

The sun shines, hay is being made.

All along English Creek and Noon

Creek, mowing and raking and stacking

^{are}
~~is~~ the order of the day. As to how
this year's cutting compares with
those of recent years--have you seen any

rancher ~~recently~~ ^{lately} who wasn't grinning

like a Christian holding four aces?

--Gros Ventre Weekly Gleaner, July 20

"Hand me a half-inch, would you, Jick."

"Here you go."

I passed the ~~box~~ ^{open}-end wrench of that size to Pete beneath the power

buckrake. There was a grunt of exertion, a flash of metal as the
and clattered off the chassis,
wrench flew, and the news from Pete:

"Sonofabitch must be a ~~3/8~~ three-eighths."

I had been here before. "Did you ~~get~~ ^{hit} your knuckles?"

"Sure did."

"Did you round the head off the bolt?"

"Sure did."

*copy
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spin

"Are you sure you want to put up hay again this year?"

"Guess what, nephew. The next rusted-up sonofabitch of a bolt under here has got your name on it."

At noon of that first day of ^{preparing} ~~getting~~ Pete's haying machinery, ~~into running order,~~ when he and I came in to wash up for dinner Marie took one look at the barked knuckles and skin scrapes and blood blisters on the both of us and inquired:

"Did you two count your fingers before you started all this?"

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Despite what it took out of a person's hide, I still look back on that as ^{top notch} among the best possible employment, my ~~summer~~ job ~~as~~ in ^{of haying} the hayfield as scatter raker for Pete.

~~of haying~~

The Reese ranch was a beauty for hay. Pete inherited not only my grandfather Isaac Reese's acreage there along Noon Creek but ~~also~~ old Isaac's realization that nurturing more than one source of income is as good an idea as you can have in Montana. Pete was continuing with the sheep Isaac had turned to after the crash of cattle prices ~~also~~ ^{was improving the ranch's} ~~had set to work developing his~~ hayfields, running ditches into the bottomland meadows ^{of wild hay} to irrigate them from Noon Creek. Even ⁱⁿ ~~during~~ the Depression's driest years, Pete always had hay to sell during the

winter. This year, it looked as if he would have a world of the stuff.

Those ~~bottomland~~ ^{tall-grass} meadows of ~~wild hay~~ lay one after another along the creek like ~~fat~~ ^{fat} green pouches on a thong. Then there was the big field

atop ~~the benchland~~ the Noon

Creek-English Creek divide which grew dry-land alfalfa. In a wet year

like this one, the alfalfa was soaring up more than knee-high and

that wide benchland field looked as green as they say the Amazon is.

Those first days after the Fourth of July, the hay was very nearly ready for us and I was more than ready for it. Ready to have the McCaskill family situation off my mind for the main part

of each day, at least. It did not take a great deal of original

thinking, ~~in those first days after the Fourth,~~ to realize that

the deadlock between my parents and Alec ^{now} was stouter than it had

been before. If Alec ever needed any confirming in his rooting-

tooting cowboy notion of himself, his ~~rodeo~~ ^{rodeo day} calf-roping and pugilistic triumphs

had ~~would~~ ^{done} more than ~~do~~ so. Both of those and Leona too--Alec's feet

might not even touch the ground until about August. Anyway, I

had spent so much thought on the ^{Alec} matter already that summer that

my mind was ~~ready~~ ^{looking around} for a new direction. My father, my mother, ^{my brother} Alec:

let them do the sorting-out of

Alec's future, ~~and~~, I now had an imminent one--haying at Noon

Creek--^{all}~~of~~ my own.

I ^{might} ~~should~~ have known. "The summer when," ^{I have said} my mother ever after

called this one. For me, the summer when not even haying ~~was~~ turned out as expected. The summer when I began to wonder if anything ever does.

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To be quite honest, on a task like those first few days of readying the equipment for haying I provided Pete more company than ~~I did~~ help. I mean, I can fix machinery when I have to but I'd rather be doing anything else. My point of view is that I would be more enthusiastic about the machine era if the stuff healed itself instead of requiring all the damn repair it does. And Pete was much the same as me where wrench work was involved.

But I still maintain, companionship is no small thing to create. Amid all that damn bolting, unbolting, rebolting, bushing, shimming, washering, greasing, oiling, banging, sharpening, straightening, ~~and~~ ~~so on~~, wouldn't you welcome a little conversation? And the farther removed from the mechanical chore at hand, the better? At least my ,just right out of the blue, uncle and I thought so. I recall Pete ~~me~~ telling me about the Noon Creek Kee-Kee bird. "You never heard of the Kee-Kee bird we got around here? Jick, I am surprised at you. The Kee-Kee bird shows up ~~here~~ ^{lambing shed} the first real day of winter every year. Lands on top of the ~~barn~~ over there and takes a look all around. Then he says, 'Kee-Kee-Keerist All Mighty, c-c-cold c-c-country!! ~~this is a cold country!!~~ and heads for California."

not

I in return favored Pete with a few of the songs from Stanley's repertoire, starting with the one about the lady who was wild and woolly and full of fleas and never had been carried above her knees. He looked a little startled at my musical knowledge, but was interested enough.

^{Too:} how startling it was to hear, This sticks with me, ~~the surprise of hearing,~~ from a face so reminiscent of my mother's, the kind of language Pete ~~unleashed~~ ^{unleashed} on the haying equipment during those repair days. It also was kind of refreshing.

^{then,}
 So all in all, Pete and I got along like hand and glove. And
 I have already recited Marie's glories, back there at the Fourth of
 July picnic. If anybody in the Two country could cook in the same
 league as my mother, it was Marie. So my ears and the rest of me both
 were well nourished, that couple of days as Pete and I by main
 strength and awkwardness got the haying gear into running order.

It never occurred to me at the time, but I suppose Pete welcomed
 having me around--and Alec in the earlier summers when he was in
 the raking job--because he and Marie were childless. Their son died
 at birth, and Marie very nearly died with him, her health in fact had
 never been strong since. So for a limited time, at least, someone
 my age was a privileged character with the Reeses.

Even so, I ^{held off} ~~waited~~ until Pete and I were finishing up the last
 piece of equipment, replacing broken guards on the mowing machine,
 before I tried him on this:



"Pete, you know Stanley Meixell, don't you?"

"Used to. Why?"

"I'm just sort of curious. My folks don't say much about him."

"He's been a long time gone from this country. Old history."

"Were you around him when he was the English Creek ranger?"

"Some. When ~~every~~^{any}body on Noon Creek who could spell K-O-W was running cattle up there on the forest. During the war and just after, that was."

"How was he as a ranger?"

"How was he?"

"Well, yeah. I mean, did Stanley go about things pretty much the way Dad does? Fuss over the forest like he was its mother hen, sort of?"

"Stanley always struck me as more of a rooster than a mother hen." That, I didn't get. Stanley hadn't seemed to me particularly strutting

in the way he went about life. "But I will say this," Pete went on.

"Stanley Meixell and your father know those mountains of the Two better than anybody else alive. They're a pair of a kind, on that."

"They are?" That the bunged-up whiskey-sloshing camp tender I had
 squired around up there ^{in the Two} was as much a master of the mountains as my
 father--All due respect to Pete, but I couldn't credit it. ^{Figuring maybe Pete's} ~~Maybe his~~

specific knowledge of Stanley was better than his general, so I asked:
 "Well, after he was the English Creek ranger, where was his ticket to?"

"His ticket?"

"That's the saying they have in the Forest Service about being
 transferred. After here, where did Stanley get transferred to?"

"The Forest Service isn't my ball of string, Jick. How do you
 feel about sharpening some ^{mower} sickles? There's a couple against the
 wall of the shop somewhere."

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"How's ^{she} ~~she~~ going, Jick?"

The third morning I rode over to Pete and Marie's, the mower man
 Bud Dolson greeted me there at breakfast. Pete had gone into Gros
 Ventre to fetch him the night before, Bud having come up on the bus
 all the way from Anaconda. Ordinarily he was on the bull gang at
 the smelter there, a kind of roustabout's job as I understood it.
 "Good to get out in the ^{real} fair for a change," Bud claimed was his

reason for coming to mow hay for Pete summer after summer. Smelter fumes would be a sufficient ^{propulsion} ~~ticket~~ to anywhere, yes. But I have a sneaking hunch that the job as mower man, a month of being out there by himself with just

a team of horses and a mowing machine and the waiting hay, ~~was~~ meant

~~quite~~ a lot in itself to somebody as quiet as Bud.

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The first genuine ^{scorching} ~~hot~~ day of summer arrived with Bud, and by about ⁹ 8 o'clock the dew was off the hay and he was cutting the first ^{the nearest} ~~one~~ swath of ~~one~~ of the Noon Creek meadows, a path of fallen green beside the standing green.

———
"How do, Jick."

While I was saddling Pony to go home ^{to English Creek} ~~at~~ the end of that afternoon, Perry Fox came riding in from Gros Ventre.

You still could find Perry's species in a lot of Montana towns then, old Texas punchers who rode north on a trail drive somewhere before the turn of the century, and for this reason or that, never found their way back to Texas. Much of the time when I was growing up, Gros Ventre had as many as three of them: Andy Cratt, Deaf Smith Mitchell,

of escape always narrowed instantly to the same point: where, except up to the sweet blue meadows of heaven, was there to go?

"The world has many wheres," said Melander. "We need just four of them."

Melander drained his mug in a final gulp, folded himself down to rest one knee on the dirt and with a stick began to diagram.

A first south-pointing stab of shoreline, like a broad knife blade. Baranov Island, on the oceanward side of which they squatted now.

A speckle of isles, then a large landform, south-pointing too, like the sheath Baranov had been pulled from. The Queen Charlotte group of islands.

The first genuine hot day of summer arrived with Bud, and by

about 8 o'clock the dew was off the hay and he was cutting the first

swath of one of the Moon Creek meadows, a path of fallen green beside

the standing green.

"How do, Jack."

While I was saddling Perry to go home at the end of that afternoon,

Perry Fox came riding in from Gros Ventre.

You still could find Perry's species in a lot of Montana towns then,

Old Texas punchers who rode north on a trail drive somewhere before

the turn of the century, and for this reason or that, never found

their way back to Texas. Much of the time when I was growing up,

Gros Ventre had as many as three of them: Andy Cratt, Deaf Smith Mitchell,

and Perry Fox. They had all been hands for the old Seven Block ranch when it was the cattle kingdom of this ^{part of Montana} ~~area~~, then afterward hung on by helping out the various small ranchers at branding time and when the calves were shipped, and in between, breaking a horse for somebody now and again. Perry Fox was the last of them alive yet. ^{into} ~~In his late~~ seventies, I guess he had to be, for Toussaint Rennie told my father he could remember seeing both Perry and Deaf Smith Mitchell in the roundup of 1882, skinny youngsters aboard big Texican saddles. Now too stove-up for a regular ranch job, Perry spent his winters in Dale Quigg's saddle store helping out with harness mending and other leather work, and his summer job was on the ~~dump~~ ^{dump} bunch rake for Pete.

As I responded to Perry's nod and drawl of ^{greeting} ~~How do, Dick~~ and ~~watched~~ ^{like Bud,} ~~helped~~ him undo his bedroll and war bag from behind his saddle--Perry would put up in the bunkhouse here at Pete's now until haying was done-- ^{couldn't help but} I ~~happened to~~ notice that he had a ^{short} piece of rope stretched snug beneath his horse's belly and knotted into each stirrup. ^{This was a new one} ~~I could think of~~

and Perry Fox. They had all been hands for their old Seven Block

now and again. Perry Fox was the last of them alive yet. In his late

seventies I guess he had to be, for Toussaint Remond told my father

Another brief broken isle-chain of coast, then a long blunt slant, almost sideways to the other coastal chunks. Vancouver Island.

At last, fourth and biggest solidity in this geographical flagstone of Melander's, the American coastline leading to the Columbia River.

The place where the coast and the river met, Melander Xed ^{large.} as if making his name-mark. Astoria.

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Map lesson done, Melander recited the mainframe of his plan. That if they selected their time well and escaped by night they could work a canoe south along the coast. That there at its southern extent, down beyond the Russian territory and that of the Hudson's Bay Company,

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on me, stirrups tied like that. That night I asked my father about it.

Come to that, has he, my father said. Riding with hobbled
stirrups.

I still didn't savvy.

At his age Perry can't afford to get thrown any more, my father

spelled it out for me. He's too brittle to mend. So with the stirrups

tied down that way, he can keep himself clamped ^{into them} ~~on~~ if his horse starts

to buck."

"Maybe he just ought to quit riding horseback," I said, without thinking it through.

My father set me straight on that, too. "Guys like Perry, if they can't ride you might as well take them out and shoot them. Perry has never learned to drive a car. The minute he can't climb onto a horse and keep himself there, he's done for."

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~~my team of horses~~

The fourth morning, Pete had me harness up ~~Blanche and Fisheye~~

and take my rake to the mowed field to help Perry get the dump raking

underway. Truth be told, that day I was ^{the majority} the one who did ~~most~~ of the

dump raking--scooping the hay into windrows, that was--while Perry

~~ever since the hay stem clomped in out of the lever~~

tinkered and tinkered with his rake teeth and his dump lever and his horses'

harness and so on. Right then I fully subscribed to what Pete said

about his custom of hiring Perry haying after haying: "He's slow as

the wrath of Christ, but he is steady." I suppose if my behind was

as aged and bony as Perry's,

I wouldn't have been in any hurry either to apply it to a rake seat

for the ^{or five} coming four weeks.



At the end of that ~~first~~ day of windrowing, when Perry and I had unhitched our teams and Pete was helping us look them over for any harness sores, up the road to the ranch buildings came the Forest Service pickup and in it my father and my mother as well. They'd been to Great Falls on a headquarters trip my father had to make for one reason or another, and ~~and then~~ ^{before starting} home they swung by First Avenue South to chauffeur the last of the haying crew to Pete.

He tumbled out of the back of the ~~Forest Service~~ pickup now.

The stackman, Wisdom Johnson.

"Hey, Pete!" cried Wisdom. Even after the 2-hour ride from Great Falls in the ~~back of the pickup~~ ^{open breezes} Wisdom was not what could be called even approximately sober. On the other hand, he wasn't so swacked up he had fallen out of the pickup on the way to the job, which was the hiring standard that counted. "Hey, Perry!" the greeting process went on. "Hey, Jick!" If the entire population ~~that~~ of Montana had been there in the Reese yard, Wisdom would have greeted every one of them identically. ~~The impression~~ Wisdom Johnson's mind may not have been one of the world's broadest, but it liked to practice whatever it knew.

"As I savvy it, Wisdom," acknowledged Pete, "that's what you're here for, all right--hay."

"Pete, I'm ready for it," Wisdom ~~said~~^{testified} earnestly. "If you want to start stacking right now, I am ready. You bet I am. How about it, ready to go?" Wisdom squinted around like Lewis and Clark must have. "Where's the field?"

"Wisdom, it's suppertime," ~~"It's about 1-~~ Pete pointed out. "Morning will be soon enough to start stacking. You feel like having some grub?"

Wisdom considered. "No. No, I don't." He swallowed to get rid of the idea of food. "What I need to do is sort of sit down for awhile."

Perry stepped forward. "I'll herd him to the bunkhouse. Right this way, Wisdom. Where'd you winter?"

"Out on the coast," reported Wisdom as he unsteadily accompanied Perry. "Logging camp, up north of Grays Harbor. Rain! Perry, do you know it'd sometimes rain a week steady? I just did not know it could rain that much--"

~~Chin in hand and elbow~~
~~Leaning on an elbow~~ propped on the doorframe, my mother ~~watched~~^{skeptically}
~~rolled-down~~
all this out the ~~open~~ window of the pickup. Now she opened the door and stepped out.

(not)

Not surprisingly, ~~my mother~~ ^{she} looked about two-thirds riled.

I don't know of any Montana woman who has never gritted her teeth, one time or another, over that process of prying men off bar stools and getting them launched toward ~~home~~ ^{whatever they're supposed to be doing in life.} "I'll go in and visit Marie," she announced, ^{my father and Pete and I all} which ~~all of us~~ were glad enough to have happen, ~~we~~

Pete made sure my mother was out of earshot, then inquired:

"He ⁱⁿ ~~at~~ Sheba's place, was he?"

"No, in the Mint, though he did have Bouncing Betty with him. She wasn't about to turn loose of him, as long as he had a nickel to his name." Upon study, my father looked somewhat peevish, too. Wisdom ^{Johnson} must have taken considerable persuading to part with Bouncing Betty. "So at least I didn't have to shake him directly out of a whore's bed. But that's about the best I can say for your caliber of employee, brother-in-law."

Pete broke a grin at

my father and razzed: "I wouldn't be so damn hard up for crew if you'd paid attention to the example of Good Help Hebner and raised anything besides an occasional scatter raker."

Somehow Pete had known what the moment needed. Pete's kidding had within it the fact that the other of the rake-driving McCaskill brothers had been Alec, and he ~~was~~ not a topic my father particularly cared to hear about these days. Yet here it came, the half-wink of my father's left eye and the answer to Pete's crack: "Scatter rakers were as good as I could do. Whatever that says about my caliber."

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The fifth day, we made hay.

The windrows that Perry and I had raked formed a pattern I have always liked—a meadow with ribs of hay, evenly spaced. Now Perry was dumping the next field ^{down} along the creek and Bud was mowing the one beyond that.

Those of us in the stacking crew began our end of the matter.

We sited the overshot stacker toward the high edge of the ~~low~~ meadow, so the haystack would be up out of the deepest winter snowdrifts along

Noon Creek. With the power buckrake, Pete shoved several loads of

hay into place behind ~~the front of~~ the stacker. Then Wisdom ^{maneuvered} tossed

^{that accumulation} and smoothed with his pitchfork until he had the base of his stack

made the way he wanted it. ^{An} ~~Almost square~~ island of hay almost

but not quite square--8 paces wide, 10 paces long--and about chest-high.

"You said last night ^{you're} ~~you were~~ ready, Wisdom," called Pete. "Here it comes." And he bucked the first load of hay onto the fork of the stacker. "Send it to heaven, Clayton."

The final man, or I should say member, of our haying crew was the stacker team driver, ¹² ~~Twelve~~-year-old Clayton Hebner. Pete always hired whichever Hebner boy was in the 12-to-14-year range for that

stacker team job and they were pretty much interchangeable, a skinny kid with a forelock and nothing to say for himself; apparently the volume know for that whole family was on Good Help Hebner. All that was really noticeable about Clayton was his Hebner way of always eyeing you, as if you were the latest link in evolution and he didn't want to miss the moment when you sprouted wings or fins. At Pete's words Clayton now started into motion his team of horses

which were hitched to the cable which, through a tripod-and-pulley rig within the stacker, lifts the twin arms of the stacker and the hay-loaded fork, and the hay ~~blows~~ went up and up until--

It occurs to me: does everybody these days think ^{that} hay naturally comes in bales? ~~That~~ God ordained ^{that} ~~for~~ livestock ^{shall} ~~to~~ eat from 80-pound loaves of hay tied up in twine by \$10,000 machinery? If so, maybe

I had better describe the notion of haying as it used to be. All

in the world it amounted to was gathering

hay into stacks about the size of an adobe house; a well-built haystack even looks as solid and straightforward as an adobe structure, though of course stands higher and has a rounded-off top. But try it yourself sometime, this gathering of 10 or 12 tons of hay into one stack, and you will see where all the equipment comes in. Various kinds of stackers were used in various areas of the West--beaverslides, Mormon derricks, swinging forks, jayhawks--but Pete's preference was an overshot. An overshot stacker worked as its



name suggests, tossing a load of hay up over a high wide framework which served as ~~an~~ a sort of scaffolding for the front of the haystack.

If, say, you hold your arms straight out in front of you, with your hands clutching each end of a basket with hay piled in it; now bring your arms and the basket straight up over your head with a little speed, and you are tossing the hay exactly as an overshot does.

In short, a kind of catapult principle is involved. But a slow one,

for

it is the responsibility of the stacker team driver to pace ^{his} the horses so that the ^{overshot's} arms and fork fling the hay onto ^{whichever part of} the stack

the stackman wants it. Other than being in charge of the speed of the team, though, ^{driving the stacker team} it is a hell of a dull job, walking back and

forth behind the horses as they run the overshot up and down, all damn day long, and that's why a kid ^{like Clayton} usually got put on the ^{task.} ~~stacker~~

~~team job.~~

So hay was being sent up, and as this first haystack and the day's temperature both began to rise, Wisdom Johnson suffered. This too was part of the start of haying--Wisdom sweating the commerce of Great Falls saloons out of himself. Soaking himself sober, lathering ~~himself~~ into the summer's labor. We all knew ^{by heart} what the scene would be this initial morning, Wisdom lurching around up there atop ^{mound of} the hay as if ^{he} had a log chained to each leg. It was a little painful to watch, especially now that my camptending sojourn with Stanley ^{Meisell} had taught me what a hangover truly is. Yet agonized as Wisdom looked, the stack was progressing prettily, as we also knew it would. The stackman, he was ~~the~~ maestro of the haying crew. When the rest of us had done our mowing or raking or bucking or whatever, the final result of it all was the haystack ^S the stackman built. And Wisdom Johnson could build them, as he put it, "high and tall and straight." No question about it, Wisdom was as big and brawny as they come; nine of him would have made a dozen. And he also just looked as if he belonged atop a haystack, for he was swarthy enough to be able to work all day up there without his shirt on, which I envied much. If I tried that I'd have burned and blistered to a pulp. Wisdom simply darkened and darkened, his suntan a litmus each summer of how far along our haying season was.

As July heated up into August, more than once it occurred to me that, with the sweat bathing Wisdom as he worked up there next to the sun, and his arm muscles ^{bulging} protruding handsomely as he shoved the hay around, and ^{that} the dark leathering of his skin, he was getting to the heavyweight fighter look like Joe Louis. But of course that wasn't something you ^{said} could say to a white person back then.

This was the second summer of Wisdom being known as Wisdom instead of his true name, Cyrus Johnson. The nickname came about because he had put up hay a number of ~~seasons~~ ^{seasons} in the Big Hole Basin down in the southwestern part of the state, and according

to him the Big Hole was the front parlor of heaven. The hay there was the best possible, the workhorses all but put their harnesses on themselves each morning, the pies of Big Hole ranch cooks nearly floated off into the air from the swads of meringue atop them. ~~the~~

list of glories went on and on. Inasmuch as the Big Hole had a great reputation for hay even without ^{the} ~~Sidney's~~ ^{Cyrus's} testimony, ^{of Cyrus Johnson,} the rest

of us ^{Reese} at the table tended to nod and say nothing. But then came one ^{early in that} suppertime, ~~during~~ the first summer I hayed for Pete, when Cyrus started

in on a fresh Big Hole glory. "You
 take that Wisdom, now. There's my idea of a town. It's the friendliest,
 drinkingest, prettiest place--"

"Wisdom? That burg?" Ordinarily Bud Dolson was silence itself.
 where he was from the Big Hole town of
 But Anaconda was not all that far from ~~the Big Hole town~~ Wisdom and
 Cyrus
 Bud had been there. As ~~Sidney~~ now had the misfortune of asking him.

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"I think so," replied Bud. "I blinked, I might ^{we} have missed most
 of it."

A Cyrus looked hurt.

mod "Now what do you mean by that?"

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"Cy,
 "Sid, I mean that the town of Wisdom makes the town of Gros Ventre
 look like London, England."

"Aw, come on, Bud. Wisdom is a hell of a nice town."

Bud shook his head in pity. "If you say so, Wisdom." And ever
 since, the big stackman was Wisdom Johnson to us.

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This first stack was well underway, Pete had ~~worked~~ buckraked several windrows in to the stacker. Now began my contribution to the haying process. I went over and climbed onto my scatter rake.

If you happen never to have seen one, a scatter rake simply resembles a long axle--mine was a 10-foot type--between a set of iron wheels, high spoked ones about as big around as those you think of a stagecoach having, but not nearly so thick and heavy. The "axle," actually the chassis of the rake, carries a row of long thin curved teeth, set about a hand's width apart from each other, and it is this regiment of teeth that ~~scrapes~~ ^{together} rakes along the ground and scrapes ~~up~~ any stray hay lying there. As if the hayfield was a head of hair and the scatter rake a big iron comb going over it, so to speak. Midway between the wheels a seat stuck up for the rake drive--me--to ride on, and a wooden tongue extended forward for a team of horses to be hitched to.

My team was in harness and waiting. Blanche and Fisheye. As workhorses go, they weren't too bad a pair; a light team, as you didn't need the biggest horses in the world just to pull a scatter rake, but more on the steady side than frisky. That Blanche and Fisheye were

civilized at all was a relief to me, because you never know what you might get in a team of horses. One of them maybe can pull like a Percheron but is dumb, and the other one clever enough to teach geometry but so lazy he constantly lays back in the traces. Or one horse may be a kicker, and his mate so mild you could pass a porcupine



under him without response. So except for Fisheye staring sideways at you in a ~~not~~ fishy way as you harnessed him, and Blanche looking like she needed a nap all the time, this team of mine was better than the horse law of averages might suggest.

I believe I am right in saying Pete was the first rancher in the Two country to use a power buckrake -- an ^{old} automobile ^{-and -engine} chassis with a ~~buckrake~~ fork mounted on it to buck the hay in from the field to the stack. Wisdom Johnson ^{a few summers before} had brought word ~~that~~ of the invention of the power buckrake in the Big Hole: "I tell you, Pete, they got them all over that country. They move ^{hay} faster than you can see." That proved to be not quite the case, but the contraption could ^{bring in} gather hay as fast as two buckrakes propelled by horses. Thus ^{the} internal combustion engine ^{roared into} ~~came~~ to the Reese hayfields and speeded matters up, but it also left dabs of hay behind it, scatterings which had either blown off the buckrake fork or which it simply missed. The scatter raker was the gatherer of that ^{leftover} hay, which otherwise would be wasted. In place on my rake seat, I ^{now} clucked to Blanche and Fisheye, reined them toward the part of the meadow Pete had been bucking in loads from, and my second summer of scatter raking was begun.

I suppose I have to admit, anybody who could handle a team of workhorses could run a scatter rake.

(no. 4)

But not necessarily run it as it ought to be done. The trick was to stay on the move but at an easy pace, keep the horse in mild motion and the rake teeth down there gathering leftover hay, instead of racing around here and yon. Roam and glean, by going freestyle over a field as a fancy skater swoops around on ice. Well, really not quite that free and fancy, for with the horse and a 10-foot rake you are directing maybe a ^{and a half} ton of moving weight, the horse portion of it possessed of ^{some} notions of its own, and ~~so~~ ^{your maneuvers accordingly have} ~~whim has~~ to be somewhat approximate. But still I say, the more you could let yourself go and just follow the ~~motion~~ flow of the hayfield, so to speak--swoop in where the ^{power} buckrakes had ^{recently} just been, even if there wasn't much spilled hay apparent there--the better off you were as a scatter raker. A mind as loose as mine was about right for scatter raking.

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~~_____~~

"How did it go?" my mother asked, that first night of full haying. We were waiting supper for my father, who was somewhere up the North Fork inspecting the progress of a CCC trail crew there.

"A stack and a half," I reported offhandedly as if I had been a hayhand for centuries. "About usual, for first day."

"How did you get along with Blanche and Fisheye?"

~~_____~~

^{kind of a}
"They're ~~a~~ logey pair of sonsa--" I remembered in time to mend my mouth; the vocabulary I'd been using around Pete and the crew was a quick ticket to trouble here at home-- "of so and sos. But they're okay."

She appraised me from where she was leaning against the kitchen sink, arms folded across her chest. Then surprised me with her smile and: "It's quiet around here, ~~sink~~ without you."

I chose to take that as a compliment. More than that, I risked ribbing her in return, a little. "Well, I guess I could call you up on the telephone every noon ^{from} at Pete and Marie's, and sing you a song or tell you a joke."

"Never mind,
~~That's all right,~~ Mister Imagination," she declined. "I'll adjust."

~~_____~~

~~_____~~

I didn't pay it sufficient mind at the time, but in truth my mother did have to adjust. Alec in exile. Me rationed between English Creek and the Noon Creek hayfields. My father beginning to be gone more and more as fire danger increased in the forest. The reverse of her usual situation of a houseful of male McCaskills-- a genuine scarcity of us. There is another topic which occupies my mind these days, ^{the} the way life sorts us into men and women, not on any basis of capability that I have ever been able to see. High on the ~~among~~ list of questions I wish I'd had the ^{good sense} ~~brains~~ to ask, throughout that immense summer, is the one to my mother--her view about being born as a woman into a region which featured male livelihoods.

—————
 "You finally starved out up there, did you," she now greeted my father's late arrival. "Wash up and sit up, you two, supper will be just a minute now."

"How'd it go today?" my father asked me, and I repeated my report of Reese haying. Through that and other supper conversation he nodded and said uh-huh a lot, which signaled that he was only half-listening. The symptom was annual. At this point of the summer, and hot as this

28

one suddenly had turned, fire was forever on the mind of a forest ranger. The joke was told

that when the preacher at a funeral asked if anyone wanted to memorialize the deceased, a ~~forest~~ ranger was the first one onto his feet and began: "Old Tom wasn't the worst fellow I ever knew. Now I'd like to add a few words about fire control."

When you think about it, my father's yearly ^{deep} mood about fire was understandable enough. He was responsible for an entire horizon. The skyline made up of peaks and reefs and timbered slopes and high grasslands: that conglomeration of nature ~~landmarks~~ was designated his district of the Two Medicine National Forest, and every blessed inch of it was prey to lightning storms and careless campfires and flipped cigarettes. His line of defense was a light thread of men across that mass of mountain and forest; the lookouts in the tall towers, and at this time of year, the fire guards he would start stationing in camps and cabins for quick combat against lightning strikes or smolders of any other sort. My father entirely subscribed to the theory that the time to fight a forest fire was before it got going. True, the timber of the Two here on the east

face of the Rockies was not as big and ^{dense and} flammable as the forests farther west in Montana and Idaho. "But that doesn't mean they're made of goddamn asbestos either," ran the complaint of east-side rangers ~~in~~ on the Two, the Lewis and Clark, the Custer, ^{and} the Helena, ^{against} ~~towards~~ what they saw as a westward tilt in the thinking and ^{the fire} budget of Region One headquarters. It was a fact that the legendary fires occurred ^{over there} west of the Continental Divide. The Bitterroot blaze of 1910 was an absolute hurricane of flame. Into smoke went 3 million acres of standing trees, a lot of it the finest white pine in the world. And about half the town of Wallace, Idaho, burned. And this too--the Bitterroot fire killed 85 persons, 84 of them done in directly by the flames and the other one walked off a little from a hotshot crew on Setzer Creek and put a pistol to himself. The Forest Service, which was only a few years old at the time, was bloodied badly by the Bitterroot fire. And as recently as 1934, there had been the fiasco of the Selway fires ^{along} ~~near~~ the Idaho-Montana line. That summer, the Selway National Forest became the Alamo of Region One. Into

} Mike Handy file card

Idaho map {

} Selway
 Vol. of records etc. in Forest fire file

rewrites,
based on
Selway files
in Forest fire
file

^{back-country} those fires the regional forester, Major Kelley, and his headquarters staff poured 5400 men, and they never did get the flames under control.

The Pete King fire, the McClendon Butte fire, the Hell Gate fire east of the Lochsa River, the Coolwater fire, a spot fire at Canyon Creek, all were roaring at once. When the OO fire blew up, a couple of hundred CCC guys had to run like jackrabbits to escape it. Five

fire camps went up in smoke, the OO ranger station almost did. Nothing

the Forest Service tried ^{on the Selway} worked. Nothing could work, really. An

inferno has no thermostat. In those years, the official notion

of fighting a forest fire was what was called the 10 a.m. policy:

aim for control of the fire by 10 the next morning. My father was

following the reports from the Selway and said, "The Major better just

aim for 10 a.m. on Christmas Day for this one." Actually the rains

of late September finally slowed the Selway fires, and only weeks after

that, the Major killed off the Selway National Forest, parceled out its

land to the neighboring Clearwater and Nezperce forests and scattered

its staff like the tribes of Israel. The Selway summer sobered everybody

working in Region One--the total defeats by fire and the Major's

obliteration of a National Forest unit--and for damn sure no ranger

wanted any similar nightmare erupting in his own district.

Oct. '64 letter in Selway, forest fire file; also Koch letter

B of R
P. 45-
"could happen anywhere"

I stop to recount all this because of what happened now, as my father finished supper and thumbed open the day's one piece of mail, an official Forest Service envelope. "What've we got here," he wondered, "the latest kelleygram?"

His next utterance was: "Sonofabitch."

He looked as if he had been hit with a 2 x 4, stunned and angry. Then, as if the words ~~might~~ would have to change themselves when read aloud, he recited from the letter:



based on
Region I
Annual Efficiency
Report, 1939
p. 7

"Placement of man^{power} ^{fire season} ~~this year~~ will be governed by localized fire danger measurements. An enforced lag of manning below current danger will eliminate over-manning designed to meet erratic peak loads and will achieve material decrease in FF costs over past years' expenditures. Organization on east-side forests in particular is to be held to the lowest level consistent with carefully analyzed current needs."

My mother oh so slightly shook her head, as if this confirmed her suspicions of brainlessness in the upper ranks of the U.S. Forest Service. My father crumpled the letter and crossed the kitchen to the window looking out on Roman Reef and Phantom Woman peak and other of the mountains of the Two.

I asked, "What's all that mean?"

on our side of the Divide

"No fire guards until things start burning," said my father without turning from the window.

—

Right up until the time haying started, I had been rehearsing to myself how to talk my parents into letting me live in the bunkhouse at Pete's with the rest of the hay crew. It was something I imagined I much wanted to do. Be in on the gab of Wisdom and Perry and Bud, ^{all} hear the tales of the Big Hole and First Avenue South and Texas and Anaconda and so on and so on. Gain one more rung towards being a grown-up, I suppose ~~it came down to~~ ^{was what was working on me.} Yet when haying time arrived I did not even bring up the bunkhouse issue.

For one thing, I could anticipate my mother's enunciation about one shavetail McCaskill already living in a bunkhouse and to judge by Alec's ^{recent} ~~summer~~ behavior ^{is} "One ~~Was~~ More Than Enough." For another, with my father on the go as much as he was this summer, it seemed plain that he would prefer for me to be on hand at English Creek whenever he couldn't ~~be~~. But do you know, I actually made it unanimous against myself. What the matter came right down to was that I didn't want to give up the porch bedroom at English Creek for the dubious gain of bunking with hay hands.

Which is how I became a one-horsepower commuter. The one horse being Pony, whom I found I regarded with considerable more esteem ever since Mouse decided to hose down the rodeo grounds that time in front of Leona. Each morning now I got up at 5, went out and caught

and saddled Pony outside the barn--quite a lot of light in the sky that time of year--and the pair of us would head for the Reese ranch.

Where morning is concerned, I am my father all over again. "The day goes downhill after daybreak," was his creed. I don't suppose there are too many people now who have seen a majority of the dawns of their life, but my father did, and I have. And of my lifetime of early rising I have never known better dawns than those when I rode from English Creek to my haying job on Noon Creek.

The ford north of the ranger station, Pony and I would cross-- if there was enough moon the wild roses along the creek could be seen, pale crowds of them--and in ^a few minutes of climbing we came atop the bench of land which divides the two creek drainages. Up there, at that brink-of-dawn hour, the world reveals all its edges. Dark lines of the tops of buttes and benches to the north, towards the Two Medicine River and the Blackfeet Reservation. The Sweetgrass Hills bumping up far on the eastern horizon like ^{five} dunes of black sand. The timbered crest of Breed Butte standing up against the stone mountain wall of the west. What trick of light it is I can't really say, but everything looked as if drawn in heavy strokes, with the

final shade of night penciled in wherever there was a ~~brush~~ gulch or coulee.

The only breaks in the stillness ~~of it all~~ were Pony's hooves against the earth, and the west breeze which generally met us atop that broad benchland. I say breeze. In the Two country anything that doesn't life ~~+~~ you off your horse is only a breeze. My mountain coat was on me, my hat pulled low, my hands in leather work gloves, and I was just about comfortable.

Since Pete's haying season ^{always} lasted a month or a little more, I rode right through the phases of the moon. My favorite you can guess on first try. The fat full moon, resting there as if it was an agate marble which had rolled into the western corner of the sky. During the early half of my route the mountains still drew most of their light from the moon, and I watched the reefs and other rock faces change ~~completion~~ ^x from light gray to ever so slightly pink--as the sunrise began to touch them. Closer to me, the prairie flowers now began ~~to make~~ ^d themselves known amid the tan grass. Irises, paintbrushes, bluebells, sunflowers.

Then this. The first week or so of those daybreak rides, the sun was north enough that it came up between the Sweetgrass Hills.

They stand 60 or 70 miles ~~from where I sat atop~~^{east}
across the prairie from where I was riding,

way over towards Havre, so there was a sense that I was seeing a sunrise happening in a far land. The gap between the mounded sets of hills first filled with a kind of film; a haze of coming light, it might be called. Then the sun would slowly present itself, like a big glowing coal burning its way up through the horizon.

Those dawns taught me that beauty makes the eyes greedy. For even after all ~~that~~^{this}, mountains and moon and earth edges and the coming of the sun, I considered that what was most worth watching for was the first shadow of the day. When the sun worked its way about half above the horizon, that shadow emerged to stretch itself off from Pony and me, ~~horse~~^{horse} and youngster melded, into an apparition of left-over dark a couple of hundred feet in length. Drawn out on the prairie grass in that ~~fantastic~~^{far-reaching} first shadow, Pony and I loomed like some new creature put together from the main parts of a camel and a giraffe.

Is it any wonder then that each of these haying-time dawns made me feel remade?

#

Meanwhile it
 It continued to be the damndest summer of weather anybody could
 remember. All that rain of June, and then July making a habit of
 90 degrees, and now on the morning of the 21st of July we woke up
 to snow in the mountains. Fire was on the loose elsewhere in Montana--
 spot fires across the ^{Continental} Divide in the Flathead country and ^{others} up in Glacier
 Park, and a big blaze down in Yellowstone Park that hundreds of men
 were on--

Manhattan

~~Park~~ while my father's forest lay snoozing under a cool sheet of
 white.

"How did you arrange that?" my mother mock-questioned him at
 breakfast. "Clean living and healthy thoughts?"

"The ^{prayerrr} powerrr of Scotch ~~prayerrr~~," he rumbled back at her in
 his preacher voice. Then with his biggest grin in weeks: "Also known
 as the law of averages. Tough it out ~~in a minute~~ long enough in this
 country and a snowstorm will eventually happen when you actually
 want it to."

As I say,

Putting up Pete's hay always took about a month, given some days of being rained out or broke down. This proved to be a summer when we were reasonably lucky about both moisture and breakage. So steadily that none of us on the crew said anything about it for fear of changing our luck, day on day along Noon Creek our new stacks appeared, like fresh green loaves.

My scatter raking became automatic with me. Of course, whenever my mind doesn't have to be on what I am doing, it damn well for sure is going to be on some other matter. Actually, though, for once in my life I did a respectable job of combining my task at hand and my wayfaring thoughts. For if I had a single favorite daydream of those hayfield hours, it



~~If I had a single favorite daydream of those hayfield hours, it~~
 was to wonder why a person couldn't be a roving scatter raker in the
 way that sheep shearers and harvest hands moved with their seasons.
 I mean, why not? The principle seems to me the same: a nomad profession.
 I could see myself traveling through Montana from hay country to hay
 country--although preferably with a better stepper^s than Blanche^{and Fisheye,} if
 team
 there was much distance involved--and hiring on, ~~horse~~ and rake and
 all, at the best-looking ranch of each locale. Maybe spend a week,
 at the peak of haying
 ten days, at each. Less if the grub was mediocre, longer if a real
 Dwell
 pie maker was in the kitchen. ~~Live~~ in the bunkhouse ~~so~~ as to get
 to know everybody on a crew, for somehow ~~each~~^{every} crew, ~~each~~^{every} hay hand,
~~discernably a little~~
 was ~~in some way~~ different from any other. Then once I had learned
 enough about that particular country and earned ~~the~~ from the boss
 the invite, "Be with us again next ~~year~~^{"You'll be coming} year, won't you?", on I would
 go, rolling on, the iron wheels and ~~the~~^{line} of tines of
 my scatter rake like some odd overwide chariot rumbling down the
 road.

an abrupt

A case of wanderlust, this may sound like, but then it took
 very little to infect me at that age. Can this be believed? Except
 for once when ~~we~~ all of us at the South Fork school were taken to

Helena to visit the capitol, a once-in-awhile trip with my father when he had to go to forest headquarters in Great Falls was the farthest I had ever been out of the Two country. Ninety miles; not much of a grand tour. There were places of Montana I could barely even imagine.

Butte. All I knew definitely of Butte was that when you met anyone from there, even somebody as mild as Ray Heaney's father Ed, he would announce "I'm from Butte" and his chin would shoot out a couple of inches on that up-sound of yewt. In the midst of all this wide Montana landscape a city where shifts of men tunneled like gophers. Butte, the copper kingdom. Butte, the dark mineral pocket. Or the other thing that was always said: "Butte's a hole in the ground and so's a grave." That, I heard any number of times in the Two country. I think the truth may have been that parts of Montana like ours were apprehensive, actually a little scared, of Butte. There seemed to be something spooky about a place that lived by eating its own guts, which is the way mining sounded to us. Butte I would ~~definitely~~ surely have to see someday. And the Big Hole Basin. As Wisdom Johnson told it,

stacker team job; it consisted

were to see somebody. And the big note began. As Madison Johnson told me
when he the way things worked to us. Butte I would reminiscently and only

I think the first way were seen that parts of Montana like ours were
so, a "place". That I heard any number of times in the two countries.
Other things that was always said: "Butte, a note in the glowing and
Butte, the copper kingdom. Butte, the dark mineral basket. Of the
Montana landscape a city where suits of men filled the like Robbers.
houses on that up-sloping of land. In the midst of all this wide
announced "I'm from Butte" and his own world about one a couple of
from there, even somebody as wild as Ray Henney's father. But he would
Butte. All I knew definitely of Butte was that when you met anyone
there were places of Montana, I could barely even imagine.

Heard to what the capital, a once-in-a-while trip with my father

No

REVERSED

as haying season approached in the Big Hole the hay hands--they called them haydiggers down there, which I also liked--began

to gather about a week ahead of time. They sifted in, "jungled up"

creekside in the willows at the edge of town, and visited and gossiped and just

laid ~~about~~ ^{around} until haying started. I ~~liked~~ ^{savored} the notion of that, the

gathering, the waiting. Definitely the Big Hole would be on my hay

rake route.

And the dry Ingomar

~~The dry Sumatra~~ country down there in the southeastern part of the

state, where Walter Kyle had done his hotel style of sheep ranching.

The town water supply was a tank car, left off on the railroad siding

each week. Walter told of coming back to town from sheep camp one late fall

day and seeing flags of celebration flying. His immediate thought

was that somebody had struck water, "but it turned out to be just

the armistice ending the war." Havre and the High Line country.

Fort Peck dam. Miles City. Billings. Lewistown. White Sulphur

Springs. Red Lodge. Bozeman and the

green Gallatin Valley. For that matter, Missoula. Montana seemed

to be out there waiting for me, if I only could become old enough

to get there.

But. There's always a "but" when you think about going everywhere and doing everything. But how old was that, when I would be advanced enough to sample Montana to the full?

North of the ears strange things will happen. Do you know who kept coming to mind, as I thought my way hither and thither from those Noon Creek hay meadows? Stanley Meixell. Stanley who had gone cowboying in Kansas when he was a hell of a lot younger than I

was. Stanley who there in the cabin during our ^{journey}campending ~~trip~~

told me of his wanders, down to Colorado and Wyoming and over into the Dakotas, in and out of jobs. Stanley who evidently so much

preferred the wandering life that he gave up being a forest ranger,

to pursue it. Stanley who could plop himself on a bar stool on the

Fourth of July and be found by Velma Simms. But Stanley who also

looked worn down, played out and

overbooazed, by the footloose way of life. The example of Stanley

bothered me no little bit. If the wanderer's way was as alluring

as it seemed from my seat on the scatter rake, how then did I account

for ~~Stanley's~~ the eroded look ^{around Meixell's} of Stanley's eyes?

#

few weeks of haying were behind us
 Almost before I knew it, the first ~~portion of ~~starting~~ haying was~~
~~over~~ and we were moving the equipment ~~up~~ onto the benchland for the
 ten days or so of putting up the big ^{meadow} ~~field~~ of dry-land alfalfa there.
 "The alfaloofy ^{ee} field," as Perry Fox called it.

This was another turn of the summer I looked forward to with interest,
 for ~~the~~ ^{this} alfalfa ^{haying} ~~field~~ was far enough from the Reese ranch house that
 no longer went
 we ~~didn't~~ in at noon for dinner. Now began field lunches.

My stomach aside, why did I look forward to this little season
 of field lunches? I think the answer must be that the field lunches
 on the bench ^{appealed to me.}
~~constituted~~ constituted a kind of ritual that ~~I liked~~. Not that
 I would want to eat every meal of my life in the stubble of a hayfield,
 but for ten days or so, it was like camping out or being on an
 expedition; possibly ^{even} a little like "jungling up" the way the Big
 Hole hayhands started off. Whatever, the ^{alfaloofy} ~~field~~ ^{ee} lunch routine went
 like this.



~~The field lunches on the bench constituted a kind of ritual.~~

A few minutes before,

noon, here came Marie in the pickup. She had with her the chuck box,

the old Reese family wooden one with cattle brands burned everywhere

on its sides, and when a couple of us slid it ~~down~~ back to the tailgate and lifted it down and waited

and opened it, in there were two or three kinds of sandwiches wrapped

in a dishtowel, ^{5,} and a ^{bowl of} potato or macaroni salad, and a gallon jar of

cold tea or lemonade, and bread and butter and jam, and pickles, and radishes

and new garden carrots, and a pie or cake. Each of us ^{chose} found a dab

of shade around the power buckrake or the pickup--my preference was

to sit on the running board of the pickup; somehow it seemed more

like a real meal when I sat up to eat--and then we ploughed into the

lunch. Afterward, which is to say the rest of the noon hour, ~~Pete~~

Pete was a napper, with his hat down over his eyes. I never was; I

was afraid I might miss something. Clayton too was open-eyed, in

that silent sentry way ~~of~~ all the Hebner kids had.

smoked, each rolling himself a handmade. ^{This} ~~That was the~~
Perry and Bud ~~meanwhile each rolled himself a smoke.~~

cue for Wisdom to pull out his ^{own} sack of Bull Durham, pat his shirt

pocket, then say to Perry or Bud, "You got a Bible on you?" One or

the other would loan him the packet of cigarette papers and he'd roll

himself one. Strange how ~~a~~ ^{he} guy could always have tobacco but perpetually

col. Pop
out me
Pop?

birds

anyone
he

...one. ...
...the other would soon run the ...
...backpack' then ...

...that attempt ...
...was ...
...here was a ...

...had shifted appreciably on our ride thus far. I snugged a rope or two

to justify the report to my father: All tight as raddlesstrings.

While I was cross-examining the pack ropes my father had been
looking back out over the country behind us. Since we're this far along,
he decided, maybe we might as well eat some lunch.

The view rather than his stomach guided him in that choice, I believe.

be out of papers, which were the half of smoking that cost almost nothing, but that was Wisdom for you.

The womanly presence of Marie, slim and dark, sitting in the shade of the pickup beside the chuck box, ^{and the dogging Pete,} posed the need for another ritual. As ~~coffee~~ ^{tea} and ~~iced tea~~ ^{lemonade} caught up with kidneys, we males one after another would rise, carefully casual, and saunter around to the far side of the haystack and do our deed. Then saunter back, trying to look like we'd never been away and Marie showing no least sign that we had.

Eventually Pete would rouse himself. He not only could nap at the drop of an eyelid, he woke up just as readily. "I don't suppose you ^{characters} ~~guys~~ finished this field while I was resting my eyes, did you?"

Then he was on his feet, saying the rest of the back-to-work message:

"Until they invent hay that puts itself up, I guess we got to."

———

Our last day of haying the benchland alfalfa brought two ~~events~~ ^{occurrences} out of the ordinary.

The first came at once, when I headed Blanche and Fisheye to start the morning by raking the southwest corner of the field to ~~make~~ there a while. Maybe a quarter of a mile farther from where I was lay a nice grassy coulee, along that The ground there slope of Breed Butte. ~~It~~ was part of Walter Kyle's place, and with Walter summering up in the mountains with his sheep, Dode Withrow always put up the hay of this coulee for ~~Withrow~~ ^{him} on shares. The Withrow stacking crew had ~~got~~ ^{pulled in and} set up the afternoon before--I could pick out ~~see~~ Dode over there, still with a cast on his leg, and I could all but hear ~~Dode~~ ^{him} on the topic of trying to run a haying crew with his leg set in cement. If I hadn't been so content ^{with} ~~about~~ haying for Pete, Dode would have been my choice of somebody to work for.

~~Maybe~~ ~~The similarities~~ scatter rakers are all born with similar patterns of behavior in them, but in any case, at ^{this} ~~the~~ same time I was working the corner of our field the Withrow ~~scattered~~ ^{raker} driver was doing the nearest corner of theirs. Naturally I studied how he was going about ~~it~~ ^{matters}, and a minute or so of that showed me that he wasn't a he, but Marcella Withrow.

I ~~have~~ ^{had} no idea what the odds ~~are~~ ^{must be against} on a coincidence like that--

Marcella and me having been the only ones in our class those 8 years

seemed to elude my father, but he could be nimble enough in the short run. I wasn't without some practice at girling. And Bet was worth extra effort.

~~At~~ ^{matrimony} The McCaskill-Reese ~~marriage~~ ^{after that} ensued, and a year or so ~~later~~, Alec ensued. Which then meant that my father and mother were supporting themselves and a youngster by a job which my father had been given because he was single and didn't need much wage. This is the brand of situation you can find yourself in without much effort in Montana, but that it is common does not make it ~~one~~ ^{one} ~~damn bit more~~ ^{acceptable} ~~comfortable~~.

amid the previous evening's contention my father and Alec could have been put under

oath, each Bibled to the deepest of the truths in him, my father would have had to say something like: I don't want you making my mistakes over again. And Alec to him: Your mistakes were yours,

of grade school at South Fork, and ^{now} the only English Creek ~~pick~~ ones
 in our particular high school class in Gros Ventre, and ^{this moment} ~~now~~ both
 doing the same job, in the same hay neighborhood. ~~Anyway,~~ it made
 me grin. It also ~~made me look~~ ^{caused me to peek} around with care, to ~~be~~ ^{make} sure that I
 wouldn't be liable for any ^{later} razzing from our crew, and when the coast
 looked clear I waved to Marcella. She did the same, maybe even to
 checking over her shoulder against the razzing possibility, and we rattled past
~~passed~~ ^{one another} and raked our separate meadows. Some news to tell Ray Heaney
 the next time I got to town, anyway.

The other event occurred at noon, and this one went by the name
 of Toussaint Rennie.

He arrived in the pickup with Marie and the ^{chuck box of} lunch. "I came to
 make sure," Toussaint announced, his tan gullied face solemn as
 Solomon. "Whether you men build haystacks right side up."

Actually the case was that Toussaint ^{had finished} was through with ditch-
 riding for awhile, with everybody harvesting ^{now} instead of irrigating,
 and Marie had ^{driven} ~~gone~~ up to the Two Medicine to fetch ^{company for} ~~for~~ him for the day.
 blood-and-sou~~mates~~,
 What conversations went on between those two ~~soumates~~, I've always
 wished I could have overheard. [#] The gab between the hay crew and

Toussaint was pretty general, though, until we were done eating.

Pete then retired to his nap spot, and Perry and Bud and eventually

Wisdom lit up their smokes, and so on. ~~But after~~ A little time passed,

then Toussaint leaned from where he was sitting and laid his hand on the

chuck box. "Perry," he called over to Perry Fox. "We ate out of

this, a time before."

"That we ~~have~~^{did}," agreed Perry. "But Marie's style of grub is a whole helluva lot better."

Toussaint put his finger to the ~~F~~^{large} burnt into the end of the

chuck box. "Dan Floweree." ~~The~~[#] finger moved to the 9R brand on

the box's side. "Louis Robare." ~~To~~[#] the T beside it: "Billy Ulm."

~~space~~[#] had been used to burn in a big D-S. Then to the lid, where the ~~next one~~[#] had been burnt

"This one you know best, Perry."

I straightened up. It had come to me ~~where~~[;] where Perry and Toussaint ~~had~~^{would have} first eaten out of this chuck box, when those ~~brands~~^{cattle} were first seared into its wood. The ~~roundup~~^{famous} of 1882, from the elbow of the

Teton River to the Canadian line; the one Toussaint told my father about, the one he said was the biggest ever in this part of Montana.

Nearly 300 men, the ranchers and their cowhands and horse wranglers and night herders and cooks--40 tents it took, to hold them all.

Each morning the riders fanned out in half circles of about 15 miles' ride and rounded in the cattle for sorting; each afternoon the branding fires of the several outfits sent smoke above the prairie as the irons wrote ownership onto living cowhide. When the big sweep was over, coulees and creek bottoms searched out over an area ^{larger than} ~~the size of~~ some eastern states, about 100,000 head of cattle were accounted for.

"Davis-Hauser-Stuart," Perry was saying of the brand on the chuck box lid. "My outfit at the time."

DHS, the Damn Hard Sittin'."

Wisdom Johnson was beginning to catch up with the conversation.

"Where was this you're talking about?"

"All in through here," ^{indicated with a slow} ~~said~~ Perry ~~with a swing~~ of his head from shoulder to shoulder. "Roundin' up cattle."

"Cattle?" Wisdom cast a look around the benchland, as if a herd might be ^{pausing} out there this very moment. "Around here?" It did seem ~~to~~ a lot to believe, that this alfalfa field and the farmland ^{on horizon} to the east of us once was a grass heaven for cows.

"Everywhere from the Teton to Canada, those old outfits had cattle," Perry ^{confirmed} affirmed. "If you could find the buggers."

Bud Dolson spoke up. "When'd all this take place?"

Toussaint told him: "~~1882~~ A time ago. '82."

"1882?" queried Wisdom. "Perry, how ungodly old are you?"

Perry pointed a thumb at Toussaint. "Younger'n him."

Toussaint chuckled. "^{Everybody is.} ~~Everybody is.~~"

—

How can pieces of time leap in and out of each other the way they do? There I sat, that ^{noontime,} ~~noontime,~~ listening to Toussaint and Perry speak of eating from a chuckwagon box all those years ago; and hearing myself question my mother about how she and her mother and Pete were provisioned from the same chuck box on their St. Mary's wagon trip a quarter of a century ago; and ^{gazing on} ~~watching~~ Pete, snoozing there in the shade of the ^{pickup} ~~buckrake,~~ simultaneously my admired uncle and the boy who helloed the horses at St. Mary's.

"Cattle?" Madson cast a look around the benchland, as if a herd
"We ~~had~~ ^{shall have} to set a snare for Mister Wemblers."
"Around here?" "I did seem to see a
Aye, Melander agreed, that was the very problem to be grappled
lot to believe, that this fellow's field and the fairland for the east
mind to betray them to the Russians for a reward?
of us once was a grass heaven for cows.
to be at Wemblers' mercy. What if I took it into his narrow bull
"Everywhere from the Teton to ^{Wemblers} ~~the Teton~~, those old outfits had cattle,
Karlsson squinted in thought, then said that what galled him was
"If you could find the buyers."
"Besides, he is a bull for strength. We can use him."
"When'd all this take place?"
have to be done here within the fort--would raise more questions than
"I was a time ago."
a valued smith such as Wemblers--especially when the killing would
Melander shook his head. He had thought it through, and the death of

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Isidor on one of the highest trails ^{farthest back in} ~~in this part of~~ ^{of the Tm.} the mountains
where a misstep by one pack 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:} ~~called:~~ Mac, if we was to roll this packstring right about
here, the bastards'd ^{bounce till} ~~roll~~ they stunk.

Since the lookout gear and our food only amounted to a load for
one horse it hadn't been necessary to ^{call on} ~~hire~~ Isidor for this counting
trip of ours. But even absent he had had his influence that morning
as I arranged the packs on Brownie/Homer under my father's scrutiny,
both of us total converts to Isidor's perpetual preachment that in

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tid
thing

Toussaint and the history that went everywhere with him set me to thinking. Life and people were a kind of flood around me this summer, yet for all my efforts I still was high and dry ~~so far~~ ^{where} ~~as~~ one point of the past was concerned. When Toussaint climbed to his feet to ~~me~~ visit the far side of the alfalfa stack, I decided. Hell, he himself was the one who brought the topic up, back at the creek picnic on the Fourth. You are a campjack these days. And an outhouse engineer and a dawn rider and a hay equipment mechanic and a scatter raker, and an inquisitive almost-15-year-old. I got up and followed Toussaint around the haystack.

"Jick," he acknowledged me. "You are getting tall. Mac and Beth will need a stepladder to talk to you."

"Yeah, I guess," I contributed, ~~but~~ my altitude was not what I wanted discussed. As Toussaint tended to his irrigation and I to mine, I ~~asked~~: "Toussaint, what can you tell me about Stanley Meixell? I mean, I don't know him real well. That time up in the Two, I was only lending him a hand with his campending, is all."

"Stanley Meixell," Toussaint intoned. "Stanley was the ranger. When the national forest was put in."

"Yeah, I know that. But more what I was wondering--did he and my folks have a run-in, sometime? I can't quite figure out what they think of Stanley."

change?

you think of Stanley?"

He had no there. "I don't just know. I've never come up

against anybody just like him."

Toussaint nodded. "That is Stanley," he affirmed. "You know

more than you think you do."

nothing. # ~~Samuel~~ ~~called~~ ~~on~~ ~~from~~ ~~the~~ ~~topic~~ ~~of~~ ~~muskets~~: "And you know

for ~~Sam~~ heaven-certain, Melander, that we'll find this American fort

at-what is it, Astoria?"

"Astoria," ^{for} named for the rich man Astor. It is there, I have

known sailors ~~whose~~ whose ships have called there. Perhaps we

will not even have to go that far ^{if} if we meet a merchantman or supply

ship along the way. English, Spanish, Americans or the devil, ^{it won't matter.} So

long as they're not Russians."

could raise and lower the anchor of an ocean liner on the string of

links that began to happen now.

Our new venue for haying was the old Ramsay homestead, The "upper place," my mother and Pete both called it by habit, because it was the part of the Reese ranch farthest up Noon Creek, farthest in toward the mountains. The meadows there were small but plentiful, tucked into the willow bends of Noon Creek the way pieces of a jigsaw puzzle clasp into one another. Pete always left the Ramsay hay until last because its ^{twisty little} fields were so hard to ~~work~~ buckrake, in some cases he had to drive out of sight around two or three bends of the creek to bring in enough hay for a respectable stack. "You spend all your damn time here going instead of doing," was his unfond sentiment.

For me on the scatter rake, though, the ^{upper} ~~Ramsay~~ place was just fine. Almost any direction I sent Blanche and Fisheye prancing toward, there stood ~~Breedn Butte~~ ^{Breedn Butte} or the mountains for me to lean my eyes on. In this close to them, the Rockies took up more than half the edge of the earth, which seemed only their fair proportion. And knowing the reefs and peaks as I did I could judge where each sheep allotment was, ^{along the mountain wall of} there in my father's forest. Walter Kyle atop Roman Reef with his sheep and his telescope. Andy Gustafson with one of the Busby bands, under the middle of the reef where I had camped him; farther south, Sanford Hebner in escape from his family name and situation. Closer toward Flume Gulch and the North Fork, whatever human improvement had

replaced Canada Dan as herder of the other Busby band. Lower down, in the mix of timber and grass slopes, Pat Hoy and the Withrow sheep; and the counting vee where my father and I talked and laughed with Dode. Already it was like going back to another time, to think about that first day of the counting trip.

The upper place, the old Ramsay place, always presented me new prospects of thought besides its horizons, though. For it was there that I was born. Alec and I both, in the Ramsay homestead house that still stands there today, although abandoned ever since my father quit as the Noon Creek association rider and embarked us into the Forest Service life. I couldn't have been but a year or so old when we moved away, yet I felt some regard for this site. An allegiance, even, for a bond of that sort ^{will} happen when you have been the last to live at a place. Or so I think. Gratitude that it offered a roof over your head for as long as it did, this may be, and remorse that only emptiness is your successor there.

September children,
Alec and I, native Noon Creekers. And my mother's birthplace down the creek at the Reese ranch house itself. Odd to think that of the four of us at the English Creek ranger station all those years, the place that answered to the word "home" in each of us, only my father originated on English Creek, he alone was our link to Scotch Heaven ~~and~~ →

and the ^{Montana} ~~American~~ origins of the McCaskills. We Americans scatter fast. 2

And something odder yet. In a physical sense, here at the upper place I was more distant from Alec than I had been all summer; the Double W lay half the length of Noon Creek from where my rake now wheeled and glided. Mentally, though, this advent to our mutual ^{native} ~~home~~ ground was a kind of reunion with my brother. Or at least with thoughts of him. While I held the reins of Blanche and Fisheye as they clopped along, I wondered what saddle horse Alec might be riding. When we moved the stacker from one site to the next, I thought of Alec on the move too, likely patrolling Double W fences this time of year, performing his quick mending on any barbwire or post that needed it. By this stage of haying Wisdom Johnson a time or two a day could be heard remembering the charms of Bouncing Betty, on First Avenue South in Great Falls. I wondered how many times a week Alec was managing to ride into Gros Ventre and see Leona. Leona. I wondered-- well, just say I wondered.

With all this new musing to be done, the first day of haying the Ramsay meadows went calmly enough.

~~The first day of haying the Ramsay meadows was calm enough.~~

mod
 A Monday, that was, a mild day following what had been a cool and cloudy Sunday. Wisdom Johnson, I remember, claimed we ^{now} were ^{haying} ~~getting~~ so far up into the polar regions that he might have to put his shirt on. Anyway, a Monday, a getting-underway day.

The morning of the second Ramsay day, though, began unordinarily.

I started to see so ~~much~~ as soon as Polly and I were coming down off the benchland ~~into~~ the Reese ranch buildings. My mind as usual was at that point was on sour milk soda biscuits and fried eggs and venison sausage and other breakfast splendors as furnished by Marie, but I couldn't help watching the other rider who always

approached the Reeses' at about the time I did. ^{This} ~~That~~ of course was Clayton Hebner, for as I'd be ~~at~~ descending from ~~my~~ my benchland route Clayton would be riding in from the ~~North~~ Hebner place on the North Fork, having come around the opposite ^{end} ~~side~~ of Breed Butte from me.

Always Clayton was on that same weary mare my father and I had seen the two smaller Hebner jockeys trying to urge into motion, at the

outset of our counting trip, and always he came plodding in at the same pace and maybe even in the same hooftracks as the ~~day~~ morning before.

The first few mornings of haying I had waved to Clayton, but received

The first ten minutes of waiting I had passed to Clayton, but received
some back and forth even in the same footprints as the ~~next~~ minutes before.
outset of our country trip, and stayed in some bygone in at the
John and Maybelle's--gawping behind the mesh. Since the baked goods
were tied in a dish towel on my saddle, I did the courteous thing
and got off and took the bundle up to Florence. Florence was, or had
been, a fairly good-looking woman, particularly among a family population
minted with the face of Good Help. But what was most immediately
noticeable about her was how worn she looked, as if she'd been sanded
but I couldn't help watching the other rider who stayed
version as well as other pleasant phenomena as I watched by water
at that point was on some milk and biscuits and fried eggs and

John
The look

She was a
OO-
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^{though}
Florence never saw it beyond the second year of high school in
Gros Ventre because she already had met Garland Hebler and promptly
was pregnant by him and, a little less promptly on Garland's part,
was married to him. She gave a small downcast smile as I handed
her the bundle, said to me Thank you ^{again,} ma Jick, and retreated back
inside.

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no response. And I didn't deserve any. I ought to have known Hebners didn't go in for waving. But etiquette of greeting was not what now had my attention. This particular morning, Clayton across the usual distance between us looked ~~somehow~~ larger, looked ~~more~~ slouchy, ~~as~~ as if he might have nodded off in the saddle, looked somehow--well, the word that comes to mind is dormant.

I had unsaddled Pony and was turning her into the pasture beside the barn when it became evident why ~~Clayton~~ Clayton Hebner didn't seem himself this morning. He wasn't.

"Hello there, Jick!" came the bray of Good Help Hebner. "Unchristly hour of the day to be out and about, ain't it?"

—

--"Clayton buggered his ankle up," Good Help was explaining in a fast yelp. Even before the sire of the Hebner clan managed to unload himself from the swaybacked mare, Pete had appeared in the yard with an expression ~~on his~~ face that told me ranch house walls did nothing to dim the identification of Good Help Hebner. "Sprained the goshdamn thing when him and Melvin was grab-assing around after supper last night," Good Help ~~continued~~ sped on to the two of us. "I tell you, Pete, I just don't know--"

--what's got into kids these days, I finished for Good Help in my mind before he blared it out.

Yet just about the time you think you can recite every forthcoming point of conversation from a Good Help Hebner, that's when he'll throw you for a loop. As now, when Good Help ^{delivered himself of} ~~sped on~~ to this:

"Ought not to leave a neighbor in the lurch, though, Pete. So I'll take the stacker driving for you for a couple days till Clayton mends ~~up~~ up."

Pete looked as though he'd just been offered something nasty on the end of a stick.

But ^{just} There was no way around the situation, ~~though~~. Someone to drive the stacker team was needed, and given that 12-year-old Clayton had been performing the job, ^{maybe} ~~there was~~ an outside chance ^{existed} that Good Help could, too. *Maybe.*

"Dandy," ^{uttered} ~~said~~ Pete without meaning a letter of it. "Come ~~in~~ in and sit up for breakfast, ^{Garland.} Then Jick can sort you out on the horses Clayton's been using."

As I'd be approaching from my benchland route, Clayton Hebner would be riding in from the North Fork, having come around the

county, too. *Went to*

been performing the job, there was an outside chance that good help the speaker, then was needed, and given that 12-year-old Clayton had

4 B... there was no way around the situation, though. Someone to drive the end of a stick.

Pete looked as though he'd just been offered something nearly on par with up.

I'll take the speaker driving for you for a couple days until Clayton

ought not to leave a neighbor in the lurch, though, Pete. So

you for a job. As now, when good help is to be had: