

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, the editor's wife inquires whether somebody still has her big yellow potato-salad bowl from last year; the rodeo will feature \$140 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

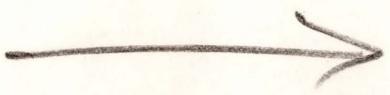
I have to honestly say that the next few weeks of this remembered summer look somewhat pale in comparison with my Stanley episode.

Only in comparison, though. [#] You can believe that I arrived back lard 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
 Mountains--this identical father now announced that he ~~was off~~ ^{would be} ~~the~~ ^{the English Creek}
~~the~~ premises ~~for a week,~~
~~Missouri~~ 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
~~announced,~~ ^{unveiled} "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 ~~xxx~~ straightforward douser with^mout any lighting and left the forests so sopping that there was no fire danger for ^{awhile}, 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 headquarters for a refresher course. Send them back to school, as it was said. Both my father and Murray Tomlinson of the Blacktail Gulch station down on

Sun River had been so assiduous about evading ^{this} ~~these~~ in the past that the

finger of selecti on now never wavered whatsoever: it pointed ^{the pair} ~~at~~ and my ^{of them} ~~father~~ to Missoula for a week of fire school.

~~26~~ 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 ^{Gulch} 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, the 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 ^{Elison} ~~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~~^{toilet} 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~~^{do} something manual ~~as~~^{than} to diddle around with some temperamental damn piece of ~~machinery~~ machinery. No, my grouse was of a different feather than that. I ~~simply~~^{purely} 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~~^{and strange} avenue of endeavor was ~~under~~^{already} my feet and my father was pointing me along it and ~~saying~~^{chirping,} "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~~^{neither 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 white kitchen in four stakes with ~~string~~ ~~string~~ from one to another to represent the outhouse dimensions--inasmuch as ours was a two-holer, as was *3-holer?* considered good-mannered ~~gentle~~ for a family, it made a considerable rectangle; I guess about half again bigger than a cemetery grave--and now all I the stringed-in space faced was to excavate to a depth of about seven feet. *with*

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

^{Saturday when}
 the hole by ~~the day~~ my father was due back. Jobs which can be broken

down into stints that way, where you know ^{that} if you put in a certain amount

of daily effort you'll ^{overcome} achieve the chore, I have always been able

^{handle} 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. ^{That day} When I ~~first~~ started ⁱⁿ on the outhouse rectangle I

of course ^{first} had ^{to} 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~~ part of ^{this} 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 ^{merely} 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 ^f 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~~^{heaps}, the slag of the plowed prairie.

I cite all this because by my third afternoon ~~stint~~^{shift} 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%

~~rocks~~^{small stones}. We had studied in school that glaciers ~~traveled~~^{bulldozed} 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~~^{dead sure} 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 ^{to be} ~~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. ^{With a little effort} The gravel and the dirt mixed with ^{were} ~~it was~~ shovelable enough. ^{with a little effort.} But I simply liked to do ^{occasional} ~~a little~~ pick work, ^{reach-down-and-leave} liked the different feel and rhythm of that tool, operating overhand as it does rather than the perpetual ~~lifting~~ of shoveling.

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

So I was loosening the ^{gravelly} earth at the bottom of the hole with swings of the pick, and on the basis of Alice Van Bebbler'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 ~~nothing~~ 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 ^{nine-tenths} ~~90%~~ of a person is above the ears, but I swear

the proportion sometimes gets reversed in me. ~~All right, I was safely~~ ^{Not that I wasn't}
 out of sight, ^g squatting down there; when I'd been standing up working,
 my excavation by now was about shoulder-deep on me. No problem ~~with~~ ^{there.}
 No problem so ~~that, but~~ long as Stanley didn't get a direct look down ~~here~~ into
 the hole, but what if that happened? What if Stanley stopped at the
 station, for some reason or other? being stopped anyway And, say, he decided to use the
 outhouse, and as he was ~~ambled~~ ^{headed} out there decided to amble over to admire
 this pit of mine? What then? Would I pop up like a jack-in-the-box?
 I'd sure as ~~hell~~ ^{the dickens} look just as silly as one.

I was also ~~finding out~~ ^{learning} that the position I had to squat in wasn't
 the world's most comfortable. And it was going to ~~It was occurring to me that it would~~
 take a number of minutes for Stanley and company to ~~come~~ ^{saunter} 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

^{the} 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~~ ^{more like} 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 $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ 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.

hunching down in a toilet hole
 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 ^{eventually} 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 ^{over the rim of the pit} to

determine which direction I had to face embarrassment from.

And found nobody. ^A No Stanley, no Bubbles, nothing alive ~~in sight~~.

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

#

"So," my mother inquired upon ^{return} 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 ~~the~~ 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 ^{sermoned} ~~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 ^{with his pack string} ~~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."

15A

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, including my father, ~~and she simply retorted~~ ^{she simply retorted,} "Park your tongue then," and went to work on the meal while Pete and I ~~talked~~ ^{chinned} about the green year.



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

By now the ~~the~~ weather service was declaring this the wettest June in mind. ~~the~~ ^{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 ²¹~~20~~¢ 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 ^{cherished} ~~regarded~~ haying as the one elastic
part of their year, the calendar told them when lambing or calving
would begin, and shipping time ^{was} ~~was~~ ^{doomed as} 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,

Alec Pete?

to you this place, don't you think?

blasted in my mind, as I guess you'd call it



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 ^{don't} suppose." ~~that~~ It was interesting to see comments go back and forth between ~~these two~~ ^{this pair;} 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~~ ^{"could be"} ~~this~~ ~~that~~ 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.

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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."

#



my mother

[Handwritten scribble]

My personal theory is that a lot of misunderstanding followed ~~her~~

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 ~~ten~~ ^{eleven} that we were visited for the morning by Louise Bowen, wife of the

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

was newly assigned onto the Two, having ~~been in~~ ^{held down} an office job at

Region ~~one~~ headquarters in Missoula, ^{all the time before,} 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 ~~the~~

Teton River

~~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. ^{The} 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~~

~~of our visits from her~~ ^{that was the extent} she ever called on us again. But I did notice, when ~~I went with my~~

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

Bowen was toddling around with a lamb bell on him.

about
mobility
of a 4-yr-old

[Handwritten scribble]

#

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 ^{spuds}~~potatoes~~. "I'll
~~will~~ try," she allowed. "I Will Try."

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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 ^{education} 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."



#

25 Years Ago
in The Gleaner

#

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.

man?

"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 wagonneering 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 somewhere on its own. ^{as the rest of me dug,} Mine was on that wagon journey with my mother and Pete and their mother.

man in digger

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~~ ^{grain} grew on a stem was ~~in~~ ^{over} 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 territory~~ 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~~

name
them?

Mac?

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

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

near where Badger flows into the Two Medicine River was ^{the place} ~~where~~ 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} ~~would have been living where he still did, upstream from~~



road

beyond that,

~~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~~ ^{SAW} see it as somewhat like a traveling circus,

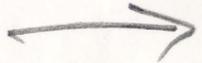
but with go-devils and scrapers and other road machines instead of

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 ^{wandered} sometimes ~~came~~ into the conversation ^{whenever} when someone would learn that ^{my mother,} although she was married to a man only a generation or so ^{away from} ~~out of~~ kilts, herself was just half-Scottish. "The other half," my father would claim when he judged that she was ~~x~~ 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

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^{Isaac}
 on the journey west, ~~he~~ arrived to North Dakota determined on a living
 from workhorses. The Great Northern railroad was pushing across the
 top of the ^{western} 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. ^{His} ~~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

wagon.") ~~A person can be fluent in other parts of the head than just the tongue, and within ~~weeks~~ ^{days} after sizing up the ~~Great Northern~~ ^{railroad} 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, ~~perhaps~~ ^{I guess}

~~I guess~~
~~was far for~~

~~sternally~~ ^{greatly} grateful to have had a father-in-law he both admired and

got entertainment from--and soon ^{Isaac} had his own teams and drivers working

~~subtle~~

on contract for the Great Northern.

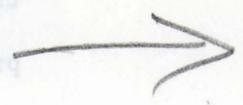
But When construction reached

the east face of the Rockies, the mountains held Isaac. Why, nobody ^{ever could figure out} in the family had any notion. Certainly in Denmark he must never have

seen anything ~~much~~ ^{barneyard} higher than a manure pile. But while his horses and men worked on west ^{through Marias Pass} as the railroad proceeded toward the coast,

Isaac stayed ~~on~~ at East Glacier and looked around. In a week or so ^{horsebacked} he ~~came~~ south along the mountains toward Gros Ventre and ^{out of that journey,} bought a

~~relinquishment~~



homestead

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

4/ Isaac Reese was either ~~very~~ ^{as hell} shrewd or ~~very~~ ^{as hell} lucky, even at my stage of life.

I am not entirely clear whether there is any appreciable difference

between the two. ~~But~~ ^{anyway} by whichever ~~higher~~ ^{here} guidance, he lit in a region

of Montana where ~~there were~~ ^{were standing in line} 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, ^{those} 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 ^{injected} put in at this point. She was Anna

Ramsay, teacher at the Noon Creek school. Her, I ~~know~~ ^{know} 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 ^{was} ~~is~~ the one standing and looking in charge, while

Isaac ^{sat} ~~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, ^{back there,} cast all the more into ~~the~~ shadow by my
 father's supply of stories about Isaac.

In a sense, the first of those ^{Isaac} 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~~ ^{ambush}
 and request my mother in marriage, Isaac greeted him at the door
 and before they were even properly sat down, had launched into a
 a whole evening of horse topics, Clydesdales and Belgians and Morgans
 and fetlocks and withers and ~~hocks~~ ^{hocks and pasterns.} and hooves. Never tell me a Scandinavian
 harbors no sense of humor.

no #

When my father at last managed to wedge the question in, Isaac
~~minimally~~ repeated as if he
 tried to look taken aback, eyed him hard and ~~said like~~
 was making sure:
 a ~~question~~ ^{question} "marriage?" Or as my father said Isaac pronounced it:
 "mare itch?" ^{# Isaac} 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~~ ^{that}. Then he got to his feet and loomed over my
 father. "Ve'll took one now, ~~then~~ ^{den.} And with ~~me~~ ^{Mason jar moonshine} 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 ~~in~~ 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 ^{even} discern a gradation, like layers on a cake, of ^{my} ~~my~~ shovelfuls of the ~~Two~~ ^{'s,} ~~country,~~ ^{'s,} ~~Monday,~~ ^{'s,} ~~Tuesday,~~ ^{'s,} ~~Wednesday,~~ and now today's light-chocolate top. ^{Damn} 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 ~~need~~ ^{cost} some effort, because I was getting down so deep the soil would ~~have~~ ^{need} 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



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axe in rhythm with a song of Stanley's about the gal named ^{Lou} ~~Lu~~ and what she was able to do with her wingwangwoo. ⁴ 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 ^{my cargo into the woodbox} ~~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 ^{it didn't exactly} ~~know~~ 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~~^{going} 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~~^{drew} me more of her attention than I bargained for. ~~was comfortable having.~~ "Uh, how many nights?"

I got quite a little braiding done in the silence that answered that, and when I finally figured I had to ~~look~~^{glance} 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, ^{is all.} 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 ^{in, uh, old times.}"

"What did he say about being ranger?"

"That he was the one ^{here} before Dad. And that he set up the Two
 as a national forest." It occurred to me to ^{try her on} ~~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?"

change of my hol

"For a while. Maybe a year."

"Is that where I remember ^{Stanley} ~~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 ^a ~~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."

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 ² mother took the notion. My father had been away ^{up there,} 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~~ ^{that trip take then?} ~~that~~ Now, in a car, it was a matter of ^{or three} 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, ~~I~~ ^{yes} 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

^{exactly} 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 helling 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. ~~See~~ Copenhagen. ~~My~~

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

Second Wife. She never thought ^{the name of} that one was as funny as ~~my~~ ^{Father} 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 helling 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 ^{nearly} 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 ~~even~~^{yet} 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 ~~was~~ ^{only} further inquiry about my grandparents, how Anna Ramsay and Isaac Reese first ^{happened to} ~~met~~ ^{meet} and when they'd decided to get married and so on. ^{But} ~~Some~~ somewhere a cog slipped, and what had fallen out of my mouth instead was: "Why'd you marry Dad?"

"Well, you know," I ^{now} ~~floundered~~ ^{searching} ~~looking~~ 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. ~~John Ramsey~~ 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?" [#] "I did know that chapter. That ^{when} ~~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, ~~she took over~~ in her mother's stead, the Noon Creek teacher. [#] "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. ^{Mac} 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. ^{That spring} ~~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 ^{last of} 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~~in~~ and Bet--and ^{then to} 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, ~~was~~ 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 ^a 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, ~~was~~ need I say. Oh, and there was this. I hadn't been around him or those other Scotch Heavensers while I was away at college,

and I'd lost the knack of listening to ~~their~~ ^{that} 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 ~~warr~~ ^{wearrr} and ~~burrr~~ ^{tearr} on my ~~back~~ lips. They 'rrre in prrrime condition, if you 'rrre everrr currrious.'

My father the flirt. Or ~~flirt~~ ^{flirr}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 apt term~~ ^{aptness} "fliberty." 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 come 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. ^{Jack,} But 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~~ ^{this}. But it did come out: "Mom, I know it all can't. But some?"

—

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 ^{pastured} put

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,
a bit. You can arrive into the ^{most scruffy} ~~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



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 ^{oasis} ~~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 ^{a park} an amenity than it had been, clearing out the willows which were taking over the creek bank and building ^{than laying in} some riprap ~~in~~ to keep the spring runoff out of the park. And someone during that WPA work came up with an idea I've ^{not} ~~never~~ seen before or since. There near the creek where ~~there~~ ^{crippled} a big ^{leaned--} cottonwood ~~stump~~ stood-- a windstorm had ripped off its main branches--a crew sawed the tree off low to the ground, leaving a ^{road} stump about two feet high; then atop the stump was built a speaker's pulpit, ~~was built atop the stump,~~ a slatted ~~square~~ round affair somewhat on the order of a ship's crow's-nest.

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The one and only time I saw Senator Burton K. Wheeler, who some people ~~in the audience~~ 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~~^{creekside} 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~~^{the} trees were snowing.

Fat old cottonwoods stood all along the arc between the park and the neighborhood, while younger ~~shar~~ trees were spotted here and there across the rest of the expanse, as if they had been sent out to be shade-bearers. ^{The day was moving into} There was just enough breeze 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 moving into

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, ^{thus} the summer ~~so~~ far had stayed ^{enough} 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. I had to traipse

around ^{somewhat} a ~~little bit~~, helling people and being helloed, before I spotted my mother and father, sharing shade and a spread blanket

with Pete and ~~Virginia~~ ^{Marie} 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

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." We took our Ereezers over ^{near} to the coffee-and-lemonade

One more
copy from
my sister
I did, even
need

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 ^{to} ~~who~~ suggested the system ~~3~~
 that instead of everybody and his brother showing up ^{at the Fourth armed} with ice creamers
 and coffee pots and jugs of lemonade, each part of the community take
 a turn in providing for all. ~~So now ~~second turns were taken~~ one year~~
 the families west of Main Street in Gros Ventre ~~would do~~ ^{did} 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~~ ^{finally} after us what was called
 last year of the rotation "the rest of Creation," the farm families from
 east and south ^{and north} of town and anybody else who didn't fit some other category.

So for ^{the next} 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 ~~it~~ ^{everybody'd eaten} 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~~ ^{begin}
 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 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 ~~came~~ ^{migrated} downstream ~~to~~ here to the park, so to speak. Preston and Peg Rozier. Charlie and Dora ~~Farrell~~ ^{Finletter}. 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 Frew. The Hills arrived last, while I was still inventorying ^{the crowd;} J.L.

together

here

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 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.

Wish do time

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. ⁴"Phony Nose Gorman," Toussaint was telling. "Is he one you remember?" ⁴My father shook his head: "Before my time." Much of Toussaint's lore was before anyone's time. ⁴"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 ~~in~~ 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 ^{Blackfoot} 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 →

8A

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 ^{steady} 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

Two Medicine

had to do with the point that the 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

Riel

region of Montana after the ~~Metis~~ rebellion in Alberta was put down

in 1885, but ~~when you counted~~ back across the decades, and you found that Toussaint already

had grown to manhood by the time were hanging
here in the Two country long before the Mounties had Louis Riel and

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

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

Marivether

and Clark expedition: "I come down from 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 ^{unmistakable} ~~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 Assiniboinés, 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." ^{Able to straddle} ~~Straddled~~ that way, Toussaint had a view into almost anything that happened ^{in the early Two country.} He was with the bull teams that brought the building materials for the original Blackfeet ^{Reservation} ~~agency~~ 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 ^{off the prairie} cowhides by the thousands. "That was what was left in this country by spring. More cowhides than cows."

more

11

He saw young Lieutenant John J. Pershing and his Negro soldiers
ride through Gros Ventre in ¹⁸⁹⁶ ~~1896~~, herding a few hundred ^{woebegone} Crees north

"Each ~~to~~ creek those
Birch Creek and Badger Creek
soldiers crossed, English Creek and ~~Badger Creek and Birch Creek~~

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

~~canals~~ ^{eighty-thousand acre} canals come to the prairie, the irrigation project that

built Valier from scratch in ¹⁹⁰⁹ ~~1909~~ and drew in trainloads of homesteaders--

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

Valier ^{there} ~~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

Toussaint leaned toward ^{Pete's wife} 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

Stop

in that family who could get along with him. Most of ^{Toussaint's} 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

own trouble my + 1 daughter

that the last few years of her life, Toussaint and his wife Mary didn't even live under the same roof ^{and ↓} whenever my father stopped by their place,

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

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, ^{and} only her black hair, which she wore shoulder-^{long}length, brought out the Blackfoot ~~and~~ ancestry and whatever ^{farther-east Indian} heredity it was that Toussaint transmitted. So her resemblance to ^{Toussaint} 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 ^{alike} similar in how each of them regarded life. As if they had seen it all before and ^{shared the amusement} were ~~wryly~~ amused that things were no better this time around.

dirty?

of the 4th year

But Toussaint's story of the first Fourth wasn't quite done. "↓

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

An Barclay's joint.

already an old man. ^{me.} 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."