

doubtless your pick of a next job as Roosevelt doles out these projects.

While the rest of—"

"Is that what you think I'm at, here? Jesus aching Christ, Darius.

You make me tired. I'm at this job to do it up royally, build this dam

the best way I know how. That's the point, to any of this."

"Ah, but is it. Isn't it more the point to keep society lulled with a bit of work, a bit of wage, while there's no real solving of anything?"

"Lull--? Where's anybody who's lulled, around here? These guys are going to go around saying until their dying breath, 'I worked on Fort Peck.'"

"But you'll always sing the lead, won't you?"

"What the hell is it you think, that a mob of people can just fling themselves at something and it'll be built? You can't get away with that, Darius. They couldn't even at Dnieperstroy. ^{The Sovietskis} ~~They~~ had Cooper and Company in there as engineers, somebody's got to be answerable when you're build—"

"Knowhow, the American language, I'm sure ^{Owen} ~~Owen~~."

"In any language! Even in Red!" Owen was up and standing over him.

Now he shouted over the top of Darius's head. "Max!" Sangster, mid-distance

figure overseeing an extension of the dredgeline strutwork, turned and waved. "Cover until I get back, okay?" Owen called to him through cupped hands. "And ring up Jepperson, would you, and tell him I'm detaching this one" ^mhe jerked a quick thumb at Darius ^m"for a little while."

Then he spun around to his uncle, frowning intently at him and then down the abutment slope to the motor pool vehicles. "Get in the pickup."

Darius cocked his head warily. "What would be the reason for that?"

"There's something I want to show you at the spillway."

"Hold on, Owen ^m--I've had the ha'penny tour of the spillway once already, you know."

"Get in the goddamn pickup before I stuff you in it!"

Darius closeted his anger in the face of Owen's worse case of it, and climbed in the government pickup. Owen veered over to the nearest ransack shack where tools and supplies were kept, grabbed a sizable empty box and flung it in the back of the pickup. Then, mystifying Darius, he drove without a word across the dam, the opposite direction from the spillway, and up into the Fort Peck townsite. At the bowling alley, he jammed to a halt. Darius could not resist asking:

"Are we going to settle this with a duel of skittles?"

Still wordless, Owen slammed out of the pickup and into the bowling alley and soon came back with the box full, heaving it with a grunt into the back of the pickup. He glowered at Darius for a moment through the back window of the cab, then ~~got~~^{jumped} in again and drove across the dam, this time unmistakably into the maze of humpy little hills that would bring them out beside the spillway, and its rail spur.

Darius appraised Owen, stonily driving, and felt a sense of arguer's stimulation along with his apprehension. He had missed Jaarala something fierce; someone who grasped by habit, almost by bloodright, the need to chew at the heels of the powers[#] ~~that~~[#] ~~be~~. He even pined a bit for Mott, bent trumpet though he had turned out to be.

Darius tensed as the pickup barreled down a hill to where acetylene^l flickers threw light and shadow over an iron valley of wreckage, the cutting torches at work on railcars crumpled and tangled like a kicked set of toys.

Sabot, Owen. A wooden shoe—French, as it happens. The word is
from that, sabotage is. But I suppose you know so, educated fool that

ital

you are.

The first time, the wrench into the gearteeth, was mad fury; Darius himself would not have called it anything other. Tactics, however, were fury pounded cold and snipped into actions, were they not.

1-22
1 Feb

The movement, you see, Owen. You think you know by book what it is about, what I am about. And you can't, poor learned mealmate. "In the mind of every man, hidden under the ashes, a quickening fire"^T_m biblical to me as your blueprints are to you. Tactic by tactic, "compatible with the minimum of brutality": my gospel, old Sorel's as far as he went, you would pry at instantly, ask "Who gets to set the minimum?" I could tell you^T_m but must never^T_m that it sometimes sets itself; that a George Crawford and I blunder it back and forth between us until, bad surprise, one of us exists no more. But here within our family enterprise, as you regard Fort Peck, metal is the minimum.

The machine^E-breakers. Did you ever read up on them, in your earnest engineering courses? Not a man at this dam, except perhaps you, would know the name "Ned Ludd" if it floated in his breakfast bowl. But what a bogeyman old Ned was, set loose by laborers when they burned hay^R-ricks

1700s
and clothiers' mills, broke up knitting looms and wrecked the winding gears at mine pits. You're a man of numbers, you'll appreciate this: before the Luddites were done making their point by riot, London had to put them down with an army the size of those it was sending against Napoleon. But even that didn't put paid to the tactic itself. Were Jaarala here, he could tell you of the IWW's knack of slowing a sawmill with but one spike driven into a log.

And here we're all at making this one great machine of yours, this dam, are we not. And why? To take everyone's mind off any cause except perfecting the gadget, a thing that turns running water into standing water. Cleverest sink plug in the world, this Fort Peck machine.

So what I have done to machinery in a few nights of slipping sabots into the works, Owen, dear, is to make the kings of things know. Your Corps. Your construction companies. Your dolemaster Roosevelt. For that matter, you, who have no quarrel with the ^{order}~~order~~ of things so long as it ^t~~meets~~ schedules and sets records. But those who put their hands to the work ought to own that work, Owen. That's flat basic. That's the meaning of the movement, poor battered bastard piece of history that

it is. Of myself, we may as well say. As long as there is one spoor
of the movement--I somehow seem to have become that minimum, here--the
rest of you are made to know that the order of things can be turned
upside down.

end
itals

Mind awlirl, Darius cut glances from the smashed gravel cars just
ahead to the unreadable profile of Owen. As they pulled even with the
railroad spur, Owen swept a tallying look along the wreck and the repair
work.

And drove on by.

Before Darius quite caught his breath, they were alongside the huge
concrete trench of the spillway, Owen jouncing them down through the hills
next to the gape of it, Darius having to keep watch back and forth
between his possessed nephew and the mile-long fan of spillway floor
below his side of the pickup.

The pickup roared to the service ramp which angled down onto the
spillway. The watchman there, appalled to have this traffic, waved
them on in a hurry when Owen flashed his particular job button.

itals

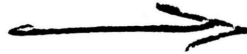
Now, by God, Darius. Push the political wool away from your eyes

1620
for once. Now you're about to see some solving.

Owen drove up the spillway, no longer the dirt canyon where Proxy gave Darius lessons in how to herd the truck but a vast inclined floor of concrete sections as neat and new as fresh linoleum. Halfway along, Owen abruptly pulled to a halt.

"Sit," he said to Darius as he would to a dog.

He himself bailed out of the pickup cab, hefted the box from the back, and over



at the center seam of the concrete sections, a groove perhaps half the size of a rain gutter, he yanked bowling pins out by the neck and meticulously set them up, all ten at last standing at attention in their formation. triangle Darius watched silently.

Back into the pickup, Owen drove a ways while watching the rearview mirror. When he stopped this time, Darius knew to get out with him.

The pins were specks in the distance, against the fresh gray of the concrete. Owen hefted the bowling ball out of the box. Going over to the seam in the concrete, he put the bowling ball down onto the shallow groove and gave just enough of a push to start the black ball rolling. The two men listened to the slight rumble as the ball rolled and rolled, holding to the hairline mark of channel in the middle of the concrete expanse, until it looked the size of a BB demolishing the formation of the pins.

after the distant clatter.

"That's engineering," said Owen, "'Knowhow,' if that's the best you can stand to call it, Darius." He swept his hand around to indicate the concrete canyon they were in. "This was all hills and coulees, shalebanks until Hell wouldn't have it--you couldn't have flown pigeons

through here without them getting dizzy. Now take a look. Go ahead.

Look! [#] Darius with obvious reluctance moved his eyes from Owen to the ^{straight} immense gout of the spillway, half a mile of concrete ahead of them to

where it met the river below the dam and even more of it behind them

where the colossal spillgates stood. [#] "A mile of concrete in here,"

Owen resumed intensely, "laid two feet thick, down a five percent grade,

and all of it so goddamn exact and smooth that ball rolled along it

without ever bouncing, didn't it. Blueprints and specs and hard-ass engineers

and crews who want to go about it right, this is the kind of thing we

can give the world. It's what the dam is going to be, something that

works like it's supposed to. We know how on this, you bet we do. Those

~~pie-in-the-sky~~ politics of yours, though, ~~Darius~~, they can't ever take

the world in hand ^{this same} ~~that~~ way. You can work on how to run people until

you turn blue, be my guest, but I'm going to keep doing what I can see

a real result on. Dams, jobs. The actual factual, Darius."

"If I ever see the light, ~~Owen~~, I'm sure it'll be because you

brained me with it," Darius said with surprising surrender. "Does

this conclude the sermon for today?"

Owen actually had been set to argue on and on, until he had Darius's cuckoo politics backed into the corner where they belonged. He was somehow disappointed to see this expression on Darius, which looked oddly like a smile of relief.

—————
"You know my inclination about the stoppage rate," ^{the} Colonel ^{argumented} Pemberton

said. "Zero would be a nice number to have."

Both supposed to be at ease in front of his desk, Major Santee and Captain Brascoe conspicuously waited for each other to respond first.

Rank always told. Giving way under the major's bland silence, Brascoe had to offer up: "We--_mI still think the breakdowns are nothing but carelessness."

"Sugar in gas tanks isn't careless," Santee took advantage of that.

"Someone mad at a foreman is all that one amounted to, I believe,"

^{the} Colonel ^{argumented} Pemberton weighed in unexpectedly. "Someone has to get the deuces and treys of life, and whoever did, that day, lost his head and went sugaring."

Santee and Brascoe waited out the colonel's pensive expression.

When his eyes snapped to the captain again, Brascoe reported: "The federales in Butte are about done running their check on our fingerprint files, sir. Nobody matches up yet to their list of known radicals, and they're up to the R's."

~~The~~ ^{Armenter} Colonel Pemberton turned his head to the other officer. "We know there's nothing to fear in the names starting with S, right, Joe?"

"Yes, sir," Major Santee answered by rote.

^{Armenter} Colonel Pemberton's mouth turned down. He did not make many jokes, and wanted it acknowledged when he did. He swung back to Brascoe, who resumed:

"I've put on more watchmen. Beyond that, it's a question of taking measures that will slow up the night work and the"

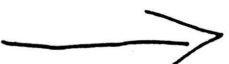
^{the} ~~Colonel Pemberton~~ ^{Armenter} cut in. "I'd bet these spots of trouble are just a little run of bad luck. Keep the work at full push. Dismissed, gentlemen."

~~#~~
DROP CAP

There was not a man or woman at Fort Peck who did not forever remember precisely where they were and what they were at shortly after noon on September 22nd of 1938.

p. 727A follows →

Hugh was by the front door of the Blue Eagle, trying to look as if the saloon had sneaked up on him instead of vice versa. With a last bleak glance along the main street of Wheeler--after all, what could he say to Meg or any of the rest of the family if he was caught ^T_m at slipping in here: Eh, have you heard there's an epidemic of amnesia? ^T_m ^{Ital.}



in he went, heart hammering.

The saloon was all but empty. Right time of day for this, at least. Tom Harry ^{scanned} ~~glanced~~ down the bar at him in sardonic surprise. "Look what the snakes chased in."

"The riprap work is shut down for a little while," Hugh defended his presence here. "They're mucking around with a walking crane that got itself stuck." Giving him just time enough for this. He hoped.

Tom Harry seemed to have heard that one and all other variations before. He added to that impression with a bartender shrug and said, "What can I get you, a glass of mother's milk or what?"

By now Hugh qualified as a connoisseur of soda pop, working his way through the flavors. His latest, Orange Crush, he considered sweetly vile.

"You can't tell me you don't miss the real stuff," Tom Harry prodded as he set the garish bottle of pop before Hugh.

"I can never touch it again, that's all," Hugh said nobly.

"Not ever, huh? That's a long dry while, Duff."

Hugh looked at him with a start of panic, as if Tom Harry somehow

knew what they had all ended up confessing to each other at the Carteret Institute, outside the Amen Corner sessions, afterward when no staff were around: that [↑]yes, if a man knew he was about to be on his deathbed; say he had only a month to live, doctor's sworn diagnosis; then, yes, every last one of them had concluded that under such circumstances they would go on ~~one last~~ ^{a final} blue-screaming wall-eyed delirious jag. "There I stood at the gate of God, drunk but unafraid," quoted one of the Southerners, who tended to be dreamy and literary. But that was wish, the fuzzwuzzland ²called If. Here and now, a man honorably cured would...

"You heard me, you smirky bastard," Hugh said to Tom Harry. "Never." He drained the last of the Orange Crush. "Give me another of those putrid things."

Owen's mind was on shale, which still was slipping off the east bank into the core pool and messing up his water[#]level.

How the hell am I supposed to stay on the mark if that stuff dumps itself in whenever it feels like it?

The second hell of it was, this was a perfectly nice day, for

a change; the rowdy weather that moved in after Labor Day had finally petered out and now the sky chose Indian summer, chinked with a few high streaks of cloud, thin and shaped like wingspans of birds. Owen a lot rather would have been at lunch, sunning himself and making Swiss cheese of Darius's arguments, than trotting to the far end of the core pool again. Not for the first time, he wished the planet had been constructed without any Bearpaw shale.

The boss of the survey crew, Pete Blegen, hailed ^{him} ~~Owen~~ before he could reach the latest slide of shale and commence swearing at the substance.

"The freeboard reading is way ~~to hell~~ under," Blegen reported as if relieved to be rid of the news. "Hate to tell you, but it's ~~at~~ only three feet."

"Can't be," Owen said instantly, then gave Blegen a quit-kidding grin.

Pol.
"Better not be."

In spite of himself Owen spun around to shoot a glance at his dredgeline, eyeballing the cascade from its discharge pipes into the pool water beneath. The specification there he knew as well as his own name. A constant four and a half feet interval was supposed to be maintained

between the water[#]level in the core pool and the discharge empty^ying into it, so that the fill would drain and settle properly. The reading Blegen had given him, off the mark by, Christ, a foot and a half, meant either a mighty amount of shale had slipped into the pool and brought its water[#]level up that much, or the dredgeline had sunk that much. Either sounded ~~wacky~~ ~~crasy~~, and Owen had to hope the discrepancy was in the surveyors' numbers. He carefully watched Blegen's face. "You're not fooling, huh?"

"That's the reading I got."

"Pete, go run your level on it again. The Ad Building's going to want a confirmation." So do I, you better bet, Owen's expression told

the surveyor and sent him off at double-time.

Hard damned stuff to nurse, Hugh decided of the Orange Crush as

the second bottle rapidly emptied despite his every effort at moderation.

Sighing heavily, he signaled Tom Harry for another. As the barkeeper bore the next bottle to him, Hugh restlessly asked:

"What time does she come on?"

"Who?" said Proxy, from the doorway. "Mother Machree?"

ital.
I hope the rest of the day isn't going to go like this. As ever,
 Owen would rather have ^{eaten toads} ~~taken a beating~~ than have to shut down his dredgeline,
 but he trudged over to the nearest field telephone and stood by. Specs
ital.
are specs, another unwelcome but unavoidable thought. If the core pool
 water[#]level was really as far out of whack as Blegen maintained, they
 shouldn't keep pouring fill in. Can't. Don't dare. It'll mush up,
ital.
if it hasn't already. Any toddler making mudpies knew the right recipe:
 just enough water, not too damn little, not too sonofabitching much.
 As we all of a sudden seem to have ^{an extreme} ~~a~~ excess of, here in the world's
ital.
biggest core pool, congratulations, ^{Fillmaster} ~~Engineer~~ Duff.

He watched as the survey crew, down at the edge of the pool, unanimously
 gave him a hateful glance over their shoulders when Blegen told them they
 had to re³run their reading. The astronomers, as they were known, already
 felt it was beneath their dignity to be squinting through their lovely
 transits in the muck ^{around} ~~of~~ the core pool. Blegen's tone of voice, though,
 was sending them hopping to do it over.

Waiting, Owen prowled three paces back and forth, as if tethered to
 the field telephone post. At least misery had a lot of company this

afternoon. He could see ^{down} onto the face of the dam where the riprap work was gummed up, too; halted for the past half hour or so because the walking crane had mired in a soft spot. They ~~which~~ when it came to that snotty tasks ^{that} always meant the bullgang ~~were~~ were going to have to walk the huge Cat-tread crane out to firmer ground by laying big wooden mats in front of its tracks. But right now, hanging loose, smoking and joking until the trucks with the mats showed up, none among the bullgang looked looser than the rail-thin figure spectating up in Owen's direction.

Darius to the rescue, the thought momentarily entertained Owen, whether or not a stuck crane can be elevated according to Marx.

Blegen was yelling for his attention.

The survey boss had his arm up, three fingers extended toward Owen, as if bidding at an auction. The freeboard reading had surveyed out at three feet again. Damn.

Now Blegen pointed emphatically with his other arm at the dredgeline discharge pipe. The survey crew had run a separate reading on it from a benchmark this time, and Owen Duff's core pool was not up a foot and a half; Owen's Duff's dredgeline had sunk, sagged, that much.

ital. What a horseshit turn of events this is. Owen sourly fieldphoned all four dredgemasters and told them to shut down. He hated the next step and had to keep telling himself over and over regs are regs, too, Duff, even for you as he picked up the phone again and, like any man of regulations who had both a ^{crane} ~~steenshovel~~ and a pipeline bogged down in inexplicable soft spots in his dam, notified the Ad Building.

— The two of them, Proxy and Hugh, resorted to the backmost table at the Blue Eagle, out of the saloon traffic and Tom Harry's range of hearing.

"Odd time of day for this, I know," he stabbed at making conversation.

She wasn't sure why, but she gave him a break by not asking if he had gone to all this trouble of looking her up to tell her the time.

"Different in here in broad daylight," she granted, nodding a greeting to the piano player Gert as she passed by to her keyboard with a brimming shot glass carried carefully in each hand. "A little."

Hugh watched the shot glasses go past as if they were ^{the crown jewels} ~~a double show~~ on show.

~~of comets.~~ He turned again to Proxy with a surprisingly winning rueful smile. "Not so much temptation to expand the job, you mean?"

"Hugh, I said 'a little.'" Not that it was any of his business, but she would let him know anyway. "I go out back with somebody if and when I want. But I'm not taking on drunks and wet-eared kids and whatever else in pants that walks in here, am I. I mostly dance any more, okay? *ital*

Now what's on your mind besides your chapoo."

"A thing I need to know, ~~Proxy~~ *Proxy*"

"Just one? Aren't you lucky." ~~Curiosity had her, though.~~ *J*

"That brother of mine and whatever he might be getting himself into," Hugh named off. *J* Straightforwardly he looked Proxy over, as if sizing up a witness. Not that it was possible to be neutrally judicious in looking Proxy over. "As regards political matters," Hugh thought he had better specify. "If that size of words covers the matter of Darius."

She couldn't help smiling a little. One thing life with Darius had taught her was that a response didn't necessarily have to be an answer.

"You've known him a real lot longer than I have," she now responded.

"I knew him when we were lads and I've known him since he showed up here cap in hand. There's damn near all of history in between." And *ital*
a bothering quantity since, such as fingerprints that want hiding and

trains that become a topic of conversation one fine night and let go
their brakes soon thereafter. That's what I need to know of our Darius,
Proxy. If I am right. If I am not the world's leading fool, which
sometimes has been the case, too.

"Why care?" Proxy asked as if she could use the answer. "Why let yourself in for heartburn?"

"Proxy, now, that's up there with the best of them, isn't it, in the all-time questions," Hugh told her in a tone that gave no ground.

"It would take somebody who can lie faster than a horse can trot to say we're always happy with the object of our interest. There are times we're simply stuck with it, aren't we." He clonked the pop bottle on the table, looked at it, picked it back up, then glanced across and held his gaze steady against hers. "I was handed Darius for a brother, and I helplessly care."

Proxy studied him. More than years, or politics either, made a difference between Hugh and Darius. Hugh had rough spots in him you couldn't iron out with a steamroller, but at least they were on the map. Watching him sit across from her and take a swig of orange pop now

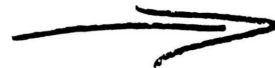
with repulsion and determination, she kind of liked the fact that while he had cleaned up his drinking, he hadn't gone Holy Joe in any other way.

#

Neil liked to know what he was doing, but working with Birdie Hinch had its mysteries.

As now, when they had just come on shift, a little late as Birdie seemed to think was their right, and were starting their patrol of the dredgeline along the crest of the dam when Birdie let out a buzzsaw whine-- which Neil after a moment realized was an Oklahoma rendition of Gawwwdd DAMN!--and threw his hat at the first drain[#] trap. (sun cap)

"Lookit that!" Birdie st ~~tromped~~ over to the huge pocket of metal beneath the first section of pipeline and crammed his hat back on his head. "Bastards on the last shift left us a clogged trap," he complained. "That ain't fair play. They ain't supposed to hightail off before--" m



"Is this what's got everything shut down?" Owen ~~already~~^g hadn't looked as if he was in his best mood when the pair of them had to go past him on their way out here, so Neil was uneasy with the idea of the entire work of the dam hung up waiting on how expeditiously he and Birdie Hinch could clean out a trap.

"Naw," Birdie answered. "Something else." Slower than molasses but without wasting an ounce of effort, Birdie began undoing the turnbuckles on his side of the pipeline trap, still voicing hurt over the unfairness of the previous shift. When the trap hinged open, though, Birdie drew in his breath sharply.

"I take it all back. Our ship just come in, Neil," he crowed.

"We got ourselves a wowser of a skull, look at that sucker. Tom Harry'll pay plenty for this one."

The buffalo head, with one cavern of eye socket peering out of the muck and twin hooks of horn on guard, ~~looked~~^{appeared} weirdly determined to stay buried in the clot of clay. Birdie in admiration, Neil in resignation, they hunkered down to study the tub-sized skull.

"Alas, poor shaggy Yorick."

"Huh?" They both jumped ~~a little~~ at the intonation from Darius, who was standing over their shoulders.

"What the dingdong hell is that supposed to mean?" Birdie demanded with a querulous squint.

Darius's hand made a wiping never-mind motion against the air.

"What's the bollix that has us shut down?" He knew virtually all there was to know about work stoppages, but this standstill puzzled him.

"It ain't us," Birdie fairly spat. "The bastards before us left--"

Darius did not stay for the recitation, simply shook his head impatiently and clambered back down from the crest of the dam to where the rest of the bullgang were still lounging around, standing on one foot and then the other and wisecracking about easy money today, tourist wages.

Birdie and for that matter Neil had other things on the mind right now than Darius. They barely watched him go before the lodged skull claimed their fullest attention again. "A lot of people might call me a liar on this," Birdie said judiciously, "but I'd say this is the stud daddy of all buffalo."

"Yeah, right, it's a whopper," Neil had to agree distastefully. He didn't like the look of the thing, blind to the bone yet that socket seeming to fix an eternal stare on them. Weird business with eyes bothered him, still. If it was up to him, he would smash the staring monstrosity with a crowbar, break it out of there in pieces like a giant eggshell before the dredgeline boss or even Owen himself came and got on their backs. But one of Birdie's vocations was involved here. "Okay, what's ~~what's~~ the recipe for getting the thing out?"

"See, all's we do, Neil, is you work on that clay around it and I pry in kind of gentle behind it. I got to ~~have~~^{get} a lady shovel for that. Be right back."

As Birdie scooted off along the crest of the dam, Neil shrugged out of his jacket, slung it over the nearest pipeline support, and started clearing muck away from the buffalo skull.

—————
Darius still did not like the setup of this shift.

The big bugs—~~some~~^{former} ~~officers from the Corps~~ of the work gangs, and contractors' superintendents, and a clot of engineers featuring of course Owen—
were clustering at the lip of the core pool where the field telephone

was located. In Darius's experience, an assembly of bosses always brought trouble. He glanced along the dam for any sign of equipment breakdown or someone injured, but that did not seem to be it.

He checked again toward Neil and Birdie, Neil noggin down at work on the clogged trap and Birdie skylarking off in search of a small-headed shovel. Nothing to be divined from that pair except the cranial measurements of a buffalo. On impulse Darius headed up the face of the dam. Whatever the war council was about, up there, he wanted to take a gander at it himself.

"Hey!" the bullgang foreman Jepperson yelled. "Where you going, Scotchman? Christ's sake, you ^{haven't} ~~ain't~~ even put your gloves on yet."

"Drastic case of the drizzles," Darius called back over his shoulder and climbed faster.

He reached the crest in time to see a car rapidly coming, that of ^{the} ~~Farmer~~ Colonel Pemberton, biggest bug of the outfit. Something tickled in the back of Darius's mind and down his neck. He halted and sighted west along the top of the dam.

The steel rails of the railroad track were bending sideways,
bulging like a drawn bow.

Darius turned east and ran, toward the shore, to race all the way
back to Scotland if that's what it took.

~~He~~

To Owen, the start of the slide was like a heat shimmer, as when
waves of air danced in the alfalfa field in hottest summer. Slow and
hazy to the eye, distorting everything. Bringing about the unbelievable:
the railroad track snapping apart sideways, ^{as if} ~~apparently~~ of its own volition.

Next the lightpoles swayed as they couldn't possibly, and then swooned
to the upstream side of the dam. The slope there of fill and gravel
and partial riprap looked out of kilter to him, oddly unmoored. God, no!

The whole thing can't-- Along the crest of the dam the dredgeline was
crumpling section by section, almost orderly. Neil! Get the hell--

Then, though, everything speeded up. Crevices cut the earthfill of the
dam's upstream face, collapsing it into mush. The water in the core pool
was vanishing, a wet roar was over everything, people scrambled everywhere.

A damworker darted past Owen so fast he only belatedly realized it was
Statuelike,
Darius. ~~Already incredulous at the extent of the slippage,~~ Owen watched

~~statue-like~~ as a half-mile section hinged away from the rest of the dam and slid into the lake, taking with it the ~~riprap~~^{walking} crane and bulldozers and trucks and the railroad track and the dredgeline and men.

#

180
Some ~~one hundred and eighty~~ of them were at work on the east upstream section of the dam when it gave way, and the eight or ten minutes of the slide turned them into hydraulic arithmetic.

The riprap crew nearest the east bank comprised the main number, 1250 about ~~a hundred and twenty-five~~. They were waiting to start laying the next tier of rock, as soon as the crane got back into action and resumed hoisting big quarry boulders from the railcars down onto the face of the dam for them. Meanwhile they were killing time by greasing their equipment and trading insults with the bullgang, below them where the crane had sunk into unusually wet gravel. Close to the crest of the dam as they were, the riprap crew had mostly level running when someone shouted Look out, there she goes! and the slide started.

SC

They fled, clambered, vaulted, whatever it took, in wild retreat to the east bank of the river valley, the face of the dam crumbling at their heels.

#

Five persons were in the Colonel's car. Colonel ^{Armenter} Pemberton and Major Santee and Captain Brascoe, all in the backseat, saw the calamity past flinching heads in front of them. For Max Sangster, coming out to see if he could lend Owen a hand with the core pool puzzle and sitting across from the Colonel's driver, the slide was framed in the windshield, horror focused in the panel of glass. Half a decade of engineering, millions of cubic yards of Fort Peck Dam, were melting like brown sugar in front of Sangster's eyes. He and the three officers were thrown forward as the driver hit the brakes, then the car was racing in reverse, the Colonel's wordless driver turned tautly half-around as he steered over his shoulder and gunned the accelerator, one crevice after another opening and folding away from where the car had just been.

———
Scattered across the half-mile slope of caving earth, four dozen men of the bullgang rode the slide. A typical set of them, a pair of workers watched by Owen from his helpless distance, managed to leap across two cracks that opened in front of them, but the third took them and then closed over them. For a panicked moment both thought they would suffocate, but water gushed up below and pushed them out where they

could breathe. The water tumbled them down the ooze into the lake, where they had to fight not to be sucked down by a whirlpool. There were islands of muck now, a Missouri archipelago in the lake, and they managed to pull each other onto one of these mud mounds and cling there until a motorboat crew came for them. Other escapes, out across the tide of devastation by twos and threes and other handfuls, were just as miraculous.

Those who died did so one by one.

A deckhand on the workboat at the foot of the riprap saw the vast wall of avalanche coming, grabbed the railing, but was swept overboard and buried in the mudslide's ~~immensity~~.

A young riprap worker who had been down on one knee tying a shoelace when the damslope gave way also was buried, and suffocated; hours of effort to revive him in an iron lung failed.

A bullgang ~~laborer~~ ~~member~~ who seized a passing section of dredgeline strutwork was carried safely down the trajectory of the slide but jarred loose when it careened into the lake, and drowned.

Four simply vanished.

——— Neil was carving clay away from the buffalo skull when he felt the ground shake. He thought a bulldozer must have run into the

dredgeline, and he jerked his head out of the trap of the pipe to have a look. Then he felt the general motion, the slippage, everything tipping. Around him the dredgeline crew was running, trying to run; he saw Birdie disappear in a quicksandlike whorl of gravel. The dredgeline was starting to snake down the slope, atop the avalanche of all the fill material from the crest of the dam on down. Jesus, this is worse than-- To get out of the gravel tearing at his feet, Neil straddled up onto the dredgeline pipe, desperately hugging down around it to grab the trap's turnbuckles to hang on to. Bareback on the Chinese dragon of pipe, he rode down the avalanche toward the waiting water.

Owen backpedaled, skittered sideways, outright ran when he had to, but always with his head turned toward the slide, staying clear of the crater in the side of the core pool as it washed out, all the while trying to register where Neil would end up.

Rosellen was making short work of next week's Corps duty roster, paying only half attention to it whapping through the typewriter, glancing ~~looking~~ up and around her for the latest on the rumor that had been bouncing through the Ad Building. Some sort of problem at the dam.

She noticed Major Santee's secretary, Betty ~~Ann~~^{Jane}, coming her way and she timed the last of her piece of typing, as she liked to do, so that she could rip it out of the typewriter and hand it across with a grin

BJ

the instant ~~Betty Ann~~ arrived for it.

Jane

Betty ~~Ann~~ didn't take the roster. With an odd look on her face

she asked Rosellen:

"What shift is your Neil on?"

#

Wanting to throw up but telling himself he didn't have time, Owen

edged back out along what was left of the rim between the core pool and

where the face of the dam had been, desperate to turn around and start

scanning down into the soupy mess of the slide but forcing himself to

watch the remainder of the dam. Here where the slippage had occurred

the dam now was narrowed by half, as if a monstrous bite had been taken

out of its upstream side. As best Owen could judge, the downstream

crest hadn't budged ~~an~~ inch, yet. Hadn't better, either, the sonofa--

If a similar slice of it fell away, the whole dam would go, Missourians

would be fishing the bodies of half of Fort Peck out at St. Louis. The

Johnstown flood, hell. The Owentown version, if it happened, would make

ital.

Johnstown look like a swimming accident. Owen Duff knew there was no

reason why the downstream side of the dam would go out, too; slippage
a form of epidemic.

wasn't ~~infectious~~. Yet why, why had any of his scrupulous earthfill slipped?

Dancing from nerves, jittering himself out along the earthfill cliff
with his back turned to the gulp of slide, Owen decided if the rest of
the dam was going to go, it would go; looking at it would never stop it.
He whirled around to what he had to face at the slide area.

An immense ^{raw} gulch lay below him ~~now~~, half a mile across, where the
fill had flowed out into the lake, millions of yards of carefully dredged
material reverting into goo and gravel, and the dredgeline was strewn on
it like sections of blown-down stovepipe.

Ital.
The trap, Owen remembered. Neil had been cleaning the trap. Find
that steel pelican-pouch in the dredgeline, what was left of it, and
Neil ought to be with it.

~~##~~
Charlene set her jaw and kept on combing out old lady Abbot^t, one of
the Cactus Flat porcupineheads, as people poured past the front window
of the beauty shop. Must be a fire somewhere down the street, she figured,
and she was in no mood to see another one of those. People were really

on the ~~be~~^{trot}, though, every time she glanced up from Mrs. Abbot's ~~stiff~~^t obdurate hair. If she hadn't known better, she'd have thought one of those pounding past in the crowd was Hugh.

From the east shore Darius stared at the delta of destruction below. Some sections of the stone-tiered face of the dam had stayed intact as they skidded out into the lake, solid islands like ~~pieces~~^{chunks} of a jigsaw puzzle pawed apart. A queer spur of the railroad track still was in place atop the lip of the biggest island, wavery streak of rails beginning in mid-air, ending in mid-air. Between the archipelago of riprap islands and the damaged crest of the dam was what looked like a cesspool lake, gravel and mud and the backed-up Missouri mixed into a murky brown basin.

Already the pandemonium of the escape was precipitating into hundreds of separate aftermaths, ~~many~~^{some of the} damworkers standing petrified ~~with~~^{overcome} thoughts of their close call, a legion of others racing back toward the slide area to search for survivors. Darius thought of Neil with a pang. Willing cog

in the machine of work, Neil had let it cost him his life. And Owen; Darius looked but could not spot him in the school of dam bosses, from the Colonel on down, frantic on the far side of the slide.

Ital.
Owen. Darius jerked his bitter gaze away from the gesticulating bosses and stared again at the riprap islands, strewn but solid, in the lake, suddenly knowing what he was seeing. The face of the dam, shalehater Owen's crafty dam, had not merely avalanched, had it, not plummeted apart in a simple collapse of slope. It had slipped on its under-earth, as a ship would slide down the greased launchway into the Clyde.

"Jackie, no, you can't play soldiers in the flour bin. Meg, would you--"

"Jack, my man, let's go for a promenade." Meg captured the boy out of the trailer house kitchen that ^{Kate}~~Phonix~~ was trying to set to rights and whisked him past Bruce edging through the doorway with an armload of bedding. "Perhaps it already has come to your attention, Jack," the parents heard her deep instructive tone begin before she and the boy were even past the front fender of the truck, "that the municipality of Park Grove is more grove than park."

Bruce furrowed his forehead. "He's going to grow up talking like a lawyer's parrot."

But ^{Kate}~~Phenix~~ was busy at sliding the trailer's kitchen window open.

sideways, which was going to take some getting used to. She was intent beyond that at watching the huge ^{Gallatin}~~Madison~~ broadside to them in a dredged pit less than a hundred yards away, the mountain of the dam behind it.

The giant dredge, a cross between a verandahed hotel and a steamshovel and painted sailor-white, was nothing like the cable ferry her grandfather and father had operated, yet ^{she}~~Phenix~~ felt she had been here before. She had

been like Jackie, at the rampage age, when Grandpere died and they moved in with Grandmere to take over the ferry business, and that same first day her mother had caught her dabbling in the water ^{alongside}~~under~~ the hull of the ferry and given her an astounding bare-butt spanking. You are to stay away

from that river, Lucille ^{Millay}~~Abbey~~ made her small daughter know between

whaps with the flat side of a yardstick, you are to stay away from that boat. Jackie was going to need the same, the first instant he wandered toward the river. Today would not be too soon, ^{Kate}~~Phenix~~ believed.

Bruce's next armload of moving stuff in, she felt his flanks brush teasingly along her fanny as he edged past. "Close quarters," he alibied.

"Everything is, with you," she said, ~~but she provided him a little nudge~~

~~of her hip, the sort of thing he wanted.~~

"Owen and Charlene made out all right in here," he said hopefully, remembering in fact how the bachelor version of himself had almost burnt up, from the inside out, watching Owen go home noons and nights to this cute trailer and cuter Charlene.

The scene out the window still had ^{Kate}~~Rhonda~~ abstracted. "So what's going on? Are Mum Mum and I the only ones who aren't on idle time today?"

Bruce had been curious about that himself, the dredge shut down all this while. He came over to peer out beside ^{her}~~Rhonda~~, expecting more than not to see Owen storm up the gangplank and kick things into gear again.

Instead they both saw the eruption of action spreading out from the field telephone in the lever house, commotion that spilled down the decks into men running and shouting, "Dam!...Gone out!..."

^{Kate}~~Rhonda~~ half-spun, toward the door, the truck, the scream to be let out for Jackie and Meg, but Bruce caught her arm.

^{Katy}~~Rhonda~~ "I don't think so, ~~Rhonda~~," he said with monumental calm. "Or we'd be seeing about a hundred-foot wall of water heading our way,

wouldn't we."

#

am caps

The ~~two-hundred-foot~~ deep gulch of the slide had eaten westward in the dam, along the core pool ~~for what looked like half a mile.~~ Owen knew that the core pool ~~would~~ ^{must} have emptied ^{into the lake} like a broken flume when the slide got underway, adding a lubricant into the shifting mass of fill. Oh God oh why... He plunged down the cavity of the core pool, the wet gravel making heavy going, and wallowed his way until he could struggle up onto the far part of the dam crest. The railroad tracks ^{resumed} ~~broke off~~ out of ~~there;~~ ^{it} ~~into mid-air,~~ beyond ~~them~~ the rest of the dam face, the three and a half miles of it westward, stood securely unchanged, another world entirely from the blowout of mud, gravel, water and stone. Grimy and bedraggled with it, Owen read the slippage like a textbook, sick inside himself at the lesson of half a mile of engineered earth strewn out into the lake.

Men along with it. Where's... Owen leaped from boulder to boulder down the riprap until he was at lake level, the muck-flat of the slide to his left, the islands of the broken-away sections of the dam face in front of him. He took a testing step out onto the slurry; there was enough gravel in it that he could flounder toward the broken line of dredgeline ~~dredge~~ pipe, pilings sprouting up from it like small bones. Portions

of the slide were large enough to have dry humps of ~~land~~^{ground,} which he could gain footing on and plunge across to the next. ~~Owen~~^{He} came up over one of these to be confronted with what looked like a crazy cannon, a Big Bertha elevated to fire into the lake. It stopped him cold for a moment, until he saw that it was a thirty-foot length of discharge pipe hurled atop the tipped-over cab of the crane.

The calculations Owen could not help doing as he plunged across the slide ~~flat~~^{worse than awful,} were coming out ~~terrible~~. Five or six million cubic yards, he was sure it couldn't be any less, gone in this slippage. Sections of the dredgeline had been carried at least a thousand feet by the slide, every snaking surge of the big pipe amid enough damfill to bury the whole population of Montana, let alone a single missing Duff. Neil, damn you, where-- Neil could be anywhere out here, under any depth of muck. Yet most of the dredgeline, been ushered down into the lake still oddly intact. crippled as it was, had ridden out the slide,

Owen was at the first still-standing section of dredgeline now. filled He ~~filled~~ his lungs to shout Neil's name, looked out at the long stretch of kinked and zigzagging ~~dredgeline~~^{pipe} in front of him, and held the lungful of breath. Beyond on the east shore he could see the intake-gate towers, four in a row, unscathed, people everywhere up there, and men coming down into

the slide area with prodpoles. They were too distant to be of any help in his search ~~for Neil~~. He was in motion now, following the pipe sections out across the muck as it still gurgled and seethed, the slide carrying on an awful conversation with itself. Owen clambered alongside the dredgeline until it occurred to him, furious with himself, to climb atop it. The footing wasn't the greatest, and every dozen feet or so he had to step over a support pole laying half over the huge pipe, but he made better time than wading down there in the mud. He watched below his feet for the collar of the trap.

When he came to it, his hope sank. The pipeline had buckled and kinked down into a crevice of the slide, hardly any of the metal showing above the muck. He reached down to a piece of glop wedged between the pipe and a support timber. A jacket.

Now Owen let out with a roar of "Neil!" and balanced himself atop the dredgeline, trying to figure out where best to plunge down and start digging. Then, halfway along the length of pipe from the drain trap, he saw a bump in the mud, almost under the big roundness of the pipe. The bump slightly turned toward him, and eyes opened in it.

Owen in six careful steps went to a place on the pipeline just beyond the mud-globbed head, spraddled down and then slid off into the blob mud. The ~~figure~~ mired under the pipe had shoulders now.

"Neil?! Neil, don't go dying on me!"

"Get your...goddamn...dam off me then."

The mud-caked figure gave a ragged combination of gasp and giggle, head wobbling back to give Owen a full white-eyed stare, as making sure he was really there. Neil was drawing in tortured breaths as ~~if having~~ deep and ragged as if he had run for miles, but at least it constituted breathing. Frantically Owen dug barehanded at the heavy mush of earth encasing ~~Neil~~ ^{him}. "Stay still," he ordered.

"Did it...all go?"

"Shut up. Just breathe, okay?" Owen pawed away. "No, the dam didn't all go. Just this one--slippage." He saw the relief register in Neil's eyes, but a tight squint of concern quickly came back.

"Birdie. He...somewhere..."

Still clawing muck away from Neil, Owen shot a look around. "There isn't any sign of Birdie," he said in a guilty strangled tone.

How long he dug by hand, fingernails tearing, skin tender and hurting, Owen had no idea. Neil occasionally groaned or gasped, but otherwise lay perfectly still as Owen had ordered him to. This worried Owen.

"You doing okay?" he asked Neil, as if demanding so.

"Hurts...on the side."

Owen drew a hard breath. He hated what he was going to have to do, but he needed to know whether this was an internal injury or--

"Here?" He laid the palm of his hand on Neil's ribcage.

"OWWW!" Neil's eyes had opened twice as wide. "Hell, yes...there!"

He gulped painful air into himself, and used it to say: "Ownie, you'd massacre a man...while you're saving his life."

Owen pursed his lips, either against a madman smile or a sob of gratitude, he wasn't sure which. "Broken ribs," he told Neil. "They'll hurt some more, but I can get you out of here now."

— All that endless afternoon, at last into common dusk, Fort Peck tried to pick itself up off the floor of the big slide. Searches went on until there was deemed no chance anyone^e could have lasted beneath the flood of muck, the mosquito buzz of planes with newspaper

photographers already overhead as rescue parties slogged and poked and slowly retreated from the slideflat. Queasy communities downstream from the dam, Park Grove only the first of the number along the Missouri's descent toward St. Louis, had to swallow hard and decide where to sleep that night, somewhere on high ground or in the valley cut by the river's eternal longing to wander.

———
Birdie Hinch felt all beat to hell.

Gravel had gone over him and roaring water from the core pool had surged him free and then there was a pell-mell mudswim, half dogpaddling and half being oozed along, out into the mush at the head of the slide. His shirt ^{had} filled with so much mud it weighted him into the mess like a lead sinker on a fishing line, but he managed to tear it off and bob better.

Birdie had been constantly amazed at the kaleidoscope of clear thoughts coming to him as the muck avalanche tossed him along: Wouldn't this have to happen just when we found that nicest buffalo skull...I'm gonna die, out of this. Ain't yet, though...They just can't pay a man enough to put up with this... And at last, gingerbread man of mud gasping on one

of the isles of the slide, I'll be a sonofagun, look at those guys

running out onto this. ^{man} # Rescued, and with somebody's practically new

mackinaw jacket draped over him, and deposited to the hospital where the

ambulatory ones such as him had to wait while the worse injured were

rushed into care, he found a corner to limply sit in and ache, watching

the parade of casualties ~~some~~ ^{pour} in. Muddied and bloodied, the thirty or

so men who had undergone the slide ^{and lived} weren't much recognizable, but toward

the last Birdie saw Neil, bunged up but obviously going to make it, brought

in by Owen and some of the rescue workers, and was glad of that.

Right in the middle of the hospital hubbub a flustered timekeeper pressed into service by the Ad Building was running around with a clipboard, taking down names of survivors.

Birdie, one of the world's talents at overhearing, caught the timekeeper's ~~this~~ voice when that pintsize sheriff popped in to check with him: "We're up to three known dead and ^{five} ~~four~~ still missing."

When the sheriff whirled back out, the timekeeper scanned the hospital ^{uproar} ~~commotion~~ for any fresh arrivals and lit up when he finally spotted

Birdie. He hustled over, pencil and clipboard ready, to take Birdie's

name.

Birdie looked him in the eye and said as if badly put upon:

"Duff. But don't you already got me down there, from when I come in the door?"

"Aw, yeah, hell, I'm sorry," the embarrassed timekeeper said, his finger finding Duff, N. on his ^{hasty} ~~lengthy~~ list of survivors. "You guys look all alike with the mud on you."

That was all it took. ^{By nightfall} The name of Birdie Hinch ^{was} ~~now~~ everlastingly among Fort Peck's missing, ^{and} ^{he} the man ^{was hopping} ~~who~~ had been ~~him~~ ^{hopped} a boxcar ~~that night~~ on a Great Northern train bound for the Pacific Coast and a next life.

 ^{hospital} They crammed into Neil's ~~room~~ the minute the doctor would let them.

Except for the way his face drew down a little on one side in the direction of the sharp complaints from his ribs, he looked like a Neil who had been severely scrubbed, bleached and wrung dry and was happy that was over. Sitting beside his bed Rosellen, eyes wide, kept watching him as if he might go out of sight against the hospital sheets in the manner a winter-pale rabbit does against snow.

"Neil," Meg began, "that was a ride we do not want you to repeat."

"Came pretty close to the line that time, didn't you, brother," Bruce began, in what sounded oddly like envy.

A majority of the Duffs chimed in that way, Neil able to grin and
 kid them back between winces, ~~caused by his ribs.~~ ^{But} Everyone uncomfortably
 knew that the worst ~~tender spot~~ ^{casualty} in the room was Owen's, who looked as
 though he'd been hammered directly on the heart. Charlene ~~was staying~~ ^{ed}
 always next to him, ~~right there but~~ not saying much, ~~the best she could do~~
~~on the matter of the dam and its wound to him.~~

Proxy, to contribute, said Owen ought to take up fortune-telling,
 if he was able to pick out where Neil ended up in all that crap of the
 slide.

"All I could see of him were eyes and teeth," Owen managed to vouch.

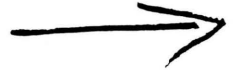
One saves the other, and by doing, something of himself, Meg was
 pursed with thinking, rue and relief and an oddly sad love mixing in
 her as she watched her sons. The ladders of this family run up and down,
both, don't they ever, Owen.

"You'd grin too when you saw it wasn't some geezer with a halo and

p. 760A follows →

wings coming for you," Neil spoke up from the bed. Then, as if he had been giving this some thought, he said: "Unk, you must've known a shortcut off the dam."

Hugh stirred, and sensed a warning look from Proxy as he did. He



too had been curious, at Darius's spotless deliverance while the rest of the bullgang and poor devil Birdie were handed a flood of mud. In no position himself to bring up precise whereabouts at the time of the slide, Hugh waited with terrible interest Darius's answer on his.

More fool you, Neil, to be scrabbling around at that trap rather than tending to the goings-on around you, as I was. Aloud, though,

Darius had ready: "Nature called at the right time and in the right way, in my fortunate case, Neil. I was on my way to visit the littlest of houses, when the dam began to shimmy."

Small Jackie, tongue-tied for once in this confusing hospital visit, was awed at ~~Jackie Uncle~~ ^{Grand Unk} 'Rius telling everybody about going to the little house.

Darius shook his head to show them all his wonder at his own escape.

"I gave a shout," he declared, looking to the hospital bed as though Neil had been truant.

In the starched sheets, Neil tried to remember. The shudder of the dredgeline, the tremor he had thought was a big piece of equipment ramming the pipe, was the first thing that would come back. Then the

ground under him giving way, and his instinctive scramble atop the dredgeline. Life as he now possessed it began with those.

Owen stared across him to Darius. He couldn't recall any shout from Darius either, only the wordless sprinting figure who had ~~gone~~ ^{flown} past him on the dam crest. "I didn't hear that," ~~he~~ ^{Owen} said, "but you did whistle by me getting off the dam."

Darius locked eyes with him. "Now, Owen, I'll deny to my last breath that I was running. But I will say, I overtook a good many who were."

The assembled Duffs at last laughed, all but Owen and Hugh.

DROP CAP

Stained with disaster but still standing, Fort Peck Dam met each morning now in the company of hollow-eyed engineers and Corps officers and construction bosses. They took turns staying up nights in the Ad Building, emerging with a fresh day's schedule for the work of repair, and then machines and crew ~~s~~ would go warily into the half-mile gouge of the slide area.

"It went fast," Darius mused. "You wouldn't think soil could outrun a man. ~~Seven~~ ^{Eight} men." # He and Proxy had formed the habit of watching out the houseboat window at this work, before time for their own. By now,

pretty sure she had seen what there was to see, Proxy had gone back to ^{morning} favorite pursuits, such as propping up on the bed and studying her picture in the old copy of LIFE. Darius had sometimes warned her, humorously, that she would wear that page out with looking. But right now he was all intent himself as he watched a railroad speeder go across the dam to the slide area and stop, the section crew climb off. "Very damn nearly nine, counting our Neil," Darius said as if in afterthought.

Proxy still did not say anything.

He kept watching the railroad repair crew as he asked: "Where exactly again were you when the news came, love?"

"The usual." The sound of her turning the pages. "Yakking with Tom Harry. He was telling me again all about how he plans to pull up stakes and go off where he can see a mountain ^{any time} when he feels like it, and I was saying to him gopher holes are more his style. Same old routine."

"Liar, liar," Darius crooned in schoolyard singsong, then dropped his voice harshly: "cunt on fire."

Proxy sat up rigidly on the bed and stared at his back.

"Woman, you think I don't hear? You ought to be married to yourself--"

you'd soon find out. Every loose mouth at Fort Peck lets me know who you've been with. Oh, casually, of course. Merely making a bit of joke. 'Saw that goodlooking wife of yours dancing the pockets off of old Smitty, wish I had a means of support like that,'" he mimicked. He kept on looking out the window. "When the slide went, you were monkeying around with Hugh."

Proxy hurled the magazine at his back. "Whatever the hell happened to 'we don't need to oversee each other just because we're married!'"

Darius reached down, swung around and slammed the magazine back at her, pages wildly flapping. "I didn't count on caring so much ^{about} ~~for~~ you!"

"Huh uh, Darius," Proxy told him tensely but levelly. "What you didn't count on is caring about any frigging thing but those politics of yours."

"And you?" he said in worse than a whisper. "You know all the ins and outs of caring about, do you, Proxy?"

—————
He walked out onto the silent spillway, alone this time.

Why didn't I savvy...

Ital

In the back of his mind he was aware of the watchman's uneasiness, off behind him on the approach to the highway bridge over the spillway, where he had parked the government pickup. But Owen Duff made a lot of people uneasy, since the slide.

Neil, in that mess...it would have to be...job I put him on...why'd

I ever...

This time Owen was atop the spillway's imperial gate piers pictured by the LIFE camera, the highway bridge going across them like the ^{lofty} trough of an ^{aqueduct} ~~aqueduct~~. Beneath the slowly walking man and the mid-air highway were the sixteen great gates of the spillway, waiting to regulate overflow from the lake into the spillway channel. If the dam, his dam, would ever hold together long enough to produce an overflow.

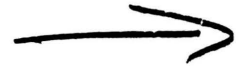
When he reached the middle of the ~~gate~~ structure, Owen stepped up out of the road onto the walkway and halted there, hands resting on the waist-high balustrade while he stared down at the vast concrete trench below as if it mirrored everything. The sonofabitching Bearpaw shale.

Here they had known to ^{exposed} rock saw the shale and haul it out, or to face it over with waterproof bituminous compound; known they did not dare let

any scour of moisture in to crumble that shale to mud under the heavy concrete channel. But no, Duff, you couldn't carry that idea for only three miles over those hills and... Why hadn't he demanded rockcutting the entire face of that bluff, or bitumen sealing of everything in sight, or a mammoth retaining wall, something, anything, back there at the east abutment where that bank of shale kept tormenting his core pool. Having the bluff, one whole wall of the valley, as the anchor bank of the core pool was supposed to have been an advantage; sure, bits of it might crumble, but as soon as the impervious fill built up onto it and the core pool water was drained away, there the sealed east end of the dam was supposed to be, natural and perpetual. Except that shale sidehill had its own ideas about how it was going to behave around water, didn't it, Duff. The lost face of the dam's east section--^Tnow he knew, too late he knew--^Thad slid on a wettened underbank of that shale like a hog on ice. Huh uh, slicker and quicker than that, even. Owen could envision instantly the railroad tracks, like pieces of a model-train setup neatly pulled apart, out there on the several slide-islands. Couldn't have asked for smoother sledding. The geologists--^TChrist, toboggan experts would've been better--^T

the geologists back there at the core sampling and porosity tests had missed the deep-seep process, that saturations could keep spreading down through the abutment shale like water through a monstrous sponge. The Kansas City blueprinters of the dam had missed it. And he himself had missed it, in worrying about what the shale was doing to his core pool instead of what his core pool was doing to the Bearpaw shale.

The board of inquiry wasn't going to miss it.



Owen leaned into the balustrade, elbows on it now, still seeming to contemplate the mile-long concrete floor down there. Corps scuttlebutt had it that Quigley, the Harvard ~~brain~~ ~~huckly-muck~~ on the investigating board, was saying the dam was not worth finishing. Its other eight engineering whizzes, though, were not likely to conclude that a slide of ³three percent of its total earthfill was anywhere near fatal to Fort Peck Dam. No, they were going to want the slide fixed, weren't they, and by whatever prescription needed to make ~~dam~~ ~~good and sure~~ ^{certain} it did not happen again.

Engineering truly was a clever whore, Owen Duff at this moment would have told you in something like wonder and nausea: no sooner did it allure a person into committing a phenomenal disaster than it came flirting back with the exact cure. ^{He} ~~Owen~~ had seen the fix to be made there in the dusk of slide day, after he had Neil to the hospital and found his dazed way back to the edge of the gouge in the dam. ~~Stick in a sheet-steel wall,~~ ^{Piledrive a secondary cut-off} ~~cover it with~~ ^{barrier and a} ~~inside~~ a fifty-foot core of impervious fill, then replace the dredged material in a gentler slope; with that kind of dry and compacted mass over it, the shale would have no way to pull the rug out from under four million yards of earthfill again. That was all that was necessary

on fixing the slide.

On himself, Owen was not at all sure what was needed. Over the side here, off this bridge onto that expanse of concrete, would do it quick enough. Be like dropping an egg off a cliff. He knew to the specified inch the height of this spillway gate structure; plus a three-foot balustrade to climb up onto and drop from. The equivalent of a six-story building, down to death. Not a record, but far enough.

Or stay. Stay in life. Face down the board of inquiry--I followed every spec, on the core pool, the fill, everything; the core of the dam never budged, did it; the dam didn't go out, did it--and make the case for fixing the slide area as he knew how. Fixing it might take a year, time enough to get himself back to normal. Whatever the hell normal was, any more.

Like a man dizzy, Owen backed away from the balustrade.

— Kate
~~Rhonda~~ was doing battle with the ready-counter of the Rondola, asking whether her orders of ham and eggs were past the oink and cluck stage yet, when in Mr. Important walked and marched right past the counterful of customers. He turned her around to him, lifted her off

the floor in a full-length bear hug, and carted her like that through the swinging door into the kitchen.

Dola and Ron and the dishwasher swiveled to the arrival of the enwrapped pair, then looked studiously elsewhere.

^{Kate}
It was only inches worth, but ~~Rhonda~~ stared worlds into Bruce's face, until he set her down.

"All the fixing up after the slide?--^mthey've decided they have to bring in a dozen divers for it," he told her, grinning a mile. "The inside skinny is that we'll be diving here all next year, maybe more. And guess who's being made the lead guy."

^{Kate's}
~~Rhonda's~~ dazed expression failing to change, he spelled it out for her.

"I've got all the seniority, hon. Crew chief--^mthat'll be me, just got told. At twice the money."

Finally out of things to reel off to her, ^g~~now~~ Bruce was the one who looked dazed. ^{Katy,}
~~Rhonda's~~ "Rhonda, we've got it made, again."

770

PN

Part Eight

PT

THE SHERIFF

1991

With grunts of pain that he could barely prevent from being yelps Carl Kinnick rolled the wheelchair to his bed, reached over and yanked down hard on the emergency call cord.

The nurse was there in under a minute. She whipped into the room, white britches swishing, then stopped short at the sight of him, scrunched in his wheelchair same as ever.

"Going on the dam trip," he notified her.

"Like fuck huh uh, you are." In her surprise she ~~even~~ forgot to professionally cushion the words with his name. "Can't, can you? The way your hip hurts you?"

"Don't care." He kept squinting at her as neutrally as he could,

needing her help on this.

him the four little words,

All she would have to do to dispose of this situation was to ask

"Did you sign up?" Shit no, he hadn't signed up for the outing to the

dam, she knew. He hadn't done anything except sit here and be ornery

for as long as she had worked here. Why on my shift? she reflected as

she angrily stretched past him to flip the emergency call button back to

OFF. Why couldn't the old poot take it into his head to go to bingo

tonight, if he finally wants to get out of his room? She didn't even really

have to think through all the kinds of trouble involved in letting him

go to the dam. They would need to take the cabulance van instead of the

rec bus because of him in his wheelchair, and Mosteller the driver would

shit a brick about that. Doris the recreation director went miles out

of her way to avoid Carl Kinnick ever since that birthday party fiasco;

she'd be spooked silly to have him show up for her pittypat little

~~visit-to-Fort-Peck~~ this afternoon. Howls would go up from the other

residents on the excursion too, the nurse could just about hear those

already: old devil him anyway, has to spoil it for everybody else, coming

along and sitting there like death warmed over.

On the other hand, such as it was, the Little Prick had never before

shown her he really wanted anything.

"If I let you," she said in her tone that kidded and didn't,

"promise not to come back?"

#

Mosteller, the longhaired ~~young~~ driver, had earphones on and wobbled his head from side to side in tune with whatever musical ~~noise~~ racket it was he was listening to. In the old days the sheriff would have slapped a reckless-driving ticket on him so fast his head would swim.

There weren't all that many on the dam trip. The bridge-club biddies from the third floor, and Theresa Machias who used to work at the courthouse and was the only one who so much as said hello to him, and old Danvers who was half ga-ga three-quarters of the time, and of course Doris, who kept slipping nervous eyecorner glances at him. He wished the dirtymouthed young nurse was along.

He and the wheelchair were cinched in at the back of the cabulance, the others' gray heads and Danvers's empty bald one poking up in front of him from the bench seats. Tail gunner on the hearse, he thought of, and pursed a tiny smile to himself.

This very first part, right out of town, was the only bit of this

familiar route he cared anything about. The intense green, a color almost savage (although the sheriff found it restful), of the cottonwoods concentrated along the Milk River, before the road headed over the ridge toward the Missouri. Otherwise this drive down from Glasgow still did not amount to much, by his standards of interest. ~~interestless~~ The traffic deaths of speedball damworkers had all happened before white roadside crosses were put up to mark car-wreck fatalities, so the sheriff couldn't even pick out the spots where he'd had to gather up the crushed and flung bodies.

What still surprised him, as the cabulance topped the last little rise before starting down to the river, was that the town of Wheeler had vanished absolutely. The hasty frame buildings had been easy pickings, torn down for salvage or hauled away to farms and ranches for use as granaries and chicken coops. The sheriff enjoyed the thought of Wheeler ending up as barnyards.

Fort Peck, the town of, still featured the big dark hotel and the Swiss gingerbread theater, and a Corps of Engineers office with a Spanishy red-tile roof in the permanent portion of the old Ad Building. Then it thinned radically, to a couple of neighborhoods of cookiecutter

houses fixed up and a luncho-gaso-laundromat. Not nearly as gone as Wheeler, New Deal, Square Deal and all the others, but plenty depleted.

As were those Army Engineer big shots who went on into the war, the sheriff ruminated as the cabulance drove on. ^{Armenter} Pemberton, Santee, and Roscoe--no, Brascoe. Dead, dead, and dead. ^{Santee} ~~Brascoe~~, the story they told on him was that he'd been assigned as one of those top-secret couriers sent places with a briefcase handcuffed to his wrist, and that he'd somehow lost one of those courier cases. Killed himself, over it. Huh. Those prettypants Corps boys all gone and here he still had breath in him.

Suddenly, the dam.

You were on the thing before you could ever recognize it as such. It had never seemed right to the sheriff that the downstream slope of the dam had grassed over, looking like a sidehill hayfield that had been there forever. Overall, the dam now resembled a narrow-topped and particularly flat benchland which somehow happened to stand in the way of a body of water backed up across the curvature of the earth. (Out there on the water was another thing the sheriff was never going to grow used to, the everyday sight here of boaters and fishermen.

Real
Hell, tourists even, a few anyway.) You had to study this view inordinately to realize the scale of the dam, the immensity of fill that was diked across here. And over near the dam's east side there was not even a trace of where the big slide had happened, they had riprapped over that so it looked as innocent as virgin scenery, too.

The cabulance's destination, site of the tour that Doris was hugely determined to herd them through, could be seen poking up down by the outlet channel where the river came out of the tunnels: the pair of powerhouses that had been added after the dam was done. Twin concrete skyscrapers amid the gopher holes. More federal money, in the sheriff's estimation, typically pushed up into the air instead of just let slide down those gopher holes. He shifted in his wheelchair, so as not to solidify in one position, and was careful to gasp behind the clench of his mouth so the others could not hear the pain.

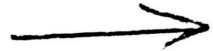
Slowly the cabulance drove and drove across the dam, west to east, one full mile, two, three. Far down the slope now, at the toe of the dam, the river tore out of the diversion tunnels in a narrow white gush. On the dam's other side, upstream, across that entire half of the horizon

the lake lapped against the midriffs of hills. Outdoing the original intentions of the engineers, Fort Peck Dam backed up the waters of the Missouri for 135 miles from here. The sheriff read somewhere once that this lake's load of standing water affected the rotation of the earth, and he didn't doubt it a bit.

"Almost there," Doris sang out.

The lake steadily slapped at the riprap below the road, coloration on the boulders marking how much higher the waterlevel had been during runoff, late last spring. Just ahead now, at the east abutment of the dam, an overlook ringed with small boulders jutted up, wayside signs there telling the history and vital statistics of the dam.

"This'll do," he pronounced. "Pull over, in there."



The recreation director badly wanted the voice to be that of poor old Mr. Danvers, who harmlessly piped up at odd moments. But, whittled down and propped in a wheelchair though he was, Carl Kinnick vocally still had an unmistakable edge, about like a ~~puzzsaw~~^{police siren's.}

She turned to him with the best smile she could manage and said, "Now then, Mr. Kinnick, if you need to...go, in just a minute now there'll be restrooms at the powerh--"
T
m

"Not a matter of me going. Staying put suits me."

Even the bridge-club bunch, normally Doris's most durable allies, tittered at that. And Mosteller the driver, who had heard Carl Kinnick's ^{din} tone over the ~~connection~~ in his headphones, was already pulling over into the outlook parking area, stopping to see what was the matter.

Doris unbuckled her seatbelt and went to the back of the cabulance, ^{sheriff situation.} to the ~~trouble~~.

"Just leave me off here," ^{he} ~~the sheriff~~ ordered, if she was hearing properly. "Pick me up on your way back."

"But what..." The reasoning against that was automatic, it was as plain as the wrinkles on his face. "Mr. Kinnick, we can't just go--"
T
m

drive off and leave you here all alone."

He stared back at her as if giving her a minute to learn common sense.

"Don't you see?" she said against that stare. She was also aware that the whole contingent in the cabulance, from Mosteller on back, was watching intently, sopping this in. "We simply can't...the responsibility..."

"Any responsibility for me is mine."

"...is a big one and..."

"I'll stay and keep the sheriff company," Theresa Machias spoke up from one of the front seats. "I've seen that powerhouse nine Septembers in a row."

Doris turned in the direction of Theresa and said that was certainly nice of her but was she sure, and Theresa said of course she was sure or she wouldn't have opened her mouth in the first place.

Then Doris was hovering over the sheriff again, asking whether it suited him to have Theresa stay with him, which he thought he concurred with civilly enough, considering. ⁴ Even so the recreation director hesitated, hanging on in his vicinity but staying a little away from him, too.

She evidently couldn't make up her mind whether he was more likely to pitch over and die, or reach up under and snap her garter. After another uncertain hover, ^{Doris} ~~she~~ backed off and asked him:

"Will this be all right for you, are you sure? It's so windy here."

He couldn't help looking at her as if she was a complete fool.

"There's always wind in this country."

"Yes, well—^m" She bit her lip and told Mosteller, "All right then,

Jerry," and the driver operated the cabulance's ^{lift} ~~elevator~~ platform and indifferently wheeled the sheriff off and over to the ^{lake end of the overlook.} ~~side of the turnout.~~

Theresa Machias sensibly had a coat with her and her donut cushion to sit on, Doris was a little relieved to see as she trailed after to supervise getting the two of them settled. Already the sheriff was ignoring her, refusing to swerve his gaze from one particular ^{promontory} ~~point~~ of the river bluffs, ~~land~~, across there to the west, even when Doris's hand darted in and tucked his jacket collar closed around his neck. She heard him say:

"It was up there."

The recreation director tried to follow the line of his gaze, across the lake to the high blunt bluffs. "What, Mr. Kinnick. What was?"

Didn't she wish she knew. The sheriff shook his head, holding in the tiny smile until he was sure she had turned away.

After giving the pair of them one last assurance that she would be back before they knew it, Doris climbed into the cabulance and the vehicle trundled ~~went~~ down the slope out of sight behind a powerhouse.

Theresa had parked herself on a ^{sittable} ~~big~~ rock a decent distance from the sheriff's wheelchair. She dug a pack of cigarettes and her silver-plated retirement lighter from her coat pocket. After lighting up, and then letting out a crashing cough which somehow seemed to satisfy her, she offered the pack in the general direction of the sheriff for politeness's sake. "But you never used these, did you."

"~~Hmm-mm~~. They stunt your growth, Therese."

Snorty chuckle from her, something ^{equivalent silently} ~~silent equivalently~~ from him.

Then, shriveled up there in his wheelchair, he turned his head from her, back toward the bluff across the dam.

Theresa periodically emitted smoke and checked up on Carl Kirmick with a glance. What a little sonofabitch on six wheels he had been, when he was sheriff all those years. Bite your head off if you couldn't

put your finger ^{immediately} ~~instantly~~ on whatever piece of court paper he was after.

She timed another casual glance at him. Two-wheeled now, though.

DROP CAP

It was up there, that he had gone through it that other time.

Procedure took him to the point, back there in 1938 in that aftermath of the truck, where he had questioned the remaining Duffs until the questions wore out. Their answers, though, showed no wear at all.

Ital.
I was at home. Or: Working my shift. Or: We went to the show that night,
both of us. Their chain of alibi, always somebody handy to vouch for this or that in their stories, except on the central matter of the pair in the truck cab.

Ital.
No idea he was up to anything like that, the widow of the drowned unclothed man maintained.

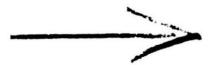
Ital.
Never knew there was anything going on between them, the husband of the dead and unclad woman swore.

Then the sheriff would have to backtrack, go through the questions again, trying to weave a case that would catch one or another or, for all he cared, five or six or all eight of the damned surviving Duffs.

p. 780^A follows →

At last, he gave in and borrowed the truck.

More like confiscated it, if you want the truth. Well aware that his undersheriff would blab something like this all over Fort Peck, the sheriff went by himself to Moore Motors in Glasgow and ^{informed} ~~told~~ Ted Moore he was taking that reconstituted Ford ^{Triple} ~~Double~~ A for a couple of hours, making sure to mention to Ted that he'd be piloting the truck to the dam project to check out a circumstance. But halfway down the highway to Fort Peck, the sheriff veered off, west, along an old sectionline road, no more than a set of ruts grooved alongside a stretch of barbwire fence. The truck jolted across the prairie on the twin wheeltracks, the sheriff perched on the edge of the ^{wide-bodied} ~~seat~~, up close over the ^{sizable} ~~large~~ steering wheel,



grimly absorbing the bumps.

After a matter of more miles than he had remembered on this route, the sheriff came out above the Missouri, on a high bluff some ways upstream from the dam. Below at the turn of the bluff a little treed-over stream called Nettle Creek used to empty into the river, but the lake had filled back this far by now. What little of the bottomland that was left to view looked eaten into, a dredge's trademark bites with huge scalloped edges. At the dam, a fleet of barges and workboats had been pulled in to work on repairing the slide; the sheriff could see their boxy forms against the scar of the slide, but at such a distance no one could see what he was up to in the truck.

Here the slope to the water was quite sharp, higher and steeper than the ^{ramp} ~~one~~ the truck had freewheeled down at the dam~~site~~ to its plunge into the lake, so Kinnick took care in nosing the truck to a stop, facing down to the valley of the Missouri. Wasn't sure why he needed the actual water below him for this; knew it was basically a dangerous idea, if the truck should happen to get away from him ~~during this~~. And wouldn't that be one sweet hell of a way to go: the whole county talking about

him drowning too, same as that Duff affair, and not even a woman keeping him company. He ~~in fact~~ wished there had been a way to bring a woman along for this, make it considerably more real; but if word about something like that escaped, he'd be laughed out of office. Drowning would be simpler.

So he sat alone and thought through the onset of this maddening case.

The truck parked as it was, barely over the brow of this big ridge, enough tilt for an absolute panorama of the river but not enough for much sliding forward if you lay down across the seat: somebody trying to use a moonlight view of the river to encourage the clothes off somebody else might find this the best angle, he figured.

The sheriff took off his hat and hesitantly placed it on top of the back of the seat against the rear window, couldn't see what else to do with it in the circumstances.

Even though he had examined this vehicle, to the point of eyestrain, before the remaining Duffs turned it back over to Moore Motors, now he made himself systematically scan the inside of the truck cab one more time,

and then the emergency brake, defunct, of course, starting at the steering wheel and sideways and down to the gearstick angling up from the transmission housing in the floorboards, and across the wide ~~phony-leather~~ seat to the passenger-side door, and on up and around to the rear window where that cloud of their clothing had damply clung. Only to divine the same thing again, nothing.

Maybe he was carrying the experiment kind of far with this next maneuver, but he unscrewed the standard black knob of the gearshift, tossed it in the glove compartment, and screwed on the fancy amber whorly one that had been there when the truck went into the river.

Nothing more to do but do it.

The sheriff licked his lips. Lips and Licking were pertinent to what he was attempting to emulate, sure, but he wasn't employing them out of pleasure.

Staying as studious as he could, he lay down, extending himself across the seat to the passenger side, belly down in the male position.

The seat felt a little cool, ungiving, against his freshly shaved cheek. Not like the woman's skin would be, there, but he couldn't help that. He checked back over his left shoulder to the knob of the gearstick.

It was within range of his hip, but not nearly touching. The sheriff was sure as anything that the truck had been ^{left} in low gear, the night of the deaths; that's what people do, after all, when they park a vehicle anywhere that it might roll, jam it into grandma-gear.

Drawing a deep breath, feeling foolish but impelled at the same time, he nudged his hip against the gearshift knob, as might happen if a man went a little sideways in excitement.

Nothing. His hip twinged, but the gearshift stayed steadily in place.

The sheriff swore quietly at the gaudy knob, then tensed himself and battered it as hard as he could with his hip. Still nothing, except the major bruise he knew he was going to have there. The sheriff could not believe the woman's hip would have been more lethal, but in the interest of research he turned over onto his back as he imagined she would have been, knees somewhat sticking up, and banged against the gearshift with his other hip, hard and harder. Next he flung out an arm sharply against the gearknob. Then he tried a tumble against it, half-falling off the seat so that all his sideward weight went against the taut metal rod. He thought for a moment, then scrambled behind the

steering wheel, and careful not to let the truck start rolling, jammed a foot on the brake while he shifted ^{gears} ~~the gearstick~~ into reverse, toward the dashboard. His personal theory was that the couple would have been so involved they wouldn't have bothered with getting the gearshift a little more out of their way, but okay, say they did. With the truck now in reverse, the sheriff lay back down to see if he could bounce the shiftstick out of this gear, either, with his hip.

In any combination of positions that Sheriff Carl Kinnick could think of, any semblance of accidental bump or shove or knock or thrust or lunge during the blind concentrations of lovemaking, the gearshift would not pop out of gear.

DROP CAP

And so the truck at the dam[#]site had to have had help in starting to roll, coasting down the slope ^{of the ramp} in its deathride to the floor of the river.

Back then, more than half a century ago, the sheriff despised the feeling of frustration after his failed re^Penactment, and it still got him worked up, just thinking about it.

Accident, the answer that would have closed the case then and there, simply did not fit the picture.

From his solo session there in the truck cab the sheriff was positive there was no inadvertent way to depress a clutch pedal while having sex, either, and even if something that weird had managed to happen and some way there was the shift of gear out of low ^{or reverse} into neutral, why couldn't the man or even the woman have tromped on the brake pedal, or flung a door open, or swerved the steering wheel, or anything like that to save themselves? Okay, say they were going at each other to the point of oblivion ^{the} the sheriff still found it very hard to believe that the jolt of the truck starting into motion down that rough ^{planked slideway} ~~pluff~~ wouldn't have interrupted even 101 ^{percent} passion.

Murder, then?

Both of them knocked over the head and sent rolling into the river? The ^{bodies} two were a bit banged up, but that dodo of a coroner had not been able to single out any contusions that the plunge in the truck wouldn't itself have caused. In his own mind the sheriff could come up with a way for it to happen at gunpoint: somebody following them to their tryst on the dam slope ramp, surprising them there naked in the middle of the action, shoving a gun in their faces and forcing them to start the truck

rolling, the gunhandler riding the running board until the last moment, leaping off as the truck sailed into the Missouri. But that scenario was a stretch, several ^fways. And how come the pair still couldn't have bailed out as soon as the truck hit the water?

Two lives gone. And others thrown into a hell of a tangle. That fed the sheriff's fury, too. Anyone who encountered Carl Kinnick at, say, a car wreck would remember forever his snappishness, his coil of what seemed to be affronted anger. Which is absolutely what it was. The waste of lives drove him wild: how dare they? how could they throw away, through too much speed or booze ~~or dope~~ or showing-off, the [#]sum-result of themselves? Sheriffing could not control everybody's behavior, he had ~~reluctantly~~ ^{with reluctance,} concluded, but that did not alter the fact that it needed some controlling.

And so, the final so he always came to, the Duff case always had been doubly perturbing to him because the deaths in the truck stacked up as a deliberate forfeit of life. Not just ^{the} foolishness of making seat-springs sing in the night, although there plainly was some of that involved in this episode. But beyond that, what had happened ^{was done} intentionally.

What people were capable of thinking up. That was the lasting question, wasn't it. Carl Kimmick supposed it had better be, or he might as well be wadded up and tossed in this lake instead of still pursuing thoughts along that line.

"~~Move~~ move around some, so I don't stiffen up like a rock," he heard Theresa Machias say, in the tuned-up tone people use when they're saying something a second time. "Anything you want done, ^{Carl,} first?"

He moved his head enough to see her, on her feet now but still a healthy distance from him. "Doing okay the way I am, ~~There~~," he told her, and as she went off on a ^{short} ~~little~~ walk to the other end of the outlook, he turned his attention back to the bluff across the water.

He sat there, hunched, confined, older than the hill of manufactured earth beneath the wheels of his chair; sat and with all the ardor left to him kept at it. Kept ^{furious at} ~~hating~~ the Duffs for the mystery they lived with and two of them died by, and just as helplessly loving them for this last ^{slick} ~~hard~~ stone of sheriffing to gnaw on, this case of theirs that would not let itself be solved.

789

PN

Part Nine

PT

TRUCK AND RIVER

1938

You wait in the weeds long enough and sometimes something good will come along. He almost couldn't believe the luck of this, this midnight chance at her.

Here where they were parked, the lightpoles along the dam showed the spew of the dredgeline, small silver waterfall in the torn canyon left by the slide. On out into the lake, the temporary lights of the slide-islands were as pretty and crooked as star formations, clusters strung wherever the crews were at work salvaging the drowned machines or scavenging the riprap boulders onto barges for use again when the

face of the dam was fixed.

"Going day and night, patching the roof of the Missouri River," he said to break the hard little distance of silence between them there in the cab of the truck.

She did not say anything. Day, night, still not enough to fix how wrong this had all gone.

He looked ^{across} ~~over~~ at her. It was going to be like this, was it. Mood, when he'd prefer her nude.

All right, she had reason to be upset. She was not the only one.

"Proxy ¹_m" he began in a blurt that even surprised himself, and broke off huskily.

In the dark of the cab of the truck, she could just see his profile. They all looked inescapably alike, the Duff men, as though traced on paper several times over. Although she was finding out their differences.

"Proxy is climbing Hugh's leg," the words came bitterly out of him, "good Lord, woman, haven't you seen that?" She watched him take off the cap, run a hand through his hair, hesitate for a place to set the cap. You came saying you tip your cap only to yourself, didn't you, Darius.

it's.

Ital
Here you are, still at it. Looking ^{across} ~~over~~ at her again, he put the cap up on the back of the seat behind him. "Proxy hot to trot, time for a new Duff, a little taste of brotherly love direct from my brother? Hasn't everyone seen that?"

She didn't answer.

The truck stayed silent except for the hum of the heater, and as if all at once deciding the cab was warm enough, she felt down to the ignition key and turned it off. Darius waited for her move toward him, but none came.

He put a hand over to her, to see what it might bring.

"Does that engineer even do this by blueprint?" he asked, touching her skillfully enough to change her breathing.

"No." She swallowed, but then got the words out. "At least not with me."

More of Darius's hand. She concentrated past it to the note of mockery in his chuckle, kept herself tensed toward the hateful sentence she knew was coming. "But with Charlene," he was saying it, "it must have got that way for our man Owen, why else."

There in the dark, small tight fists resting on the steering wheel, Rosellen hated him all the way back to first principles. Bone, blood, breath, everything of Darius Duff she hated. The force of this was beyond anything she had ever imagined, it was as if there were suddenly several of her, furious cast of characters all of them her, packed into everything she felt against him. She hated him on behalf of Neil, Charlene, Owen, herself, any and all who would have their lives come apart if he told what he knew.

#

ital

He had been looking high and low for Owen, core pool to the toe of the dam, as the crowd poured to the Fort Peck railroad siding and the presidential train, waiting for Roosevelt. In their tournament of argument, noontimes, FDR was ever there like the mercury in a thermometer, register of what Owen believed was politically far enough and Darius believed was doctrinally never enough, and Darius could hardly wait now to keep company during the speech and then argue it degree by degree with Owen. A chance to see America's royal trickster in action, it would be a treat for any thinking man, as they both were. Word had reached the crowd that the President's motorcade was on its way, down through the hills from the

spillway, and Darius was as keen for the coming performance as any.

He lacked only Owen.

Tracking down the engineer Sangster and wife in a good spot at the end of the roped-off area for Corps officers and their families and dignitaries not quite entitled to the presidential train's rear platform, Darius found out the most recent sighting of Owen. "Left a little bit ago. Had to go pick up Charlene."

Darius opened his mouth to set Sangster straight, then instinct snapped it shut for him. He moved off quickly into the crowd, thoughts weaving as he went.

Charlene already had been picked up and delivered here. By Proxy and Tom Harry in the Packard. By plan of Owen.

"Favor to ask you, Proxy--I'm going to be snowed under by Corps rigamarole on Franklin D. day," Darius could hear again Owen of a few nights ago, at one of those encouragement suppers at Hugh and Meg's.

"Can you give this working wife of mine a lift out to the shindig?"

Proxy had said sure, why not, somewhat unnecessarily adding that the Packard always had plenty of room, and then Charlene had joked about

itals

finally riding in style at Fort Peck. And just now, in this prowl for Owen, Darius had spotted the three of them, bartender and hairdresser and taxi[#]-dancer, perched like nabobs on the Packard roof where they could see to FDR's train.

And Sangster, spectating in a coveted spot with his arm around his wife, did^{not} ~~not~~ much look as though rigamarole was overburdening the engineers this day, did he.

His brow knit ~~with suspicion~~, Darius searched higher, heading up the bluff toward the Ad Building. This is not like our Owen, to miss

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out on a Roosevelt holy day. Latecomers from Glasgow and beyond were hurrying onto the bluff's slope here between the Y of the road to the Ad Building and the dredgeline road down past the winter harbor. The sidehill gave a clear view out over the gathering, FDR's motorcade in sight alongside the train down there now. Darius hesitated, lingered, then decided this onlooking site was as good as any, Owen or no Owen.

The preliminaries gradually came and went and then all at once the lordly Roosevelt cadences, of politics and the river, and of the river and politics, were rolling out over the thousands of cars and more thousands

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of listeners, including the impressed skeptic Darius. Voice like God's

town crier, he was thinking to himself, no wonder the man can get away with--

Then he saw the truck.

Triple

The Model ~~Double~~ A, unmistakable with its little cap-peak outside

visor, was on its way from the river, the oxbow section downstream from

the dam where the dredges were working. Working, that is, except during

this Roosevelt event, when all crews were given time off. Watching in

Triple

the ~~Double~~ A's direction, Darius could not help but wonder why Neil would

be trucking anything at this hour, this day.

The truck pulled in at the back edge of the winter harbor lot solid with

vehicles, a scrawny deputy sheriff pointing ~~to~~ to a parking spot. And

out hopped Rosellen, walking swiftly, head down, around the parked mob.

She looked for all the world like someone hastening back now from a quick

errand, something tended to at home or the office, taken care of by dashing

off in the truck. Except she had been on the fork of the road that went

only to the dredges.

After a moment's incredulity, Darius laughed, knowing.

And in minutes here the other one came, in the familiar beat-up

government pickup. Around to the motor pool lot, and then Darius could make him out on foot, Owen in long strides cutting across to see the presidential train pull away. Owen the fillmaster, from the dredge Gallatin where the fillmaster had quarters.

After that, Darius believed he could even tell the times when they were slipping off together to whatever hideyhole. Whenever Owen edgily excused himself out of a noon, it had been all Darius could do not to give him the oldest mocking smile there was and pipe out, "Have you tried a pantry yet?"


Rosellen wished she and Darius had this over with. The ending, the going. Primed as she was for this, she found it hard to make happen. Rage of this depth was a new story to her. She felt half-dizzy ^{between} ~~with it~~ and the despondency; the same kind of desperate batty intensity she'd had after Neil looked into the eclipse and there was nothing she could do for him, and when stories she'd written her heart out on were mailed back to her with editors' polite scorn. Clenched all over; that was how she-

"Rosellen, love, how long do we have?" Darius asked urgently.

"Enough." Honey it as he would, love had nothing to do with tonight's deal.

She had come for him at the houseboat. "Not here," she had said.

"Not under Proxy's roof." He had chuckled, dry sound. Then followed her out and into the truck.

As she drove to the dam, he'd started to ask: "Where's--" 

"At the show." Neil, Charlene and Owen, ~~Rhonda~~ ^{Kate} and Bruce, all five of them in the midnight dark of the movie theater, the newsreel coming on now; more Europe. They'd been determined, the three couples, to try to make a night of this, supper together as they used to and then the usual few beers and music at the Blue Eagle, Neil ~~was~~ ^{was recuperated} enough to dance ~~slowly~~ ^{and gingerly}.

Everybody needed this Saturday night out, they said as if it was a chorus, Owen the only one overly quiet but not the only one deep into ~~worry~~ ^{worry}. Rosellen had pleaded a splitting headache when the movie came up, but insisted Neil go with the others, he needed some fun. The headache was close to the truth, although the sensation reached all the way down through her, the ~~upset~~ ^{harrowed} feeling and the taut determination.

Darius had left the choice of site to her, she was the expert at slipping around to such places, wasn't she. She had driven with him, curious passenger in America, to the quiet end of the dam where the

riprap work stood stalled until the slide section was rebuilt. Deserted this time of night, the little dock called Port Peck was a dark stub into the water at the base of the dam. Where the planked ramp angled down to the dock and the lake, Rosellen parked carefully, on enough of the incline that they could see out to the temporary lights on the slide-islands, and killed the engine. "Scenic," Darius had commended then. "If it's the sort of thing you're here to see," she had said back, trying to sound composed.

Now his words broke in on her, the strings of lights still constellated across the truck's windshield. "I'll tell you a thing that board of inquiry ought to interest itself in, there. Why a man who knew shale could go slick as lard didn't call everyone off the dam, when we were all standing around flummoxed just before the slide. It'd have saved your Neil some woe."

All the long thoughts that led her here crisscrossed now. Neil would have to take the hurt of this, but less than if he had been hit with the news of her and Owen. Owen, Owen and Charlene, this was a way to make up for the trespass there, escapade. ~~to preserve them~~ wipe away his ~~sting~~ Proxy? Proxy knew about stories

and consequences, she would ~~grit~~ and bear this and go on. The others, they would ^{close} ~~make~~ ranks against whatever the world said about this, as

Duffs always did when they had to. Rosellen only regretted this wasn't the kind of thing she could run by her debating partner ~~Phonda~~ ^{Kate}.

"That board yet could, you know," Darius's voice a goad in the dark.

"If someone were to put a word in their ear."

She didn't believe what he said about Owen and the slide. Or about Proxy and Hugh, for that matter. Liar as well as everything else he was. Next on that list would be snitch.

"Tell us, Jealous," Rosellen said.

He cocked a look at her. Sounding suddenly cautious, he asked:

"Whyever do you say that?"

"It's what came. Words have that habit."

Tale

She remembered to the word how it started, it couldn't have been a farther cry from what she was trying for on paper.

Seeing ~~that~~ ^g she finally could get rid of the dredging report she'd typed up for him, that April noon, she took it to Owen's office right away after Sangster emerged from their session of dam talk and whistled off to lunch. When she stepped in, Owen was turned in his chair, facing

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the window where he could see the river and the dam, the eraser on his pencil bouncing brup brup brup on his desktop as he sat there mulling. At first she wasn't sure he even knew she had come in, but then he said: "Thanks. More paper ammo for the battle of Fort Peck."

Curious, she said: "You look like you're in danger of thinking yourself inside out. What about?"

"Winter harbor." The wide line of his mouth tucked down at its corners, his sign of joshing at himself. "It's only six months from now, so I figured I'd get a little headstart on the worrying."

Nhn.

"That's funny." The cute serious concentration marks showed up between her eyebrows. "The sun must be doing different things to us.

I just looked up the opposite of hibernation."

gave her an appreciative look and,
Quick as presto, Owen was hooting with laughter about getting his seasons crossed, next thing he knew he'd be outside on Christmas trying to aestivate with the snow snakes. And after a surprised moment at all that, Rosellen laughed because she was glad ~~he was~~ the two of them chimed this way.

Is there such a thing as inadvertent flirting? Unintended ~~mad pash?~~ mad pash?

She came to wonder, after that noon and others, as the two of them paid attention to each other, new ways, little ways, ways that did not necessarily

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have to lead dangerously far but could, could.

After they took the plunge, dazed and giddy and guilty and stimulated there in the tight shiplike quarters while everyone else was off seeing Roosevelt, she tried to sort out what was happening. Juanita and Gilbert chasing through the grass with her typewriter keys after them, chickenfeed. What she and Owen were drawn into was as complicated as a family album, it seemed to her. The best way she could put it was that they each wanted something like a portion of a person more, another helping, in their marriages. Not the first pair ever to catch catnip on the breeze at the same time, they both knew; plural of spouse is spice, but that oldest of jokes on humans is always freshly played. Only slowly did they catch on to each other, implacable attachment to larger-than-life aspirations like sharing a sense sharper than anyone else's around them. Slipping off to meet, their not many times--Rosellen's educated guess on Owen was that he tiredly wanted back his dating days of Bozeman, someone warm and willing and without Charlene's grudge against his work. Someone, instead, who prized Fort Peck as he did. Go for broke, the part of him beyond blueprint had chosen when the chance with Rosellen surfaced. Her

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diagnosis on herself didn't take much: a little starved, that was all, for somebody who when you asked what was on his mind, he told you. And getting back at Charlene, of course that figured in, too--all the big sistering, any Bluebird Girl could spell that out in macaroni letters. Charlene and her prettiness, her fanciness, her little flirts traded with Bruce. Sisters paired like ark animals that didn't quite match, she and Charlene. On his side of things, Owen had to flinch past the fact of Neil; but brothers fork apart where a woman is concerned, ask anywhere in history.

So, neither of them meant anything lasting by their handful of times together. Rosellen pretty much knew what she was having with Owen wasn't actual love, although there were things about him she wished she could take home and put under the ^{sheets} bed. She didn't even think she was out of love with Neil, although as Proxy advised they did seem to need a fresh shot of each other. What Rosellen, pressed to it, would have said she loved was the experience itself; the experiencing of ^{their tryst.} ~~it~~. The story, secret, then would just be there, put away in herself--and of course Owen--when

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they all left Fort Peck. Except that Darius had pushed himself into the picture.

After the slide, the first time they'd managed a minute to be alone to talk, in the back hallway of the Ad Building, she had taken a look at Owen's painfully peaked expression and said, "Don't blame yourself to death. You went out there and saved Neil's skin."

"It's nothing as simple as a few million yards of mud," he responded. Darius had been at him about the two of them, he told her rapidly. Like a beak into a wound.

"Mad as hell about something, everything^I--I can't get him simmered down." Hollow-eyed, Owen shook his head as if finally having met the impossible. "Maybe having it to hold over us will be enough for him.

Maybe he'll never say anything." Rosellen watched him, feeling it begin to burn at her, as Owen finished: "Except to me. And I hope not to you."

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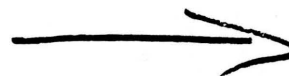
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"What's this 'Tell us, Jealous'?" Darius's mimicking voice rose in the truck cab. "Is there more where that's from? Because¹_m---

"Because nothing. Forget I said anything." Rosellen gazed steadily across at him as if convincing herself of something. Then said: "I told you I'd make you a deal." She reached down and took her shoes and socks off. She began to unbutton her dress, turning toward him enough to make sure he could watch her at it. But before scooting over to the middle of the seat to finish undressing, she dropped her hand to the gearstick. "Better get this out of our way first." Stepping hard on the brake to keep the truck from moving at all, Rosellen pumped the clutch in with her other foot and moved the gearstick up into reverse, farthest away from the truck seat.

"Barefoot driving," Darius said of her quick exploit. "I am all admiration."



"Barefoot all over, next," Rosellen said, that saying ^{of} ~~borrowed from~~
^{'s} Proxy making him blink in the darkness. Then he felt the drift of her
fingers onto the buttonline of his shirt. "You, too," Rosellen stipulated.

Darius complied, he would have taken his clothes off at high noon
in Picadilly for this.

All garments at last tucked up onto the back of the seat with his cap,
the two of them made what position they could on the long narrow truck
seat, and it began. Never pass it up, ran in Darius's mind, not that he
ever had or intended to, especially now. The world was a goner, since
the festering cowards' peace at Munich, and a man may as well lose himself
in his favorite hiding place of pleasure while he could. These otter-smooth
maneuvers of woman, white magic of their thighs and their moon-touched
breasts, the hidden delta where the loins meet, this and then this and
yes this--

breathing open-mouthed.
"Wait." She wriggled, out from under and up onto her side, "Let's...
trade places."

Bare and bright-eyed, Rosellen moved partway over him, hands kneading
the strategic hollows between his collarbones and the root of his throat.

He couldn't help but wonder whether she was taking tips from Proxy, where else did she learn spice such as this? Rosellen was surprisingly instructive, what a bonus, coaxing him to lay his head back, kissing her way down him, wait, she said again, and he did, letting her shift around to where she wanted, murmuring something tersely to him about not wanting to bump into the steering wheel, until he could feel her finding a position over his lower thighs. His head turned a little, he could see up at the windshield which had grayed over, steamed up from their breath and body heat. Darius would have chuckled at that if his throat had not been too tight with wanting. He shut his eyes a moment, all the desires humming in his head, Olivia, Jessie, Fiona, temporary Proxy, missed-chance Meg, as he waited for this next.

Rosellen paused in mid-motion there low on him. She had to slip behind the steering wheel, a bit sideways, for this. There was just room. She kept as much of herself applied to him as she could while her left leg angled down and her left foot just touched the clutch. This ending she had found in herself. Employ the eraser. On him, on the mess made of her own story and three others', on the way life was

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ambushing all hopes. Over with. Rosellen pushed her foot down on the clutch and palmed the gearstick knob to her, out of reverse, out of gear.

"Wh--? We're going!" he let out, struggling to rise in the darkness.

Rosellen answered for everything with herself, flinging for all she was worth onto his neck, shoulders, any of him she could fight as he tried to get out from under, adding her weight and terrible determination as the truck tipping forward on the ramp started him sliding off the seat, Darius borne under her as the truck kept picking up momentum, coasting faithfully until it glided from the dam, into the gather of the water.

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