed."

"I did notice something of that sort." In the semi-dark, Owen's hand had started up again, doing one of the things she liked done. "But that was way last night, and this's this morn--"

A storm of coughing announced that the occupant of the room next door had come awake.

They went still, trying to hold in their laughter. Owen nudged Charlene ^{'s bare hip with his own.} "Go sell that guy a box of cough drops, why don't you."

"Oh, sure, me. And what if he wants a slide-rule, Mister Smartie Ownie, where would that leave you?"

"Never mind ^{on} ~~about~~ the cough drops. I'll go next door and pay him not to cough."

They talked on in low tones, catching up on having each other so near, so available. Charlene felt as though she had somehow kidnapped herself, dared to take herself away into another custody, Owen's, Owen's

and her own. The car trip had been more than mere miles, more than

cutting catercorner across Montana for a hurried Christmas with a husband.

More like the world's longest free taxi ride, near endless but exhilarating.

Neil had driven like a person newly back from blind. Like most farm

kids, he could handle a steering wheel and still be seeing off in a

dozen directions. She would have bet that his gaze had registered every

butte, mountain, coulee, fencepost, and jackrabbit between Bozeman and

Glasgow. While she conjured the only direction that interested her

one whit, ahead, and sneaked peeks at Neil to make sure his eyelids

were still up. In profile he looked startlingly like Owen at the age

when she had met him and fallen for him like nobody's business, but in

the next moment ^{Neil} ~~he~~ would gawk one way or another and all she could read

^{him} ~~Neil~~ was w-e-t behind the e-a-r-s. But so what, if ^{he} ~~Neil~~ had had no

notion of how thoroughly he was fetching her to Owen, to Glasgow such

as it was. Every minute that Neil's borrowed coupe had scooted north,

she had been that much farther along in abandoning lonely. For Christmas,

Charlene was giving herself Owen.

"Nobody has any real place to be," he was laying out the Duffs' holiday

situation to her, "right now." Including us, he thought. Sangster had nobly vacated his share of this hotel room and moved in down the hall with Cody, but Cody's room partner would be back from Kansas City a few days after Christmas--Owen had half his mind going, all the time now, on where to put Charlene and himself. Did he mind, that Neil had deposited her ~~Charlene~~ practically like a bedwarmer on Christmas Eve? No. Did he mind, that he was going to have to scramble to come up with lodging for them in chockful Glasgow? He sure as hell did. Charlene's unwrapping-us-for-Christmas-Eve announcement that she had handed in her job at the department store back in Bozeman threw him for a minute, here she was, for permanent, way ahead of schedule. In the desperate matter of housing, the only ^{shortcut} ~~quick route~~ he could think of, ~~talk about needing a Murgatroyd factor, in a hurry~~ was to ask the Corps officers to use their influence. He supposed that's what colonels and majors were for.

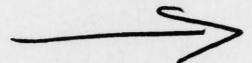
"As far as Christmas dinner, the cookhouse is about it," he went on now. Charlene watched him from horizontal inches away. "We'll grab a table for the six of us, and Mother can get off long enough to eat with us all."

"We're on our own for Christmas day," Charlene asked, trying not to sound relieved, "until then?"

"I have plans," Owen said. "Some of them may even take place out of this bed."

The day was cloudless, the snow brightly silken in the fields along the road to the river. ^{They} ~~Owen and Charlene~~ both were a little woozy and smug _o from their start-of-day lovemaking, and Owen honked the horn and gave a languid two-fingered wave to every truck they met, while Charlene sat over next to him so close you couldn't have put the edge of a dime between them. She ^o ~~was~~ wearing a capacious pair of his wool ^{flannel} ~~and one of his~~ ~~shirt~~ ~~shirts~~ pants and her own heaviest coat, ^{she felt} ~~feeling~~ wonderfully swaddled in clothes.

Owen was spiffy all the way down, even in winter getup; she had always



liked his habit of fully buckling his overshoes with his pants legs neatly bloused into them, so that he looked like something instead of flapping along buckle-less like most men.

At the Fort Peck bluff, ~~Owen~~^{he} pulled into a turnaround banked high with plowed snow, parked the government pickup, and with a straight face told ~~Charlene~~^{her} that this was it, Mrs. Nanook, they had to mush on foot the rest of the way.

Charlene could tell he was kidding but not how much. The snow stood as high as her head, everywhere around. Oh, Owen, don't do this to me, not when I'm trying, really I am. Before knotting the headscarf she was putting on, she swallowed and asked: "How far?"

"As far as you can see," ~~Owen~~^{he} said but grinning now. "Right there, the top of that biggest snowbank, is all. Come on, I'll give you a hand up."

They clambered onto the firm pile of snow, and the site where the dam-to-be had risen to Owen's eyes that spring and the bottomland farms and fields put their pattern ^{view for} up into Hugh's and Bruce's and Neil's that autumn, now stunned Charlene's with stark winter river.

The first snow, more than a month ago, had done away with the chalked outline of the dam, but the cutting by ~~the~~ brush and timber crews had incised the boatyard into the landscape. Work was scheduled to begin on the hull of ~~the~~ ^{his} first dredge only two weeks from now, so the boatyard was automatically ~~the~~ first place Owen looked. The ~~huge~~ ^{immense} hull timbers could be seen waiting, asking to be envisioned into his ~~130-foot-~~ ¹⁷⁰ long vessels, the white fleet of the Missouri River. # Beside him Charlene peered just as hard, but she could not have told you at specifically what. Ruts ran everywhere, gray muddy tracks of trucks and heavy equipment darkly streaking the snow of the bottomland. There were ~~great~~ ^{giant} muddy gashes along the riverbanks where timber had been torn out. War, fought with mud, this mainly looked like. What appeared to be a cross between a lumberyard and a junkyard held all of Owen's attention, she saw, in fact had him smiling wide with satisfaction. Yet if ~~Owen~~ ^{he} were to turn to her, right ~~then~~ ^{now}, and say, "Surprise! We're in a dream, ~~in~~ ^{or} Siberia or somewhere," she ~~wouldn't~~ ^{not} have been surprised. The Missouri, which she had been picturing as a bigger version of the stretch of the river past Toston, looked nothing whatsoever like its younger self there; this was an eternity

of river, something beyond ~~huge~~^{vast}, winter-ugly even in the rare December sun. The split channels around Cow Island were edged with ice. The color of the water, even, said colder than you can imagine.

Charlene moved around a ~~little~~⁹ to warm up, and Owen came and put his arms around her from behind to help out. He rocked from side to side a little, her enclasped body swaying with his, as they both ~~looked~~^{gazed} out over the valley and the start of the damwork. Then he asked:

"So what do you think, prettypants?"

"It's lots of river."

"The bigger the better, for making people some work." He might have been commending the room capacity of paradise to her. "The PWA guys about wet their pants when they hear we can put five hundred men onto the boatyard down there, and near a thousand on the spur railroad, and on and on. This is going to be one of the population centers of Montana before we're done, know that?" # She felt him stop the gentle swaying, as if having come to what he needed to say next. # "You maybe can't tell from the looks of it yet, but it's on its way to being one sweet hell of a dam, ~~Charlene~~^{Charlalene}." He laughed, close above her ear. "Myself, 9

~~I can almost feel it, how it's all going to take shape down there.~~ ¹¹⁾ I

know what you're about to say--what's the sense in hanging around to build it if I've already got the thing built in my head, hmm?"

"Owen, now, I was not," she maintained, ~~although her thoughts were~~
~~definitely in that vicinity.~~ "It's just that for somebody who isn't you, it's so--so hard to put together."

"The devil is in the details, ^{you bet} ~~yeah.~~ But the big thing here is pretty simple when you think about it. This is an even-steven process, really that's all in hell it is. Using the river's own water and riverbed Dredge the fill, pipe it to where you want to make your dam. to regulate it. That's the trick. You don't need to pile concrete a mile high to have a dam, or have you heard me say that before?" He laughed once more, while she wished again she had gone to Panama and Pennsylvania with him, ^{the} ~~that~~ summer of his thesis research. Not simply because she ^{had} ~~missed~~ him like everything, the long days and slower nights--the half-sick flu-ey ^{that} feeling ~~which had~~ told her definitely there was no mistake, she loved ^{Duff} Owen to the base of her being--but so she might have seen with him, all along the way, the earthfill history that entranced him. From here on out, she told herself as she leaned back against him with determination,

at least she could join him in his Fort Peck vision. She could begin by swallowing the fact that what looked to her like the most haggard country in the world looked to Owen like dirt engineers' heaven.

Charlene had vowed to herself she would pull her tongue out by the roots rather than tussle him about the domicile topic on the very day of Christmas, but Owen thought of it himself, glancing at her a little guiltily.

A "Oops, the townsite. It'll be right down over there, on that apron of land just up from the base of the bluff, see it?" She thought she more or less did. "When they get rolling on the construction next spring," Owen was assuring her, "the town'll go up so fast it'll make your head swim."



"They're ~~certainly~~ going to name it Owentown, ~~I hope?~~ ^{aren't they?"} she teased to reward him.

"Hnn mm, no such luck. The Corps boys came up with something real original--'the Fort Peck townsite.' But tell you what, we'll do better than that, right now."

Owen struck a pose, one overshoe puttee out in front of the other.

"I claim this territory in the sovereign name of Charlene, the--what rank do you want?--"

"Empress, why not."

"--the Princess--"

"Queen!"

"--the Duchess of the Big Muddy prairie."

"Oh, swell, just what I've sat up nights wanting to be," she gave

him with a poke toward his ribs. ^{He} ~~Owen~~ dodged, then grabbed her in a roundhouse hug. They laughed at each other at extremely close quarters.

When they had to break their clinch or risk freezing together into nose to nose statuary, Owen glanced at the sun and said they'd better be heading back to Glasgow. As Charlene turned to find her footing

p. 96A follows →

down the snowbank, she heard him make another pronouncement:

"That's the family dam. Now for the damn family."

#

So, Charlalene, no matter how we set our faces for it, this is
how a Duff gathering goes. Bruce won't give me the time of day,
which suits me fine. The Old Man and I agree we're going to disagree
without quite taking an axe handle to each other. And as you already
noticed about Neil, he's got his own set of tracks he follows. Sometimes
it's a pretty close call, isn't it, whether enough of us are speaking
to the rest of us to get the salt and pepper passed. With a dozenth
sideways glance Owen checked to see how she was doing. From the look
of her, Charlene was taking it like an ace. Determined to dress up for
Christmas dinner even if it did mean squooshing in at a cookhouse table
where the plank bench and oilcloth supported forty-two other fannies and
sets of elbows besides those of the six Duffs, she had put on her green
velvet outfit. It definitely paid off, Owen thought; with her hair
gleaming dark and her arms and just enough neckline gleaming white, he
could not remember when he had last seen her this snazzy.

Glossy as a magpie, thought Hugh, giving one more regard to Charlene's

combination of ever so black hair and snowy complexion. ~~"Under my wings~~ ^{plumage}
everything prospers,' sang the checkered bird. Better get used to marital
prosperity again, eh, Owen?

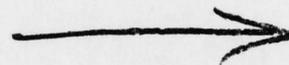
Fawncy came to mind in Meg, the old Inverley term for those who took their tea in thin cups, although she told herself she did not like to think that of Owen's choice of a wife, really she didn't.

"--knows his stuff when it comes to Christmas presents, don't you, Neil," Charlene felt forced to carry ~~on~~ more than her share of the dinner conversation. "Delivered me for this right on time. Now all you've got to do is go shopping for yourself. Something that comes in redhead, maybe?" She could tell that Neil, poor kid, had a crush on her, and figured the sooner she razed him out of it, the better.

~~"That's a nice color, too," Neil said swallowing, either on a forkful of turkey or Charlene's new attitude.~~

One big moment was going to stay with Bruce from this Christmas, which otherwise seemed to him pretty much a sad soup-kitchen affair; with the cookhouse horde for involuntary holiday company, he missed the homestead in a sizable way for the first time. ~~As for the glimmer moment,~~

~~he could not account for it, how he even noticed with all the dinner-~~
~~distraction going on.~~ Neil was sitting next to him, more than a little
 unsettled from Owen's roughing his hair and asking him if he had a patent
 yet on coaxing women to ride in a car with him all weekend. Next to
 Neil, the Old Man automatically performed his "We'll come to the table
 as long as we're able and eat everything this side of the stable," which
 all but Charlene had heard him do any number of times before, and she
 did not seem overly impressed. Across from the Old Man, their mother
 seemed to be trying to make Charlene welcome for Owen's sake, but not
 necessarily for Charlene's own. Here she was, then, Bruce suddenly saw--
 highly attractive Charlene with that black hair any man would want
 to bury his face in, midnight jewel among the worktanned Duffs--and
 yet, ~~lucky~~ Owen seemed a bit elsewhere. Bruce tucked that away, this
 first ^{glimmer} ~~sign~~ that Owen could have more on his mind than he knew what to
 do with.



DROPCAP

~~No one in all the planning at Fort Peck~~~~Nobody in all the Fort Peck planning~~ had foreseen the town without

Limits, Wheeler.

The town that picked up the name of Montana's senior senator and dam-wangler ~~simply~~ sifted to the dam site on tradewinds as old as enterprise

and lust.

MO#

~~First of all,~~ on a day that was neither quite the end of the winter

of 1933 nor the start of the spring of 1934, one lone trailer house

~~abruptly~~ ^{suddenly} was parked on the prairie near the official Fort Peck townsite

~~(the cookie cutter town,~~ ^u as that Corps version of municipality already

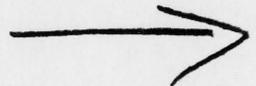
was being called), brought in by some arithmetician who had torn out

the modest double bed and installed eight bunks for workmen weary of the

drive back and forth from Glasgow. Not much sooner was that trailer house

unhitched than here came a tavern or two or was it three; they replicated

so fast it was hard to keep track. In a dead heat, housing and houses



that were not to be confused with housing started mushrooming. Happy Hollow, snug in a little dip at the back end of Wheeler, was the distinct area where the houses of prostitution proliferated, under nicknames such as the Riding Academy and the League of Nations. Some of that particular trade also freelanced in the dancehalls that kept springing up until downtown Wheeler was rife with them.

As to housing in a more domestic sense, everything was built on the principle that temporary was good enough. When the dam was done, Wheeler's population would pick up and move anyway. So, tumbleweed structures built up and built up along streets that drew themselves onto the prairie. Into your shack, shanty, lean-to, or dugout you could barely fit such basics as bedsprings and kitchen table--all over Wheeler, family trunks sat outside the door under a drape of canvas tarp--and for decoration, a framed famous picture such as that wolf gazing down at a ranch house, on a midwinter night, his breath smoking, would suffice.

Squalid, flirty, hopeless, hopeful, nocturnal and red-eyed, Wheeler



~~grew to~~
 almost immediately ~~three thousand strong~~ (fifteen hundred damworkers
 and fifteen hundred camp-followers, the demography was usually given as)
 and still ~~growing~~ ^{burgeoning}. Into the midst of this, across ~~two weekends~~ ^{a couple of} the Duffs
 whacked together ~~two sets~~ of Wheeler lodging, a rough-lumber cabin of
 two rooms for Hugh and Meg, and a one-room beaverboard special for the
 enthusiastic new bachelor householders, Neil and Bruce.

———

Sheriff Carl Kinnick took up the implications of the Wheeler frontier
 with the county commissioners in Glasgow.

"I'm about to have a Klondike on my hands. What do you want done
 about it?"

What they wanted, when translated, was for blood not to flow openly
 in the Wheeler streets but the gush of damworkers' wages toward cash
 registers to stay unobstructed in any way.

The sheriff at least shamed them into granting him another
 undersheriff. He would have told you it was coincidental that the one
 he hired and assigned to Wheeler stood six feet three inches tall and
 looked bigger.

———

Owen swung by to see his parents' new place of residence.

He sat in the government pickup a minute, determined to swallow the lump in his throat. Every day now he had been driving past Wheeler and its alley-cat aspects, but it never fully registered on him until seeing this particular clapped-together shack. Worse, he felt obscurely guilty, although it was none of his doing that the cookie-cutter town of Fort Peck was being built for the Corps personnel and the civvie engineers and a big swatch of barracks for manual laborers who weren't married, while those with families were left to fend out here on the prairie--what the hell, the Corps would build anything you pointed it toward, and in this particular instance it simply had not been told to house people universally. And the ^{it} ~~interim housing~~ situation wasn't as if he and Charlene were having such a swell time of it in Glasgow either, making do in one of the breadbox trailer houses out back of the temporary Corps offices.

But no two ways about this, Meg and Hugh Duff's new home was a tough looker. Rough raw boards and a couple of small windows and, as the Old Man doubtless had already said, not enough room to cuss a cat without getting fur in your mouth. Oh, Owen knew the place was still in process, his father and the twins would bank dirt around

the base of the house before next winter and ~~that~~ his mother would coax out flowers, even if it was only morning-glories. But ~~Owen~~^{he} still felt burdened by what he was seeing, as he opened the door of the pickup and headed for the house.

"Owen! Welcome to the holy city."

The sight of his mother didn't help. ~~Meg Duff~~^{She} had just come off her morning shift at the cookhouse ~~newly~~ installed near the boatyard and while she had all the usual smile for Owen, the interior of the ~~two rooms~~^{around her} resembled ~~sale~~^{He} ~~site~~^{sale}. ~~Owen~~ recognized household items from the homestead, stacked and piled into corners, with no particular order nor apparent prospect of any. ~~†~~ Meg gestured as if she would take care of it in a moment. "We're in, and a roof over us. That's at least something."

"I'll get Charlene to come down and give you a hand."

"Oh, that's not--" Meg said, too swiftly, then did a major repeal.

Necessary or not, if Owen thought it was a worthwhile idea to apply

Charlene—"Of course, that'd be appreciated."

"She can come down with me Monday, stay the day here with you.

p. 101A follows

Do her good." He grinned broadly at ~~Meg~~^{his mother.} "Do you both good. Maybe do the metropolis of Wheeler some good, even. How's the cookin'?"

"Adventurous. Those dredge-builders of yours are on an onion-sandwich kick. One of them started it, and now Mr. Jansala and I spend half our time in tears, slicing--Owen, whatever are you looking at?"

"What I'm afraid it is, is daylight." ~~He~~^{He} went ~~over~~^{to} to the back wall and felt at the join of the uneven lumber. Sure enough, he could put the end of his little finger in some of the cracks between the boards.

"Your father hasn't come around to accepting tarpaper quite yet," her words barely reached him. "There's time, luckily, before next winter."

Owen blew out a depressurizing breath to keep from saying anything.

Meg busied herself at pouring ~~each of them a cup of coffee, as if~~^{though}

that would put etiquette between them and the matter of Hugh. When

she handed Owen his cup, though, his expression said they weren't done

with ~~that~~^{their} oldest topic yet. They knew each other too well. ~~Owen~~^{He} took

~~one sip and asked her outright:~~^{his mother}



"How's his behavior?"

"Predictable, at least." Meg laughed her laugh that played with what she had just said. Then she looked over at ~~Owen~~ ^{her prize son.} "Not what you think. He hasn't gone on one of his tears since--well, it's been some little while." ~~honestly, it has, Owen.~~

Which means he's overdue. ~~He~~ Owen felt it traveling in him again, the around and around question of why it had to be this way with his father, ~~of whether it~~ ^{might} ~~could~~ have come out differently when

italics

Hugh and the eighteen-year-old Owen were finishing the seed harvest, ^{Financial} the late-summer glorious time of the year, there on the homestead. Daylight at last, ^{such as} financially, Hugh was sure with a crop ~~like~~ ^{Talk about} this. An absolute shortcut to the bank: with alfalfa seed you ~~didn't even need to build~~ ^{needn't even} the haystacks ~~and then run the hay through sheep or cattle~~ ^{nor} ~~and then be~~ ^{nor} livestock buyers in gabardine suits. You merely at the mercy of ~~per-pound buyers.~~ You simply harvested the hay, sacked up its rich little seeds and sold the sackfuls. Infinitely easier than flax, which was slippery stuff to make cooperate with a binder reel, and a better payoff, much better, than oats or barley. By now, a decade and a half ~~was~~ ^{he} into the homestead, Hugh had the touch for alfalfa seed, if he did

itals

say so himself. It takes anyone ten years to learn how to farm a particular
piece of land. But when you got it right, learning to live with one
year's rainfall and the next year's lack of it, figuring out the pattern
of yield hidden in the soil, and the splendid alfalfa sprang into gallant
green and bursting purple, which led at last to this harvest of the valuable
buckshot-size seeds: this was as close as Hugh Duff could come to ^{prayer} praying.

And there would be more such fields. He and Owen simply had to keep
at it. "We're very nearly there, Ownie. That lowlying acreage will set
us up, something wonderful. The two of us can ^{clear it and} break it out yet this
fall, eh?"--Owen gave a short uninflected response--"then next spring
we can work it...what 'd you just say?"

"Not me."

Hugh peered at him, trying to comprehend.

"More schooling, is what I've got in mind," Owen answered the
question unspoken. Then he swallowed, and said it entirely: "College,
at Bozeman."

Here again how life could change in the space of a word or two;

Hugh had always hated that and forever would. Just when a person thought

caved it out from under him again.

he had found his footing, that's when something like this would hit.

He controlled himself to the extent necessary to say:

"I need to ask you...to hold off on that, a year."

Owen was ready for that one. "Then there'll be another year."

Something else you need me for. No, this is quits. This year."

Hugh did not want to ask further, but had to. "Just when is it
you're taking yourself off to such great things?"

"Not for a week yet." Owen had this readiest of all. "I can
take care of the place while you go to town."

While you go on your bender. While you hide in a bottle. While
you fall off the water wagon as you ^{so} regularly do. Owen might as well
have spoken the charges every conceivable way, it would not have mattered
more. What hit Hugh was his son's basic calculation, Owen's calm
allowance of time for his father to behave in the expected ^{unreliable} manner.

"Throw salt on it and walk away, eh, Ownie?" Hugh spoke with fury.

"That's going to be your notion of life, is it? Don't trouble yourself

any here. Your mother and the twins will get by while I'm in town.

Those of us who can take a knock for each other's sake will get by."

itals

end
itals

"Has he said--will he stick with the work here, do you think?" ^{now}

Owen asked his mother, [↓] past his original intentions. What the hell else

can I do, when she's sitting here in a shack the wind will pour through?

Damn him anyway, why is it always so rough--

"There is no other choice whatsoever," Meg willed away ^{his} ~~Owen's~~

question just as she had done all the times it rose up in her.

"That hasn't always stopped him, has it?" ^{His mother and he} ~~Owen and his mother~~ had

always been ^{natural} allies ~~on this~~. Yes, go, she had told him the summer of his

break from home. Have it better for yourself than we've been able to.

You are special to me, Owen, and I want to see you make your way to fine

things. "Hanging on to the homestead ^{practically} forever," Owen cited

as if prosecuting in absentia, "the way he did. You saw he was throwing

good money after bad, I saw it--how did he get to be the only Scotchman

who doesn't know how to keep his hand around a dollar?"

"He's Hugh Duff," Meg said. "He takes slowly to persuasion."

"He'd better take to the chance ~~we all have~~ here," Owen said

reflectively, eyes on the chinks of daylight through that back wall,
"or he'll find himself sweeping out whorehouses, the damned old--"

"Don't!"

~~She~~
~~Meg~~ was giving him a look that peeled him back to boy, the scold
that seemed to hurt her twice as much as him. ~~He~~
~~Owen~~ felt his face
flush. Then his mother seemed to come to herself, and smiled the apology.
"I'm never going to like hearing you take on against your father, even
when I feel like knocking his ears down myself."

"All right, I guess we better keep our priorities straight," Owen
resorted to. "Nailing his hide to the wall isn't nearly enough to help
this place any." He figured he knew just the thing that would, though.

The Blue Room, it came to be called, after Owen snuck back the next
day with an armful of discarded blueprints and a pot of wallpaper paste.
Paper-hanging was not his strong point and the room's corners ran every
way but square, but the heavy plan-paper covered over the cracks and
knotholes.

When Hugh came home that night, he stood for a long minute looking
at the white-on-blue lines of the cross section of the dam, the elevations

and dimensions of Owen's engineering world.

Watching him, Meg bit her lip, wondering which way this would go.

It somehow went more than one. Hugh first of all said with savage satisfaction, "Have him perform a few more hundred domestic miracles around here, and we'll almost be living like people again." But then he passed a hand over his face, a ^{expression} downcast ~~look~~ following it.

"Hugh, wash for supper," Meg urged quickly.

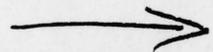
He shook his head. "I'm going downtown. I may be a while."

"I wish you wouldn't." They both paused, and when he made no answer, she said with familiar anger, "But don't let that stop you, I suppose."

"It never yet has," he dropped over his shoulder as he went out the door.

—————
Two days later.

Neil and Bruce were in their cinematic period. A Wheeler entrepreneur had deduced that people could not drink and dance one hundred percent of the time, and opened a moviehouse; the ^{twin} two Duff brothers became instant



Reed

addicts. For days after seeing George Arliss and ~~Reid~~ ^{Reed} Beddow in Squadron from the Clouds, they piled into the crew truck with the cry, "Pilots, to your machines!" They yowled for a week after Charlotta Hoving, playing the advertising agency secretary in Stupendous, attained the halibut magnate's hand by thinking up the winning slogan "Lutefisk, the hominy of the sea." Night after night the pair of them goggled in the dark of the movie theater, in the congregation of hundreds like them, and swaggered out as if they'd been to harems and casinos. When they piled into their parents' house on their way home and retold that night's movie, Hugh and Meg had something to agree on--that their ^{twin} sons had not behaved this way since they were five-year-olds.

This particular end of an afternoon, Bruce and Neil were a bit ahead of themselves, as they ~~often~~ ^{generally} were in trying to burn up their leisure time, and so decided to sample the latest sights along the main street of Wheeler until the sacred moviehouse opened. As usual the town reeked of newly cut lumber and fresh pitch, as if the community perfume were turpentine. Construction would flare up in one spot, then seem to change its mind and hop across town. ~~This~~ ^{This} That was one of the



things about Wheeler, it built and built and changed and changed but wasn't nearly all in working order yet. Directly in front of them down the block, a top-heavy man in a suit and vest shot out from a vacant slapboard building, turned, and gave the fresh construction a kick. He seemed to think it over briefly, then kicked the structure twice as hard.

"I felt that from here," Bruce said aside to Neil. "If that guy keeps on, he'll be in the market for assistant kickers."

"Wait a minute," Neil said. "Let's just see." He went over to the edifice assailant. "You putting up this building, mister?"

"No," the man said with supreme disgust, "I'm just throwing money at the goddamn place for exercise."

"What's left to do?" Neil peeked into the walled-in shell of building, ^{bluish} atop ~~gray~~ Fort Peck clay. "Only the flooring? My brother and I can handle a hammer."

"Look, junior, the last jackleg sonofabitch of a carpenter left me in the lurch here. I need the real item. Every minute this place isn't making me money it's costing ^{me} ~~me~~ money. Fort Peck's got carpenters up the ^{gigi} ~~geegee~~, and they're all out there"—he waved toward the damsite—

"on Franklin D.'s payroll, God bless him."

By now Bruce had his head in the structure beside Neil's. Off behind the stack of floorboards stood a pile of cardboard boxes ~~which~~^{that} advertised Mighty Mac bib overalls and Peerless worksocks and so on. "Opening a line of dry goods, huh?"

"Wet," came the sarcastic correction. "Buddyboy, you're looking at the Blue Eagle Tavern. Or would be, if it had a sonofabitching floor in it."

"We can lay your floor for you," Neil asserted. "Give us a crack at it, Mr.--?"

"Harry. Tom Harry." The man in the suit looked at the pair of them as skeptically as if checking the sex on new puppies. "This'd need to be done on a strict contract basis. Meet the deadline, or no pay--I can't be forking out to jacklegs who don't come through on the job. You two ever worked that way before?"

"All our lives," Bruce tried to testify, Neil cutting him off with:

"Say we do contract it, what'd be the pay?"

Tom Harry named his price.

"You're on!" Neil and Bruce told him in chorus. ~~It~~ It was Neil who

cast a second look at the stack of floor boards and thought to ask:

"How long have we got to do this flooring?"

"Tonight," said Tom Harry.

Neil and Bruce hammered while Hugh hefted lengths of floor boards and Tom Harry sat and smoked cigarettes.

The hammersounds racketed into the Wheeler night. Wham wham wham, Neil's was a steady three-beat delivery onto each nailhead; Bruce's tended to surround the matter, WHAM wham-am WHAM-am. While the hammers hit those higher notes, a pile driver gave bass whumps beside the river. The bluffs of the Missouri here had heard din before--the bawling rumble of buffalo herds, the last-stand discourse of Sitting Bull's winter camp before the summer of the Little Big Horn, the axes of steamboat woodhawks--but there had been half a century of comparative silence since any of those. Now and for years to come, a river of sound waited to drown down onto the site of Fort Peck--the opera shrieks of shale saws, the incessant comings and goings of locomotives and bulldozers and trucks, the castrato falsetto of steam whistles, the attacks of jackhammers. Tonight the Duffs began their accompaniment of that full clamor of work. Tonight

the true first pinions of the Fort Peck project were being driven:
the pilings of the railroad trestle, the nails of the Blue Eagle's floor.

To the great surprise of the Duffs, the flooring proved to be
hardwood, high-grade. Nice seasoned tightgrained tongue-and-groove oak;
lovely, really, if you weren't trying to drive nails into it or lugging
twelve-foot boards of it all night long. Hugh, at the lumber pile, had
a bit of perspective that Bruce and Neil, kneeling in arm-earnest
exertion on the fresh flooring, lacked. "You could dance on this stuff."

Tom Harry blew a cumulus of blue smoke and said, "What the hell did
you think the point of this is? Civic beautification?"

"Taxi-dancing," Hugh identified, as if he knew the boulevards of
the world. "Hate to be the one to tell you, but the Wheeler Inn has
beat you to it. Half the women west of Chicago are already working
that dive."

"Check out the arithmetic," Tom Harry said unperturbed. "Soon as
this dam project really gets geared up, there'll be three shifts a day--
one gang working, one sleeping, and that will still leave about thirty-
five hundred men off-shift, any hour of the day or night. Not going

to be any shortage of guys hanging around hot to trot, don't worry."

#

Neil tried to take the floor-laying task in little seasons. He would fit his end of a board into place, immediately drive the nails to snug it, catch his breath while Bruce whaled away at ^{the far} his end of the ~~floorboard~~, then start down the length of the wood, nailing it at every joist while Bruce similarly worked toward the middle.

Before tonight, Neil was exulting to himself, he wouldn't have said his prospect of becoming a contractor ^{at Fort Peck} was anything to write home about. He still wondered whether a handshake with Tom Harry constituted ^{the} full basis of a contract. But only as long ago as this morning, he hadn't known enough about it to even wonder, had he. One major fact stood out clearly ~~enough~~ to him: this flooring deal wasn't any so-much-per-hour as decided by somebody else, it was going to be a lump-sum payoff for Duff's working like Duffs. And wasn't that something?

Either his hammer or Bruce's consistently drowned out parts of the conversation between Hugh and Tom Harry, so that they seemed to be carrying on a grave discussion in addled shorthand:

"You really--blam--there'll be--bang--thous and people in this--

whamblam--excuse for a town?"

"Twice that. Simple arithmetic--blam--thousand making a living from the dam and--bang--thousand making a--whammedy-blam--living off them."

"Where's--bang--good in that?"

"I didn't say a--blam--thing about good, I'm just--whang--you it's going to happen."

 Bruce by midnight was convinced that his future was going to die out in nailheads. He had a vision of himself; his right arm ~~would droop~~ ^{ing} down eighteen inches longer than his left, the entire right side of his body from his cramped foot to his raw knee to his aching shoulder ~~would swell~~ ^{swollen} up irreparably from all this hammering; he would come out of this night looking like half a gorilla; he was convinced.

He nearly keeled onto his face in relief when Tom Harry announced he always ate a bite at this time of night and if the Duffs were interested, he supposed they could chow down with him.

The saloon owner resorted to his ~~pile~~ ^{stack} of cardboard boxes, pulling one out with a grunt, then began handing around to Hugh and Neil and

Bruce tin cans ^{that} ~~which~~ had no labels.

One of them asked, "What've we got here?"

"How would I know?" Tom Harry answered. "The labels came off at some forest fire camp, that's how I was able to buy the stuff cheap."

The men ate, plums preceding beans. Then the three Duffs were back at the flooring.

———
It was Bruce, head down, who hammered his way to the footings at the back of the building and, still on his knees, reared back with a grateful sigh to rest. He immediately found that he was looking not at the footings of the back wall, but the supports of a platform of considerable size.

"Bandstand," Tom Harry identified it for him.

Even in his stupefied state, Bruce gave it a try:

"Now, the floor of a bandstand wasn't brought up in our deal."

"Floor is floor," stated Tom Harry.

———
Around three a.m., Tom Harry said: "There's an outside chance you knotheds might get this done." (~~Bruce for one could not conceive~~
~~how.~~) The tavern impresario stepped over to his pile of cardboard boxes

again. Out of the top one he lifted a mounted deer head, lugged it over to the wall along the floored section, stood on a sawhorse and hung the piece of taxidermy as high as he could reach. Back to his next box, which produced the snarling head of a grizzly bear.

Tom Harry cradled the tremendous head, he and it glowering back at the bleary stares of the Duffs.

^{ca} "Deecor," he explained, and went off to affix the baleful ~~bear~~ ^{grizzly}

above the front door. # An entire safari of stuffed heads gradually aligned the four walls of the Blue Eagle saloon, until Tom Harry came at last to a flat box. Reverently he plucked out the wadded-up newspapers protecting the picture frame, and, just above where his cash register would be, hung the campaign portrait and its bold print:

]
A Gallant Leader--
[

Franklin D. Roosevelt

sm
caps

#

By dawn, Hugh and Neil looked done in and Bruce could barely creep, but you could have skated figure eights ~~as~~ across the fresh floor of the Blue Eagle

~~Tavern
Saloon~~

With a practiced thumb, Tom Harry riffled out the green bills of

the contract price and held the money out to Neil.

"Tell you what," the saloonkeeper gruffly invited the numb trio, "come back in half an hour when I get the bar set up and a bottle opened, and I'll let you buy the first round of drinks ever served in the Blue Eagle."

"You can jitney down with me," Owen had said, reasonable as pie,
"and come back on your own after you ^{help} get Mother's place kicked into shape."

Here then they and the Monday morning of it were. Outside the Downtowner Cafe in Glasgow, Charlene and Owen and two dozen damworkers trooped onto the first jitney bus of the day. The workers were quiet, in honor of a wife, and she could feel the generalized envy, which made her even a little more proud of Owen and herself than usual.

When the jitney drove down over the Fort Peck bluff, miles of muck and machinery sprawled across the bottomland--twice as much of everything, it seemed, since Charlene had last seen the dam^site. Other jitney buses and crew trucks were disgorging workmen by the hundreds, a human chaos pouring out on top of the mechanical one. Owen again pointed out to her the preparations at the Fort Peck townsite, but she couldn't tell if there had been any real progress yet. The one sure measurement she knew how to make here was that she could see more of the river each time, the channel

edge sharper, as new sections of the riverbank were ~~skinned~~^{denuded} of timber.

no # The bus made a stop in the ^{inexact} middle of Wheeler, and Owen and she stepped off. If the Fort Peck dam site was becoming a jungle of mud and grotesque equipment, the so-called town of Wheeler was running amok like an overgrown Hooverville. Everything looked like a back alley. And from all the bottomland clearance effort, everyone had woodpiles the size of haystacks. (Cottonwood was about the worst firewood there was, but free wood was free wood.) It crossed ~~Charlene's~~^{her} mind that a lot of Wheeler's so-called houses would be better burned in the stove and the firewood stacked up for shelter. ^{But} She kept that to herself as she and Owen picked their way to his parents' ~~two-room~~⁹ shanty.

"Here you go, Mother," Owen announced. "Brought you the other love of my life." Then Owen Duff strode off to engineer his dam, and Meg Milne Duff and Charlene Tebbet Duff were left to fend with each other and the long day ahead.

"Charlene." Meg had a way of saying the name as if it was a sentence unto itself. She keenly asked, pretty sure she knew: "How are you liking Glasgow?"

p. 117A follows

Charlene restrained herself to saying Glasgow was quite a place, different, going night and day.

"Funny that they put that name to it, I still think," Meg seemed to muse to herself, the Scottish burr very much in her throaty voice.

Charlene was apprehensive that this was going to lead into some kind of Old Country story--old countries were part of the territory Charlene was determined



to climb away from in life--and so she rapidly changed the topic to the surefire:

"How's everyone doing?"

Meg brightened right up at that, and although Charlene mainly still thought of Neil as a skim-milker and Bruce as a wild jackass and Hugh as she wasn't quite sure what, she found herself a little intrigued by Meg's blends of tart pride in each of the Duffs of the dam.

—————
The first dredge, the Gallatin, was aswarm with timberers and caulkers and shipwrights at other tasks Bruce knew he was going to have to figure out in a hurry, as he reported aboard. He knew this was a break, being shifted up onto the dredge-outfitting crew, and he couldn't help looking pleased with himself as the boatyard foreman, Medwick, had him sign onto the roster.

Bruce cocked his head and asked, "Say, are you any relation to--"

"No," the stocky foreman said by rote, heartily sick of having to tell the world he was no kin to Ducky Medwick, the St. Louis Cardinals outfielder. He wished Ducky Medwick had gone into the priesthood.


 He took a look at Bruce and wished, too, that he had been sent
yet another
 somebody besides ~~A~~ drylander to help build this dredge. But Cecil Medwick
 said only, "Draw your tools at the ransack shack and we'll see what we
 can do with you."



 Now that he had been picked for the trestle crew, Neil had risen
 spectacularly. He had become brace monkey.

It fatigued any normal human being to watch him. Using telephone
 poleman's climbing spikes, ~~Neil~~ ^{he} would scale a ~~bridge~~ ^{trestle} piling, dragging
 up with him the pneumatic drill and the length of air hose that powered
 it. In place up there, twice as high as a house, he had to bring the
 hefty drill and its twenty-inch-long bit above his head, position the
 apparatus so that it would bore through the ~~wood~~ ^{wood} piling at the
 desired angle, and hold it there while the air pressure fed the drill
 into the wood. Whenever they could, Bruce and Hugh and Meg and Owen
 sneaked glances at Neil up there, the ribbons of drilled wood festooning
 down from him, the drill held overhead as if he were making a matador's
 stiff-armed plunge into the bull. The other Duffs knew this was out-
 of-this-world work, but they didn't know the half of it either, the

ital
 tricks of the trade ^{he} ~~Neil~~ was picking up. In the climbing, he had needed to unlearn the natural tendency to shinny and instead climb with one side of his body at a time, right leg and arm up and clamped into place, then left leg and arm up in the same clamp-step, then both right limbs again, on and on. That was the first trick, and the next, once he was up there thirty feet, was to lean back into thin air, absolutely trusting the climber's harness around his waist while he put all his strength to the pneumatic drill.

"Takes a little getting used to," was all Neil said of this.

Hug
 Hugh, though. Hugh was having none of the spurious notion that there was such a thing as advancement, in make-work such as this. He would do as he was doing. Go each day in a bone-rattling crew truck a little farther ~~west~~ into the bottomland. Hop down and head with his axe into the reachable enemy, the Missouri's army of brush. Work himself numb.

end ital

 Under her report on the men's jobs, Meg was wondering about Charlene.

How much time she spent on keeping her hair so perfect, and the extent to which she was kicking herself for having tossed her job in Bozeman

over her shoulder, and why she and Owen were waiting so long to have
~~any~~ ^g children. I wonder why I even bother to wonder, though. Meg was

^g was not alone among the Duffs in thinking the answers were on the surface
of Charlene; everything about her seemed a bit self-elevated. But, Meg
had to remind herself again, if Owen--

Owen's mother seemed to have a mood a minute, as far as Charlene
could see. Meanwhile, Charlene was fairly itching to do something about
the housekeeping in this shack, which somehow seemed gauntly un-lived-in
and wildly cluttered at the same time. Wouldn't you just know, the only
thing in here that looks like anything is Owen's blueprint.^s "Well,
better put me to work," ~~Charlene~~ ^{she} more than volunteered.

They spent considerable time deploying boxes and shuffling furniture
around before ~~Charlene~~ ^{either of them} realized they were putting together two opposite
households. ~~She~~ ^{Charlene} would clear a boxful ("These are all knickknacks--it's
a shame you don't have space for them here") out of sight under the bed
only to have Meg shortly resurrect it ("I need these where I can get



at them"). ~~One making a practice run for the supremely tidy Fort Peck~~

~~townsite house ahead and the other wanting familiar things readily at~~

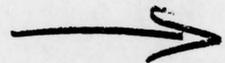
~~hand in desperate new Wheeler,~~ they sparred through half the morning

with packings and unpackings.

"Let's say," Meg at last said carefully, "this will do, for now."

"If you think so," Charlene replied with determined neutrality.

She couldn't manage, though, to stop glancing around the two rooms of shambles, still not sure what she was seeing here in the house of Meg.



~~Duff~~ A craving for disorder? Some ~~loco~~ ^{loco} ~~rocky~~ brand of order that was all Meg's own? Whichever, Charlene could have done without it in a mother-in-law.

Out came cups and coffee, a ritual either woman could have ~~done~~ ^{performed} under ether. But instead of ~~ordinary~~ ^{plain} cookies, Meg produced a plateful of ~~a supremely fancy-looking kind~~ ^{golden ring-shaped ones} with a delicate dusting of powdered ~~crystals.~~ ^{sugar} Charlene disliked sugary dustings, but went through the obligation of picking up one of the things. It was so light it almost flew up out of her hand. She took a bite. The most delicious item she had ever tasted.

"Mmm. What do you call these?"

"I ~~just~~ call them booty from the cookhouse," Meg said with a wry expression, ~~smile,~~ "but Mister Jansala calls them ballenacrunchers." Jansala took considerable explaining, as did his cooking wizardry, both women glad to have something definite to fill the air with.

But when that topic ran dry, both women simultaneously knew that Charlene herself was going to be their next.

Meg did manage to put most of a smile on it as she asked:

"What do you find to do with yourself?"

Good question. See the sights of Glasgow, by walking to the post office and back. Correspond with her salesgirl chums at Cunningham's, but that had been dropping off lately, at the Bozeman end. Cook three meals a day on the trailer house's tiny shepherder stove, at least there was some challenge to that. Read. Sit. Breathe. Yawn.

"Crosswords, a lot," Charlene found to reply.

"Those puzzle thingies?" Meg could not help looking surprised, if not shocked.

"Mmmmm. You can learn a lot. New words. It kind of turns a person into a dictionary." Owen was already one or something beyond. "Ownie, I've looked up everything on water there is--what can they possible mean, 'shortest name for a river, two letters?'" He thought for ~~about~~ ⁷ two seconds and said, "Po." And naturally, it fit.

"Well," said Meg, letting it stand as a full sentence. Then resorted to: "When they build that Fort Peck town and you're right here--"

"--it should be better then, yes," Charlene filled in before ~~Meg~~ ^{she} could.

It was bound to be better, in an actual house in a real neighborhood with

all the other wives of engineers and Corps officers, close at hand to Owen's work. These days, this Glasgow captivity, the problem with watching Owen engineer the Fort Peck Dam was that she never saw Owen. Her Owen. The one who kept being a surprise, always putting some fresh tickle into life for her. Here and now in this session with Meg, though, she kept to "Everybody is pretty much on the run until then," loyally saving ^{him} ~~Owen~~ out of it.

To her great surprise, Meg said it for her. "He can be devilishly solitary, our Owen."

Charlene nibbled at another ballenacruncher, thinking hard. Was Owen's own mother taking her side? If so, how far? Lord, the ins and outs of these Duffs.

"He's up to his ears in what he's doing, I imagine?" Meg went on. She laughed a little, as if inviting Charlene into her rueful view of men named Duff. "They're all that sort. From Hugh on down, they don't know any other way about it but to beat a job to death with work."

"Owen maybe needs--other work," Charlene produced. She watched her startled mother-in-law and decided she might as well put the next card

on the table[^], too. "Away, maybe."

Meg looked worse than startled. If Owen went, before the rest of them could find their footing here at Fort Peck...

"I just mean," Charlene brushed the sugar from the pastry off her fingers, "he can go so far, he knows such a lot, if he gets the right thing to work on."

And you get to swish yourself someplace where you ^{needn't} ~~don't have to~~ look

at mud and shacks. Meg tried, though, to be hearty with this next:

"You can't mean that,

~~Hold on, though,~~ Charlene--don't they keep saying this is the biggest dam of its kind, ever?"

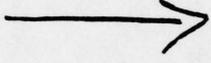
"Could be it'll be the only of its kind, too. Then what, for Owen? There's only so much you can build with earthfill. When he has to move to concrete, the engineers at Grand Coulee and Boulder Dam and so on will be ~~be~~ years up on him."

"Owen has always made a way for himself," Meg's voice stepped out to his defense. "I'm surprised his own wife would hold him back from what he most wants to do."

~~Charlene was the startled one now.~~

"Hold him--? Just a cockeyed minute here. I only ever pointed out--"
Wedding-band instinct took over ^{in Charlene,} and she said flatly enough to set any
mother-in-law straight: "That's between Owen and me, wouldn't you have
to say?"

"No, actually, Charlene, I'd say it's a matter for Owen," Meg gave
^{to her}
her back at least as instructively. "I've never known him to put a foot
wrong"--except, ^{her} a tiniest pause by Meg suggested, in who he walked to



the altar with--"and if he thinks this dam is the work for him, he should see it through."

"It's not that simple a proposition, it really isn't. Owen himself says that if Fort Peck works the way it's supposed to, it'll be a feather in his cap, yes. But if something goes wrong, it'll stick to the engineers here. Back we'll all go to cow pasture dams, he says so himsel--"

"Charlene. I am for Owen. I can't help that, and I won't even try."

"He's not just yours to be for any more, though, is he. He went out and added a wife."

"I'm not trying to take him back from you. That's silly to even think." (Oh, is it?) "But he doesn't stop being my son just because--"

"Nobody said he has to stop being your--"

"Well, then?"

"Well then, what?"

#

"How'd it go?"

Owen was perfectly cheery, chirping that out, when he got home to Glasgow after work. He could afford to be, Charlene figured, before

she

~~starting~~ ^{ed} on answering him; he didn't have any in-laws around.

"We didn't see eye to eye."

"On what?"

"You name it. Anything."

She saw ~~he~~ Owen was going to wait her out, with not the best expression in the world on his face, so she confessed the specific.

"You. She and I got into it, a little, over--"

"Me? Goddamn it, you two. Couldn't you just unpack boxes and pat that shack into place a ~~little~~ ² bit, without getting into a battle royal about--what'd I have to do with it, anyway?"

"What you and I have talked about, is all. Where Fort Peck ~~can~~ ^{is going to} lead to, as against the other dams."

"I thought you and I agreed we'd look at that a little farther down the line," Owen said in the dead-level tone he employed against surprises.

"Like when we have an actual house to live in and I have an actual dredging operation to size up ~~the actual factual~~ ^{the actual factual} ~~actual stuff~~ to judge by, on how things are going, then decide from there."

"I know we did. It just came up somehow, with your mother." Back at the department store in Bozeman, the first one to see Mr. Cunningham

slip out of his office on one of his inspection prowls would always scribble a note and zing it down in the change canister, Have you seen the big scissors? Charlene ^{right now} felt as if the big scissors of life had sneaked up on her unannounced. Here she was in the second fight of the day and all she'd been trying to do was to cache some damn boxes.

"All right, then, those things happen," Owen said as if he didn't at all see why they had to. "Let's just get back to maintaining some peace."

"And what is it you think I'm supposed to do about that?"

"Maybe tone things down a bit, where the rest of the family is concerned."

"Owen, it was only a spat. It was not as if your mother and I threw furniture at each other."

"Listen one damn minute, Charlene, okay? I'm trying to help the members of my family, and my mother is the main one we've--I've got to team up with. The Old Man will pay attention to her, some, and Neil will pay attention to me, some, and among us we can maybe hogtie Bruce. But if you're going to be fighting with my mother, that kills it all.

The whole bunch of them will turn their backs on you. On us. And that's something I can't have happen."

"You know, Owen, I only remember marrying one Duff."

"The rest get thrown in free. Charlene, this^{is} only until they can get themselves squared away here. I have enough say, here and there on the project, that I've managed for Neil and Bruce to come up with pretty damn good jobs. I can probably even send something the Old Man's way, whenever he comes to his senses enough to take it. They all of them can keep on up the ladder, if they don't decide they'd rather put a foot in my face. So, all I'm saying is it'd help everybody's situation by not having my mother on the outs with us." Owen put a hand into her hair, stroking ever so lightly. "How about giving that a try for me, think you can?"

What Charlene deeply thought was that the circumstances had not yet been invented, in human annals, under which Meg would ever let herself be on the outs with her perfect Owen, and that this was always going to pose a problem for a daughter-in-law of Meg Duff. But what she confined herself to saying was:

p. 129A follows →

"Ownie, I'll make every try. But you're letting yourself in for some real refereeing."

#

The dam's first principle was to build not from the bottom up, but

from the bottom down. To give a dirt dam builder a nightmare, merely ~~The riverbed at Fort Peck consisted of sediment~~

whisper "seepage": water, and clay on top of shale, and seepage was the ultimate nightmare: water

eating its way beneath, undercutting the dam's mass of earthfill.

Owen had worked the topic to death in his ~~college senior~~ ^{degree work} thesis at Bozeman,

evaluating the performance of earthen embankment dams. Rode the rails

to the West Coast, his last college summer, and signed on as a coal stoker

on a freighter in order to reach Panama and explore the Gatun Dam there,

which made use of the material moved in the cutting of the Panama Canal--



Gatun was the biggest earthfill dam ever tried, before Fort Peck. Then
the rest of his freighter voyage, on around to an East Coast port, and
Pennsylvania to be hitchhiked across, ^{so he could} ~~for Owen~~ to look back on the one
that spooked everybody--the South Fork Dam, which had been above Johnstown.

Fort Peck's shield against seepage had to be steel, thirty-four million pounds of it in girder form, driven side by side straight down through riverbed's sediment and clay the ~~clay and shale~~ into bedrock. Amid all the other fever spots of site preparation here in 1934, piledrivers were beginning to monotonously peg the girders into the earth, to an average depth of one hundred feet. Day by week by month, the cut-off wall, as this was called, would rise and extend as a metal palisade across the Fort Peck valley.

mod On top of this cut-off wall would come the pyramid core of earthfill dredged from the river's bottoms and banks, and on either side of the core the more gradual slopes of fill, all engineered with Fort Peck's singularities in mind.

"Any earth dam, to be built to permanence, must be tailor-made to
fit its individual location," Owen phrased it in the ~~exhaustive~~ thesis
that
which tipped the balance for him when the hiring was done for Fort Peck.

Taken together, then, the watertight cut-off wall and the impervious core and the vast pervious buttresses of fill would form the heavy lid to hold back the river water, permanently.

Two thousand two hundred and eighty people died at Johnstown, when that less than permanent dam went out in 1889.

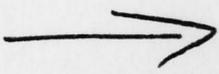
Colonel Parmenter's decision to name Owen Duff as the fillmaster, overseeing the dredging and mounding of a world-record quantity of earthfill, was the kind of jump a career needed only once.

"He's young for it," Major Santee objected.

"He'll get over that quick enough," the colonel said.

———
It was not even Saturday night yet, mere Thursday, when Hugh dragged himself home from fighting brush and found himself invited right back out. By Meg, who was telling him:

"I thought we might both go downtown tonight."



"You don't want to do that, Meggedy," ^{he} ~~Hugh~~ said uneasily. "Just a lot of drinking and carrying on, there."

"Hugh, I do too want to."

That tone let him know she meant it, and it threw him. For one thing, he was much less than sure that Bruce and Neil, who were in their bowling period now, were actually at the bowling alley this very night rather than draped over a taxi [#] dancer apiece. For another, Hugh couldn't think where his and Meg's next move could possibly be, if ^{she} ~~Meg~~ took a look at Wheeler in full howl and vetoed staying here.

"I'll go alone," she was declaring, "if I have to."

There is no alone in Wheeler, Hugh thought, that's the point of this place. Aloud, though:

"Put on your ^{madhouse} ~~prezzyhouse~~ clothes, then, and let's go."

They could hear the downtown activities long before they were there, the ~~music~~ ^{big} din of the Wheeler Inn the loudest of all, and so Hugh steered Meg into the Blue Eagle instead. It too was packed with drinkers and dancers, but Hugh had in the back of his mind that Tom Harry ^{did not seem} ~~was not~~ the kind to tolerate total riot. Indeed, the interior of the Blue Eagle

hummed and jangled--a solo piano was providing the taxi-dance music this night--but there were ~~no~~ ^{none of the} blood-curdling shrieks ~~as~~ the Wheeler Inn seemed prone to.

Hugh with his effective elbows managed their way to the bar, Meg as close as possible behind him with a fixed expression of gameness. She had Charlene to thank, or not, for this excursion. Determination had been building up in Meg, ever since their set-to over standing by Owen, to sally out with Hugh to his nether side of life; show him she stood by him, even here, even in this deepest precinct of the everything, if that's what it took. Such was Wheeler. People, Margaret Duff to name one, who would have sworn they hated the roistering side of life now found themselves practically aswim in it, just from residence in this town.

~~Wheeler.~~

Tom Harry was presiding beside the cash register while a hectic squad of part-time bartenders manned the bar. The nearest one stopped in front of Hugh and Meg and gawked.

The familiar ~~hawknose~~ ^{nose like a sail set in the wind} made Hugh laugh. "Birdie, my man," he said feeling suddenly and unaccountably ritzy. "Couple of shellacs, if you please."

p. 133A follows →

Meg herself half-smiled. "You almost sound as if you know your way around."

Hugh handed her one of the two bottles of Great Falls Select Beer that Birdie Hinch thrust at him. "Three times for luck," he recited and clicked his bottle against hers once, twice, and again. "Don't forget, love, it was Duffs who laid the foundation of this place," ^{he} ~~Hugh~~ grandly indicated the vicinity of the floor. "We know its every cubit, do Bruce and Neil and I."

A moment or two later, he felt further ratified in his choice of



venue

~~the Blue Eagle~~ when a massive undersheriff appeared in the doorway,

took the temperature of the place by craning a look to Tom Harry, then

went back out. Hugh ever so carefully sipped his beer instead of

~~ing.~~ ~~swigged.~~ Meg couldn't have swigged if her life depended on it, ~~taking~~

their time while the business of pleasure tuned up around them.

¶ People's life stories were pouring out on both sides, a gaunt Dakotan

recounting the five hundred miles of mud he and his wife and three kids

had inched through to reach Fort Peck, and a big-shouldered man with a

chomping accent telling another ^{about} his misadventures in Butte's mines and,

if Meg was hearing right, brothels. ¶ Rumor and gossip were spreading with

barracks alacrity. President Roosevelt was coming to Fort Peck to commend

them all in person, she overheard, and hourly wages were going to be put

higher because the foremen were reporting that they had never seen human

being^s who worked like these. No, she heard a moment later, a wage cut

was on its way, because never had so many managed to do so little; and

it was Eleanor Roosevelt who was on her way to Fort Peck. The town of Wheeler

was going to stay so wide open, she ^{took in} ~~heard~~ on her left, that they were

going to take the doors off these saloons; no, it was said on her right,

Wheeler was about to be patrolled by Army troops. # Above all the
talk the piano was going like a house afire, played by a pouter-breasted
woman who looked like a church organist. Distinctly unchurchly, however,
was the procession of amber drinks lined up along the top of her piano.
Amid her music[#]-making, men eyed the taxi[#]-dancers, the taxi[#]-dancers smoothed
the fabric down their thighs. Meg studied these actions. So this is how
they do it. Each woman, some pretty and some desperately homely and
the majority in between, sat waiting on a bar stool until a male paid
the fare by buying her a beer or a mixed drink--the mix, naturally,



being water and cake coloring--and entitling himself to a dance.

Watching this commerce, Meg knew she had to disapprove. The question was, how much. Quite a lot of the dancing, she was surprised to note, was decorous, but the night was young yet in Wheeler.

When it came to bowling, Bruce was something terrific and he knew it. His style had sweep and power without quite overdoing the speed of the ball, and his strikes had a ^{resonance} ~~sound~~ nobody else in the bowling alley could match--a complete, sound-of-doom KWONK ^{that} ~~which~~ mowed down all ten pins at once.

"Fun to see them fly," he announced after his third strike in a row.

"You'd use a double-barreled shotgun on them if you could," Neil observed. He wasn't nearly as good a strike-maker but could pick off spares, where Bruce seemed to rely on the windforce of the ball passing the pin.

"Suppose there's a living in this?" Bruce joked.

"Sure. Right down at the other end of the alley." Neil ~~inclined~~ ^{inclined} his head to the ^{lame} ~~boy~~ working as pin ^{setter.} ~~monkey, setting up the tempins.~~

Knowing there was no limit on the number of times Bruce could stand

to win, Neil simply went along with the bowling for what he thought was long enough and then called it off.

"Still early," Bruce said. "Buy you a beer. Buy you a tootsie roll! Buy you a roll with a tootsie!"

"Big talk," said Neil, heart hammering.

"Well, we could start with the beer," Bruce maintained.

#

Down the bar from Hugh and Meg, a pair of Corps of Engineers officers forged in. "Bourbon on the rocks," one ordered.

Birdie Hinch ^{goggled} ~~squinted~~ at the bottles of mixers under the bar.

"What's rocks?"

Next in the parade of arrivals was a group of men not in uniform but dressed so alike that they might as well have been. With them, Owen. He came over at once, his eyebrows up.

"Meg, it's our first-born!" Hugh announced, as though this were a miraculous conjunction. To Owen, he delivered: "Your mother expressed a wish to see the nightlife of Wheeler, which seems to include you, Ownie."

"Came in to have one before we head back to Glasgow," Owen indicated with his head toward the ~~group~~ of other engineers, but still trying to

size up the latest unexpected family situation. The Old Man at least
 looked sober, and his mother ~~looked like she was~~ ^{appeared} determined to get an
 education about Wheeler, all right. "I'll have it with you, if I'm
 invited."

"What do you think, Meg, are we picky about our company?" asked Hugh.
 Nonetheless he high-signed to Birdie to bring a beer ~~for~~ ^{for} Owen.

"This pleases me," Meg smiled around the words at Owen, "my men
 paying court to me, with all the competition there is around."

"Married men don't go in for that kind of behavior, do they, Dad."

The taxi-dancing revved up as the piano player produced a sultry waltz.

Holy Christ, I wish they'd get the cookie-cutter town built. If Charlene
ever lays eyes on this... Owen pulled his attention back to the immediate

issue, his father's behavior around anything bottled. Hugh, though, ~~seemingly~~ ^{ed}
~~to have~~ ~~had~~ turned into something like a saloon statesman, sip by sip at his

beer instead of guzzling it, staying attentive to Meg's every word,
 and benignly scanning the Blue Eagle throng as if he were an opera-goer.

All the years. That first and last fight, Owen tearing himself away,
 the road to Bozeman and now to here. Owen felt a surge of reenforcement,

the world had brought the matter out in his favor instead of his father's.

They could finally talk truce, he figured, it was the only thing left for Hugh Duff to talk, wasn't it? If Owen had had it to do over again, though, he would not have begun with:

"Dad, you look like dam-building is ~~beginning~~^{starting} to agree with you."

"Do I? That surprises me no little bit, Ownie. My end of this dam-building is strangely like tedium," Hugh Duff informed his eldest son. "Not to mention blisters, sore back, and general debilitation."

Now you see why I went into engineering, the thought rushed in Owen. He controlled it and told his father: "The brushwhacking won't last forever. When we reach the point of using big equipment, jobs'll be better."

"I can look forward to advancement all the way to wheelbarrow pilot, can I."

"Shush, Hugh, you'll be fine," Meg told him as if to convince all three of them. "Don't listen to him, Owen, he's only saying that to hear his head rattle."

Hugh, though, was looking a new question at Owen, asking it as if

in all reasonableness.

"How can this ever work?"

With a start, Owen comprehended that Hugh must have spent evening after evening gazing at the shack's walls of lateral blueprint, the dam in its unprecedented width. "It'll work, don't worry yourself about ^{maintaince slotly} that," he ~~stated tightly~~. "What we'll be doing is using the flow of the dredge material to sort—"

"No," Hugh cut him off, "not your engineer sermonry, Ownie. I mean the nature of the idea itself. Fiddling with the river--what's the point of that?"

"First off, flood control--" Owen began and realized ^{his father} Hugh had been ~~laying in wait~~ ~~waiting in the weeds~~ for those words.

"Eh, ignorant me. Here I had the notion from somewhere that there's going to be a permanent flood, out of this," Hugh ^{pronounced} said. "A hundred and ~~twenty-five~~ ~~fifty~~ miles or so of it, in back of your whackety great dam."

"Hugh, drop this right now," Meg warned.

"No, let him, Mother." Owen drew a fortifying breath and looked at his father. Get it out of his system. Out of all our systems. "There's

a lot of politics behind this dam, I don't kid myself about that. All down the Missouri, and then the Mississippi Valley on from there, people get flooded out in any wet year, and then they're after somebody to do something about it. Partly this dam is on account of that, partly it's Roosevelt having to put people to work somehow."

"But I had work!" Hugh blurted. ~~He~~ Beside him, Meg had her eyes closed and wished she could do the same with her ears. Yet and again, here it ~~came~~ ~~was coming~~, Hugh's refusal to see the homestead as it had become, these last years. When there weren't too many grasshoppers, there was too little rain. When the crop was good, the price wasn't. When the price was good, the crop wasn't. For the life of her, Meg could not understand ~~he~~ how ~~Hugh~~ could stay so fixed to all that. ~~He~~ "We had work!" ~~Hugh~~ he was exclaiming. "Bruce and Neil and"--he gazed at Owen, then away--"myself. The place--"

"It was blind work," Meg told him tensely. "There was no seeing a living, these past summers."

"Other summers would have come, Meg," he said back to her, then targeted Owen again. "Your precious people downstream, who get their socks wet when it floods--why can't they be told to put their enterprises

on higher ground?"

"You can't undo that much of things, that's why," Owen answered in ready exasperation. Meg glanced around apprehensively to see if the entire Blue Eagle by now was watching her husband and her son go at each other, but realized that even their raised voices didn't make a dent in the din level. ^H"People are established there," Owen was going on, "they're determined to live where they want and--"

"And those of us who chose best higher up the river get drowned out because we're fewer," Hugh put in.

"Now that's malarkey, and you know it."

"I don't know that, Owen. I don't know that at all."

"Then maybe it's time you did. What is it you think, that Fort Peck Dam looked around for the person to inconvenience the most and chose exactly you? Dad, for crying out loud, there are dams being built right now on the Columbia, the Colorado, the Tennessee, the Sacramento, the you-name-it. It's too ~~damn~~ ^dbad we can't build any of those without putting water over somebody. People have to contend with that, a little. But there's no--"

"A little?"

"More than a little, then. Some. A lot! Is that better?"

"Bothers you, does it." Hugh looked at Owen in cold satisfaction.

"It fucking ~~ay~~^{aye} should. Margaret, I'm sorry about the language."

"And I'm sorry about you," Meg gave him, her voice up there with theirs now. "I thought there was more to you, Hugh Duff, than this mooncalf notion that we've been put out of a paradise that would send Eden to shame. That wasn't the only place on the face of the earth where you can grow a stalk of alfalfa. The wages here, if we"--her look said you--"keep at it, can get us onto our feet, wherever we want. Hugh, the place, these years--the place made us a start but it never made us much else."

"At least it was greatly more than a shack and an axe and a spoon,"

Hugh hammered those words.

Owen made a last try. "You want to go back to basics, here's one for you." With the moisture condensed on the bottom of his beer bottle, he drew a damp straight line on the polished wood of the bar. "This is the Missouri, our place to here, right this minute." Above that,

he sketched a wet arc. "But the original river went like this, all the way up north of Havre and around, in the bed of what's now the Milk River--you maybe didn't know that, I bet, but until glacial times royally rearranged things, the Missouri River didn't flow anywhere near our place."

Hydraulics 330, the course at Montana State College that made Owen sit up straighter and straighter; Professor Zell, by way of illustration, intoning to him and the other students about the incomparable forces of the glacial

process, which Zell pronounced as if it rhymed with no less. # Tutor to

his parents, Owen glanced up earnestly to make sure they, particularly the male one, were following this revelation of the Missouri River's past.

"So, see, what a river does, any river, is geologically temporary. Rivers are always changing, so here we're just--"

"These are not glacier times!" Hugh ~~all~~ but thundered.

"Christ Jesus," Bruce let out,

"Joe Zuz," Bruce said, as he and Neil halted at that voice and

made the sighting at the bar of the Blue Eagle. "It's the Old Man

and Mother and the Reverend Ownie."

Uncomfortably joining them, Neil ~~brightly~~ proffered "How you doing,

p. 143A follows →

Ownie?" while Bruce said to nowhere, "Thought we'd get out of the house for a change."

"A dire need of fresh air, no doubt," said Meg.

Neil cleared his throat, ~~then looked at Bruce.~~ "Bruce owes me a beer for letting him beat me by a million pins tonight, don't you."



Bruce grunted and started trying to flag down Birdie Hinch.

"So," Neil said next. He decided the dam would probably be the most popular topic. "Ownie, when's the bigger work start?"

"Any day now."

"Ask him how much more whacking down brush ~~we~~ ^{his dear old father} can look forward to, why don't you?" Hugh prompted loudly and took a tilt of his beer.

"A hundred and ~~fifty~~ ^{twenty-five} miles or so." Owen stared Hugh in the eye to be sure there'd be no mistaking his meaning.

Hugh choked on his beer. "All the way to our--?"

"All of it," Owen vouched, "the whole lake bottom, if we can."

"But you're going to put water over all that anyway! What's the point--"

"More frogskins," Neil contributed.

"That's about it," Owen agreed. "Wages are the thing." He cocked his head as if to angle this into Hugh most effectively. "You cussed as loud as anybody when this country came to a stop. ^{I seem to remember."}

Hugh went right back at him ~~with~~ ^g "This country will get going again, then, as long as everybody puts in enough hours on the woodpile?"

"You pair are going to wear your tongues out," Meg tried to ~~turn~~^{them} off.

~~Hugh and Owen.~~ Neil and Bruce, dumbstruck, were watching as if they had just been adopted into a family of cutthroats. "Christ all mighty," Owen was saying in a gritted tone to Hugh's last point, "it's always more complicated than that."

"Simple it down for me, then," Hugh challenged. "Tell your old daftie of a father where this is going to lead to, this work that doesn't need doing except so people can be paid for doing it."

"Owen doesn't have all night," Meg put in.

"The loyalty of a loving ^{Scotch} wife," Hugh announced to the rafters of the Blue Eagle. "There's nothing like it except possibly ambush and slaughter."

Just then, at the end of the bar next to the bandstand, a ruckus broke out among the taxi ~~dancers~~.

"That's my stool," stated the one with white-blonde hair and aviatrix slacks. "More to the point, snooks, that's my customer."

"This stool doesn't have your name on it anywhere I see," maintained the plumpish redhead.

"Probably it's got yours by now," said the ^{peroxide} blonde, "from the weight of that fanny."

"You're the one to know about fannies," the redhead retorted. "You peddle yours every chance you get."

"At least I get the chance," the blonde said coolly. #Owen, taking this in with the rest of the Duffs, reminded himself that he absolutely was going to have to start getting home earlier these evenings and do the night fantastic with Charlene. The platinum blonde--no, what was beyond platinum; chromium?--was starting to look pretty good to him. She clearly knew her business where her competition was concerned, keeping after the redhead: "Now, clear off of my stool and away from my customer."

"You can have the stool when Jimsie and I dance," cooed the redhead.

"Isn't that right, Jimsie?"

The blonde abruptly turned away and marched up the little set of stairs to the bandstand. There she turned around again, took a quick running start, and sailed off the bandstand, her spread legs catching the redhead around the waist and her arms locked around the copper head of hair. Like a toppling totem pole, the entwined ~~pair~~ of women hit the floor, the redhead underneath.

"Ow," Bruce commented feelingly. "Floorburn."

Meg astonished and Hugh and Neil and Bruce and Owen deeply interested, the Duffs spectated as the blonde, still astraddle of the redhead who still with had the breath knocked out of her, groped for her opponent's ears as handles to bang her head against the floor. # Before she could get fully underway at that, Tom Harry had vaulted the bar and swooped his arms around the blonde from behind, pulling her off the flattered redhead.

"For cripe's sake, Shannon," he complained, "you could of broken her neck. You could of broke both your necks, and then where the hell would I be?" # The blonde, now a tornado of elbows, ^{tore} ~~twisted~~ free of her employer, caught hold of the customer Jimsie, and went out the back door with him in tow. Tom Harry shook his head and stooped to the redhead who was woozily attempting to sit up. "Music, Gert," he directed the piano player. When the first hesitant notes of Roses of Picardy did not dissolve the thick circle of onlookers, Tom Harry looked up.

"Dance!" he roared. "This one's on the house!"

The taxi-dance women a little sulkily, the men eagerly, pairs of partners again filled the floor of the Blue Eagle.

"I'm going to call it a night," Owen announced, "before the blood gets over our heads." He still had the drive back to Glasgow, the day's shale core samples to tabulate, and needed to assemble his thoughts for the morning's inevitable ~~staff meeting~~ ^{series of briefings}. He gave his father a each of them still wanting to clout some sense into the other; minimum goodbye, his mother a gallant kiss, and Neil and Bruce a wry last look, ~~he was~~ ^{I'm} the one who ought to be twins.

Bruce and Neil promptly evaporated off ~~somewhere to contemplate~~ ^{to} the events of the evening. Hugh turned to Meg and asked drily, "Enough Wheeler for you?"

"No," she surprised him again, determinedly displaying her beer bottle with still a sip in it. "Not quite yet."

DROP CAP The southern tip of Valley County, Montana, had become magnetized, Sheriff Kinnick grew convinced.

That spring and summer of 1934, besides Sangster weaving his ^{railroad} ~~his~~ bridge up into the air above the river and Owen's fleet of dredges and barges amassing along the riverbank, work commenced on the four giant diversion tunnels to carry the river beneath the dam and on stripping away the couple of thousand years of silt the Missouri had deposited where the

core of the dam needed to rest with absolute firmness. Piledrivers, which already had everybody at Fort Peck ear-weary from pounding down ^{wooden} the trestle pilings day and night, in July remorselessly resumed with steel, the girders of the cutoff wall. And to the sheriff's furious dismay, in August here came Franklin Delano Roosevelt, merrily dragging all the trappings of the presidency of the United States with him, to spend ten minutes giving his political benediction to the Fort Peck Dam. "Fort Peck is only a small percentage of the dream," the President said in the direction of downstream constituencies. "Before American men and women get through with the job, we are going to make every ounce and every gallon of water that flows from the heaven^s and the hills count before it makes its way down to the Gulf of Mexico." As far as ^{Carl} ~~Sheriff~~ Kinnick was concerned, FDR could have simply jotted that onto White House stationery and dropped it into the mail, saving Valley County and its sheriff an immense amount of bother.

But bother kept coming, by the dozen. Just when the sheriff was getting used to the problem of Wheeler, would-be Wheelers sprang up ^{everywhere} around the dam site with names such as Delano Heights, Lakeview, Midway, Parkdale, Willow Bend, Valley, McCone City, Minot, Wilson, Martinsville,

no
talk

Park Grove, Idlewile, New Deal, Square Deal, Free Deal...like urchins imitating higher society, the places built themselves, shack by shanty by flophouse by gin mill, a new "town" for every month of the year 1934.

Wheeler still predominated, at such levels as taxi-dancing and drink consumption and ~~venues~~^{emporiums} of prostitution, but what law officer in his right mind wanted whole towns cropping up in his jurisdiction before he had properly even heard of them? So, as some brand-new rough arrangement of neighborhood followed onto each spate of jobs created at Fort Peck, the sheriff sucked in his breath and told himself that all this was temporary.

If a person could just stand "temporary" as including the next four years.

#

Owen and Charlene's trailer house now was parked on the official Fort Peck townsite, where the Corps had contractors simultaneously laying out curvaceous residential streets on the pattern of the Country Club^{suburb} in Kansas City and erecting the mass of barracks that was going to make Fort Peck the biggest bunkhouse on the planet. There at the edge of the zone of construction, Charlene would not exactly have described herself as entertained, but at least the routine here was more diverting than Glasgow had been. Whenever he wasn't in a