

"Bzzz," Proxy said pleasantly but drew away, hard and all. "Buzz off, Brucie. That's as far as this merry-go-round goes." She crinkled her nose at him, which made her look like Delilah must have in her prime, with a peroxide rinse. "Think that over the next time you try buy a dance and turn it horizontal." The last he got from her was the sight of the provocative back of her slacks vanishing toward the dance line at the end of the bar.

Minstrelaires

As the ~~Rhythmaires~~ tore into another tune, unrepeatable thoughts filled Bruce's mind while he jostled his way back to the bar and more or less blindly came out at the elbow of Darius again.

Bruce blinked. On reflection, this was maybe not the best spot to have ended up. On further reflection, it might be even worse if he slunk out of here without putting up a front to Darius. Besides, Darius's back was still doctrinairely turned to the dancefloor and its FDR skipjays. Tom Harry had departed to deposit the first installment of the evening's take in his office safe, but Darius didn't really look as if he was in the market for a new arguing partner at the moment. Bruce squared himself up and moved in shoulder to shoulder with his uncle.

"Champ dancer," Darius greeted him and shoved a bottle of beer to him.

"Needed that," Bruce said after a swig and a sunshine smile at ^{Darius.} ~~his~~

~~uncle.~~

"You're also a damn chancer," Darius said.

The smile dropped off Bruce as if cut free with a knife.

"Don't be fiddling around with Proxy," Darius told him softly.

~~He~~ ~~Darius~~ took a beer swig of his own, but his eyes never left Bruce's.

After a long deliberate swallow, he said: "As they say about suicide, there's no future in it."

"Hey, what. You've got this wrong," Bruce tried to muster. "A turn around the dancefloor is all it was."

Darius kept on eyeing him. Couldn't face a fact if his life

depended on it. Hugh's old failing. ~~Given and maybe Neil were another~~

~~matter, but Darius was sure he and Meg could have produced a better one than this.~~

#

Birdie Hinch nearly jumped out of his skin, and did ^{hop} ~~jump~~ down from

his perch in poker table territory, when Hugh spoke up behind him.

"Birdie, I believe you have something of mine."

Birdie rubbed at his nose with the back of his hand, taking a racoonlike peek at Hugh as he did so. "You told me don't give it back to you, unless you was sober."

"Sober is a relative term. Now Birdie, if you please, fork it over."

"Stone cold sober, is what you said, ^{let's} Hugh."

"This is no time to turn scrupulous, man." Hugh stepped closer, teetered over him. His face was nearly in Birdie's. Breath like a brewery on overtime. Birdie bit a lip uneasily.

"Birdie, that money." Hugh was frowning, considerably at himself for asking back the safekeeping sum, the half that was left of Darius's payoff to him; but preponderantly at Birdie, righteous little banker all of a sudden. "I need it. Right now. Let's go, wherever you've stashed it."

When Birdie Hinch did not move, Hugh's control went. "Damn it!" he burst out. "Don't make me give you a knuckle sandwich! My money, go get--"

"Two can fight, Hugh." Birdie swiftly kneed the taller man in the groin, then turned and ran.

"Whu--!" Hugh let out, half doubled over. Birdie hadn't laid into him very hard, but it didn't take much there.

~~Radically surprised, anesthetized by drink, galvanized by wanting~~
~~that money to keep his spree going,~~ ^{He} ~~until~~
~~Hugh~~ stayed hunched a moment, ~~His~~
 fury overcame his hurt. Still clutching himself, he slowly leaned back and craned as high as he could, to catch sight of the fleeing back of Birdie as it appeared and disappeared through the maze of people in the Wheeler Inn. Birdie was squirming through the outer edge of the crowd, nearly to the door, as Hugh took out after him.

———
 "--didn't mean anything by it, that's the way people dance,"

Bruce was saying.

"--not accusing you of anything, merely informing you for your own health," Darius was saying.

———
 "If it isn't my horseshoe honey." Proxy gave Birdie the little tickle in the ribs reserved for regular customers. "Look, I'm ^{real} sorry, Oklahoma, but tonight has gotten kind of busy."

"This ain't about that," Birdie rattled out. Although he sorely wished it was. "Hugh is on a tear. Somebody better do something about

him besides me." Birdie's words were still in the air as he ducked

back into the Blue Eagle crowd and wove for the back door.

———
 Hugh swayed in ^{the} front doorway, still fumbling at his pants. He'd had to pause at the alley to take a leak, dimly relieved that he still could. Now he sorted the sardined clientele of the Blue Eagle for Birdie. His inspection, though, caught on a piece of headgear visible just above the others at the bar. That Dutch-boy ^{cap} of Darius's, or whatever it was.

Everybody I know is sartorial but me, a great pity toward himself
 came over Hugh. Birdie forgotten, he lunged off toward the bar and the cap and Darius.

———
 "--if that's the way you feel about it," Bruce was sounding hurt.

--the only way there is to feel about it," Darius was sounding grim, "so the next time you think you can play twinkletoes with--"

"The two of you better quit feeling around," Proxy broke in, "and get the net out for-- Speak of the devil."

"With the tongues of men and of angels, and cymbals and tinkles and such, eh?" Hugh barged in to the bunch, proud to declaim with the

best of them. Old Ninian Duff and the Reverend Nevertheless Milne, between the two of them hadn't they done the guts out of half a dozen Bibles? Family line. It always told. Which brought Hugh's thoughts around to Bruce, unexpectedly present. "Where's Jackie? Why're 'nt you home?"

"Mother's taking care of him, don't goddamn worry yourself about that," Bruce fumed. "She can take a crack at you next."

"In due course," his father granted, giving ^{him} ~~Bruce~~ a tragic wink.

Darius, who himself had been putting away drinks like a camel this evening, looked perplexed at the load Hugh had on. "Hugh," he asked in wonder, "do you tamp it into yourself?"

By now Hugh had focused onto Proxy. His head nodding in grave consideration, he asked as though concerned:

"And how're tricks, Proxy?"

"Hey, farmer." As ^{she} ~~Proxy~~ spoke it, it amounted to a summons to etiquette. "The last I heard, it doesn't cost anything to be civil."

Hugh looked surprised, gallantly wounded, and sly all at once.

Darius was about to say that they had all had enough of an evening when Bruce beat him to it. "Come on, Dad, FDR is probably already in

| ← bed, let's us--"

"The election!" Hugh exclaimed, remembering. "Darius, you've ever been quite a follower of politics, haven't you. Always trying to make new britches out of old curtains, back there at the Clydeside? Tell us, as a connoisseur of things political. What'd you think of the election?"

"Unk is in mourning," Bruce could not resist.

"No!" Hugh let out, all amazement. "Do you suppose the big bugs conspired at things again, Darius?" Hugh brought his right thumb up to eye-level, looked at it with fixation, then tapped the pad of it significantly with his opposite forefinger. "As the moron said over the empty mustard jar, 'This has all the fingerprints of a hidden hand.'"

"Hugh, you--" Darius grabbed out at his brother.

"What's going on here?" a new voice shouldered in. "Been getting reports you people are about at each other's throats."

The undersheriff, Peyser, was big enough to obtain the immediate attention of even Hugh.

"Eh, the harness bull of justice! Watch out now, miscreants.

Officer, sir, I wish to report a matter of considerable missing mon--"

"Hush, Hugh." Darius forced a smile at Peyser and squeezed the back of Hugh's neck as hard as he could with one hand.

Bruce, blinking a mile a minute at the suddenly materialized lawman, stepped in close on the other side where his father stood wobbling.

Proxy, the only one in the bunch who appeared to Peyser to be in a sane condition, was pursed up like a radish tester.

In the background, Peyser saw Tom Harry throw up his hands and stalk off to the farthest end of the saloon.

Shifting his weight, the undersheriff studied this collection of Duffs, then glanced over his shoulder. Sheriff Kinnick himself was in town tonight, trying to hold the lid on Wheeler. The sheriff was working one side of the street while Peyser was supposed to be laying down the law to the other. These rangutangs know how to celebrate, so a certain amount of bottle behavior we just have to put up with, Kinnick had enunciated the night's policy. But whenever any of them reach the fuck-you stage with you, that's it. Toss them in the cooler. On the other hand, the sheriff wasn't the one who had to live in the same town with these Blue Eagle hammerheads.

"You going to take him home and hang him out to dry," Peyser finally rumbled, "or do I have to?"

"We're about to have the matter in hand," Darius said quickly, "are we not, Bruce."

"Sure are," the younger man brazened. Peyser looked at him narrowly; he'd thought this was the trucker one, Neil, but no, it was the former madcap motorcyclist. With great obviousness Bruce was gripping his father's arm energetically. "Else what's a family for, huh, Dad?"

Hugh glared straight ahead at the undersheriff. "Where's my money, you tin-star Fuckaroon?" he bellowed. *Cap & C.* Peyser warily considered him, meanwhile putting a hand in his back pocket where he carried handcuffs. The guy really was as pie-eyed as a boiled owl. The undersheriff looked from the drunken one to the twitchy set on either side of him; Peyser would have felt a lot better about this if the high ~~muckety-muck~~ ~~mucky-muck~~ Duff from the dam, Owen, was around.

"They can handle it, Norm," Proxy spoke up, not quite sure why she bothered. "Honest."

"They better. That sheriff of mine would just as soon billyclub a specimen like this as look at him."

"We're on our way," Darius ^{vowed} ~~stated~~. "After you, constable."

Proxy, though, was the first to move in the wake of the big undersheriff. "Tom is going to cream his jeans if I don't get back on the dance line right now. Nighty-night, all," she left them with, one last pang to Bruce.

"If I help you steer him out of here, can you handle him home, do you think?" Darius asked as though thinking might be a new event for Bruce.

"You bet," Bruce maintained, stonily meeting his uncle's eyes.

Stepping around to start breaking a trail to the door, Darius glimpsed the open gap at the front of Hugh's pants. "Hugh, ^{ugh} damn it, man, you're unbuttoned. You'll get us all arrested yet for letting your steed out of your barn."

"Eh?"

~~"Inn?"~~

Darius let out a royal sigh. "Here, I'll do you up." He moved close in front of Hugh to shield the doing of it and began to button

Hugh's fly.

Hugh swayed, then rasped out:

"Aren't you the clever whore, too."

Bruce froze, figuring this was it, Duff blood was about to cascade.

Darius's hands stopped, then did up the last button of Hugh's fly.

As he stepped back from his brother his voice shook but he managed to

say: "Better go home with the boy now, Hugh. You've had a mouthful

more than you should've."

#

In the morning he met himself in the mirror and backed away.

If beauty was skin-deep, Hugh Duff had definitely been skinned. Even

his reflection looked shakey, and his facial color was off, except

where it streaked like peppermint in his eyeballs.

Never given to easy confessions, even ^{Hugh} ~~he~~ had to admit this was

beyond dismal. The record for morning-after heebie-jeebies. ^{Reluctantly} ~~He~~ tried

running his tongue around the inside of his cottony mouth, at the same

~~time intensely aware of Meg~~ but only half-hearing what ^{Meg} ~~she~~ was telling

him from the other side of the kitchen until he caught the words cannot

stand to be under the same roof any more, when you are as you were

last night. Hugh. Hugh, I am going to have to leave--

"That won't be necessary, Margaret. I'll go."

"You?" Meg erupted. "You? Where is there for you go to?"

He turned around to her, her outburst stoppered at the sight of his face. Hugh had a look on him she had not fully seen since his days of courting her in Inverley.

———
Owen was as incredulous as she had been.

"He took off out of here just like that? Where the hell to?"

His mother deliberately looked away from him before she answered:

"He said to tell you he's gone to college."

———
The jag boss searched his suitcase, then the chest of drawers, then under the mattress, for the third morning in a row.

Hugh watched him, melancholy for them both. Since the jag boss, a thickset back-of-the-Yards Chicagoan named O'Shea, stayed with him day and night, when exactly could Hugh have conjured alcohol into the room? Hugh ~~all~~ too well knew he had another twenty-five days ahead here

at the Carteret Curative Institute, but O'Shea evidently was here for all time, inspector general of the satchels of drunks.

"Clean as an angel's drawers," Hugh's keeper announced, also for the third morning in a row. He cocked his ear to the sound of the cart in the hallway. "And here comes your slug of concrete."

Hugh wasn't saying much. The heavy gray concoction, which had to be taken every two hours, tasted like bad whiskey, hot malted milk, and chalk. It crossed his mind that not even Darius's money, soberly beseeched out of Birdie Hinch for absolutely this purpose, could buy flavor here.

In subsequent days Hugh Duff went through moods he hadn't known were in him. He jumped O'Shea the fifth morning--the relentless cleanliness of angel's drawers no doubt accounted for it--and after O'Shea pinned him and then stepped back with a grin, Hugh realized where he stood. Christ, man, he could've cleaned your clock six ways to Sunday. Watching his ~~own~~ behavior from then on, Hugh without a stumble advanced to shots in the arm, hypodermics of pink something or other, and onward to jiggers of the nasty yellow goop which was the Carteret secret remedy; all of it

dope of some kind, he figured, but he didn't care as long as it did the job on him. Outside the Institute windows, Chicago blared in the night. After the first week the jag boss was gone; in his place, dollops of wax which could be used to plug the ears if North Rush Street sang too temptingly. The Carteret philosophy prided itself on going hard on hardcase drinkers: this is the belly of the booze beast, this is Jonah's bed in the whale, and you had better lay stretched there scared and sober in the dark to make yourself know you can survive it. Hugh ingested on schedule, sat up straight in the Amen Corner sessions every afternoon along with meat-packing heirs and Southern cotton traders. After two weeks of this, the blessed midpoint, he was granted permission to go out to a movie with the other inmates who had been toeing the line. With a corporal's guard of O'Shea and a couple of orderlies, they trooped around the corner to the ~~Windsor~~ ~~Uptown~~ Theatre. To the bafflement of the other moviegoers, at nine o'clock sharp, fifty men simultaneously took out little ^{vials} ~~phials~~ and drank them in one toss, their community gulp of ~~taking~~ the Carteret cure.

#

When the first issue of the magazine reached him by somebody slyly shoving it along the counter of the Downtowner Cafe in Glasgow, the sheriff had a heart-stopping moment over the opening frieze-photo of taxi-dancers and damworkers draped over one another and the big black-type underline 10,000 MONTANA RELIEF WORKERS MAKE WHOOPEE ON SATURDAY NIGHT. Then he remembered he'd just been safely re-elected for the next four years.

Even so, Carl Kinnick felt as though he was being scrubbed down with gravel as he flipped his way through the magazine piece. Cowless cow towns--rickety as git-up-and-git--saloons wide open--all-night whooperies--taxi-dancers lope around with their fares in something half way between the old ^{barroom} ~~barroom~~ stomp and the lackadaisical stroll of the college boys at Roseland--Red Light suburb--the only idle bedsprings are the broken ones--Franklin Roosevelt has a Wild West--

That last one, Wild West, the magazine smart-alecks managed to use seven times in nine pages, by the sheriff's fuming tally. On the other hand, they counted up ^{only} ~~six~~ shantytowns for Fort Peck, missing the actual ten or so. ~~another six.~~ # Sheriff Kinnick sat there not knowing what the

hell to think, looking at the dead-accurate pictures (including the one of some anonymous blonde number tossing down a drink under that damned FDR campaign poster in the Blue Eagle) and the haywire lingo, until he turned to the very front of the magazine. There the editors announced that in sending their camera eye ~~exploring~~ ^{to explore} this exciting time in history that ~~was~~ ^{would be known as} the American century, they were presenting Fort Peck Dam on the cover, although it wasn't. The structure pictured, looking like the kind of massive parapet Mussolini would love to strut on while he made speeches, was the concrete piers of the spillway gates, three miles away from the actual dirt dam. This, said the editors and the cover of the new magazine, was LIFE. Well, maybe.

———
DROP CAP

The truth is not in that woman. # Meg, masked with I-am-after-all-

a-Milne-of-Inverley Sunday-best manners, watched as Proxy held the attention of Hugh and Darius and even Owen and apparently even Charlene.

Although, really, it must be--she doesn't expend any of it when she talks.

"...but that's how those dance marathons are," Proxy concluded with a flourish, looking around the ~~Sunday~~ ^g dinner table at them all.

"Real long." This latest story had been about the time in Hibbing,

Minnesota, when she and her partner danced for so many hours straight

that the contest judges gave up and paid them to quit.

"You've got more constitution than I have, then," Charlene said
as if comparing histories *eg*
~~a little dreamily.~~ "I'd have perished of boredom first, Prox."

"Just in case any of us take up marathon dancing, what did you do to keep yourself occupied?" Owen prodded Proxy along some more. He always liked to see how far out on a limb she would let herself get, when she started storying.

"Umm, nothing worth mentioning," was all he could draw out of her, though. Proxy tried to watch her step where Owen was concerned--after all, who in her right mind would want to cross tomahawks with Charlene?

"Spent the time reading the Good Book, naturally," Darius interposed.

"You're one to talk," that brought him from Hugh. "You'd have
~~parroted~~
~~recited~~ poetry the whole while."

"That reminds me," Proxy sailed on again, "do you know this one?"

Prim as a spelling-bee contestant, she reeled off:

"She offered her honor,

He honored her offer;

And so all night long,

it was on 'er and off 'er."

Charlene giggled at that more than Owen thought was strictly

deserved, but then he let loose a laugh, too. Hugh and Darius gave their indecipherable chuckles, so close to identical. Meg panted on what she was pretty sure was the last smile in her and reminded herself that she had a full week ahead to get over Proxy before they all went through this again. For the benefit of Hugh, which was to say in the furtherance of his Carteret cure, she had enlisted Darius and Owen and Charlene for these ~~Sunday~~ round-robins of what amounted to sentry duty, and that meant putting up with Proxy, bag of yarn that she is.

Meg fiddled with her spoon and then her fork and listened to the January freshet of wind in the kitchen stovepipe as the others razed Proxy's taste in poetry. # ^{Carlyle} So, happy 1937, Hugh ~~McKinnon~~ Duff. Year one of your Reform Act. When we shall see whether the mend holds. For now, she would shoo them all into the Blue Room and follow up with more coffee and poundcake, whenever Proxy shut up.

She thinks she is somebody, Proxy retaliated against the fidgets of Meg's fork and spoon. Face it though, Prox, there ^{had} ~~to~~ have been a time back in that thistle patch they're all from when she could have had her pick of Hugh or Darius. So maybe she is.

—

DROP CAP

Janus is the two-faced god, and while ~~Kate~~ ~~Florida~~ could not have specifically told you that, she knew all about the fickle behavior of his namesake month. Snow and blow, clear away and then gray, with mocking icicle grins hung on the Rondola's eaves---~~that~~ ^{this} was January for you. Every start of every year of her life had taken place in such weather, Fort Peck weather, and Bruce's talk of Louisiana and California notwithstanding, anywhere with a sunshine coast ^{warm} and water to be dived, she would not be surprised to find herself still here when the next ice age came by. Although, she did mention to herself in this mood, there were women who punched their own tickets in life, got themselves to elsewhere; Proxy was well-traveled, you could say that for her in more ways than one.

January, though, probably made even Proxy hole up on the houseboat, Kate figured. Snuggle in there with Darius; breakfast, lunch, and dinner in bed, she wouldn't be surprised. Noontimes past, Bruce and herself used to about beat down the door getting at each other, hadn't they. Not so much any more. Jackie's presence in the shack, that of course made a difference. But even on those occasions when Meg, bless her cactus heart, kept Jackie a while extra, it wasn't a sure thing that Bruce would

find his way home in time for an opportunity together. Kate wanted to be fair to him on this score of settling down, so-called, in some parts of life and not others. Bruce was always going to go around inviting lightning, as Owen said about him. Yet he was a good enough father toward Jackie. Better than that, actually. When he was around.

For now, all that Kate decided was to take January in sips, times like this when meal business went slack and she could carry a cup of coffee for herself over by the cafe's front window. She rubbed the usual spot in the window frost to see out again. Out there, the river, iced and white, the source of her chronic)
dream of somebody--lately it had been Jackie and her, both--tied to the ferried wagon the way Grandmere Henriette had been. ^{Kate}~~Sheena~~ didn't put much credit in dreams. Didn't think she did, anyway. Nearer in view, cut in a long channel pointing toward the Rondola, was the winter harbor,

p. 619B follows

the dredges moored there. She remembered every detail of how her father, late each year when the Missouri grew dangerous with ice, would skid the flatbottomed ferry out onto the riverbank, drain the converted Fordson tractor engine that powered its windlass, take down the bridle pully from the long cable across the river, and begin to wait out winter.

All the harbors in the head.

DROP CAP

Neil climbed down from the truck into the snow, only ankle-deep here on the ridge above the Duff homestead. Winter had swept through without murderous cold, at least to this point of early March, and after testing the weather he decided he could work without his coat on.

He ^{clomped}~~tromped~~ across the ditch, his overshoes scrunching on the dry snow, and went over to the white lump on the prairie. Owen and he had taken care to pile the spilled lumber good and tight before they towed the truck in to Glasgow last fall, and the stack looked intact, but even in this mild, open winter it had collected a ^{sizable bank}~~lot~~ of snow and so ~~plenty~~ of the boards were bound to be frozen to each other. The worst was going to be how wet his gloves would get, mauling the boards out of the snow, but he had a ~~couple~~ of spare old pairs somewhere under the

seat of the truck.

He'd had every intention of

~~Neil~~

~~he had fully intended to plunge~~ ^{ing} right at the work, even though

~~he knew that bethering with this stack of stuff was not strictly necessary.~~

but

~~("How about a nice bonfire?" Bruce had proposed.)~~ ~~but~~ he found himself

stalling, giving in. At last he turned around and took the look he had

been dreading, down the long slope to the river and the stand of trees

beyond the stark patch that had been the homestead buildings. Any more

he wore dimstore dark glasses when he drove the truck—he was aware

it was a bit like taking out insurance after the guillotine had already

lopped your head off—and now he hesitantly reached up and took them off

for a fullest possible look at the smidgin of gravel bar where he had

~~tried to fight the~~ ^{solar ember} ~~green worm~~ in his eye. The leaves, in the time since

he stared so desperately into them that eclipse dawn, had turned and

fallen and the cottonwoods stood bare and skeletal. My God, what if

it'd happened this time of year. That ^{green} thing would still be crawling

in my

~~He~~

~~Neil~~ fumbled the flimsy dark glasses back on, the river valley

going the color of mossy water through them. He knew he shouldn't let

Photostatic

~~remembering the eclipse.~~

He knew it was batty to resent the blind bad luck of being singled out by the sun. That one unerasable moment here when all he'd done was to glance up from the verge of the road in curiosity about the out-of-kilter sunrise, and bang: everything turned upside down and a hell of a repair bill on the truck. A happenstance he couldn't have done anything about, he'd told himself ~~a million times~~ over and over. But there were times ever since then when he wanted to take a swing at something.

~~remembering the eclipse, the blind had luck of being singled out by~~
~~the sun, keep bethering him. So why did it? He knew it was crazy to~~

resent a happenstance that he couldn't do anything about, but there were
~~ever since then~~ times when he wanted to take a swing at something. That one ~~damnable~~ ^{unerasable}

moment ~~in the truck~~ here, when he'd glanced up from the verge of the
road in curiosity about the out-of-kilter sunrise; just when a guy

believed he was gaining in the world, bang: a perfectly nice day went
~~# and a hell of a repair bill on the truck.~~
wicked and everything turned upside down. It had shown him how

~~stretched thin life was.~~ While Rosellen had chosen the exact same time
to turn fierce about sticking with Fort Peck, instead of seeing about
treacherous ~~perilous~~ ^{perilous} life for themselves somewhere less ~~dangerous~~ He couldn't put his finger

on it, why he and she couldn't seem to connect better on this one argument.

~~(He knew Bruce would have told him the finger wasn't the part he ought~~
~~to be concerned with.)~~ But as he kept telling her, trestle work and

hauling at the dam weren't going to last, so before awful long she was
going to have to argue with the calendar as well as him about their
time to go.

He discovered he was shivering, and turned and dived to work on

pick up
 P. 620A
 substitute

the lumber pile. ~~Between kicking the boards loose from the snow and ice and dragging them across the ditch and loading them onto the truck, he soon was breathing hard, but he didn't let up on the exertion. This he wanted over and done with.~~

DROP CAP

In a land usually beholden to wind, today's breeze was only the gentlest of stirrings. Come, this breeze laughed, help me chase the grass and set the wildflowers to jigging on their stem legs.

Laughing along with it, Juanita and Gilbert next...

mod Nhn, what do they do next, old Nita and Gil, about whom I barely give a hang? Leaning back from her typewriter, Rosellen ran both hands through her hair and checked on the sundial of spring she had been watching out the Ad Building window: a patch of snow, gone gray and ugly, which clung to the side of a coulee between the Corps townsite and Wheeler. That snowbank dwindled markedly these April days, but spring was coming more easily out there than it was on her pages. So, are stories going into hibernation on me? That's interesting. What would be the opposite, when warm weather-- She got out Know Your Antonyms!

p. 622A follows. →

and there hibernation's reverse was, ["]aestivation: a state of dormancy
or torpor during the summer or periods of drought.["] She had to chuckle.

That could explain a lot about Juanita's and Gilbert's reluctance to
 show any life on the paper this noon hour, they were out there aestivating.

~~Jot, she commanded herself. Jot a little, jot a tittle, put something
 down on paper somehow. She sorted through pencils until she found a
 brand new one with the right kind of lead--~~

~~a needle-sharp 2 3/8, which she'd read was advantageous for a writer,~~

~~not too soft, not too hard--then located her stenography notebook, then
 antiquary put aside, she fenced around again,
 had to clear paperwork on her desk out of the way. Meanwhile she needed~~ing

to keep watch so that Owen didn't suddenly show up over her shoulder

wanting his dratted monthly dredging report and become curious about

what was in her typewriter. She'd tried to get the report off her desk

and onto his, but Max Sangster was in with him and they were talking over

something about the dam hot and heavy. The clock wasn't doing her any

favours either. Why was noon always the shortest hour? The more she

thought about it, though, if time was short today, maybe she shouldn't

waste any by switching to pencil and paper when she already had Juanita

and Gilbert in the typewriter.

~~Busty and~~ daydreamy as a ^{glazed} ~~porcelain~~ figurine, Rosellen did not look

like someone with all of life on her desk. Yet there she sat, ^{steaming}

to know people's sensations, stories, the private roads of their lives.

Right now what she really wished she had the story of, knew how to tell, was

Neil running into the eclipse the way he had. But he was like a porcupine

about that one topic. When she had tried to coax details out of him, he asked

her ^{right} back whether she wanted to know about it or just write about it.

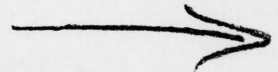
Both. All. She was surprised he would even put the question like that.

Neil, sugarboat, why won't you turn loose of that eye episode? I know

it must have been awful for you at the time. But it didn't even leave

a sty, did it? He shook his head. Then why--? All he would say after

that was that she should stick to making stories up.



Stickum wasn't the only ingredient, whatever Neil thought. ^{Kate}~~Rhonda~~

had told her last fall that the famous photographer ate supper in the Rondola every night with Gone With The Wind propped open in front of her. That book was longer than the Bible, and a good deal more windy, despite its title. Yet people read it until they almost passed out from the effort. Disgruntled--is there grunted?--~~how~~^g Rosellen took a hard look into her typewriter at Juanita and Gilbert and the laughing breeze, and pulled out the sheet of paper and crumpled it.

DROP CAP

Time to move the circus. Owen as ringmaster, fillmaster, scarcely took time to breathe; his figure, thin as a rake, ^{but that beehive of a}~~with that impressive~~ head, seemed to be wherever anyone looked while twenty total miles of dredgeline were being uncoupled in 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ -foot sections of massive pipe and hauled by an army of trucks to new strutworks waiting on the downstream side of the dam. All four dredges, Owen's great white wagons of the Missouri, were going to parade one final time through the river channel between the halves of the dam and take ready positions, downstream, to gnaw at the river's banks and bottom afresh. From here on out, all of the dredging would happen downstream, because after the start of this summer the

river would be plugged. No more channel, once the boulder-and-gravel barrier was dumped into place at the upstream face. Even by Owen's impatient standards, the mouth of the channel there was already changing in startling fashion--an 800-foot trestle, sudden forest of pilings shooting up out of the water, was going into place in the gap between the dam halves.

With this final trestle and its railroad track being highballed into place, the damsite now from, say, famous-photographer altitude looked like a model-railroad layout: the track vaulting the bottomland and high pilings of the river on the new trestle and following the east bluff of the river around to the downstream top of the dam ^{then} ~~and~~ crossing back over the water on the steel truss bridge there. This oval was going to be used relentlessly for closure of the river, trains steaming out onto the trestle with barrier material and exiting back across the truss bridge, the go-round continuing with train after train until the river no longer flowed. Owen and Sangster and the other engineers looked forward to it like kids promised a train set for good behavior.

~~But it would take most of May and June yet, before the push to~~
~~plug the river, and meanwhile Owen had moving to~~ ^{be done.} ~~He had to watch~~

himself so his head didn't spin with all there was to do, this beautiful frantic spring. He felt almost as if he was being flirted at by the waiting channel, the last gap in the skyscraper wall of soil across the Fort Peck valley;

once the river was shut off, he could throw fill into that huge waiting vee with everything he had. Yet, as he prowled along his pipelines

and booster stations and dredges, he had the sensation of leaving a

neighborhood he loved, this upstream stretch of the river where the

earth had been made to flow into new form. For certain, he and his

~~miles and~~ tons of apparatus had changed the neighborhood no little bit.

Dredging cuts lay around him like square flooded fields. Time, though,

to go. ~~To start thinking about the cubic yards that would plug through~~

~~his dredging setup from fresh fields on the other side of the dam.~~

Owen paused, to pull out his Eversharp and ^{then} a notebook. He had two of them going now, one in each shirt pocket, for the day-by-day dredging and for the big move downstream. He quirked a little smile at himself as he made sure he had the right notebook. To readily tell them apart

p. 625A follows →

from here on, he wrote in crisp lead on the cover of the one for the

move:

cap
small caps

Exodus.

#

Someone on high, whom he correctly suspected to be Owen, had taken



pity on Darius this past winter and instead of freezing half to death at ice-cutting, he had been merely chilled to the marrow every day in a pour job down in the tunnel-gate shafts. Then and now, concrete was being poured furiously, and to Darius's surprise, with hoisting cranes going overhead and the operatic clamor of machinery and the odd crammies of workspots down in the shaft forms and the way the silo-like walls took gradual curvaceous form, the work reminded him of shipyard life more than anything had yet at Fort Peck. Now that the weather was momentarily so winsome, though, he lingered up top before going down with the other bullgang two men for the next batch of pour.

"Duff, what the dickens they doing up there?" Rosocki called up out of the bottom of the shaft to him. "We been waiting forever on this pour. Tell them to get their ass in gear, would you, so we can be out of this gopher hole."

Darius peered around over his shoulder. Down the dam slope from him and the shaft mouth, a driver of a cement truck had swung out onto the running board to take a dubious look at the rise where he had to back up. Darius watched the rear of the truck approaching as the driver

revved it in reverse gear, but then the vehicle shuddered ahead, short of the pouring hopper, before the driver could get the brakes on. The foreman ~~Abbot~~^{Miliron} was on his way over, looking dire.

Darius reported into the shaft, "They're trying to teach the truck manners," then went down the ladder steps nailed to two-by-fours of the shaftwall form with ~~his~~^{the} odd shambling grace that always made others stop and watch him ~~on a ladder~~⁹, a scarecrow dancing ballet. As Darius touched foot to the bottom of the shaft, he heard ~~Abbot~~^{Miliron} yell at the truck driver, "We're behind on this pour! Damn it, get that thing up here!"

Darius chuckled and turned toward Rosocki and Cates to say something about the universal tone of voice of foremen, Clydeside to Fort Peck. As he did, a shadow fell over the three of them, instantly followed by the sound of metal slammed into metal.

Rosocki and Cates squeezed themselves against the side of the shaft as if papering themselves to it, Darius flinging himself into their clutching arms. The pouring hopper, struck by the ~~backing~~⁹ truck, plunged into the shaft ~~with them~~⁹ with a grating roar.

The ~~crash~~^{crash} deafened them for a moment, then the stunned three

stared at the shaftwall. The hopper as it plummeted had scraped down the wall, breaking like matchsticks every step of the two-by-four ladder Darius had just shimmied down.

"God Almighty had his hand on your shoulder that time, Duff," Rosocki said shakily.

Darius said absolutely nothing. Even after an extension ladder was brought and he and Cates and Rosocki climbed out to the scared apologies of the truckdriver and the grudging commendation of the foreman for not getting themselves killed, Darius still did not have a word to say.

That night, someone lodged a wrench in the gearteeth of the project's biggest hoisting crane, crippling it.

#

By the tens of tons, rock was flowing onto the dam now. Trainloads of quarry stone were being brought in from two hours away, at Snake Butte--as the name promised, rattlesnakes accompanied the cargoes of boulders, and caused everybody at Fort Peck to think more carefully

about where they stepped--and then the loads were discharged on the slope at the west end of the dam, where heavy equipment was beginning to place all this rock to form riprap, the breakwater-like artificial shore which would withstand the waves of Fort Peck Lake when the dam filled.

Bruce wished rock had never been invented. All spring, he had been diving to the footings of the new trestle, which straddled the river at the upstream face of the dam and in effect was going to be the haul road for the mountain of rock as riprap was emplaced on the full four-mile width of the dam. It was the middle of May now. The ~~darned~~ engineers, Owen very much included, demanded that the trestle be done by the start of June so that they could run their rock trains across it to the eastern half of the dam; then by the end of June, they wanted to be able to stand trains on top of the trestle and merrily dump boulders and gravel over the side until they had the river plugged. All well and good and dandy-fine for the engineers, it seemed to Bruce; for him, it meant underwater handling of braces and bolting in the hardest part of the river, the heart of the current. Unlike Sangster's

truss bridge at the downstream end of the channel, an elegant cat's-cradle
of steel girders ~~which~~ ^{that} suspended itself across the river, the trestle
walked through the river on stilts ^{them} and every one of ~~those stilts,~~
actually thick wooden pilings, ^{brace} carried specifications that made Bruce
sweat beads of his soul. If he messed up, went woozy from the bends
and forgot to bolt down one end of a braceplate, then when the weight
of a sitting trainload of rock came onto—he didn't want to think about
it, and couldn't get it off his mind.

Up through the water, aloft in the strutwork of the trestle, Neil
had been called in as brace monkey. Swaying over the river on a
safety belt--~~Neil~~ ^{he} swore he could feel ^{the} a thrum of the current, hum of
^{humming} the Missouri in the wood of the pilings--he didn't like the looks of
^{channel} the trestle project any better than Bruce did.

Floodwater, they both gladly could have done without.

#



In that pleasantest spring, the water traditionally trickling down rock faces and soft coulees began to swell as the snowpack in the Rocky Mountains turned to mush. Down a 50,000-square-mile slab of the continent the trickles began to feed the creeks, Blacktail and Newlin and English and Cut Bank and Hound and Cow and some hundreds of others that were the capillaries of the vast geography of drainage from Bozeman to St. Louis. One by one the myriad creeks began to lift the rivers, the basic trio of Gallatin, Madison, and Jefferson in their collecting-basin valleys of southmost Montana; then, beyond where those three formed into the headwaters of the Missouri, north across six hundred miles, other river after other river began to muscularly contribute high water, the Dearborn, the Smith, the Sun, the Teton, the Marias, the Judith, the Musselshell. By the time the water reached Fort Peck, several hundred brimming creeks and ten enlarged rivers were running as one.

#

Great, just sonofabitching great. The one spring when we could use a little cooperation from the river, it's running twice as much water as it did other springs. Where does it even get it all from, the Colonel and the Major peeing their pants about the schedule? Sangster is going

^{conniptions}
to have ~~litters~~ if they have to shut down on bracing that trestle.

I'm going to have something myself if all this sets back the plug date.

Where the hell am I supposed to put fill by then if the channel isn't--

"Eh, Owen. A minute of your time?"

Hugh had headed him off before he could reach the government

pickup and start for the briefing at the trestle. "Dad," he acknowledged,

trying to think why his father wasn't over at the dredgeline poking traps.

Christ, was the dredgeline ^{clogged} ~~plugged~~? Had the Old Man and Birdie let--

"There's a job I want on," said his father, just like that.

At long wonderful last. Owen tried not to spoil this by looking

too pleased. "Well, sure, good. Anything short of my own, just name it."

"Snakecatcher."

"Sn--? Are you out of your pickled mind?"

"Not pickled any more, remember?"

But what's the difference, if you're going to behave like this.

Owen worked his mouth without saying anything, trying to study his

father afresh. Now that Hugh had turned dry, he went around with

the willed aplomb of a firewalker. But, thought Owen, refurbished dignity or rectitude or whatever the blazes it was didn't particularly qualify him for-- "Dad, listen. Since when do you know anything about handling ^{rattle} snakes?"

Unfazed, Hugh told him:

"My idea of it is, it would give a man something to concentrate on."

—

Snagboats were on busy duty upstream from the ^{dam channel,} ~~trestle~~, grappling out the most threatening tree trunks and logs before they could build up ^{dangerously} against the shins of the trestle ~~and put dangerous pressure on those pilings.~~

Still, everyone aboard the diving barge was keeping half an eye on that stretch of the river, Colonel's briefing or no Colonel's briefing ^{if,} say, a floating forest of big cottonwoods suddenly showed up around that bend of the Missouri, there was going to be a unanimous footrace for the high ground of the dam.

By now even the color of the river looked mean, a sullen muddy tone as if lava was corrupting the water.

"But you can see enough to work down there?" Colonel ^{awwenter} Pemberton asked.

"Yeah," Bruce answered with ~~possibly~~ ^{untimely} crazy honesty. "Just enough."

All in God's world they wanted from this day, the Corps officers and the engineers and the apprehensive diving barge crew and for that matter Bruce, was the one more diving shift it would take to finish bracing the footings of the ^{channel} ~~the~~ trestle. If they could get the bracing done, in Sangster's estimation, everything ought to hold. If they didn't, and higher water and a jam-up of snags and other trash found the right pressure to put against an unbraced section, then--Sangster mourned out in Dear John tones--that's all she wrote.

"I still say we ~~have~~ ^{need} to wait and see how long before the ^{flood} ~~the~~ crest is due to get here," Owen maintained. He watched for the effect on Colonel ^{armenter} ~~Pemberton~~, never easy to gauge either. Then he swung toward Bruce.

Come on, Bruce. For once in your life, take it a little slow. "What does our government diver think?"

"That this would be a nice time," Bruce said as if the idea had just hit him, "for about a two-week vacation."

The bullgang, languishing along the top of the dam next to the trestle, heard the round of laughter come up from the diving barge and wondered

to each other what was so dratted funny down there in the big drink.

~~They were on a smoke break which they had been told might go on for~~

~~quite some time, nobody, in authority or otherwise, wanted to be out on~~

~~that trestle if the flood started to take it. Neil had shed his climbing~~

gear and was ^{laying} back with his hands under his head, trying to just

listen to the laughter come and go or to nap or anything except to think

about the trestle and high water and random danger flicked down like

a playing card out of the sky, but the thinking would not go away. Next

to him, unusually untalkative, sat Darius. ~~In theory, Darius was helping~~

~~to move the dredgeline pipes to the channel, but that crew was shut~~

~~down too; during the night someone had poured sugar in the gas tanks~~

~~of the haul trucks. Darius, pensive, watched~~ ^{ing} down the slope of the dam

to the diving barge and the specific figure of Bruce.

"You know, though, sir," Bruce spoke up again, with Owen snapping a look at him, "I'd kind of like to get it over with. I'm ready to go down"^{he}--Bruce a little theatrically peered at the lusty water--"whenever you say."

Jesus, where does he get it from, piped in hot from the Old Man?

Owen was trying to hold his temper, knowing himself already riled

about the screw-up in the pipe hauling, if he could get his hands on

the joker who ^{passed in the of his hand time} sugared ~~those~~ gas tanks... Bruce, though, was the immediate

issue. Here's Bruce Duff for you, world--never happy unless he's in trouble

up to his bottom lip. Aloud, actually quite loud, Owen said: [#]"And I

think we don't want to go off half-cocked here. Look, how about this,

everybody," by which he meant Colonel ^{arrived} Pemberton. "We get the noon

reading from Tansy Creek," ^{on} ^{and} ^{the} the nearest upriver measuring station, ^{on} ^{if} "If

the river is cresting at Tansy, okay, we'll know it'll hit here a couple

of hours from then. That'll make it tight, but there'll still be time

enough for Bruce to go down and finish his bracing, ^{right}, Bruce?"

Sure, you bet, Ownie know-it-all, if everything goes right. If

I don't drop my wrench in the silt. If I don't black out any too many

minutes at a time. If this and if that. "I'd still rather start the

dive now," Bruce argued, "and have a little more time down there just

in case everything--"

"Damn it, though," Owen broke in, "what if we get the noon reading

and the crest is past Tansy Creek? What if it's at about"--he took a breath and looked bleakly at Bruce--"the Nettle Creek coulee? Then it'd hit here while you're down on the dive. That wouldn't be such a hot thing to have happen, would it, Bruce?"

"I can't guarantee holding this barge in the middle of something like that," the barge boss Taine spoke up.

Bruce cut Taine off with an angry swipe of his hand. "Hey, here," he was still directing his argument to Owen, "I'm the goddamn one on the spot who has to--"

"I still say it's a matter of timing," Owen insisted, "we've got to know when the sonofabitching crest will get here and work from--"

"Gentlemen."

Both Duff brothers appeared startled at the word from Colonel

argument
Pemberton. x

The Colonel gazed back and forth between Bruce and Owen.

"I don't wish to lose a diver, I don't wish to lose this barge, I don't wish to lose the trestle," he solemnly enumerated, even if those didn't particularly add up. "Everyone take a break. We'll wait for the noon reading from the Tansy Creek station."

—

Looking steamed, Bruce climbed the face of the dam as though he was charging up San Juan Hill. Near the top, the sight of Darius slowed him considerably; ^{he} ~~Bruce~~ had been treading with care around his uncle, not to mention Proxy's volcanic vicinity, ever since the night in the Blue Eagle. Aw, well, hell, he can just hunker up and stay sore, if that's what he wants, Bruce decided ~~and said only the stiff acknowledgment,~~ "Unk," he acknowledged stiffly.

"Nephie," Darius returned commensurately ~~to his nephew.~~

Neil was sitting up yawning but impatient ~~along with it.~~ "What's the deal?" he asked Bruce. "You bigwigs got the river figured out?"

Bruce stopped short. Christ Jesus, now him. Neil seemed to be on the prod pretty often, any more.

Holding his temper--there had to be some limit to how many brothers, uncles, and whatnot a guy could take on in one day--Bruce laid out river matters for Neil, primarily in profanity, then glanced over his shoulder as if the barge argument was following him. "Let's clear out of here until Owen gets off the warpath," he concluded. "Come on, I'll stand you to coffee and pie."

Tactics. Take care of those and they'll take care of--

"Mind if I tag along?" Darius spoke up.

Bruce thawed so visibly Darius was almost embarrassed. "You bet, Unk. You can explain to us how one Duff can be such a horse's patoot"-- he jerked his head in the vicinity of the barge and Owen--"while the rest of us are so perfectly nice."

The Rondola was brimming with customers as usual, but places at the end of the counter were being vacated by a ~~train~~^{railroad} crew, and the three Duffs moved right onto stools still warm from the gandydancers' fannies. ➔

~~Bruce's head was so full of the trestle problem it took him a moment to sort out what time of day it must be ~~by now~~^g. He had been wrestling with the ~~trestle~~^{channel} from time immemorial, it seemed like.~~

"Jesus, I hate it when Owen gets this way," he said, rubbing his eyes. "And he's this way now."

~~"Yeah, but he's right that the ~~trestle~~^{bracing} better be done before ~~high~~^{the real} water shows up here," Neil ~~maintained combatively~~^{stayed combative.} "You let the river soup itself up a little more and you aren't going to want to be under it and I damn sure won't want to be out over it and--"~~

Bruce cut him off with an upraised hand. "No more Missouri River
until we can mix it with pie." ~~He was winking~~ ^{Bruce} ed ^{theatricaly} at the

waitress. "We came to brighten your day, Better Half."

"Surrounded, am I," ~~she~~ ^{Kate} ~~nonchalantly~~ greeted them, dealing out
three cups and pouring coffee. "Won't the dam fall down without you
characters leaning against it?"

"We left Owen in charge," Bruce ~~confided~~ ^{muttered,} "so it wouldn't dare."

"Hi, Kate, how you doing?" Neil was pleased to get her in on this.

He had forgotten she'd be on shift or he would have proposed this Rondola
sideshow himself, to try to settle Bruce down some. ~~I've just~~ ^{ju} been
trying to drill some common sense into this husband of yours, about how
much water it's wise to walk under."

"Better get a big auger," she said.

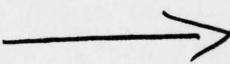
Neil shot a glance at Bruce, expecting him to blow up. Instead,
looking less riled than when he'd stomped away from the river, Bruce
said so soberly it was comical: "There, hear that? This is what
she does to me."

"Kate, merciful," Darius flashed in with. "Tell us, what's the pastry prospect?"

"There's pie, and it's rhubarb."

"Saves on the strain of deciding, anyway," Bruce said. "Hon, put this on our tab, will you--I went out of my mind and told these guys I'd treat."

Neil and Bruce watched restlessly as Darius poured cream and sugar on his slice of rhubarb pie, then dug into theirs unadorned. While Bruce and Darius--mostly Bruce--talked trestle through mouthfuls, Neil let his gaze drift after Kate as she wielded the relentless coffee pot and swept dishes to and from customers. That little exchange between her and Bruce, wham bam; nothing moony about the state of their marriage, it looked like. Watching her at waitressing, he liked the way she never scurried, just covered the territory in take-it-or-leave-it style. Kind of interesting, actually, to rest the eyes on Kate's long silky build, although he was reminded of Bruce's original assessment that you couldn't see her coming around a corner.



On her next pass along the counter she came over to them again with the coffee pot.

"Not I," Darius declined again, one cup of the stuff more than adequate with him.

"Had all I can stand, too," Neil said against another refill. Which sounded stiffer than he'd intended, so he glanced up at ^{Kate}~~Rhonda~~ and kidded: "Bruce claims there's something in the coffee here and that's how you got him."

Rhonda judiciously looked in the ~~coffee~~ pot she was holding as as Bruce chortled and the other two sat there grinning.

She killed off Bruce's chortle by pouring Neil's and Darius's cups to overflowing and skipping his. With all the nonchalance in the world she told him, "You already had some, remember?"

—

The noon reading of the river depth left no further room for argument. The flood crest had just passed Tansy Creek, it would hit Fort Peck in another few hours, and while Bruce could grind his teeth all he wanted ^{to} ~~to~~ he also had to hustle into ^{his} ~~the~~ diving suit. There was time enough left for a standard dive, Owen had been right about that, but where the hell does he get the idea, Bruce was still thinking furiously

as his helmet snicked into place, that this'll be a standard dive?

———
 "The damned knothed of a kid did it, Charlalene! Bruce goosed the moose!"

Owen bounced into the house so full of strange beans that she at first thought he had come home drunk. Now she recognized it as engineer elation. "You're pinning medals on Bruce?" Charlene checked to make sure. "Since when?"

"The trestle! He--"

———
 "--got done with the bracing in jig time," Neil was telling rapt Rosellen, "he didn't even take his whole diving shift. The barge bunch looked like they couldn't believe it, him signaling already he had it whipped, down there. You should've seen him, though, when that helmet came off him--old Bruce looked like one relieved puppy." Neil himself looked as if he was thinking back step by step on the history of Bruce.

"Oh," he thought to say, though. "Saw ^{Kate} Rhonda today, too."

———
 Darius was kissing places on her, lingering here, darting there. Proxy nibbled her lip in pleasure. He did know how to get a woman's

attention. ^eHis tongue ^gas practiced as a cat's. She could feel every least maneuver of his mouth, ~~tongue~~, charting planet to planet on her, slow delicate orbit of first the aureole on one breast and then same on the other, then on to teasing each erect crest, somehow finding time in the soft valley between to say things. God, you wouldn't think a Scotchman could make love talk, would you.

"Hmnnn?" she brought herself out enough to respond. "What, ~~sugarbush~~?"

"Laid eyes on ^{Kate}~~Maenda~~ today," he was saying as if just reminded.

"She's a bit flat in the netherlands, isn't she."

Hugh had to admit he didn't care much for their rattling. Far,

far better to hear the buggers than not, though.

By the nature of things, each rattlesnake was peeved, stirred up at ~~having had~~ its boulder cave ^{being} derricked away or yelling and jumping men

^{ing}~~having trespassed~~ into its vicinity, by the time Hugh was called to the scene. He was assigned the west half of the dam, which had the headstart in rockwork on the face of the dam and thus more snake business. Now that the riprap loads were rolling across the trestle to the east half

too, a second snakecatcher had been put on over there and Hugh had heard practical jokes were being pulled on him, a dead rattler cozily coiled behind his lunchbox when he want to pick it up, for instance. No one pulled anything on Hugh Duff.

He stayed perched judiciously on a stone slab and ^{scouted} ~~looked~~ around for his latest poisonous customer. Invariably the snake was reported as being the size of the Loch Ness monster, but they were damnably hard the pattern on their backs blending so with their surroundings. to spot, So, in a way he was oddly grateful to that angry buzz of the rattle, as a ^{warning} ~~locating~~ device. Poised there, he was outfitted with a sheephook, its 7-foot handle a healthy length, ^{while the} ~~and its~~ narrow springsteel neck of hook designed to snare the hind leg of a sheep did nicely enough around the circumference of a rattlesnake. Hugh's procedure was elemental but not necessarily simple. Yank a rattler out of ^{its} ~~his~~ striking position, like a coil of enfevered rope. Then pin it down (make sure ^{'s o} ~~it was~~ pinned down), in back of ^{wedge of} ~~its~~ head, with the flexible neck of the sheephook. Then reach in and employ the machete, which he carried at his waist in ^{that} ~~the~~ a scabbard ~~the~~ would have suited an admiral.

—————
And so now I am married to the St. Patrick of Fort Peck. There

/

he goes--Sir Hugh, of the Serpent-Ridding Hussars.

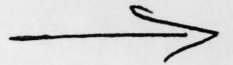
She had Jackie on an outing, on a walk along the bluff where they could look down and see the trains run. The boy attended closely to anything that went on wheels. Unfortunately, thought Meg, he seemed to be thoroughly his father's son in that. Bruce and momentum, kidskin and glove. She hoped Kate wasn't tiring of his velocity. Not that she herself was the leading expert at keeping up with the demands that were men. These days, these lovely walks with Jackie, Meg spent the major share of her attention on the lanky figure with the shepherd's crook, there on the boulder dike in the mid-distance. How then can he keep being the same Hugh, having traded himself in wholesale as he did in Chicago? Are we stone, under it all, as Owen's dam will be there at the lakewater?

"See Gramp?" she tried to point him out to Jackie. "Gramp, down there letting daylight into the snakes--see him?"

The child, though, had caught sight of color dancing by in the air. "Mum Mum," he called for her attention, pointing after the dancing

thing. "Buttafly."

"Jack. I'm glad you brought that up," Meg said to him, as usual speaking to the child as though they both were Prime Ministers. "There now is something I have never understood--a butterfly does fly, I grant you, but do you see anything the least bit buttery about it? Would you



not say, Jack, a better name for the lovely tiny beast would be 'flutterby'?"

Bright-eyed, her conversation partner considered this with the quizzical smile that reminded her so of Owen.

"Fluttaby," the boy agreed.

—

Ah, now he saw the adversary, patterned-green circles of itself under it as the snake lay looped to strike. Pink mouth hotly open, twin fangs prepared, the better to dagger and poison you with, my dear.

4 Quick as a pirate, Hugh grappled down with the sheephook, spilled the nestled snake sideways into a curving series of writhes, pressed down with the neck of the hook, then delivered the chop with the machete.

His heart and breathing always sped up by about twice during this. Hours at a time went by, though, in snakework, when he did not think about a bottle of anything.

~~l~~ Hugh ^{he} now employed the other item he carried on this job, a fisherman's creel. With another slash of the machete, he lopped the rattle off the defunct snake and dropped it in the creel with the others. "I don't see how you can go those snakes, Hugh," Birdie had said to him more than once. In the spirit of enterprise, though, Birdie shellacked the rattles Hugh

provided, ~~glued~~ ^{Already} them on little wooden bases and sold them. ~~The~~ tails of rattlesnakes ~~now~~ were showing up all over Wheeler beneath the mounted skulls of buffalo.

DROP CAP

Four days before the river was to be closed off, in the middle of an already complicated enough afternoon of jigsawing the dredgelines back together downstream from the dam, Owen was called to the field telephone.

"Sangster. Sounds like he's got a hair crosswise," the pipehaul foreman warned before handing him the phone.

"Owen," said the thin voice on the other end, "you better come see something."

"What, at the trestle again? I'll be right--"

"Huh uh," the field-phone voice now sounded as if it was ~~hard to~~ ^{having trouble} believe ^{ing} itself. "This is at the truss bridge again."

His first look at the slumped earth, within spitting distance of the ~~truss~~ ^{truss} bridge, sent Owen white-faced. Sangster ^{'s} ~~whose bridge this~~ ^{was} was whiter.

The slipped section of fill resembled a muddy scallop shell perhaps

two hundred feet long and a hundred high. It had slid, still in one arched piece, several feet down into the river channel. Scoured away underneath by the flood, loosened by the rapid fall of the floodwater, who the hell knew what the precise cause was: it had slid. The arc of gap where the shell edge had pulled away from the dam was spookily neat, as if a hill had just taken an innocent step forward from the mountain of earthfill. There was nothing innocent about it. The shifted heap of fill was throwing enormous weight down against the main pier of the railroad bridge.

"It holding okay?" Owen tore his eyes away from the sickening dam slippage to ask about the health of ^{Sangster's} ~~the~~ bridge.

"Not really." Sangster even still sounded pale. "Out of line about a foot already, and more to come. That pier's cracked."

Owen ^{spoke} ~~said~~ six or eight expletives, rapid-fire.

"I agree," Sangster said. "But we've got to do something besides cuss at it."

They knew they had only minutes before the official car delivered Colonel ^{armer} ~~Pemberton~~ and Major Santee and general hell.

—————

They already had the gravel cars going by the time the Ad Building contingent descended. First thing first, everyone could see that much. If they lost the truss bridge they lost the railroad loop, the key to plugging the river; they would lose the entire dam schedule, they would lose all advantage over the river for Christ knew how long. Thirty timely railcars of gravel, dumped on the weak side of the cracked concrete pier to temporarily shore it up, saved them from that at least for the moment. But now came the question of holding together both the bridge's underpinning and the channel shoulder of the dam until they could get the river plugged.

Owen and Sangster and everybody in the vicinity nervously sized up the Corps officers as the briefing was convened there at the river. Colonel ^{arwenter} ~~Pemberton~~ appeared to be wishing for the Philippines. Major Santee looked a little smirky, as he often did when things went wrong.

The colonel made short work of discussion. "What about this, Duff?"

What about what? What the floodwater did along here, so that
neither I nor God Almighty can guarantee you that chunk of earthfill
won't move some more, won't cave off and take the bridge with it, in

the next four days or the next four minutes? That there was only, what,

one chance in five that we'd get the highest water of the whole project

this spring, but that's exactly the ~~senefabitching~~ thing we did get?

Or that what I most want right now, the one thing I can think of to maybe


stabilize the fill that's slipped, is to have high water up against it

again? What are you going to think of any of my whats, Colonel?

Owen took the deep, deep breath needed to go for broke.

———
Fort Peck woke up to dynamite at dawn.

The detonation, at 4:20 a.m. sharp, breached the dike which had been holding back the river water above the tunnel portals. That quick, with one ka-boom and a dirt geyser of blown dike, the map of the Missouri River changed. Now the river forked at the dam, the main flow still tumbling through the channel at the ^{truss}~~railroad bridge~~ but an easterly eddy



swirling its way into the tunnel inlets. It was a bit past dawn when the first river water made its passage through the tunnels and surged into the outlet channel below the dam, frothing white against the confining concrete.

At the main channel, at the ~~railroad~~^{truss} bridge, four years of calm planning and temperate engineering about how to most handily close off the Missouri River had to be fed into the meatgrinder of the next twelve hours. Improvising every inch of the way, they were going to make the ~~water of the~~ river into the counterweight proposed by Owen Duff, by backing the water up against the sloughed section of fill like a liquid retaining wall. Which meant plugging the river here and now, at the downstream end of the channel, instead of upstream at the trestle the intended three days from now.

⁹ ~~(Owen, where the hell's that dispatcher, we got to get rolling on--~~ ¹¹

Which meant that the 45-car trainload of plugging boulders could not be ~~jauntily~~^{merrily} dropped straight into the river--the side girders of the truss bridge were in the way--but needed to be unloaded at both ends of the bridge, spilled down onto gravel approaches to the river.

"I know, I know, Colonel, it's not the greatest field office there ever was, but it's all the ready-built crew could skid over here to us in a hurry. What ^{exactly} is it? Well, sir, it's a two-holer. ^{Le}

Which meant that ~~the crane barge~~ ~~derrick boat~~ laboring in the middle of the river current had to grapple the boulders from the gravel banks one by one, to build a rough sill out into the chanel.

"Okay, Max, so this is slower than the wrath of God, but we don't have any choice but to keep that derrick boat at-- ^{Le}

Which meant that the rail fleet of gravel cars couldn't let fly with their massive plug of gravel until the boulder sill was firmly there to keep it from washing away.

"Oh, Jesus, it won't be done until WHEN? ^{Le}

To the engineers, this was like being trapped in a very long game of checkers when they had been all set to play bombs-away.

——— Hold, you so-and-so. There's no damn reason for you to be falling into the river.

Owen wasn't addressing this thought to the truss bridge although, heaven knew by the blue smoke of invective and energy he was lending in

support of Sangster and it, he did not want to see the steel span hit the water either.

Either nobody savvies or nobody's saying--not even you, Max--
that the truss bridge could be only the first symptom here.

Whatever else he was at, through this longest day, Owen kept the slipped section of damfill guardedly in sight, forever in mind.

Just hold. That's not asking such a hell of a lot, is it? Sit
there, another few hours is all, and then I can tend to you. If he ran the arithmetic of the situation through his head once ~~today~~ ^{this day,} he ran it two hundred times. The site of the slippage, the core pool, the distance between: by every calculation he could think of, the core pool sitting dumb, fat and happy up there in the east half of the dam should be safely far enough from where that odd shell of fill had given way; look, millions of other cubic yards there in the channel shoulder supporting the core pool hadn't given way. Result: the slippage as it now stood didn't necessarily mean that the core pool was going to start leaking out of it any minute and the leak would increase to a gush in less time than it took to tell about it and the gush would speedily grow to be a breach

and the breach majestically would cave away and the entire sonofabitching core pool would rush out in a 150-foot-high avalanche of water and fill, tearing the guts out of the dam.

Owen Duff, engineer, knew the slipped spot didn't necessarily mean that.

Owen Duff, alarmed member of the human race, Fort Peck subgroup, was not so sure. This version, the one he had to traipse around in while ^{big} rocks got fumbled into place beneath the bridge, would not breathe easy until he had the plugged Missouri and a Niagara of freshly-piped dredge material both at work shoring up that slipped spot.

So hold, damn it, okay?

—

The bridge pier needed helpings of gravel every so often, and so Sangster at least had spurts of being busy at that, having the train dispatcher roll ^{another} 30-car cut of dumper cars in, which Owen envied him.

He himself had the pipeline crew hauling and installing along the channel shoulder and had called in the bullgang to help out with the last needed section of the strutworks there, and all four of his dredges were standing ready downriver, so that as soon as the river was safely

plugged they could pour material like mad into this neck of the channel and backfill the slipped slope. Begin to end the dam, as well. Oh, there'd be another full year, fifteen months maybe, of building it up and topping it off. But the vee of the river channel was the last gap, the four-mile valley between the chosen bluffs had shrunk down to it. Owen had ready or was getting ready everything he could think of to throw at the channel. But for now he was reduced to scenery inspector, standing watching the ungodly slow progress of the rock sill under the bridge.

The river boiled around the ^{crane barge,} ~~derriek boat,~~ which stood there in midstream like a patient broad-butted fisherman, its long boom swinging as it brought a ton-and-a-half boulder into the water, going back for another.

#

Reporting for pipeline work, the bullgang watched the scurry ~~The scurry and commotion around the truss bridge was watched~~ and commotion around the truss bridge with envy. ~~with envy by the bullgang when they reported for pipeline work.~~

"Not much call for guys with hammers in that, is there?" someone asked wistfully.

"Afraid not," answered their foreman, Jepperson. "No, most of you,

just whack away at setting up the next section of struts. I goddamn well know you're going to spend most of your time gawking over there, but ^{and} try _^ look busy once in a while." Jepperson shifted his weight. "But four of you get to be gravelmasters."

A silence settled on the crew.

"What this is," Jepperson went on, "they're gonna double up on the gravel dumping. Constantly run trains until they get the river held. The four guys up there," he jerked his head in the direction of the railroad bridge, "who're used to doing it will show you how. Oh, and you'll draw an extra two bits an hour." Someone sang out Our chance to be big rich! and there was a little laughter.

"So, let's say--" Jepperson made a show of looking around "--Morrie...

~~Livingston~~
~~Red Lodge Red...Duff...~~"

Not I, said the man named Me.

The expression on Darius put a sourball look on the foreman as well.

"Not you, Bonny Prince Darry. Other Duff, Neil there." # Neil bit a corner of his mouth, but stepped forward.

"And..." Jepperson shopped through the crew for one more. He stopped as Birdie Hinch moved indicatively. The three the foreman had named so far were all much younger, fitter. "Birdie, →

sorry, but I'm supposed to send guys who can run like--" He broke off, then grinned. "Yeah, okay. And Birdie."

#

By mid-afternoon, officers and engineers were running on coffee and habit. They had all been up through the night, pitching in on the final readying of the inlet channels and the tunnels for the river diversion, and ever since early morning they had watched ~~rock by rock~~ ^{boulder by boulder} as the sill gradually grew, and they were close to becoming zombies before Sangster cured them with:

"That's as much as we can do with rock. Hadn't we better go to gravel, Colonel?"

#

~~The quartet from the bullgang~~ ^{sent to be apprentice gravelmasters} were at the end of the bridge, receiving the fastest education of their lives. The four men already working the gravel cars which periodically shored up the ailing bridge pier were showing them the routine. There was a catwalk between the truss girders and where the train ran. Scrambling along that, you had to keep pace with a given dumper car and when the shout of "Pull!" came, reach down and yank the big springpin which opened one of the two hopper doors beneath the railcar. Your partner on the other side of the train opened

the other hopper door at the same time and the dumper car was emptied of fifty tons of gravel, falling with an appalling roar and a hellish cloud of rockdust into the river. This had to be done constantly at a trot-- the trains were not to stop, not for anything--and the ^{newcomers'} ~~bullgang members~~ respect for the gravelmasters rapidly rose by hundreds of percent.

#

This was Sangster's show now, the gravel plug to be dumped down through the bridge car by car and train by train, and Owen caught a fleeting look of gratitude on the bespectacled man when he told him he was clearing out of his way, going up to a perch in the bridge girders for a ringside seat.

~~He was startled~~

He was startled to see Neil, below on the catwalk, then wished ^{that} he'd thought of ~~it~~ himself, getting Neil assigned out of the bullgang to perform this. With a little softsoap and pressure, he could have wangled Bruce onto the gravelmaster crew too. Wouldn't that have been something, Owen thought to himself, ^{twin} Duff brothers plugging the Missouri.

#

Neil developed a lope to keep up with the dumper cars, although Birdie Hinch somehow managed simply by ^{scampering.} ~~scurrying.~~ The four pairs of men ran a strange looping race, the lead pair dumping their car

of gravel and turning to run back past the other three sets of men to the fourth dumper car back in line, following beside it until the "Pull!" signal again. They finished the first train, two thousand tons of gravel gone to the river bottom, and the next train immediately came.

——— Suppers went uncooked. The crews were not going to be home until the river was plugged or the bridge was lost. Light lingered, this time of year, and as the blue evening came on, wives drove down from Wheeler or walked across from Officers' Row in the Corps townsite and clustered on the bluff by the Ad Building. Rosellen said something to Charlene about having to get used to being bridge widows for however long, and while Charlene didn't answer, she thought there was no getting used to anything at Fort Peck.

Proxy showed up, saying with fine disgust that taxi-dancing was slow tonight anyway, all it took was a nice evening and males were occupied with softball, she said, making it sound like a social disease.

The three of them and the other women watched the activity at the truss bridge and the river gap, where tiny figures scurried and

constant
 traincars marched in file and bulldozers lurched across slopes; from their distance, it looked like the place on an anthill where boiling water had been poured.

"Making the gravel fly pretty good, aren't they." From the sound of him, Bruce was the ~~complete~~ authority on stopping rivers. He had come up without any of the three women noticing until here he stood with his hands in his hip pockets, ~~expert appraiser~~ ~~connoisseur~~ of the roiled water beneath the bridge.

"Decided to hang around the widows' club, mm?" Charlene looked glad to have a chance to kid him as a break in the monotony. Proxy cold-shouldered him without making a big issue of it. It was Rosellen, until then absorbed in watching the drama at the truss bridge, who cut her eyes over to Bruce a couple of times and right away wanted to know:

"What'd you do with Kate? Isn't she along for this?"

"Doesn't get off until 9," he handled that in a breeze. Actually, he added, he was on his way to the Rondola to pick her up after work. "But the view is better from up here." Whereupon he grinned around at Charlene and Rosellen and Proxy in turn, although only for the barest

instant at Proxy.

Rosellen caught him off guard by asking:

"Don't you kind of wish you were down there closing the river off for good?"

"There'll still be stuff to tend to, don't worry your head about that," Bruce gave her. "For a while yet I'll keep on doing the clog dance on the river bottom."

He flinched when Proxy, as if to herself, hummed a snatch of "When We Danced Close and the World Stood Still." But then Charlene began a big conversation about Fourth of July intentions, whether Bruce and Kate would be available if everybody could get together for another Nettle Creek picnic. "That last one was a lot of fun," she smiled as if calling back a favorite dream. "Sure it was," Bruce laughed, "because you shot the pants off everybody else."

Rosellen could have slapped them both. Here the time was, the dam taking hold, the river changing forever, Fort Peck within inches, minutes, of becoming the monument they'd all spent these years making, and the two of them chose now to go coochy-coo at each other about

p. 660B follows

that stupid shooting match.

Expert reader of faces that she was, Proxy kept watch on Rosellen.

Smile, chile. If Big Sis wants to get her jollies by teasing Bruce-ums,

not a thing in this world we can do about it. She'd just better know

when to turn it off, is all.

—————

"There goes the river," Hugh wanted to say in the worst way. All that prevented him was the understanding that it would be the worst way. Meg would lay into him like a catamount if he took a dig at Owen's triumph. He believed it constituted unnatural forbearance, but he stoppered himself while he and Meg and Jackie watched the ^{action at the bridge} ~~river drain~~ from the roof of the Rondola. Customers passing beneath into the cafe joked about hoping the roof held long enough for them to get a cup of coffee, and it was true the flat tarred surface groaned a little as ⁹ ~~half~~ a dozen people at a time took short turns as spectators, but the Duffs by some unspoken consent had residence up there while the river was being pinched off between the great halves of Owen's dam. Holding Jackie, Meg was keeping him mesmerized with the tale of a selkie, a man who was also a seal--"Think of it, Jack,

he could catch himself a fish any time he felt like it and wear lovely fur trousers as well."

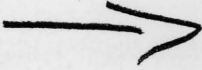
"Meg." Kate came climbing the ladder, careless of knees and more from under flashing out of her waitress uniform. "Let me have him a minute." She took the boy and turned so that he was looking with her toward the railroad bridge and the rumbling gravel trains. Hugh distinctly heard her say, "I want him to see the river go."

— In the bullgang, Darius did his work on the dredgeline supports with his hands only, his true attention on the contest between the might of the dam project and the strength of the river. Were it not for Owen and Neil, he found, he would silently cheer for the river.

— Another train done, another came. Every time a carload was dumped now, some gravel was swept away in the current as if the Missouri was determined to deliver it to St. Louis, but some stayed, a loose and shifting pyramid there under the water.

Neil, sprinting and wondering along with the other seven gravelmasters how much more of this there would be, how much more they could take,

glanced up at Owen whenever he could. Braced there in the girders like a spiffed-up steelworker in a Stetson and pressed khakis, Owen looked somehow distracted, gazing off at the channel shoulder instead of watching the bombardier-bursts of gravel into the river. What do I expect, though, that he's going to act like some kind of radio announcer



up there calling a fight? "Here's a haymaker from Neil Duff...followed by

a wallop of gravel from Birdie Hinch...but the Missouri is absorbing all

the punishment they can throw at it, so far. "Huh uh. Owen is going

to go about it his own way, whatever it is. # Catching himself at this,

knowing he was going a little giddy from exertion, Neil concentrated

on his running, staying exactly even with the next dumper car, the

little hop-skip when "Pull!" was shouted again and the thunder of gravel.

#

Owen could,

He could feel it all, through the bridge. The slow rumble of the

train, the concussive force as each carload was dumped: the incessant

rhythms came up through his shoes, and sideways out of the girders into

his gripping hands. ~~He~~ ^{Owen} knew better but he could wish, couldn't he,

that he and the bridge were taking into themselves all the tremble

of plugging the river, that none could reach and dislodge the slipped

area of fill. So far, the wishing had worked.

#

In the half-dusk, the gravel dumping slowly but unstoppably gained,

the hail of ~~gravel~~ ^{pebbles} building up in a rough slurry which would show for an

instant above the riverwater and then slip from sight.

Tired as they were, the gravelmasters worked like acrobats now,

bouncing to the catwalk railing to peek down at the effect of each
dumpload, then back into the rhythm of catching their next dumper car,
yanking the springpin--

In the end it was a carload dumped by Birdie Hinch and a very tired
Neil that brought the shout:

"That one's staying dry!"

Neil scooted to the railing ^{beneath} ~~beside~~ Owen's perch and the two of them
stared down. In the vast wallow of gravel mush below, a low conelike
heap--as Darius would have said, "Not two hands higher than a duck"--
was a drier gray. The Missouri, by just that much, was captured now.

Part Six

THE SHERIFF

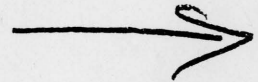
1937

The big gravy spreader himself came to show off at the dam after they had managed to pen up the river, to the sheriff's steaming despair. Franklin Delano Roosevelt at his rosiest, jaunty as if he'd built Fort Peck Dam with his own pink hands, when the fact was he couldn't even maneuver himself from his special train to the presidential touring car without a gang of help. Didn't seem to matter, though, to this President's smiling repeal of the law of averages, the disgusted sheriff thought; three
~~a~~ thousand counties in the United States and here was Roosevelt majestically roostering around in his, for the second time in one lifetime.

Waiting, watching, the sheriff hardly knew where to start in being nettled. Glasgow, the depot sign read as the President's entourage began to disgorge from the train, but to Carl Kinnick it might as well have announced Nightmare. For the past two weeks now the Secret Service advance man Boatwright, barging into everything as if Valley County all of a sudden belonged to him; the elaborate chain of command it took for the sheriff to get the simplest thing done, such as roping off the depot platform; the wise-ass Highway Patrol special contingent who wanted to know whether the President's motorcade was going to go for the (speed record from Glasgow to Wheeler; the on-loan police from Great Falls who figured they knew everything because they were from a city; the couple of hundred of the National Guard called into uniform and deployed along the presidential route, who figured that because they were military they knew more than any cops; and all that only brought you to Roosevelt's own voluminous retinue of staff and newspaper people and the mob of politicians from far and wide, to be dealt with starting now. As a Democratic officeholder the sheriff had to be part of the political folderol, too, and it was amazing to him as he herded them through to the train, the number of

delegations who on the Fort Peck example wanted to talk to the President about a water scheme for the Marias River or the Two Medicine River or whatever their closest river happened to be; you'd think, the sheriff thought, Montana could be dammed up enough to irrigate this entire side of the earth.

Something moved, whirled, at the corner of the sheriff's vision, and he twisted in that direction with his hand on his gun butt. Tornado of pigeons, scared up from the grain elevator on the other side of the railroad tracks. Nerves. The sheriff wished he didn't have any.



America the Beautiful, the Glasgow high school Kiltie band ^{now} let

loose with, red-kneed in the October wind. The crowd had been gathering for hours, the street behind the depot solid with people across to the Goodkind Block and all the way down to the Coleman Hotel, and wouldn't you know there'd be at least one, some smart-aleck Caruso at the front of the throng warbling out the popular mock version:

"My country 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of Franklin D.,
next thing to king!
Won't you please run again,
Third term for fun again..."

The serenade did not actually constitute disturbance of the peace--hell, the peace was already disturbed by the President himself--so the sheriff folded his arms and turned around to reconnoiter the trackside situation again. The delegations wanting this or that had been busily trooping through the presidential Pullman, and the schedule pretty quick called for Roosevelt to emerge onto the rear platform to smile and wave at the crowd, then descend into the open touring car for the drive to

the dam. About time, the sheriff told himself as he was given the high sign by McIntyre, the President's secretary, to step up into the Pullman with the final delegation of supplicants.

In there, the presidential parlor car was surprisingly old-fangled. Velvety. Kind of musty, to tell the truth. Not that Carl Kinnick was there to sightsee. He knew from the '34 visit that the presidential rail quarters would be chockfull of important hands to be shaken, and he first of all made sure of Governor Ayers's and Senator Murray's and Congressman O'Connell's and then merely shook whomever until it came his turn at the President's. Giving the sheriff the most famous smile this side of the man in the moon, Roosevelt assured him how perfectly delightful it was to be in Glasgow once more.

Even the FDR handshake--the master ~~campaigner's~~ ~~politician's~~ proffer of just-enough: this much touch of my flesh shall ye have, and not a pore more--provoked the sheriff, as he stepped back to watch the political menagerie in here sort itself out. Conspicuous by his absence this time was Senator Wheeler, who by now was at odds with the President for the New Deal having veered ~~so~~ ~~too~~ far to the left. Here and appearing thoroughly unhappy about it was

Congressman O'Connell, who appeared to suspect that Roosevelt didn't know where real left was located. The thought of FDR dainty-handing his way through the whole damned national picture like this, maybe even for another term after this one, was just about more than Carl Kinnick cared to look ahead at.

Right now, though, the local officeholders were going to be accorded the privilege of following FDR out onto the train's rear platform so their constituents could view them in the presidential presence. Roosevelt had to be got onto his feet. The sheriff was determined not to miss this. He forged his way around the end of the milling group of aides and politicoes in the Pullman so he would have the clearest possible shot at seeing. A Secret Service agent scrutinized him sharply, then evidently decided this was only a short man's natural behavior.

From the waist up, Roosevelt there in his chair was monumental. Even his head seemed sizes larger than anyone else's. Commensurate shoulders and chest. The sheriff knew the story, how Roosevelt swam, swam, swam after polio hit him. All that work in the water and the exertion of the wheelchair had built him a torso that would have done a lumberjack .

proud.

The legs, though.

Even to the unsympathetic sheriff it appeared pitiful and painful, Roosevelt's ritual of going clenched from the jaw on down, gearing himself for the lurch upward so the metal leg braces could be locked to hold him in a standing position, his son James there on his left, his weak side, to provide firm ~~clenched~~^{tensed} biceps he could grip onto, now the President of the United States grunting himself ready, then the actual massive tottering rise like--

The sheriff didn't know like what, but it was damn sure unforgettable.

#

The town of Wheeler, democratic and Democratic, antic and frantic, was boiling over for Roosevelt.

Cheers ~~sang~~^{sang} out at the approach of the motorcade of the President who put the country back to work, who provided a wage to those whose pockets had been emptied by the Depression, and, not incidentally, who re-opened the nation's saloons. Theoretically the dam work was going on uninterrupted until FDR's big speech upon leaving Fort Peck, but somehow there were crews, complete with foremen, who saw the President from vantage points such as the Wheeler Inn and the Blue Eagle as well as

from the job site later on. Toddlers and taxi-dancers and cardsharps and Corps wives in their Sunday best jammed in next to the damworkers on the board sidewalks. When at last it arrived in the procession, the open touring car gave them their money's worth, the confident presidential smile and wave as Roosevelt was borne along the main street of Wheeler until the motorcade proceeded, naturally, to Delano Heights.

#

Back in the jampacked Blue Eagle, a patron shouted out: "How about a free round in honor of the President?"

"How about go screw yourself," Tom Harry replied from the busy cash register.

#

As the motorcade wound down the ridge to the dam, the sheriff in the follow-car behind the President's brooded ahead. Not that Franklin D. himself seemed to have a care in the world, jovially letting his ear be bent by Colonel ^{armenter} Pemberton in the jump seat or the Governor or the Senator alongside him on the big back seat. The man truly did possess the ultimate politician's knack of appearing interested in every gopher hole and dandelion.

All Carl Kinnick could think about was what could go wrong, here in his county, as the rajah of the Hudson River was shown the conquered Missouri, transported across the great earthfill, shown the entire sprawling dam project from the overlook on the east abutment, then driven up into the hills to the ^S/_Xpillway and at last to the spur railroad where the special train had been brought around for the presidential speechmaking.

The sheriff's heart, or at least the place where he pinned his badge, sank as the speaking site and the winter harbor parking lot grew into view. There and waiting were thousands. Thousands of cars, to only start the matter off; the intermittent sun caroming off all those windshields, the dazzle of vehicles looked like the mass lot at Ford's Rouge River plant^o and it didn't take much figuring of how many people would have piled into each car to come to this and then adding on, what, ten thousand damworkers already swarming around here--Sheriff Kinnick knew this was going to be even worse than

his worst dream of it.

The sheriff hopped out fast when the motorcade pulled up alongside the special train. He spotted his undersheriff Peyser, a head taller than the rest of the cordon at the ^{back end} ~~rear~~ of the train. Cussing his way through the crowd, the sheriff wriggled in to make sure Peyser was doing what he was supposed to, keep an eye on the radio guys who were putting up microphones on tall stands to catch the President's speech from the train's rear platform.

"How you doing, Carl," the undersheriff placidly greeted him.

Sheriff Kinnick scowled at the poker-faced Peyser in return, then stared up through the grillwork of the ~~train's~~ rear platform to where the hen herd of politicians was forming up around Roosevelt and his microphones.

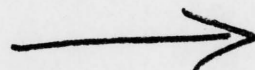
What if somebody took a shot here at Roosevelt the way that crackpot did back East in '33?

The sheriff was no connoisseur of history, but he knew a lot about blame. Oh, sure, the gunman there in '33 potted the Chicago mayor right next to ^{FDR} ~~Roosevelt~~ instead ^{but} people in Montana were good shots. No,

if the President--particularly this President--was killed in Carl Kinnick's county, that would be it for his career as sheriff. He'd might as well ~~go~~ pick grit with the chickens, if that happened.

And unfortunately he could think of just countless ways it could happen. Somebody mad about being let go from his job at the dam. Some liquored-up bottomlander who was sore about losing his land to the dam. Some Republican driven nuts by the New Deal. Some Communist; you never knew what that bughouse bunch was up to, but the report was that they hated FDR for keeping the country from going far enough to the left; incredible to the sheriff.

Or some woman. So far as he knew, women hadn't taken their turn yet at assassinating. (Congressman O'Connell's young knockout of a wife, prettily stationed right up there at the presidential elbow. Beauty turned beast, bango. Wouldn't that be a setup.) God, if the women ever started cutting loose...



So there was every kind of possibility here in this Fort Peck crowd, and one of the uncomfortable thoughts wasn't only the danger to Roosevelt. Supposedly the Secret Service bodyguards were to ~~humanly~~ shield the President from assassin peril, but where were those boys when the Chicago mayor got picked off? The sheriff knew that if it came to that, if he spotted somebody here yanking out a gun, he'd have to put himself between that gun barrel and Roosevelt. He'd take death. There wasn't any choice, sheriffing.

~~##~~ ————— As the ~~Governor~~ launched into amplified greetings to ~~Montana for~~ Roosevelt and his trainload, the sheriff went and claimed the roof of the cab of the truck that had been pulled up parallel to the presidential Pullman for the ~~thirty or so~~ newspaper photographers and reporters to see over the crowd.

"Governor Ayers, and I almost said 'My old friends of Fort Peck,' because some of you were here three years ago."

The presidential voice now, and if the sheriff had been a praying

man he would have asked that Roosevelt just say it was nice to be in Montana, accept a bouquet and kiss Miss L-H Beef on the cheek, and scoot

back inside the railroad car. ~~Even doing it that way wouldn't be bulletproof,~~

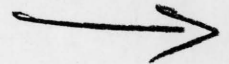
~~but infinitely less risky than standing up there front and center as a~~

~~target for however long an all-out speech took.~~ But The sheriff knew FDR³

blast his ~~gaudy~~ ^{lordly} guts, was not going to pass up a chance at an all-out ~~speech~~ ^{speech} ~~anything.~~

Roosevelt looked out around the Fort Peck valley and at the dam as if making sure of something.

"The one thing that I have specialized on ever since I started



collecting postage stamps at the age of ten years is geography. The geography, especially, of the United States."

The squire next door, this familiar kindly confiding tone of Roosevelt's was. The sheriff shook his head. You had to half-admire how much the man could get away with. But then after predictably wafting himself and his audience out here "beside the wide Missouri," FDR turned up the oratory:

"This great river gathers into story, the written and told tributary, out of passages cut by large desires. Beginning, so far as we know, with

