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Marilyn--I can't remember if you've done one of these chapter first-pages for this book. Anyway, just type the mock newspaper item in the upper right as shown, and then begin the ~~the~~ rest of the page down where you'd ordinarily start an opening page.

✓

TWO

This will mark the fifteenth Fourth of July in a row that Gros Ventre has mustered a creek picnic, a rodeo and a dance. Regarding those festivities, ye editor's wife inquires whether somebody still has her big yellow potato-salad bowl from last year; the rodeo will feature \$1140 in prize money; and the dance music will ~~be~~ again be by Nola Atkins, piano, and Jeff Swan, fiddle.

--Gros Ventre Weekly Gleaner, June 29

I have to honestly say that the next few weeks of this remembered summer look somewhat pale in comparison with my Stanley episode.

Only in comparison, though. <sup>#</sup> You can believe that I arrived back land of sheepherders and packhorses to English Creek from the ~~mountains~~ in no mood to take any further guff from that father of mine. What in Holy H. Hell was that all about, him and Stanley Meixell pussyfooting around each other the way they had when they met there on the mountain, then before it was over my father handing me over to Stanley like an orphan? Some counting trip, that one. I could spend the rest of the summer just trying to dope out why and what and who, if I let myself. Considering, then, that my bill of goods against my father was so long and fresh, life's next main development caught me by

entire surprise. This same parent who had just lent me as a towing

service for a whiskeyfied geezer trying to find his way up the Rocky

would be

Mountains--this identical father now announced that he ~~was~~ off ~~to~~

*the English Creek*

~~the~~ premises ~~on so,~~

~~Miscoula~~ for a week, and I hereby was elevated into being the man of the house.

# "Your legs are long enough by now that they reach the ground," he

~~solemnly~~ provided by way of justification the supertime this was

~~unveiled~~  
~~announced,~~

"so I guess that qualifies you to run this place, don't

you think?"

# —





#

Weather brought this about, as it did so much else that summer.

The cool wet mood of June continued, and about the middle of the month

our part of Montana had the solidest rain in years, a toad-drowner

that settled in around noon and poured on and on into the night.

That storm delivered snow onto the mountains--several inches fell in

the Big Belts south beyond Sun River, and that next morning here in

the Two, along the high sharp parts of all the peaks a white skift

shined, fresh-looking as a sugar sprinkle. You could bet, though, there

were a bunch of perturbed ~~and uneasy~~ sheepherders up there looking out

their wagon doors at it and not thinking sugar. Anyway, since that

storm was a ~~hard~~ straightforward douser with<sup>m</sup>out any lighting and left

the forests so sopping that there was no fire danger for ~~a~~<sup>awhile</sup>, the

desk jockeys at the national forest office in Great Falls saw this as

a chance to ship a couple of rangers from the Two over to Region

Send them back to school, as it was said.

headquarters for a refresher course. Both my father and Murray Tomlinson

of the Blacktail Gulch station down on

Sun River had been so assiduous about evading ~~these~~<sup>this</sup> in the past that the

finger of selecti on now never wavered whatsoever: it pointed ~~at~~<sup>the pair</sup> and my

~~father~~<sup>of them</sup> to Missoula for a week of fire school.

~~So~~ the morning came when my father appeared in his Forest Service monkey suit--uniform, green hat, pine tree badge--and readied himself to collect Murray at the Blacktail <sup>Culch</sup> station, from where they would drive over to Missoula together.

"Mazoola," he was still grumbling. "Why don't they send us to Hell to study fire and be done with it? What I hear, then, mileage is probably about the same."

My mother's sympathy was not rampant. "All that surprises me is that you've gotten by this long without having to go. Have you got your diary in some pocket of that rig?"

"Diary," my father muttered, "diary, diary, diary," patting various pockets. "I never budge without it." And went to try find it.

I spectated with some anticipation. My mood toward my father hadn't uncurdled entirely, and some time on my own, some open space without him around to remind me I was half-sore at him, looked just dandy to me. As did this first-ever designation of me as the man of the house. Of course, I was well aware my father hadn't literally



meant that I was to run English Creek in his absence. Start with the basic that nobody ran my mother. As for station matters, my father's assistant ranger, Paul <sup>Eliason</sup> ~~CC~~ was strawbossing a fire-trail crew not far up the South Fork; any vital forest business would be handled by Paul or the ranger south of us on the Indian Head district, Cliff Bowen.

No, I had no grandiose illusions. I was to make the check on Walter Kyle's place sometime during the week and help Isidor Pronovost line

out his pack string when he came to pack supplies up to the fire lookouts and do some barn cleaning

and generally be on hand for anything my mother thought up. Nothing to get wild-eyed about.

Even so, I wasn't prepared for what lay ahead when my father came back from his diary hunt, looked across the kitchen at me, said "Step right out here for some free entertainment," and led me around back of the ranger station.

There he went to the side of the outhouse, being a little gingerly about it because of his uniform. Turned. Stepped off sixteen paces-- why exactly sixteen I don't know, but likely it was in Forest Service regulations somewhere. And announced: "It's time we moved Republican headquarters. How're your shovel muscles?"

So here was my major duty of "running" English Creek in my father's absence--digging the new hole to site the ~~outhouse~~<sup>toilet</sup> over.

# — Let me be clear. The job itself I didn't particularly mind.

Shovel work is honest sweat, even yet I would ~~about as soon~~<sup>do</sup>

something manual ~~as~~<sup>than</sup> to diddle around with some temperamental damn

piece of ~~machinery~~<sup>machinery</sup>. No, my grouse was of a different feather than

that. I ~~simply~~<sup>purely</sup> was perturbed that here was one more instance of my father blindsiding me with a task I hadn't even dreamt of. First

Stanley, now this outhouse deal. Here was a

summer, it was beginning to seem like, when every time I turned around

~~some new~~<sup>and strange</sup> avenue of endeavor was ~~under~~<sup>already</sup> my feet and my father was pointing

me along it and ~~saying~~<sup>chirping</sup>, "Right this way--"

All this and I suppose more was on my mind as my father's pickup vanished over the rise of the Gros Ventre road and I contemplated my work site. # Moving an outhouse may not sound like the nicest occupation

in the world, ~~but~~<sup>neither</sup> is it as bad as you probably think. Here

is the program: When my father got





back from Missoula we would simply lever up each side of the outhouse high enough to slip a pole under to serve as a skid, then nail crosspieces to keep the pair of skids in place and with a length of cable attached to the back of the pickup, snake the building over atop the new pit *and let it down into place, ready for business.*

So the actual moving doesn't amount to all that much. The new *There's the drawback.* pit, though. The pit, my responsibility, was going to take considerable doing. Or rather, considerable digging.

At the spot my father had paced to and marked, I pounded in four stakes with *white kitchen* string ~~strung around~~ from one to another to represent the outhouse dimensions--inasmuch as ours was a two-holer, as was *3-holer?* considered *good-mannered* ~~control~~ for a family, it made a considerable rectangle; I guess about half again bigger than a cemetery grave--and now all I *the strung-in space* faced was to excavate to a depth of about seven feet.

Seven feet divided by, umm, parts of five days, what with the ride I had to make to check on Walter Kyle's place and helping Isidor with his pack string and general choring for my mother: I doped out that if I did a dab of *steady* digging each afternoon I could handily complete

<sup>Saturday when</sup>  
the hole by ~~the day~~ my father was due back. Jobs which can be broken

down into stints <sup>that</sup> that way, where you know if you put in a certain amount

of daily effort you'll <sup>overcome</sup> achieve the chore, I have always been able

<sup>handle</sup> to ~~it~~. It's the more general errands of life that daunt me.

I don't mean to spout an entire sermon on this outhouse topic,

but advancing into the ground does get your mind onto the earth, in

more ways than one. <sup>That day</sup> When I ~~first~~ started <sup>in</sup> on the outhouse rectangle I

of course <sup>first</sup> <sup>to</sup> had cut through the sod, and once that's been shoveled out,

it leaves a depression about the size of a cellar door. A sort of

entryway down into the planet, it looked like. Unearthing that sod

was the ~~one~~ <sup>this</sup> part of the task that made me uneasy, and it has taken me

these years to realize why. A number of times since, I have been present

when sod was broken to become a farmed field. And in each instance

I felt the particular emotion of watching that land be cut into furrows

for the first time ever--ever; can we even come close to grasping what

that means?--and the native grass being tipped on its side and then

folded under the brown wave of turned earth. Anticipation, fascination:

part of the feeling can be described with those words or ones close to them.



It can be understood, watching the ripping-plow cut the patterns that will become a grainfield, that the homesteaders who came to Montana in their thousands believed they were seeing a new life uncovered for them.

Yet there's a further portion of those feelings, at least in me. Uneasiness. The uneasy wondering of whether that ripping-plow is honestly the best idea, smothering a natural crop, grass, to try to nurture an artificial one. Not that I, or probably anyone else with the least hint of a qualm, had any vote in the matter. Both before and after the Depression--which is to say, in times when farmers had enough money to pay wages--kids such as I was in this particular English Creek summer were <sup>merely</sup> what you might call hired arms; brought in to pick rocks off the newly broken field. And not only the newly broken, for more rocks kept appearing and appearing. In fact in our part of Montana, rock picking was like sorting through a perpetual landslide. Anything bigger than a grapefruit--the heftiest rocks might rival a watermelon--was dropped onto a stoneboat pulled by a team <sup>f</sup> of horses or tractor, and the eventual load was dumped alongside the field. No stone fences built to look like ligatures of the landscape as in

New England or over in Ireland or someplace. Just raw ~~piles~~<sup>heaps</sup>, the slag of the plowed prairie.

I cite all this because by my third afternoon ~~stint~~<sup>shift</sup> of digging, I had confirmed for myself the Two country's reputation for being a toupee of grass on a cranium of rock. Gravel, more accurately, there so close to the bed of English Creek, which in its bottom was 100%

~~small stones~~<sup>small stones</sup> ~~rocks~~<sup>rocks</sup>. We had studied in school that glaciers ~~traveled~~<sup>bulldozed</sup> through this part of the world, but until you get to handling the evidence shovelful by shovelful the fact doesn't mean as much to you.

I am ~~positive~~<sup>dead sure</sup> this happened on the third afternoon, a Wednesday, because that was the day of the month the English Creek ladies' club met. There were enough wives along the creek to play two tables of cards, and so have a rare enough chance to visit, and club day always found my mother in a fresh dress right after lunch, ready to go. This day, Alice Van Bebber stopped by to pick her up. "My, Jick, you're growing like a weed," Alice crooned out the car window to me as my mother got in the other side. Alice always was flighty as a chicken looking in a mirror--living with Ed likely would do it to anybody--and away the car zoomed, up the South Fork road toward Withrows',



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as it was Midge's turn <sup>to be</sup> ~~the~~ hostess.

I know too that when I went out for my ~~shift~~ comfort station shift, I began by doing some work with a pick. Now, I didn't absolutely have to swing a pick on this project. <sup>With a little effort</sup> The gravel and the dirt mixed with <sup>were</sup> ~~it was~~ shovelable enough. <sup>with a little effort.</sup> But I simply liked to do <sup>occasional</sup> ~~a little~~ pick work. I liked the different feel and rhythm of that tool, operating overhand as it does rather than the perpetual <sup>reach-down-and-leave</sup> ~~lifting~~ of shoveling.

Muscles too need some variety in life, I have always thought.

# So I was loosening the <sup>gravelly</sup> ~~the~~ earth at the bottom of the hole with swings of the pick, and on the basis of Alice Van Bebber's blab was wondering to myself why a grownup never seemed to say anything to me that I wanted to hear, and after some minutes of this, stopped for breath. And in looking up, saw just ~~seeing~~ starting down the rise of the county road a string of three horses. # Sorrel and black and ugly gray. # Or, reading back down the ladder of colors, Bubbles and the pack mare and the saddle horse that Stanley Meixell was atop.

I didn't think it through. I have no idea why I did it. But I ducked down and sat in the bottom of the hole.

The moment I did, of course, I began to realize what I had committed myself to. They say <sup>nine-tenths</sup> ~~99%~~ of a person is above the ears, but I swear

the proportion sometimes gets reversed in me. ~~Not that I wasn't~~ ~~All right, I was safely~~

out of sight, <sup>g</sup> squatting down there; when I'd been standing up working,

my excavation by now was about shoulder-deep on me. No problem <sup>there.</sup> ~~with~~

No problem so ~~that, but~~ long as Stanley didn't get a direct look down ~~here~~ into

the hole, <sup>being stopped anyway</sup> but what if that happened? What if Stanley stopped at the

station, for some reason or other? And, say, <sup>being stopped anyway</sup> he decided to use the

outhouse, and as he was <sup>headed</sup> ~~ambling~~ out there decided to amble over to admire

this pit of mine? What then? Would I pop up like a jack-in-the-box?

<sup>the dickens</sup> I'd sure as ~~hell~~ look just as silly as one.

<sup>learning</sup> I was also ~~finding out~~ that the position I had to squat in wasn't

And it was going to <sup>the world's most comfortable.</sup> ~~It was occurring to me that it would~~

<sup>saunter</sup> take a number of minutes for Stanley and company to ~~come~~ down from the

rise and pass the station and go off up the North Fork road, before I

Just how many minutes began to interest me more than anything else. could safely stand up. Of course I had no watch, and the only other

way I knew to keep track of time was to count it off like each second

between lightning and thunder, one a-thousand, two a-thousand-- But

That I'd have to work ~~it~~ out in my head, Alec style. the problem there, how much time did I have to count off? Let's see,

say Stanley and his horses were traveling 5 miles an hour, which was

<sup>the</sup> figure The Major was always raising hell with the Forest Service packers



by-god-and-by-damn  
 about, insisting they ought to be able to average that. But The  
 Major had never encountered Bubbles. Bubbles surely would slow down  
 any enterprise at least half a mile an hour, dragging back on his lead  
 like a tug-of-war contestant ~~the way~~  
 rope ~~as~~ he did. Okay,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles an hour considering Bubbles, and it  
 was about a mile from the crest of the county road to down ~~here~~ here at  
 the ranger station; then from here to where Stanley would pass out  
 of sight beyond the North Fork brush was, what, another third of a  
 mile, ~~maybe~~ <sup>more like</sup> half a mile. So now: for Stanley to cover one mile at  
 $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles an hour would take--well, 5 miles an hour would be 12 minutes;  
 4 miles an hour would be 15 minutes; round the  $4\frac{1}{2}$  mile an hour pace off  
 to say 13 minutes; then the other  $1/3$  to  $1/2$  mile would take somewhere  
 around 6 more minutes, wouldn't it be? So, 13 and 6, 19  
 minutes. Then 19 times 60 (60 seconds to the minute) for the total

I'd need to count to, and that was, was, was...1100-something.

# <sup>hunching down in a toilet hole</sup>  
 This was all getting dismal enough without me reciting one a-thousand,  
 two a-thousand, three a-thousand, all the way up to 1100-something.

Besides, I had no idea how much time I had already spent, in the

calculating. # Besides again, numbers weren't really what needed thinking

on. The point to ponder was, why was I hiding anyway? Why had I

plunked myself into this situation? Why didn't I want to face Stanley?

Why had I let the sight of him hoodoo me like this?

Some gab about the weather, inquiry as to how his hand was getting along,

say I had to get back to digging, and that would have been that. But

no, here I was, playing turtle in the bottom of an outhouse pit.

Sometimes there's nobody stranger in this world than ourselves.

So I squatted and mulled. There's this for sure about doing those

two together, they fairly soon convince you that you can think better

standing up. Hell with it, I <sup>eventually</sup> told myself. If I had to pop up and

face Stanley with my face all pie, so be it.

I unkinked ~~myself~~ and came upright with some elaborate arm-

stretching, as if I'd just had a nice break from work down there.

Then treated myself to a casual yawn and began eyeing around <sup>over the rim of the pit</sup> to

determine which direction I had to face embarrassment from.

And found nobody. <sup>A</sup> No Stanley, no Bubbles, nothing alive ~~in sight~~.

anywhere around, except one fourteen-year-old fool.

# ——— "So," my mother inquired upon <sup>return</sup> coming back from her ladies' club,

"everything peaceful around here?"

"Downright lonesome," I said back.

# ———



Now let me tell of my mother's contribution to ~~this~~ that week.

It ensued around mid-day on Thursday. First thing that morning  
 my father's  
 the ~~household~~ packer Isidor Pronovost showed up, and I spent  
 the front of the day working as cargodier for Isidor, helping him  
 make up packs of supplies to take up to the fire lookouts. Isidor  
 ("Balance," Isidor <sup>sermoned</sup> ~~said~~ as he always did. "We got to balance the  
 sonsabitches, Jick, that's every secret of it." Harking back to my  
 Bubbles experience I thought to myself, don't I know it.) Then Isidor  
 was not much more than out of sight <sup>with his pack string</sup> ~~when~~ when here came my mother's  
 brother, Pete Reese; English Creek was getting about as busy as Broadway.

# Pete had driven into town from his ranch on Noon Creek on one errand  
 or another, and now was looping home by way of English Creek to drop  
 off our mail and see how we were faring. He stepped over and admired  
 my progress on the outhouse hole--"Everybody on the creek'll be wanting  
 to patronize it. You thought of charging admission?"--and handed me  
 the few letters and that week's Gleaner. His doing so reminded me  
 I was the temporary host of the place and I hurriedly invited, "Come  
 on ~~in~~ over to the house."

We no sooner were through the door of the station than my mother was saying to Pete, "You're staying for dinner, aren't you," more as declaration than question, so Pete shed his hat and offered that he supposed he could, "if it's going to be something edible." Pete got away with more with my mother than just about anyone else could, she simply retorted, including my father, and she simply retorted "Park your tongue then," chinned and went to work on the meal while Pete and I ~~talked~~ about the green year.





That topic naturally was staying near the front of everybody's

By now the  
mind. ~~the~~ weather service was declaring this the wettest June in

~~since~~ news  
Montana ~~in~~ 1916, which was more than welcome. In Montana too much rain

is just about enough. All the while the country had been greening and greening, the crop and livestock forecasts were flourishing, too.

Pete imparted that Morrel Loomis, the biggest lamb buyer operating in

the Two country, had ~~been~~ come up from Great Falls for a look at the

Reese and Hahn and Withrow bands, and that Pete and Fritz and Dode

all decided to go ahead and contract their lambs to Loomis on his offer

of <sup>21</sup>/<sub>100</sub>¢ a pound. "Enough to keep me floating toward bankruptcy," Dode

had been heard to say, which meant that even he was pretty well pleased

with the price.

"Beats last year by a couple of cents, doesn't it?" I savvily

asked Pete.

"Uh huh, and it's damn well time. Montana



~~"I hope to Christ so," Pete seconded that sentiment. "Montana~~  
 has got to be the champion 'next year' country of the entire damn  
 world."

"How soon did you say you'd be haying?" my mother interrogated  
 without looking around from her meal work at the stove. I wish now  
 that she had in fact been facing around toward Pete and me, for I am  
 sure my gratitude for that question was painted all over my face.  
 Wherever haying began I was to drive the scatter rake for Pete, as  
 I had done the summer before and Alec had for the few summers before  
 that. But getting a rancher to estimate a date when he figured his  
 hay crop would be ready was like getting him to confess to black magic.  
 The hemming and hawing did have the basis that hay never was really  
 ready to mow until the day you went out and looked at it and felt it  
 and cocked an eye at the weather and decided this was as good a time  
 as any. But I also think ranchers ~~regarded~~ <sup>cherished</sup> haying as the one elastic  
 part of their year, the calendar told them when lambing or calving  
 would begin, and shipping time ~~was~~ <sup>loomed as</sup> another constant, so when they  
 had a chance to be vague--even Pete, of the same straightforward lineage  
 as my mother, now was pussyfooting to the effect that "all this rain,  
 so you can't blame it on the weather."

Alec Pete?



hay's going to be kind of late this year"--they clung to it.

"Before the Fourth?" my mother ~~specifically~~ narrowed the specification.

"No, I <sup>don't</sup> suppose." ~~that~~ It was interesting to see comments go back and forth between ~~these two~~ <sup>this pair;</sup> like studying ~~a~~ drawings of the same face done by two different artists. Pete had what might be called the kernel of my mother's good looks: same ~~eyes~~ neat nose, apple cheeks, roundish jaw, but proportioned smaller, thriftier.

"The week after?"

"Could be," Pete allowed. "Were you going to feed us sometime today or what?"

Messages come in capsules as well as bottles. The content of ~~all~~ <sup>"could be"</sup> ~~this~~ <sup>that</sup> was that no hay would be made by Pete Reese until ~~well~~ after the Fourth of July and until then, I was loose in the world.

# — There during dinner, it turned out that Pete now was on the question end of the conversation:

"Alec been around lately?"

"Alec," my mother reported in obituary tones, "is busy Riding the Range."

18A

"Day and night?"

"At least. Our only hope of seeing him is if he ever needs a  
clean shirt."

#

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My personal theory is that a lot of misunderstanding followed ~~her~~ <sup>my mother</sup>

around just because of her way of saying. Lisabeth Reese McCaskill

could give you the

time of day and make you wonder why you had dared to ask. I recall once when I was about <sup>eleven</sup> ~~ten~~ that we were visited for the morning by Louise Bowen, wife of the

<sup>Indian Head</sup> ranger at the ~~Bar~~ Mountain district to the south of us. Cliff Bowen

was newly assigned onto the Two, having <sup>held down</sup> ~~been in~~ an office job at

Region ~~one~~ <sup>all the time before,</sup> headquarters in Missoula, and Louise was telling my mother

how worried she was that her year-old, Donny, accustomed to town and

a fenced yard, would wander off from the station, maybe fall into <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~

<sup>Teton River</sup> Creek. I was in the other room, more or less reading a Collier's and minding my own business, but I can still hear how my mother's response suddenly seemed to fill the whole house:

"Bell him."

There was a stretch of silence then, until Louise finally kind of peeped:

"Beg pardon? I don't quite--"

"Put a bell on him. <sup>The</sup> Only way to keep track of a wandering child is to hear him."

Louise left not all too long after that, and ~~I can't think when~~ <sup>that was the extent</sup>

<sup>of our visits from her</sup> ~~she ever called on us again.~~ But I did notice, when ~~I went with my~~

~~drove down~~ <sup>and I rode along,</sup> father to borrow a saw-set from Cliff a month or so later, that Donny

Bowen was toddling around with a lamb bell on him.

Pete was continuing on the topic of Alec. "Well, he's at that age--"

"Pete," she headed him off, "I know what age my own son is."

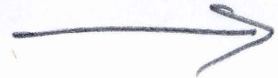
"So you do, Bet. But the number isn't all of it. You might try keep that in mind."

My mother reached to pass Pete some more fried <sup>spuds</sup> ~~potatoes~~. "I'll

~~will~~ try," she allowed. "I Will Try."

#

—





When we'd eaten and Pete declared "~~well~~" it's time I wasn't here" and headed home to Noon Creek, my mother immediately began drowning dirty dishes and I meanwhile remembered the mail I'd been handed, and fetched it from the sideboard

where I'd put it down. There was a letter to my mother from Mr. Vennaman, the Gros Ventre principal--even though Alec and I were gone from the English Creek school my mother was still on its school board and so had occasional dealings with the <sup>education</sup> muckymucks in Gros Ventre and Conrad--probably the latest Kelleygrams. and a couple of Forest Service things for my father, but what I was after was the Gleaner, thinking I'd let my dinner settle a little while I read.

I'd been literary for maybe three minutes when I saw the names.

¶ "Mom? You and Pete are in the paper!"

She turned from where she was washing dishes and gave me her look that said, you had now better produce some fast truth.

I pinned down the newsprint evidence with my finger. "See, here."

#1

25 Years Ago  
in The Gleaner

#1

indent  
8 spaces

Anna Reese and children Lisabeth and Peter visited Isaac Reese at St. Mary's Lake for three days last week. Isaac is providing the workhorses for the task of building of the roadbed from St. Mary's to Babb. Isaac sends word through Anna that the summer's work on this and other Glacier National Park roads and trails is progressing satisfactorily.

As she read over my shoulder I thought about the journey that would have been in those days. Undoubtedly by democrat wagon, all the way north from the Reese place on Noon Creek, past the landmark of Heart Butte, across the Two Medicine River, and then on even beyond Cut Bank Creek, very nearly to Chief Mountain, the last peak that could be seen on the northern horizon. I of course had been over that total route with my father, but only a piece at a time, on



various riding trips and by pickup to the northernmost part. ~~But~~ But to do the whole journey at once, by hoof and iron wheel, a woman and two kids, struck me as a notable expedition.

"Sounds like a long time in a wagon," I prompted cannily. "You never told me about that."

"Didn't I." And she turned and went back to her dishpan.

Well, sometimes you could prompt my mother, and sometimes you might as well try conversing with the stove poker.

#

So, unenlightened by my wagoning mother, I retreated into my

hole, so to speak. Yet, you know how it is when you're doing something your body can take care of by itself. Your mind is going to sneak off as the rest of me dug, somewhere on its own. Mine was on that wagon journey with my mother and Pete and their mother.

There wouldn't have been the paved

and the Park highway north to Browning then, just the old road as the ~~wagon~~ wheels

of the ~~freight~~ freight wagons had rutted it into the prairie. Some

homesteads must still existed ~~would~~ have been in existence between Gros Ventre and the

Reservation boundary at Birch Creek, but probably not many, those were

the years when the Valier irrigation project was new and anybody who

grain knew ~~wheat~~<sup>grain</sup> grew on a stem was ~~in~~<sup>over</sup> there around Lake Francis trying to

be a farmer. Mostly empty country, then, except for livestock, all

the way to Birch Creek and its ribbon-line of trees. Empty again,

~~Blackfoot country~~ from there north to Badger Creek, where I supposed

~~of the same~~ some Blackfoot families lived then as ~~they did~~ now. There near Badger

~~Reese wagon~~ they would have passed just west of the place where, a century and some before, Meriwether Lewis and the Blackfeet clashed. ~~For all~~

Reservation That piece of country to us was simply grass, until my father deduced

in a book of from reading the Lewis and Clark journals that somewhere off in there

near where Badger flows into the Two Medicine River was ~~where~~<sup>the place</sup> Lewis

and his men killed a couple of Blackfeet over a stealing incident and

began the long prairie war between whites and Indians. Passing that

area in a pickup on paved highway,

never made that history seem real to me. I would bet it was more

believable from that wagon. Then up from Badger, the high benches

to where the Two Medicine trenched deep through the landscape.

~~Rennie~~ ~~there~~ ~~Toussaint would have been living where he still did, upstream from~~



road <sup>beyond that,</sup>  
~~the Two bridge.~~ Maybe another day and a half of travel, through

Browning and west and then north across Cut Bank Creek, and over

the divide to St. Mary's, and there

at the end of it all the road camp, its crews and tents and workhorses,

in my imagination I ~~could~~ <sup>saw</sup> see it as somewhat like a traveling circus,

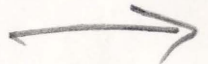
but with go-devils and scrapers and other road machines instead of

circus wagons. And its ringmaster, my grandfather, Isaac Reese.

He was the only one of my grandparents yet alive when I became old

enough to remember, and I could ~~only~~ just glimpse him in a corner

of my mind. A gray-mustached man at the head of the table whenever we



we had Sunday dinner at the Reeses', using his knife to load his

fork with food in a way which would have caused my mother to give

Alec or me absolute hell if we had dared try it. I gather, though,

that Isaac Reese got away with considerably more than that in life--

I suppose any horse dealer worth his reputation did--and it was a

*thriving Reese there on Noon Creek*

decent ranch that Pete took over after the old man's death.

That Reese side of the family <sup>wandered</sup> sometimes ~~came~~ into the conversation

<sup>whenever</sup> ~~when~~ someone would learn that <sup>my mother,</sup> although she was married to a man

only a generation or so <sup>away from</sup> ~~out of~~ kilts, herself was just half-Scottish.

"The other half," my father would claim when he judged that she was ~~a~~ in

a good enough mood he could get away with it, "seems to be something like

badger." Actually, that lineage was Danish. Isak Riis departed Denmark

aboard the ship King Carl sometime in the 1880s, and the pen of an

immigration official greeted him onto American soil as Isaac Reese.

In that everybody-head-west-and-grab-some-land period, counting was

more vital than spelling anyway. By dint of what his eyes told him

*cut of  
move?*

*hi*



on the journey west, <sup>Isaac</sup>~~he~~ arrived to North Dakota determined on a living  
from workhorses. The Great Northern railroad was pushing across the  
top of the <sup>western</sup> United States--this was when Jim Hill was promising to cobweb  
Dakota and Montana with railroad iron--and Isaac began as a teamster



on the roadbed. <sup>His</sup> Isaac's ways with horses and projects proved to be as sure as his new language was shaky. (My father claimed to have been on hand the famous time, years later, when Isaac couldn't find the words "wagon tongue" and ended up calling it "de Godtamm handle to de Godtamm vagon.") ~~A person can be fluent in other parts of the head than just the tongue, and within <sup>days</sup> ~~weeks~~ after sizing up the <sup>railroad</sup> ~~Great Northern~~ situation~~

"the old boy" ~~he~~ was writing back to every shirttail relative in Denmark for money to buy horses--my father always was a ready source on Isaac, <sup>I guess</sup> ~~perhaps~~

~~greatly~~ <sup>sternally</sup> grateful to have had a father-in-law he both admired and got entertainment from--and soon <sup>Isaac</sup> had his own teams and drivers working on contract for the Great Northern.

When construction reached the east face of the Rockies, the mountains held Isaac. Why, nobody <sup>ever could figure out</sup> in the family had any notion. Certainly in Denmark he must never have seen anything ~~much~~ <sup>barnyard</sup> higher than a manure pile. But while his horses <sup>through Marias Pass</sup> and men worked on west as the railroad proceeded toward the coast, Isaac stayed ~~on~~ at East Glacier and looked around. In a week or so <sup>horsebacked</sup> he ~~came~~ south along the mountains toward Gros Ventre and <sup>out of that journey,</sup> bought a

~~relinquishment~~



homestead  
relinquishment, which became the start of the eventual Reese ranch.

4/ Isaac Reese was either <sup>as hell</sup> ~~very~~ shrewd or <sup>as hell</sup> ~~very~~ lucky, even at my stage of life.

I am not entirely clear whether there is any appreciable difference

~~anyway~~ between the two. ~~But~~ by whichever ~~higher~~ <sup>here</sup> guidance, he lit <sup>here</sup> in a region of Montana where ~~there were~~ <sup>were standing in line</sup> a couple of decades of projects waiting

for a man with workhorses. The many miles of irrigation canals of the water schemes at Valier and Bynum and Choteau and Fairfield,

ranch reservoirs ("ressavoys" to Isaac), the roadbed when the branch railroad was built north from Choteau to Pendroy, street-grading when

Valier was built onto the prairie, <sup>those</sup> all the Glacier Park roads and trails.

As each appurtenance was put onto the Two country and its neighboring areas,

Isaac was on hand to realize money from it.

4 "And married a Scotchwoman to hang onto the dollars for him," my


father always <sup>injected</sup> ~~put in~~ at this point. She was Anna

Ramsay, teacher at the Noon Creek school. Her, I ~~know~~ <sup>e</sup> next to nothing about. Just that she died in the influenza epidemic during the war,

and that in the wedding picture of her and Isaac that hung in my parents' bedroom she <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ the one standing and looking in charge, while Isaac <sup>sat</sup> ~~sits~~ beside her with his mustache drooping whimsically.

Neither my mother nor my father ever said much about Anna Ramsay Reese--  
which helped sharpen my present curiosity, thinking about her trundling  
off to St. Mary's in that wagon. Like my McCaskill grandparents she  
simply was an absent figure, <sup>back there,</sup> cast all the more into ~~the~~ shadow by my  
father's supply of stories about Isaac.

In a sense, the first of those <sup>Isaac</sup> tales was the genesis of our family.





stories was the genesis ~~was~~ of our family. The night my father, the young association rider, was going to catch Isaac by ~~surprise~~ <sup>ambush</sup> and request my mother in marriage, Isaac greeted him at the door and before they were even properly sat down, had launched into a whole evening of horse topics, Clydesdales and Belgians and Morgans and fetlocks and withers and ~~hocks~~ <sup>hocks and pasterns.</sup> Never tell me a Scandinavian harbors no sense of humor.

no 4

When my father at last managed to wedge the question in, Isaac ~~repeated~~ <sup>repeated as if he</sup> ~~minimally~~ tried to look taken aback, eyed him hard and ~~said like~~ was making sure: ~~a question marriage?~~ Or as my father said Isaac pronounced it: "mare itch?" <sup>Isaac</sup> Then ~~he~~ looked at my father harder yet and asked: "Tell me dis. Do you ever took a drink?"

My father figured honesty was the best answer in the face of public knowledge. "Now and then, yes, I do."

Isaac weighed ~~this~~ <sup>that</sup>. Then he got to his feet and loomed over my father. "Ve'll took one now, ~~then~~ <sup>den.</sup> And with ~~me~~ <sup>Mason jar moonshine</sup> reached down from the cupboard, the pairing that began Alec and me was toasted.

#

When I considered that I'd done an afternoon's excavating, physically and mentally, I climbed out ~~the~~ and had a look at the progress of my sanitation engineering. By now the pile of dirt and gravel stood high and broad, the darker tone on its top showing today's fresh shovel work and the drier faded-out stuff beneath, the previous days'. With a little imagination I thought I could <sup>even</sup> discern a gradation, like layers on a cake, of <sup>my</sup> ~~each~~ <sup>my</sup> shovelfuls of the ~~Two~~ <sup>'s,</sup> country, ~~Monday~~ <sup>'s,</sup> Tuesday, <sup>'s,</sup> Wednesday, and now today's light-chocolate top. <sup>Damn</sup> Interesting, the ingredients of this earth.

More to the immediate point, I was pleased with myself that I'd estimated the work into the right daily dabs. Tomorrow afternoon was going to <sup>cost</sup> ~~need~~ some effort, because I was getting down so deep the soil would <sup>need</sup> ~~have~~ to be bucketed out, but the hole looked definitely finishable.

I must have been more giddy with myself than I realized, because when I went over to the chopping block to split wood for the kitchen woodbox, I found myself using the





16

33

✓

axe in rhythm with a song of Stanley's about the gal named <sup>Lou</sup>~~her~~ and what she was able to do with her wingwangwoo. <sup>4</sup> When I came into the kitchen with the armload, my mother was looking at me oddly.

"Since when did you take up singing?" she inquired.

"Oh, just feeling good," I guess, I said and dumped <sup>my cargo into the woodbox</sup> ~~the wood~~ loud

enough to try prove it.

"What was that tune, anyway?"

"Pretty Redwing,  
Little Brown Church in the Vale, I hazarded. "I think."

That brought a further look from her. "While I'm at it I might as well fill the water bucket," I proposed, and got out of there.

#

After supper, I suppose it was lack of anything better to do,

~~that~~ made me tackle my mother on that long-ago wagon trip again.

That is, I was doing something but <sup>it didn't exactly</sup> ~~nothing~~ that strained the brain, since hearing Stanley tell about having done that winter of

hair work a million years ago in Kansas, I had gotten mildly interested and was braiding myself a horsehair hackamore. I was discovering, though, that in terms of entertainment, braiding is pretty much like chewing gum with your fingers. So--

"Where'd you sleep?"

She was ~~glancing~~<sup>going</sup> through the Gleaner. "Sleep when?"

"That time. When you all went up to St. Mary's." I kept on with my braiding just as if we'd been having this continuing conversation every evening of our lives.

She glanced over at me, then said: "Under the wagon."

"Really? You?" Which ~~brought~~<sup>drew</sup> me more of her attention than I bargained for. was ~~comfortable having~~. "Uh, ~~how~~<sup>how</sup> many nights?"

I got quite a little braiding done in the silence that answered that, and when I finally figured I had to ~~look~~<sup>glance</sup> up, I realized that she was truly studying me. Not just taking apart with a look: studying. Her voice wasn't at all sharp when she asked: "What's got your curiosity ~~bump up?~~"

"I'm just interested, <sup>is all.</sup> Even to me that didn't sound like an overly profound explanation, so I tried to go on. "When I was with Stanley, those days campending, he told me a lot about the Two. About when he was the ranger. It got me interested <sup>in, uh, old times.</sup>"

"What did he say about being ranger?"



"That he was the one <sup>here</sup> before Dad. And that he set up the Two  
as a national forest." It occurred to me to <sup>try her on</sup> ~~confirm~~ a piece of  
chronology I had been attempting to work out ever since that night  
of my cabin binge. "What, was Dad the ranger at Indian Head while  
Stanley still was the ranger here?"

"For a while. Maybe a year."

"Is that where I remember <sup>Stanley</sup> ~~him~~ from?"

"I suppose."

"Did you and Dad neighbor back and forth with him a lot?"

"Some. What does any of that have to do with how many nights I  
slept under a wagon twenty-five years ago?"

She had a reasonable enough question there. Yet it somehow seemed  
to me that a connection did exist, that any history of <sup>a</sup> ~~the~~ Two country  
person was alloyed with the history of any other Two country person.

That some given sum of each life had to be added into every other, to  
find the total. But none of which sounded sane to say. All I did  
finally manage was: "I just would like to know something about things  
then. Like when you were around my age."

have of  
my  
not

No doubt there was a response she had to bite her tongue ~~from~~ to keep

from making: that she

wasn't sure she'd ever been this age I seemed to be at just now.

Instead came: "All right. That wagon trip to St. Mary's. What is

it you want to know about it?"

"Well, just--why was it you went?"

My mother took the notion. My father had been away <sup>up there,</sup> for some weeks.

He often was, contracting horses somewhere. She rustled the Gleaner





as she turned a page. "About like being married to a ranger," she added, but ~~it~~ lightly enough to show it was her version of a joke.

"How long did ~~that~~ <sup>that trip take then?</sup> ~~it~~ Now, in a car, it was a matter of <sup>or three</sup> a couple of hours.

She had to think about that. After a minute: "Two and a half days. Two nights," she underscored for my benefit, "under the wagon. the Two Medicine ← One at ~~Badger Creek~~ and one at Cut Bank Creek."

"How come Cut Bank Creek? Why not in Browning?"

"My mother held the opinion that the prairie was a more civilized place than Browning."

"What did you do for food?"

"We ate out of a belly box. That old one from chuckwagon days, with all the cattle brands on it. Mother and I cooked up what was necessary, before we left."

"Were you the only ones on the road?"

"Pretty much, <sup>yes</sup> I suppose. The mail stage was still running then."

~~We must have met it~~ somewhere along the way. I guess we met it."

She could nail questions shut faster than I could think them up.

Not deliberately, I see now. That was just the way she was: a person who put no particular importance on having made a prairie trek and seen a stagecoach in the process. # My mother seemed to realize that this

<sup>exactly</sup>  
 wasn't flowering into the epic tale I was hoping for. "Jick, that's all I know about it. We went, and stayed a few days, and came back."

# Went, stayed, came. The facts were there but the feel of them wasn't.

# "What about the road camp?" I resorted to next. "What do you remember

about that?" The St. Mary's area is one of the most beautiful ones, with the mountains of Glacier National Park sheering up beyond the lake.

The world looks to be all stone and ice and water there. Even my mother might have noticed some of that glory.

# ~~She~~ Here she found a small smile. "Just that when we pulled in, Pete began helloing all the horses." She saw that didn't register

with me. # "Calling out hello to the workhorses in the various teams,"

she explained. "He hadn't seen them for awhile, after all. 'Hello,

Woodrow!' 'Hello, Sneezer!' Methusaleh. Runt. ~~Cop~~ Copenhagen. ~~My~~

mother let him go on with it until he came to a big gray mare called

the name of Second Wife. She never thought that one was as funny as ~~my~~ Father did."

There is this about history, you never know which particular ember of it is going to glow to life. As she told this, I could all but hear Pete helloing those horses, his dry voice making a chant which sang across that road camp. And the look on my mother told me she could, too.



Not to be too obvious, I braided a moment more. Then decided to try the other part of that St. Mary's scene. "Your own mother. What was she like?"

"That father of yours has been heard to say ~~that~~ I'm a second serving of her."

Well, this at least informed me that old Isaac Reese hadn't gotten away <sup>nearly</sup> with as much in life as I'd originally thought. But now, how to keep this line of talk going--

"Was she a leaper too?"

"No," my mother outright laughed. "No, I seem to be the only one of that variety."



Probably our best single piece of family lore was that my mother leaped in with the century. The 29th of February of 1900, she was born on. Which of course meant that except when each leap year showed up, she lacked a definite calendar date for her birthday. She herself never made anything of that, just let each off-year birthday be marked on whichever date seemed most convenient at the time, February 28th or March 1st. But either my father or Alec one year came up with the card-cut idea. So three years of every four, the bunch of us congregated at the table after the supper dishes were done and my mother shuffled a deck of cards. Likely not more than two or three quick riffles, because there was a pretty abrupt limit on how much she was willing to fool around. Then we all would make our predictions as to what manner of birthday year this seemed to be--tomorrow, or the next day--and she cut the cards--a heart or diamond delivering her a last-of-February birthday, a club or spade a first-of-March. This particular year had been a red one, I recall, because she said at the time:

"So I don't even get a day's grace any more." It sobers me to realize that when she made that plaint about the speed of time, she was not ~~yet~~ <sup>yet</sup> even two-thirds of the age I am now.



--"Why did I What?" The Gleaner was forgotten in front of her now, her gaze was on me: her particular look that could skin a rock.

I swear that what I'd had ~~from~~ framed in mind was ~~just~~ <sup>only</sup> further inquiry about my grandparents, how Anna Ramsay and Isaac Reese first <sup>happened to</sup> ~~meet~~ <sup>met</sup> and when they'd decided to get married and so on. <sup>But</sup> ~~Some~~ somewhere a cog slipped, and what had fallen out of my mouth instead was: "Why'd you marry Dad?"

"Well, you know," I <sup>now</sup> floundered, ~~looking~~ <sup>searching</sup> for any possible shore, "what I mean, kids wonder about something like that. How we got here." Another perilous direction, that one. "I don't mean, uh, how, exactly. More like why. Didn't you ever wonder yourself? Why your own mother and father decided to get married? I mean, how would any of us be here if those people back then hadn't decided the way they did? And I just thought, since we're talking about ~~all~~ this anyway, you could fill me in on some of it. Out of your own experience, sort of."

My mother looked at me for an eternity more, then shook her head. "One of them goes head over heels after anything blonde, the other one wants to know the history of the world. Alec and you--where did I get you two?"

I ~~had~~ figured I had nothing further to lose by taking the chance:

"That's sort of what I was asking, isn't it?"

"All right." She still looked skeptical of the possibility of common sense in me, but her eyes let up on me a little. "All right, Mr. ~~Andrews~~ Inquisitive. You want to know the makings of this family, is that it?"

I nodded vigorously.

She thought. Then: "Jick, a person hardly knows how to start on this. But you know, don't you, that I taught most of that--that one year at the Noon Creek school?" <sup>7</sup> "I did know that chapter. That <sup>when</sup> my mother's mother, Anna Ramsay Reese, died in the 'flu epidemic of 1918, my mother came back from what was to have been her second year in college and became, ~~MacCaskill~~, in her mother's stead, the Noon Creek teacher. <sup>4</sup> "If it hadn't been for that, who knows what would have happened," she went on. "But that did bring me back from college, about the same time a long-gearred galoot named Varick McCaskill came back from the army. His family still was in here up the North Fork. Scotch heaven. <sup>Mac</sup> So ~~he~~ was back in the country and the two of us had known each other-- oh, all our lives, really. Though mostly by sight. Our families didn't



always get along. But that's neither here nor there. <sup>That spring</sup> ~~When this~~

Mac character was hired as association rider--"

"Didn't get along?"

I ought to have known better. My interruption sharpened her right up again. "That's another story. There's such a thing as a one-track mind, but honestly, Dick, you McCaskill men sometimes have no-track minds. Now. Do you want to Hear This, Or--"

"You were doing just fine. Real good. Dad got to be ~~the~~ the association rider and then what?"

"All right then. He got to be the association rider and--well, he got to paying attention to me. I suppose it could be said I paid some back."

Right then I yearned the impossible. To have watched that double-sided admiration. My mother had turned 19 <sup>last of</sup> the February (or March 1)

of that teaching year; a little older than Alec was now, though not a whole hell of a lot.

~~very much~~ Given what a good-looker she was even now, she must have

been extra special then. And my father the cowboy--hard to imagine

that--would have been in his early twenties, a rangy redhead who'd

been out in the world all the way to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Varick and Lisabeth, progressing to Mac~~h~~ and Bet--and <sup>then to</sup> ~~some~~ secret territory of love language ~~impossible~~ that I couldn't even guess at.

They are beyond our knowing, those once-young people who become our parents, which to me has always made them that much more fascinating.

--"There was a dance, that spring. In my own schoolhouse, so your father ever since has been telling me I have nobody to blame but myself." She again had a glow to her, as when she'd told me about Pete helling the horses. "Mac was on hand, ~~made~~ by then he'd been hired by the Noon Creek ranchers and was around helping them brand calves and so on. That dance--" she shrugged, as if an impossible question had been asked--"that dance I suppose did it, though neither of us knew it right then. I'd been determined I was never going to marry into a ranch life. Let alone to <sup>a</sup> cow chouser who didn't own much more than his chaps and hat. And later I found out from your father that he'd vowed never to get interested in a schoolmarm. So much for intentions. Anyway, now here he was, in my own schoolroom. I'd never seen a man take so much pleasure in dancing. Most of it with me, ~~hadn't~~ need I say. Oh, and there was this. I hadn't been around him or those other Scotch Heaveners while I was away at college,



and I'd lost the knack of listening to ~~their~~ <sup>that</sup> burr. ~~of theirs.~~ About the third time that night he said something I couldn't catch, I asked him: 'Do you always talk through your nose?' And then he put on a real burr and said back, 'Lass, it saves ~~my~~ <sup>wearrr</sup> and ~~my~~ <sup>tearr</sup> on my ~~back~~ lips. They 'rrre in prrrime condition, if you 'rrre everrr currrious.'

My father the flirt. Or ~~flirt~~ <sup>flirr</sup>rt. I must have openly gaped over this, for my mother reddened a bit and stirred in her chair and declared, "Well, you don't need full details. Now then. Is that enough family history?"

Not really. "You mean, the two of you decided to get married because you ~~both~~ liked how Dad danced?"

"You would be surprised how large a part something like that plays. But no, there's more to it than that. Jick, when people fall in love the way we did, it's--I don't mean this like it sounds, but it's like being sick. Sick in a wonderful way, if you can imagine that. The feeling is in you just all the time, is what I mean. It takes you over. No matter what you do, what you try to think about, the other person (Or your blood, however you want to say it.) is there in your head. It's"--she shrugged at the impossible again--

"there's no describing it beyond that. And so we knew. A summer of

that--a summer when we didn't even see each other that much, because your father was up in the Two tending the association cattle most of the time--and we just knew. That fall, we were married." Here she sprung a slight smile at me. "And I let myself in for all these questions."

There was one, though, that hovered. I was trying to determine whether to open my yap and voice it, when she took it on herself.

"My guess is, you're thinking about Alec and Leona. Lord knows, they He's always been all go and no whoa. imagine they're in a downright epidemic of love. Alec maybe is. But

Leona isn't. She can't be. She's too young and--" my mother scouted

~~for an aptness~~ ~~for an apt term--~~ "flibberty." Leona is in love with the idea of men,

not one man. And that's enough on that subject." She looked across

at me in a way that made my fingers quit even pretending they were ~~and how some your folks and Dad's didn't get al--~~

manufacturing a horsehair hackamore. "Now I have one for you. Jick, you worry me a little."

"Huh? I do?"

"You do. All this interest of yours in the way things were. I just hope you don't go through life paying attention to the past at the expense of the future. That you don't pass up chances because



they're new and unexpected." She said this next softly, yet also more strongly than anything else I'd ever heard her say. "Jick, there isn't any law that says a McCaskill can't be as forward-looking as anybody else. Just because your father and your brother, each in his own way, looks to the past to find life, you needn't. They are both good men. I love the two of them--the three of you--in the exact way I told you about, when ~~you~~ your father and I started all this. <sup>Jick,</sup> But ~~be~~ be ready for life ahead. It can't all be read behind you."

I looked back at her. I wouldn't have bet I had it in me to say

~~this~~ <sup>this</sup>. But it did come out: "Mom, I know it all can't. But some?"

# —

1

Cars and pickups and trucks were parked so thick that they all  
the part of town around the park.  
but swamped that ~~English Creek side of town~~. It is nice about a  
horse, that you can park him handily while Henry Ford still would be

circling the block and cussing. I chose a stand of high grass between

the creek bank and the big cottonwoods just west of the park and ~~put~~ <sup>pastured</sup>

Mouse on a tie of rope short enough that he couldn't tangle it around  
anything and long enough for him to graze a little. Then gave him a  
final proud pat, and headed off to enlist with the picnickers.

Some writer or another put down that in the history of Montana,  
the only definite example of civic uplift was when the Virginia City  
vigilantes hung the Henry Plummer gang in 1864. I think that overstates,  
most scruffy  
a bit. You can arrive into the ~~scruffiest~~ of Montana towns and delve  
around a few minutes and in all likelihood find two outstanding features--



most  
class of in  
of English  
places



2 ✓  
the cemetery and the park.

In Gros Ventre's instance, the cemetery in fact commanded the town's prime site, the small knoll at the southwestern outskirts which offered views of mile upon mile of the English Creek valley and beyond that, the wonderful wall of the Rockies. The local joke on this was that the last reward of a Gros Ventre resident was scenery. The park, though, ran a good second to the cemetery in pleasantness. A half-circle of maybe an acre, it fronted on English Creek just west of Main Street and the highway bridge <sup>oasis</sup> ~~was~~ one last amenity before the road arrowed north into the plains and benchlands. In recent years WPA crews had made it a lot more of <sup>a park</sup> ~~an amenity~~ than it had been, clearing out the willows which were taking over the creek bank and <sup>then laying in</sup> ~~building~~ some riprap <sup>in</sup> to keep the spring runoff out ~~of the park~~. And someone during that WPA work came up with an idea I've <sup>not</sup> ~~never~~ seen before or since. There near the creek where ~~there~~ <sup>crippled</sup> a big <sup>leaned--</sup> cottonwood ~~stump stood~~ a windstorm had ripped off its main branches--a crew sawed the tree off low to the ground, leaving a <sup>wood</sup> stump about two feet high; then atop the stump was built a speaker's pulpit, ~~was built atop the stump~~, a slatted ~~hexagonal~~ round affair somewhat on the order of a ship's crow's-nest.

one of  
only  
kind -  
was once had been  
set out 7 or 8 to 10 years  
Sen Wheeler  
Burton K  
speech  
from

The one and only time I saw Senator Burton K. Wheeler, who some people ~~in the neighborhood~~ thought might become President if Roosevelt ever stopped being, we were let out of school to hear him give a speech from this speaking stump.

From where I had left Mouse I emerged into the ~~creek~~<sup>creekside</sup> corner of the park where the stump pulpit stood, and I stopped beside it to have a look around.

A true Two country Fourth of July, the trees were snowing.

# Fat old cottonwoods stood all along the arc between the park and the neighborhood, while younger ~~small~~ trees were spotted here and there across the rest of the expanse, as if they had been sent out to be shade-bearers. <sup>The day was providing</sup> ~~There was~~ just enough breeze <sup>into</sup> in the treetops to rattle them a little and ~~to keep~~ make them shed their cotton wisps out through the air like slow snow.

day was providing

Through the cottonfall, the spike of tower atop the Sedgwick House stuck up above one big cottonwood among the trees at the far side of the park. As if that tree had on a party hat.



As for people, the park this day was a bunch of islands of them. I

eliminated  
3d "10"

literally mean islands; <sup>thus</sup> the summer ~~so~~ far had stayed <sup>enough</sup> so cool that  
seemed so unaccustomed that it was  
even a just-warm day like this one ~~was~~ putting people into the shade  
of the various cottonwoods, each little gathering of family and friends

on their specific piece of dappled shade like those cartoons of  
castaways on a desert isle with a single palm tree. <sup>4</sup> I had to traipse

<sup>somewhat</sup> around a ~~little bit~~, helloing people and being helloed, before I  
spotted my mother and father, sharing shade and a spread blanket

with Pete and <sup>Marie</sup> ~~Virginia~~ Reese and Toussaint Rennie near the back of  
the park.

Among the greetings, my father's predominated: "Thank goodness  
you're here. Pete's been looking for somebody to challenge to an  
ice-cream making contest." So before I even got sat down, I was off

One more  
chance from  
my father -  
I did, even  
missed


on that tangent. "Come on, Jick," Pete said as he reached for their  
ice cream freezer and I picked up ours, "anybody who cranks gets a  
double dish." <sup>4</sup> We took our Ereezers over <sup>near</sup> ~~to~~ the coffee-and-lemonade

table where everybody else's was. This year, I should explain, was  
the turn of English Creek and Noon Creek to provide the picnic with  
ice cream and beverage. Bill Reinking, who despite being a newspaperman



had some fairly practical ideas, was the one <sup>to</sup> ~~who~~ suggested the system <sup>3</sup> ~~at~~ that instead of everybody and his brother showing up <sup>at the Fourth armed</sup> with ice creamers and coffee pots and jugs of lemonade, each part of the community take a turn in providing for all. ~~one Fourth of July~~ ~~to now~~ ~~one year~~ <sup>did</sup> the families west of Main Street in Gros Ventre ~~would do~~ the ice-cream-coffee-and-ade, the next year the families east of Main Street, the one after that those of us from English Creek and Noon Creek, and then ~~finally~~ <sup>after us</sup> what was called ~~last year of the rotation~~ "the rest of Creation," the farm families from <sup>and north</sup> east and south of town and anybody else who didn't fit some other category.

<sup>the next</sup> So for a while Pete and I took turns with the other ice cream manufacturers, cranking and cranking. Lots of elbow grease, and jokes about where all that fancy wrist work had been learned. Marie shortly came over on coffee duty--she was going to do the making, my mother would serve <sup>everybody'd eaten</sup> ~~it~~ after the eating--and brought along a message from my father and Toussaint: "They say, a little faster if you can stand it." Pete doffed his Stetson to them in mock gratitude. The holiday definitely was tuning up. And even yet I can think of no better way to ~~get~~ <sup>begin</sup> a Fourth of July than there among virtually all of our English Creek neighbors. Not Walter







Kyle, up on the mountain with his sheep; and not the Hebners, who never showed themselves at these creek picnics; and not the Withrows, who must have been delayed ~~in~~ some way. But everybody else. ~~Merle Torrance and Aggie and George Enrich from the North Fork.~~ The South

together

Fork folks other than the Withrows--Fritz and Greta Hahn, Ed and Alice Van Bebber. Then the population of the main creek, those who merely

here

migrated

~~came~~ downstream ~~in~~ here to the park, so to speak. Preston and Peg

Finletter

Rozier. Charlie and Dora ~~Farrell~~. Ken and Janet Busby, and Bob and

Arleta Busby--I had half-wondered whether Stanley Meixell might show

up with the Busbys, and was relieved that he hadn't. Don and Charity

the crowel;

Frew. The Hills arrived last, while I was still inventorying; J.L.

leaning shakily on his wife Nan. "Set her down," J.L., "somebody called,

referring to the ice creamer the Hills had brought with them, "we'll do

the twirling." "I get to shivering much more than this," J.L. responded,

"and

I can just hold the goddamn thing in my hands and make ice cream."

In truth, J.L.'s tremble was constant and

With do time

almost ague-like by now. It is terrible to see, an ailment fastened

onto a person and riding him day and night. I hope not to end up

that way, life over and done with before existence is.

But that was not the thought for this day. If a sense of life, of the blood racing beneath your skin, is not with you at a Fourth of July creek picnic, then it is never going to be.

# —

When Pete and I finished ice cream duty and returned to the blanket, my father had Toussaint on the topic of what the Fourth of July was like when Gros Ventre and he were young. <sup>4</sup>"Phony Nose Gorman," Toussaint was telling. "Is he one you remember?" <sup>4</sup>My father shook his head: "Before my time." Much of Toussaint's lore was before anyone's time. <sup>4</sup>"Tim Gorman," Toussaint elaborated, "Cox and Floweree's foreman a while. Down on Sun River. Froze his nose in that '86 winter. Some doctor at Fort Shaw fixed him up. Grafted skin on. I saw him after, the surgery was good. But Phony Nose Gorman, he was called. He was the one the flagpole broke with. There across from the Medicine Lodge, where the garage is now. He was climbing it to put Deaf Smith Mitchell's hat on top. On a bet. Those times, they bet on the sun coming up--"



Toussaint Rennie this day looked maybe sixty-five years old, yet

had to be a possible fifteen beyond that.

~~fifteen~~  
~~twenty~~ beyond that. He was one of those chuckling men you meet rarely,

evidently able to stave off time by perpetually staying in such high

humor that the years didn't want to interrupt him. From that little

current of laugh always purling ~~in~~ in him, Toussaint's face had crinkled everywhere it could.

~~impressively~~ that face, Tan and wrinkled deep, like a gigantic walnut. The

Toussaint rest of ~~him~~ was the general build of a potbelly stove. I suppose

his Toussaint's girth had been increasing steadily for some while ~~him~~ without

our really noticing, for he hadn't yet let it interrupt life, as he

~~had always lived it~~; he still was riding the ditches of the <sup>3 back/est</sup> Reservation's

Two Medicine irrigation project, his short-handled shovel sticking out

of a rifle scabbard as his horse plodded the canal banks.

Allotting a foot-and-a-half head of water to each farm ditch; plugging

gopher holes or muskrat tunnels in the canal bank with gunny sacks

of dirt; keeping culverts from clogging; in a land of scarce water,


a ditchfrider's job was vital above most others, and Toussaint

apparently was going to hold his

until death made it drop from his hand.

P. & A follows →

In about the way that shovel was carried in that scabbard, the history of the Two country rested there in Toussaint's memory, handy to employ. And sharpened by <sup>steady</sup> use. It never was clear to me how Toussaint, isolated way to hell and gone -- he bached out there a few miles west of where the highway crossed the Two Medicine River, about 15 miles from Browning and a good 30 from Gros Ventre--could know news from anywhere in the Two country as fast as it happened. Whatever the network was--my father called it moccasin telegraph--Toussaint was its most durable conductor.





not

To the Two

He came in the time

of the buffalo, a boy eight or so years old when his family roved in

somewhere in the Dakotas.

from ~~the Red River country of North Dakota~~. The Rennies were part

French--my father thought they might have started off as Reynauds--

but mostly tribal haze of their Indian background, Toussaint himself

was only ever definite in declaring himself not a Blackfeet, which

had to do with the point that the <sup>Two Medicine</sup> woman he married, Mary Rides Proud,

was one. The usual assumption was that the Rennie lineage was Metis,

for other Metis families--Salois, OO, OO--had ended up in this general

region of Montana after the <sup>Riel</sup> ~~Metis~~ rebellion in Alberta was put down

in 1885, but <sup>and you found that</sup> ~~when you counted~~ back across the decades, Toussaint <sup>already</sup> ~~was~~

<sup>had grown to manhood</sup> ~~here in the Two country~~ <sup>by the time</sup> ~~long before~~ the Mounties <sup>were hanging</sup> ~~had~~ Louis Riel and scattering

Toussaint himself was worse than no help on ~~dispersed~~ his followers. ~~A further theory was that French and Indian~~

<sup>matter of origin,</sup> ~~this seems~~ for all he would say was to claim pedigree from the Lewis

and Clark expedition: "I come down from <sup>Marivether</sup> Lewis himself. My grandfather

had red hair."

matter of origin

4 Thinking back on it now, I suspect the murk of Toussaint's lineage was carefully maintained. For the one thing <sup>unmistakable</sup> ~~definite~~ about the Rennie family line was its knack for ending up on the side of the winners in any given contest of the Montana frontier. "The prairie was so black with buffalo it looked burnt. I was with the Assiniboines, we came down on the buffalo from the Sweetgrass Hills," one Toussaint tale would relate, and the next, "The trader Joe Kipp hired me to take cattle he was selling to the Army at Fort Benton. He knew I kept Indians from stealing them." <sup>Able to straddle</sup> ~~Straddled~~ that way, Toussaint had a view into almost anything that happened <sup>in the early Two country.</sup> He was with the bull teams that brought the building materials for the original Blackfeet <sup>Reservation</sup> agency ~~north~~ north of Choteau, before there was a Choteau or a Gros Ventre. "Ben Short was the wagon boss. He was a good cusser." After the winter of '86, Toussaint freighted <sup>off the prairie</sup> cowhides by the thousands. "That was what was left in this country by spring. More cowhides than cows."



11

He saw young Lieutenant John J. Pershing and his Negro soldiers  
ride through Gros Ventre in <sup>1896</sup>~~1890~~, herding a few hundred <sup>woebegone</sup> Crees north

"Each  
to push them back over the line into Canada. ~~Each~~ creek those  
Birch Creek and Badger Creek  
soldiers crossed, English Creek and ~~Badger Creek and Birch Creek~~

~~some more~~ leaked  
and all of them, a few Crees ~~and~~ away into the brush." He saw the

~~mining canals~~ <sup>eighty-thousand acre</sup> canals come to the prairie, the irrigation project that

<sup>1909</sup>  
built Valier from scratch in ~~1890~~ and drew in trainloads of homesteaders--

"Pretty quick they wondered about this country. Dust blew through

<sup>there</sup>  
Valier so much, plates were turned face-down on the table until

you turned them up to eat off of. One tree, the town had. Mrs.  
Guardipee watered it from her wash tubs."--and the Two Medicine canal  
he himself had patrolled for almost a quarter century, the ditch rider  
job he held and held in spite of being not a Blackfeet: "It stops them  
being jealous of each other. With me in the job, none of them is."  
The first blats of sheep into this part of Montana were heard by  
Toussaint. "I think, 1879. People called Lyons, down on the Teton.  
Other sheepmen came fast, Charlie Scoffin, Charlie McDonald, Oliver  
Goldsmith Cooper." The first survey crews, he watched make their  
sightings. "1902, men with telescopes and Jacob's staffs."

--"The first Fourth of July you ever saw here," my father was prompting.

"When was that, do you think?"

Toussaint could date it without thinking. "Custer's year. '76. We heard just before the Fourth. All dead at the Little Bighorn. Everybody.

Gros Ventre was just Barclay's hotel and saloon. Men took turns,

coming out of the saloon to stand sentry. To look north." Here

Pete's wife  
Toussaint leaned toward Marie and said in mock reproach: "For Blackfeet."

# All of us echoed his chuckle. The tease to Marie was a standard

one from Toussaint. Married to Pete, she of course was my aunt, and if I'd had 1,000 aunts instead of just her, she still would have been my favorite. More to the point here, though, Marie was Toussaint's granddaughter, and the only soul anywhere

in that family who could get along with him. Most of <sup>Toussaint's</sup> ~~his~~ sons wouldn't even speak to him, His daughters had all married out of his orbit as

rapidly as they could, and down through the decades any number of his

Rides Proud in-laws had threatened to shoot him. (Toussaint claimed he had a foolproof antidote to such threats: "I tell them bullets can fly more than one direction.") I myself remember

that the last few years of her life, Toussaint and his wife Mary didn't even live under the same roof <sup>and I</sup> whenever my father stopped by their place,

Toussaint was to be found in residence in the bunkhouse. Thus all the

on  
trunk  
my +  
1 direct



evidence said that if you were a remove or two from him Toussaint could be a prince of the earth toward you, but anybody sharing the same blood with him he begrudged.



Except Marie. Marie was thin and not particularly dark--her father

was Irish, an office man at the Agency in Browning; only her black

hair, which she wore shoulder-length, brought out the Blackfeet and

ancestry and whatever heredity it was that Toussaint transmitted.

So her resemblance to <sup>Louisa</sup>him really was only a similar music in her voice,

and the same running chuckle at the back of her throat when she was pleased. Yet be around the two of them

together for only a minute and you knew without mistake that here

were not merely natural allies but blood kin. There just was something

unmistakably similar in how each of them regarded life. As if they

had seen it all before and were wryly amused that things were no better

this time around.

But Toussaint's story of the first Fourth wasn't quite done." ↘ (An Barclay's joint.)

(took a turn at sentry. I was in there drinking with them. ~~I was~~

already an old man. Fifteen.

"Ancient as Jick," Marie murmured with a smile my direction.

"Jick has a few months to go yet," my mother corrected. Which made

me defend: "I'm getting there as fast as I can."



→ Marilyn--please start this at top of a new page. 15 ✓

And the good mood among the cluster of us ~~was~~ was about to get better. My mother turned to Marie and asked: "Do you suppose these scenery inspectors have earned any food?"

"We'll take pity on them," Marie agreed, and the ~~picnic provisions~~ <sup>picnic</sup> provisions began to emerge from the pair of ~~boxes~~ <sup>grub</sup> boxes.

The ~~blue~~ blanket became like a raftload of food, except that such a cargo of eating likely would have sunk any raft.

There were the ~~fryer~~ <sup>part of the</sup> chickens my mother ~~was preparing~~ <sup>spending that morning preparing</sup> that ~~young~~ <sup>young</sup> morning delectable spring fries with drumsticks about the thickness of your thumb. ~~That~~ <sup>This very</sup> morning too, Toussaint had caught a batch of trout in the Two Medicine and now here they beckoned, fried up by Marie. Blue enamel broilers of fish and fowl, side by side. The gateposts of heaven.

¶ Marie's special three-bean salad, the pinnacle of how good beans can taste. My mother's famous potato salad with little new green onions cut so fine they were like ~~flakes~~ <sup>sparks</sup> of flavor ~~amid it.~~

New radishes, sweet and about the size of a ~~thumb nail~~ <sup>marble</sup>, first of Marie's garden vegetables. A dozen and a half deviled eggs arrayed by my mother.

A jar of home-canned pickled beets, a strong point of my mother's.

A companion jar of crab-apple pickles, a distinction of Marie's.

A plate of my mother's cinnamon rolls. A loaf of Marie's saffron bread. Between the two, a moon of <sup>Reese</sup> home-churned butter.

A lard pail of fresh donuts by Marie. A gooseberry pie from my mother.

My eyes feasted while the rest of me readied to. My father <sup>urged</sup> said

"Dive in, Toussaint," and the passing of dishes got underway.

"Been a while since breakfast," Pete proclaimed when he had his plate loaded. "I'm so excited to see food again I'm not sure I'll be able to eat."

"Too bad about you," Marie said in that soft yet take-it-or-leave-it way so like Toussaint's. And my mother didn't overlook the chance to put in:

"Wait, we'll sell tickets. People will ~~line~~ line up to see Pete

Reese not eat."

"Come on now, Bet," came the protest from Pete. "I have never eaten more than I could hold."

As they should <sup>d</sup> at a picnic, the conversing and the consuming cantered along together in <sup>this</sup> ~~that~~ fashion. I think it was at the

start of <sup>we were all letting</sup> about the second plateload, when a person lets out a dubious hmm <sup>of this or that</sup> <sup>going</sup> <sup>having</sup> <sup>that</sup> about having another helping but then goes ahead and has it, Pete

asked my father if fire school in Missoula had made him any smarter



than he was before.

"Airplanes," my father announced. <sup>firefighting</sup> "Airplanes are the apparatus of

<sup>hoosier</sup> the future, at least according to this one ~~guy~~ we heard from over there."

"The hell. How's that gonna work?"

"I didn't say it was going to work. I just said what the hoosier

told us. They're going to try parachutists--like these guys at fairs?"

"Say on," urged Toussaint, squinting through a mask of eager puzzlement.

Toussaint always was avid to hear developments of this sort, as if they confirmed for him the humorous traits of the human race. "That radio stuff," he had declared during the worst of the drought and the dust storms, "it monkeys with the air. Dries it out, all that electric up ~~there~~ there."

<sup>Over</sup> "Out in Washington they're about to test all this out," my father continued his report of <sup>latest</sup> up-in-the-air science. "Send an airplane

with a couple of these parachutists over a mountain smoke and see if they can get down there and tromp it out before it grows to a real fire.

That's the cheery theory, anyway."

Pete shook his head. "They couldn't pay me enough to <sup>jump out of one of those.</sup> do that."

"Hell, Pete, the jumping would be easy money. The landing is <sup>plow into</sup> ~~eat~~ another of Toussaint's trout, the only drawback." My father readied to ~~bite into another drumstick,~~

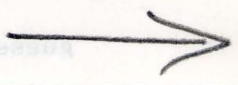
<sup>but first</sup> offered <sup>Fact is,</sup> then ~~said~~ as if in afterthought: "I told them I'd volunteer"--my mother's

<sup>sighted in</sup>  
full skepticism ~~was~~ on him now, waiting to see if there was any color of

seriousness in this--if the parachute was going to be big enough for

my saddlehorse and packstring too."

The vision of my father and assorted horses drifting down from  
the sky the way the cottonwood fluffs were floating down around us  
set everybody to laughing like loonies.





Next it was Toussaint's <sup>again.</sup>inning. The mention of horses reminded him of a long-ago Fourth of July in Gros Ventre when everybody ~~got~~ caught horse-race fever. "How it happened, first they matched every saddle horse against every other saddle horse. Ran out of those by middle of the afternoon. Still plenty of beer and daylight left. Then somebody got the notion. Down to the stable, everybody. Brought out the stagecoach horses. Bridled them, put boys on <sup>them bareback.</sup> ~~their backs.~~ Raced them against each other the length of Main Street." The Toussaint chuckle. "It was hard to know. To bet on the horse, ~~how~~ or how high the boy would bounce."

Which tickled us all again. Difficult to eat on account of laughing, and to laugh on account of eating. give me that dilemma any time.

All this horse talk did remind me about Mouse, and I excused myself to <sup>picket him</sup> ~~go move~~ Mouse onto another patch of grass. Truth to tell, getting myself up and into motion also would ~~it also was an opportunity to~~ shake down some of the food in me and ~~possibly~~ make room for more.

4

Thinking back on that scene as I wended my way to the edge of the park where Mouse was tethered, I have wished someone among us then had the talent to paint the portrait of that picnic. A group scene that would have preserved those faces from English Creek and Noon Creek and Gros Ventre and the ~~eastern~~ <sup>out-east.</sup> farming ~~benches~~ <sup>country</sup> and yes, Toussaint's from the Two Medicine. <sup>That</sup> Would convey every one of those people at once and yet also their separateness. Their selves, I guess the world should ~~would~~ be. I don't mean one of those phoney-baloney gilt concoctions such as that one of Custer and all his <sup>and doomed</sup> embattled troopers there at the Little Bighorn, which hangs in three-fourths of the saloons I have ever been in and disgusts me every single time. (To my mind, Custer can be done justice only if shown wearing a tall white dunce cap.) But once I saw in a magazine, Look or Life or one of those dead ones, what one painter tried in this respect of showing selves. He first painted ~~hundreds of~~ little pictures of tropical flowers, in pink and other pastels; wild roses I guess would be our closest comparison flower here in the Two country. Some several hundred of those, he painted. Then when all these were hung together in the right order on the wall, the flower colors fit together from picture to picture to create the outline of a tremendously huge snake. In any picture



by ~~it~~ itself you could not see a hint of that snake. But look at them together and he lay kinked ~~across~~ that entire wall mightier than the mightiest python.

That is ~~the~~ kind of portrait I mean of the creek picnic. Not that very many of those people ~~that day~~ <sup>there</sup> in ~~Maria Wood~~ <sup>the</sup> Park could be called the human equivalent of flowers, nor that the sum of them amounted to a colossal civic snake. But just the point that there, that day, they seemed to me each distinctly themselves and yet added up together too.

I have inquired, though, and so far as I can find, nobody ever even thought to take a photograph of that day.

#

When I came back from re-tethering Mouse, my parents and Pete and Marie were in a four-way conversation about something or other, and Toussaint was spearing himself another <sup>trout</sup> ~~fish~~ out of the broiler.

His seemed to me the more sensible endeavor, so I dropped down next to him to inflict myself on the chicken supply. I was just beginning ~~and reached myself one more piece of chicken.~~

to do ~~do~~ good work on my favorite piece of white meat, a breastbone, when Toussaint turned his head toward me. The potato salad had come to rest

nearest my end of the blanket and I reached toward it, expecting that he was going to ask me to pass it to him. Instead Toussaint stated: <sup>quietly</sup>

"You ~~have become~~ <sup>are</sup> a campjack <sup>these days</sup>."

# Probably I went red as an apple. I mean, good christamighty.

Toussaint's words signaled what I had never dreamt of: moccasin telegraph had the story of my sashay with Stanley.

Everything that coursed through me in those moments, I would need Methusaleh's years to sort out.

Questions of source and quantity maybe hogged in first. How the hell did Toussaint know? And what exactly did he know? My dimwitted approach to a bobwire fence in an electrical storm? My tussle with Bubbles? My alcoholic evening in the cabin? No, he couldn't know any of those in detail. Could he?

The possibility of Toussaint having dropped some mention of that last and biggest matter, my night of imbibing, into the general conversation while I was off tending Mouse made me peer toward my mother. No real reassurance there; <sup>plainly</sup> her mood <sup>declined</sup> had ~~changed~~ since the parade of the food onto the blanket, she now was half-listening to my



father and Pete and half-gazing off toward the ripples of English Creek.

Whatever was occupying her mind, I could only send up prayers that it

wasn't identical to the topic on mine.



Geography next. How far had the tale of Jick-and-Stanley spread?

Was I traveling on tongues throughout the whole damn Two country?

"Hear about that <sup>M</sup>McCaskill kid? Yeah, green as frog feathers, ain't

he? You wonder how ~~they~~ let him out of the house by himself?"

<sup>beyond that</sup> And ~~finally~~, philosophy. If I was a <sup>Toussaint</sup> topic, just what did that

constitute? The mix of apprehension and surmise was all through me.

Plus a <sup>flavor</sup> ~~corner~~ of something which <sup>seemed</sup> ~~felt~~ surprisingly like pride. Better

or worse, part of me now was in Toussaint's knowledge, his running

history of the Two. In there with Phony Nose <sup>Goldman</sup> ~~Hogan~~ and the last

buffalo hunt and the first sheep and the winter of '86 and Lieutenant

Black Jack Pershing and the herded Crees and--and what did that mean?

Being a ~~to be~~ part of history, at the age of fourteen years and ten months: why had that responsibility picked me out?

They say ~~that~~ when a cat walks over the ground that will be your grave, a shiver goes through you. As I sat there that fine July noon

with a breastbone forgotten in my hand, Toussaint again busy eating

his trout after leaving the track of those <sup>six</sup> ~~five~~ soft words across my

life--"You <sup>are</sup> ~~have~~ become a campjack--yes, I shivered. <sup>these days</sup>



My father's voice broke my trance. <sup>Toussaint and Jick</sup> ~~"If you two~~ ever would get

done eating for winter, we could move along to the gourmet part of  
the meal. Some fancy handle-turning went into the making of that  
ice cream, you know. Or at least so I hear by rumor."

My mother was up, declaring she'd bring the cups of coffee if  
a certain son of hers would see to the dessert. Toussaint chuckled.  
And put up a restraining hand as I started to clamber to my feet, ready  
to bolt off to fetch dishes of ice cream, bolt off anywhere to get a  
minute of ~~thinking~~ thinking space to myself.

"Do you know, Beth," Toussaint began, stopping her and my heart at  
the same time; "do you know--that potato salad was good."

# —  
A picnic always slides into contentment on ice cream.

no #

All around us as each little batch of people finished <sup>dessert and coffee</sup> ~~eating,~~

<sup>Hopped</sup> flopped onto  
men ~~lay~~ on their backs or sides while the women ~~were primly~~ sat up  
and chatted with one another.

I, though; I wasn't doing any sliding or flopping, just sitting  
there bolt-upright trying to think things through. My head was as  
gorged as my stomach, which was saying a lot.

Normally,  
that is  
I...

~~to me~~ <sup>9</sup> ~~My father~~ <sup>though</sup> acted as if he didn't <sup>have</sup> a thing in the world on his

mind, ~~though~~. To my surprise, he scootched around until he had room  
to lie flat, then sank back with his head in my mother's lap.

Pretty close to perfect, he said. Now if I only had an obedient  
wife who'd <sup>relieve me of</sup> ~~loosen~~ these dress shoes ~~for me~~.

If I take them off you, my mother vowed, you'll be chasing <sup>after</sup> them  
as they float down the creek.

This is what I have to put up with all the time, Toussaint, came  
his voice from under the hat. She's as independent as the ~~air~~ <sup>moon</sup>.

My mother answered that by sticking out a thumb and jabbing it between  
a couple of his ribs, which brought a whuw! out of him.

this story  
typed  
over  
ms  
copy

Pete



Marilyn--please start this  
on a new page.

27

Down at creekside, the high school principal Mr. Vennaman~~and~~ was  
stepping up into the stump rostrum. Evidently it was time for the  
<sup>evidently.</sup> program. <sup>contain</sup> I tried to ~~put~~ at the back of my mind the cyclone of thoughts  
about Toussaint and mocassin telegraph and myself.

"--always a day of pleasure," Mr. Vennaman's voice began to reach  
those of us at the back of the park. "This is a holiday particularly

American. Sometimes, if the person on the stump such as I am at this

moment doesn't watch his enthusiasm, it can <sup>become</sup> ~~get~~ a little too much so.  
which Mose Skimmer, a Will Rogers of his day, proposed  
I am always reminded of the mock speech ~~written~~ for this nation's

one-hundredth birthday in 1876:

"Any person who insinuates in the remotest degree that America  
isn't the biggest and best country in the world, and far ahead of  
every other country in everything, will be filled with gunpowder and  
touched off."

When the laughing at that died down, Mr. Vennaman went on: "We  
don't have to be quite that ardent about it, <sup>I think.</sup> but this is a day we can simply  
<sup>be</sup> ~~are~~ thankful to be with our other countrymen. A day for neighbors,  
and friends, and family."

"Some of those neighbors, in fact, are here with a gift of song for us." Mr. Vennman peered over toward the nearest big cottonwood.

"Nola, can the music commence?"

This was interesting. For under that towering tree sat a piano.

Who came up with the idea I never did know, but some of the Gros Ventre men had hauled the instrument--of course it was one of those old upright ones--out of Nola Atkins' front room, and now here it was on the bank of English Creek, and Nola on the piano bench <sup>readying</sup> ~~ready~~ to play.

I'd like to say Nola looked right at home, but actually she was kept busy shooing cottonwood fluff off the keys and every so often there'd be a plink as she brushed away a particularly <sup>stubborn</sup> ~~reluctant~~ puff of it.

Nonetheless, Nola ~~nodded~~ bobbed yes, she was set.

I think it has to be said that the singing at events such as this is usually a pretty dubious proposition, and that's <sup>more than</sup> likely why some at each of these Fourth picnics. out-of-town group was invited to perform ~~every year.~~ That way, nobody local had anything to live down. ~~Now~~ this year's songsters, the Valier Men's Chorus, <sup>now</sup> were gathering themselves beside Nola and the piano. Odd to see them up there in that role, farmers and water company men, in white <sup>draws</sup> shirts and with the pale summits of their foreheads where hats customarily sat.



Their voices proved not to be golden, but not really unlistenable either. The program, though, inadvertently hit our funny bones <sup>as much as</sup> ~~more~~ <sup>Because</sup> ~~that~~ it did our ears. The chorus's first selection was "I Cannot Sing the Songs of Long Ago," And then, as if offering proof, they wobbled next into "Love's Old Sweet Song." The picnic crowd <sup>blossomed</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>with</sup> ~~full of~~ grins over that, and I believe I discerned even a trace of one on Nola Atkins at the piano.

Mr. Vennaman came back up on the stump, thanking the Valerians "for that memorable rendition" and introducing "yet another neighbor, our guest of honor this day." Emil Thorsen, the <sup>state</sup> sheepman and ~~senator~~ from down at Choteau, <sup>declared</sup> ~~said~~ in a voice <sup>old</sup> that could have been heard all the way downtown that in early times when he was first running for office and it

was all one county through here from Fort Benton to Babb instead of being broken up into several as it is now, he'd have happily taken up our time; "but since I can't whinny any votes out of you folks any more, I'll just say I'm glad to be here among so many friends, and compliment you on feeding as good as you ever did, and shut myself up and sit down." And did.



imparting? popped to  
Mr. Vennaman was on his feet again, leading the ~~man~~ hand-clapping

and then saying: "Our next speaker actually needs no introduction."

I'm going to take a lesson from Senator ~~Larson~~ <sup>Thouen</sup> and not bother to

fashion one. "Two traits always marked Mr. Vennaman as an educator:

the bow tie he ~~always~~ <sup>perpetually</sup> wore and the way, even saying hello on the

street, he seemed to be looking from the front of a classroom at

you. Now he peered and even went up on his tiptoes a bit, as if

calling on someone in the back row of that classroom, and sang out:

no # "Beth McCaskill?"

I knew I hadn't heard that quite right. # Yet here she was, <sup>getting up from</sup> ~~climbing~~

<sup>beside my father</sup> ~~onto her feet~~ and smoothing her dress down and setting off toward

the speaker's stump, with folded sheets of paper clutched in her

business hand. <sup>No doubt about it,</sup> ~~I admit~~ I was the most surprised person in the state

of Montana right then, but Pete and <sup>Marie</sup> ~~Virginia~~ were not far behind and

even Toussaint's face was squinched with curiosity.

"What--?" I floundered to my father. "Did you know--?"

"She's been sitting up nights writing this," he told me with a

cream-eating grin. "Your mother, the Eleanor Roosevelt of English Creek."



She was on the stump now, smoothing the papers onto the little stand, being careful the creek breeze didn't snatch them. She looked like she had an appointment to fight panthers, but her voice began steady and clear.

"My being up here is anybody's suggestion

but my own. It was argued to me that if I did not make this talk,

it would not get made. That might have been <sup>the</sup> a better idea.

But <sup>Maxwell</sup> ~~Ira~~ Vennaman, not to mention a certain Varick McCaskill, has

the art of persuasion. I have been known to tell <sup>that</sup> ~~my~~ husband <sup>of mine</sup> that

he has a memory so long ~~that~~ he has to tie knots in it to carry

it around with him. We'll all now see just how much my own remembering

is made up of slip knots."

Chuckles among the crowd at that. A couple of hundred people being entertained by my mother: a minute before, I would have bet the world against it.

"But I do say this. I can see yet, as clearly as if he was standing in

long outline against one of these cottonwoods, the man I have been

asked to recall. Ben English. Many others of you were acquainted

with Ben and the English family. Sat up to a dinner or supper Mae

put on the table in that very house across there." Heads turned, nodded.

The English place was the one just across the creek from the park, with

the walked-away look to it. If you were driving north out of Gros

Ventre the English place came so quick, set in there just past the highway bridge, that chances were you wouldn't recognize it as a ranch, rather than a part of the town. But from ~~there in~~ the park,

the empty buildings across there seemed to call their facts over to us. The Englishes all dead or moved away. The family after them felled by the Depression. Now the land leased by

Wendell Williamson ~~from the Bank~~. One more place which had supported ~~a family~~ <sup>people</sup>, now populated by Double W cows.

"Or," my mother was continuing, "or dealt with Ben

for horses or cattle or barley or hay. But acquaintance doesn't

always etch deep, and so at <sup>Max</sup> ~~Ira~~ Vennaman's request I have put together

what is known of Ben English."



"His is a history which begins where ~~that of~~ ~~anywhere~~ all settlers of the West ~~has to go to~~ of America has to: elsewhere."

Benson English was born in 1865 at Cobourg, in Ontario in Canada.

He liked to tell that as he and his brothers one by one left home, their mother provided each of them a Bible, a razor, whatever ~~little~~ money she could, and some knitted underwear." My mother here looked as if she entirely approved of Ben English's mother. "Ben English was seventeen when he followed his brother Robert into Montana, to Augusta where Robert had taken up a homestead. Ben found a job driving freight wagon for the Sun River Sheep Company from the supply point at Craig on the Missouri River to their range in the mountains. He put in a year at that, and then, at eighteen, he was able to move up to driving the stage between Augusta and ~~Craig~~ Craig."

*She lifted a page, went right on as if she'd been giving Fourth of July speeches every day of her life.*

Atop there with six horses <sup>young Ben English's</sup> surging beneath him seemed to be his place in the world. Soon, with

his wages of forty dollars a month, he was buying <sup>his own</sup> horses. With a



broke team in the lead and his green ones in the other traces, he

nonetheless somehow kept his reputation as a driver you could set

your clock by." Here she looked up from her sheets of paper to glance

*Senator Thomen*  
over to ~~Tom~~ Larson. "Ben later liked to tell that a bonus of stage

driving was its <sup>civic opportunities</sup> ~~political influence~~. On election day he was able

to vote when the stage made its stop at the Halfway House. Then

again when it reached Craig. Then a third time when he got home

to Augusta."

*focused* back down to  
When the laughter at that was done, my mother ~~looked up from~~

her pages, ~~to the picnic crowd~~. "There was a saying that any man who

had been a stagecoach driver was qualified to handle the reins of

heaven or hell, either one. But Ben English, as so many of our

parents did, made the choice halfway between those two. He homesteaded.

*the spring of 1893*  
In ~~1890~~ he filed his claim southwest of here at the head of what is

now called Ben English Coulee. The particulars of ~~his claim~~ the English

homestead on Ben's papers of proof may sound scant, yet many of us

here today came from just such beginnings in this country: "A dwelling

house, stable, corrals,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles of wire fences, 30 acres of hay cut

each season--total value, \$800."



"Around the time of his homesteading Ben English married Mae Manix of Augusta, and Ben and Mae moved here, to the place across the creek, in 1896. Their only child, Mary, was born there in 1901. I remember of Mary that, when we were schoolgirls together, she could recite a verse Ben had taught her. 'Smile and the world

smiles with you/Kick and you kick alone/For a cheerful grin/will

let you in/where a kicker was never known. ✓ As might be imagined,

Mary was always able to practice that philosophy a <sup>somewhat</sup> ~~little~~ better than I could."

Here my mother paused, her look fastened over the heads of all of us on the park grass, <sup>toward</sup> <sup>one of</sup> ~~the~~ the trunk of <sup>earlier,</sup> the big cottonwoods farthest back; as if, in the way she'd said, someone was standing in outline against the gray bark.

(no 9) "A lot of you can remember the look of Ben English. A rangy man, standing well over six feet, and always wearing

a black Stetson, always with a middle crimp. He sometimes ~~would~~ <sup>grew</sup> grow

a winter beard, and in his last years he wore a mustache that made

him look like the unfoolable horse dealer he was. Across thirty-some

years my father--Isaac Reese--and Ben English knew each other and

liked each other and tried to best each other. Put the pair of them

✓  
~~and my father~~ together, my mother used to say of their visits, and

no 4  
they would examine a horse until there was nothing left of it but a

hank of tail hair and a dab of blue.

Once when my father bought a horse with an odd stripe in its face,

Ben told him he was glad to see a man of his age taking up a new

occupation--raising zebras. My father got his turn back when Ben

bought a dark bay Clydesdale that stood twenty-one hands high at

the shoulder, <sup>very likely</sup> ~~possibly~~ the hugest horse there ever has been in this



valley, and upon asking what the horse's name was, discovered it was Benson. Whenever my father saw Ben and the Benson horse together he called out, "Benson and t Benson, but t'ank Godt vun of t'em vears a hadt."

Of all the crowd, I am sure my father laughed loudest at this Isaac Reese tale, and Pete was noddin in confirmation of that accent he and my mother had grown up under. Our speaker of the day, though, was sweeping onward.

noq

"Anyone who knew Ben English more than passingly will recall his

knack for nicknames. For those of you old enough to remember them

around town, Glacier Gus Swenson and Three-Day Thurlow both were

christened that way by Ben English. <sup>Laughs</sup> Chuckles of recognition spattered

amid the audience. Glacier Gus was an idler so slow that it was said

he wore spurs to keep his shadow from treading on his heels, and

Three-Day Thurlow had an <sup>everlasting local</sup> ~~immortal working~~ reputation as a <sup>passable</sup> dandy worker

his first day on a job, a complainer on ~~the~~ <sup>his</sup> second, and gone sometime

during his third. <sup>"Ben's"</sup> ~~I believe his~~ nicknaming had no ~~malicious~~ thought of

malice behind it, however; <sup>"He"</sup> ~~Ben likely~~ did it for the pleasure it gave

his tongue. In any event, in their pauper's graves ~~both~~ Glacier Gus

<sup>each</sup> and Three-Day lie buried in a suit given by Ben English."

She put the page she had just finished beneath the others, and the next page she met with a little bob of her head, as if it was the one she'd been looking for. <sup>all this time.</sup> "So it is a justice of language that a namer himself lives on in an extra name. Originally this flow of water was <sup>simply</sup> just called Gros Ventre Creek, to go with the <sup>Townsite</sup> town. But it came to be a saying, as the sheepmen and other travelers would pass through here, that they would stop for noon or the night when they reached English's Creek. An apostrophe is not the easiest thing in the world to keep track of, and so we know this as English Creek."

She paused again and I brought my hands up ready to clap, that sounding to me like the probable extent of the Ben English history. But no, she was resuming. Do I never learn? My mother had her own yardstick as to when she was done with a topic.



"I have a particular memory of Ben English,

myself. I can see him yet, riding past our ranch <sup>on Noon Creek</sup> on his way to his

cattle range in the mountains, leading a string of cayuse packhorses

carrying block salt. On his way back he would ride into our yard

and pass the time of day with my father while still sitting in his

saddle, but hardly ever would he climb down and come in. His

customary explanation was that he had to get home and <sup>move the water.</sup> irrigate. more water

He seemed to feel that if he stayed in the saddle, he indeed was on

his way <sup>to that irrigating task.</sup>

# My father had his head cocked in a fashion ~~that was new to him~~ as if what she was reciting was new to him. I figured that was just his pride in her performance, but yet--

"And that memory leads to the next, of Ben English in his fields across from us here, moving the water. Guiding the water, ~~which~~ it might be better said.

~~For Ben English used the water~~

of his namesake creek as a weaver uses wool. <sup>With respect.</sup> With care. With patience.

Persuading it ~~to~~ to become a product greater than itself." Once more

she smoothed the page she was reading from.

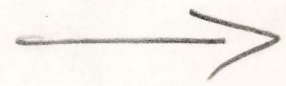


"Greater than itself. As Ben English himself became, greater than himself. From the drudgery of a freight wagon to the hell deck of a stagecoach to a <sup>dry-land</sup> homestead to a ranch of green water-fed meadows that nicely supported a family, that was the Montana path of Ben English. Following his ability, trusting in it to lead him past the blind alleys of life. This is the day to remember a man who did it that way."

more

Was I the only one to have the thought <sup>brim up</sup> ~~dawning~~ in me then? That suddenly, somehow, Alec McCaskill and the Double W had joined Ben English in this speech?

Whether or not, my mother had returned to the irrigation theme.





"Bill Reinking has been kind enough to find for me in the Gleaner files something which says this better than I ~~mean~~

can. It is a piece that I remembered was published ~~in the Gleaner~~

when the first water flowed into the ditches of the Valier irrigation

project. Who wrote it is not known. It was signed simply 'Homesteader'.

<sup>, no, thousands</sup> which among the hundreds <sup>'Homesteader'</sup> who were homesteading this country then, maybe

isn't quite as anonymous as 'Anonymous' but awfully close, and it is

titled 'The Lord of the Field.' ~~It reads:~~ She drew a deep breath. "It reads:"

# "The irrigator is the lone lord of his field. A shovel is his

musket, gumboots are his garb of office, shank's mare is his steed.

To him through the curving laterals the water arrives mysteriously,

without sign of origin or destination. But his canvas dam, placed

with cunning, causes the flood to hesitate, seek; and with an eager

whisper, pour over the ditch bank and onto the grateful land. The

man with the shovel hears the parched earth drink. He sees

its face of dusty brown <sup>of sudden</sup> turn to glistening black. He smells the odor of life as the land's plants take the water in green embrace.

He feels like a god, exalted by this power of his hand and brain

to create man-made rain--yet humble as even a god must be under

the burden of such power."

I honestly believe the only breath which could be discerned in that crowd <sup>after that</sup> ~~just then~~ was the one my mother let out. Now she looked

her attention to her written sheets, and the words it gave her next were:

"Ben English is gone from us. He died in the summer of 1927,

of a strained heart. Died, to say it plainly, of the work he put

into this country, as so many have. My own father followed Ben English

to the grave within two years. Some say that not a horse in the

Two country has had a good looking-over since their passing." Which

was one of the more <sup>barbed</sup> ~~risky~~ things she could have said to this audience, full as it was of guys who considered themselves

pretty fancy horsemen. But she of course said it anyway and sailed on.

"Ben English is gone, and the English place stands empty across there, except for the echoes of the auctioneer's hammer." A comment with larger barbs yet on it. Ted Muntz, whose First National Bank had foreclosed on the English place from the people ~~the~~ Mrs. English sold it to, without doubt was somewhere in this audience. And all out among the picnic crowd I saw people shift restlessly, as if the memory of the foreclosure auctions, the Depression's "hammer sales," was a sudden chafe.

My father by now was listening so hard he seemed to be frozen, an ice statue wearing the clothing of a man, which confirmed to me that not even he knew how far my mother was headed with this talk.



"English Creek is my second home," she was stating now as if someone was arguing the point with her, "for you all know that Noon Creek is where I was born and grew up. Two creeks, two valleys, two claims on my heart. Yet the pair are also day and night to me, as examples of what has happened to this country in my lifetime. Noon Creek now is all but empty of the families I knew there. Yes, there is still the Reese name on a Noon Creek ranch, I am proud as anything to say. And the Egan name, for it would be easier to dislodge the Rocky Mountains than Dill Egan. But the others, all the ranches down Noon Creek but one-- all those are a <sup>roll call</sup> ~~register~~ of the gone. The Torrance place: sold out at a loss, the family gone from here. The Emrich place: foreclosed on, the family gone from here. The Chute place: sold out at a loss, the family gone from here. Thad Wainwright's place, Thad one of the first cattlemen anywhere in this country: sold out at a loss, Thad passed away within a year. The Fain place: foreclosed on, the family gone from here. The Eiseley place: sold out at a loss, the family gone from here. The Nansen place." Here she paused, shook her head a little as <sup>again</sup> if ~~if~~ disavowing Alec's news that this was where he and Leona would set up a household.

"The Nansen place: foreclosed on, Carl dead by his own hand, Sigrid and the children gone from here to her parents in Minnesota."

What she was saying was a feat I hadn't known could be done. Her words, the tolling rhythm of "sold--foreclosed--gone from here," expressed outright the fate of those Noon Creek ranching families. Yet all the while she was telling an equally strong tale by omission. "All the ranches down Noon Creek but one," had been her phrase of indictment. Everybody in this park this day knew "but one" could only mean the Double W; knew that each and every of those sales and foreclosures ended up with Wendell Williamson holding the land, by outright ~~a~~ buy or by lease from the First National Bank of Gros Ventre. A silent echo I suppose sounds like a contradiction in terms, yet I swear this was what my mother was achieving; after every "sold--foreclosed--gone from here," the ringing unspoken fact of that family ranch swallowed by the Double W.

"English Creek," she was going on, "thankfully has been spared the Noon Creek history, except once." We knew the next of her litany, it stared us in the face. "The English place. After Ben's death, sold to the Wyngard family who weren't able to make a go of it against



the Depression. Foreclosed on, the Wyngards gone from here."

A "A little bit ago, Max Vennaman said this is a day for friends and neighbors and families. So it is. And so too we must remember these friends and neighbors and families who are not among us today because they were done in by the times." This said with a skepticism that suggested the times had familiar human faces behind them.

"But an auction hammer can shatter only a household, not the gifts of the earth itself. While it may hurt the heart to see such places as the home of Ben English occupied only by time and the wind, English Creek is still the bloodstream of our valley.

It flows its honest way--" the least little pause here; just enough to seed the distinction from those who prospered by the auction hammer-- "while we try to find ours."

She looked up now, and out across us, all the islands of people.

Either she had this last part by heart or was making it up as she went, <sup>never once did she glance</sup> <sup>her ahead of pages</sup> because ~~she never looked~~ down at ~~the paper~~ as she said it.

A "There is much wrong with the world, and I suppose I am not known to be especially bashful about my list of those things. Maybe I

But I think it could not be more right that we honor ~~him~~ in this

valley a man who savvied the land and its livelihood, who honored

the earth instead of merely coveting it. It could not be more right that

tall Ben English in his black hat amid his green fields, coaxing a

head of water to make itself into hay, is the one whose name this

creek carries."

She folded her sheets of paper once, then again, stuck them in

the pocket of her dress and stepped down from the stump.

Everybody applauded, although <sup>a few</sup> ~~some~~ a lot more luke-warmly than

others. Under our tree we were all clapping hard and my father

hardest of all, but I also saw him swallow in a large way. And

when he realized I was watching him, he canted himself in my

in many  
constantly  
it -  
it did not  
but  
my



direction and murmured so that only I could hear: "That mother of yours."

Then she was back with us, taking compliments briskly. Pete studied her and said: "Decided to give <sup>big boys</sup> ~~the~~ some particular hell, didn't you?" Even Toussaint told her: "That was good, about the irrigating."

But of

us all, it was only to my father that she said, in what would have been a demand if there hadn't been the <sup>t</sup> ~~ting~~ of anxiousness in it:

"Well? What did you think?"

My father reached and with an extended finger traced back into place a banner of her hair that the <sup>crests breeze</sup> ~~wind~~ <sup>lifted and</sup> had lain across her ~~ear~~ ear.

# "I think," he said, "I think ~~is~~ that being married to you is worth all the risk."

One thing sure: that was enough picnic to last me a while.

*A* Toussaint's murmur to me, my mother's speech to the universe. A person's thoughts can kite back and forth between those almost forever. It was just lucky I had specific matters to put myself to, fetching Mouse from where he was tethered and riding through the dispersing picnickers and heading on across the English Creek bridge to the rodeo grounds.

I was to meet Ray Heaney on the corral alongside the bucking chutes, the best seats in the arena if you didn't mind perching on a fence pole. Again this year my father drilled home to me his one point of rodeo protocol.

"Just so you stay up ~~there~~ on that fence," he stipulated. "I don't want

to see you down in there with the chute society." By which he meant

fifteen or twenty the clump of hangers-on who always clustered around the bucking-chute gates, visiting and gossiping and looking generally important, and

who regularly were cleared out of there two or three ~~times~~ times every

rodeo by rampaging broncs. When that happened, Up onto anything climbable they all would

scoot to roost, like hens with a weasel in their midst, and a minute

or so after the bronc's passage they'd all be right back in front of the chutes, preening and yakking again. I suppose the chute society offended back, preening and yakking. I suppose the chute society offended



my father's precept that a horse was nothing to be careless around.

In any case, during the housecleanings when a bronc sent them ~~all~~ scrambling for the fence, <sup>it</sup> it was my father's habit to cheer loudly for the bronc.

No Ray yet, at our fence perch. So I stayed atop Mouse and watched the world. In the pens behind the chutes the usual kind of before-rodeo confusion was going on, guys hassling broncs here and ~~calves~~ <sup>with</sup> there, the air full to capacity ~~of~~ dust and bawling and whinnying.

Out front, about half the chute society was already planted in place, tag-ends of ~~half a dozen~~ <sup>their</sup> conversations mingling. "That SOB is so tight he wouldn't give ten cents to see Christ ride a bicycle backwards."

"Oh hell yes. I'll take a quarter horse over a Morgan horse any time."

Them Morgans are so damn hot-blooded. ~~With~~ <sup>With</sup> haying coming and one thing and another, I don't see how I'm ever going to catch up with myself."

# I saw my mother and father and Pete and

Marie and Toussaint--and Midge Withrow had joined them, though Dode wasn't yet in evidence--~~go up~~ <sup>settling themselves at</sup> into the far end of the grandstand, farthest from the dust the bucking horses would kick up.

# other

People were streaming by, up into the grandstand or to sit on car fenders or the ground along the outside of the arena fence. I am here <sup>an advantageous</sup> to recommend the top of a horse as a site to view mankind, everybody below sees mostly the horse, not you.

Definitely I was ready for a recess from attention. From trying to judge whether people going by were nudging each other and whispering sideways, "That's him. That's the one. Got lit up like a ship in a storm, out there with that Stanley Meixell--"

Keen as I could be, I caught nobody at it--at least for sure--and began to relax somewhat. Oh, I did get a couple of lookings-over. Lila Sedge drifted past in her moony way, spied Mouse and me, and circled us suspiciously a few times. And the priest Father Morrisseau knew me by sight from my stays with the Heaneys, and bestowed me a salutation. But both those I considered routine inspections, so to speak.



1

People kept accumulating, I kept watching. A Gros Ventre rodeo always is slower to get under way than the Second Coming.

Then I ~~slipped~~ happened to remember. Not only was I royally mounted, I also was carrying wealth.

I nudged Mouse into action, to go do something about that <sup>four-bit</sup> ~~dollar~~ <sup>piece</sup> ~~bill~~ my father had bestowed. Fifty whole cents. Maybe the ~~money~~ Depression was on the run.

The journey wasn't far, just fifty yards or so over to where, since Prohibition went home with Hoover, the Gros Ventre Rotary Club operated its beer booth. I swung down from Mouse and stepped to the plank

counter. Behind it, they had several washtubs full of ice water and bottles of Kessler and Great Falls Select stashed down into the slush until only the brown necks were showing. And off to one side a little, my interest at the moment, the tub of soda pop.

One of the unresolved questions of my life at that age was whether I liked orange soda or grape soda better. It can be more of a dilemma than is generally realized: unlike, say, those <sup>picnic</sup> ~~options~~ of trout or fried chicken, ~~at the picnic~~ you can't just dive in and have both. Anyway, I had voted grape and was taking my first gulp when somebody inquired at my shoulder, "Jick, how's the world treating you?"

I ever  
saw  
Butte 007

<sup>inquirer</sup>  
The ~~sayer~~ was Dode Withrow, and his condition answered <sup>as to</sup> why he  
Midge and my folks and the others. ~~wasn't~~  
wasn't up in the grandstand with my parents and the Reeses and Midge.

<sup>expression goes, Dode</sup>  
As the ~~saying has it~~, he evidently had fallen off the wagon and was  
<sup>He</sup> trigged out in a black sateen  
still bouncing. Dode was ~~wearing~~ a maroon shirt and nice gray gabardine  
<sup>stockman</sup>  
pants and his dress Stetson, so he looked like a million, but he also  
had breath like the downwind side of a brewery.

"'Lo, Dode. You looking for Midge and the folks? They're down  
at the far end."

Dode shook his head as if he had water in his ears. "That wife  
of mine isn't exactly looking for me." So it was one of the Withrow  
<sup>Dode and Midge built up to about once a year.</sup>  
family jangles that ~~happened every year or so~~. During them was the  
only time Dode seriously drank. Tomorrow there was going to be a  
lot of frost in the air between Midge and Dode, ~~but~~ then the situation  
would thaw back to normal. It seemed to me a funny way to run a marriage--  
I always wondered what the three Withrow daughters, Bea and Marcella and  
Valeria, did with themselves during the annual temper contest between their  
parents--but this summer was showing  
that I had everything to learn about the ways of man and woman.

"Charlie, give me a couple Kesslers," Dode was directing across the  
beer counter. "Jick, you want one?"



"Uh, no thanks," dumbly holding up my ~~orange~~<sup>grape</sup> soda the way a toddler  
would show off a lollipop.

"That stuff'll rot your teeth," Dode advised. "Give you goiter.

St. Vitus dance." →

"Did you say two, Dode?" Charlie Hooper called from one of the beer tubs.

"I got two hands, don't I?"

While Dode paid and took a swig from one bottle while holding the other in reserve, I tried to calculate how far along he was toward being really drunk. Always tricky arithmetic. About all that could be said for sure was that of all the rodeo-goers who were going to get a skin full today, <sup>at this rate</sup> Dode was going to be among the earliest.

Dode tipped the Kessler ~~up~~ down from his mouth and looked straight at me. Into me, it almost seemed. And offered: "Trade you."

I at first thought he meant his bottle of beer for my <sup>grape</sup> orange pop, and that befuddled me, for plainly Dode was in no mood for pop. But no, he had something <sup>other</sup> ~~else~~ in mind, he still was <sup>gazing</sup> ~~looking~~ straight into my eyes. What he <sup>came out with</sup> ~~said~~ next clarified his message, but did not ease my <sup>bafflement</sup> ~~befuddlement~~. "My years for yours, Jick. I'll go back where you

are in life, you come up where I am. Trade, straight across. No, wait,

more  
customers  
looking  
really



5

I'll toss in Midge to boot." He laughed, but with no actual humor in it. Then shook his head again in that way as if he'd just come out from swimming. "That's in no way fair. Midge is okay. It's me--" he broke that off with a quick swig of Kessler.

What seemed needed was a change of topic, and I asked: "Where you watching the rodeo from, Dode? Ray and I are going to grab a fence place up there by the booth, whyn't you sit with us?"

"Many thanks, Jick." He made it sound as if I had offered him knighthood.

"But I'm going to hang around the pens a while. Want to watch the broncs.

→

6

swayed

always mended quick.

~~March 2~~

The data  
upon he  
showed up.

operating  
use. Beyond

purple?

a chokecherry-colored shirt; and atop that,

so erect they could not be mistaken.



When I got there Alec was off the horse, a big alert deep-chested bay, and was fussing with the loop of his lariat in that picky way that calf ropers do. All this was taking place out away from the arena fence and the parked cars, ~~where there was~~ <sup>in some</sup> open space which Alec and the bay and the lariat seemed to claim as their own.

I dismounted too. And started things off on an admiring note:

"I overheard some calves talking, there in the pens. They were saying how much they admired anybody who'd rope them in a shirt like that."



"Jicker!" he greeted me back. "What do you know for sure?" Alec's words were about what they ever would have been, yet there <sup>hung</sup> ~~was~~ that tone of absent-mindedness behind them again. I wanted to write it off to the fact that this brother of mine had calf-roping on his mind just then, but I <sup>couldn't</sup> ~~wasn't~~ quite convinced <sup>myself</sup> that was all there was to the matter.

It did occur to me to check whether Alec was wearing a bandanna this year, and he wasn't. Evidently my father <sup>at least</sup> ~~had~~ teased that off him permanently.

"Think you got a chance to win?" I asked, just to further the conversation.

"Strictly no problem," <sup>also</sup> ~~he~~ assured me. All the fuss he was giving that rope said something else, however.

"How about Bruno Martin?" He was the young rancher from Augusta who had won the calf roping the previous year.

"I can catch a cold faster than Bruno Martin can a calf."

"Vern Crosby, then?" <sup>quick-as-a-cat</sup> ~~Another quick~~ roper, who I had noticed warming up behind the chute pens.

ed: guide  
confidence  
myself



"What, you taking a census or something?" Alec swooshed his lariat overhead, that expectant whirl in the air, and cast a little practice throw.

I explored for some topic more congenial to him. "Where'd you get the highpowered horse?"

"Cal Petrie lent him to me." Cal Petrie was foreman of the Double W.

Evidently Alec's ropeslinging had attracted some attention.

*laid fingertips to*  
I lightly ~~touch~~ed the bay's foreshoulder. The feel of a horse is one of the best touches I know. "You missed <sup>crack</sup> ~~the~~ picnic. Mom spoke a speech."

Alec frowned at his rope. "Yeah. I had to put the sides on

Cal's pickup and haul this horse in here. A speech? What about?

How to sleep with a college book under your pillow and let it run

uphill into your ear?"

"No. About Ben English."

"Ancient history, huh? Dad must have converted her." Alec looked

like he intended to say more, but didn't.

There wasn't any logical reason why this should have been on  
 my mind just then, but I asked: "Did you know he had a horse with  
 the same name as himself?"

"Who? Had a what?"

"Thank Godt vun of t'iem veers-a--"

"Ben English. Our granddad would say, There goes Benson and--"

"Look, Jicker, I got to walk this horse loose. How about you"

*more  
shaded?*





11

✓

doing me a big hairy favor?"

Something told me to be a little leery. going to be "Ray's waiting for me over

on the--"

"Only take a couple minutes of your valuable time. All it is,

I want you to go visit Leona for me while I get this horse ready."

"Leona? Where is she?"

"Down <sup>toward</sup> at the end of the arena there, by her folks' car." As indeed she was, when I turned to see. About a hundred feet from us, spectating this entire brotherly tableau. Leona in a ~~silver~~ clover-green blouse, that silver-gold hair above like daybreak over a lush meadow.

"Yeah, well, what do you mean by visit?"

"Just go on over there and entertain her for me, huh?"

"Entert--?"

"Dance a jig, tell a joke." Alec ~~had~~ swung into the saddle atop

the bay. "Easy, hoss." I stepped back a bit and Mouse looked <sup>admiring</sup> affronted

as the bay did a little prance to try Alec out. Alec reined him under

control and leaned toward me. "I meant it, about you keeping Leona

company for me. Come get me if Earl Zane shows up. <sup>She</sup> don't want

to see ~~him~~ that jughead hanging around her."

Uh huh. Revelation, all 22 chapters of it.

"Aw, the hell, Alec. <sup>I--" I</sup> ~~I~~ was about to declare that I had other

things in life to do than fetch him whenever one of Leona's ex-boyfriends came sniffing around. But that declaration melted somewhere before

I could get it out, for here my way came one of those Leona smiles that

would burn down a barn, and she <sup>simultaneously</sup> patted the car fender

beside her. # While I still was <sup>molten</sup> soldered in the middle of all that, Alec touched the bay roping horse into a fast walk toward some open country beyond the calf pens. So I figured there was nothing for it but go on over ~~to Leona~~ and face fate.

lead  
mouse?

"Lo, Leona."

"Hello, John Angus." Which tangled me right at the start. I mean, think about it. The only possible way in this world she could know about my high-toned name was from Alec. Which meant that I had been a topic of conversation between them. Which implied--I didn't know what. Damn it all to hell anyway. First Toussaint, now this. I merely was trying to have a standard summer, not provide word fodder for the entire damn Two country.

"Yeah, well. Great day for the race," I cracked to recoup.

Leona smiled yet another of her dazzlers. And said nothing. Didn't even inquire "What race?" so I could impart "The human race" and thereby



break the ice and--

substituted.

"You all by your lonesome?" I ~~asked~~. As shrewd as it was desperate,

~~this~~ that. Not only did it fill the air space for a moment, I could truth-

fully tell Alec I had been vigilant about checking on whether or not

Earl Zane was hanging around.

She shook her head. Try it sometime, while ~~trying~~ <sup>attempting</sup> to keep a full

<sup>in place</sup> smile on your face. Leona could do it and come out with more smile

than she started with. When she had accomplished <sup>this facial miracle</sup> ~~all that~~ she leaned

my way a little and nodded her head conspiratorially toward the other

side of the car.

Holy Jesus. Was Earl Zane over there? Earl Zane was Alec's size

and built as if he'd been put together out of railroad ties. Alec

hadn't defined <sup>to me this</sup> ~~that~~ possibility, ~~known~~ of Earl Zane already being on

hand. What was I supposed to do, tip my hat to him and <sup>merrily</sup> say "Hi there,  
I'll go get my brother

Earl, just stand where you are, ~~my brother wants~~ so he can come beat

the living daylights out of you?" Or better from the standpoint of my own health, climb back on Mouse and retreat to my original side of the arena.

For information's sake, I leaned around Leona and peered over the hood of the car. And



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IN THESE SPACES  
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was met by startled stares from Ted and Thelma Tracy--Leona's parents--  
and another couple with whom they were seated on a blanket and carrying  
on a conversation.

"Your folks are looking real good," I mumbled as I pulled my head  
back to normal. ~~"Nice to see them so."~~ "Nice to see them so."

also, I had some back from weeks in Montana, and in the waiting  
also, I had some back from weeks in Montana, and in the waiting



Leona, though, had shifted attention from me to ~~Mouse~~ the specimen of horseflesh at the other end of the reins I was holding. "Riding in style, aren't you?" she admired.

"His name is Mouse," I confided. "Though if he was mine, I'd call him, uh, Chief Joseph."

Leona ~~looked~~ slowly revolved her look from ~~the~~ the horse to me, the way the beam of a lighthouse makes its sweep. <sup>Then</sup> ~~she~~ asked: "Why not Crazy Horse?"

From Leona that was tiptop humor, and I yukked about six times as much as I ordinarily would have. And in the meantime was readying myself. After all, that brother of mine had written the prescription he wanted from me: entertain her.

<sup>and</sup> "Boy, I'll have to remember that. You know, that reminds me of one. Did you ever hear the joke about the Chinaman and the Scotchman in a rowboat on the Sea of Galilee?"

Leona shook her head. Luck was with me. This was my father's favorite joke, one I had heard him tell to other Forest Service guys twenty times; the heaviest artillery I could bring to bear.

<sup>see,</sup> "Well, there was ~~there~~ a Chinaman and a Scotchman in a rowboat on the Sea of Galilee. Fishing away, there. And after a while the Chinaman puts down his fishing pole and <sup>he</sup> leans over and nudges the Scotchman and says, 'Jock, tell me. Is it true what they say

about Occidental women?" And the Scotchman says, "Occidental, hell,

I'm cerrrrtain as anything that they behave the way they do on purrrrpose!"

I absolutely believed I had done a royal job of telling, even burring the r's just right. But a little crimp of puzzlement <sup>now punctuated</sup> ~~came into~~ Leona's

smiling face, right between her eyes. She asked: "The Sea of Galilee?"

I cast a <sup>wide</sup> look around for Alec. Or even Earl Zane, whom I would <sup>with one hand in my pocket</sup> rather fight ~~blindfolded~~ than try to explain a joke to somebody who didn't get it. "Yeah. But you see, that <sup>isn't</sup> ~~doesn't~~..."

Just then, Mouse got into the act. Why he could not have waited another two minutes until I <sup>had</sup> found a way to dispatch myself from Leona; why it <sup>didn't</sup> ~~hadn't~~ come into his horse brain any other time of the day <sup>that very moment</sup> up until ~~right then~~; why--but no why about it, he was proceeding, <sup>were sharing the fender,</sup> directly in front of where Leona and I sat, to take his leak.

The hose on a horse is no small sight anyway during this process, <sup>six feet away</sup> but with Leona there ~~spectating~~, Mouse's seemed to poke down, down, down.



I cleared my throat and examined the poles of the arena fence and then the posts that supported the poles and then the sky over the posts and then crossed and uncrossed my arms <sup>a few times,</sup> and still the down pour continued.

A wild impulse raised in me: Mouse's everlasting whiz reminded me of

<sup>Withrow</sup> Dode spraddled atop that boulder the second day of this <sup>unprecedented</sup> ~~ricocheting~~

summer, and I clamped my ~~my~~ jaw to keep from blurting to Leona that scene

and the handhold joke. That would be about like you, John Angus

McCaskill. Celebrate disaster with a dose of social suicide. Do it

up right.

Meanwhile Leona continued to serenely view the spectacle as if it was the fountains of Rome. more?

"I'll take over now, Jicker." Alec's voice came from behind us, he <sup>outside of the</sup> had circled the arena on the bay horse. Peals of angel song could not have <sup>come</sup> ~~been~~ more welcome. "How'd he do as company, Leona?"

Leona shined ~~in~~ around at Alec, then turned back to bestow me a final glint. And ~~in~~ answered: "He's a wonder."

# — I mounted up and cleared out of there--Alec and Leona all too soon would be mooning over each other like I didn't exist anyway--and as <sup>promptly</sup> ~~soon~~ as I was out of eyeshot behind the catch pen at the far end of the arena I gave Mouse a jab in the ribs that made him woof in surprise. Chief Joseph,

my rosy hind end. # But I suppose my actual target was life. ~~the~~

This situation of being old enough to be on the edge of everything and too young to get to ~~the~~ the middle of any of it.

There was this, though. At least Earl Zane hadn't showed up.

Is it wolfsbane that the stories say will ward off a werewolf? If nothing else, <sup>some sort of</sup> maybe I had a future as Zane bane.

# —  
"Hi," Ray Heaney greeted as I climbed onto the arena fence beside him. The grin-cuts were deep into his face, the big front teeth were out on parade. Ray could make you feel that your arrival was the central event in his recent life. "What've you been up to?"

far out of the question, I chose neutrality--

"Oh--summary seemed so impossible, I chose neutrality--about the usual. You?"

"Pilot again." So saying, Ray held up his hands to show his calluses.

One hard <sup>oblong</sup> bump across the base of each finger, like sets of knuckles on

his palms. I nodded in <sup>commendation</sup> ~~admiration~~. My shovel calluses were mosquito

bites by comparison. This made the second summer Ray was stacking lumber

in his father's lumber yard--the "pile it here, pile it there" nature of that

job was what produced the "pilot" joke--and his hands and forearms were

gaining real heft.

no answer question

#2  
more?



# Now

Ray thrust his right <sup>mitt</sup> ~~hand~~ across to within reach of mine. "Shake

the hand that shook the hand?" he challenged. It was a term we had

picked up from his father--Ray could even rumble it just like Ed

Heaney's bass-drum voice--who remembered it from his own boyhood <sup>in Butte</sup> when

<sup>still</sup> guys went around saying "Shake the hand that shook the hand of John L.

Sullivan," the heavyweight boxing champ of then.

I took Ray up on the <sup>hand duel</sup> ~~challenge~~, even though I pretty well knew

how this habitual contest of ours was going to turn out from now on.

We made a careful fit, ~~grip~~ of the handshake grip; then Ray chanted the start, "One, two, three." After about a minute of mutual grunted squeezing, I admitted: "Okay. I'm out-squeeze."

# "You'll get me next time," Ray said. "Didn't I see Alec riding around acting like a calf roper?"

# Some years before, Ed Heaney <sup>had driven</sup> ~~drove~~ out from Gros Ventre to the ranger station one spring Saturday ~~in~~

to talk forest business with my father. And with him, to my surprise

and no little consternation, came his son my age, Ray. I could see

perfectly <sup>damn</sup> ~~well~~ what was intended here, and that's the way it did happen.

Off up the <sup>South</sup> ~~North~~ Fork our fathers rode to eyeball a stand of timber

which interested Ed for fence posts he could sell at his lumber yard, and Ray and I were left to

EH from Butte

being damn was at my at

entertain one another.

Living out there at English Creek I always was stumped about what of my existence would interest any other boy in the world. There was the knoll with the view all the way to the Sweetgrass Hills, but somehow I felt that might not hold the fascination for others that it did for me. Ordinarily horses would have been on hand to ride,

*one solution to*

~~solving~~ the situation, but the day before Isidor Pronovost had taken every one of them in a packstring to a spike camp of CCC tree planters.

Alec was nowhere in the picture as a possible ally; this was haying time and he was driving the scatter rake for Pete Reese. The ranger station itself was no refuge; the sun was out and my mother would never

*let us get away with*

~~hear of us~~ lolling around ~~inside~~ inside, even if I could think up a

reasonable loll. Matters were not at all improved by the fact that, since I still was going to the South Fork grade school and Ray went

in Gros Ventre, we only

knew each other ~~and~~ by sight.

He was a haunting kid to look at. His eyes were within long deep-set arcs, as if always squinched the way you do to thread a

needle. And curved over with eyebrows which wouldn't needed to have

been much thicker to make a couple of respectable <sup>blonde</sup> mustaches. And

then a flattish nose which, wide as it was, barely accommodated all

the freckles assigned to it.

*color?  
blonde?*



no 9

When Ray really grinned--I didn't see that this first day, although I was to see it thousands of times in the years ahead--deep slice-lines cut his cheeks, out opposite the corners of his mouth. Like a big set of parentheses around the grin. His lower lip was so full that it too had a slice-line under it, this kid looked more <sup>as if</sup> ~~like~~ he'd <sup>out of</sup> ~~like~~ a pumpkin been carved than born. Also, even more so than a lot of us at that age, his front teeth were far ahead of the rest of him in size, <sup>in</sup> ~~at~~ any school <sup>yard</sup> there always were a lot of traded jibes of "Beaver tooth!" but Ray's frontals really did seem as if they'd been made for toppling willows.

As I say, haunting. I have seen grown men, guys who ordinarily wouldn't so much as spend a glance at a boy on the street, stop and study that face of Ray's. And here he was, thank you a whole hell of a lot, my guest for <sup>this</sup> ~~that~~ day at English Creek.

So we were afoot with one another and not knowing what to do about it, and ended up wandering the <sup>creek bank north of</sup> ~~area around~~ the ranger station, with boredom building up pretty fast in both of us. Finally I got the idea of showing him the pool a little ways downstream in English Creek where brook trout always could be seen, hanging there <sup>dark</sup> ~~in~~ the clear water.

In fact,

I asked Ray if he felt like fishing, but for some reason he looked at

me a little suspiciously and muttered "huh-uh."

We viewed the pool, which took no time at all, and then thrashed on along in the creek brush for awhile, just to be doing anything.

It was semi-swampy going, so at least we could concentrate on stretching or jumping across the wet holes.

anything ~~doing something~~. Ray was dressed in what I suppose his mother thought

were old enough clothes to go into the country with, but his old

clothes were ~~so noticeably ritzier~~ considerably better than my everyday ones ~~and~~ <sup>that</sup> he maybe

was embarrassed about that. Anyway, for whatever reason, he put up

with this brushwhacking venture of mine.

Whacked was what he got. My mind was on something else, likely

how much of the ~~day~~ <sup>gaped</sup> morning still ~~was~~ ahead of us, and without thinking I

let a willow spring back as I pushed past it. It whipped Ray across

the left side of his face and ~~brought~~ <sup>drew</sup> a real yelp from him. Also

<sup>a</sup> the comment to me: "Watch out with those, beetle brain."



"Didn't mean to," I apologized. Which <sup>most likely</sup> ~~undoubtedly~~ would have buried the issue, except for what I felt honorbound to add next: "Sparrow head."

You wonder afterwards how two reasonably sane people <sup>descend</sup> ~~got~~ into a slanging match like that.

"Slobberguts," Ray upped the ante with.

→ "Booger eater," I promptly gave him back.

"Pus gut."

"Turd bird."

As I remember it, I held myself in admirable rein until Ray came out with "turkey dink."

For some reason that one did it. I swung on Ray and caught him just in front of the left ear. Unluckily, not quite hard enough to knock him down.

He popped me back, alongside the neck. We each got in a few more swings, then the <sup>pistcuffs</sup> ~~battle~~ degenerated into a wrestle. More accurately, a mud wallow.

~~Neither one of us ended up permanently on top.~~ <sup>each</sup> We ~~both~~ were strong enough, and <sup>outraged</sup> ~~mad~~ enough, to be able to tip the other, so neither one of us ended up permanently on top. Simply, at some point we wore out on

wanting to maul one another any further, and got to our feet.

Ray's clothes looked as if he'd been rolled the length of a pig pen.

Mine I guess weren't much better, but they hadn't started off as fancy

and so I ~~there~~ figured my muss didn't matter as much.

Of course, try convince my mother of that. <sup>Come noon</sup> We had to straggle

in ~~at noon~~ <sup>laid eyes on</sup> to get any dinner, and when she ~~saw~~ <sup>scouring in</sup> us, we were in for a

<sup>in a scouring, in ways than one.</sup> ~~more ways than one~~ <sup>Ray</sup> ~~marathon of scrubbing.~~ <sup>change into</sup> She made ~~Ray put on~~ a set of my clothes--

funny, how improved he looked when he was out of that town gear--

<sup>sat</sup> and ~~put~~ us at opposite ends of the table while we ate, <sup>then immediately</sup> and afterward

she ~~thundered~~ issued two decrees: "Jick, I believe you would like To

Read in the Other Room. Ray, I think you would like To Put Together

the Jigsaw Puzzle I Am Going to Put Here on the Table for You."

When I started high school in Gros Ventre, Ray came over to me

at <sup>noon hour</sup> ~~noon~~ the first day. He planted himself just out of arm's reach

from me and offered: "Horse apple."

I balled up both my fists, and my tongue got ready the words <sup>S</sup> which

would fan our creekside battle to life again: "Beaver tooth." Yet the

direction of Ray's remark caught my <sup>notice</sup> ~~attention~~: "horse apple" was pretty

<sup>back</sup> far ~~down~~ the scale from "turkey dink."

For once in my life I latched on to a possibility. I held my



<sup>tendered</sup>  
stance and ~~said~~ back to Ray: "Mud minnow."

It started a grin on him while he thought up: "Slough rat."

"Gumbo gopher," I provided, barely managing to get it out before we were both laughing.

Within the week I was asking my mother whether I could stay in town overnight with Ray, and after that I <sup>made</sup>~~did~~ many a stay-over at the Heaneys' throughout the school year. Not only did I gain the value of Ray and me being the best of friends; it was always interesting to me that the Heaneys were a family as different from ours as crochet from oil cloth. For one thing they were Catholic, although they really didn't display it all ~~that~~ much, just through a grace before every meal, and by eating fish on Friday, which eventually occurred to me as the reason Ray had looked at me suspiciously ~~there~~ at the creek when I asked him about fishing.

(Start this at top of new page, please.)

26

Now that we ~~we~~ were established atop the arena corral, I reported to Ray my chin session with Dode Withrow at the beer booth.

Ray took what might be called a spectator interest in the Withrow family.

He never ~~really~~ came right out and said so, but his eye was on the

middle Withrow girl, Marcella, who was in ~~our~~ <sup>the</sup> same high school class, <sup>we were.</sup>

~~had a~~ world-by-the-tail

Marcella was trim in figure like Midge and ~~had Dode's world-capturing~~

<sup>like Dode's usual one.</sup>

grin. So far Ray's approach to Marcella was distant admiration, but

I had the feeling he was trying to figure out how to narrow the distance.

Maybe the day would come when I was more interested in a Leona

or a Marcella than <sup>in</sup> perching up there above general humanity, but right

then I doubted it. I considered that the top-pole perch Ray and I

<sup>while this</sup> had there next to the bucking chutes was the prime site of the whole

rodeo grounds. We had clear view of every inch of the arena, the dirt

oval like a small dry lake bed before us. And all the event action

would originate right beside us, where even now the broncs for the

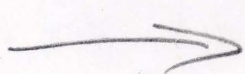
first section of bareback riding were being hazed into the chutes

alongside my corral <sup>spot</sup> ~~perch.~~ The particular Gros Ventre bucking chute

<sup>at a time</sup> setup was that as six broncs were hazed in for their set of riders,



pole panels were retracted between each chute, leaving <sup>what had been</sup> the half-dozen  
 chutes as one long narrow pen. Then as the horses crowded in in single  
 file, the panels were shoved in place behind them one by one, penning  
 each bronc into the chute it would buck into the arena from. ~~About~~  
 as slick a system as there is for handling rodeo brons, <sup>I suppose.</sup> But what  
 is memorable to me about it is the instant before the pole panels <sup>were</sup> ~~are~~  
 shoved into place to serve <sup>as</sup> ~~chute walls~~ <sup>dividers</sup>: when the horses <sup>came</sup> ~~have~~ <sup>ing</sup> swarmed  
 into the open chute pen, flanks heaving, heads up and eyes glittering.  
 From my perch, it was like looking down through a transom into a  
 long hallway suddenly filled with big <sup>perplexed</sup> ~~startled~~ animals. There ~~are~~ not  
 many sights <sup>are its equal.</sup> ~~like it.~~



Above and to the left of Ray and me was the announcing booth and its inhabitants, a <sup>nice</sup> proximity which added to the feeling that we were part of the inside happenings of the rodeo. To look at, the booth resembled a little woodshed up on stilts, situated there above and just in back of the middle of <sup>the</sup> bucking chutes. It held elbow room for maybe six people, although only three of the booth crowd did any actual rodeo work. Tollie Zane, if you could call his announcing work. Tollie ~~was~~ evidently was in residence at the far end of the booth, angled out of view from us, ~~for~~ but a large round microphone like a waffle iron standing on end indicated his site. <sup>Then</sup> Nearest to us was the scorekeeper, Bill Reinking, editor of the Gleaner, prominent with his ginger mustache and silver-wire eyeglasses. I suppose he did the scorekeeping on the principle that the only sure way for the Gleaner to get any accuracy on the rodeo results was for him to originate the arithmetic. Between Bill and Tollie was the space for the timekeeper, who ran the stopwatch to time the events and blew the whistle to signal when a bronc rider had lasted eight seconds atop a bareback or ten in a saddle ride. The timekeeper's spot in the booth was empty, but <sup>this</sup> ~~that~~ was about to be remedied.



"Wup wup wup," some Paul Revere among the chute society cried, "here she comes, boys! Just starting up the ~~stairs~~ <sup>ladder!</sup>"

Heads swiveled like weathervanes hit by a tornado. And yes, Ray and I also sent our eyes ~~over~~ <sup>around</sup> to the little ~~flight~~ <sup>ladder</sup> along the side of the announcing booth and the hypnotizing progress up ~~it~~ <sup>it</sup> of Velma Simms.

"Tighter than last year, I swear to God," someone below us was contending. "Like the paper fits the wall," testified another. And yet another, "But I still need to know, how the hell does she ~~get~~ <sup>herself</sup> into those britches?" Velma Simms came of eastern money--plumbing equipment I believe was its source; I have seen her family name, Croake, on hot-and-cold spigots--and in a community and era which considered divorce usually more grievous than manslaughter, she had been through three husbands. That we knew of. Only the first ~~had been~~ <sup>was</sup> local, the lawyer Paul Bogan.

They met in Helena when he got himself elected to the legislature, and if my count is right, it was at the end of his second term when Velma arrived back to Gros Ventre and Paul stayed over there at the capital in some kind of state job.

Her next husband was a fellow named Sutter,

who'd had an automobile agency in Spokane. In Gros Ventre he was like a trout out of water, and quickly went. After him came Simms, an actor ~~who was~~ <sup>Velma happened across</sup> in some summer performance at one of the Glacier Park lodges. By February of his first Two country winter Simms was hightailing his way to California, although ~~he~~ <sup>he</sup> eventually did show up back in Gros Ventre, so to speak, as one of the cattle rustlers in a Gene Autry movie at the Odeon. ~~I cite~~



(mod)

Lately Velma seemed to have given up marrying and instead emerged each Fourth with the current beau--they tended to be like the scissorbill following her up the ladder now, in a gabardine stockman's suit and a too-clean cream Stetson, probably a bank officer from Great Falls--in tow. I cite

all this because Paul Bogan, the first in the genealogy, always had served as rodeo timekeeper, and the next Fourth of July after his change of residence, here Velma presented herself, bold as <sup>new</sup> paint, to take up his stopwatch and whistle.

It was her only instance of what might be called civic participation, and quite why she did it, nobody had a clue. But Velma's ascension to the booth now was part of ~~an~~ every Gros Ventre rodeo. Particularly for the male portion of the audience. For as you may have gathered, Velma's Fourth appearances were encased in

~~for her~~ annual new slacks of stunning snugness. One of the ~~the~~ theoreticians in the chute society just now was postulating a fresh concept, that maybe <sup>Velma</sup> ~~she~~ heated them with an iron, put them on hot, and ~~let~~ let them shrink down on her like the rim onto a wagon wheel.





I saw once, in recent years at the Gros Ventre rodeo, a young  
 bronc rider and his ladyfriend, watching the action through the pole  
 arena gate.

They each held a can of  
 beer in one hand, and the rider's other hand was around the girl's  
 shoulders. Her other hand, though, was down resting lightly on his  
 rump, the tips of her fingers just touching the inseam of his Levis  
 back there. I'll admit to you, it made my heart turn around and face  
 north. That the women now can and will do such a thing seems to me  
 an advance like radio. My awe of it is tempered only by the regret  
 that I am not that young ~~man~~ bronc rider, or any other. But let that go.  
 My point here is just that in the earlier time, only rare self-advertised  
 that of Velma Simms  
 rumps such as ~~Penny Thorpe's~~ were targets of public interest, and then  
 only by what my father and the other rangers called ocular examination.

It registered on me there had been a comment from Ray's direction.  
 "Come again?" I ~~asked~~ apologized.

"No hitch in Velma's gitalong," Ray offered one more time.

I said something equally bright in agreement, but I was surprised  
 at Ray making an open evaluation of Velma Simms, even so tame a one as  
 that. The matter of Marcella maybe was on his mind more than I had figured.

Just then an ungodly noise somewhere <sup>between</sup> a howl and a yowl issued above us. A sort of high HHHRUNGHHH like a cat was being skinned alive. I was startled as hell, but Ray knew its source. "You see Tollie's loudspeaking getup?" he inquired with a nod toward the top of the announcer's booth. I couldn't help but have noticed such a rig.

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The contraption was a pyramid of rods, which held at its peak a half-dozen big metal cones like those morning-glory horns on old phonographs, pointing to various points of the compass. Just in case those didn't cover the territory, there was a second set of four more 'glory horns a couple of feet beneath.

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"He sent ~~to~~ Billings for it," informed Ray, who had overheard this information when Tollie came to the lumber yard for <sup>a number of</sup> 2x4s to ~~be~~ help brace the contraption into place. "The guy who makes them down there told him it's the real deal to announce with."

We were not the only ones contemplating Tollie's new announcing machinery. "What the goddamn hell's Tollie going to do," I heard somebody say below us, "tell them all about it in Choteau?" Choteau was 33 miles down the highway.





either left white space or put dashes.

33

"WELCOME!" crackled a thunderblast of voice over our heads.

"To the Gros Ventre rodeo! Our fifteenth annual show! You folks are wise as hooty owls to roost with us here today. Yes sir! Some of everything is liable

to happen here today and ~~Tollie~~ Tollie Zane, father of the famous Earl, held the job of announcing the Gros Ventre rodeo on the

basis by which a lot of positions of authority seem to get filled: nobody else would be caught dead doing it. But before this year, all that the announcing amounted to was shouting through a megaphone the name of each bucking horse and its rider. The shiny new 'glory horns evidently had gone to Tollie's head, or at least his tonsils. ~~You know~~

"The Fourth of July is called the cowboys' Christmas and our festivities here <sup>4/4</sup> today will get underway in just--"

"Called what?" somebody yelled from the chute society. "That's

~~Tollie~~ Brainerd for you, sweat running down his face and he thinks it's snowflakes."

"Santy Claus must have brought him that <sup>goddam talking</sup> contraption," <sup>guessed somebody else.</sup>

"<sup>Tollie's</sup> Now, you guys, lay off now," a third one put in. ~~Brainerd's~~ maybe

right. It'd explain why he's as full of shit as a Christmas goose."

Everybody below us ~~heehawed~~ <sup>splendiferous</sup> hee-heeed at that while Tollie roared on about the glorious tradition of rodeo and what heart-stopping excitement we were going to view in this arena today.

~~Tollie~~ Brainerd was a kind of <sup>plodding</sup> blutzy talker anyway, and now with him slowed

down either out of respect for the new sound system or because he was

translating his remarks from paper--this July Christmas stuff was originating from somewhere; had a kit come with the ~~the~~ 'glory horns and microphone?--you could about soft-boil an egg between parts of his sentences.

5#

"Anybody here ~~from~~ Great Falls?"

Quite a number of people yelled and waved their hands.

5#

"Welcome ~~to~~ America!"

Out in the crowd there were laughs and groans. And most likely some flinching in the Rotary beer booth; ~~the merchants there knew~~ a real boon to business, Tollie ~~cracking wise to~~ <sup>at the expense of</sup> people who'd had 90 miles of driving time to wonder whether this rodeo was worth coming to.

But this seemed to be a day when Tollie, armed with ~~amplification~~ amplification,

5#

was ready to take on the world. "How about--North--Dakota? Who's here--  
from--North--Dakota?"

Of course, no response. Tourists were a lot scarcer in those days, and ~~In those days,~~ the chances that anybody would ~~come~~ <sup>venture</sup> from North <sup>just</sup> Dakota to see the Gros Ventre rodeo were zero and none.

5#

"That's right," blared Tollie. "If I--was you--I wouldn't--admit it--~~either~~!"





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be made out by all three watchers.

"Working like Firms at it," observed Braaf. "Digging paddles that deep, you'd think their arms'd pull off."

Wennberg, still not wanting to accept: "But how in Judas...?"

Karlsson had plucked the glass from him and was studying again.

Rare for him, Braaf was openly perturbed; his right leg jiggled

lightly in place, as if testing for run. Wennberg sought to look

stolid, but Karlsson noticed him swallow at his own <sup>throat-</sup>pebble of fear.

"And are trampled by the Russians."

Tollie spieled on for awhile, actually drawing boos from the Choteau folks in the crowd when he proclaimed that Choteau was known as a town without a single bedbug: "No sir they are all married and have big families!" At last, though, the handling crew was through messing with the brons in the chutes alongside Ray and me, and Tollie was declaring "We are just about to get

the pumpkin--rolling. Bareback--riding--will be--our first--<sup>event.</sup>

"Pumpkin?" questioned whoever it was in the chute society that was keeping tab of Tollie's excursions through the calendar. "Judy H. Christ! Now the whistledick thinks it's Halloween."

About all that is worth mentioning of the early part of that rodeo is that its events, a section of bareback riding and after ~~it~~<sup>that</sup> some steer wrestling or mauling or whatever you want to call it, passed fairly mercifully. Ray and I continued to divide our time snorting laughs over something either Tollie or the chute society provided. Plus our own wise-acre efforts, of course, Ray nearly fell off the corral from cackling one time when I speculated whether this much time sitting on a fence pole mightn't leave a person with the crack in his behind running crosswise instead of up and down. You know how that is, humor is totally contagious when two persons are in the same light mood. And a good thing, too, for by my estimation

the actual events of a rodeo can always use all the help they can get.



(mod)

Although like anybody out here I have seen many and many a rodeo, to me the arena events are <sup>never</sup> ~~not~~ anything to write home special about. It's true that <sup>barrel</sup> ~~barrel~~ riding has its interesting moments, but bascially the <sup>ride</sup> ~~event~~ is over and done with just about as it's getting started.



I don't know, a guy flopping around on the naked back of a horse <sup>just</sup> seems to me more of a stunt than a sport.

As for steer wrestling, that is an absolutely phony deal, never done except there in front of a rodeo crowd. <sup>Leaping onto a running</sup> ~~It~~ <sup>steer</sup> has about as much to do with actual cattle ranching as

wearing turquoise belt buckles ~~cockfighting~~ does. And that calf roping. Calf roping I nominate

as an event the spectators ought to be paid <sup>for sitting</sup> to sit through. I mean,

here'll come one guy out of the chute <sup>yahoo after the calf</sup> swinging a community loop and <sup>trot</sup> could run through, elephant would come and the next guy will pitch a loop so teeny that <sup>spitwad</sup> ~~small~~ it bounces off the back of the calf's neck like a ~~softball~~.

Whiff whiff whiff, and then a burst of cussing as the <sup>rope-flinger's</sup> ~~guy's~~ throw misses its mark: there is the essence of <sup>rodeo</sup> calf roping.

<sup>if I ran the world there'd</sup> ~~There ought to be~~ standards, such as making <sup>any</sup> a calf roping entrant

dab onto a fencepost twenty feet away, just to prove he knows how

to build a decent loop.

Anyway. All I am saying in this rodeo sermon is that the best feature of the whole affair to me--except maybe for the processional of a Velma Simms--is the excuse it gives everyone to gather together for most of an afternoon. Present me several hundred people to gawk around at and speculate on and, yes, somehow be part of, and that is my idea of the highest sort of holiday. If various forms of nonsense with livestock have to be put up with for that, so be it.



"Alec's bringing his horse in," Ray reported from his sphere of the arena. <sup>Guess he's</sup> ~~"He must be roping in this section."~~

"So's everybody else in the world, it looks like." ~~As you maybe~~  
 Horsemen and hemp, hemp and horsemen. It was a wonder the combined  
 swishing of the ropes of all the would-be <sup>now assembling</sup> calf ropers didn't lift the  
 rodeo arena off the ground like an autogyro. As you maybe can tell,  
 my emotions about having a brother forthcoming into this event were  
 strictly mixed. Naturally I was pulling for Alec to win. Brotherly blood is at least that thick. Yet a corner of  
 me was shadowed with doubt as to whether victory was <sup>really</sup>  
 such a good idea for Alec. Did he need any more confirming  
 in his cowboy mode? Especially in this dubious talent of  
 hanging rope necklaces onto slobbering calves?

~~Anyway.~~ <sup>4</sup> This first section of the calf roping now proceeded about  
 as I could have foretold, a lot of air fanned with rope  
 but damn few calves collared. One surprise was produced,  
 though: <sup>after a fast catch</sup> Bruno Martin of Augusta missed his tie, the calf  
 kicking free before its required six seconds flat on the  
 ground were up. If words could be seen in the air, some  
 blue dandies accompanied Martin out of the arena.

<sup>snagged</sup>  
~~up~~ # The other strong roper, Vern Crosby, ~~snared~~ his calf  
 suffered  
 neatly, ~~had~~ a little trouble throwing him down for the  
 tie, but then <sup>niftily</sup> gathered the calf's legs and wrapped the  
 pigging string around them, ~~faster than could be watched.~~  
 as Tollie spelled out for us, "faster--than--Houdini--can--  
 tie--his shoelaces!"

So when the ~~time~~ moment came ~~was~~ for Alec to guide  
 the bay roping horse into the break-out area beside the  
 calf chute, the situation was as evident as Tollie's  
 voice bleating from that tin bouquet of 'glory horns:

# "Nineteen--  
 seconds--by Vern--Crosby--is still--the time--to beat.  
 It'll take--some fancy--twirling--by this--next--young--  
 buckaroo--one of--the hands--out at--the Double--W--"

he's getting hisself squared away and will be  
 ready in just--"

# The calf chute and the break-out area where ~~the~~ <sup>each</sup> roper  
 and his horse burst out after the creature were at the  
 far end of the bucking chutes from us. Ray cupped his  
 hands and called <sup>to there</sup> across: "Wrap him up pretty, Alec!"

so we  
 had to  
 look  
 a little  
 around



voice, and of whom even less was remarked, Karlsson. It is told that at a Scandinavian free-for-all, Danes will be the ones dancing and laughing, Norwegians endeavoring to start a fight, Finns passing bottles, and Swedes standing along the wall waiting to be introduced. Melander constituted a tall exception to this slander, but Karlsson, narrow bland face like that of a village parson, would have been there among the wall-props.

Confidence was not what Melander sought out of Karlsson. A time, he had noticed Karlsson snoozing in Sitka Sound, back from a

ed will be and separated away himself getting ready in just--"

ready and called himself with him of himself, ready

Across there, Alec appeared a little nervous, <sup>dandling</sup> ~~swinging~~ his rope <sup>around</sup> ~~more~~ than was necessary as he and the bay horse waited for their calf to emerge.

But then I discovered I was <sup>half-</sup> ~~kind of~~ nervous myself, jiggling my foot on <sup>its</sup> ~~the~~ corral pole, and I had no excuse whatsoever. You wouldn't catch me out there trying to <sup>a 75-pound</sup> ~~snare~~ animal running full-tilt.

The starter's little red flag whipped down, and the <sup>cal</sup> ~~cal~~ catapulted from the chute into the expanse of the arena.

<sup>A</sup> Alec's luck. Sometimes you had to think he held the <sup>patent</sup> ~~monopoly~~ on four-leaf clovers and ~~a~~ rabbit's feet. The calf he drew was a straight runner instead of a dodger.

Up the middle of the arena that calf galloped as if he was on rails, <sup>and</sup> ~~and~~ Cal Petrie's big horse gained <sup>ing</sup> ~~ground~~ on him <sup>for Alec</sup>.

every hoofbeat. <sup>and</sup> ~~I~~ I believe that if you could have pulled the truth

from my father and mother right then, even they would have said that

Alec looked the way a calf roper ought to. Leaning forward but still

as firm in his stirrups as if socketed into them, swinging the loop

of the lariat around and around his head strongly enough to give it

a good fling but not <sup>overdoing</sup> ~~overexcited~~ about it. Evidently there had been

much practice performed on Double W calves as Alec rode the coulees

these past weeks.

"Dab it on him!" I heard loudly, and realized the yell had been by me.

calf chute  
1/2 for side  
of looking  
chute

mark  
on?



Quicker than it can be told Alec made his catch. A good one, where all the significant actions erupt together: the rope straightening into a <sup>tang</sup> line in the air, the calf gargling out a bleahh as the loop choked its neck and yanked it backward, Alec <sup>evacuating from</sup> ~~leaving~~ the stirrups in his dismount. <sup>Within</sup> ~~In~~ a blink he was in front of the tall bay horse and scampering beside the <sup>straps</sup> ~~line~~ of rope the bay was holding <sup>as picture</sup> taut, and now <sup>Alec</sup> ~~was~~ upending the calf into the arena dust and now gathering calf legs and now whipping the pigging string around them and now done.

5# "The time--for Alec--McCaskill--" I thought I could hear remorse inside the tinny blare of Tollie's voice, and so knew the report was going to be good--"seventeen--and--a half--seconds."

The crowd whooped and clapped. Over at the far fence Leona was beaming as if she might ignite, and down at the end of the grandstand my parents were glumly accepting congratulations on Alec. Beside me Ray was as surprised as I was by Alec's <sup>first-rate</sup> showing, and his delight didn't have the conditions attached that mine did.

"How much is up?" he wondered. I wasn't sure of the roping prize myself, so I asked the question to the booth, and Bill Reinking leaned out and informed us, <sup>"Thirty"</sup> ~~Forty~~ dollars, and supper <sup>for two</sup> at the Sedgwick House."

"Pretty slick," Ray admired. I had to think so myself. Performance is performance, whatever ~~my~~ ~~thought~~ my opinion of Alec's venue of it. Later in the afternoon there would be <sup>one more</sup> ~~another~~ section of calf <sup>ropers,</sup> ~~roping~~, but with the ~~main~~ guys, Bruno Martin and Vern Crosby, already behind him, Alec's leading time looked good enough to take to the bank.



5# Tollie was bleating onward. "Now--we turn--to some--prairie--sailors--and the--hurricane--deck," which translated to the first go-round of saddle bronc riding. ~~"The boys--"~~

I will say for saddle bronc riding that it seems to me the one rodeo event that <sup>comes</sup> ~~is~~ close to legitimate. Staying on a mount that is trying to unstay you is a historic procedure of the livestock business. "The

boys are hazing the ponies into the chutes and when we

5# commence--and--get started--the first--man out--will be--Bill Semmler--on a horse--called--Connption. In this--meanwhile--though--did--you hear--the one--about--the fellow--who <sup>goes</sup> ~~went~~--into--the barber--shop--and--"

I never did get to hear Tollie's stonsorial tale, for I happened to glance down to my left into the bucking chutes and see disaster in a spotted horsehide charging full-tilt at me.

"Hang on!" I yelled to Ray and simultaneously flipflopped <sup>rightward</sup> myself and dropped down the fence so that I had my arms clamped around both the top corral pole and Ray's hips.

Ray glommed tight to the pole with his hands. <sup>WHOMP! and a clatter.</sup> The impact of the pinto bucking horse slamming into the chute-end where our section of corral cornered into it went shuddering through <sup>the pair of</sup> us, as if a <sup>giant</sup> ~~huge~~ sledgehammer had ~~at~~ hit the wood; but our double gripping kept us from being flung off the top of the fence.

→ "Jesus!" Ray let out, rare for him. "There's a goosy one!"

Our narrow brush did not escape microphone treatment.

5# "This little--Coffee Nerves--pinto--down at--chute six--has a--couple of--fence squatters--hugging--the wood--pretty good!"

Tollie was <sup>alerting</sup> ~~informing~~ the world. "We'll see--whether--they--go ahead--and--kiss it!"



"Numbnuts," I muttered in the direction of the Zane end of the announcing booth. Or possibly more than muttered, for when I managed to glower directly up there, Bill Reinking was delivering me a certifying wink and Velma Simms was puckered the way a person does to hold in a laugh.



Ray had it right, the pinto was <sup>truly</sup> ~~indeed~~ riled and then some, as I could confirm while cautiously climbing back onto my perch and locking a firm arm around the corner post between chute and corral. No way was I going to take a chance on being dislodged down into the company of this Coffee Nerves bronc. The drawback of this flood-the-chutes-with-horses system was that the <sup>e</sup> first horse in was the last to come out, from this end chute next to me, while the initial five horses were being bucked out ~~the~~ Coffee Nerves was going to be causing around in chute six and trying to raise general hell.

The pinto looked ~~more than capable of so doing.~~ Coffee Nerves had close-set pointy ears; what are called pin ears, and <sup>indicate</sup> ~~are an indication of~~ orneriness in a horse. Worse, he was hog-eyed. Had small darting eyes that shot looks at the nearest threat all the time. Which, given my position on the fence, happened to be me. I had not been the target of so much eyeball since the tussle to get that Bubbles packhorse up the <sup>side of the</sup> ~~mountainside.~~

(no 4) One thing I have skipped in life is any desire toward rodeo riding.

With no least regret. Maybe that makes me less a westerner than I ought to be. But it also has made me a less ramshackle human being. Letting a horse scramble your brains and wallop your bones and joints for the fun of it is not my idea of intelligent living.



Particularly if the bronc is on the order of Coffee Nerves, touchy anyway and now in a real shitfit of fury ~~furiously~~ about being caged in a chute.

Ray was peering behind me to study Coffee Nerves, so he was the one who noticed. "Huh! Look who must've drew him."

There in back of chute six, Earl Zane was helping the handlers try to saddle the pinto.

My session of watchdogging Leona for Alec of course whetted my interest in the matter of Earl Zane, whom I ordinarily wouldn't bat an eye to look at. Now here he loomed, not ten feet away from Ray and me, at the ~~back~~ <sup>rear</sup> of Coffee Nerves' chute amid the cussing crew of handlers trying to contend with the pinto and the saddle that was theoretically supposed to go on ~~his~~ <sup>its</sup> back. Earl Zane had one of those faces that could be read at a glance:

as clear as the label on a maple sugar jug it proclaimed SAP. I suppose he was semi-goodlooking in a sulky kind of way. But my belief was that Earl Zane's one known ability, handling horses, derived from the fact that he possessed the ~~same~~ <sup>identical</sup> amount of brain as the ~~horse~~ <sup>average</sup> and they thus felt ~~a~~ <sup>affinity</sup> ~~mental~~ comradeship with him. Though whether Coffee Nerves, who was

whanging a series of kicks to the chute lumber that I could feel ~~come~~ <sup>arrive</sup> up through the ~~seat of my pants~~ <sup>corral pole I was seated on</sup>, was going to simmer down enough to ~~accommodate~~ <sup>accommodate</sup> ~~okum~~ with Earl Zane or anybody else remained an open question.

I was doubly glad to see one who was going to be coming into it

more began Earl

mental



In any case, I was transfixed by what was brewing here. Alec looked likely to win the calf roping. Coffee Nerves gave every sign of being the buckingest saddle bronc, if Earl could stay on him. Two winners, one Leona. The arithmetic of that was <sup>something to contemplate.</sup> ~~challenging.~~

Various geezers of the chute society were peering in at Coffee Nerves and chiming "Whoa, hoss" and "Here now, <sup>knock head,</sup> settle down," which was doing nothing to improve the pinto's disposition. After all, would it yours?

Distracted by the geezer antics and the Earl-Alec equation, I didn't notice the next arrival until Ray pointed out, "Second one of the litter."

Indeed, Earl Zane had been joined in the volunteer saddling crew by his brother Arlee, the one a year ahead of Ray and me in school. Another horse fancier with brain to match. And full to overflowing with the Zane family swagger, for Arlee Zane was a big pink specimen: about what you'd get

if you could coax a hog to strut around on its hind ~~leg~~ legs wearing blue jeans and a rodeo shirt. Eventually maybe Arlee would ~~duplicate~~ duplicate

Earl, brawny instead of overstuffed, but at present there just was too much of <sup>all of him,</sup> Arlee, up to and including his mouth. At the moment, for instance, Arlee had strutted around to the far side of the announcing booth and was yelping up to his sire: "Tell them to count out the prize money! Old Earl is going to set his horse on fire!" God, those Zanes did think they were ~~hot spot~~, the ding-dong of the world's bell.



"How about a bottle of something?" I proposed to Ray. The mental strain of being Zanebane <sup>must have been</sup> ~~was~~ making me thirsty. "I'm big rich, I'll buy."

"Ace high," Ray thought this sounded, and added that he'd hold our seats. Down I climbed, and away to the beer booth again. The tubs weren't showing many Kessler and Select necks by now. I half-expected to coincide with Dode again, but didn't. But by the time I returned to Ray with our two bottles of grape, I was able to more or less Marcella and the other Withrow daughters, offhandedly report that I had seen ~~the Withrow girls,~~ in the shade under the grandstand with a bunch more of the girls we went to school with. Leona on one side of the ~~arena~~, Marcella and the school multitude on the other, Velma Simms in the air behind us; I did have to admit, lately the world was more full of females than I had ever previously noticed.

5# "Under way again!" Tollie was issuing forth. "A local buckaroo coming out of chute number one"--

Bill Semmler made his ride but to not much total, his bronc a straight buckner who crowhopped down the middle of the arena in no particularly inspired way until the ten seconds ~~was~~ <sup>he</sup> was up and the whistle blew.

"Exercise," Ray commented, meaning that was all Semmler was going to get out of such a rocking-horse ride.

At that, though, exercise was more than what was produced by the next rider, an out-of-town guy whose name I didn't recognize. Would-be rider, I ought to say, for a horse called Ham What Am sailed him ~~onto the dirt~~ <sup>earth</sup> almost before the pair of them issued all the way out the gate of chute two. Ham What Am <sup>then</sup> ~~continued~~ <sup>buckling</sup> his circuit of the arena, kicking dirt twenty feet into the air with every buck, while the ostensible rider knelt and tried to get any breath back into himself.

5# "Let's give--this--hard-luck--a cowboy--a big--hand!"  
Tollie advocated. "He ~~is~~ sure--"

OO sure--split a--long crack--in the air--  
that time."

"You guys see any crack <sup>out there</sup> in the air?" somebody below us inquired. "Where the hell is Tollie getting that stuff?"

"Monkey Ward," it was suggested. "From the same page featuring toilet paper."



But then one of the Rides Proud brothers from up at Browning--one or another of Toussaint's army of grand-nephews he wasn't on speaking terms with--~~lived up to his~~ lived up to his name and made a nice point total atop a chunky roan called Snuffy. Sunfishing was Snuffy's tactic, squirming his hind quarters to one side and then the other with each jump, and if the rider manages to stay in tune with all ~~the~~ that hula wiggling it yields a pretty ride.

This performance was plenty good enough to win the event, unless Earl Zane could do something wonderful on top of Coffee Nerves.

Following the Rides Proud achievement, the crowd laughed as they did each year when a little buckskin mare with a flossy mane was announced as Shirley Temple, and laugh~~ed~~<sup>ed</sup> further when the mare piled the contestant, ~~some~~ <sup>some</sup> guy from Shelby, with its third jump.

5# "That Shirley--for a little ~~gal~~ gal--she's got ~~a~~ mind--of her ~~own~~ own,"

bayed Tollie, evidently under the impression he was providing high humor.

Then, sooner than it seemed possible for him to have drawn sufficient breath for it, he was giving us the next ~~announcing~~ <sup>loudspeaker</sup> dose.

more?

5#

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"Now here--is a rider--I have some acquaintance with. Getting

~~set--in chute number five--on Devil's Lad--Earl Zane.~~ <sup>Dust Storm</sup>

Show them--how--Earl!"

assuming

So much for assumption. <sup>ing the obvious.</sup> Earl had not drawn the pinto, <sup>and Arlee's</sup> his participation in saddling it was only the Zane <sup>trait</sup> propensity ~~for~~ sticking a nose into anything available.

The fact remained, though, that Alec's rival was about to bounce out into the arena aboard a bucking animal. I craned my neck trying to get a look at Leona, but she was turned in earnest conversation with a certain calf roper wearing a chokecherry shirt and I could only see a silver-gold floss. Quite a wash of disappointment went through me. Somehow I felt I was missing the most interesting scene of the entire rodeo, Leona's fact, just then.

5#

"And here--he comes--a cowboying--sonofagun--and a son-- of--yours truly--"

In fairness, I will say Earl Zane got a bad exit from the chute, the cinnamon-colored bronc he was on taking a little hop into the

arena and stopping to <sup>gaze</sup> look around <sup>at the world</sup> just as Earl was all <sup>premed</sup> set for him

to buck. Then <sup>as</sup> when it sank in on Earl that the horse wasn't ~~bucking~~ →



bucking and he altered the rhythm of his spurring to fit that situation, <sup>Dust Storm</sup> ~~the horse~~ began to whirl. A spin to the left. Then one to the right. It was worth the admission to see, Earl's thought process clanking one direction and the horse's the other, then each reversing and passing one another in the opposite direction, like two drunks trying to find each other in a revolving door. The cinnamon bronc, though, was always one phase ahead of Earl, and his third whirl, which included a sort of sideways dip, caused Earl to lurch and ~~lose~~ lose the opposite stirrup. It was all over then, merely a matter of how promptly Earl would <sup>keep his appointment with</sup> meet the arena dirt.

"Blew a stirrup," came from the chute society as Earl picked himself ~~up~~ up off the <sup>planet</sup> ~~earth~~ and the whistle was heard. "Ought've filled <sup>those</sup> ~~the~~ stirrups with chewing gum before he climbed on that merry-go-round."

Tollie, however, considered that we ~~all~~ had seen a shining feat. "Almost--made it--to the--whistle--  
on that--rough one! You can--still show--your face--  
around home--Earl!"

Possibly the pinto's general irritation with the world rather than the diet of Tollie's voice produced it, but either way, Coffee Nerves now went into his biggest eruption yet. Below me in the chute he began to writhe and kick, whinnying awfully, and I redoubled my life grip on the corner post as the thunk! thunk! of his hooves tattooing the wood of the chute reverberated ~~up~~ through the seat of my pants.



"Careful," Ray warned, and I suppose sense would have been to trade my perch for a more distant site. Yet how often does a person get to see at close range a horse in combat with mankind? Not just see, but feel, in the continuing thunks; and hear, the <sup>pinto's</sup>whinny a sawblade of sound ripping the air; and smell, sweat and manure and <sup>animal</sup>ranger in one <sup>unforgettable</sup>mingled ~~amazing~~ odor?

Coffee Nerves' <sup>hammerwork with his hooves</sup>~~hammering~~ built up to a crash, a splay of splinters which sent the handlers <sup>tumbling</sup>~~sprawling~~ away from the back of the chute, and then comparative silence: just the velocity of air through the pinto bronc's nostrils.

4 "The sonofabitch is hung up," somebody reported. In truth, Coffee Nerves was standing with his rear right leg up behind him, the way a horse does for a blacksmith to shoe him, except that instead of any human having hold of that <sup>wicked</sup>~~rear~~ hoof, it was jammed between a solid chute pole and the splintered one above it.

As the handling crew gingerly moved in to see what could be done about extrication, Tollie enlightened the crowd:

5# "This little <sup>pinto</sup>~~bay~~ pony--down in ~~Six~~ <sup>recaltrisant</sup>--is still--proving--kind of--~~caltrisant~~, Tollie enlightened us. The chute boys--are doing some--persuading--and ~~your~~ show--will resume--in just--a jiffy. In the--meantime--since this--is the--cowboys'--Christmas--so to say--that reminds--me--of a--little story."



"Jesus, he's back onto Christmas," <sup>issued</sup> ~~came~~ from the chute society.

Tollie  
"Will somebody go get ~~Brainerd~~ a goddamn calendar?"

"Dumb as he is," it was pointed out, "it'll take two of us to read it to him."

"There was ~~this~~--little boy--who wanted--a pony--for ~~Christmas~~."

Somebody had gone for a prybar to loosen the imprisoning poles ~~at the back of the chute~~ and free the renegade pony of chute six, but in the meantime there was

nothing to do but let Tollie wax forth.

Even at normal, Tollie's voice sounded as if his adenoids had gotten twined with his vocal cords. With the boost from the address system, his <sup>steady</sup> drone now was a real ear-cleaner. "Well--you see--~~this~~ little boy--kept--

5# telling--the other kids--in the family--that he ~~had~~ it--all ~~fixed~~ up--

with Santa ~~Claus~~. Santa ~~Claus~~ was going--to bring him--a pony--certain

sure. So when ~~Christmas~~ Eve ~~came~~--they all ~~of~~ them--hung ~~their~~ stockings--  
by the ~~fireplace~~ there."

"If I hang up a woolsack alongside my stove," somebody in front of the chutes pined, "suppose I'd get <sup>Velma Simms</sup> ~~Penny Thorpe~~ in it?"

5# "And the ~~other~~ kids--thought ~~they'd~~ teach--this little ~~boy~~--a lesson.

So after ~~everybody~~--had gone ~~to~~ bed--they got ~~back~~ up again--and went ~~on~~ out--

of around you."

But we have deciding to do. We've been holed here too long. The water ahead of us doesn't shrink while we're here. I say we had better chance

Do such things have a single first moment? If so, just here Melander begins to depart from a further half dozen years of the salting of fish.

Karlsson was a part-time bear-milker. That is to say, ordinarily he worked as an axman in the wood-cutting crew, but his upbringing near the forests of Skane had sufficiently skilled him as a woodsman that he was sent with the hunting party which occasionally forayed out to help provision New Archangel; to milk the bears, as it was jested. The sort of fellow with nothing much he cared to put to back, and with a train of admirers disappeared into a longhouse with it. Otherwise, though, all the come-and-go of the village still was around the carcass.

wind blowing directly across Hecate Strait. For the first time since their leaving of New Archangel, up went the canoe's small pole of mast and a lugsail. "Not much of a suit of sails, more like a kerchief."



to the barn and--got some--ladies, excuse my language--horse manure--

"Quick, mark that down," somebody <sup>advised</sup> called up to Bill Reinking. <sup>"That's the</sup> First

Tollie's <sup>spouting</sup> <sup>shit</sup> time ~~Brainard's~~ ever apologized for talking horse manure.

--and filled--his stocking with it. So the next morning--they're

all gathered--to look and see--what Santa Claus--left each <sup>one</sup> of them.

Little Susie says--"Look, he left me--a dollie here in--MY stocking."

And little Tommy says--"And look--he left me--apples and oranges--

in MINE." And they turned--to the little boy--and asked--"Well, Johnny--

what did Santa--leave YOU?" And Johnny looked--in his stocking--and

said--"He left me--my pony--but he got away."

There was that sickly laughter a crowd gives out because it's embarrassed not to, and then one of the chute men called up to the booth that they had the goddamn bronc freed, get the rider on him before he raised any more hell.

"BACK TO BUSINESS," Tollie blared as if he was calling elephants,

before Bill Reinking <sup>managed to</sup> <sup>across</sup> leaned over and shoved the microphone a little

farther from Tollie's mouth--back to business--the bronc--in chute

six--has consented--to rejoin us. --Next man up--last one in this

go-round--on a horse called--Coffee Nerves--will be--Dode Withrow."

7th was no sidley  
happy enough  
7 laughter a  
rodeo and give

54



last will end, that these stepping-stone details predominated in his thinking about the escape. Rarely, and then never aloud to any of the other three, did Melander mull the totality of the coastal journey ahead. This made a loss to them all, for Melander alone of the four had traveled greatly enough on the planet to understand the full scope of what they would be attempting. To grasp that their intended ten hundred miles of paddling stretched--wove, rather, through the island-thick wilderness coast--as far as the distance from Stockholm to Venice, or from Gibraltar across all the top of Africa to Sicily. Each mile of the thousand, too, along a cold northern brink of ocean which in winter is misnamed entirely: not pacific at all, but malign. Melander's knowledge of water enwrapping the world, the canny force of its resistance to

Karlsson cracked the gate for himself.

"You're croaking like a raven down there tonight." Karlsson spun to the resumed voice from the blockhouse. "Something got you by the throat?"

Motionless, Karlsson frantically rummaged the times he had shared the hootch jug with Bilibin, what words....Then from beside him in the ~~blackness,~~ <sup>dark,</sup> a bray in Russian:

"Nothing fifteen drops won't cure!"

Karlsson's right elbow was being gripped by the largest hand <sup>imaginable,</sup> ~~in~~ <sup>not in the dark:</sup> ~~New Archangel,~~ which told him what his eyes couldn't, Melander. "We'll

Fresh silence at the other guardpost. Deeper, tauter silence, it seemed to Karlsson, unrelenting as Melander's grip.

At last:

"Swig fifteen more for me and make a start on my woes as well.



I yanked my head around to see for sure. Yes. Dode was up top the back of chute six, gazing ~~down~~ at ~~the~~ the ~~Nervous~~ exasperated specimen of horse below. Dode did look a little soberer than when I met up with him by the beer booth. He wasn't any bargain of temperance yet, though. His face looked hot and his Stetson sat toward the back of his head in a dude way I had never seen him wear it ~~before~~.

Ray was saying, "I never knew Dode to enter the bucking, before."

Which coincided with what was going through my mind, that Dode was the age of my father and Ray's; that his bronc-stomping had taken place <sup>long</sup> years ago; that I knew for a certainty ~~that~~ Dode did not even break horses for his own use any more, but bought them saddle-ready from Tollie Zane. <sup>#</sup> No," I answered Ray, "not in our time."

I had a clear view down into the chute as the bronc crew tried to keep Coffee Nerves settled long enough for Dode to ease into the saddle. The pinto went through another symphony of commotion, kicking and slamming sideways and whinnying that sawtoothed sound; but then hunched up motionless for a moment <sup>in a kind of sitting squat,</sup> evidently contemplating what ~~was~~ next to pull from its repertoire. In that moment Dode simply said "Good enough" and slid into the saddle.

As if those words of Dode's were a curfew, the gapers and gawkers of the chute society evaporated from the vicinity where Coffee Nerves would emerge into the arena, some of them even seeking a safe nest up on the corral.



5# "One of--our friends--and--neighbors--Dode is. Rode many--  
a bad one in--his time. He'll be--dancing out--on this--  
little pinto--in just--one--minute."

It honestly occurred no more than a handful of seconds from then. Dode had the grip he wanted on the bucking rope and his arm was in the air as if ready to wave and he said in that same simple tone, "Open."

The gate swung, and Coffee Nerves vaulted into the arena.

I saw Dode suck in a fast breath, then heard it go out of him in a huhhh as the horse lit stiff-legged ~~and~~ with its forefeet and kicked the ~~air~~<sup>sky</sup> with its hind, from both directions ramming the surprise of its force up through the stirrups

into Dode. Dode's hat left him and bounced once on the ~~spot~~<sup>splotch</sup> across Coffee Nerves' rump and then toppled into the dust of the arena. Maybe imagine you have just

But Dode himself didn't shake loose at all, which was a  
~~fortunate~~<sup>good</sup> thing because Coffee Nerves already was uncorking another maneuver, this time swapping ends before crashing down in ~~that~~<sup>all</sup> stiff-legged style ~~again~~. Dode still sat deep in the saddle, although another huhhh reamed its way out of him. Maybe imagine you have just jumped from a porch roof to the ground twice in ~~a few~~<sup>about five</sup> seconds, to give yourself some idea of the impact Dode was absorbing.

~~of him.~~ He must have been getting Coffee Nerves' respect, ~~for now the~~<sup>brone</sup> exactly reversed the end-swapping he had just done, a trick almost guaranteed to ~~unhinge~~<sup>catch</sup> the rider ~~leaning~~<sup>astride</sup> wrong. Yet Dode still was up there ~~on top of~~<sup>astride</sup> the pinto.



I remember tasting dust. My mouth was open to call encouragement to Dode, but there was nothing that seemed good enough to call out for this ride he was making.

Now Coffee Nerves launched into the jump he had been saving up for, a real cloud-chaser, Dode at the same <sup>instant</sup> ~~time~~ raking the horse's shoulders with his spurs, both those actions fitting together exactly as if animal and man were in rhythm to <sup>a</sup> ~~the same unheard~~ <sup>none of the rest of us could hear,</sup> signal, up and up the horse twisting into the air and the rider's free left arm high above that, Coffee Nerves and Dode soaring together while the crowd's <sup>urging</sup> ~~scry~~ seemed to help hold them there, a wave of sound suspending the pair ~~there~~ above the arena earth so that we all could have time to fix the sight into memory everlastingly.

Somewhere amid it all the whistle blew. That is, off some far wall of my awareness echoed <sup>the</sup> ~~that~~ news of Dode, having ridden Coffee Nerves, but the din that followed flooded over it.

<sup>no #</sup> I still believe that if Coffee Nerves had lit straight, as any <sup>moon visit</sup> ~~other~~ sane horse would do descending from a ~~jump~~ like that, Dode would not have blown that ~~right~~ left stirrup. But Coffee Nerves somehow skewed himself half-sideways about the time he hit the ground: imagine now that the ground yanked <sup>s</sup> itself to one side as you ~~came~~ <sup>plummet</sup> down off



that porch: and Dode, who evidently did not hear the timer's whistle or was ignoring it, stayed firm in the right stirrup, nicely braced as he was, but the pinto's slewfoot maneuver jolted his boot from the left one.

And now when Coffee Nerves <sup>writhe</sup> ~~cattywampus~~ into his next buck, <sup>cattywampus</sup> ~~sideways~~ to the left, he simply sailed away from under Dode, who dropped off him back-first,

falling like a man given a surprise shove into a creek. # Not water, however, but <sup>around</sup> ~~a cloud of~~ dust flew up ~~from the~~ form which thumped to the arena surface.

The next developments smudged together. I do know that <sup>now</sup> ~~I was~~ <sup>shouting</sup> ~~calling~~ out "Dode! Dode!" and that I lit running in the arena direct from the top of the corral, never even resorted to any of the poles as rungs to get down, and that Ray landed right behind me. As to what we thought we were going to accomplish I am even less clear; simply could not see Dode sprawled out there by himself, I suppose.

# The pickup man Dill Egan was spurring his horse between Dode and Coffee Nerves, and ~~even then was~~ having to swat the pinto in the face with his hat to keep him off Dode. Before it seemed possible my father and Pete were out there too, and a half dozen other men from out of the grandstand and Alec and a couple of others from the far side of the arena, ~~and~~ their hats thwacking at Coffee Nerves as well, and through all the commotion I could hear my father's

particular roar of HYAH! HYAH! again and again before the bronc finally veered off.

5# "fell off--the rainbow--en that one--right enough,"  
Tollie was blaring.



So that registered on me, and the point that the chute society, this once when they could have been useful out here in the arena, were dangling from various fence perches or peering from behind the calf chute. But the sprint Ray and I ~~were making~~ <sup>made</sup> through the loose arena dirt is marked in me only by the sound that reached us just as we reached Dode. The noise hit ~~us~~ <sup>our ears</sup> from the far end of the arena: a tingling crack! like a tree breaking off and then the crashing and thudding as it came down. <sup>¶</sup> For a confused instant ~~I~~ <sup>truly</sup> thought a cottonwood had fallen.

My mind tried to put together that with all else happening in this overcrowded space of time.

But no, Coffee Nerves had slammed head-on into the gate of the catch pen, toppling not ~~just~~ the gate but the hefty gatepost, which crunched the hood of a parked car as it fell over. who had been spectating along the fence People ~~were~~ scattering from the prospect of having Coffee Nerves out among them, ~~but the~~

<sup>¶</sup> The bronc however had rebounded into the arena. Piling into that

gatepost finally had knocked some of the spunk out of ~~him~~. Coffee

Nerves, <sup>He now</sup> looked a little groggy and was wobbling somewhat,

which gave Dill Egan time to lasso him and <sup>dally</sup> ~~got~~ the rope ~~scrambled~~ around a corral post.

~~This~~ <sup>That</sup> was the scene as I will ever see it. Dode Withrow lying out there with the toes of his boots pointing up, and Coffee Nerves woozy but defiant at the end of the lasso tether.

Quite a crowd encircled Dode, although Ray and I hung back at its out edge; exactly what was not needed was any more people in the way.

Doc Spence forged his way through, and I managed to <sup>see</sup> look

in past the arms and legs of all the <sup>men</sup> people around him and Dode. And saw happen what I so desperately wanted to ~~see~~. When Doc held something under Dode's nose, Dode's head <sup>twitched</sup> moved.

Before long I heard Dode give a long mmmm, as if he was terrifically tired. After that his eyes came open and he showed that he was able to move, in fact would have sat up if Doc Spence ~~had~~ hadn't stopped him. By now Midge and the Withrow girls had scurried out and Midge was down beside Dode demanding, "You ninny, are you all right?"

Dode fastened his look on her and made an mmmm again, then burst out loud and clear, "goddamn that stirrup anyway," which lightened

the mood of all of us around him, even Midge looking less ~~in~~ warpath-like

after that. I <sup>could just hear</sup> thought of the razzing Dode was going to take from <sup>his herder Pat</sup> Sam

<sup>forced landing of his:</sup> Hoy about this, "Didn't know I was working for an apprentice bronc

stomper, Dode. Want me to saddle up one of these big ewes, so's you can practice staying on?"



Relief was all over my father as he went over to the grandstand fence to report to my mother and Marie and Toussaint. Ray and I tagged along, so we heard it as quick as anybody. "Doc thinks he's okay," my father relayed. "But he's got to take him to Conrad for an X-ray just to make sure."

My mother at once called out to Midge an offer to ride with her in the ambulance to Conrad. Midge though shook her head. "No, I'll be all right. The girls'll be with me, no sense in you coming."

Then I noticed. Toussaint was paying no attention to any of this conversation, nor to the process of Dode being put on a stretcher over his protestations that he could walk or even foot-race if he had to, nor to Coffee Nerves being <sup>tagged</sup> ~~led~~ into exit through what <sup>little</sup> ~~was~~ left of the catch pen gate. Instead <sup>he,</sup> Toussaint, was standing there <sup>gazing</sup> ~~looking~~ into the exact center of the arena, as if the extravaganza that Coffee Nerves and Dode had put on still was continuing out there. The walnut crinkles deepened in his face, his chuckle rippled out, and then the declaration: "That one. That one was a ride."

# —

There of course was more on the schedule of events beyond that.

5\* Tollie inevitably thought to proclaim "Well, folks the show goes on!"

But the only way for it to go after that performance by Coffee Nerves

and Dode was downhill, and Ray and I retained our fence perch <sup>just</sup>~~only~~

through the next section of calf roping to see whether Alec's  $17\frac{1}{2}$

seconds would hold up. Contestant after contestant rampaged out,

flailed some air with a lariat, and came nowhere close to Alec's time.

It had been a rodeo. English Creek had won both the saddle bronc riding and the calf roping.

# —————




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top of a new page

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We were riding past the Medicine Lodge, which had its front door <sup>propped</sup>  
with a beer keg,  
open, probably so the accumulating fume of cigarette smoke and alcoholic  
breath wouldn't pop the windows out of the place. As Dode Withrow  
would have said, it sounded like Hell changing shifts in there. The  
jabber and laughter and sheer concentration of humanity beyond that saloon  
door <sup>way</sup> of course had Ray and me gazing in as we rode past, and that gaze  
was what made me abruptly halt Mouse.

Ray didn't <sup>ask</sup> ~~say~~ anything, but I could feel his curiosity as to  
~~we~~ <sup>stalled</sup> ~~stopped~~ in the middle of the street. Nor was it anything  
I could put into words for him. Instead I <sup>offered</sup> ~~said~~: "How about you  
riding Mouse down to your place? I'll be along in a little. There's  
somebody ~~in there~~ I got to <sup>go</sup> see."





Ray's look toward the Medicine Lodge wondered In there? but his voice only conveyed "Sure, glad to" and he lifted himself ahead into the saddle after I climbed down. Best of both worlds for him: chance to be an unquestioning friend and get a horse to ride as well.

I went into the <sup>blue air of the</sup> saloon and stopped by the figure sitting on the second bar stool inside the doorway. The Medicine Lodge was getting itself uncorked for the night ahead. Above the general jabber somebody toward the middle of the bar was relating in a semi-shout: "So I told that sonofabitch he <sup>H</sup> just better watch his <sup>around me</sup> step or there <sup>is</sup> was gonna be a new face in <sup>H</sup> hell for breakfast." My interest, though, was entirely here at the seated figure.

The brown hat moved around as he became aware of me.

"'Lo, Stanley," I began, still not knowing where I was going next with any of this.

"Well, there, Jick." ~~What do you know for sure?~~ The crowfoot <sup>clutched deeper</sup> lines <sup>Meipell's</sup> deepened at the corners of Stanley's eyes as he focused on me. He didn't look really tanked up, but on the other hand couldn't be called church-sober either. Someplace in between, as he'd been so much of our time together on the mountain. "Haven't seen you," he continued in all pleasantness, "since you started living aboveground."

Good Christ, Stanley had noticed my ducking act that day I was digging the outhouse hole and he rode by. Was my every



Ray's look toward the Medicine Lodge wondered in there? but his  
voice only conveyed "Sure, glad to" and he lifted himself ahead into  
the saddle after I climbed down. Best of both worlds for him: chance

a ~~line~~ view of the coast ahead. What they saw was this: a shattered

~~line~~ of headlands, shadowed by seastacks like ~~steeped churches, like~~

vast hayricks, like great shipsails and dark tunnel mouths; sea rock

like a field of icebergs.

rethink that a bit by Melander's josh that New Archangel's true  
enterprise was the making of axes to cut down trees to turn into  
charcoal which was then used to make more axes. All in all, <sup>then,</sup> Karlsson  
minded New Archangel life a good deal less than any of the <sup>three</sup> other  
three Swedes. What held Karlsson into the pattern of the escape  
was the plan itself. That question of capability, whether  
Melander's idea could be made real, could transport men so far  
along the wild coast. <sup>That, and</sup> There was also the musing to be done  
about how he himself would perform. For one thing, Karlsson  
wondered whether sometime during the escape he would have to  
kill Wennberg. And for another, whether he could manage to  
kill him.

p. 48 A follows →

moment

~~was~~ visible to people any more, like a planet <sup>being perpetually</sup> studied by one of those

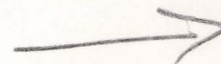
California telescopes?

"Yeah, well... How you been?"

"Fine as snooze. And yourself?"

"What I mean, how's your hand doing?"

Stanley looked down at it as if I was the first to ever point out





its existence. "Not bad." He picked up the bottle of beer from the counter before him. "Works good enough for the basics, anyway."

And tipped down the last of that particular beer. "Can I buy you a snort?"

"No, no thanks."

*three days*  
"On the wagon, huh? I've clumb on it some times myself. All else considered, though, I'd just as soon be down off."

It occurred to me that since I was ~~the money~~ in this place anyway it didn't cost any more to be cordial. The stool between Stanley and the doorway was vacant--an empty mixed-drink glass testified that its occupant had traveled on--so I straddled the seat and amended: "Actually I would take a bottle of orange, though."

Stanley indicated his empty beer bottle to Tom Harry, the nearest of the three bartenders trying to cope with the ~~crowd~~ crowd's liquid wants.

"When you get time, professor. And a sunjuice for my nurse, here."

*Harry*  
Tom ~~Paul~~ studied me. "He with you?" he asked Stanley.

*him and me,* "vouched to the *barman* bartender."  
"Closer than kin, Stanley solemnly assured ~~him~~ "We have rode

millions of miles together, *him and me.*



"None of it aged him that much," Tom Harry observed, nonetheless setting up a bottle of orange in front of me and a fresh beer for Stanley.

descript'n  
of bar  
& crowd

"Stanley," I started again. He was pushing coins out of a little pile, to pay for the <sup>latest round</sup> ~~next drink~~. Fishing up a five-cent piece, he held it toward me between his thumb and forefinger. "Know what this is?"  
"Sure, a nickel."

"Naw, it's a dollar a Scotchman's been squeezing." The fresh beer got a gulp of attention. For the sake of the conversation I intended I'd like to have known how many predecessors that bottle had had, but of course Tom Harry's style of bartending was to swoop empties out of sight so there ~~could be~~ <sup>no such</sup> no self-incriminating count <sup>could be</sup> taken.

I didn't have long to dwell on Stanley's possible intake, for some out-of-town guy wearing a panama hat zigged when he meant to zag on his way toward the door and lurched into the pair of us. Abruptly the guy was being gripped just above the elbow by Stanley--his right hand evidently had recuperated enough from Bubbles for this, too--and was retargeted <sup>so you don't get</sup> toward the door with advice from Stanley: "Step easy, buddy, ~~Don't you~~ <sup>yourself hurt.</sup> ~~know~~ in this county there's a \$5 fine for drawing blood on a fool!"

Mr. Panama Hat left our company, and Stanley's handling of the incident reminded me to ask something. "How you getting along with Canada Dan these days?"

"Better," Stanley allowed. "Yeah, just a whole lot better." He paid recognition to his beer bottle again. "Last I heard, Dan was up in Cut Bank. Doing some town herding."



Cut Bank? Town herding? "What, did the Busby boys can him?"


"I got them to give Dan a kind of vacation." Then, in afterthought:  
"Permanent."

I considered this. Up there in the Two with Stanley those weeks ago, I would not have bet a pin that he was capable of rousing himself to do justice to Canada Dan. Yet he had.

"Stanley-- "

"I can tell you got something on your mind, <sup>pick</sup> Might as well ~~it~~ unload it."

If I could grapple it into position, that was exactly what I intended. To ask: what was that all about, when we first met you there on the mountain, the skittishness between you and my father? Why, when I ask anyone in this family of mine about Stanley Meixell, is there never a straight answer? Just who are you <sup>to us?</sup> How did you cross paths with the McCaskills in the past, and why are you back crisscrossing with us again?



Somebody just beyond Stanley let out a whoop, then started in on a twangy rendition of the song that goes: "I'm a calico dog, I'm a razorback hog, I'm a cowboy on the loose! I can drink towns dry, I can all but fly, I flavor my beans with snoose!" In an instant, Tom Harry was there leaning over the bar, <sup>and with a pointed finger</sup> informing the songster that he didn't care if the guy hooted, howled, or for that matter blew smoke rings out his butt, but no singing.

This, Stanley shook his head over. "What's the world coming to when a man can't offer up a tune? They ruin everything these days."

First Dode, now Stanley. It seemed my mission in life this Fourth of July to steer morose beer drinkers away from <sup>even</sup> deeper gloom. At least I knew which direction I wanted to point Stanley: back into history.

"I been trying to figure something out," I undertook, honestly enough, one more time. "Stanley, why was it you quit rangering on the Two?"

Stanley did some more demolition on his beer, then cast a visiting glance around the walls at Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the stuffed herd, and eventually had to look at me and ~~asked~~ asked as if verifying:

"Me?"

"Uh huh, you."

"No special reason."

"Run it by me anyway."

"Naw, you'd be bored fast."

"Whyn't you let me judge that."

"You got better use for your ears."

"Jesus, Stanley--"



"Heads, steady--"

"But it's all the same."

"No object lesson."

He'd, and eventually had to look at me and say

glance about the walls at Franklin D. Roosevelt and the statue

glanced at some more demolition on on his feet, then cast a longing

the "mo."

another, one more time. "Steady, my way it's not that long on

now had to stare out--Wennberg clomped past the sitting Braaf, stopped,

and examined. <sup>#</sup> "What's here on the back of you, then?" he demanded. <sup>=</sup> Wennberg

Braaf glanced dully up toward the blacksmith. Slipping his arms

from the Aleut parka, he brought the garment around for a look.

and all but "I'll be with you!" In an instant, Tom Harty

backpack and I'm a cowboy on the loose; I can drink some day, I

a sudden sensation of the song that goes: "I'm a cowboy and I'm a

somebody that's been steady for one a while, then started in on

All this while I was <sup>attempting</sup> ~~trying~~ to pry sense out of Stanley, the tail of my eye was trying to tell me something again. Someone had come up behind me. Which wasn't particular news in the Medicine Lodge throng, except this someone evidently had no other site in mind; his presence stayed steadily there, close enough to make me edgy about it, sitting half-braced as I was in case this guy too was going to crash <sup>in</sup> our direction.

I half-turned on the bar stool to cope with ~~this~~ <sup>the</sup> interloper and gazed full into the face, not all that many inches away, of Velma Simms.

I must tell you, it was like opening a kitchen drawer to reach in for a jelly spoon and finding <sup>instead</sup> ~~my hand was in~~ among the crown jewels of England. For I had never been close enough, head-on, to Velma to learn that her eyes were gray. Gray! Like mine! Possibly our four were the world's only. And to <sup>lipstick, on</sup> garner further that her ~~lips~~, the very lips that ruled the rodeo whistle, <sup>was</sup> ~~were~~ the beautiful <sup>dark-</sup> ~~darkness~~ beyond-red of ripe cherries. And that she was wearing tiny pearl earrings, <sup>below</sup> ~~under~~ the chestnut hair,

as if her ears could be unbuttoned to further secrets even there.

And that while the male population of ~~N~~ northern Montana was focusing <sup>Velma's renowned</sup> ~~famous~~ slacks, on the backside of ~~her blue jeans~~, they were missing important announcements <sup>could be found</sup> up front. Sure, there ~~were~~ a few battlelines at the corners of her eyes and across her forehead; but <sup>right then</sup> ~~they~~ simply seemed to <sup>confirm to me</sup> ~~testify~~ that Velma <sup>unbelievable but</sup> ~~she~~ knew what to do with all this arsenal of hers. And so: out of all





Unbelievable but so: out of all the crowded flesh in the Medicine  
Lodge just then, solely onto me was fixed this attention of Velma Simms.

She just stood there eyeing me while I gaped, until the point of  
her attention finally prodded through to me.



"Oh. Oh, hello, Mrs.--uh, Velma. Have I got your seat?" I

scrambled off the bar stool as if it was suddenly red-hot.

# "Now that you mention it," she replied, and even just saying that,

her words were one promissory note after another. Velma floated past

me and snuggled onto the stool. A little

extra of that snuggle went in Stanley's direction.

"Saw you there at the announcing booth," I reminisced brightly.

"Did you," said she.

<sup>maybe</sup>  
I ~~am~~ a slow starter, but eventually I catch up with the situation.

My quick gawp around the saloon confirmed what had been <sup>trying to</sup> ~~dawning~~ on me.

This year's beau in the gabardine suit was nowhere.

"Yeah, well," I began to extricate myself. "I got to be getting."

"Don't feel you need to rush off," said Stanley. As if <sup>God's</sup> ~~the world's~~  
<sup>the male race</sup> gift to ~~man~~ <sup>enthroned</sup> ~~kind~~ wasn't ~~snuggled~~ right there beside him. "The night's  
still a pup."

"Uh huh. That's true, but--"

<sup>the empty mixed-drink</sup>  
"When you got to go," put in Velma, twirling ~~her~~ glass to catch  
Tom Harry's attention for a refill, "you got to go."



over coals, the dogfish had proved surprisingly civil to the taste, and Karlsson was so relieved he was trying a rare joke. "I saw a bear eat fish once, near Ozherskoi. He looked big as an oxen<sup>?</sup>. Swatted salmon out of the water and skoffed them down belly-first."

Melander pretended to ponder. "I think it was well you didn't

invite him for supper tonight. He might have had his nose at that sea beast we've just put into ourselves."

extra of that snuggle went in Stanley's direction.

"Saw you there at the snowing booth," I reminded brightly.

"Did you," said she.

I was slow starter, but eventually I catch up with the situation.

Melander's idea could be made real, could transport men so far along the wild coast. There was also the musing to be done about how he himself would perform. For one thing, Karlsson wondered whether sometime during the escape he would have to kill Wennberg. And for another, whether he could manage to kill him.

The hardest wait among them was Braaf's. Melander had forbidden him from stealing until the final flurry of muskets and food on the date of the escape. To keep his hands busy

"Right," I affirmed. "And like I say, I, uh, got to go." <sup>#</sup>What made me add to the total of my footprints already in my mouth, I can't truly account for. Maybe the blockade I had hit again in wanting to ask all the questions of Stanley. In any case, the parting I now blurted out was:

"You two in a dancing mood tonight? What I mean, see you at the dance, will I?"

Stanley simply passed that inquiry to Velma with a look. In theory, <sup>Velma</sup> ~~she~~ then spoke her answer to me, although she didn't unlock her gaze <sup>from</sup> ~~with~~ him at all as she said it: "Stanley and I will have to see ~~how~~ ~~much~~ whether we have any spare time."

<sup>#</sup> ~~clambering aboard~~  
So. One more topic ~~in~~ my already bent-over brain. Stanley

Meixell and Velma Croake Bogan Sutter Simms.

<sup>#</sup> —



"Ray? What kind of a summer are you having?"

We were in the double-window of his bedroom, each of us propped within the sill. A nice breeze came in on us there, the leaves of the big cottonwood in the Heaneys' front yard seeming to flutter the air our way. Downstairs the radio had just been turned on by Ed Heaney, so it was <sup>7 o'clock</sup> ~~6:30~~ the dance wouldn't get underway for an hour or so yet, and as long as Ray and I were going to be window-sitting anyway for the next while, I <sup>figured</sup> ~~thought~~ I'd broach to him some of all that was on my mind.

"Didn't I tell you? <sup>Pilot."</sup> ~~Killing~~

"No, I don't mean that. What it is--do things seem to you kind of unsettled?"

"How?"

"Well, Christ, I don't know. Just in general. People behaving like they don't know whether to include you in or out of things."

"What kind of things?"

*more* "Things that went on years ago. Say there was an argument or a fight or something, people fell out over it. Why can't they just say, here's what it was about, it's over and done with? Get it out of their systems?" *more*

~~Hell~~ "that's just grown-ups. They're not going to <sup>let</sup> tell a kid in on anything, until they figure it's too late to do him any good."

*4* "But why is that? What is it that's so goddamn important back there that they have to keep it to themselves?"

"Jick, sometimes--"

"What?"

"Sometimes maybe you think too much."

I thought that over briefly. "What am I supposed to do about that?"

Christ, Ray, it's not like poking your finger up your nose in public, some kind of habit you can remind yourself not to do. Thinking is thinking. It happens in spite of <sup>a person,</sup> you.

"Yeah, but you maybe encourage it more than it needs."

"I what?"

"See, maybe it's like this." Maybe a thought comes into your head, →



"Have fifteen drops, Pavel, it drives the snakes from one's boots..."

Karlsson was astounded with the evident believability of his gate performances. The hootch, however, deserved at least equal billing. Under the New Archangel allotment of fifty cups of rum per man per year, Bilibin was a man perpetually parched. "They might as well be spooning out dust to us," he averred to Karlsson between swigs.

By autumn of 1852, Karlsson was not departing the stockade until nearly dark--"Come along and dip your ladle in the kettle," the slim Swede would invite; "No, no, no, I'm limber as a goose's neck, no more women for me, you can have mine too," Bilibin would splutter back at him--and returning far into the night, proffering the hootchina jug.

~~mid -~~  
In early November, Melander said in his procedural way that the time had come for Braaf to steal the coastal maps by which they would navigate south. "It's the Tebenkov maps we want. Tebenkov must have been one Russian who had something other than cabbage between his ears. When he was governor here he made his captains chart all of this coastline, and there's a set aboard each ship. I saw the steamship's while Rosenberg was bathing his bottom at Ozherskoi. We'll take those, they won't be missed until spring or whenever in hell's time the steamship gets fired up again. Can you read Russian, Braaf?" Braaf shook his head. "No? Well, no matter, we need the  
about the bottom of your cargo, there."

Ray's eyes squinched more than ever as he worked on his notion,

and the big front teeth nipped his lower lip in concentration. <sup>Then:</sup> "Maybe,

let's say maybe a thought comes into your head,

it's only about what you're going to do next. Saddle up Mouse and

take a ride, say. That's all the thought it really needs--then put

on the saddle and climb on. But the mood you're in, <sup>Jick</sup> you'd stop <sup>first</sup> and

think some more. "But if I go for a ride, where <sup>am I going to</sup> will I go?" Ray <sup>here</sup> was

went into <sup>coming deep and</sup> in one of his radio voices, the words crowding each other fast like

Kaltenborn's. "What is it I'll see when I get there? Did anybody

else ever see it? And if anybody did, is it going to look the same

to me as it did to them? And old Mouse here, is it going to look the

same to Mouse as it does to me?"

Raymond Edmund Heaney Von Kaltenborn broke off, and it was just

Ray again. "On and on that way, Jick. If you think too much, you

make it into a whole dictionary of going for a ride. Instead of just

going. See what I'm saying?"

"Goddamn it now, Ray, what I mean is more important than goddamn

riding a horse."

change  
clipped



"It's the same with anything. It'll get to you if you think  
about it too much, Jick."

"But what I'm telling you is, I don't have any choice. This  
stuff I'm talking about is on my mind whether or not I want it to  
be."

Ray took a look at me as if I had some sort of brain fever that  
 might be read in my face. Then in another of his radio voices intoned:  
 "Have you tried Vick's VapoRub? It sooooothes as it woocorks."

There it lay. Even Ray had no more idea than the man in the moon  
 about my perplexity. This house where we sat tucked in <sup>blue</sup>~~white~~-painted  
 sills, above its broad lawned yard and under its high cottonwoods,  
 this almost second home of mine: it ticked to an entirely different  
 time than the summer that was coursing through me. The Heaney family  
 was in place in the world. Ed was going to go on exiting the door of  
 his lumber yard at <sup>6</sup>~~10~~ every evening and picking up his supper fork  
 at 10 after 6 and clicking on that Philco radio at <sup>7</sup>~~6:30~~, on into  
 eternity. Genevieve would go on keeping this house shining ~~and Mary Ellen~~  
 and discovering new sites for doilies. Mary Ellen

and discovering new areas for golfers. Many other

features. The house would go on keeping this house and the

at 10 after 9 and sticking on that radio radio at 9:30 on into

the summer and at every evening and sticking on the summer folk

was in place in the world. It was going to go on existing the door of

the than the summer that was coming through me. The house family

this almost second home of mine: it stuck to an entirely different

style, above the broad lawn and under the high cottonwoods,

about my backyard. This house where we sat stuck in the

there it lay. Even the had no more than the man in the moon

"Have you tried the new? It's soooooo as it's soooooo."

might be seen in my face. Then in another of the radio voices intoned:

a noose is around your neck at the time."

The steam thinned as the opened doorway sucked it away, and

brought into view Braaf. With his clothes off, he looked more

than ever like an oversized boy rather than a man. Both Melander

and Karlsson noticed that Braaf did not even pause to accustom

himself to the cumulus of heat before crossing the room to them,

nor bother to put the steam-sieving mask to his mouth until he

was seated, a little way from the other two.

It's the same with everyone. It's the same to you as it is to me.



would grow up and learn nursing at the Columbus Hospital in Great

Falls. Ray would grow up and take a year of business college at Missoula

and then join his father in the lumber yard. Life under this roof

had the <sup>rhythm</sup> ~~order~~ of the begattings in the Bible. The Heaneys were not

not even anywhere ~~close~~ similar, )  
the McCaskills, and I lacked the language to talk about any of the

difference, even to my closest friend.

# —