

that I would like a series of drinks."

"Don't get too plotzed to polka, later on," she decided was the best she could ^{do} with him for now. "Listen, I have to go be dancing, this is the biggest ~~deezy~~ ^{we've had in here} of a night ~~Tom~~ has had since the Fourth of July."

Darius felt her kiss on his temple, then was alone in the celebrating mob.

A very drunk constituent tottered in next to Darius, imparted

"Here's to the greates' ^{sq} president ever, Frank'n ^{sq} Eleanor Roosevelt,"

clinked his beer bottle against Darius's before Darius could whisk

his away, then surged deeper into the saloon. May you have a dozen noses

and pepper in your snuff, Darius bestowed after him. Yet Darius had to

grant, even through the beers he himself was polishing off, that Roosevelt

was only the, what did they call it, proximate cause of his dreadful state

of mind. Plentywood. Mott. The Red Corner that had paled out. Those were

the real shafts in the ribs. Mott had been soundly defeated. No, trounced.

No, ground into the dirt of Sheridan County. So much for Fusion, the

fuse that fizzled. Back to square one again. No, Darius, be honest

with yourself; if you can't, who will? Back before ^{Roman} square one, that's

where the movement ^{stands} ~~stood~~ now, somewhere off the damnable political

checkerboard entirely. That funeral...the boy...the same with Crawford...

why does blind chance forever have to intrude every blasted time we...

Darius brought himself to, and turned to face the next tormentor awaiting him, grinning sardonically down the bar. The election bet he had lost to Tom Harry amounted to twenty dollars, fortunately unbeknownst to Proxy.

Hugh had not intended to be drawn into the election celebration, but wasn't it forever being said that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was magnetic? Here in the screeching Wheeler Inn therefore ~~he~~, Hugh, was; attracted by the historic moment, joining in every toast to the shantytowns' favorite President, the begetter of Fort Peck Dam, the big wheel of the New Deal. What was that joke, yes, he had it now: ~~oh yes~~. A man's got to believe in something, so I believe I'll have another drink. Beer providentially in hand. Bottle in either hand, now that he took conscious inventory. Hugh shrewdly put one back on the bar in reserve, pleased with his reasoning power. He had handed his wages over to Meg as usual, last week's payday; she'd be baffled how he had the money to go on this toot. Confusion to our nemeses, eh, Darius? Wiping beer foam from his

mouth with the back of his hand, drunk but still capable, Hugh bit

the skin there gently but firmly to keep from laughing aloud. Wouldn't

do to laugh out loud at Meg.

#

The way Bruce had it figured, he was owed a little fun. Wasn't diving season all but over, now that Owen was putting the dredges into winter harbor? Hadn't he weathered the bends, survived the river again, soldiered through this tricky damned year, ice to overheated, like a good fellow? ^{Kate} Rhodie wouldn't be home until after midnight from dishing out T-bones to the election celebrants, and he could swing by and pick up Jackie from Mother and the Old Man before that and put him snug abed, then be waiting up casually to hear how ^{Katy's} ~~Rhodie's~~ night had gone.

Meanwhile, there was his own to be tended to.

#

Look, Tom Harry just had explained to Darius, think of the United States as a ^{great} big envelope, and the only ^{states} ~~ones~~ that hadn't voted for Roosevelt were the two pitiful little stamps up in the corner.

Darius had begun remarking what an infuriating bastard Tom Harry could be without even half trying, when he heard at his ear:

"Hey, unk, celebrating the election? Old FDR sure showed them his rosy rear end, didn't he?"

Darius said with resignation, "Another country heard from." He made room for Bruce at the bar. "For the love of heaven, man, buy us a round before this barkeep steals the shoes off us."

Bruce in fact bought more than one, standing there spectating the fate of the world as argued by Darius and Tom Harry, but his heart wasn't in philosophy. Up on the bandstand, the ~~Rhythm~~^{Minstrel}aires were braying out dance music. A nice familiar tension started at the back of Bruce's throat. He peered over a bunch of heads and spied the whitish-blond hair.

"I haven't said hello to Proxy^{yet,}" Bruce let drop to Darius. "Guess I'll go pay my regards, maybe see if she'd like to dance with a relative for a change. Be okay with you?"

His uncle gave him a glance, then waved a dismissing hand and resumed on the education of Tom Harry.

Maybe it was his imagination, but Bruce thought Proxy studied him like he was horseflesh when he went over to her. "Everybody is on the

loose tonight, huh?" she met him with but included a ^{slight} ~~little~~ smile.

"You in here irrigating your way to health like the rest of them, Bruce?"

"A person can do better than lipping on a bottle," he observed, which cocked Proxy's smile a little sideways. "I know you get your fill of dancing," he went right on to, "but could you stand one more?"

She had to admit she was an eeny bit curious about Bruce. ^{Kate} ~~Phonda~~

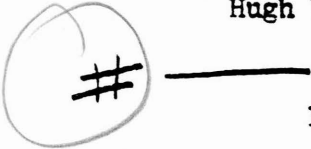
hung onto this flirtface for some reason. Maybe the kid had something to flirt about all the way down, so to speak.

Checking in Darius's direction, she made out that he was deep into telling Tom Harry the history lesson of the workers at The Times of London coming back from tea-break and finding that the owners had settled their labor dispute by wheeling in ^{Gatling} ~~machine~~ guns, The bloody Times of toffee-nose London, man! Which proved that not even the most elegant of the big bugs could be trusted, not FDR nor any--
m

To Proxy, history was one thing, commerce was another. "Sure, if you want to give it a whirl," she said to Bruce, taking care to make it seem a natural transaction. "If your money's no good, I can sic the rest of the family on you."

#

Hugh patted himself down three times, more surprised with each pat to find his pockets drained. Quite a feat, really, that the half of Darius's sum ~~to him~~ that he had set aside for this sort of liquid expenditure had already been expended, not to mention liquidated. ~~Hugh~~ ^{He} shook his head in wonder at himself. Wouldn't he be up a dry creek without a tiddle if he didn't know precisely and exactly--ah ha! prezactly ^L_m where to obtain further funds. Taking a woozy bearing toward an elaborately embroidered horseshoe on the back of a shirt, perched where its wearer could kibitz down at the Wheeler Inn's ceaseless poker game, Hugh began plowing through the press of bodies.

 Proxy had danced with every kind of specimen, tall, short, neither, drunk to the gills, shy as virgins, obvious tomcats, puffy deacons in suits and vests, and once even with a traveling salesman with a wooden leg, and as far as she was concerned surprises were few and far between. Bruce was one. He danced like somebody who had been studying up on it since grade school.

"Will this do?" he asked as if he had a patent pending on it.

"Suits me," she had to admit. "In this job, people do more walking

on my feet than I do."

Bruce gave her the winning grin of a kid who always counts on getting the large half of anything. "Your tootsies will get good care from me." He hugged her into him a little more, as other dancers squashed past on both sides of them. Dance[#] steps were mostly only a matter of survival, in a crush of couples like this. Yet and so, Proxy could tell that Bruce had a first-class sense of rhythm, surprising in somebody with the male Duffs' customary build of long extremities joined with hard knots; her main complaint about Darius so far had been that his bony knees were wicked in bed.

"Not much running room on the floor tonight, is there," Bruce now observed softly, and pressed her close enough that she could feel the bump in his pants.

✓
OK?
yes ~~Snug dancing was one thing, and~~ ^{If} Proxy ~~if she~~ wanted to lure a potential John D. out to the Packard, ^{she} could put herself on him like melting beeswax. ~~But~~ [≡] that wasn't the case with Bruce. She wasn't volunteering much, but he was front and center on her and exploring for more.

"Speaking of room, how about a little breathing space?" she made it sound like a suggestion.

Bruce's concentration was elsewhere. Among his fascinations were Proxy's slacks. Peter-cheaters. Is that why she always wears them, to string things out a while longer? Then her bountiful blouse. She's got a full house there, for sure. Maybe it was his imagination again, but he believed that her nipples were standing out more and more at attention, the cozier they danced.

Proxy got his attention by pulling on his earlobe.

"This is not such a real great idea," she told him.

"Bought this dance fair and square, didn't I?" he murmured, looking at her as if spooning her up. "So I get to lead. Relax and put yourself on automatic, why not?" ["]Proxy.["]

Instead, she lifted onto her tiptoes to peer around Bruce toward the bar. The back of Darius's head was still evident as he stayed busy being disputatious with Tom Harry. The swaying throng of other dancers was solidly elbow to elbow surrounding her and Bruce, which was the only way you could get away with this. She smiled her smile of long practice

at Bruce and decided to give him a buckle job.

He appeared startled, then thrilled, then beyond that, when her right hand slid away from his back and crept around front and gripped onto his belt buckle, riding there jammed recklessly between them as they danced closer than close, then slowly the fingering reach down behind the buckle, touching exploratorily, skin greeting skin, the tips of her fingers cupping down over the tip of his ^{hard-on} erection and staying there.

There was not much motion to dancing like this, but what motion there was Bruce could feel with embarrassing intensity.

"Proxy, whoa," she could hear the strain in his whisper, "can we go--"

"Hmm mm. A little buckle-fuck will fix you right up, don't you think?" she whispered mockingly back. "You bought yourself a dance.

This is a dance."

In alarm, agony, and a dizziness that seemed to extend all the way down to that place in his throat, Bruce thought the music would never let up. The instant it did, he was saying thickly: "Press^u come on now, I'll wait out back or wherever until you--"

"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.

OK?
NO
STET

"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~~ ^{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. ~~Owen 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." S

"Sober is a relative term. Now Birdie, if you please, fork it over." 305

"Stone cold sober, is what you said, ^{the} Hugh." ~~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—"
m

"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,~~ ⁴ He ^{until} ~~He~~ 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.

"I 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.

Ital.

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. 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, ^{damn it,} ~~damn it,~~ man, you're unbuttoned. You'll get us all arrested yet for letting your steed out of your barn."

"Eh?"

~~"Eh?"~~

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? ^{all} Hugh 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

Ital.

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 ³¹⁰blared 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~~ ^{Windsor} 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~~ 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. ~~total by 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 ^{to explore} ~~exploring~~ this exciting time would be known as in history that ~~was~~ 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} ~~Sunday~~ 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

STET

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, Proxy."

"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--^T_M 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 spelling³-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 pasted on what she was pretty sure was the last ^{Sunday-best} 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. (I tol)

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

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. (I tol)

#

DROP CAP

Janus is the two-faced god, and while ~~Kate~~ ^{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 and ^{warm} ~~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--^m tied to the ferried wagon the way Grandmère Henriette had been. ^{Kate} ~~Shonda~~ 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 pulley 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~~ ^{clomped} 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 ~~lot~~ ^{sizable bank} 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~~ ^{few} 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 bothering with this stack of stuff was not strictly necessary.

but

("How about a nice bonfire?" Bruce had proposed.) ~~Yet~~ 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

~~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.

NEW
INSERT

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 ~~batty~~ ~~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 ~~unerasable~~ ~~damnable~~

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

wicked and everything turned upside-down. It had shown him how
and a hell of a repair bill on the truck.

stretched-thin life was. While Rosellen had chosen the exact same time

to turn fierce about sticking with Fort Peck, instead of seeing about

life for themselves somewhere less ~~treacherous~~ ~~perilous.~~ ~~hazardous~~ 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

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
from
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...

no 4

Nhm, 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.

ital. 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

~~Antonyms put aside, she glanced around again, ing~~
~~had to clear paperwork on her desk out of the way. Meanwhile she needed~~ 315

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
right

her back whether she wanted to know about it or just write about it.

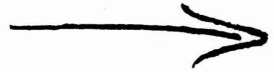
Both. All. She was surprised he would even put the question like that.

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}~~Phonda~~

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?--^m~~now~~ Rosellen took a hard look ^{sc} into her typewriter at Juanita and Gilbert and the laughing breeze, and pulled out the sheet of paper and crumpled it. ^{it's}

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 ^{twelve = and = a = half =}12½-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—^{eight-hundred =} 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

Pick up

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 ^{then} and 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

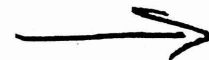
move:

Exodus.

cap
small caps

##

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 damned 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 ^{that} ~~which~~ suspended itself across the river, the trestle walked through the river on stilts ^{them} and every one of ~~these 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 ¹ ~~he~~ _m 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 ^{he} ~~Neil~~ swore he could feel ^{the} ~~the~~ thrum of the current, ~~hum of~~ ^{humming} the Missouri in the wood of the pilings ¹ ~~he~~ _m didn't like the looks ⁹ ~~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 ~~hitters~~ 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 ~~plugged~~ ^{clogged}? 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 ^{dangerously} the most threatening tree trunks and logs before they could build up ³²⁰ against the shins of the trestle, ~~and put dangerous pressure on these 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 ^{Garmenter} Pemberton asked.

"Yeah," Bruce answered with ^{untimely} ~~possibly 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~~ ^T Sangster mourned out in Dear John tones ^I ~~m~~ that's all she wrote.

"I still say we ^{need} ~~have~~ 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 poured in the of his haul trucks the gas tanks... Bruce, though, was the immediate issue. Here's Bruce Duff for you, world--never happy unless he's in trouble

Ital. 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 Pemberton. "We get the noon reading from Tansy Creek, the nearest upriver measuring station, ^{and} 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?"

Ital. 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

Armenter
Pemberton.

mod 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 *Ital,* 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 ^T_m there had to be some limit to how many brothers, uncles, and whatnot a guy could take on in one day ^T_m—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--

mod

"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~~. 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--"

pick up
from middle
of p. 639

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

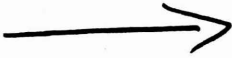
Neil shot a glance at Bruce, expecting him to blow up. Instead,
looking less riled than when he'd stomped away from the river, Bruce
said so soberly it was comical: "There, hear that? This is what
she does to me."

"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 ~~Rhonda~~ ^{Kate} and kidded: "Bruce claims there's something in the coffee here and that's how you got him."

~~Rhonda~~ ^{Kate} judiciously looked in the coffee pot she was holding 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} he also had to hustle into ~~the~~ ^{his} 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

Ital.

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} ~~Phonda~~ 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. His tongue as 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 ~~Maenda~~ ^{Kate} 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 ~~looked~~^{scouted} 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 ~~locating~~^{warning} device. Poised there, he was outfitted with a sheephook, its ^{seven} 7-foot handle a healthy length, ~~and its~~^{while the} 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 ~~his~~^{its} striking position, like a coil of enfevered rope. Then pin it down (make sure ~~it was~~^{is} pinned down), in back of its ^{wedge of} head, with the flexible neck of the sheephook. Then reach in and employ the machete, which he carried at his waist in a scabbard ~~the~~^{that} 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.

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.

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 ^{having trouble} ~~hard to~~ believe ^{ing} itself. "This is at the truss bridge again."

His first look at the slumped earth, within spitting distance of the ~~railroad~~ ^{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 ~~the~~ ^{Sangster's} 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 ^{Armenter} ~~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 ^{Armenter} 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

(Ital.)

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 ~~conefabitching~~ thing we did get?

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

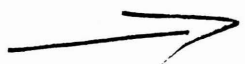
stabilize the fill that's slipped, is to have high water up against it

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.

W Owen, where the hell's that dispatcher, we got to get rolling on--

Which meant that the ~~45~~^{forty-five}-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--^mbut 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. *Te*

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 channel.

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

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? *Te*

Caps

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.

*the* Hold, you so-and-so. There's no damn ^{roman} 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 thirty} 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 try ^{and} 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?"

#

sent to be apprentice gravelmasters

The quartet ~~from the bullgang~~ 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--^{newcomers'} and the ~~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 he'd thought of ^{that} ~~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