

meeting Owen would come home for lunch, a nice bookmark in the middle of the day, they both thought. And after work, as now, he could practically be back at the trailer house and kissing Charlene before his head knew he had left the office.

"Owen."

He
Owen swung around, only a stone-skip from the trailer house. Neil was perched on a windowsill of a prefabricated barracks framework ~~that~~ which hadn't been there at lunchtime.

"Catching some air?" Owen asked him. Then, wondering more than he wanted to: "Or did Charlene put the run on you for not knowing when to take your hat off?"

Neil shook his head, letting Owen try to decipher that and his quiet grin.

"I need to ask you to pitch in on something," Owen's no-longer-such-a-kid brother said. "A business proposition."

#

The next Saturday morning, they borrowed Tom Harry's big Packard and away the bunch of them cruised, propelled by Neil's idea. Meg vigilant between Owen and Hugh in the front seat, and Neil and Bruce

spread all over the back seat as if practicing to be rich.

"Come on, Ownie, try this boat out," Bruce urged. The fresh paving of the new State Route 24 went north ahead like a gray slither between a hundred miles of prairie on either side.

Owen was tempted to point out that the Duffs already were shooting along at their greatest velocity in history. In spite of being told to by Bruce, he actually was romping on the accelerator a little in the highway's straighter stretches, the speedometer needle arcing over onto 60, more than enough to make Meg and Hugh ⁹ both purse up in apprehension, and he'd liked to have brought Bruce down a peg by telling him that the five of them were moving with the combined momentum of a person going 300 miles an hour, was that fast enough for him?

"Keep your shirt on, how about," Owen stayed determinedly amiable. "We all get thrown in the calaboose for speeding, it'd be the Fort Peck record for most arrests in one family."

"Not a good thought, eh, Bruce?" Hugh still was detouring his words around Owen, but at least they were words and not shouts. "How would they ever test the famous suction pumps without us?"

The whole carfull ^T laughed for a mile. The suction episode had come about because the boatyard boss, Medwick, was grouching over being short-handed ^t for a booster-pump test that needed to be run immediately and Bruce, helpful, cited his father and Birdie Hinch as willing temporaries. Medwick pulled the pair off the brush-cutters' crew truck and the next thing they knew they were aboard a barge-like pump unit moored to the riverbank. All this was, Medwick stressed to Hugh and Birdie and Bruce and a few other boatyard hands he had conscripted, was a simple silt test, to see how the floating barge behaved when the ~~big~~ ^g 2,500 horsepower pump was revved up. When he gave the word they'd run a few minutes of silt through the intake pipe and the pump and the outlet ^{line} ~~pipe~~, and that would be that. Medwick looked dubiously at Hugh, a farmer if he had ever seen one, and ^{stuck} ~~put~~ him out on deck to watch against clogs at the intake. He put Birdie Hinch, senatorial-faced ^g ~~and grave~~ and nodding, in charge of the pump's gate valve meant to prevent vacuum surges in the ~~pumping~~ ^{suction} process. ~~Then Medwick and~~ ^g Bruce and the others took up their posts in the pumphouse and Medwick started up the ~~immense~~ ^{big} pump. Things hummed and gushed nicely for a minute until Medwick yelled to Birdie to check on his gate valve.

The Roman-nosed little man studied the wordage on the valve in professorial fashion, although as Hugh knew and Medwick didn't, Birdie Hinch could not have spelled squat if you spotted him the k and the w. Then, veteran incompetent that he was, Birdie managed to flip the valve setting the only wrong way possible, totally backward. At once the suction pump sucked much too enthusiastically as a vacuum surge ^{shot} ~~came~~ through the intake line, blowing off the top seals of the pump, sudden tons of silt and water gushing into the panicked pumphouse. The avalanche of mud, grit, and water flushed Medwick and the two men nearest him and on top of them Birdie out of the pumphouse in a tumbling act featuring yelling and cussing. Bruce, the last man washed out the side door, managed to flip the emergency switch on his way past and shut down the fiasco.

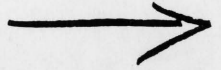
"Medwick never even so much as told me 'thank you,'" Bruce complained now with profound mock hurt.

"I just wish you had closed that pumphouse door," Owen chided him in similar tone. "You let a lot of good fill material get away."

Meg, monitoring her men, glanced over her shoulder to smile at

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Neil, who gave her a ^{wordless} ~~quiet~~ grin back. Intricate, families are, she thought. If this expedition had been Owen's idea, Hugh would have scoffed it to death. If Hugh had proposed it, Owen would have been mortally dubious toward it. If Bruce had thought it up, everybody else would have written it off as a pipedream. Only Neil, quietly central as Switzerland, could



have put this out on the table and not had it knocked it off.

They were nearly there by now. Bruce took a last chance to razz his father about the shortest boatyard career in history. "Medwick told me, Dad, he'd have kept you and Birdie on if he had an unlimited supply of suction pumps and barges."

"Tears as big as horseturds rolled down his cheeks, I'm sure," Hugh said drily. "Margaret, I'm--"

"--sorry about the language, you every time are," Meg chanted to him. "Owen, Bruce, Neil, any of you," she lightly inquired, "do you know where I can send a man to have his tongue scraped?"

The Packard swept into Glasgow. Homely as it was, a town deposited onto bald nowhere by railroad iron, Glasgow nonetheless looked Parisian after Wheeler. Meg made mental note of a paint store.

Owen parked a block down the street from Moore Motors, Hugh having pointed out the fiscal suicide in pulling up to an automotive dealership in a swanky Packard.

At once the Duff sons fanned out through the lot of used trucks, Meg and Hugh sticking with Neil. Their show of support perhaps paid off.

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It was Neil who spotted the big Model AAA wide-body.

He approached the truck as if he could rub it and have three wishes granted.

The ton-and-a-half Ford had a distinctive cab, with a little cap peak of outside visor above the windshield, and out in front of that an impressively long hood atop fenders arched as judiciously as the shoulder-flaps of Roman armor. At the opposite end of the wheelbase, the rear wheels were duals, fourfold traction ^{that} ~~which~~ appealed to anyone who had ever fought Montana mud. Besides that, the Triple A was a favorite in the High Line oilfields for its roomy cab, letting four roughnecks--if they weren't too brawny--ride abreast during pipe hauls. True, the cab, hood, fenders and the rest of this Triple A had seen better days, quite a number of them. The paint had

to be guessed at as the original Ford any color you want as long as it's
black. From farm experience, though, the Duffs knew that when sun and other elements had blistered a piece of machinery down to blue metal, it was just getting nicely broken in.

"Not bad," Owen came over and praised.

"Mr. Jaraala says that although Henry Ford should be taken out and shot," Meg provided, "his trucks are sound."

"It does look like it's hell for stout," Hugh came up with.

"That's what we want," confirmed Bruce. Then generously deferred:

"Don't we, Neil."

Neil was too stricken with truck-itis to answer. The Model ~~Double A~~^{Triple} seemed to stand there, like a well-broken pack animal, in waiting agreement with him and what he had grasped about Fort Peck. That everything Fort Peck needed had to be hauled in from somewhere. The dam site itself was no more self-sufficient than a polar base camp. ~~Supply and more supply~~ ^{Right now} ~~was what most of the commotion of construction currently was about.~~ Owen's fellow engineers were bending railroad iron down from the Great Northern in a spur line to serve the dam site, and there'd eventually be another rail line from the quarry at Snake Butte to bring in rock--rock! A place that didn't even have rocks of its own, that told you something.

No, Neil had it figured cold. That loads of whatever kind (heating stoves, workshoes, bulldozer attachments, angle iron, two-by-fours, kerosene, groceries--good grief, even drinking water) were going to have to be brought in to Fort Peck and the worker towns almost endlessly until the dam was completed, and he might as well be the trucker of some of those loads. With family backing, such as Bruce to occasionally

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spell him in the driving and the other Duffs giving a hand as needed, this could be an enterprise for them all, why not. Even Charlene, Neil had been proud to find out, was kicking in on this in her own way. She had outright volunteered to have the celebratory meal ready for them when they came home to Fort Peck as truck tycoons.

The four Duff men all but took the ~~Double~~^{Triple} A apart bolt by bolt, in assuring themselves the truck was in decent running condition.

They are something to see together, if I do say so myself. Meg, sitting in the driver's seat ~~of the truck~~ out of the sun, watched the quartet of ~~four similar~~ long-boned forms bending over the engine in front of her in learned disputation about aluminum pistons. Put a frame around them and the curious can line up for guesses.

Aren't they a lot for the heart to stand, Mrs. Duff?

--The heart picks and chooses, more than you might think.

If you had it to do over, would you put so much bright into ~~the~~^{your}
~~eldest son?~~
~~Owen one?~~

--Ask him yourself, you need to on that. Mothers and even wives
do not dare answer everything.

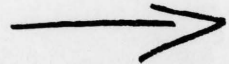
And the dual set Neil and Bruce--would you have two at once, again?

--A major question, there, whether it has been fair to either.

Your sparring partner Hugh--how do you account for him, as your
mate for a lifetime?

--I am still working on that, to this moment.

"We can stouten up the springs," Hugh was chipping in, through the
windshield in front of her. "Put in new leaves. I can tend to that."



He was sure Birdie Hinch would know the whereabouts of heavy-duty spring-leaves in the dam site supply building. Neil and Bruce were vying with each other about how high to make the new boxboards. Owen, ^{was writing} looking bemused, ~~wrote~~ ^a out the check for ~~the~~ downpayment ^{on} the truck.

——— One of Neil's figurings about the Duff trucking enterprise could not have been more completely off. Bruce showed no interest whatsoever in driving any of the hauls. "Your set of wheels, Neilie, you get to use them. I'll pitch in on the loading and unloading."

It took precisely a week for Bruce's abstinence from the truck to be explained. That next Saturday, he bought a motorcycle.

——— The world looked different from behind the steering wheel of the ^{Triple} Model ~~Double~~ A. Neil all but lived in the truck, taking on short ^{runs} ~~runs~~ after his trestle shift, mostly loads of firewood that he would deliver out of the bottomland, then on Saturdays and Sundays he would ~~try to~~ line up longer hauls, need-it consignments of equipment or spare parts that a contractor wanted in a hurry from Glasgow or Havre or even Great Falls. On the local stuff, evenings, Owen ⁵ or Hugh if he could drag enough energy out of himself after a day of bashing brush, or Meg--not Charlene yet, though--had been helping him out at tossing stovewood off

the truck; and naturally Bruce was a windmill at ~~that~~ ^{this}, able to empty a load while most people would still be standing around looking at it.

But then away Bruce would scoot, round-goggled pilot on that motorcycle, burning up miles to no advantage that Neil could see, why did people

have any trouble at all telling the two of them apart? ~~Neil at the~~

at the moment, three full weeks into his dual-wheeled career, a hard-driven four hundred miles behind him since he got off the early shift at Fort Peck that morning, could have pointed out to you that the pair of brothers weren't even existing on similar faces of the continent;

new guy
Bruce ~~right~~ ^{About} now would be whistling into his graveyard shift at the Missouri River boatyard while here Neil was on the other side of the Continental

Divide, across the entire Rocky Mountains, at the lumbermill town of with a hard-driven four hundred miles behind him since he got off the early shift at Fort Peck that morning.

Coram, He had managed to get the truck loaded with lumber before utter stretched out on the seat of the ~~reemy~~ cab, dark, and now he would sleep ~~on the seat of the truck~~, then before daybreak

~~the~~ ~~e~~ start ~~driving~~ east, back to Fort Peck. Wake up cold and stiff, but climb

down and walk around the truck a dozen or so times to ~~stir~~ ^{stir} himself awake,

then head onto the highway. By sunrise he would be on the plains out from Browning, and while the sun seared up through the highway, just as he had met it sinking molten through this same road at sunset yesterday,

he would crimp his hatbrim lower, duck his head a little to one side, squint at the highway's edge and the borrow pit, and as a last resort slow down the truck. But he wouldn't ever,

stop. If he had to buck the sun, morning or evening, its trajectory and

^{stubbornly} his coinciding, so be it. ~~#~~ Almost a little scary ^{Neil} to Neil, how undodging

and powerful the view of things seemed to ~~him~~ now. Time spent in the

truck brought him thought after thought about the routes of life. He

went back and forth over the past year, the homestead to Fort Peck. The

homestead had been--well, home. Neil was one who liked living by seasons,

and the changing complexion of each year within the canyon had suited

him fine, the ^{overnight} ~~abrupt~~ green when spring ^{arrived} ~~came~~ and then the gradual tanning

of summer; he could take almost a chameleon comfort in those surroundings.

It required no leap of his imagination to have seen himself staying on there, working the home place, watching for a chance to marry a schoolteacher.

And the Old Man was not wrong about the crop; alfalfa seed was a kind

of annual gold. If you could last out the bad years, farming that

riverbank bar, the good ones would be heavenly.

But Fort Peck was a jillion times more interesting. Hectic, yes,

scruffy, you bet, and somewhat dangerous into the bargain. Nor could

he ~~yet~~ ^e see the point of workshifts done strictly by the clock, ~~all the~~ [#]

~~regulation and assigning and overseeing that smothered natural labor--~~

~~it was one more reason for the truck, a way to be on his own as much as~~

he could. ~~#~~ Yet Neil could not help but think, ^{here} ~~there~~ in the last mindturnings

before sleep, that the chance to be in on Fort Peck outweighed any of

that, the lull of what he had known on the homestead or the bothers of

being a timeclock worker. [#] He ^{rolled} ~~turned~~ over on the truck seat, his hip

grazing the knob of the gearstick, as if it was nuzzling him for more

hauling of the infinite bits and pieces needed at the boatyard, the

trestle, the workers' towns, the diversion tunnels, the spillway...

the only envy Neil would admit he had of Owen was that capacity to see

how Fort Peck's scatteration of projects was all going to fit together

into one gigantic functioning dam, presto, by some exact day.

~~#~~ —————

The two of them were in the best kind of tangle, from his hand

submerged in her hair, fingers spread there in a loving sift, restlessly

making strands, cupping the curve of the back of her head, ^e ~~and~~ her arms

fastened tight across his back and her legs locking the lower part of him to her, while his other hand stroked curves there; between, the touchings that happened without any guiding, the hard buds of her breasts and the hilt fullness of his erection; and everywhere else summer on their skin, at last out from under the bedcovers of autumn and winter and spring, this chance to wrap around each other on the white open of sheets an arousal in itself; now the coming-in, she understood why the word come was applied so many ways to this, Charlene could say it herself within the murmured chant of darling, can you, there, yes, you can and not even mean it as dirty, mean it as come to her without the, well, the in and all, the egg-puddle that was the male messy contribution to this, the girls at the department store used to laugh about how men were always spilling their tapioca, she giggled far down in her throat; so much better, this, ~~than~~ ^{than} the beginner's moan which could pass for a groan, or vice versa-- love tutored this, even though she'd had to learn the language of ^{it} ~~this~~ herself, although that wasn't quite fair either, Owen had had some inspirations, whispers, help me a little, as now, there, let me, now you, the bedsound too, a sudden gallop to it, what, he thought, what's she...

Oh listen to us, she thought, noisy, we're so--the bed, it's never--
that's not--

The insistent knocking on the trailer house door froze them. [#]The urgent voice asking "Owen? Owen, are you there?" did worse, dissolving their coupled position.

Rolling off the bed, Owen lurched into pants, angrily threw on a shirt and started to tuck it in, then thought better of that and let it drape over his front. "Okay!" he yelled at the knocking. "Okay, okay! Coming!"

When he opened the door, his mother was there in the moonlight. She looked silvery, Owen needing a moment to realize she still was wearing her cookhouse uniform. "I hated to, Ownie," she was saying. "At this hour. But--"

"That's okay," ^{he lied x} ~~Owen said unconvincingly.~~ He cleared his throat and blinked hard a few times. "Come up, come in." He gave her a hand up into the trailer house. "What's wrong?"

Charlene whipped around the partition from the bedroom to where they were, the white chenille bedspread wrapped around her. Owen and

Meg both stared at her apparel, nubbins and tassels everywhere on her.

"Your father," Meg resumed to Owen. "He hasn't come home at all."

I didn't know where else to turn." She glanced at Charlene with what

Charlene considered a characteristic mother-in-law hex expression of both

sorry and serves you right. "Neil went off on a haul after work and

Bruce is on-shift until morning, so I--" ^{Meg} ~~she~~ swallowed, then raggedly

started up again: "Payday, this was, and we were going to go downtown

together the way we've been doing, all orderly, but he--"

"Okay," Owen said with an expulsion of breath. Off on one of those

benders of his. I'd like to bend him, the old-- "I'll go find him." He

glanced back and forth at Charlene in her bedspread and Meg in her cookhouse

uniform. "Can you two--"

"We'll be just ducky," Charlene said stiffly.

Not knowing what more to say except yet another "Okay," Owen headed

out into the night.

It was a sweet soft summer night to be out in, Owen had to grant

his father that. A full moon, silver as a new dollar. By now the

day's heat had gentled down entirely and these hours across midnight

and earliest morning had the crystal quality that brings on vows to practice more poetry or astronomy. (Best of all, though, Owen still thought, for what he and Charlene had been doing. He had already made up his mind to ask ~~her~~ ^{Charlene}, whenever he got ~~home~~ ^{back} from this, if she had saved his place.) The new skeleton frames of buildings by the dozens were ~~visible~~ ^{moonlit} as he hightailed it through the Fort Peck townsite, walking as fast as he could. From the cut-off wall in the bottomland came the buh-THUD buh-THUD of piledrivers, incessant mating ~~call~~ [#] that would go on until carpenters' hammers started again here in the morning. Immediately below Owen, along the river, the boatyard was lit up. The ~~hull of the~~ dredge Gallatin had been launched, first vessel on this stretch of the Missouri since God knew when, and now finishing-work was ~~going on within~~ ^{being done.} ~~cabin of the~~ the long white dredge, like a big bungalow stretched out like taffy. caulking and painting the long white dredge, Bruce and the other boatrats, perfecting the first of Owen's earthfill fleet. Get it done! Finish your goddamn finishing-work! The dumb fury of that--the dredge couldn't be put to use anyway until the ~~cut-off wall~~ ^{dam's} far enough along, was ~~completed~~, weeks from now--told Owen he had better simmer down, tend to his task of truant officer.

Then he was utterly, coldly furious again.

Directly ahead of the figure of Owen, the main street of Wheeler
pulsated in the prairie night, ogling back at the moon, winking suggestively

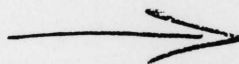
at the constellations. Spit on your hands and hone your hooves,
 Centaurus, and we'll make you into a dambuilder. Cassiopeia, ^{darling,} you can
 find work in this town. Gemini, you twins eternally stuck with each other,
 we have some of those around, too. None of which registered on Owen Duff,
 neither Wheeler's summonings to the stars nor its narrower neon urgings
 for him to Drink Budweiser or Choose Great Falls Select, as he set his
 mouth and started his search.

"He stomped out of here a couple hours ago," Tom Harry reported,
 Owen knowing almost before he heard the words that his father getting
 tanked up here in the Duffs' home port, the Blue Eagle, would have been
 altogether too damned simple.

Before Owen spun to go, the barkeeper nodded a slightest nod of
 apology to him.

"Sorry, Duff"--he called all of them that--"I should've coldcocked
 him and slung him into the back room for you."

Owen trudged down the block toward the vividly audible Wheeler Inn.
 He was not sure he was employing logic, maybe more like going back into
 evolution, to try the Wheeler Inn next, the oldest and biggest of the
 downtown drink-and-



dance places, Ruby Smith's place. Supposedly Ruby had been through all this before, in the Klondike gold rush, and wherever she had learned it, she did know how to draw a full house. Owen was hardly inside the door before one of Ruby's veterans, a hard blonde whom everyone called Snow White, strutted up as if welcoming him home from farthest foreign parts.

"You look like the right kind of dance would do you some good," she prescribed.

A lot of things would. "I'm taken, sis. You seen anything of a guy who looks like me, but older and ornerier?"

"Can't imagine that recipe, buster," Snow White gave him with a huff of dismissal.

I hardly can either, ^{he} ~~Owen~~ thought, but I damn well better. Hugh

Duff, the Houdini of the Missouri. Where would the old coyote go?

#

Charlene was making coffee, no small trick with one hand, the other keeping the bedspread from cascading off her. By all rules of civility she ought to go and put some clothes on, she knew, but the bare feeling under the bedspread shawled around her this way was a ^{stimulating} reminder of what she and Owen had been busy at.

"Charlene, really, you needn't."

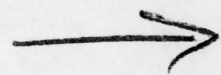
Besides, if manners were the issue, what was her mother-in-law doing interloping here in the dead of night, strayed-off husband or no strayed-off husband? This can't have been the first time Meg ever had to face an empty side of the bed.

"Charlene. This is putting you out more than I ever intended, fixing coffee and all."

Payday, though, did add something a little more serious; Charlene could grant that. She'd gathered from one of Owen's steamings about his father that Hugh threw money into the wind when he went off on one of these toots.

"I'm not even sure I should stay for a cup, Charlene. I probably should just take myself--"

Charlene silently laid out two cups and both women concentrated on the coffee pot for a while, until it began to chug.



Charlene poured, then delivered a cup in front of Meg along with what she had worked herself up to asking:

"You had to have thought about leaving him, haven't you?--Meg,

~~I don't see one thing~~ ^{what's} funny about it."

~~To Charlene's surprise, her question~~ ^{The hard laughter she} had set Meg off into hard

laughter. That wasn't bad enough, ^{Meg was shooting her} ~~she shot~~ an expression to Charlene

as though Charlene was complicit in tolerating these hopeless ways of

men. Charlene did not see herself so at all, and her next tone said so.

~~Her next tone proved it.~~

"I can't loan you Ownie every payday night, you know."

"No, no, now." Meg rubbed a finger along the rim of her coffee cup as if testing it for sharpness. "It's not a matter of that." She glanced up and at Charlene's hair, which Charlene all at once realized still had the runnels of fondling and other muss made by Owen's fingers.

"I know Owen and you have yourselves to do with."

"Maybe you'd be doing everyone a favor"--Charlene paused, then

~~determinedly~~ put everything into it--"Owen too, if you ditched Hugh."

^{I am} Instantaneously Meg shook her head. ~~I am~~ one who fights it through, I

suppose." She stopped and thought. "It's a bad Scottish habit, ^{really.} Culloden and those places, it tends to leave us in shreds."

"Listen though, Meg. You've been married ^{practically} forever, compared to me. And it's not that I have anything against Hugh." ~~(Except for him dragging his son, my husband, into the middle of the night like a puppy with a piece of twine around its neck.)~~ "But don't you have to ask yourself where the limit to all this is?"

"Draw a line, ought I, in the soil of Fort Peck. Declare, 'Hugh Duff, if you stray across that, you're a gone geezer.'" Meg had drawn herself ^{commandingly} up ~~dramatically~~, flummoxing Charlene with how much more commanding she looked. "It has its appeal," Meg bobbed her head in agreement and ^{ever so} ~~the~~ younger woman. smiled ^{slightly} at Charlene. "But Charlene--when we have our say, that way, it still only works if they give a listen, doesn't it." Meg eyed her until Charlene gave a blush, legacy of their earlier argument about the steering of Owen's career.

———

Practically swimming through the tight-packed throng along the bar of the Wheeler Inn, Owen saw man after man he knew from the dam crews, Stetsoned-up or suited-up or still in muddied workclothes, and drunk

and sober and between. The squad of Great Northern gandy dancers, Montenegrins or some such, who had set a track-laying record on the final mile of Sangster's railroad spur line to the damsite. The flinty newcomer from the rim of the Rockies, powder monkey turned rancher turned powder monkey again courtesy of the Depression and its sunken livestock prices, who had a reputation as a magical handler of dynamite in the diversion tunnel excavations. Other tunnel muckers, the Butte gang and the ex-coalminers from Roundup, drinking separately. Montana Power linemen here to string the web for the dam project's insatiable draw of electricity. A few ^{conspicuous in lack of sunburns,} conspicuously non-sunburned Ad Building staffers who daily crossed paths with Owen. Grudgy construction foremen who knew him and his name ^{from} ~~from~~ persnickety memos. ~~blueprints.~~ Shoulder deep in all these, staying on the move, Owen kept asking Seen my old man? and the answers continually came No, Naw, Nope, Sure haven't or Yeah, but it was some time ago, with a stinger generally in the tail of that last: He had quite a load on. Working his way clockwise ^{(What the hell, any method of} ~~this is better than none)~~ ^{was} through the Wheeler Inn ^{horde,} ~~through~~ ^{at last} Owen finally arrived at ~~found and checked with~~ the beefy young football player from the University of Texas who served as Ruby Smith's bouncer, but who produced no news of

Hugh. Then Owen discovered Birdie Hinch perched in a back corner watching the activity at a poker table with his chickenhawk gaze, and Birdie yielded even less. Peering down at the clamping grasp Owen had on his arm ~~as Hugh was asked about~~, Birdie piped out: "If I do run acrost him, I'll sure-hell tell him to steer clear of you."

— Outside again, Owen took the relief of fresh air into his lungs and against his eyes. He stood a minute in the street, under the sky frosted with stars, clear ice-glints. He saw that the moon had moved significantly, while he had been winnowing the Wheeler Inn crowd. Down the street there still was the Buck Horn Club and the Dewdrop Inn and Ed's Place and the Bar X and doubtless some others since ~~Owen~~^{he} had last paid any attention. He plunged on down ~~the street~~, into the first of them.

The story was the same in all such places: men ached at women, and the women considered the men and tried to single out those worth aching at in return. Owen, no prude, nonetheless was ~~a little~~^{gawking} alarmed at how he could almost taste this wanting at the back of his mouth. So many of the damworkers and taxi-dancers were young, or rejuvenated by a

job here at Fort Peck, and wages had brought possibilities; a Saturday
Wheeler Saturday
 payday and a night when the wallet could at last back up the longings,
 you did not have to be a major philosopher to define possibilities out of
 those. As ~~he~~ Owen sifted the town of ~~Wheeler~~ saloon by saloon and dancehall
 by dancehall, there were a number of ~~moments~~ situations, where he was just
 as glad not to find his father then. But he kept at it and at it.
 The dam's workforce now ~~was~~ ^{totaled} five thousand, and Owen would have sworn
 he already had sorted that many by hand tonight.

Wheeler was taking note of Owen Duff this night, too.

Max Sangster and the nurse he was going to marry emerged from the
 late show at the moviehouse as Owen cut across the street, half a block
 away, striding like a pair of scissors going. By now Sangster had seen
~~several~~
~~many~~ sides of Owen but not this nightflying one. When his date asked
 what was the matter, who it was that had him stopped and staring, he
 mused: "The guy I work with. He looked kind of wound up."

no # In the saloons, the dime-a-dance joints, his marches in and out
 of them, early as his brush against the midnight softball game, others
 too had noticed Owen Duff, his searching presence passing into their

eyes, up the brainstairs to memory. In wraiths and wisps that are the moments remembered, such existence as we have to others, Owen's excavating course through Wheeler became part of all the recalling about the Duffs in the time ahead, ferreted and unfolded by a fierce small sheriff. The seeds of memory this night were glimpses of Owen intently quizzing the town and murmurs that tagged after him.

That's the fillmaster. Yeah, him, there, he's the guy they say is going to pour the dirt for this dam....

One of the engineers, Owen something. They say he's bright enough to read by at night....

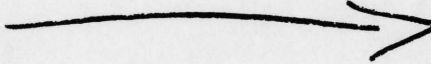
Duff, one of that Duff tribe....

More women than men looked at Owen, some of them frankly commercial as the taxi^{*}-dancer had been, others simply to be looking, wondering what he had so different on his mind on a Saturday night. All the way back at the Wheeler Inn a trimly built woman named Nan Hill, long married to the flinty rancher/dynamiter, had turned from beside her husband and watched Owen pass through the crowd, a ruffle of recognition in her but not quite able to put a name to it, as when we try to identify the

most elusive flavor in a stew.

Owen meanwhile was dreading the conclusion apparent as he barged into Ed's Place, the final and most rinkydink bar along the street.

No Hugh,



and no more downtown places. That left only Happy Hollow.

Owen wiped a hand across his mouth, said something fervent, and went out and hitched a ride with a pickup heading ^{over} ~~up~~ the hill to the

brothelopolis, the two men in it arguing the merits of the red-light

house called the ^{spirited} Riding Academy against those of the ~~one~~ called the ^{more cosmopolitan} League of Nations.

Owen hopped out into Happy Hollow almost before the pickup had stopped. The brothels sat ^{sociably} in a fence corner, plowed fields behind them, six enterprises down one fenceline and four along the other.

Great, just sonofabitching great, ^{he} ~~Owen~~ thought about the prospect of having to ransack ten whorehouses in search of his father, and stomped into the closest one, whose sign after all announced it was The Trail.

The madam, ^{with} a nice pussycat bow adorning the top of her blouse, appraised Owen.

"You seen--" he said and moved his open hand up almost under his chin, indicating to his face.

"In the kitchen," she did her own indicating with an amused shift of her eyes in that direction.

Not quite able to believe it, Owen shouldered through the swinging door between the brothel's parlor and its capacious kitchen. [#] At the end of the long table, empty glasses arrayed in front of them, sat Hugh and an overly ample woman with hair the color of a brand-new brick.

"Owen! By whatever's holy, it's Owen!" Hugh turned and drunkenly confided to the woman, "You don't see Owen out and about, much. He's domesticated."

"Pleased meetcha," Hugh's ^{ample} ~~plump~~ companion slurred out.

"This 's--" Hugh peered at her in confusion.

"Celeste," she stated.

I'll bet, Owen told her by look and thought. "Dad, listen. It's time you went home."

"Been there before, Owen." His father simultaneously wrinkled up his nose and shook his head. "Long time, been there. Not all it's cracked up to be, home."

"'s nice here," Hugh's partner in glassware agreed. She picked up her drink and carefully aimed it at the mostly empty glass ^{that} ~~which~~ stood in front of Hugh. "Here we go--'Three times for luck!'" The clink,

clink, clink sounded tuneful as the two men wordlessly watched. Right there handy, Owen noticed, stood her little bottle of nail polish for ^udabbing her mark on the money Hugh tossed down for each round of drinks. Whatever the whore's cut of the booze take was in this establishment, Celeste plainly had been having a highly profitable evening out of this customer.

"Chase off to bed, why don't you," Owen instructed her. "Alone. Just this once."

"Oh, and aren't you purer than driven fucken snow," the woman flared. "What've you got against playing thread-the-needle in bed, sonny? You plopped into this world by way of what's down his pantleg, didn't you?"

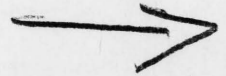
"Bet you didn't bargain for that, Ownie." Hugh gave Celeste his solemn admiration.

"Onto your feet, Dad." Owen stepped gingerly around the table on the side away from the woman and dragged Hugh up out of his chair. Patting Hugh's money pocket while exchanging glowers with the prostitute, Owen was relieved to feel a semblance of silver dollars there, not many but some.

Hugh half-~~struggled~~[^] half-~~shrugged~~[^] against ^{Owen's} ~~Hugh's~~ grasp, saying over and over, "Show her."

"Neither one of us has anything to show Celeste. Now come on."

"Not her. Other her. Show her, her and her dam work. Damn dam work." Hugh paused, evidently in thrill of hearing what he had just said.



Then his face soured. "I--she thinks she didn't decide right, none of it, back--^{that mother of yours}~~she~~ thinks she can turn me into--"

"Never goddamn mind!" Owen cut him off savagely.

Grappling with Hugh, steering him and partly carrying him at the same time, ^{he}~~Owen~~ got his father out into the parking area of Happy Hollow. He propped Hugh against the fender of a sedan and waited, panting. In a minute a pair of customers emerged out of the League of Nations.

"--said she's a white Russian, but hell, ain't they all?" one was pondering as Owen called out, asking for a lift, saying he had somebody with him who was pretty badly out of commission. ^{hop in,} Sure, ~~the~~ other two said back, they'd drop them wherever they wanted in town. Hugh put up an incoherent protest as Owen fought him into the back seat of the car. But once in, Hugh simply sat, staring. Meeting himself on the long road, according to his expression. Owen's gaze was sideways at his father, full of why? Hugh was snoring against his shoulder by the time they were halfway home.

#

The stabs of pain centered at the back of his head, as if his brain was being bounced against the inside of his skull.

^{let out}
"Whuh," he ~~said~~ to indicate he had life in him. Then an "uhhh" as

each wicked jolt shot upward through his spine and hit home.

Hugh blearily realized his leg was in the air, tucked under the arm of a figure with his back turned but ^{who} possibly might be Neil, who ~~was~~ administering the bunkhouse wake-up cure by pounding Hugh's heel with the palm of his hand.

Sunlight was pouring into the shack. Wincing, ~~squinting~~ ² Hugh could not see Meg anywhere and gradually figured out that she must already have left for the cookhouse. When ~~Hugh~~ ^{he} at last quit uhhhhing and let out an angry ow, Neil turned around and gave him the awful news that it was time to go to work.

—

The day before the next payday, Hugh and Birdie were called out of their brush-cutting and told that a transfer to the trestle gang had been cut for Hugh Carlyle Duff and John Bell Hinch. [#] Birdie only said the bosses must think the two of them were joined like Siamese. Hugh knew whose hand was behind the switch in jobs, but he couldn't get why Owen had gone to the bother. [#] He did the next day, when the trestle workers filed into the ~~payline~~ [#] and right there alphabetically behind him was Neil, saying he'd give him a lift straight home in the truck.

—

DROP CAP

A weekend in the middle of the week; what could be better if you were Bruce and on the loose? Fresh off the graveyard shift with the rest of July 3 ahead of him and then the Fourth as a holiday, all he had to do was to figure out where to point the motorcycle. The city of Great Falls was not out of the question, the city of Billings was not out of the question. The city of Calgary, Canada, was not out of the question, even. [#] Trying to decide, one delicious distance over another, breezing along on the motorcycle minding his own business at about fifty miles an hour in a twenty-five-mile-an-hour zone, Bruce all at once heard the Wheeler undersheriff's siren start up.

He had what he considered an inspiration. He veered the motorcycle onto ^g the road ~~into~~ the Fort Peck townsite, ^{zipping} ~~arrowing~~ along Milk River Drive there toward Owen and Charlene's trailer house.

Just his current luck, though: Captain ^{Brascoe} ~~Bailey~~, the Fort Peck town manager ^{adjutant officer} ~~adjutant officer~~, was right there at the new Administration Building when Bruce brapp-brapp-brapped by.

Bruce screeched to a halt in front of Owen and Charlene's, and had barely unstraddled the motorcycle when ^{Brascoe's} ~~Bailey's~~ government car was there, with the undersheriff's car pulling up behind that.

The traffic pileup brought Charlene out of the trailer house.

"Bruce, what?!" Even at this time of day, in a keepcool frock that showed her bare arms and more than a suggestion of shoulder and throat, she looked dressed-up. "What's happened now?"

"Hi, Charlene, how you doing?" he started brassing it out. "I just came over to do some borrowing from Owen."

"Owen's never around at this time of day, you know that."

In the big silence that followed, she heard how that sounded. She crossed those bare arms over her breasts and gave Bruce a lethal glare.

"His...tire pump," Bruce fumbled onward. "Got a real soft, uh, tire. Needs a little..."

The Corps captain and the undersheriff were keeping their faces straight, too straight.

"We just seem to have a speeding case here, Mrs. Duff," Captain ~~Bailey~~ ^{Brascoe} imparted. "If you'd like to get on with your day while we handle it--"

"Gladly," Charlene flung in the direction of Bruce and spun into the trailer house.

~~Bruce~~ ^{He} flinched at Charlene's slam of the door, then put his mind

back to that inspiration of his. "Wait a minute, here. How can you arrest me if I'm not one of your Corps guys?"

"Oh good," the captain said wearily, "a barracks lawyer." He turned to the undersheriff. "Norm, you want him instead?"

Bruce could scarcely wait to triumphantly trump that, too. "But this is government whatchamacallit, jurisdiction, in here, isn't it? Got 'US of A property' on everything in sight."

The undersheriff and the captain both eyed Bruce.

"Nail him with 'pursuit'?" ^{Brascoe}~~Bailey~~ suggested to the undersheriff.

"Could, although that always complicates things up. I think I know something swifter." The big undersheriff leaned down toward ^{Brascoe's}~~Bailey's~~ ear and murmured a few words' worth.

^{Brascoe}~~Bailey~~ nodded, took a parade-ground step forward toward Bruce and intoned: "You're free to go."

As Bruce climbed back on the motorcycle and delightedly lifted his foot to give the starter-kick, the captain continued:

"But I'm placing this motorcycle under arrest. It's going to serve thirty days' detention."

—————

P. 186 follows →

Some certain morning, August freshly onto the calendar and the suncount
 ever so slightly farther from solstice and toward equinox, you step
 out into the day and the air carries the first ^{minty}~~mintlike~~ trace of ^{a turning season.}~~autumn.~~
 Only a hint, cool and astringent and brief, ^{and} then the summer sun asserts
 itself. But from then on, you can never quite put it out of your mind
 that autumn has ^{been heard from}~~spoken~~.

Owen stretched backward in his chair and stared again at the
 twelve-month planning calendar on the Administration Building wall, where
 all months were crucial but they weren't nearly equal. October. The nine
 months before then existed only to gestate October. By October, things were
 going to have to fall into place, in a big way. The three-hundred-mile
 powerline from Great Falls was supposed to be finished by then, which would
 bring the juice for Owen's dredge motors. Gravel for the toe of the dam, the
 immense downstream retaining pile that all the other elements of the dam
 had to rest against, was supposed to start pouring in by the trainload
 then, too. And, Sangster's song to be sung, the railroad ^{truss}~~bridge~~ and the

~~upstream trestle~~ ^{was} ~~were~~ supposed to ~~both~~ ^{service} be in place by then. When all this

supposed-to-be had definitely happened, then and only then the dredge

Gallatin could start placing the fill; Fort Peck Dam could actually start

rising from the much worked over site. If ~~the~~ ^{those} deadlines--~~October~~--weren't

met, winter could catch the project before the first of the earthfill

was underway; same as last year, they'd be in snowdrifts up to their

hind ends, having to plow and shovel and cuss to get the least little

thing done, and meanwhile the ~~con-fabitching~~ river could freeze tight at any

time, leaving Owen's dredges to sit useless in the winter harbor until

spring break-up.

Owen rapped his pencil on the desk, wincing down at his dredge

fleet-to-be. He sometimes wished he could trade places with Bruce,

whistle through a shift of hammering on something instead of sitting in

here Octobering his guts out.

#

Meals 50¢

Big feed 75¢

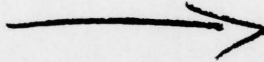
Hell of a gorge \$1

am
caps

The eatery nearest the boatyard, the Rondola Cafe, was medium-busy

p. 187A follows

all day long, interspersed with two frenzies of feeding when the various dam crews changed shifts. ^{One crew} ~~The men going on~~ poured in, to have big breakfasts ^{while} before work, the men coming off shift arrived famished for supper. (The owl-shift changeover at midnight was firmly ignored by the owners, Ron and Dola, who claimed they needed sleep sometime.) Bruce came off shift this particular August morning, started for home, decided he didn't want only his own company at the shack, and so, for a change, popped into the Rondola. Half of Montana was in there already, but amid the swarm Bruce spotted Boudreau



from the dredge-building crew at a place at the counter, and went over and goosed him in the ribs and stood behind him, making conversation until Boo was done eating. As soon as he got up to leave and Bruce slid onto the stool, the waitress ^{appeared} ~~materialized~~, scooping away the dirty dishes and simultaneously asking Bruce, "What'll it be?"

She was lanky, poker-faced, ^{with inspiring green eyes.} ~~bright blue-eyed~~. Auburn hair, bobbed.

Bruce took a little longer than necessary to enunciate what he ate for breakfast every morning of his life, hotcakes and fried eggs, up, if that wouldn't cause her too much troub--

"Stack of jacks and a pair, sunnyside," she called over her shoulder while pouring him a brimming mug of coffee, then sidestepped along the teeming counter doing refills. There were three other waitresses constantly flying by to the ready-counter ^{that} ~~which~~ opened off into the kitchen, but ~~he~~ ^{Tall, for a woman.} Bruce sized up this one while she worked. Slender. Straight-backed.

Not much balcony on her, there in the uniform blouse, but some, some.

The waitress behaved like one of those people who can do any number of things at once--here she was dealing out a tableful of plates while glancing from group to group to see who needed coffee or wanted dessert,

maintaining small talk
 and ~~carrying on conversations~~ along with it. Bruce wanted to be like that, a juggler of life. In his most preening moments, he figured he was getting there.

Business racketed in the cafe while he ate, dozens of conversations bouncing off the low greasy ceiling, the wall-top frieze of commercially-printed clever signs adding a visual din to the spoken. ^{He} ~~Bruce~~ tried to figure out how to make time with the ever-busy waitress; his inventive requests for more coffee brought him just that, coffee.

Then on one of his eye-follows of her, as she ~~arm~~-stacked dirty *on her arm* dishes and carried them in to the continual kitchen calamity, he spotted the heap of dishes at the sink. Draining his coffee cup and plunking down his meal money and what he figured was a staggering tip, he headed into the kitchen.

Dola and another woman were so busy frying and grilling and buttering and gravying that they didn't even notice Bruce's existence. He proceeded to the sink and rolled up his sleeves. Over at the meatblock, Ron was slicing an entire flitch of bacon as fast as he could make the butcher knife move.

"Stand some help on these dishes, can you?" Bruce called across and without waiting plunged into the chore.

"Absolute rescue, is what we need," Ron called back gratefully.
~~Our dishwash~~ ^{pearl diver} ~~guy~~ went on a bender. A world of thanks, mister."

Only the vicinity of it that involved the lanky waitress interested Bruce, and he made a point of turning and taking the dishes right out of her hands, saving her the scraping and stacking, whenever he saw her from the tail of his eye. He scrubbed, swabbed, rinsed, dried, piled up the clean plates; changed dishwater time and again as it turned gray and filmy; caught up on the logjam of silverware, even gained on the terrible pots and pans. Eventually he could just do the dishes as they arrived, which gave him more time to spectate the poker-faced waitress coming and going.

The Rondola's trade eased off at mid-morning, and the next time the waitress swished in and handed him a small stack of dirty dishes as she'd become accustomed to, Bruce didn't take them. Instead he stood looking at her and came straight out with:

"I know how to dance, too."

The waitress never even batted a ~~bright blue~~ ^{cool green} eye. "That makes two of us, then."

~~Kate Millay.~~
~~Rhonda Dabney.~~ Wasn't that just the peachiest name, Bruce asked himself sixty times an hour for the next several days.

He had squired ~~Rhonda~~ ^{Kate} to the Blue Eagle the first night, not about to pass up that ace-in-the-hole boast ~~about~~ ^{of} having nailed into place the very floor on which they were dancing, and whether it was that or the phase of the moon, the two of them seemed to click.

~~The sheriff~~
~~Sheriff Carl Kinnick~~ was stepping out of his patrol car for a late bite of supper at the Downtowner Cafe in Glasgow when the motorcycle rocketed past him, not quite taking ~~the~~ ^{his} car door with it.

About time I made an example out of one of these speed demons
triggered in his mind and he ducked back into the car and hit the starter and then the siren.

The motorcycle already had fogged into the night, out of town and down the road to Fort Peck, naturally. As with everything else to do with Fort Peck, ~~Sheriff~~ ^{Sheriff} Kinnick wished the new highway had never happened. Word had reached him that the damworkers who lived in Glasgow were bragging

about setting speed records, least minutes from the Glasgow city limits ^{the first shock of} to Wheeler. The county commissioners were climbing all over ~~the~~ ^{him} sheriff

about the speeding and the car wrecks, and as much as it graveled him to have to ask for help, Kinnick had put in a plea to the state for a highway patrolman. Although where was the state highway SOB right now, when he could have been some use in nailing this two-wheel ^{ed} maniac.

The highway between Glasgow and Wheeler measured seventeen miles long, and it took the sheriff a ^{full} dozen of those miles, pushing down hard on the accelerator, to draw within glimpse of the motorcycle. Or what, ahead as far as his headlights would reach, had to be the motorcycle, though it looked like a white flag whipping along at eighty miles an hour. His siren was not noticeably slowing the motorcycle miscreant, and the sheriff ^{had} started to wonder about the science of this situation: was the damnable motorcycle possibly traveling faster than ^{the} sound of his siren? The white whatever-it-was kept on billowing and flapping, cleaving the night up ahead. ^{Carl Kinnick} ~~The sheriff~~ swallowed hard and trounced on the gas pedal just the little bit more that he dared to.

The patrol car gained enough that he could see her all: the white

blouse, pulled untucked from her slacks by the wind of the ride as she hugged the back of the motorcyclist, the fabric tenting up and out from her shoulders like a cotton cape in a hurricane. Below, ~~Rhonda's~~ ^{Kate's} long bare back; and the blazing white brassiere strap across it.

The sheriff stared as long as he dared at a speed like this, then he slacked off sharply on the gas pedal; jammed a hand to the siren switch and killed the wail. Coming ~~down~~ ^{down} ~~into~~ the main drag of Wheeler, he ~~let~~ ^{ed} the patrol car coast to a complete stop while he watched the taillight of the motorcycle ember away into one of the streets of shacks.

The sheriff shook his head. But instead of turning around on the highway, he revved the patrol car again and sped ahead. ~~The sheriff~~ ^{He} slammed the ~~patrol car~~ through Wheeler like a rock through chickenhouse sheeting, past the dirt street where the motorcyclist and passenger had turned in, past the ~~bars~~ ^{saloons} and dance joints and brothels, speedometer needle jumping and jumping as he floored the gas pedal. Then, at the far end of Wheeler, he braked, turned around, and drove decorously back to Glasgow.

—


Neil of course was the first to know that Bruce was a goner. He'd had only to be around the two of them together for five minutes, Bruce going into the damndest antic he could think of and ~~Rhonda~~^{Kate} simply meeting it as if it was the time of day, before he figured She's the brand for him and mentally began moving out to the barracks.

For the rest of the family, Bruce spelled it out in sugar, scarcely able to let go of ~~Rhonda's~~^{her} hand long enough for ~~her~~^{Kate} to shake any of their congratulating ones. Everyone had to agree with his proud point that he'd brought home one who fit in with the Duff altitude. Indeed, Kate was not only up there in height but had a strikingly thrifty construction; you could look her in the face and tell she was long-legged. Bruce was not the first Rondola customer and possibly not the last to find her angles of attraction intriguing, just enough here, there, wherever it counted, to add up. In ancient Greece the foes of the region of Laconia demanded surrender with the ultimatum If we conquer you at arms, we will kill you, and back came the message of reply, If. Both the nature and build of Kate were along the laconic ~~life~~^{line} of that if.

As the lovey pair made their rounds, Meg tapped her fingernail on

the edge of her cup and thought about how far off she had been in her expectation that Bruce was going to have caravans of girlfriends before settling down at about age (34.)

Hugh could have done without one more female eye-of-judgment on him. He felt he was perpetually up against Meg's medicinal scrutiny, and next had come Charlene with her attitude that the Duffs ought to puff themselves up like the duke's balloon, and now here ~~this Kate,~~ ~~this Kate,~~ deadly in the way she could sort you into your bin without a word said. Were there no jolly, neutral, unsharpened women that the Duff men could ever find?



Charlene was ^{simply}~~merely~~ relieved to have Bruce no longer on the loose.

Smart enough not to show what a kick she was getting out of a clan of men who were tall enough for her--Bruce, Neil, Owen and Hugh in a bunch reminded her of pencils sticking out of a cup--Kate more than held her own with all the Duffs until Owen.)

History was the culprit. Out of all the tortuous routes that were depositing thousands of people willy-nilly at Fort Peck, ^{Kate Millay's}~~Rhonda's~~ story was the least expected: local. Her father, and his father before him, had been the ferryman on the Fort Peck cable-ferry, a glorified raft which had operated a little way upstream from the present damsite activity.

("About down the bluff from Happy Hollow, if you know where that is,"

^{Kate}~~Rhonda~~ had slipped in on Hugh with a straight face.) Owen, though, heard a faint echo in one of the side-canyons of his mind. ^{Millay's Millay's}~~"Debney. Debney."~~

Wasn't there somebody else by that name, in the Indian Agency when it was still here?"

"That was still us. My grandfather started out at that."

Owen cocked his head in curiosity. Government clerks usually stayed government clerks. "How'd he get from that to running a prairie ferry?"

195A

Kate gave him a very long look, and then the summary: "My grandmother
_____ used to say, over her next-to-dead body."

itals

High water everywhere when the original ^{Millays, Kate's} ~~Dabneys~~, ^{Rhonda's} grandparents,
came to Fort Peck, every creek tearing at its banks as their wagon
and wiry team of horses struggled across fording places on the journey
from Miles City. Where the route was not flooded or muddy, it was dusty and
acrawl with rattlesnakes emerging from winter. Henriette ^{Millay} ~~Dabney~~ was
white-eyed by the time they reached the Missouri River. She also had
come down with a ripping cough. Philip ^{Millay} ~~Dabney~~ could see across, not
far downstream from the ferry crossing, to the stockaded trading post.
He was to be the assistant agent at the Indian Agency there, a ^{chance upward} ~~step up~~
in the world from the Land Office clerkship in Miles City, but also a
heartstopping traverse across such water.

The ferryman ^{grimaced} ~~wined~~ as he eyed the wretched pair, and then the
high-running river. "I ordinarily wouldn't, until this water lets up
some," he let Philip know. "But that's a sick woman there."

"Come, Henriette, we have to."

p. 195B follows

itals

"No," wildly. "The water is too--"

"We must get you across."

"No." The cough tore out of her. She shook her head incessantly,

refusing to look at the river.

Philip went to the back of the wagon for one of the ropes he picketed

the horses with at night. Then he climbed back up to the wagon seat.

"Give me your hands, Henriette." She watched listlessly as those were

tied, then began to scream as he wrapped the rope around and around her

waist, lashing her to the iron support of the wagon seat. After he had

knotted the rope, Philip put a hand over her mouth. Henriette stopped

her screaming and simply stared at him. Swallowing hard, he said: "So

you won't...fall out."

Kate's

~~Phonda's~~ grandmother told that on herself, when at last the distances

of age lay between her and that crossing of terror, when the whispers

connecting Philip Millay's purchase of the Fort Peck ferry and missing

funds at the Indian Agency had ^{sufficiently} ~~finally~~ abated. All families have stories,

sometimes in what is not said in the outright telling. Kate knew as if

p. 195C follows

195C

by birthright that her grandmother had been brought hogtied into the
Missouri River country not past falling but past jumping.

"Say again?" Owen followed up on Kate's "next-to-dead" remark,
as if they were having this conversation over a field telephone and the
connection was bad. "What, you mean his quitting the government job
spooked her ^{that much?"} ~~Charlene~~ ought to be over here hearing this, get a different
slant on things.

"It was just something between them," Kate said, looking him in the
eye. "Some family matter."

"Examining her pedigree?" Bruce was back on the scene, slipping an
arm a long way around her willowy waist. "Bet you never thought I'd
have out-of-state in-laws, Ownie, even if it is only North Dakota."

To Owen's questioning expression, Kate reported that her parents
had moved to ^{Bismarck.} ~~Williston.~~ "Hell, that's too bad," he interjected. "Suppose
your father would come back for a job here? We could use somebody who
knows the river currents."

Owen just asking for it from her this way--Bruce loved the moment.

p. 195D follows

195D

As casually as if punching a meal ticket, Kate told Owen: "Probably shouldn't hold your breath. He left here cussing about being drowned out by the dam."

——— ^{ir}
The ~~honeymoon of Bruce and Rhonda~~ ^{Kate} was a half-hour flight in a Waco-10 Stinson biplane.

"Been up before?" the Fort Peck Air Excursions pilot asked as he strapped them in side-by-side in the cockpit behind him.

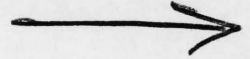
"Hell, no. We're a goodlooking pair, but we're not the Lindberghs," Bruce informed him.

The pilot dipsydoodled ~~a little~~ at the start, to see how they'd take it. When ^{Kate} ~~Rhonda~~, upside down, broke into a ^{little} grin and Bruce outright laughed, he decided they'd be no fun ^{he} and so ~~he~~ flew along the river, downstream as far as the town of Frazer where he banked the airplane tight around the grain elevator, then back up the Missouri, bumblebeeing atop the twisty course of the water. From there in the air Fort Peck looked as ~~an insanely wide~~ if a ~~mammoth~~ roadbed was being laid across the river valley, the base of the dam a ~~mile-wide terrace~~ ^{mile-broad mud terrace}, all of it crawling with machinery. Bruce dapperly pointed to the boatyard, the dredge he'd been slapping paint

p. 195E follows

195E

onto a little over an hour ago, and ~~Shonda~~^{Kate} craned a ~~look~~ over the lip
of the cockpit ^{to see, moment} ~~The instant~~ they were upstream from the tractorized sprawl
of the dam project, she touched the pilot's shoulder and motioned that
she wanted him to fly lower. The plane lost more and more altitude, as



she kept motioning downward with the flat of her hand, the flightpath now below the rim of the bluffs, and Bruce was ~~getting~~ ^{really beginning to notice} how distinct the ~~branches~~ ^{leaves} were in the tops of the cottonwoods reaching up for the plane's bottom wing. # Abruptly ~~Rhonda~~ ^{Kate} pointed: the landing and abandoned cable rig of the Fort Peck ferry, almost alongside the airplane rather than below it. Thousands of crossings made here, back and forth by the ~~Dabneys~~ ^{Millays} before her, and now she was flying the route of the river itself, magical as a dragonfly.

DROP CAP

The dynamiter's wife watched, through clouds of laundry, as the newlyweds settled in next door. She did feel a bit sorry for the unattached brother, Neil, having to move out; on the other hand, the constant ~~commotion~~ ^{racket} of truck or motorcycle roaring back and forth ought to calm down by half or more, now. # Nan Hill had had her eye on Duffs all her life and still couldn't entirely make up her mind about them; quite what they constituted, quite how their stubborn streaks and brainstormed weighed out, in those disturbing long-boned exclamation mark bodies. The first of the Duffs she knew anything about were from Scotch Heaven, as if that green cleft of valley into the footings of the Rocky Mountains had been set aside

for exactly their thistly sort. Back then, back there, a full three hundred miles from Fort Peck, rumor about wrathful Ninian Duff had hardened into legend--how he underwent early trouble on his homestead with loss of cattle, until a pair of suspected rustlers went somewhere off the face of the earth. From that kind of start, Ninian and Flora Duff parented the homesteading community along the North Fork of English Creek, anchors of example and lighthouses of beckon to the Erskines and Findlaters and Frews and McCaskills and Barclays and other populators of Scotch Heaven. Nan as a girl growing up in the west end of Gros Ventre would see Ninian Duff come tornadoing into town on one or another of his self-appointed Scotch Heaven civic tasks, black cloud of beard above his breathtaking blood bay team of horses. ~~Going past,~~ Ninian Duff looked like the station agent for Judgment Day, but he never failed to boom out ^{going past,} "Ay, good day there, Miss Nan."

itals
Ninian's letter had instructed them to arrive in June, green advent

of summer, but there were the delays common with emigration, and the
calendar of 1910 was on August when Hugh and Margaret Duff, young and
edgy, stepped down from the train onto Montana ground. VALIER, the

itals
sign on the gable of the depot confidently heralded, as if the scatter of fresh woodframe buildings across the prairie already amounted to a town for the ages.

While Illinoisans and Belgians and all others thronged off the train and tried to sort themselves out for the homestead life ahead, the young Scottish couple paused. A knobblier version of Hugh, with a ^agraying beard down to its chest, made its way toward them.

"You're here and in one piece," Ninian Duff boomed. "Good for you, Hugh lad. And this will be Margaret." He noted the cool blue eyes, the face like any pretty girl's except for the slip of the Maker's chisel that gave her a pert mark there in the center of her chin. A bit combative by the look of her, but of good stock, at least according to report. Ninian gazed on down, to the tyke with a hand lost in each of theirs. "Ay, and the future, whose name I've forgot."

"This is our Owen," Meg supplied, with a cough at whatever was in the air. She saw that Hugh, with a fixed smile, was casting glances past his uncle to the hazy sky.

"We've a bit of a wagon journey ahead," Ninian was saying. "We

itals
ought to start." And in no time, their America trunk and suitcases and themselves aboard, they were rolling west into the pungent haze.

A copper sun smoldered in the murk. Meg held Owen in her lap and willed Hugh to ask what this universal smoke was about. Just when she was all but ready to put the question herself, Hugh licked his lips and asked: "Whatever is afire to this extent?"

"Forests," Ninian replied shortly.

Meg had not yet seen anything taller than bunchgrass on their route.
near?"
"How far away?"

Ninian slapped the reins on the backs of his fast-stepping blood bay horses before answering her. "Idaho. The big forest fire is across over a few there, two hundred miles or so. And we've one now in our own mountains, in north of Jericho Reef. Don't worry any--even that one is a good distance from the North Fork."

The smoke persisted, ashy and eye-burning, as the wagon carried them through the town of Gros Ventre and up English Creek and then its fork toward where Ninian assured them Creation's noblest mountains somewhere lurked and at last into the yard at Ninian and Flora's homestead. Tired,

ital
 flustered, apprehensive, the Duffs newly from Scotland went through the motions of meeting and being greeted and then went to their bed as if ready to hide under it. First impression is worst impression, Meg always had to remind herself of that. But she could not put away the feeling that ~~English Creek's~~ ~~Scotch Heaven's~~ introduction of itself to her and Hugh and Owen could be seasons long, perhaps years.

"I have been holding land for you," Ninian announced at breakfast the next morning, ~~immediately~~ ^{concluding} after ~~saying~~ a grace of such length that Hugh and Meg had begun to wonder if they might starve to death before it was over. ~~its completion.~~ "The old Spedderson place, up across the creek a bit. We will go to it first thing."

Flora Duff, broad-beamed from childbearing but otherwise formidably agile, said she would fix a bite of snack they could take with to fortify themselves. Samuel, the oldest boy, a keen-minded eleven-year-old who ~~pestered~~ ~~had wanted to know from~~ ~~Hugh and Meg~~ ~~if they had seen~~ ^{about any glimpse they'd had} into the radio room of their ship across the Atlantic, was roundly instructed by Ninian in a day's chores of sheep and hay and horses and other homestead matters that Meg thought would challenge a grown man. Then Ninian had them in the wagon again,

→

ital
↓
again facing into the forest fire smoke that clung like acrid fog.

Flora gave them a wave through the kitchen window as they started off, but then shook her head about Meg. The girl was standoffish, something always on her mind. Spent her time doting on the little boy, Owen; would spoil him rotten if she kept on. Flora Duff was going to be glad to have Meg out from under her roof.

On the wagon ride, thankfully not a long one, Meg alternately crooned solace to Owen--poor tiddler, the stinging smoke provoked him, he seemed to be indignantly trying to figure it out--and ran her tongue around the inside of her mouth against the air's taste of soot, while Ninian preached sheep to Hugh. They passed a flock of the creatures, gray soft fleecies like rolled balls of the smoke, on a dimmed sidehill which ~~Ninian~~ ^{Ninian} pronounced to be Breed Butte, then abruptly the wagon angled down the slope, down and down, Meg clutching Owen while bracing against the tilt, until water, a surprise fresh coolness of the creek, exploded in glassy spray around them as Ninian plunged the team of horses through the crossing to the Spedderson place.

Willows. Wild hay. An old hay sled in rheumatic sag. Then house,

ital

lambing shed gone scabby from missing shingles, barn, caved-in root cellar. Little else. Not even, Meg instantly divined, a clothesline.

Ninian tromped them around the property as though it were a glen of Eden. Amid that, the smoke drifted into tatters briefly as a wind sprang down the valley from the west. Before the gust died down, Meg saw stone standing in the sky; columns of cliff nearly atop them, it very much seemed to her.

The creekside meadow of wild hay was being extolled now by Ninian, Hugh able to nod knowingly about something that grew from the ground. On the MacLaren estate just outside Inverley he'd had a good name as an oatfield hand, and when the right time came Hugh Duff would find a way to let this strutting Bible of an uncle know about that attainment.

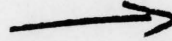
Meg spoke up. "Who and where are the Speddersons?"

"They pulled up stakes, a few years since," Ninian said as if that amounted to explanation. He turned back to Hugh. "I stepped in and bought the relinquishment, so the price I'll make you can be carried across as many years as you ^{need} ~~want~~, Hugh lad." Ninian swept an arm toward the house as if uncobwebbing it. "We can fix the place up in no time.

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itals

I'll put out a community shout and everyone will pitch in some Saturday on a new roof and--whatever. House, shed, some sheep, or cattle if you must, this country"--he indicated off into the hazy mountains--"to run them on, and you're set."



(ital)

Owen tugged at Meg's hand, wanting to explore everything all over again. As she let the boy lead her off in a toddling but determined circle of the house, the two men watched. After a minute, ^{Ninian}~~Paris~~ said aside to Hugh, his voice for once soft:

(end ital)

"I can see that you will need to resort to some suasion there."

—

Coax. Just give her a try, he encouraged himself. See if she'll put out. Even if it is broad daylight.

^{Kate}~~Rhonda~~ was ironing her Rondola uniform when ^{Bruce}~~he~~ walked in. "Sweetheart! You're off early--something happen?"

"No. Lunchbreak, is all. And I figured I'd come home and see what we can cook up."

—

The unmistakable Duff frame went by while Nan Hill was clothes^{egg}spinning ^{onto a line} pants (25¢, washed and pressed). Her sign out front, LAUNDRY DONE HERE, steadily kept all six clotheslines at full sail, her earnings actually more than J.L.'s paychecks for handling dynamite. Not that ^{J.L.}~~he~~ showed that he minded. ^{He}~~J.L.~~ was the kind who simply had pushed back from supper at the ranch one night and said: "There're wages at Fort Peck. We better throw our tails in the air and go over there." Here they were, then,

washed in from almost the most distant tributary of the Missouri, English Creek. The only farther branch of water, Nan had grown up knowing, was the North Fork, once the country of the Duffs.

#

He was going to burst if he couldn't put his ^{craving} ~~excitement~~ where he wanted to. He tossed his hat in the direction of the nearest chair and went straight over to the ironing board and kissed ^{Kate} ~~Rhonda~~ to the utmost, keeping the kiss going until she caught the idea.

"Br-r-r--" she gradually managed to clear her lips from his, "--uce, mmm, though--"

"Me, all right, doing this," he kissed her in further example and stroked down from her waist. "It better be me."

#

Like an intermittent show of comets across ^{Nan Hill's} ~~Nan's~~ field of vision, these Duffs were. To this day she could close her eyes and see not only patriarchal old Ninian but his bright and bold son, Samuel. Samuel had been only a few years older than Nan, and when he came to high school in Gros Ventre she developed a crush on him ^{that} ~~which~~ lasted until Samuel Duff went off to the Great War and was killed in a trench in France.

#

Outside the window, glimpsed past everything Bruce was doing, Nan Hill still was hanging laundry, the flapping sounds of shirts flocked in

the wind audible through the thin beaverboard wall. "Nan is right out

there," ~~Rhonda~~ ^{blew warm} ~~whispered~~ ^{quavered} against Bruce's suddenly unshirted shoulder.

One of his hands ~~reluctantly~~ ^{let up on her} went free from her long enough to pull

down the windowshade. "We'll make it dark so she can't hear us."

#

J.L. Hill was a good man, earnest and not flighty; Nan knew that,

couldn't escape such knowing. But Samuel Duff did come back to mind,

for her, ^{here when} ~~now that~~ his lookalike Bruce had buzzed home for lunch and a

minute later, ^{the} ~~lovmaking's~~ ^{noises of lovemaking} unmistakable ~~commotion~~ started to kick up

behind those puny walls next door. Quite a luncher, this Bruce.

#

When they had eaten, Flora's version of sandwiches as substantial

as planks, and Ninian began prescribing to Hugh precisely how many sheep

the Spedderson place would carry, and Hugh still hadn't said boo to

any of it, Meg was appalled. ^{him} ~~She all but pried Hugh away from Ninian,~~

and tugged ^{ing} him down to the springhouse where they could talk alone.

Ninian's stare of astonishment and reproof followed them, particularly her.

Beside the springhouse, Meg stopped ^{sharp} ~~short~~ and said: "We can't do

this."

Hugh thought she meant the doing of things the way these ^{English} ~~Scotch~~

~~Creek~~

~~Heaven~~ flock keepers did them, which had been on his mind too. "But I can

see what they're at, in this valley. It's country for animals"--at her

stare, he wished he had ~~specifically~~ ^{explicitly} said ["]sheep and cattle ["] instead--

"not entirely what we're used to, but if we put our minds to it--"

"We could put ourselves to it down to our toenails and this would still not be the place for us," Meg said flatly.

Hugh gaped at her. The thing that had impelled them from Inverley, was it between them again already? Hugh's hope had been that they ~~were~~ ^{left} ~~leaving~~ this behind them in Scotland. But he never quite knew, with Meg.

That was the glory and the damnation in being wed to this woman. He loved her so much, how could hers for him possibly be equivalent? Back the Inverley life there in ~~Grail~~ he had won her, then was afraid his victory might not hold, and that brought the turn to America. An ocean and most of the American continent seemed to Hugh about the right distance between them and the Inverley ~~Grail~~ memory.

Brass tacks were in Meg's voice now.

"Hugh, to live here--I cannot and you ought not."

He felt a mix of terror and relief. What he heard himself saying

itals

was, "The smoke can't last. They say this is the worst fire ever in these parts."

"It's not simply the smoke. Here, we'll be under Ninian's thumb."

"What, then. Where?"

"It can be almost anywhere," she provided, "as long as it's away from here."

#

Ninian Duff looked off toward the mountains. "We've a man up this valley with a wife who has never taken to this country. She says nothing, but the misery is there. Not good, that." ^{He} ~~Ninian~~ turned to Hugh. ^{do not wish} ~~"I don't want~~ to see kin of my own in that predicament. Land is being opened up"--Ninian flapped a hand to indicate, without much enthusiasm, the horizon beyond his valley--"all across Montana. I'll stake you to finding someplace other than this."

#

Hugh burned inside from his self-enforced drought as he and Meg ^{and little Owen} passed back through Gros Ventre, (Meg looking better every inch away from Scotch Heaven and God's sergeant Ninian) and then south to Great Falls and to a land locator there. Hugh in fact saved his binge until well after they were settled on the Missouri River place: miraculously,

(ital)
 more than a homestead claim, a relinquishment with a good house and
 a strong barn, and the promise in that bottomland soil. Ninian telegraphed
 him the ~~purchase~~ ^{for the downpayment,} money and with it the message Matthew X: 36. Hugh
 had to look it up: A man's foes shall be they of his own household.

end ital

DROP CAP

Charlene did not particularly want to be caught at this--prowling
 around in Permanent Residence #1; the King's House, as everybody already
~~was calling~~ ^{ed} it--but if it came to that, she had her story ready.

The carpenters had pulled out and the painters hadn't yet pulled in
 and so this morning there the house of the commanding officer of Fort Peck
 just stood, empty and inviting, and a person could not help but exercise
 natural curiosity by poking her head in, could she? After all, she would
 lightly tell the Colonel's wife or the Colonel if either happened to show
 up (she hoped it wouldn't be the Colonel), she was the only soul out of
 the thousands at Fort Peck who had seen this house go up nail by nail,
 totally. Which was pretty much true. Carpentry crews came and went
 (Owen claimed Fort Peck had crews to do nothing but evict other crews),
 and the townsite planners and Corps officers periodically dropped by and
 stood around looking wise, but only Charlene's view from the trailer house

amounted to perfect attendance. If you wanted to know the absolute truth, now that the King's House was built she felt entitled to a tour.

So, this fine brisk blue morning, September's usual early batch of bad weather gone by now and Indian summer turning up on a day-to-day basis, while Charlene was ostensibly out to stretch her legs ^{with} ~~by taking~~ a stroll around the horseshoe of Kansas Street, actually she was counting bedrooms in the King's House ~~and thus far~~ ^{she} had found five. # Holy Pete, as Owen would have put it; Colonel Parmenter and Mrs. Colonel Parmenter could about sleep somewhere different every night ^{of the week} without ever leaving home. Bonanza of bedrooms, stonework around the front door, full basement under the place, garage out back; the royal treatment, all right. # ^{She} ~~Charlene~~ kept touching the walls as she drifted through the house, as if satisfying herself that they ^{honestly} ~~actually~~ were of plaster instead of the rest of Fort Peck's chronic beaverboard. Her footsteps in amplification in the empty new rooms, she showed herself around as thoroughly as she wanted until she came to what she had been saving for last, the view from the picture window in the living room. By whatever military writ, a commanding officer's quarters always faced away from everyone else's, so this house put its back to the other eleven Permanent Residences along

this side of Kansas Street and addressed itself south to the Lab and the Ad Building as if keeping its eye on the office troops.

All at once ^{she} ~~Charlene~~ realized that out a smaller west window--the corner of the kingly eye, so to speak--her and Owen's house-to-be, the first in line of the Temporary Residences across the way there, which they rated because of Owen's rank as ~~Fillmaster~~, stood in plain sight from here. So far, so good, and possibly better to come. She and Owen at least were up here on the horseshoe with the Colonel and the Mrs. Colonel and the majors and the captains and their wives, and that in itself was a long way from Toston, in more than ~~river~~ miles.

—————

By now enterprise was the fever, the mental epidemic of Wheeler, New Deal, Square Deal, Free Deal, Delano Heights, McCone City, Park Grove, the prairie around and all roads in. # Now that people had a little money, ideas on how to generate more bubbled up overnight. The Duff and Hill households on Fifth Street awoke one morning to find that Tarpley, the neighbor across the alley behind them, had gone into the pet sideline with a yardful of frantic chihuahua dogs. At suppertime, Bruce and ^{Kate} ~~Phonda~~ and Nan and J.L. Hill conferred about whether to buy the whole yipping

pack, sack them up and drop them in the river; but decided to hold off and see whether the first night of hard freeze might eliminate the Mexican hairless dog situation. It did. ⁴ Not as short-lived were the schemes of all-purpose salves, franchisees of sewing machines, commission sales of gas irons (Bruce bought ^{Kate} Rhonda one almost before the peddler could knock on the door), and sundry other household commodities that people hadn't known they could not live without. So, ~~among all else that~~ the Fort Peck project was producing ~~in high gear were~~ new tangents daily, ^{not to mention} ~~and often~~ nightly.

~~#~~ ————— She wished the date was over. And this was before it had even started.

She fussed with her dress and then with her lipstick, and ended up in brighter versions of both borrowed from Louise, the nurse she roomed with. Now for her next ~~section~~ ^{region.} "Jeez, Louise, what am I going to do with my hair?"

"Throw it away and borrow mine, probably," she got told by Louise, who then left for night shift at the hospital.

At brushstroke thirteen of the hundred she was counting on to spruce up the hair situation, the buzzer outside the hotel room went off.

In a semi-panic she dropped the hairbrush, squirmed this way and that in front of the dresser mirror, judging herself over one shoulder and then the other, then muttered, "Hair is hair. He can take it or leave it."

Downstairs in the lobby, he looked like a noodle in a sugar bowl. "Hi!" She went over to him. "You're really on time!" Ten minutes early, actually.

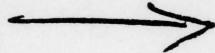
"How you doing," Neil said tightly.

They got out the doorway of the hotel without quite knocking into each other, and at the vehicle Neil, acting as though he'd memorized the maneuver, shadowed her to the passenger side and opened the door for her.

She negotiated the altitude of the runningboard in her high heels and vaulted up onto the seat, hearing herself ask ~~foolishly~~ ^{like a fool kid,} "Is this your truck?"

Lincoln-coin
"Yeah. Well, no." Neil's ~~face~~ face and shoulders hung in the windowframe of the door. "It's all of ours. Owen made the downpayment, and we all chip in on the rest."

The ways of the Duffs. Charlene had warned her they took some getting used to. But something of the same could be said about Charlene, Rosellen thought grimly, already wishing she could take back her Why not, I guess, when that sister of hers had announced Owen's fixed you up with his brother, you're going out and have a little fun. Good grief, three weeks settling herself in here at her job and the hotel mishmash, that wasn't as if she'd locked herself in a nunnery, whatever Charlene thought. Meanwhile on his way around the truck, Neil wondered again what he'd been thinking of, agreeing to take out stuck-up Charlene's probably stuck-up sister. Traipsing around with this leftover kid-sister-in-law while Owen and



Charlene, and for that matter Bruce and ^{Kate}~~Rhonda~~, doubtless were home in bed going at it like fury.

The truck trundled to the movie theater. ~~First thing at the~~
~~theater,~~ Neil had to count out the admission for the two of them in small coins, including pennies, and wished he'd thought to trade the chickenfeed to Owen for a couple of silver dollars. Then there was the matter of the movie seats, ^{Rosellen}~~Kate~~ there close beside him but five hundred people around them, an awfully public situation even in the dark. Even the elbows of the two of them stayed shy of each other, as if the armrest between them was greased.

The movie itself was a dud, too. Some king of England fought some king of France, and everybody paraded around in yards of robes.

As they headed for the truck afterward, Neil ~~all~~ ^{stopped} of a sudden ~~stopped~~ in his tracks. He gazed elaborately upward and said, "The night's still young."

Rosellen was pretty sure a person couldn't tell time by the moon, but she peered up, too, and said, "Uh huh, well--"

"Could you stand to dance a little?"

She
~~Rosellen~~ cast a glance at the rec hall, saw its windows were dark
 and started to say so. Then she caught his meaning. "Uhm. Little while,
 maybe?"

"You even^r gone to the, ah, Blue Eagle?"

"No. No place. In Wheeler, I mean."

"Uh huh. Well, the Blue Eagle isn't too bad of a place. For Wheeler,
 I mean."

But neither was it Toston, nor any other environment Rosellen Tebbet
 had set foot into in her nineteen years. The drinkers were a customary
 three deep at the bar, the dance band (fiddle, accordion, cornet and
 inevitable piano) was playing loud enough to be heard in Canada, and
 the heads of stuffed wildlife stared eternally at one another through a
 ceiling fog of cigarette smoke. Immediately inside the door, Rosellen
 stopped cold and took a look at everything.

"Oh, hey!" She spotted the corps of taxi^{*}dancers at the far end
 of the bar and pointed with her index finger like a tiny ^{little} pistol. "Are
 those the--"

"Those're them," said Neil tightly again, and steered her off to
 a table by the wall.

He surprised her, when he set off to fetch their beers, by knowing enough to circle around the bar mob and make his transaction directly with the dour saloonkeeper at the cash register. Then she saw him fishing around in the palm of his hand. More chickenfeed.

"Here you go. Great Falls' finest, and onliest," Neil presented her a longnecked bottle of Select, and hoisted his own in a fractional toast.

"This sure saves on firewood, doesn't it," Rosellen heard herself rattling out. He was looking at her blankly. "Prohibition being gone, I mean. Out from Toston, we used to see bootleg smoke all the time." I'm yapping on like a ninny. He doesn't even know where Toston is. No, wait, of course he does, on account of Charlene. "People had stills up just about any coulee." Why did I get on to this? I'm making myself sound like I'm from the bootlegger boondocks. "One time"--once upon a time, story of my life--"Charlene and I went on the train to Loweth to visit our cousin there, and we counted seventeen of those little columns of smoke on our way. Just"--she had that index finger of hers out again, but this time in a sinuous little rising waver like smoke; you could

almost catch the whiff--"every old where."

"No kidding." Neil noticed during this that she had a little nhn chuckle in her manner that reminded him of the first perk of a coffee pot.

He decided he kind of liked that chuckle.

With the beer as prompter, they talked themselves into another round
apiece and then ^{he} ~~Neil~~ ^{if a dance sounded good.} ~~asked her to dance.~~ ^{she} ~~As they started, Rosellen put her~~
~~hand around to his back and primarily found baggy shirt. Lord, she thought,~~
~~what a bunch of beanpoles they are. Owen and Neil both were so thin~~
~~that when you looked at them, you first saw only the clothes, then~~
~~the thin.~~

Neil on a dancefloor, she rapidly discovered, was very smooth going
indeed. Without managing to keep the surprise out of the question, she
asked: "Where in the world did you learn to dance?"

"Grade school." He smiled for the first time all night.

"Grade school, come on. Really?"

"Sure thing. We had a teacher, Mrs. Baugh, who was an old rip
otherwise. But she made all of us, little kids on up, know how to dance.
She said that way we'd always be able to get acquainted in town, have

something we could join in on." Rosellen had an interesting habit of keeping her eyes fastened on a person for longer than expected, as if trying to figure out whether he amounted to a bargain or not. Neil glanced down at her hair, same satin[#]-black as Charlene's, and nearly told her how nice he thought it was, but finished his recital instead. "Old lady Baugh always started us off, boys would dance with boys and girls with girls, so we wouldn't die of embarrassment. Mostly it fell to Owen to teach Bruce and me. He was the oldest, he was supposed to be the expert."

Rosellen leaned back ~~a little~~^{still further} in his arms and contemplated him.
a

"Seems to have worked."

Neil considered. "To some extent. Although I'm not sure this is the kind of town Mrs. Baugh had in mind."

There was another pair of beers involved, and closer dancing, and her telling him about having taken evening classes in typing and basic bookkeeping at the Lewis & Clark Business School in Helena while supporting herself with a day job as waitress in the Parrot Cafe and the complete surprise of the job opening at Fort Peck for a typist with a speed of

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sixty words a minute, minimum, and so now here she was, ~~in the personnel~~

~~section at the Ad Building,~~ and even closer dancing, and him telling

her the boundless future of haulage at Fort Peck, and closer dancing yet,

before the two of them found themselves in the cab of the truck, trying

out some kissing.

Rosellen's head cleared, however, when she regarded the clammy seat of the truck.

"Let's--go back," she said.

Neil straightened up from her as if snapping out of a trance.

"Sure," was all he said.

Back at the hotel, though, ^{she} ~~Rosellen~~ provided:

"Louise--my roomie--works late."

"She does?" ^{He} ~~Neil~~ swallowed. "That's good. How late?"

"Pretty late."

Neil looked at the hotel as if he'd never seen one before. "You mean, they'd just let me...kind of...come in with you?"

"Huh uh, they're strict as the dickens. There's a fire door, though."

"In case of emergency," ^{he}~~Neil~~ thought out loud, so solemnly it startled them both, then sent them into giggles.

Two minutes later, ^{she}~~Rosellen~~ entered her darkened room, and a minute after that, ^{his}~~Neil's~~ tall thin form was there too, in through the hallway fire door she'd released from the inside and wedged open for him with Louise's tube of lipstick.

"We're going to have to whisper," she whispered nervously.

"That's okay, it's worth it," he whispered back fervently.

Kissing resumed.

"This is crazy."

"More than likely."

Longer kissing.

"You're quite the date."

"Look who's talking."

"Nhn. Here, I'll. . . your fingers are big for buttons like these."

"Maybe they're better. . . here?"

"Yes. They're doing fine there."

—————

#

The next morning Bruce met him with a smirk. "So did you get anywhere with her?"

"Considerable."

Bruce's smirk went. "You did not."

"Doubt away," Neil told him and serenely put the truck in gear.

#

Within days, Neil and Rosellen had scooted in to the county courthouse in Glasgow for their license, looked up a Justice of the Peace, and ^{spoke} ~~stated~~ their marriage vows as if they couldn't wait to spurt the words out. Meg and Hugh and Owen and Charlene and Bruce and ^{Kate} ~~Rhonda~~ met this variously with ~~with various~~ disbelief, awe, ^{and} ~~or~~ amusement, but beyond that saw nothing to be done except stand back from this romance lest it knock them over.

"So, kiddo, here we are in the same family twice over." Charlene seemed a little haughty in her congratulations, Rosellen thought.

"It's your doing," Rosellen couldn't pass up the chance. "If you'd chaperoned me the way you always used to, Neil and I would still be shaking hands good-night."

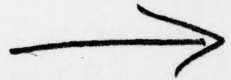
At the shivaree which was threatening to become an almost monthly

- Duff family tradition, the bride and groom were celebrated in a fashion

Rosellen had not even dared to dream of.

"Give us a song, Mother," Neil popped right out with.

"Oh, would you?" Rosellen chimed in. "I can't carry a tune in a bucket. I'd love for you to sing something for us."



Easy, girl, thought Charlene. Our ma-in-law takes her own sweet
time about letting go of a son.

Meg pulled a face, made ready to give out devastating reasons why her voice wasn't up to the occasion, and then took a good look at Neil, bright of eye, earnest as a month of Sundays. After a moment, she said:

"Hugh. First chair accompaniment, if you please."

With a mock formal bow, Hugh fetched a kitchen chair for her to stand on, then went to the wall of the shack and leaned back with his eyes closed to listen.

Facing the newly marrieds, ^{with} Owen and Charlene and Bruce and Kate camped around them like more veteran troops, Meg announced in a tone that Rosellen at first thought was a direct order: "Waken, Thou."

Swallowing delicately, Meg clasped one hand in the other at the exact distance in front of her where a hymnal would be held, and began to let her sons and daughters-in-law know what singing is.

] "Seven long years I served for thee.." [

Her low rich contralto reached Hugh as if from another country,

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this voice of Margaret Milne of Inverley that could fill in if a tenor was missing in the choir. It all came back, the honey waterfall of her hair when she let it down, ^{and this,} the rich sound of the young in love.

^{sq}
The glassy hill I clamb for thee,
^{sq}
The bloody shirt I wrang for thee--
Will thou no waken and turn to me?"

Clamb! Wrang! Rosellen was giddy with the glory of all this.

This was like Weir of Hermiston, her favorite Robert Louis Stevenson book. The Scottish lingo, and the amazing part where the man character and the woman character keep eyeing each other in church. The woman wearing a frock cut low but drawn up so as to mould the contour of both breasts, and in the nook between--how did he write it?--surely in a very enviable position, trembled the nosegay of primroses. Not that she and Neil were being that open about it while his mother stood up there singing, she told herself, but couldn't help giving him another little look. Everyone else in the shack could have told her that she and Neil were sending glances hummingbirds could feed on.

After the applause and Meg shushing them, and the beer had been poured in Charlene's best glasses that she and Owen had brought for

p. 220B follows

the event, Hugh made his way over to Rosellen, appraised her, and remarked:

"The Milne side of the family is a bit fierce in its ballads."

"No, no! I thought it was a ~~dilly!~~^{doozy}"

Rosellen ended up thinking that about the entire shivaree night. In the course of the evening she managed to make fast friends with Kate, and Neil held up well under the kidding from Owen and Bruce, and Meg and Hugh clucked appropriately over the whole brood.

The first second thoughts came to Charlene.

She couldn't deny feeling some pride over Rosellen. The town of Toston had figured the Tebbet sisters were going to have to get by in the world on their slender ankles and promising chests, and though Rosellen was always going to be in the panther-beautiful shadow of Charlene, she was chesty and curvy enough in her own right to ~~outdo~~

out do Toston's expectations. But there was no denying either that Rosellen as a kid generally had the tip of her tongue against the roof of her mouth, as if life was all peanut butter. Watching her in action now, as shapely outside and in as a Shakespearean ampersand, and cute as a wink besides, she still showed signs of being chronically young, at least to Charlene. Neil wasn't more than knee-high in experience

either, was he. Charlene knew he had just been starting to climb out moneywise with his trucking, and now look, here he was a family man with all that entailed. Charlene felt something like a pang about that hasty date she'd marshaled them into.

"How do you like that kid sister of mine?" she whispered to Owen when they were at the cake ~~pan for seconds on~~ ^{plate for second helpings of} Jaarala's scrumptious angelfood. "Evidently when she puts her mind to it, a guy doesn't stand a chance."

The fact of the matter was that Owen had less than liked the idea of Rosellen from the minute she popped up at Fort Peck, adding one more flank to an already complicated family situation. And he had been a dab perplexed by the courtship whirlwind that had just been witnessed. What, were Charlene and him the last people ever to wait until they could afford it before getting married? On the other hand, Neil right now looked so happy he might spontaneously combust, and Rosellen had not yet shown anything drastically wrong with herself except for being such a hopeless snip of a kid.

"Evidently," Owen left it at, and dug into the cake.

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Bruce had got Neil to one side. They grimed at each other, and clinked glasses. "So," Bruce started in. "Where you going to spend your ~~hornymoon~~?"

"In the truck," Neil replied.

Bruce blinked at him.

"Moving in," Neil explained with an even bigger grin, "up onto Broadway," which of course meant Wheeler.

—
DROP CAP

"If this gets any better," Sangster confessed ~~on the thirteenth of~~
October, "I won't be able to stand it."

October, so far, had been like Christmas come early for the engineers.

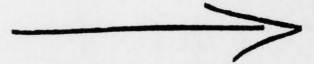
"Some of us aren't there yet," Owen maintained, as nervous and happy as he had ever been in his life.

"Sure you are. All you have left to do is connect up the whatchamadingus to the doohickey, then watch the mud poop out the other end."

On the first of October, the absolute maiden morning of the month, not one clockhair behind schedule, power sang down the ~~lines~~^{wires} from the generating station at Great Falls three hundred miles away. Owen, at the substation when the massive voltage feed ~~came in~~^{was hooked up,} ~~as the line was activated,~~ alternated between ecstasy at having this torrent of electricity at his command and apprehension at now having the entire feeder system and dredging operation on his shoulders, with a breathing space of less than two weeks to work out all the catches. Then on ~~October~~^{the} fourth, courtesy of Sangster and his elegant long truss bridge for the trains, ~~highstepping bridges,~~ here came gravel. By now the damsite from, say, honeymoon altitude looked like a model-railroad layout: a straightaway of track ran atop the steel trestle bridge, vaulting the bottomland and river where the downstream toe of the dam was going to be; then the railroad track arced around and followed the east bluff of the river to the wooden trestle bridge, Neil's lofty pilings the size of toothpicks from this aerial view, on the upstream side of the damwork. Trains steamed out onto this oval and went around clockwise, dumping railcars of gravel as they crossed the steel trestle bridge and exiting empty across the wooden trestle. At river level, with each bombs-away avalanche from

a dumpcar straight overhead, one hundred thousand pounds of gravel came down in a solid noise that had splashes at its edges. For the past nine days, the rest of Fort Peck's construction noise had been punctuated by these barrages: forty successive enormous sounds of KASHOOSH, then the brief wait for the next trainload. And now, this very day, only the thirteenth of the month, dredging was about to commence.

"Mine will run quieter," Owen shouted to Sangster next to him.

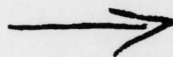


If I can get this entire cobbled-together layout up and running at all.

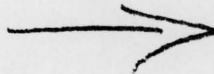
"Well, sure, plumbing is SUPPOSED to run QUIETER than real MACHINERY,"

Sangster yelled back over the clatter of a dumpcar and the thunder of
 another satisfying discharge of gravel ^{to the toe of the dam.}

But if the Gallatin, a dredge one hundred seventy feet long and
 forty wide, waddling in the river under the load of the ~~biggest~~ ^{largest} dredging
 equipment ever made, wasn't real machinery, then Owen Duff did not want
 to know what was. The thing about dredging at Fort Peck, the aspect that
 had ~~Owen~~ ^{him} simultaneously exhilarated and dry-mouthed, was that his
 equipment as fillmaster amounted to miles of apparatus ~~which~~ ^{that} had to run
 as one earth-eating dam-making machine. The Gallatin's cutterhead, like
 a nightmarishly rough and gigantic dentist's drill--taller than a man--
 was going to have to dig into the riverbank and the dredge's suction pumps
 were going to have to ingest the slurry of bank soil and river water,
 and the booster pumps along the dredgeline ashore were going to have to
 move this semi-liquid fill material through the big pipeline--the 'plumbing'
 as Sangster called it--to where the slurry would gush out against the
 gravel barrier of the toe, the fill material mounding up and the water
 running off, creating the



core of the dam. ⁴What had to make it all go, and this was the Fort Peck dredging difference, was electricity. A hellish amount of electricity, to move this much earthfill and to loft it as high as this dam was going to rise. ["]~~Jesus Mercy Christ, Duff,~~ ["]the electrical engineers moaned in fights during ^{briefings}~~meetings~~, over Owen's horsepower specifications to make his dredging system run. Moaning had never yet budged Owen Duff's arithmetic. On the Fort Peck scale of dredging, each suction pump had to be driven by an electric motor with horsepower equal to a fleet of ^{Model AAA}sixty trucks, and there were two such pumps, needing two of those voracious motors, on each dredge, and ultimately ^{he}~~Owen~~ was going to have four dredges operating and a ^{flock}~~punch~~ of pipeline booster pumps besides. ^{He}~~Owen~~ had held to the argument that it was either meet his power specs or cut back on the dam schedule, and the ~~Colonel~~ inveterately held to the sacredness of the schedule, and so the juice jockeys, ~~the electrical engineers,~~ ended up having to feed power into Owen's dredges and dredgeline pumps by stringing big, stiff cable out across series of pontoons, electricity gone nautical. The Gallatin, here on start-up day, looked as if it was leading a pack of pontoons alongside it on leashes,



each of which was a ^{three}~~five~~-inch-thick ^{conductor}~~electrical~~ cable.

One side of Owen thought this was as nifty as the engineering process could possibly get, cycling the river's own force so beautifully through the generating dynamo at Great Falls and across the prairie on the march-step forest of power poles and down through the feeder ^{web}~~system~~ of cables as ~~big around as boa constrictors~~, putting out ^{watts}~~volts~~ to spin the dredge's cutterhead and the suction pumps' impellers; refining the energy of the river to change the river. The other side of him, which had been scurrying for the past dozen days to try to make the ^{carnival}~~array~~ of dredging and power apparatus hum in unison, yearned for the steam-engine dredge days, shovel the coal in and it'd make this move that, forget about hydro-electro-hydraulic elegance.

Just digging a little ditch, that's all we're doing this fall, don't
get antsy about it, Owen told himself again while he waited, antsy, ~~beside~~
~~Sangster~~ for the dredgemaster to finish his last-minute crew check.

Any fill we can move now is a leg up on next year, is all this is,
sure, you bet.

The Gallatin's task, before snow flew and the river iced over,

was to cut a winter harbor for itself and the other dredges and barges; simply chew a nice docking channel, four hundred feet wide and a thousand feet long, at a right angle into the riverbank.

And not so incidentally, pump the dredged material most of a mile and spew it out as the very first earthfill onto the dam.

The dredgemaster at last sent down word that his crew was as ready as they'd ever be and Owen might as well come aboard. # Sangster wordlessly gave Owen the gesture they'd been trading since the previous autumn, a couple of yanks on an imaginary whistle cord the way a locomotive engineer would toot the highball signal, and headed up the bluff to the Ad Building to watch the dredge inaugurate itself.

The destination for Owen was the lever house on the dredge. Up there, where the captain would be presiding on an ordinary vessel, sat the operator with controls thumbing up around him like beer-spigot handles, and Calhoun the dredgemaster hovering behind him. On his way through the Gallatin's labyrinth of cable drums and pump motors, Owen paused at the ^{topside} ~~compartments of the deckhouse.~~ forward ~~deckhouse compartments.~~ He tossed his workgloves in onto the desk of the cabin that would serve as the fillmaster's quarters--his

225A

quarters--when he was aboard, and breathlessly ~~went~~ ^{climbed} on up ^{into} ~~to~~ the
lever house.

He had his own checklist, but before it, he ran a lingering ~~glance~~ ^{gaze}
around the entirety of Fort Peck from the perch there high on the dredge.

Out here in the middle of figless nowhere, all this had been forced
into being.

