

That the U.S. Forest Service wanted to know, in writing, what he'd done with his day constituted my father's ^{single} most chronic bother about being a ranger. Early on, someone told him the story of another rider-turned-ranger down on the Shoshone national forest in Wyoming. "Trimmed my horses tail and the wind blew all day," read the fellow's first diary try. Then with further thought, he managed to conclude: "From the northeast." My father could swallow

Kaufman,
Forest
Ranger
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advice if he had to, and so he did what he could with the perpetual nag of having to jot his activities into the diary. When he did it was entirely another matter. Two or three weeks he would stay dutiful, then came a Saturday morning when he had seven little yellow blank pages to show for his week, and the filling in had to start:

Bet, what'd I do on Tuesday? That the day it rained and I
on Mazoola paperwork?
worked over the horse stalls?

That was Wednesday. Tuesday you rode up to look over the range
above Noon Creek.

I thought that was Thursday.

You can think so if you like, but you'd be wrong. My mother was careful to seem half-exasperated about these scriiving sessions, but I think she looked forward to the chance to set my father straight on history, even if it was only the past week's. Thursday I baked, and you
took a rhubarb pie for the Bowens when you went to the ^{Indian Head} ~~Old Agency~~
station. Not that Louise Bowen is capable of recognizing a pie.

Well, then, when I rode to the Guthrie Peak lookout, that was--
only yesterday? Friday?

Today is Saturday, yesterday most likely was Friday, my mother
was glad to confirm for him.

Kolosh daggers, a couple of hatchets, and a fire flint apiece.

September's gleanings comprised a second compass--Melander wanted to be double certain about navigation--a small iron kettle, a spyglass, another box of tea and a water cask.

Early in October, New Archangel's month of curtaining rain, the plotters convened about the matter of a canoe.

Karlsson had eyed out a candidate, a twenty-foot shell with a prow which angled up into a high sharp needle of nose. If a sizable

When I became old enough to go into the mountains with him on counting trips, my father perceived relief for his diary situation.

(Previously he had tried Alec, but Alec had the same catch-up-on-it-later proclivity as his.) I think we had not gone a mile along the trail above the South Fork that very first morning when he reined up, said as if it had just occurred to him out of nowhere, Jick, whyn't you kind of keep track of today for me? and presented me a fresh-sharpened stub pencil and a pocket notebook.

It did take a little doing to catch onto my father's style. But after those first days of my reporting into my notebook in the manner of We met up with Dill Egan on the south side of Noon Creek and talked with him about whether he can get a bigger allotment to run ten more steers on and my father squashing it down in his diary to Saw D. Egan about steer proposition, I adjusted.

By now I was veteran enough that the day came readily to the tip of my pencil. Patroled--another principle some early ranger had imparted to my father was that if you so much as left the station to go to the outhouse, you had patroled--Patroled the n. fork of English Creek. Counted D. Withrow's sheep onto allotment. Commenced packing bolts and flanges and cable to Billy Peak lookout site.

My father read it over and nodded. Change that "bolts and flanges and cable" just to "gear." You don't want to be any more definite than necessary in any love note to Uncle Sam. But otherwise it reads like the very Bible.

So the day was summed and we had dined on trout and the campfire was putting warmth and light between us and the night, and we had nothing that needed doing except to contemplate until sleep overcame us. My father was ³laying back against his saddle, hands behind his head and his hat tipped ~~backward~~ forward over his forehead. Ever since a porcupine attracted by the salt of horse sweat had chewed hell out of Alec's saddle on the counting trip a couple or three years ago, we made it policy to keep our saddles by us.

He could make himself more comfortable ^{beside} ~~by~~ a campfire than anybody else I ever knew, my father could. Right now he looked like he could spend till dawn, talking over the Two country and everything in it, if Toussaint Rennie or ~~Isidor Pronovost~~ or Dode Withrow had been on hand to do it with.

My thoughts, though, still circled around Alec--well, sure, somewhat onto Leona too--and what had erupted at supper last night. But again the reluctance lodged itself in me, against outright asking my

father what he thought the prospect was ~~where~~ where Alec was concerned.

there are times a person pure
I suppose ~~a person sometimes~~ doesn't want to hear ~~hard~~ truth.

Instead, I brought out something else that had been dogging my mind.

"Dad? Do you ever wonder about being somebody ~~more~~ else?"

"Such as who? John D. Rockefeller?"

"What I mean, I got to thinking from ^{watching} ~~seeing~~ you and Dode together ^{there at the counting vee}

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Just, you know, whether you'd ever thought about ^{how} ~~he~~ could be in your place and you in his."

"Which would give me three daughters instead of you and Alec, do you mean? Maybe I'll saddle up Mouse and go trade him right now."

"No, not that. I mean life generally. Him being the ranger and



you being the sheepman, is what I had in mind. If ~~things~~ things had gone a little different back when you guys were, uh, young." Were my age, was of course what was hiding behind that.

"Dode jaw to jaw with the Major? Now I know I'm going to head down the mountain and swap straight across, ~~for~~ for the sake of seeing that." In that time the regional forester, the boss of everybody in the national forests of Montana and ^{northern} Idaho, was Evan Kelley. Major

Kelley, for he was like a lot of guys who got a big army

rank during the war, hung on to the title ever afterward as if it

was sainthood. The Major's style of leadership was basic, when he said frog, everybody better jump. I wish I had a nickel for every

time my father opened the mail from Missoula and muttered: "Oh Jesus,

another kelleygram. When does the man ever sleep?"

Everybody did admit, the Major at least made clear the gospel in his messages to his Forest Service men. What he prescribed from his rangers were

no big forest fires and no guff. So far, my father's slate was clean

of both. In those years I ~~gave~~ ^{didn't give} the matter ~~no~~ particular thought, but

I recognize now that my father's long stint ^{in charge of} ~~as~~ the English Creek ^{district} ranger of the Two Medicine National Forest ^{The Pope in Missoula, so to speak.} could only have happened with the blessing of the Major himself.

northern
Idaho?
just Moore
phone call,
1-16-84

Nobody lower could have shielded ranger Varick McCaskill from the transfers that ordinarily happened every few years or so in the Forest Service. No, the Major wanted that tricky northmost portion of the Two, surrounded as so much of it was by other government domains, rangered in a way that wouldn't draw ^{the Forest Service} any bow-wow from the ^{neighboring} Glacier Park staff or the Blackfeet Reservation people; and ^{in a way} ~~that was how~~ that would keep the sheepmen ~~happy~~ content and the revenue they paid for summer allotments flowing in; and in a way that would not repeat the awful fires of 1910 or the later Phantom Woman Mountain burn, right in here above the North Fork. And that was how my father was rangering it. So far.

"I guess I know what you're driving at, though." My father sat up enough to put his boot against a pine piece of squaw wood and shove it farther into the fire, then lay back against his saddle again.

beneath
 a
 small
 window

 beneath a single

hesitant entrance into the governor's presence gathered ~~under~~
~~one~~ ceiling two of the three unhappiest men in New Archangel.
 The third was named Bilibin.

"Excellency."

"Pastor. As you may have heard, our citizenry is fewer
 by four this morning."

"I did happen to hear the, ah, rumor."

incredible

"Yes. Oblige me, if you will. Were these men parishioners
 of yours?" Rosenberg intoned through the list of four names his
 secretary had initiated this blighted day with. Melander: ~~unimpeachable~~,
 that gabby stork of a sailor, ^a Karlsson and Wennberg: the Governor
 could put vague faces to them; average slag among the seven-year
 in here above the North Fork. And that was how
 the saint likes of 1910 or the later Phantom Women Mountain down, right

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 and the government

was surrounded as so much of it was by other Government companies,

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service. No, the Major wanted that black northernmost portion of the

"How come we do

(what we do in life, instead of something else. But I don't know.

I ~~don't~~ do not know. All I've ever been able to figure out, Jick,

is that no job fits as well as a person would like it to, but some

of us fit the job better than others do. That sorts matters out,

a little."

"Yeah, well, I guess. But how do you get in the job in the first place to find out whether you're going to fit it?"

"You watch for a chance to try it, is all. Sometimes the chance comes looking for you, sometimes you got to look for it. Myself, I had my taste of the army because of the war. And it took goddamn little of army life to tell me huh-uh, not for me. Then when I landed back here, I got to be association rider for Noon Creek by setting out to get it, I guess you'd say. What I did, I went around to Dill Egan and old Thad Wainwright and your granddad Isaac and the other Noon Creekers and asked if they'd keep me in mind when it came time to summer the cows up here. Of course, it ~~maybe didn't particularly hurt~~ ~~might have helped~~ that I mentioned how happy I'd be to keep Double W cows from slopping over onto the Noon Creek guys' allotments, as had been going on. Anyway, the job got to be mine."

"What, you mean the Double W was running cattle up here then?"

"Were they ever. They had an allotment, in the early days. A hellish big one. Back then the Williamsons didn't have hold of all that Noon Creek country to graze. So yeah, they had forest range, and sneaked cows onto

anybody else's whenever they could. The number one belief of old Warren Williamson, you know, was that other people's grass might just as well be his." I didn't know. Warren Williamson, father of the present Double W honcho, was before my time; or at least died in California before I was old enough for it to mean anything to me.

"I'll say this one thing for Wendell," my father went on, "he at least buys ^{or rents} the country. Old Warren figured he

could just take it." He gave the pine piece another shove with his boot. "The everlasting damn Double W. The Gobble Gobble You, as ^{the gent who was} ~~the~~ ranger when I was association rider used to call it."

"Is that--" I had it in mind ~~to ask~~ to ask if that was why he and my mother were so dead set against Alec staying on at the Double W, those old contentions between the Williamsons' ranch and the rest

of the Two country. But no, the McCaskill next to me here in the
 fireshine was a readier topic than my absent brother. "Is that how
 you got to be ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~ranger~~ ^{here?} Setting out to get the job?"

He went still for a moment, ~~laying~~ ^d there in that slope ^d position
 against the saddle, feet toward the fire. Then shook his head.

"The Forest Service ^{generally} ~~doesn't~~ work that way, and the Major sure as hell
 doesn't. Point yourself at the Two and they're liable to plunk you
 down on the Beaverhead or over ~~to~~ ^{onto} the Bitterroot. Or doghouse you
 in the Selway, ^{back} ~~when~~ there still was a Selway. No, I didn't aim myself
 at English Creek. It happened."

I was readying to point out to him that "it happened" wasn't a
 real full explanation of job history, when he sat up and moved his
 hat back so as to send his attention toward me. "What about you,
 on all this if-I-was-
 him-and-he-was-me stuff? Somebody you think you'd rather be, is there?"

There he had me. My turn to be less than complete. I answered:

"Not rather, really. Just might have been, is all."

An answer that didn't even start toward truth, that one was.

And not the one I would have resorted to any time up until supper

of the night before. For until then if I was to imagine myself

happening to be anybody else, who could the first candidate have been

but Alec? Wasn't all the basic outline already there? Same bloodline,

same place of growing up, same schooling, maybe even the same bodyframe

if I kept growing at my recent pace. Both of us September arrivals

into the world, even--only the years needed swapping. The remarkable

thing to me was that our interests in life were as different as they

were, and I suppose I had more or less assumed that time was going

to bring mine ^{around} up to about where Alec's were. But now, precisely

~~this~~ ^{this} that possibility was what was unsettling me. I can only describe

it something like this: that previous night at the supper table when

Alec made his announcement about him and Leona and I asked "How come?",

what I intended maybe was something similar to what my parents were

asking of Alec. Something like "Already?" What was the rush? How

could marriage and all be happening this soon, to my own brother?

Yes, maybe put it this way: What I felt, ^{or} at least sensed and

was trying to draw into focus, was the suggestion that Alec's recent course of behavior in some way ~~was~~ ^{ed} foreshadowing my own. ~~That~~ "might have been," after all, has within it "might be." It was like looking through the Toggery window in Gros Ventre at a fancy suit of clothes and saying, by the Christ, they'll never catch me dead in those.

But at the same time noticing that they seem to be your exact fit.

"Like who?" my father ^{was} ~~asked~~ ^{ing}, in a tone which signaled me that he was asking it for the second time.

"Who?" I echoed, trying to ~~not~~ think of anything more.

"Country seems to be full of owls tonight," he joked. Yet he was still attentive enough that I knew I had to come up with something that ~~seemed like~~ ^{resembled} an answer.

"Oh. Yeah. Who." I looked at the fire for some chunk that needed kicking further in, and although none really did, I kicked one anyway. "Well, like Ray. That's all I had in mind, was Ray and me." Ray Heaney was ^{my} ~~by~~ best friend at high school in Gros Ventre.

"Us being the same age and all, like you and Dode."

This brought curiosity into my father's regard of me. "Now that takes some imagination," he said. "Dode and me are Siamese twins compared to you and Ray."

Then he rose, dusting twigs and pine needles off the back of him from where he had ~~been~~ lain. "But I guess imagination isn't a shortage with you. You maybe could supply the rest of us as well, huh? Anyway, let's give some thought to turning in. We got a day ahead of us tomorrow."

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If I was a believer in omens, the start of that next morning ought to have told me something.

The rigamarole of untangling out of our bedrolls and getting the campfire going and making sure the horses hadn't quit the country during the night, all that went usual enough. Then, though, my father glanced around at me from where he had the coffee pot heating over a corner of the fire and asked: "Ready for a cup, Alec?"

Well, that will happen in a family. A passing shadow of absent-mindedness, or the tongue just slipping a cog from what was intended. Ordinarily, being miscalled wouldn't have riled me at all. But all this recent commotion about Alec, and my own wondering about where anybody in this family stood any more, and that fireside spell of brooding I'd done on ~~Alec~~ my brother and myself, and I don't know what the hell all else--it now brought a response which scraped out of me like flint:

"I'm the other one."

Surprise passed over my father. Then I guess what is called contrition.

"You sure as hell are," he agreed in a low voice. "Unmistakably Jick."

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About my name. John Angus McCaskill, I was christened. As soon as I began at the South Fork school, though, and gained a comprehension of what had been done to me, I put away that Angus for good. I have thought ever since that using a middle name is like having a third nostril.

I hadn't considered this before, but by then the John must already have been amended out of all recognition, too. At least I can find no memory of ever being called that, so the change must have happened pretty early in life. According to my mother it next became plain that "Johnnie" didn't fit the boy I was, either. Somehow it just seemed like calling rhubarb vanilla, and she may or may not have been making a joke. With her you couldn't always tell. Anyhow, the family story goes on that she and my father were trying me out as "Jack" when some visitor, noticing that I had the ^{red} ~~family~~ ^{McCaskill} blood-sorrel hair but gray eyes instead of everybody else's blue, and more freckles than Alec and my father combined, and not such a pronouncement of jaw as theirs, said something like: "He looks to me more like the jick of this family."

So I got dubbed for the off-card. For the jack that shares only the color of the jack of trumps. That is to say, in a ^{card} game such as pitch, if spades are led the jack of clubs becomes the jick, and in the taking of tricks the abiding rule is that jack takes jick but jick takes joker. I explain this a bit because I am constantly ~~astounded~~ ^{dumfounded} by how many people, even here in Montana, no longer can play a decent hand of cards. I believe television has got just a hell of a lot to answer for.

Anyway, Jick I became, and have ever been. That is part of the

pondering that I find myself doing now, whether some other name would have shifted my life any. Yet, of what I might change, I keep deciding that that would not be among the first.

This ^{my father and I} breakfast incident rankled a little even after we saddled up and resumed the ride toward the ^{Roman Reef} counting vee where we were to meet ^{Walter Kyle's} ~~Dede Spencer's~~ sheep at around noon. Nor did the weather help any. Clouds closed off the peaks of the mountains, and while it wasn't raining yet, the air ~~damply~~ promised that it intended to. One of those days too clammy to go without a slicker coat and too muggy to wear one in comfort.

To top it all off, we now were on the one stretch of the trail I never liked, with the Phantom Woman Mountain burn on the slope opposite us. Everywhere over there, acre upon acre upon acre, a gray cemetery of snags and stumps. Of death by fire, for the Phantom Woman forest fire had been the one big one in the Two's history except for the blazing summer of 1910.

Ahead of me, my father was studying across at the burn in the gloomy way he always did here. Both of us now moping along, like ^{sorrow's orphans} ~~a pair of poisoned pups~~. If I didn't like the Phantom Woman neighborhood, ^{downright} my father despised it. Plainly he considered this gray dead mountainside the blot on his forest. In those times, when firefighting was done mainly by hand, a runaway blaze was the bane of the Forest Service. } My father's slate was as clean as could be; except for unavoidable smudges before lightning strikes could be snuffed out, timber and grass ~~were~~ everywhere else on the English Creek ranger district were intact, even much of the 1910-burnt

"So long as I have lived, so long have I carved," the dagger-
man responded. "If the spirit people will let me, I will carve even
after I am dead."


Even Melander could not have said why, but that response echoed
around in the corners of his mind this night.

Just past dawn, the four men slid out onto surf.
Usual bruised-looking sky, tatters of fog in the tree tops. This
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← P. 22 before

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 country restoring itself by now. But the awful scar here was unhealed yet. Not that the Phantom Woman fire was in any way my father's own responsibility, for it happened before this district was his, while he still was the ranger at Indian Head rather than here. He was called in as part of the fire crew--this was a blaze that did ~~just~~ run wild for a while, a whole hell of a bunch of men ended up fighting Phantom Woman before they controlled it--but that was all. You ~~shouldn't~~ couldn't tell my father that, though, and this morning I wasn't in a humor to even try.

When time has the weight of a mood such as ours on it, it slows to a creep. Evidently my father figured both the day and I could stand some brightening. Anyway it was considerably short of noon--we were about two-thirds of our way up Roman Reef, where the North Fork hides itself in a timber canyon below and the trail bends away from the face of Phantom Woman to the other mountains beyond--when he turned atop Mouse and called to me:

"How's an early lunch sound to you?"

"Suits me," I of course assured him.



Out like this, my father tended to survive on whatever jumped out of the food pack first. He did have the principle that supper needed to be a cooked meal, especially if it could be trout. But as if leftover trout weren't available for the rest of the day, he was likely to offer up as breakfast a couple of slices of headcheese and a can of tomatoes or green beans, and if you didn't watch him he might do the exact same again for lunch. My mother consequently always made us up enough slab sandwiches for three days' worth of lunches. Of course, by the ~~third~~ ^{second} noon in that high air the bread was about dry enough to strike a match on, but still a better bet than whatever my father was apt to concoct.

We had eaten an applebutter sandwich and a half apiece and were sharing a can of peaches for dessert, harpooning the slices out with our jackknives to save groping into the pack for utensils, when ~~a~~ Mouse suddenly snorted.

"Stand still a minute," my father instructed, which I already was embarked on. ~~doing.~~ Meanwhile he stepped carefully backward the ~~three~~ three or four paces until he was beside the scabbard on Mouse, with the 30.06 rifle in it. }

That time of year in the Two, the thought was automatic in anybody who at all knew what he was doing: look around for bears, for they are coming out of hibernation cantankerous.

What Mouse was signaling, however, proved to be a rider appearing at the bend of the trail downhill from us. He was on a blaze-face sorrell, who in turn snorted at the sight of us. A black pack mare followed into sight, then a light gray ^{pack horse} with spots on his nose and his neck stretched out and his lead rope taut.

"Somebody's new camptender, must be," my father said, and resumed on our peaches.

The rider sat in his saddle that permanent way a lot of those old-timers did, as if he lived up there and couldn't imagine sufficient

at the pastor, who himself was known at the officers' club as a
devout plunger at the card table. The pastor hurried on: "Face
as to bury it clear up to his eyes. He was hard and fast. I took him
with the stick to the house and called Jones and Phillips to see the
curiosity. It was with difficulty that his bill was pulled out again.

old
eyes...
hard &
fast

reason to venture down off the back of a horse. Not much of his face showed between the buttoned-up slicker and the pulled-down brown Stetson, but thinking back on it now, I am fairly sure that my father at once recognized both the horseman and the situation.

Brown 2/4

The brief packstring climbed steadily to us, the ears of the horses sharp in interest at us and Pony ^{and Homer,} and Mouse. The rider showed no attention until he was right up to us. Then, though I didn't see him do anything with the reins, the sorrel stopped and the Stetson veered half out over the slickered shoulder nearest us.

"Hullo, Mac."

~~"I had half a hunch it~~
~~Thought it~~ might be you, Stanley. How the hell are you?"

"Still able to sit up and take nourishment. Hullo, Alec or Jick, as the case may be."

I had not seen him since I was, what--four years old, five? Yet right then I could have tolled off to you a number of matters about Stanley Meixell.

That he was taller than he looked on that sorrel, built in the riderly way of length mostly from his hips down. That he had once been an occasional presence at our meals, stooping first

over the wash basin for a cleanse that included the back of his neck, and then slicking back his hair--I could have said too that it was crow-black and started from a widow's peak--before coming to the table. That unlike a lot of people he did not talk down to children, never delivered them that phony guff such as "Think you'll ever amount"

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K monolog - ited

Braaf was the scale-weight of the three of us. With him ^{here} ~~among us~~,

Wennberg dared do nothing. Turn on me, he had Braaf to worry about;

contend with Braaf, there'd ~~still~~ be me. But now. It has to be

the two of us against this coast because neither of us can last

alone. Wennberg is no ox, he can see that, if his rage doesn't get


in the way. But how to keep him tamped down...

to anything?" That, instead, he once set Alec and me to giggling to the point where my mother threatened to send us from the table, when he told with a straight face us that where he came from they called milk moo juice and eggs cackleberries and molasses long-tailed sugar. Yet of his ~~eight~~ ten or so years since we had last seen him I couldn't have told you anything whatsoever. So it was odd how much immediately arrived back to mind about this unexpected man.

"Jick," I clarified. "'Lo, Stanley."

It was my father's turn to pick up the conversation. "Thought I recognized that ^{black} pack mare. Back up in this country to be campjack for the Busby boys, are you?"

"Yeah." Stanley's yeah was that Missourian slowed-down kind,



almost in two parts: yeh-uh. And his voice sounded huskier than it ought to, as if a rasp had been used across the top of it. "Yeah, these times, I guess being campjack is better than no jack at all." Protocol was back to him now. He asked my father, "Counting them onto the range, are you?"

"Withrow's band yesterday, and Kyle's and Hahn's ~~Dode Spencer's~~ today."

"Quite a year for feed up here. This's been a million dollar rain, ain't it? Brought the grass up ass-high to a tall Indian. Though I'm getting to where I could stand a little sunshine to thaw out with, myself."

"Probably have enough to melt you," my father predicted, "soon enough."

"Could be." Stanley looked ahead up the trail, as if just noticing that it continued on from where we stood. "Could be," he repeated.

Nothing followed that, either from Stanley or my father, and it began to come through to me that this conversation was seriously kinked in some way. These two men had not seen each other for the larger part of ten years, so why didn't they have anything to say to one another besides this small-change talk about weather and grass? And already were running low on that? And both were wearing a careful look, as if the trail suddenly was a slippery place?

Finally my father offered: "Want some peaches? A few in here we haven't stabbed dead yet."

"Naw, thanks. I got to head on up the mountain or I'll have sheepherders after my hide." Yet Stanley did not quite go into motion; seemed, somehow, to be storing up an impression of the pair of us to take with him.

My father fished out another peach slice and handed me the can to finish. Along with it came his casual question: "What was it you did to your hand?"

more
conuster?

2

It took me a blink or two to realize that although he said it in my direction, the query was intended for Stanley. I saw then that a handkerchief was wrapped around the back of Stanley's right hand, and that he was resting that hand on the saddle horn with his left hand atop it, the reverse of usual procedure there. Also, as much of the handkerchief as I could see had started off white but now showed stains like dark rust.

You know how it is, that Bubbles cayuse--Stanley ^{tossed a look} ~~looked~~ over his shoulder to the gray packhorse--was kind of snakey this morning. Tried to kick me into next week. Took some skin off, is all.

We ~~all~~ contemplated Bubbles. As horses go, he looked capable not just of assault, but maybe pillage and plunder and probably arson too. He was ewe-necked, and accented ^{that feature} ~~it~~ by stretching ^{back} ~~stubbornly~~ against the lead rope even now that he was standing still. "A dragger," the Forest Service packer Isidor Pronovost called such a creature: "You sometimes wonder if the sunnabitch mightn't tow easier if you ^{was} ~~ts~~ to tip him over onto his back." The constellation of dark nose spots which must have given Bubbles his name--at least I couldn't see

~~anything else nameable about him--drew a person's~~ ^{attention} ~~look~~, but if you happened to glance beyond ^{those markings,} ~~them~~, you saw that Bubbles was ^{peering} ~~looking~~ back at you as if he'd like to be standing on your spine. How such creatures get into pack strings, I just don't know. I suppose the ~~mortgage bankers~~ Good Help Hebners and Ed Van Bebbers same way ~~Good Help Hebners~~ get into the human race.

I don't remember you as having much hide to spare, my father said

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then to Stanley. During the viewing of Bubbles, the expression on my father's face had shifted from careful. He now looked as if he'd made up his mind about something. "Suppose you could stand some company?" Awful casual, as if the idea had just strolled up to him out of the trees. "Probably it's no special fun running a packstring one-handed."



Now this was a prince of an offer, but of course just wasn't possible. Evidently my father had gone absent-minded again, this time about the counting obligation he'd mentioned not ten sentences earlier. I was just set to remind him of our appointments with Walter's and Fritz's sheep when he added on: "Jick here could maybe ride along with you."

I hope I didn't show the total of ^{astonishment} ~~surprise~~ I felt. ⁹ Some must have lopped over, though, because Stanley promptly enough was saying: Aw, no, Mac. Jick's got better things to do than haze me along.

Think about morning, my father came back at him. Those packs and knots are gonna be several kinds of hell, unless you're more left-handed than you've ever shown.

Aw, no. I'll be out a couple or three days, you know. Longer if any of those herders have got trouble.

Jick's been out that long with me any number of times. And your cooking's bound to be better for him than mine.

Well, Stanley began, and stopped. ^{Christamighty,} He seemed to be considering. Matters were passing me by before I could even see them coming.

I will always credit Stanley Meixell for putting the next two questions in the order he did.

It ought to be up to Jick. Stanley looked directly down at me. How do you feel about playing nursemaid to somebody so goddamn dumb as to get himself kicked?

The corner of my eye told me my father suggested a pretty enthusiastic response to any of this.

Oh, I feel fine about--I mean, sure, Stanley. I could, uh, ride along. If you really want. Yeah.

Stanley looked down at my father now. Mac, you double sure it'd be okay?

Even I was able to translate that. What was my father going to face from my mother for sending me off camptending into the mountains with Stanley for a number of days?

Sure, my father ^{stated} ~~said~~, as if doubt wasn't worth wrinkling the brain for. Bring him back when he's dried out behind the ears.

Well, then. The brown Stetson tipped up maybe two inches, and Stanley swung a slow look around at the pines and the trail and the mountainslope as if this was a site he might want to remember. More blue-black. of his face showed. Dark eyes, ~~brown~~ ^{squint}. Into the corners of them, a lot of routes of wrinkles. Thin thrifty nose. Thrift of line at the mouth and chin, too. A face with no waste to it. In fact, a little worn down by use, was the impression it gave. "I guess we ought to be getting," Stanley proposed. "Got everything you need, Jick?"

I had no idea in hell what I needed for going off into the Rocky Mountains with a one-handed campjack. I mean, I was wearing my slicker coat, my bedroll was behind my saddle, my head was more or less on my shoulders despite the jolt of surprise that all this had sent through me, but were those nearly enough? Anyway, I managed to blurt: "I guess so."

Stanley delivered my father the longest gaze he had yet. "See you in church, Mac," he said, then nudged the sorrel into motion.

The black packhorse and the light gray ugly one had passed us by the time I swung onto Pony, and my father was standing with his thumbs in his pockets, looking at the series of three horse rumps and the back of Stanley Meixell, as I reined around onto the trail. I stopped beside him long enough to see if he was going offer any explanation, or instructions,

98A

or edification of any damn sort at all. His face, still full of that decision, said he wasn't. All I got from him was: "Jick, he's worth knowing."

"But I already know him."

No response to that. None in prospect. The hell with it. I rode past my father and muttered as I did: "Don't forget ^{to do} the diary."

"Thanks for reminding me," my father said poker-faced. "I'll give it my utmost."

98A

98A follows →

The Busby brothers, I knew, ran three bands of sheep on their forest allotment, which stretched ^{beneath the cliff face of Roman Reef} north of us from the north fork of English Creek. Stanley had slowed beyond the first bend of the trail for me to catch up, or maybe to make sure I actually was coming along

on this grand tour of sheepherders. # Which camp do we head for first?
I called ahead to him.

"Canada Dan's, he's the closest. About under that promontory in the reef is where his wagon is. If we sift right along for the next couple hours or so we'll be there." Stanley and the sorrel were on the move again, in that easy ^{style} way longtime riders and their ^{accustomed} horses have. One instant you see the pair of them standing and the next you see them in motion together, and there's been no rigamarole in between. Stopped and now going, that's all. But Stanley did leave behind for me the observation: "Quite a day to be going places, ain't it."

"Yeah, I guess." →

It couldn't have been more than fifteen minutes after we left my father, though, when Stanley reined his horse off the trail into a little clearing and the packhorses followed. When I rode up alongside, he said: I got to go visit a tree. You keep on ahead, Jick. I'll catch right up.

I had the trail to myself for the next some minutes. Just when I was about to rein around and see what had become of Stanley, the white of the sorrel's blaze flashed into sight. Be right there, Stanley called, motioning me to ride on.

But he caught up awfully gradually, and in fact must have made a second stop when I went out of sight around a switchback. And before long, he was ~~was~~ absent again. This time when he didn't show up and didn't show up, I halted Pony and waited. ~~Just~~ as I was about to go back and start a search, here Stanley came, calling out as before: "Be right there."

I began to wonder a bit. Not only had I been volunteered into this expedition by somebody other than myself, I sure as the devil had not signed on to lead it. ~~the next~~ Stanley lagged from sight So this time, I was determined to wait until ~~Stanley~~ ^{he} was up with me. And as I sat there on Pony, firmly paused, I began to hear him long before I could see him.

My name, she is Pancho,

I work on a rancho.

I make a dollar a day.

Stanley's singing voice surprised me, a clearer, younger tone than his raspy talk.

So did his song.

indent
15 spaces

"I go to see Suzy,
She's got a doozy.
Suzy take my dollar away."

she's a doozy

the
of the

When Stanley drew even with me I still ~~could~~ couldn't see much of
his eyes under the brim of the pulled-down hat, although I was studying
pretty hard this time.

again

Yessir, Stanley announced as the sorrel stopped, great day for
the race, ain't it?

The race? I gaped.

The human race. Stanley pivoted in his saddle--a little unsteadily,
I thought--enough to scan at the black pack mare and then the gray one.
He got a white-eyed glower in return from the gray. Bubbles there is
still in kind of an owly mood. Mad because he managed to only kick my
hand instead of my head, ^{most likely} ~~maybe~~. You're doing fine up ahead, Jick, I'll
wander along behind while Bubbles works on his sulking.

more

There was nothing for it but head up the trail again. At least
now I knew for sure what my situation was. If there lingered any last
least iota of doubt, Stanley's continued disappearances and his ongoing
croon dispatched it.

indent
15 spaces

"My brother is Sancho,
he try with a banjo
to coax Suzy to woo."

I have long thought that the two commonest afflictions in Montana--
it may be true everywhere, but then I haven't been everywhere--are drink
and orneriness. True, my attitude has thawed somewhat since I have become
old enough to indulge in the pair myself now and again. But back there

on that mountain those years ago, all I could think was that I had on my hands the two worst of such representations, a behind-the-bush bottle-tipper and a knothheaded packhorse.

indent
15 spaces

"But she tell him no luck,
the price is ^{an extra} ~~another~~ buck,
him and the banjo make two."

#

I spent a strong hour or so in contemplation of my father and just what he had saddled me with, here. All the while mad enough to bite sticks in two. Innocent as a ^{goddamn} daisy, I had let my father detour me up the trail with Stanley Meixell. ~~Samritan of the week, that was me.~~ And now to find that my trail compadre showed every sign of being a warbling boozehound. ~~Why was I not informed of this?~~ Couldn't I, for Christ's sake, be told the full extent of the situation before I was shoved into it? What was in the head of that father of mine? Anything?

cut

After this siege of ^{dull} ~~black mulling~~, a new angle of thought did break through. It occurred to me to wonder just how my father ought to have alerted me to Stanley's condition beforehand.

~~condition.~~ Cleared his throat and announced, Stanley, excuse us but Jick and I got something to discuss over here in the jackpines, we'll be right back? Worked his way behind Stanley and pantomimed to me a swig from a bottle? Neither of those seemed what could be called etiquette, and that left me with the perturbing suggestion that maybe it'd been up to me to see the situation for myself. # Which gave me another hour or so of heavy chewing, trying to figure out how I was supposed to follow events that sprung themselves on me from nowhere. How do you brace for that, whatever age you are?

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#

Canada Dan's sheep were bunched in a long thick line against a stand of jackpine. When we rode up a lot of blatting was going on, as if there was an uneasiness among them. A sheepherder who knows what he is doing in timber probably is good in open country too, but vice versa is not necessarily the case, and I remembered my father mentioning that Canada Dan had been herding over by Cut Bank, plains country. A herder new to timber terrain and skittish about it will dog the bejesus out of his sheep, keep the band tight together for fear of losing some.

mod ~~As we rode up,~~ Canada Dan's patch-marked sheepdog looked weary, panting, and I saw Stanley study considerably the way these sheep were crammed along the slope.

Been looking for you since day before yesterday, Canada Dan greeted us. I'm goddamn near out of canned milk.

That so? said Stanley. Lucky thing near isn't the same as out.

Canada Dan was looking me up and down now. You that ranger's kid?

I didn't care for the way that was put, and just said back: Jick McCaskill. Too, I was wondering how many more times that day I was going to need to identify myself to people I'd had no farthest intention of getting involved with.

Canada Dan targeted on Stanley again. Got to bring a kid along to play nursemaid for you now, Stanley? Must be getting on in years.

I bunged up my hand, Stanley responded shortly. Jick's been generous enough to pitch in with me.

Canada Dan shook his head as if my sanity was at issue. He's

gonna regret charity when he sees the goddamn chore we got for ourselves up here.

What would that be, Dan?

About fifteen head of goddamn dead ones, that's what. They got onto some deathcamas, maybe three days back. Poisoned ~~themselves~~ ^{themselves} before you ~~could~~ ^{can} say sic 'em. Canada Dan reported all this as if he was an accidental passerby instead of being responsible for these animals. ~~Former~~ ^{Remains of} animals, they were now.

That's a bunch of casualties, Stanley agreed. I didn't happen to notice the pelts anywhere there at the wag--

Happened right up over here, Canada Dan went on as if he hadn't heard, gesturing to the ridge close behind him. Just glommed onto that deathcamas like it was goddamn candy. C'mon here, I'll show you. The herder shrugged out of his coat, tossed it down on the grass, pointed to it and instructed his dog: Stay, Rags. The dog came and lay on the coat, facing the sheep, and Canada Dan trudged up the ridge without ever glancing back at the dog or us.

I began to dread the way this was trending.

The place Canada Dan led us to was a pocket meadow of bunch grass interspersed with ~~pretty white~~ ^{cream-colored} blossoms and with gray mounds here and there on it. The blossoms were deathcamas, and the mounds were the dead ewes. Even as cool as the weather had been they were bloated almost to bursting.

} new
fragging

That's them, the herder identified for our benefit. It's sure convenient of you fellows to show up. All that goddamn skinning, I

can stand all the help I can get.

Stanley did take the chance to get a shot in on him. You been too occupied the past three days to get to them, I guess? But it bounced off Canada Dan like a berry off a buffalo.

~~The~~ ^{of us} ~~We~~ all three ^{corpse} looked at the sheep for awhile. ~~There's not all that~~ ~~There is not too~~ much conversation to be made ~~much you can say about bloated sheep carcasses.~~ After a bit, though,

Canada Dan offered in a grim satisfied way: That'll teach the goddamn buggers to eat deathcamas.

Well, Stanley expounded next. There's no such thing as one-handed skinning. Which doubled the sense of dread in me. I thought to myself, But there is one-handed tipping of a bottle, and one-handed dragging me into this campjack expedition, and one-handed weaseling out of what was impending here next and ~~9~~ All this while, Stanley was looking off in some direction carefully away from me. "I can be unloading the grub into Dan's wagon while this goes on, then come back with the mare so's we can lug these pelts in. We got it to do." We? "Guess I better go get at my end of it."

Stanley reined away, leading the pack horses toward the sheepwagon, and Canada Dan beaded on me. "Don't just stand there in your tracks, kid. Plenty of these goddamn pelters for both of us."

P. 104A follows →

104A

So for the next long while I was delving in ewe carcasses.
Manhandling ^{each} ~~the~~ rain-soaked corpse onto its back, steadying it there,
then starting in with that big incision along the belly which, if your
jackknife slipped just a little bit, ~~would~~ ⁵ bring ⁵ the guts pouring out
all over your project. Slice along the insides of the legs, then trim
the ~~the~~ pelt off the pale dead flesh. It grudges me even now to say it,
but Stanley was accurate, it did have to be done, because the



pelts at least would bring a dollar apiece for the Busby brothers and a dollar then was still worth holding in your hand. ~~But~~ ^{though.} that it was necessary did not make it any less snotty a job, I don't know whether you have ever skinned a sheep which has lain dead in the rain for a few days, but the clammy wet wool adds into the situation the possibility of wool poisoning, so that the thought of puffed painful hands accompanies all your handling of the pelt. That and a whole lot else on my mind, I slit and slit and slit, tugging pelt off bloated belly and stiffened legs. I started off careful not to work fast, in the hope that Canada Dan would slice right along and thereby skin the majority of the carcasses. It of course turned out that his strategy was identical and that ~~he~~ ^{Canada Dan} had had countless more years of practice at being slow than I did. In other circumstances I might even have admired the drama in the way he would stop often, straighten up to ease what he told me several times was the world's worst ^{goddamn} crick in his back, and contemplate my scalpel technique skeptically before finally bending back to his own. Out of his experience my father always testified that he'd rather work any day with sheepherders ~~rather~~ ^{le} than cowboys. You might come across a herder that's loony now and then, but at least they aren't so apt to be such self-inflated sonsabitches. Right about now I wondered about that choice. If anywhere near Canada Dan was representative, sheepherders didn't seem to be ~~any~~ ^{ship} bargains of companionability either.

Finally I gave up on trying to outslow Canada Dan and went at the skinning quick as I could, to get it over with.

anywhere near
completing

Canada Dan's estimate of fifteen dead ewes proved to be eighteen. Also I noticed that six of the pelts were branded with a bar above the number, signifying that the ewe was a mother of twins. Which summed out to the fact that besides the eighteen casualties, there were two dozen newly motherless lambs who would weigh light at shipping time.

This came to Stanley's attention too when he arrived back leading the pack mare and we--or rather I, because Stanley of course didn't have the hand for it and Canada Dan made no move toward the task whatsoever--slung the first load of pelts onto the pack saddle. Guess we know what all that lamb blatting's about, now, observed Stanley. Canada Dan didn't seem to hear this, either.

Instead he turned and was trudging rapidly across the slope toward his sheepwagon. He whistled the dog from his coat and sent him policing after a few ewes who had dared to stray out onto open grass, then yelled back over his shoulder to us: It's about belly time. C'mon to the wagon when you get those goddamn pelts under control, I got us a meal fixed.

I looked down at my hands and forearms, so filthy with blood and other sheep stuff I didn't even want to think about that I hated to touch the reins and saddlehorn to climb onto Pony. But ~~I did~~ I did, climb on, for it was inevitable as if Bible-written that now I had to ride in with Stanley to the sheepwagon, unload these wet slimy pelts because he wasn't able, ride back out with him for the second batch, load them, ride back in and unload--seeing it all unfold I abruptly

spoke out: Stanley!

Yeah, Jick? The brown Stetson turned most of the way in my direction. # All the ways to say what I intended to competed in my mind. Stanley, this just isn't going to work out... Stanley, this deal was my father's brainstorm and not mine, I'm heading down that trail for home... Stanley, I'm not up to--to riding herd on you and doing the work of this wampus cat of a sheepherder and maybe getting wool poisoning and-- but when my mouth did move, I heard it mutter:

Nothing, I guess.

After wrestling the second consignment of pelts into shelter under Canada Dan's sheepwagon, I went up by the door to wash. Beside the basin on the chopping block lay a sliver of gray soap, which proved to be so coarse my skin nearly grated off along with the sheep blood and other mess. But I at least felt scoured fairly clean.

Is there a towel? I called into the sheepwagon with what I considered a fine tone of indignation in my voice.

The upper part of Canada Dan appeared at the dutch door. Right there in front of you, he pointed to a gunny sack hanging from a corner of the wagon. Your eyes bad?

I dried off as best I could on the ^{burlap,} ~~gunny sack~~, feeling now as if I'd been rasped from elbow to fingertip, and swung on into the sheepwagon. # The table of this wagon was a square of wood about the size of a big checkerboard, which pulled out from under the bunk at the far end ~~of the wagon~~ and then was supported by a gate leg which folded down, and Stanley had tucked himself onto the seat on one

our dining site.
side of ~~in~~ Canada Dan as cook and host I knew would need to be nearest the stove and sit on a stool at the outside end of the table, so I slid into the seat opposite Stanley, going real careful because three people in a sheepwagon is about twice too many.

KEEYIPE! erupted from under my inmost foot, about the same instant my nose caught the distinctive smell of wet dog warming up.

Here now, what the hell kind of manners is that, walking on my dog? He does that again, Rags, you want to bite the notion right out of him. This must have been Canada Dan's idea of hilarity, for he laughed a little now in what I considered an egg-sucking way.

Or it may simply have been his pleasure over the meal he had concocted. Onto the table the herder plunked a metal plate with a boiled chunk of meat on it, then followed that with a stained pan of what looked like small moth-balls.

Like I say, I figured you might finally show up today, so I fixed you a duke's choice of grub, he crowed. Get yourselves started with that hominy. Then, picking up a hefty butcher knife, Canada Dan slabbed off a thickness of the grayish greasy meat and toppled it aside. You even got your wide choice of meat. Here's mutton.

He sliced off another slab. Or then again here's grewed-up lamb.

The butcher knife produced a third plank-thick piece. Or you can always have sheep meat.

Canada Dan divvied the slices onto our plates and concluded:
A menu you don't get just everywhere, ain't it?

Yeah, Stanley said slower than ever, and swallowed experimentally.

The report crossed my mind that I had just spent a couple of hours elbow-deep in dead sheep and now I was being expected to eat some of one, but I tried to keep it traveling. Time, as it's said, was the essence here. The only resource a person has against mutton is to eat it fast, before it has a chance for the tallow in it to congeal. So I poked mine into me pretty rapidly, and even so the last several bites were greasy going. Stanley by then wasn't much more than getting started.

While Canada Dan forked steadily through his meal and Stanley mused around with his I finished off the hominy on the theory that anything you mixed into the digestive process with mutton was probably all to the good. Then I gazed out the dutch door of the sheepwagon while waiting on Stanley. The afternoon was going darker, a look of coming rain. My father more than likely was done by now with the Walter Kyle's and Fritz Hahn's bands. counting of ~~Dede Spencer's band~~. He would be on his way up to the Billy Peak lookout, and the big warm dry camp tent there, and the company of somebody other than Canada Dan or Stanley Meixell, and probably another supper of brookies. I hoped devoutly the rain already had started directly onto whatever piece of trail ^{my father} he might be riding just now.

Canada Dan meanwhile had rolled himself a cigarette and was filling the wagon with blue smoke while Stanley worked himself ^{toward} to the halfway point of his slab of mutton. Staying the night, ain't you?

Letter on side of
to Daniel & Canada Dan.
I wondered who
that was, then it
said "me". mutton
& hominy to me
no it was
C Dan.

detail
of
wagon,
or Dan's
country

the herder said more as observation than question. You can set up
the tepee, regular goddamn canvas hotel. It only leaks a little
where it's ripped in that one corner. Been meaning to sew the
sumbitch
sonofabitch up.

Well, actually, no, said Stanley. [#] This perked me up more than
anything had in hours. Maybe there existed some fingernail of hope
for Stanley after all. We got all that pack gear to keep dry, so
we'll just go on over to that line cabin down on ~~Spencer's~~ ^{the} school
section. Fact is--Stanley here took the chance to shove away his
still mutton-laden plate and ^{climb onto} ~~get to~~ his feet as if night was
stampeding toward him--we better be getting ourselves over there if
we're gonna beat dark. You ready, Jick?

Was I.

———
The ~~old Withrow~~ line cabin stood just outside the eastern boundary
of the Two forest, partway back down the mountain. We rode more than an hour
to get there, the weather steadily heavier and grimmer all around us,
and Stanley fairly grim himself, I guess from the mix of alcohol and
mutton sludging around beneath his belt. Once when I glanced back to
be sure I still had him I happened to see him make an awkward lob into
the trees, that exaggerated high-armed way when you throw with your
wrong hand. So he ^{finally} ~~had~~ run out of bottle, and at least I could look
^{companion} forward to an unpickled Stanley from here on. I hoped he wasn't the
kind who came down with the DTs as he dried out.

back
in
with

de
Tearan
Roman
Reef?

rain?

///

Our route angled us down in such a back and forth way that Roman Reef steadily stood above us now on one side, now on our other. A half-mile-high stockade of graybrown

stone, claiming all the sky to the west. ~~and mountains~~ Even with Stanley and

thunderclouds on my mind, I made room in there to appreciate the ^{might} ~~power~~

~~and glory~~ of Roman Reef. Of the peaks and buttresses of the Two generally,

for as far as I'm concerned, Montana without its mountain ranges ~~and~~

~~foothills~~ would just be Nebraska stretched north.

At last, ahead of us showed up an orphan outcropping, a ~~large~~ formation

~~sort of~~ like a crown of rock but about as big as a railroad roundhouse.

Below it ~~would~~ ^{ran} be the boundary fence, and just outside the fence the

line cabin. About time, too, because we were getting some first spits

of rain, and thunder was telling of lightning not all that far off.

The whole way from Canada Dan's sheepwagon Stanley had said never

a word



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65

nor even glanced ahead any farther than his horse's ears, didn't even stir ^{now as} ~~when~~ we reached the boundary fence, ^{of barbed wire.} In a hurry to get us into the cabin before the weather cut loose I hopped off Pony to open the gate.

My hand was just almost to the top wire hoop when there ^{came} ~~was~~ a terrific yell:

GODaMIGHTy, get aWAY from that!

I jumped back as if flung, looking ^{crazily} around to see what had roused Stanley like ^{this} ~~that~~.

Go find a club and knock ^{the gatewire off} ~~it open~~ with that, he instructed.
You happen to be touching that wire and lightning hits that fence,
I'll have fried Jick for supper.

So I humored him, went off and found a sizable dead limb of jackpine and tapped the hoop up off the top of the gate stick with it and then used it to fling the gate ~~off~~ to one side the way you might flip a big snake. The hell of it was, I knew Stanley was out-and-out right. A time, lightning hit Ed Van Bebber's fence up ^{South Fork} ~~the~~ road from the English Creek ^{ranger} ~~station~~ and the whole top wire melted for about fifty yards in either direction, dropping off in little chunks as if it'd been minced up by fencing pliers. I knew as well as anything not to touch a wire fence in a storm, ^{why} ~~then~~ had I damn near done it? All I can say in my own defense is that you just try going around with Stanley Meixell on your mind as much as he had been on mine since mid-morning, and see if you don't do one or another thing dumb.

I was resigned by now to what was in store for me at the cabin, so

started in on it right away, the unpacking of the mare and Bubbles. Already I had size, my father's long bones the example to mine, and could do the respected packer's trick of reaching all the way across the horse's back to lift those off-side packs from where I was standing, instead of ~~going~~ ^{trotting} back and forth around the horse all the time. I did the mare and then carefully began uncargoing Bubbles, Stanley hanging onto the ~~bridle~~ ^{halter} and matter-of-factly promising Bubbles he would yank his goddamn ~~head~~ ^{spotty} off if ~~he~~ ^{the horse} gave any trouble. Then as I swung the last pack over and off, a hefty lift I managed to do without bumping the pack saddle and giving Bubbles an excuse for excitement, Stanley pronounced: Oh, to be young and ~~fucking~~ ^{diddling} twice a day again.

He took notice of the considerable impact of this on me.

'Scuse my French, Jick. It's just a saying us old coots have.

Nonetheless it echoed around in me as I lugged the packs through the cabin door and stood them in a corner. ⁹¹ By now thunder was applauding lightning ~~higher up the mountain~~ ^{below us as well as above} and the rain was arriving in earnest, my last couple of trips outside considerably damp.

Stanley meanwhile was trying to inspire a fire in the rickety stove.

The accumulated chill in the cabin had us both shivering as we lit a kerosene lantern and waited for the stove to produce some result.

^S Feel in here like it's gonna frost, I muttered.

Yeah, Stanley agreed. "About a foot, ^{six inches deep.}"

That delivered me a thought I didn't particularly want. What, ah, what if this turns to snow? I could see myself blizzarded in here for a week with this reprobate.

Geo. Engler
letter
5 Jan '84

Aw, I don't imagine it will. Lightning like this, it's probably just a thunderstorm. Stanley contemplated the rain spitting onto the cabin window and evidently was reminded that his pronouncement came close to being good news. Still, you never know, he amended,

was not much of a layout. Simply
The cabin ~~wasn't much~~, just a roofed-over bin of jackpine logs, maybe fifteen feet long and ten wide and with a single window beside the door at the south end, ^{it'd be} but at least ~~was~~ drier than outside. Outside in fact was showing every sign of anticipating a night-long bath. The face of the Rocky Mountains gets more weather than any other place I know of and ^{a person has} you just ~~have~~ to abide by that fact. I considered the small stash of wood behind the stove, mostly kindling, and headed back out for enough armfuls for the night and morning. Off along the tree line I found plenty of squaw wood, which already soused from the rain but luckily looked ~~damp~~ but snapped okay when I tromped it in half over a log.

With that provisioning done and a bucket of water lugged from a seep of spring about seventy yards out along the slope, I declared myself in for the evening and shed my wet slicker. Stanley through all this stayed half-propped, half-sitting on an end of the little plank table. Casual as a man waiting for ^{eternity} ~~a bus~~. His stillness set me to wondering ^{Wondering} just how much whiskey was in him ^{after all}, he'd been like a mummy on the ride from Canada Dan's camp, ^{too awful} and so before long I angled across the room, as if exercising the saddle hours out of my legs, for a closer peek at him.

At first I wasn't enlightened by what I saw. The crowfoot lines

at the corners of Stanley's eyes were showing deep and sharp, as if he was squinched up to study closely at something, and he seemed washed-out, whitish, across that part of his face, too. Like any Montana kid I had seen my share of swacked-up people, yet Stanley didn't really look liquored. No, he looked more like--

How's that hand of yours? I inquired, putting my suspicion as lightly as I knew how.

Stanley roused. Feels like it's been places. He moved his gaze past me and around the cabin interior. Not so bad quarters. Not much worse than I remember this pack rat palace, anyway.

Maybe we ought to have a look, I persisted. That wrapping's seen better times. Before he could waltz off onto some other topic I stepped over to him and ^{began to untie} ~~untied~~ the rust-colored wrapping.

When I unwound that fabric, the story was gore. The back of Stanley's hand between the first and last knuckles was skinned raw where the sharp edge of Bubbles' hoof had shoved off skin: raw and seepy and butchered-looking.

Jesus H. Christ, I breathed.

Aw, could be worse. Even as he said so, though, Stanley ^{seemed} ~~looked~~ ~~even~~ more pale and eroded around the eyes. I'll get it looked at when I get to town.

There's some bag balm in my saddlebag there. Get the lid off that for me, will you, and I'll dab some on.

Stanley slathered the balm thick across the back of his hand and I stepped over again and began to rewrap it for him. He noticed that the wrapping was not the blood-stained handkerchief. Where'd you come up with that?

out the on
use of "seem"
on 2nd p.

The tail off my clean shirt.

Your ma's gonna like to ^{find} ~~hear~~ that.

I shrugged. Trouble ^{was} ~~seemed~~ lined up deep enough here in company with Stanley that my mother's turn at it ^{seemed} ~~was~~ a long way off.

Feels like new, Stanley ^{tried to assure me,} ~~said,~~ moving his bandaged hand with a flinch he didn't want to show and I didn't really want to see. What if he passed out on me? What if--I tried to think ~~of~~ of anything I had ever heard about blood poisoning and gangrene. ^{Supposedly those} ~~I seemed to know that they~~ took a while to develop. But then, this stint of mine with Stanley was beginning to seem like a while.

~~I figured it was~~ ^{It also seemed to me} time to try get Stanley's mind, not to say my own, off his wound, and

to bring up what I ^{considered} ~~figured~~ was a natural topic. So I queried:

What are we going to do about supper?

Stanley peered at me a considerable time. Then said: I seem to distinctly remember Canada Dan feeding us.

That was a while back, I defended. Sort of a second lunch.

Stanley shook his head a bit and voted himself out. I don't just feel like anything, right now. You go ahead.

So now things had reached the point where I had lost out even on my father's scattershot version of cooking, and was going to have to invent my own. I held ^{another} ~~a~~ considerable mental conversation with ^{U.S. forest ranger} ~~my~~ ^{Varick McCaskill} father about that, meanwhile fighting the stove to get any real heat from it. At last I managed to warm a can of ~~pork and beans~~ and ate →

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sack.

If and perhaps; coax at them as he would, Wennberg could make them do no more than somersault into perhaps and if. This, this damned skitter of a matter...Wennberg did not at all have well-bottom faith in the prospects of Melander's plan, but neither did he see, now, any clear path out of it. What Wennberg imagined was going to be his power over Melander and the other two somehow, by some coil of the escape plan, was turning out to be their power over him.

Karlsson bided the time with less edginess than the others. Since he went through life anyway in the manner of a man in wait, the space of weeks until the escape was to him simply one more duration, and not ^{so} long as most. Time passed, or you put it past.

Archangel day sound carried like light, and from the black-smith shop within the stockade began to ~~come~~ ^{ring chorus} the measured clamor of hammer against anvil. # As if roused by the clangor, Karlsson ^{to the taller man.} ~~turned back to Melander.~~

"Two of us are not enough strength for that much paddling."

"No," Melander agreed. "Our other man is Braaf."

"Braaf? That puppy?"

Melander tendered his new co-conspirator a serious smile which might have been a replica of Karlsson's own aboard the schooner in Stockholm harbor.

provisions I ~~found in~~ ^{dug out of} one of the packs of groceries for the herders, and exploring further I came up ^{with} ~~some~~ bread and ^{some promising} ~~other~~ sandwich material.

An imminent meal is my notion of a snug fortune. I was even humming the Pancho and Sancho and Suzy tune when, ready to dine, I sat myself down across the table from Stanley.

He ~~thought~~ looked a little quizzical, then drew in a deep sniff. Then queried:

"Is that menu of yours what I think it is?"

"Huh? Just pork and beans, and an onion sandwich. Why?"

"Never mind."

~~4~~ Canada Dan's cooking must have stuck with me more than I was aware, though, as I didn't even think to open any canned fruit for dessert.

Meanwhile the weather ^{was growing} ~~grew~~ steadily more rambunctious. Along those mountainsides thunder can roll and roll, and ^{constant} ~~claps~~ were





"Then you don't know fuck-all about where we are! You're running
us blind down this coast!"

"I know Astoria is ahead. ^{That's} ~~That is~~ enough."

"Hell take you, it's enough! You think you're too keen to be
among us, Karlsson. You've had that about you since we touched away
from that Russian dungpile. Afraid maybe I'll smudge off on you, or
long-fingers Braaf here'll pick your pocket, you act like. But
play us the fool like this. . . . We're hopeless as

Methusaleh's cock, without maps to go by! This coast'll . . .

headed type carved by a tribe far south along the coast and
occasionally bartered north as prized items of trade.

~~70A~~
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Pon

I believe my hair was swept straight on end, from that blast of
of noise and light. I know I had trouble getting air into my body,
past the blockade where my heart was trying to ~~like~~ climb out my throat.

Stanley, though, didn't show any particular ruffle at all. The quick
hand of God, my ma used to say.

Yeah, well, I informed him when I ^{found} ~~got~~ the breath for it, I'd just
as soon it grabbed around someplace else.


I stood waiting for the next cataclysm, although what really was



no 9 Theirs was a shoreside life which

~~Their coastal life~~ asks to be called nothing less than sumptuous.
coastal

In spawning time the rivers were stippled thick with salmon, veins of protein bulging there in the water to be wrested, fileted, dried for the winter larder. Abovestream the wealth was wood, particularly the cedar whose cunning these people knew how to ~~release~~ ^{set free}; under their hands it transformed to capacious lodges, canoes the length of a decent trawler, and art, ~~alarming~~ ^{the most startling of} art. Tree-sized columns of carvings simply offered the most evident form of how these tribes told stories of the creatures of timber and sea, sang and recited them, danced and acted them behind masks, in ~~cold~~ ^{chill} times wore pelts as if taking the saga-animals into themselves. (And thereby drew the attention of white newcomers to the coast, who bartered for those furs to cargo them beyond the bend of the world and barter in turn to yellow people: linkage queer in its way as any carved concatenation.) Out of this vivid swirl waited, inevitably, the reputation of these coastal people as canoe warriors and slave-takers--and ~~specific~~ illustrative tales such as that matter of the pillow of skulls. These four interloping Swedes knew no specifics of the downcoast tribes, but reason told them this much; if they had luck, they would not encounter the populated coves where the rain season was being whiled away in performance and potlatch.



on my mind was the saying that you'll never hear the lightning bolt that hits you. The rain rattled constantly loud now. [#] At last there came a big crackling sound quite a way off, and while I knew nature is not that regular I told myself the lightning portion of the storm had moved beyond us--or if it hadn't, I might as well be dead in bed as anywhere else--and I announced to Stanley, I'm turning in.

What, already?

Yeah, already--a word which for some reason annoyed me as much as anything had all day.

Leaning over to unlace my forester boots, a high-topped old pair of my father's I had ^{fully} grown into, I felt how much the day had fagged me ~~out~~. ~~Once~~ The laces were a downright chore. But once my boots and socks were off I indulged myself in a promising yawn, pulled ^{what was left of} out my shirt tail, and swung myself into the upper bunk.

Guess I'm more foresighted than I knew, I heard Stanley go on, to bring Doctor Hall along for company.

Who? I asked, my eyes open again at this. Gros Ventre's physician was Doc Spence, and I knew he was nowhere near our vicinity.

Stanley lanked himself up and casually went over to the packs. Doctor Hall, he repeated as he brought out his good hand from a pack, a brown bottle of whiskey in it. Doctor Al K. Hall.

[#] weather of the
The night I suppose continued in commotion. But at that age I could have slept through a piano tuners' convention. Came morning, I was up and around while Stanley still lay flopped in the lower bunk.

[#] First thing, I made a beeline to the window. No snow. Not only was I saved from being wintered in with Stanley, but ~~the~~ Roman Reef and ~~Phantom~~

was as gray as it had been an instant before, the murk was agreed

to be thinning a bit.

They pushed off from the beach sand, paddled carefully out

and

around the end of the seastack wall, all a moment when they could

see more seastacks ~~was~~ along the coast ahead, then the rain took

The faces were a downright chore. But once

"The rocks will steer us,"
~~we needn't be worried.~~

Karlsson said with more calm than

repeated as he brought his good hand to his back,

of whiskey in his hand.

I was up and around while Stanley still lay flopped in the lower bunk.

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and all the peaks

~~Woman Peak~~ south beyond it ~~both~~ stood in sun, as if the little square of

window had been made into a summer picture of the Alps. It still ~~was~~ ^{looks}

me, how the ~~same~~ mountains are not the same any two days in a row. As

if hundreds of copies of ^{those} mountains exist~~ed~~ and each dawn brings ⁱⁿ a fresh

one, of new color, new prominence of ^{some} ~~one~~ feature over the others, ~~some~~ ^{lag}

different wrapping of cloud or rinse of sun for this day's version.

~~lower bunk~~ # I lit a fire and went out to check on the horses and

brought in a pail of fresh water, and even then ^{Stanley} ~~he~~ hadn't budged,

just was breathing like he'd decided on hibernation. The bottle

which had nursed him into that condition, I noticed, was down by

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72
Stanley
about a third. ~~Telling myself he~~ could starve to death in bed for all I cared, I fashioned breakfast for myself, heating up a can of peas and more or less toasting some slices of bread by holding them over the open stove on a fork.

Eventually Stanley ^{did} ~~joined~~ the day. As he worked at getting his boots on I gave him some secret scrutiny, ~~but~~ ^{though,} couldn't see that he assayed much better or much worse than the night before. Maybe he just looked that way, sort of absent-mindedly pained, all the time. I offered to heat up some ^{breakfast} ~~peas~~ for him but he said no, thanks anyway.

At least ~~he~~ ^{Stanley} seemed ready for campending again, and I ^{figured it was time to broach} ~~broached~~ what was heaviest on my mind ^{the} ~~o~~ the calendar of our continued companionship.

How long's this going to take, do you think?

Well, you seen what we got into yesterday with Canada Dan. Herders ^{always got} ~~have~~ their own quantities of trouble. Stanley could be seen to be calculating, either the trouble capacities of our next two herders or the extent of my impatience. ^{better} ~~I suppose we got to figure that it could~~ ^{it'll} take most of a day apiece for this pair, too.

Two more days of messing with herders, then the big part of another day to ride back to English Creek ~~it~~ ^{it} loomed before me like a career.

What about if we split up? I suggested as if I was naturally business-like. Each tend one herder's camp today?

Stanley considered some more. You would have thought he was doing it in Latin, the time it took him. But finally: "I ~~guess~~ ^{guess} don't see offhand why that wouldn't work. You know this piece of country

pretty good. Take ^{along} the windchester," meaning his rifle. "If any bear starts eating on me he'll pretty soon give up on account of gristle." Stanley pondered some more to see whether anything further was going to visit his mind, but nothing did. "So, yeah. We got it to do, might as well get at it. Which yahoo do you want, Gufferson or Sanford Hebner?"

I thought on that. ^{Sanford} Preston Rozier was ~~a young herder~~ in his second or third ^{summer} ~~year~~ in these mountains. Maybe he had entirely outgrown the high-country whimsams of the sort Canada Dan was showing, and maybe he hadn't. Andy Gustafson on the other hand was a long-timer in the Two country and probably had been given the range between Canada Dan and ^{Sanford} ~~Preston~~ for the reason that he was savvy enough not to let the bands of sheep get mixed. I was more than ready to be around somebody with savvy, for a change.

"I'll take Andy."

"Okey-doke. I guess you know where he is, in west of here, about under the middle of Roman Reef. Let's go see sheepherders."

Outside in the wet morning I discovered the possible drawback to my choice, which was that Andy Gustafson's camp supplies were in the pack rig that went on Bubbles. That bothered me some, but when I pictured Stanley and his ^{hamburgered} ~~bandaged~~ hand trying to cope with Bubbles for a day, I figured it fell to me to handle the knothed anyway. At least in my father's universe matters fell that way. So I worked the packs onto the ^{black} ~~mare~~ for Stanley--she was so tame she all but sang encouragement while the load was going on her--and ^{then} ~~then~~ faced the spotty-nosed nemesis. But Bubbles seemed ~~no~~ ^{not particularly} more snorty and treacherous than usual, and with Stanley taking a left-handed death grip on the ^{halter} ~~bridle~~ again and addressing a steady stream of threats into the horse's ear and with me staying well clear of hooves while getting the packsacks roped on, we had Bubbles loaded in surprisingly good time.

~~more?~~

united
-1 class
-1 more

not patchy
more...

} Gao
Gyler
letter
5 Jan 84
packsacks?
or just
packs?

See you back here for beans, Stanley said, and as he reined
~~north~~ ^{Sanford's} toward Preston's camp Pony and I headed west up the mountain,
Bubbles grudgingly behind us.

I suppose now hardly anybody knows that horseback way of life on
a trail. I have always thought that horseback is ^{the} an ideal way to ^{see country} travel,
if you just didn't have to deal with the damn horse, and one thing ~~about~~ to
be said for Pony was that she was so gentle and steady you ^{could} almost forget
she was down there. As for the trail itself--even in the situation
I was in, ^{this scene} ~~that morning~~ ^{one} ~~was a scene~~ to
store away. Pointed west as I was, the horizon of the Rockies extended
wider than my vision, to take in the total of peaks I had to move my
head as far as I could to either side. It never could be said that this
country of the Two didn't offer enough elbow room. For that matter,
shinbone and cranium and all other kind, too. Try as you might to be
casual about a ride up from English Creek into these mountains, you
were doing something sizable. Climbing from the front porch of the
planet up into its attic, so to speak.

under my
apple?
more descrip.

A before long I could look back out onto the plains and
see the blue dab of Lake Frances, and the water tower of Valier on its
east shore--what would that be, thirty miles away, thirty-five? About
half as far off was the bulge of trees which marked where the town of Gros
Ventre sat in the long procession of English Creek's bankside cottonwoods and ^(willows.)
Gros Ventre: pronounced GROVE on, in that front-end way that town names
of French origin get handled in Montana, making Choteau SHOW toh and
Havre HAV er and Wibaux WEE boh. Nothing entertained residents of Gros
Ventre more than hearing some tourist or other outlander pop out with
gross ventree. My

→

father, though, figured that the joke was also on the town: "Not a

~~whole hell of a lot of them know that that's the French for Big Belly.~~
Gros Ventre's
where all this started is that, although not
Of course, Gros Ventre is the name of an Indian tribe, but not really

} Enye's
in
EV file

what might be called a local one, the Gros Ventres originally, before
Reservation days, were up in the Milk River country, near the Canadian
line. Why a ~~place~~ place down here picked up the name of Gros Ventre
that tribe's name

} Enye's
in
EV file

I didn't really know. Toussaint Rennie was the one who knew A to Why

about the Two country, sometime I would have to ask him this name question.

mita
do
Hend

yet familiar
Distant sites offering themselves above and below me, and a morning when
I was on my own. Atop my own horse and leading a beast of burden,
even if the one was short-legged and pudgy and the other too amply
justified the term of beast. Entrusted with a Winchester 30.06, not

that I ever was one to look forward to shooting it out with a bear.
A day to stand the others
~~systematic knowing~~ up against, this one. The twin feelings of
aloneness and freedom seemed to lift and lift me, send me up over the landscape.

like a balloon. Of course I know it was the steady climb of the
land itself that created that impression. But whatever was responsible,
I was glad enough to accept such soaring.

Quite possibly I ought to think about this as a way of life, I
 by now was telling myself. By which I didn't mean ~~shepherding~~ ^{chaperoning} Stanley
 Meixell. One round of that likely was enough for a lifetime. But
 as Isidor Pronovost did for ~~me~~ my father--
 packing like this, running a packstring ~~that~~ ^{held} that was worth spending some
 daydreams on. Yes, definitely a packer's career ~~looked interesting.~~

Be your own boss out on the trail. Fresh air, exercise, scenery.

Adventure. One of the stories my father told oftenest was of being
 with Isidor on one of the really high trails farthest back in the ^{se} mountains
 of the Two, where a misstep by one ~~pack~~ ^{or mule} horse might pull all the rest
 into a tumble a few thousand feet down the slope, when Isidor turned
 in his saddle and conversationally said: "Mac, if we was to roll this
 packstring right about here, the buggers'd bounce till they stunk."

Maybe a quieter mountain job than packing. Forest fire lookout,
 up there in one of Franklin Delano's lighthouses. Serene as a hermit,
 a person could spend summers in a lookout cabin atop the Two. Peer
 around like a human hawk for smoke. Heroic work. Fresh air, scenery,
 Some ~~jasper~~ ^{codger} like Stanley ^{to} ~~fetching~~ your groceries up the mountainside to
 you. The ^{new} Billy Peak lookout might be the prime ^{job} ~~one~~. I'd be finding
 that out right now if my father hadn't detoured me into companioning damn old
 Stanley. Well, next year, next counting trip--

Up and up I and my horses and my dreams went, toward the angle
 of slope beneath

~~top of the Catholic steeple there amid the Gros Ventre grove, but realistically that was mostly imagination.~~

↙ ~~I and my horses went up and up toward the angle of slope beneath~~
the center of ^{Roman} the reef. Eventually a considerable sidehill of timber took the trail from sight, and before Pony and Bubbles and I entered the stand of trees, I whoaed us for a last gaze along all the mountains above and around. They were the sort of thing you would have if every cathedral in the world were lined up along the horizon.

Not much ensued for the first minutes of the forested trail, just a sharpening climb and the route beginning to kink into a series of switchbacks. Sunbeams were threaded down through the pine branches and with that dappled light I didn't even mind being in out of the view for the next little while. under - 124

A forest's look of being everlasting is an illusion. Trees too are mortal and they come down. I was about to face one such. In the middle of ^a ~~one of the~~ straight tilt of trail between switchbacks, there lay a fresh downed ^{lodgepole pine} ~~ponderosa~~ poking out over my route, just above the height of a horse. ¶ On one of my father's doctrines of mountain travel I had a light little cruising ax along with me. But the steep hillside made an awkward place to try any chopping and ^{what I didn't have was} ~~I did not have~~ a saw of any sort. Besides, I was in no real mood to do trail maintenance for my father and the United States Forest Service. ¶ I studied the toppled

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~~Lodgepole~~
~~ponderosa.~~

It barriered the trail to me in the saddle, but there was

just room ~~in~~ enough for a riderless horse to pass beneath. All I needed

to do was get off and lead Pony and Bubbles through. But

given the disposition of Bubbles, I knew I'd damn well better do it a horse at a time.

I tied Bubbles' lead rope to a middle-sized ~~jack~~ pine--doubling the square knot just to be sure--and led Pony up the trail beyond the



windfall. Be right back with that other crowbait, I assured her as I looped her reins around the leftover limb of a stump.

Bubbles was standing with his neck in the one position he seemed to know for it, stretched out like he was being towed, and I had to haul hard on his lead rope for enough slack to untie my knots.

Come on, churnhead, I said as civilly as I could--Bubbles was not too popular with me anyway, because if he originally hadn't kicked Stanley I wouldn't have been in the camptending mess--and with some tugging persuaded him into motion.

Bubbles didn't like the prospect of the downed tree when we got there. I could see his eyes fix on the shaggy crown limbs overhead, and his ears lay back a little. But one thing about Bubbles, he didn't lead much harder when he was being reluctant than when he wasn't.

I suppose it can be said that I flubbed the dub on all this. That the whole works came about as the result of my reluctance to clamber up that sidehill and ^{do} ~~perform~~ axwork. Yet answer me this, was I the first person not to do what I ^{didn't want} ~~was supposed~~ to? Nor was goddamn Bubbles blameless, now was he? After all, I had him most of the way past the windfall before he somehow managed to swing his hindquarters too close in against the hillside, where he inevitably brushed against a broken branch dangling down from the tree trunk. Even that wouldn't have set things off, except for the branch whisking in across the front of his left hip toward his crotch.

Bubbles went straight sideways off the mountain.

He of course took the lead rope with him, and me at the end of it like a kite on a string.

I can't say how far downslope I flew, but I was in the air long enough to get good and worried. Plummeting sideways as well as down is unnerving, as hell, your body trying to figure out how to travel in those two directions at once. And a surprising number of thoughts fan

out in your mind, such as whether you are most likely to come down on top of or under the horse below you and which part of you you can best afford to have broken and how long before a search party and why you ever in the first place--

I landed more or less upright, though. Upright and being towed ~~straight~~ ^{slope of the} down the ~~mountain side~~ in giant galloping ~~strides~~ ^{strides}, sinking ~~in~~ about shin-deep every time, the dirt so softened by all the rain.

After maybe a dozen of those plowing footfalls, my journey ended.

no #

Horse nostrils could be heard working overtime nearby me, and I discovered the lead rope still was taut in my hand, as if the plunge off the trail had frozen it straight out like a long icicle. What I saw first, though, was not Bubbles but Pony. A horse's eyes are big anyway, but I swear Pony's were the size of Lincoln Zephyr headlights as she peered down over the rim of the trail at Bubbles and me all the way below.

Easy, girl! I called up to her. All I needed next was for Pony to get excited, jerk her reins loose from that stump and quit the country, leaving me down here with this tangled-up packhorse. Easy, Pony! Easy, there. Everything's gonna be--just goddamn dandy.

Sure it was. On my first individual outing I had rolled the packstring, even if it was only one inveterate jughead of a horse named Bubbles. Great wonderful work, campjack McCaskill. Keep on in this brilliant ^{fashion} ~~way~~ and you maybe someday ^{hope to} ~~can~~ work your way up to moron.

Now I had to try to sort out the situation. # A little below me on the sidehill, Bubbles was floundering around a little and snorting a series of alarms. The favorable part of that was that he was up on

his feet. Not only up, but showing a greater total of vigor than he had during the whole pack trip so far. So Bubbles was in one piece, I seemed to be intact, and the main damage I could see on the packs was a short gash in the canvas where something snagged it on our way down. Sugar or salt was trickling from there, but it looked as if I could move a crossrope over enough to pinch the hole shut.

I delivered Bubbles a sound general cussing, meanwhile working along the lead rope until I could grab his ~~bridle~~ ^{halter} and then reach his neck. From there I began to pat my way back, being sure to make my cussing sound a little more soothing, to get to the ruptured spot on the pack.

When I put my hand onto the crossrope to tug it across the gash, the pack moved a bit. ⁴¹ I tugged again in a testing way, and all the load on Bubble's back moved a bit.

Son of a goddamn sonofabitch, I remember was all I managed to come out with to commemorate this discovery. That wasn't too bad under the circumstance, for the situation called for either hard language or hot tears, and maybe it could be pinpointed that right there I grew out of the bawling age into the cussing one.

Bubble's downhill excursion had broken the lash cinch, the one that holds the packs into place on a horse's back. So I had a packhorse whole and healthy--and my emotions about Bubbles having survived in good fettle were now getting radically mixed--but no way to secure his load onto him. I was going to have to ride somewhere for a new cinch, or at the very least to get this one repaired.

Choices about like Canada Dan's menu of mutton or sheep meat, those. Stanley by now was miles away at ~~Preston Rozier's~~ ^{Sanford Hebler's} camp. Besides, with ^{how much} his hand and his thirst both the way they were, I wasn't sure ~~he would~~ ^{back down} of a repairer he would prove to be anyway. Or I could climb on Pony, head the trail all the way to the English Creek station, and tell that father of mine to come mend the fix he'd pitched me into.

^{This} ~~That~~ second notion held appeal of ^{numerous} ~~several~~ kinds. I would be rid of Stanley and responsibility for him. I'd done all I could, ~~it was~~ ^{was it} in no way my fault that Bubbles had schottisched off a mountaintop. Most of all, delivering my predicament home to English Creek would serve my my father right. He was the instigator of all this; who better to haul himself up here and contend with the mess?

Yet when I came right down to it, I was bothered by the principle of anyone venturing to my rescue. I could offer all the alibis this side of Halifax, but the truth of it still stood, ^{somebody} besides myself would be fishing me out of trouble. Here was yet another consequence of my damned in-between age, ~~too~~ I totally did not want to be in the hell of a fix I was. Yet somehow I just as ^{much} ~~totally~~ did not relish resorting to anybody else to pluck me out of it. Have you ever been dead-centered that way? Hung between two schools of thought, neither one of which you wanted to give in to? Why ^{the} ~~a~~ human ^{mind} ~~being~~ doesn't positively split in half in such a situation, I don't know.


^A As I was pondering back and forth that way, I happened to rub my forehead with the back of my free hand. It left moisture above my brow. Damn. One more sign of my predicament: real trouble always makes the backs of my hands sweat. I suppose nerves cause it. Whatever does, it spooks a person to have his hands sweating their own worry like that.

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"That's just about enough of all this," I said out loud, apparently to Pony and Bubbles and maybe to my sweating hands and the mountainside and I suppose out across the air ^{toward} Stanley Meixell and Varick McCaskill as well. And to myself, too. For some part of my mind had spurned the back-and-forth debate of whether to go fetch Stanley or dump the situation in my father's lap, and instead got to wondering. There ought to be some way in this world,

to contrive that damn cinch back together. "If you're going to get by in the Forest Service you better be able to fix anything but the break of day," my father said every spring when he set in to refurbish all the English Creek equipment. Not that I was keen on taking him as an example just then, but--

No hope came out of my search of Bubbles and the packs, any kind of thong or spare leather was absent. The saddlestrings on my saddle up there where Pony was I did think of, but couldn't figure how to



let go of Bubbles while I went to get them; having taken up mountaineering so passionately, there was no telling where Bubbles would crash off to if I wasn't there to hang onto him.

I started ~~in to~~ ^{ing} look myself over for possibilities. # Hat, ~~Joseph~~ coat, ~~short~~ ⁱ: no help. # Belt, ~~though~~ ^{ing} I hated to think of it, I maybe Yet would they be long enough if I did. # No, better, down there: my forester boots, a bootlace: a bootlace just by God might do the trick.

By taking a wrap of Bubbles' lead rope around the palm of my left hand I was more or less able to use the thumb and fingers to grasp the last ^h cinch while I punched holes in it with my jackknife. All the while, of course, talking sweetly to Bubbles. When I had a set of holes accomplished on either side of the break, I

threaded the bootlace back and forth, back and forth, and at last tied it to make a splice. Then, Bubbles' recent standard of behavior uppermost in my mind, I made one more set of holes farther along each part of the cinch and wove in the remainder of the bootlace as a second splice for insurance. In a situation like this, you had better do things the way you're supposed to do them.

I now had a boot gaping open like an unbuckled overshoe, but the lash cinch looked as if it ought to lift a boxcar.

Now there remained only the matter of negotiating Bubbles back up to where he had launched from. Talk about an uphill job. But as goddamn Stanley would've observed to me, I had it to do.

Probably the ensuing ruckus amounted to only about twenty minutes of fight-and-drag, though it seemed hours. Right then you could not have sold me all the packhorses on the planet for a nickel. Bubbles would take a step and balk. Balk and take a step. Fright or exasperation or obstinance or whatever other mood can produce it had him dry-farting like the taster in a popcorn factory. Try to yank me back down the

All the while, of course, talking sweetly to Bubblas. When I had a set of holes accomplished on either side of the break, I

second splice for insurance. In a situation like this, you had better do things the way you're supposed to do them. I now had a boot gaping open like an unbuttoned overshoe, but the lash catch looked as if it ought to lift a boxcar. I said "but here I a jerk of head toward Melander's grave in that forest--" in hall am. Wherever I am."

Karlsson looked to Brasf.

It took the young thief an instant to realize he was being polled.

He blinked and said: "You've to do it. I can't read the maps and he did not let himself sit but stayed propped there, looking across the tideflat to the forest: to the wide bay: to a lone dark stretched

slope. Balk again, and let himself slide back down the slope a little. Sneeze, then fart another series. Shake the packs in hope the splice ^{Start over on the} would let go. ~~try some more balking.~~

I at last somehow worked his head up level with the trail and then simply leaned back on the lead rope until ^{Bubbles} ~~he~~ exhausted his various acts and had to ^{glance} ~~look~~ around at where he was. When the sight of the trail registered in his tiny mind, he pranced on up as if it was his own idea all along.

I sat for awhile to recover my breath--after tying Bubbles to the biggest tree around, with a triple square knot^t--and sort of take stock. The pulling contest ~~with~~ definitely had taken all the jingle out of me.

There's this to be said for exertion, though, it does send your blood tickling through your brain. When I was through resting I directly went over ^{addressed him profanely,} to Bubbles, thrust an arm into the pack with the canned goods and pulled cans out until I found the ones of tomatoes. If I ever did manage to ^{menagerie} get this ~~expedition~~ to Andy Gustafson's ^{sheep} camp I was going to be able to say truthfully that I'd had lunch and did not need feeding by one more sheepherder. ⁴¹ Then I sat back down, opened two cans with my jackknife, and imbibed tomatoes. "One thing about canned tomatoes," my father ^{had the} ~~every~~ habit of saying ~~so often~~ said during a trail meal, "if you're thirsty you can drink them and if you're hungry you can eat them." Maybe, I conceded, he was right about that one thing. ~~once in his life.~~

By the time I reached Andy Gustafson's camp my neck was thoroughly cricked from the constant looking back over my shoulder to see if the packs were staying on Bubbles. They never shifted, though. Thank God

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for whoever invented bootlaces.

Andy's band was spread in nice fashion along both sides of a
right under the cliff of Roman Reef.
timbered draw. If you have the courage to let them--more of it, say,
that ^m was possessed by a certain bozo named Canada Dan--sheep will scatter
themselves into a slow comfortable graze even in up-and-down country.
But it takes a herder who is sure of himself and has a sort of sixth
sense against coyotes and bear.



~~82A~~

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I was greeted by a little stampede of about a dozen lambs toward me. They are absent-minded creatures and sometimes will glance up and run to the first moving thing they see, which was the case with these now. When they figured out that Pony and Bubbles and I were not their mommas, they halted, peered at us a bit, then rampaged off in a new direction. Nothing is more likable than a lamb bucking in fun. First will come that waggle of the tail, a spasm of wriggles faster than the eye can follow. Then a stiff-legged jump sideways, the current of joy hitting the little body so quick there isn't time to bend its knees. Probably a bleat, byeahhh, next, and then the romping run. Watching them you have to keep reminding yourself that lambs grow up, and what is pleasantly foolish in a lamb's brain is going to linger on to be just dumbness in the mind of a full-size ewe.

Andy Gustafson had no trove of dead camased ewes, nor any particular complaints, nor even much to say. He was wrinkled up in puzzlement for awhile as to why it was me that was tending his camp, even after I explained as best I could, and I saw some speculation again when he

noticed me slopping along with one boot unlaced. But once he'd checked through the groceries I'd brought to make sure that a big can of coffee and some tins of sardines were in there, and his weekly newspaper as well--Norwegian sheepherders seemed to come in two varieties, those whose acquaintance with the alphabet stopped stubbornly with the X they used for a signature and those who would quit you in an instant if you ever forgot to bring their mail copy of Nordiske Tidende--Andy seemed perfectly satisfied. He handed me his list of personals for the next camptending--razor blades, a pair of socks, Copenhagen snoose ~~Bull Durham~~--and away I went.

Where a day goes in the mountains I don't know, but by the time I reached the cabin again the afternoon was almost done. ~~it was almost the end of afternoon.~~ Stanley's saddle sorrel and the black packhorse were picketed a little way off, and Stanley emerged to offer me as usual whatever left-handed help he could manage in unsaddling Bubbles.

He noticed the spliced cinch. See you had to use a little wildwood glue on the outfit.

I grunted something or other to that, and Stanley seemed to divine that it was not a topic I cared to dwell on. He switched to a question: How's old Gufferson?

He said about three words total. I wouldn't exactly call that bellyaching. This sounded pretty tart even to me, so I added: And he had his sheep in a nice Wyoming scatter, there west of his wagon.

~~Sanford's~~ Preston's on top of things, too, Stanley reported. Hasn't lost

any, and his lambs are looking just real good. Plain as anything, then, ^{it went by the name} there was one sore thumb up here on the Busby's allotment and its name ^{of} was Canada Dan.

To my surprise: Stanley extended the thought aloud. "Looks like Dan's asking for a ticket to town."

This I didn't follow. In all the range ritual I knew, and even in the perpetual wrestle between Dode Withrow and Pat Hoy, the herder always was angling to provoke a reason for quitting, not to be fired. Being fired from any job was a taint; a never-sought smudge. True, Canada Dan was a ^{prime} ~~good~~ example that even God gets careless, but---

The puzzle pursued me on into the cabin. As Stanley stepped to the stove to try rev the fire a little, I asked: "What, are you saying Canada Dan wants to get himself canned?"

"Looks like. It can happen that way. A man'll get into a situation and do what he can to make it worse so he'll get chucked out of it. My own guess is, Dan's feeling thirsty and is scared of this timber as well, but ^{he don't} ~~doesn't~~ want to admit either one to himself. Easier to ^{lay} ~~blame~~ onto somebody else." Stanley paused. "Question is, whether to try disappoint him out of the idea or just go ahead and can him." Another season of thought, then: "I will say that Canada Dan is not such a helluva human being that I want to put up with an entire summer of his ^{guff} ~~crap~~."

This was a ^{starchier} ~~stiffer~~ Stanley than I had yet seen. This one you could imagine giving Canada Dan the reaming out he so richly deserved. # The flash of backbone didn't last long, though. But I guess he's the Busby boys' decision, not mine.

Naturally the day was too far gone for us to ride home to English

Creek, so I embarked on the chores of wood and water again, at least salving myself with the prospect that tomorrow I would be relieved of Stanley. We would rise in the morning--and I intended it would be an early rise indeed--and ride down out of here and I would resume my summer at the English Creek ranger station and Stanley would sashay on past to the Busby brothers' ranch and that would be that.

When I stumped in with the water pail, that unlaced left boot of mine all but flapping in the breeze, I saw Stanley study the situation. Too bad we can't slice up Bubbles for bootlaces, he offered.

That'd help, I answered shortly.

I never like to tell anybody how to wear his boots. But if it was me, now--

I waited while Stanley paused to speculate out the cabin window to where dusk was beginning to deepen the gray of the cliff of Roman Reef, ~~the silver of the rap snags of the Phantom Woman fire scar.~~ But I wasn't in any mood ~~to wait~~ ^{for} very damn ^{much} ~~long.~~ waiting.

You were telling me all about boots, I prompted kind of sarcastically.

Yeah. Well. If it was me now, I'd take that one shoestring you got there, and cut it in half, and lace up each boot with a piece as far as it'll go. Ought to keep them from slopping off your feet, anyhow.

#1 Worth a try. Anything was. I went ahead and I did the halving, and the boots then laced firm as far as my insteps. The high tops pooched out like funnels, but at least now I ^{leave me.} could get around without one boot always threatening to ~~slop off.~~

One chore remained. I reached around and pulled my shirt up out of the back of my pants. The remainder of the tail of it, I jackknifed off. Stanley's hand didn't look quite so hideous this time when ~~we~~ rewrapped it, but still was no prize winner.

Well, Stanley announced now, you got me nursed. Seems like the next thing ought to be a call on the doctor. And almost before he was through saying it, last night's bottle reappeared over the table, its neck tilted into Stanley's cup.

Before Stanley got too deep into his oil of joy, there was one more ^{vital} ~~major~~ point I wanted tended to. Diplomatically I began, Suppose ^{maybe} we ought to give some thought--
as he dippered a little water into his prescription.
--to supper Stanley finished for me, "I had something when I got back from Preston's camp. But you go ahead."

I at least knew by now I could be my own chef if I had to, and I stepped over to the packs to get started. ⁴ There a harsh new light dawned on me. Now that we had tended the camps the packs were empty of groceries, which meant that we--or at least I, because so far I had no evidence that Stanley ever required food--were at the mercy of whatever was on hand in Stanley's own small supply pack. Apprehensively I dug around in there, but ~~about~~ all that I came up with that showed any promise was an aging loaf of bread and some Velveeta cheese. So I made myself a bunch of sandwiches out of those and mentally chalked up one more charge against my father.

When I'd finished it still was only twilight, and Stanley just had applied the bottle ^{and dipper} to the cup for a second time. Oh, it looked like another exquisite evening ahead, all right. A regular night at the opera.

Right then, though, a major idea came to me.

I cleared my throat to make way for the words of it. Then:

I believe maybe I'll have me one, too.

Stanley had put his cup down on the table but was resting his good hand over the top of it as if there was a chance it might hop away. One what?

One of those--doctor visits. A swig.

This drew me a considerable look from Stanley. He let go of his cup and scratched an ear. Just how old 're you?

Fifteen, I maintained, borrowing the next few months.

Stanley did some more considering, but by now I was figuring out that if he didn't say no right off the bat, chances were he wouldn't get around to saying it at all. At last: Got to wet your wick sometime, I guess. Can't see how a swallow or two can hurt you. He transferred the bottle to a place on the table nearer me.

Copying his style of pouring, I tilted the cup somewhat at the same time I was tipping the bottle. Just before I thought Stanley might open his mouth to say something, I ended the flow.)

Then went over to the water bucket and dipped in a splash or so the way he had.

It is just remarkable how something you weren't aware of knowing can pop to your aid at the right moment. From times I had been in the Medicine Lodge ^{saloon} with my father, I was able to offer now in natural salute to Stanley:

"Here's how!"

"How," Stanley recited back automatically.

Evidently I swigged somewhat deeper than I intended. Or should have gone a little heavier on the splash of water. Or something. By the time I set my cup down on the board table, I was blinking hard.

Perhaps it did, in great storms, and that was how the islands of

Great had wondered too, looking at the colossal force of the

to stand:

Medicine people with my father, I was able to offer him in natural

can be to you, and at the right moment. From times I had been in the

It is that something you mean, I mean of something

best of New Archangel's days, Melander thought, he was truly

ready. "Let's take our tea outside the stockade. Flavor

always improves away from the Russians."

Tin mugs in hand, the two of them strolled past the sentry

at the stockade gate and went a short way into the native

While I was at this, Stanley meanwhile had got up to shove wood into the stove.

So what do you think? he inquired. Will it ever replace water?

I didn't know about that, but the elixir of Doctor Hall did ~~draw~~ ^{draw} a person's attention.

Stanley reseated himself and was gandering around the room again.

no 41

"Who's our landlord, do you know?"

"Huh?"

"This cabin. Who's got this school section now?"

"Oh. The Double W."

"Jesus H. Christ." Accompanying this from Stanley was the strongest look he had yet given me. When scrutiny told him I was offering ~~the~~ ^{clear} innocent^{is} truth, he ~~said~~ let out: "Is there a blade of grass anywhere sonuvabitches those ~~sonuvabitches~~ won't try to get their hands on?"

"I dunno. Did you have some run-in with the Double W too?"

"A run-in." Stanley considered the weight of the words. "You might call it that, I guess. I had the particular pleasure ^{once} of telling old Warren Williamson, Wendell's daddy, that that big belly of his was a tombstone for his dead ass. 'Scuse my French again. And some other stuff got said." Stanley sipped and ~~reflected~~ reflected. "What did you mean, 'too'?"

mother's milk?

"My brother Alec, he's riding for the Double W."

"The hell you say." Stanley waited for me to go on, and when
he provided:
I didn't, "I wouldn't wish that onto ~~anybody~~ ^{nobody.} But ^{just} how does it constitute
a run-in?"

"My folks," I elaborated. "They're plenty pis--, uh, ~~feed off~~ ^P feed off ~~it~~ ^{up} over it."

"Family feathers in a fluff. The old, old story." Stanley tipped
a sip again, and I followed. Inspiration-in-a-~~minute~~ ^{cup must have} been the
encouragement my tongue was seeking, for before long I heard myself
asking: "You haven't been

in the Two country the last while, have you?

Naw.

Where you been?

Oh, just a lot of places. Stanley seemed to review them on the
cabin wall. Down in Colorado for awhile. Talk about dry. Half that
state was blowing around chasing after the other half. ~~And Wyoming.~~
A little time in both Dakotas. Worked in the wheat harvest there, insofar
as there was any wheat after the drouth and the grasshoppers. And Wyoming.
I was ^{an} association rider in that Cody country a summer or two. Then
Montana here again for a while, over in the Big Hole Basin. A couple

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~~138B~~
138A

of haying seasons there. He considered, summed: Around. Which moved him to another drag from his cup.

I had one from mine, too. What're you doing back up in this country?

"Like I say, by now I been every place else, and they're no better. Came back to the everloving Two to take up a career in tending camp, as you can plainly see. They advertise in those big newspapers for one-handed raggedy ass camptenders, don't you know. You bet they do."
He ^{did} ~~seem~~ ^{trip} ~~a mite~~ sensitive on this topic. Well, there was always some other, such as the matter of who he had been before he became a wandering comet planet. "Are you from around here originally?"

"Not hardly. Not a Two Mediciner by birth." He glanced at me. "Like you. Naw, I--"



} OK
LIFE
other

Stanley Meixell originated in Missouri, on a farm east of St. Joe in Daviess County. As he told it, the summer he turned thirteen he encountered the down-row of corn--that tumbled line of cornstalks knocked over by the harvest wagon as it straddled its way through the field. Custom was that the youngest of the crew always had to be the picker of the down-row, and Stanley was the last of five Meixell boys. Ahead of him stretched a green gauntlet of down-row summers. Except that by the end of the first sweltering day of stooping and ferreting into the tangle of downed stalks for ears of corn,

Stanley came to his decision about further Missouri life. Within the week I was headed out to the Kansas high plains. If you're like me you think of Kansas as one eternal wheatfield, but actually western Kansas then was cattle country. Dodge City was out there, after all.

Four or five years of ranch jobs out there in jayhawk country ensued for Stanley. "I can tell you a little story ~~about~~ ^{on} that, ^{Jick.} This once we were dehorning a bunch of Texas steers. There was this one ornery sonuvabitch of a buckskin steer we never could get corraled with the others. After enough of trying, the foreman said he'd pay five dollars to anybody who'd bring that sonuvabitching steer in. Well, don't you know, another snotnose kid and me decided we'd just be the ones. Off we rode, and we come onto him about three miles away from the corral, all by hisself, and he was really on the prod. Tried to drive him, but no, hell no, he wasn't about to be driven. Well, then we figured we'd just rope him and drag him in. We got to thinking, though--three miles is quite a drag, ain't it? So instead we each loosed

Wennberg half-turned. He was grim but functioning.

^{though,} Braaf ^{"Might"} announced into the crystal air: "as well bail up

your breakfast now as later, iron-puddler."

"You ~~remorseless~~ crow-mouthed bastard," Wennberg husked. [†] Minutes

later, he clutched the side of the canoe, leaned over, ~~and~~ retched.

Then grasped his paddle again, cast a glare around at Braaf, and

^{more or less,} ploughed water in rhythm with the other two.

^{Seven} Their crossing ~~it~~ was ~~four~~ hours of stupefying slosh, under the

^{uninsome} most ~~williant~~ weather of the entire journey.

—

out our lariat,

about ten feet of it, and took turns to get out in front of him and pop him across the nose with that rope. When we done that he'd make a hell of a big run at us and we'd dodge ahead out of his way, and he choused us back toward the corral that way. We finally got him up within about a quarter of a mile of the dehorning. Then each of us roped an end and tied him down and went ^{on} into the ranch and hitched up a stoneboat and loaded him on and boated him in in high old style. The foreman was waiting for us with five silver dollars in his hand.

Cowboying in the high old style. Alec, I thought to myself, you're the one who ought to be hearing this.

As happens, Stanley's ^{life history} ~~story~~ went on, something came along to dislodge him from that cowboying life. It was a long bunkhouse winter, weather just bad enough to keep him cooped on the ranch. I'd go give the cows a ^{jag of} ~~little~~ hay two times a day and otherwise all there was to do was sit around and do hairwork. Each time ^{Stanley} ~~he~~ was in the barn he would pluck strands from the horses' tails, then back he went beside the bunkhouse stove to braid horsehair quirts and bridles and eventually even a whole damn lasso. By the end of that hairwork winter the tails of the horses had thinned drastically, and so had Stanley's patience with Kansas.

All this I found amazingly interesting. I suppose that part of my father was duplicated in me, the fascination about pawing over old times.

While Stanley was storying, my cup had drained itself without my really noticing. Thus when he,

Stanley stopped to tip another round into his cup, I followed suit.

The whiskey was weaving a little bit of wooze around me, so I was particularly pleased that I was able to dredge back ~~from something I'd~~ Medicine Lodge overheard yet another toast. I offered it heartily:

Here's lead in your pencil!

That one made Stanley ^{eye} look at me sharply for a moment, but he said only as he had the first time, How, and tipped his cup.

"Well, that's Missouri and Kansas accounted for," I chirped in encouragement. "How was it you got up here to Montana?"

On the 17th of March of 1898, to be real exact, Stanley boarded the first train of his life. From someone he had heard about Montana and a go-ahead new town called Kalispell, which is over on the west side of the Rockies, about straight across from there in the cabin where Stanley was telling me all this. Two days and two nights on that train. The shoebox full of fried chicken one of those Kansas girls fixed for me didn't quite last the trip through.

In Kalispell then, "you could hear hammers going all over town."

For the next few years Stanley grew up with the community. He worked ^{sawmill} mill jobs, driving a sawdust cart, sawfiling, foremanning a lumber piling crew. "Went out on some jobs with the U.S. Geological Survey, for a while there."

~~crew.~~ A winter, he worked as a teamster hauling lumber from Lake Blaine into Kalispell. Another spell, he even was a river pig, during one of the log drives on the north fork of the Flathead River.

"It was a world of timber over there then. I tell you something, though, ^{Jick.} People kind of got spoiled by it. Take those fires--December of my first year in Kalispell. They burned along the whole damn mountains from Big Fork to Bad Rock Canyon and even farther north than that. Everybody ^{went} ~~went~~ ~~came~~ out on the hills east of ~~Kalispell~~ town at night to see the fire. Running wild on the mountains, that way. Green kid I was I asked why somebody didn't do something about it. 'That's public domain,' I got told. 'Belongs to the government, not nobody around here.' Damn it to hell, though, ^{Jick.} when I saw that forest being burned up it just never seemed right to me." Stanley here ^{took} ~~had~~ stiff encouragement from his ^{forest} cup, as if quenching the distaste for fire.

"Damn fire anyhow," I seconded with a slurp of my own. "But what got you across the mountains, here to the Two?"

Stanley gave me quite a glance, I guess to estimate the state of my health under Dr. Hall's ministration. I felt first-rate, and blinked Stanley an earnest response that was meant to say so.

"Better go a little slow on how often you visit that cup," he advised. Then: "The Two Medicine country. Why did I ever kiss her hello. Good question. One of the best."

What ensued is somewhat difficult to reconstruct. The bald truth, ^{I may as well say,} is that as Stanley waxed forth, my sobriety waned. But even if I had stayed sharp-eared as a deacon, the headful of the past which Stanley now provided me simply was too much to keep straight. ^{Tale upon tale} ~~Tale~~ of the Two country; memories of how the range looked some certain year; people who had passed away before I was born; English Creek, Noon Creek, Gros Ventre, the Reservation; names of horses, habits of shepherders and ^{appreciations of certain saloons} ~~peculiarities of certain cooks~~ and bartenders. I was accustomed to ~~a~~ a broth of history from my father and Toussaint Rennie, some single topic at a time, but Stanley's version was a brimming mulligan stew. "I can tell you a time, Jick, I was riding along in here under the Reef and met an old Scotch shepherd on his horse. White-bearded geezer, hadn't had a haircut since Christmas. 'Lad!' he calls out to me. ^{here where we are?} 'Can ye tell me the elevation ~~of this mountain~~ Not offhand, I ^{say to} ~~told~~ him, ^{does} ~~why did~~ he want to know? 'Ye see, I was right here when those surveyors of that Theological Survey ^o came through years ago, and they told me the elevation, but I ~~was~~ forgot. I'm pretty sure the number had a 7 in it, though."

~~I'd ask.~~ The forest fires of 1910, which darkened daytime for weeks ^{stubborn} on end: Stanley ~~had~~ helped combat the ~~fire~~ one in the Two mountains west ^{where} of Swift Dam now ~~was~~ stood. The flu epidemic during the world war: he remembered death outrunning the hearse capacity, two and three coffins at a time in the back of a truck headed for the Gros Ventre ^{town} cemetery.

The legendary winter of '19: "We really caught ~~in~~ hell, that time. Particularly those 'steaders in Scotch Heaven. Poor snowed-in bastards."

The banks going under in the early Twenties, the tide of homesteaders reversing itself. "Another time I can tell. In honor of Canada Dan, you might say. Must ~~be~~ of been the summer of '16, I was up in Browning when one of those big sheep outfits out in Washington shipped in 5000 ewes and lambs. Gonna graze them there on the north end of the Two. Those sheep came hungry from 18 hours in the stock cars, and they hit the flats out there and got ~~onto~~ deathcamas and lupine. Started dying by the hundreds.

^{hold of} We got all the pinanginated potash and sulfate of aluminum there was in the drugstore at Browning, and sent guys to ^{fetch} ~~get~~ all of it there was in Cut Bank and Valier and Gros Ventre too, and we started in mixing the stuff in wash tubs and dosing those sheep. Most of the ones we dosed pulled through okay, but it was too late for about a thousand of them others.

^{there was to} All ~~we could~~ do was drag in the carcasses and set them afire with brush.

We burned dead sheep all night on that prairie."

Those sheep pyres I ^{believe} ~~think~~ were the story that made me check out of Stanley's companionship for the evening. At least, I seem to remember counseling myself not to think about deceased sheep in combination with the social juice I'd been imbibing, ~~which was not to be~~ by now three cups' worth. Stanley on the other hand had hardly even sipped during his tale-telling spell.

"I've about had a day," I announced. The bunk bed was noticeably more distant ~~than~~ than it'd been the night before, but I managed to trek to it.

the rooster crows," Stanley's voice followed me. "Adios till ~~morning, then~~ ~~when~~ I heard from Stanley.

"Or till the crow roosts," I imparted to myself, or maybe to a more general audience, for at the time it seemed to me an exceptionally clever

Glen
Smith
ms
↓

comment. ⁴¹ While my tongue was wandering around that way, though, and my fingers were trying to solve the bootlace situation, which for some reason began halfway down my boots instead of at the top where ~~they~~ I was sure they ought to be, my mind was not idle. Cowboying, teamstering, river pigging: all this history of Stanley's was unexpected to me. I'd supposed, from my distant memory of him having been in our lives when I was so small, that he was just another camp ^{one}tender or maybe even ~~an~~ ~~the~~ association rider back when this range was occupied by mostly cattle instead of sheep. But riding along up here and being greeted by the elevation-minded shepherd as an expert on the Two: that sounded like, what, he'd been ^{one} of the early ranchers of this country? Homesteader, maybe? Fighting that forest fire of '10: must have volunteered himself onto the fire crew, association rider would fit that. But dosing all those sheep: that sounded like camp ^{one}tender again.

Then something else peeped in a corner of my mind. One boot finally in hand, I could spare the concentration ~~for~~ for the question. "Stanley, didn't you say you been to this cabin before? When we got here, didn't you say that?"

"Yessir. Been here ^{just} a lot of times. I go back farther than this cabin does. I seen it being built. We was sighting out that ~~line~~ fenceline over there when ~~an~~ old Bob Barclay started dragging in the logs for this."

Being built? Sighting the boundary fenceline? The history was skipping to the most ancient times of the Two forest now, and ~~this~~ this turn and the whiskey together were compounding my confusion. Also, somebody had put another boot in my hand. Yet I persisted.

"What, were you up here with the Theologic--the Geologic--the survey crew?"

Stanley's eyes were sharp, as if a new set had been put in amid the webs of eyelines. And the look he fastened on me now was the levellest thing in that cabin.

"Jick, I was the ranger that set up the boundaries of the Two Medicine National Forest."

Surely my face hung open so far you could have trotted a cat through it.

In any Forest Service family such as ours, lore of setting up the national forests, of the boundary examiners who established them onto the maps of America as public preserves, was almost holy writ. I could remember time upon time of hearing my father and the other Forest Service men of his age mention those original rangers and supervisors,

rangers, the ones who were sent out in the first years of the century with not much more than the legal description of a million or so acres and orders to transform them into a national forest. "The forest arrangers," the men of my father's generation nicknamed them. Glen

Elers Koch on the ^{Callatin} ~~Bitterroot~~ National Forest, Coert DuBois on the Lolo, ^{Halena} ~~Flathead~~ and so on; others who sired the Beaverhead and the Custer and the Flathead and so on; the tales of them,

still circulated, refreshed by the comments of the younger rangers wondering how they'd managed to do all they had. Famous, famous guys.

Sort of combinations of Old Testament prophets and mountain men, rolled into one. Everybody in the Forest Service

told forest arranger stories at any chance. But that Stanley Meixell, wronghanded campjack and frequenter of Doctor Al K. Hall, had been the original ranger of the Two Medicine National Forest, I had never heard a breath of, and this was strange.

Region!
"Early Days"
V.I. - Elers
Koch, +
p. 106

du Bois as in Pym
article in Forest file
Koch names as in:
Stanley's "Early
Days" info from
"Early Days,"
p. 107;

B. Head &
Halena, p. 107
"Early Days"
Custer
alluded to
in Elers
Smith tape

P. 146A/Elers

146A

#

indent
15 spaces

"My sister is Mandy,

she's got a dandy.

At least so the boys say."

I woke with ~~those~~^{that} words in my ears and a dark brown taste in my
mouth.

9



The serious symptoms ~~occurred~~ ^{set in} when I sat up in my bunk.

My eyes and temples and ears all seemed to have grown sharp points inward and were steadily stabbing each other. Life, the very air, seemed gritty, gray. Isn't there one hangover description that your tongue feels like you spent the night licking ashtrays? ~~Exactly.~~ ^{That's it.}

"Morning there, Jick!" Stanley sang out. He was at the stove. "Here, better wash down your insides with this." Stepping over to the bunk, he handed me a tin cup of coffee turned tan with canned milk. Evidently he had heated the milk along with the coffee, because the contents of the cup were all but aflame. The heat went up my nose in search of my brain as I held the cup in front of my lips.

"No guarantee on this left-handed grub," Stanley called over his shoulder as he fussed at something on the stove top, "but how do you take your eggs?"

"Uh," I sought around in myself for the information. "Flipped, I guess."

41 Stanley hovered at the stove another minute or two, while I made up my mind to try the death-defying trip to the table. 41 Then he turned

and presented me a plate. Left-handed they may have been, but the

eggs were fried to a crisp brown lace at their edges, while their

pockets of yolk were not runny but not solidified either. Eggs that

way are perfection. On the plate before me they were fenced in by

~~wide~~ ^{wide} tan strips of sidepork, and within a minute or so, Stanley was

providing me slices of bread fried in the pan grease.

morning
light

just
make
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I am my mother's son entirely in this respect: I believe good food never made any situation worse. [#] I dug in, and by the time I'd eaten about half the plateful, things were tasting like they were supposed to. I even managed to sip some of the coffee, which I discovered was stout enough to float a kingbolt.

Indeed, I swarmed on to the last bite or so of the ~~feast~~ ^{feast} before it occurred to me to ask. "Where'd you get these eggs?"

"Aw, I always carry a couple small lard pails of oats for the horses, and the eggs ride okay in the oats."

Breakfast made me feel restored. "Speaking of riding," I began, "how soon--"

"--can we head down the mountain." Stanley inventoried me. ~~then~~

And I took the chance to get in my first clear-eyed look of the day at

him. Stanley seemed less in pain than he had when we arrived to this

cabin, ^{but} less in grasp of himself than he had during last night's recounting

of lore of the Two. A man in wait, seeing which way he might turn; but

unfortunately, I knew, the bottle habit soon would ~~sway~~ sway his decision.

Of course, ^{right} just then, who was I to talk?

Now Stanley was saying: "Just any time now, Jick. We can head out as soon as you say ready."

—

P. 148 A follows →

On our ride down Stanley^{of course} was into his musical repertoire again, one minute warbling about somebody who was wild and wooly and full of fleas and never'd been curried above her knees, and the next crooning hymnlike a ~~song~~ tune that went, "Oh sweet daughters of the Lord, grant me more than I can afford."

My mind, though, was on a thing Stanley said as we were saddling the horses. In no way was it what I intended to think about, for I knew fully that I was heading back into the McCaskill family situation, that blowup between my parents and Alec. Godamighty, the supper that produced all that wasn't much more than a half a week ago. ~~Then there~~ And in the meantime my father had introduced Stanley and Canada Dan and Bubbles, not to mention Dr. Al K. Hall, into my existence. There were words I intended to say to him about all this. If, that is, I could survive the matter of explaining to my mother why the tops of my boots gaped

out like funnels and how come my pants legs looked like I'd ~~wiped up~~ a mountainside with them and where the tail of my shirt had gone. ~~the~~

prop J of B
hiding out to
J's drunk
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Thank the Lord, not even she could quite ~~see~~ ~~see~~ into a person enough to count three tin cups of booze in him the night before. On that drinking score, I felt reasonably safe. Stanley didn't seem to me likely to trouble himself enough to advertise my behavior. On the other hand, Stanley himself was a logical topic for my mother. More than likely my father had heard, and I was due to hear, her full opinion of my having sashayed off on this campjacking expedition.

A sufficiency to dwell on, and none of it easy thinking. Against my intentions and better interests, though, I still found myself going back and forth over that last scene at the cabin. # ~~I was tightening~~ had just handed lead rope for the the ~~cinch on Pony~~ black pack mare and everloving Bubbles up to Stanley, and was turning away to go tighten the cinch on Pony's saddle. It was then that Stanley said he hoped I didn't mind too much about missing the rest of the counting trip with my father, to the Billy Peak lookout and all. "I couldn't of got along up here without you," ~~jack,~~ "he concluded, "and I hope you don't feel hard used."

Which of course was exactly how I did feel. You damn bet I did. Had been feeling ~~that way~~ ~~the instant~~ ever since my father volunteered me into Stanley's company, and for all I knew was going to go on feeling that

way until I was old and wise. Skinning wet sheep corpses, contending with a pack horse who decides he's a mountain goat, nursing Stanley along, lightning, any number of self-cooked meals, the hangover I'd woke up with--what sad sonofabitch wouldn't realize he was being used out of the ordinary?

Yet right then, 18-inch pincers would not have pulled the confession of that from me. I wouldn't give the universe the satisfaction.

So, "No," I ^{had} answered Stanley shortly and ~~went~~ ^{gone} on over to do my cinching. "No, it's all been an education."

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