translating his remarks from paper—this July Christmas stuff was originating from somewhere; had a kit come with the 'glory horns and microphone?—you could about soft-boil an egg between parts of his sentences.

"Anybody here from Great Falls?"

Quite a number of people yelled and waved their hands.

"Welcome to America!"

Out in the crowd there were laughs and groans. And most likely a real boon to business, Tollie some flinching in the Rotary beer booth; the merchants there knew cracking wise to 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, 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 from North Dakota to see the Gros Ventre rodeo were zero and none.

"That's right," blared Tollie. "If I—was you—I wouldn't—admit it—either."
be made out by all three watchers.

"Working like Finns 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.

"Laying up over the press there, Harpoons. These deep paddles out and kill whales."

Rare for him, Braaf was openly perturbed; his right leg jigged lightly in place, as if testing for run. Wennberg sought to look stolid, but Karlsson noticed him swallow at his own pebble of fear.

"And are trampled by the Russians."
Tollie spied 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 broncs 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--" 

"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 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.
Although like anybody out here I have seen many and many a rodeo, to me the arena events are never anything to write home special about. It's true that horse riding has its interesting moments, but basically the 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 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.

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 to sit through. I mean,

here'll come one guy out of the chute swinging a community loop an trot
could run through, elephant would come and the next guy will pitch a loop so

teeny that spitwad

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
guy's throw misses its mark: thereis the essence of calf roping.

There ought to be standards, such as making 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. "He must be roping in this section."

"So's everybody else in the world, it looks like."

Horsemen and hemp, hemp and horsemen. It was a wonder the combined swishing of the ropes of all the would-be 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 really 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?

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: 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.
The other strong roper, Vern Crosby, snagged his calf neatly, and a little trouble throwing him down for the tie, but then 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 moment came 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 himself squared away and will be ready in just--"

The calf chute and the break-out area where the 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 across: "Wrap him up pretty, Alec!"
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.

Capability was not what Melander sought out of Karlsson.
In time, he had noticed Karlsson dancing in Sitka sound, back from a
Across there, Alec appeared a little nervous, swinging his rope more than was necessary as he and the bay horse waited for their calf to emerge. But then I discovered I was kind of nervous myself, jiggling my foot on the corral pole, and I had no excuse whatsoever. You wouldn't catch me out there trying to snare a 75-pound animal running full-tilt.

The starter's little red flag whipped down, and the calf catapulted from the chute into the expanse of the arena. Alec's luck. Sometimes you had to think he held the 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, and Cal Petrie's big horse gained ground on him every hoofbeat. 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 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.
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 line in the air, the calf gargling out a bleat as the loop choked its neck and yanked it backward, Alec leaving the stirrups in his dismount. In a blink he was in front of the tall bay horse and scampering beside the line of rope the bay was holding taut, and now was upending the calf into the arena dust and now gathering calf legs and now whipping the pigging string around them and now done.

"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 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, "Thirty dollars, and supper at the Sedgwick House."

"Pretty slick," Ray admired. I had to think so myself. Performance is performance, whatever my opinion of Alec's venue of it. Later in the afternoon there would be another section of calf 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.
Tallie 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.

I will say for saddle bronc riding that it seems to me the one rodeo event that 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 commence—and—get started—the first—man out—will be Bill Semmler—on a horse—called—Connipption. In this—meanwhile—though—did—you hear—the one—about—the fellow—who went—into—the barber—shop—and—"

I never did get to hear Tallie's tonsorial 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 myself and dropped down the fence so that I had my arms clamped around both the top corral pole and Ray's hips. WHOMP! and a clatter.

Ray glommed tight to the pole with his hands. The impact of the pinto bucking horse slamming into the chute-end where our section of corral cornered into it went shuddering through us, as if a huge sledgehammer had 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.

"This little—Coffee Nerves—pinto—down at—chute six—has a couple of—fence squatters—hugging—the wood—pretty good!" Tollie was 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 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 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 Coffee Nerves was going to be cayusing 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 are an indication of corneriness in a horse. Worse, he was hog-eyed. Had small dart 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 mountainside.

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 furious 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 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 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 amount of brain as the horse, and they thus felt affinity a mental comradeship with him. Though whether Coffee Nerves, who was whanging a series of kicks to the chute lumber that I could feel up through the seat of my pants, was going to simmer down enough to accommodate with Earl Zane or anybody else remained an open question.
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 challenging.

Various geezers of the chute society were peering in at Coffee Nerves and chiming "Whoa, hoss" and "Here now, 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 legs wearing blue jeans and a rodeo shirt. Eventually maybe Arlee would duplicate Earl, brawny instead of overstuffed, but at present there just was too much of 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-shot the ding-dong of the world's bell.
"How about a bottle of something?" I proposed to Ray. The mental strain of being Zaniban 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 offhandedly report that I had seen the Withrow girls, 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.

"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 bucker who crowhopped down the middle of the arena in no particularly inspired way until the ten seconds 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 earth almost before the pair of them issued all the way out

the gate of chute two. Ham What Am continued 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.

"Let's give--this--hard-luck--a cowboy--a big--hand!" Tollie advocated. "Here sure--

00 sure--split a--long crack--in the air--that time."

"You guys see any crack 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 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 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 laughed further when the mare piled the contestant, a guy from Shelby, with its third jump.

"That Shirley--for a little gal--she's got a mind--of her own," bayed Tallie, evidently under the impression he was providing high humor.

Then, sooner than it seemed possible for him to have drawn loudspeaker sufficient breath for it, he was giving us the next announcing dose.
"Now here--is a rider--I have some acquaintance with. Getting
set—on chute number five—on Devil's Lad—Earl Zane.

Show them—how—Earl!"

So much for assumption. Earl had not drawn the pinto, and his participation in saddling it was only the Zane 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 face, just then.

"And here--he comes—-a cowboy—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 look around just as Earl was all set for him to buck. Then when it sank in on Earl that the horse wasn't bucking—
buckling and he altered the rhythm of his spurring to fit that situation, 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 the opposite stirrup. It was all over then, merely a matter of how promptly Earl would meet the arena dirt.

"Blew a stirrup," came from the chute society as Earl picked himself up off the earth and the whistle was heard. "Ought' ve filled the stirrups with chewing gum before he climbed on that merry-go-round."

Tollie, however, considered that we 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 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 whinny a sawblade of sound ripping the air; and smell, sweat and manure and anger in one mingled, mingling odor.

Coffee Nerves' hammering built up to a crash, a splay of splinters which sent the handlers sprawling away from the back of the chute, and then comparative silence: just the velocity of air through the pinto bronc's nostrils.

"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 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:

"This little bay pony—down in Six—is still—recalcitrant. The chute boys—are doing some—persuading—and our show—will resume—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, come 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 drone now was a real ear-cleaner. "Well--you see--this little boy--kept--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 Penny Thomps in it?"

"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-milk. 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.
to the barn and--got some--ladies, excuse my language--horse manure--

"Quick, mark that down," somebody called up to Bill Reinking. First
time Brainerd'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 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 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."
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
dark, a bray in Russian:
"Nothing fifteen drops won't cure!"
Karlsson's right elbow was being gripped by the largest hand in
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 at the 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 years ago, that I knew for a certainty Dode did not even break horses for his own use any more, but bought them saddle-ready from Tollie Zane. 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, 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.
"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 with its forefeet and kicked the air 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 pinto spot 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 good thing because Coffee Nerves already was uncorking another maneuver, this time swapping ends before crashing down in that 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 seconds, to give yourself some idea of the impact Dode was absorbing of him. He must have been getting Coffee Nerves' respect, bronc for now the exactly reversed the end-swapping he had just done, a trick almost guaranteed to unseat the rider leaning wrong. Yet Dode still was up there on top of 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 time raking the horse's shoulders with his spurs, both those actions fitting together exactly as if animal and man were in rhythm to the same unheard 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 cry seemed to help hold them there, a wave of sound suspending the pair 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 that news of Dode, having ridden Coffee Nerves, but the din that followed flooded over it.

I still believe that if Coffee Nerves had lit straight, as any sane horse would do descending from a jump like that, Dode would not have blown that right left stirrup. But somehow skewed himself half-sideways about the time he hit the ground: imagine now that the ground yanked itself to one side as you came 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 cattywampus into his next
buck, sidewise 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 a cloud of dust flew up from the form which thumped to
the arena surface.

The next developments smudged together. I do know
that I was 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 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, 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.
"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 through the loose arena dirt is marked in me only by the sound that reached us just as we reached Dode. The noise hit 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. For a confused instant I 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. People were scattering from the prospect of having Coffee Nerves out among them, but the bronc however had rebounded into the arena. Piling into that gatepost finally had knocked some of the spunk out of Coffee Nerves, which gave Dill Egan time to lasso him and the rope dally around a corral post.

That 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 look in past the arms and legs of all the 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 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 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 warpath-like after that. I thought of the razzing Dode was going to take from Sam forced landing of his:

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 led into exit through what was left of the catch pen gate. Instead, Toussaint was standing there, gazing 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. 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 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.
We were riding past the Medicine Lodge, which had its front door propped 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, 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 say anything, but I could feel his curiosity as to why we were stopped in the middle of the street. Nor was it anything I could put into words for him. Instead I 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 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 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 just better watch his step or there was gonna be
a new face in 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
lines 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
a rare view of the coast ahead. What they saw was this: a shattered
east of headlands, shadowed by seastacks like steepled churches, like
vast hayracks, like great shipsails and dark tunnel mouths; sea rock
like a field of icebergs.

rethink that a bit by Melander's josh that New Archagel'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, Karlsson
minded New Archangel life a good deal less than any of the others
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. 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.
visible to people any more, like a planet studied by one of those California telescopes?

"Yeah, well... How you been?"

"Fine as snot, 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."

"On the wagon, huh? I've climbed 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 a traveler 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's liquid wants.

"When you get time, professor. And a sunjuice for my nurse, here."

Tom Raoul studied me. "He with you?" he asked Stanley.

"Hair and me," barked to the bartender.

"Closer than kin, Stanley solemnly assured. "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.

"Stanley," I started again. He was pushing coins out of a little pile, to pay for the 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 no self-incriminating count 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 toward the door with advice from Stanley: "Step easy, buddy. Don't you hurt yourself. 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. Might as well 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? 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't but fly, I flavor my beans with snoopse!" In an instant, Tom Harry was there leaning over the bar, 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 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 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--"
"What's here on the back of you, then?" he demanded.

Braaf glanced dully up toward the blacksmith. Slipping his arms from the Alut parka, he brought the garment around for a look.
All this while I was 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 in our direction.

I half-turned on the bar stool to cope with this interloper and gazed full into the face, not all that many inches away, of Velma Sims.

I must tell you, it was like opening a kitchen drawer to reach in for a jelly spoon and finding 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 garner further that her lips, the very lips that ruled the rodeo whistle, were the beautiful darkness-beyond-red of ripe cherries. And that she was wearing tiny pearl earrings, under the chestnut hair, as if her ears could be unbuttoned to further secrets even there.

And that while the male population of northern Montana was focusing on the backside of her blue jeans, they were missing important announcements could be found up front. Sure, there were a few battlelines at the corners of her eyes and across her forehead, but they simply seemed to testify that Velma was the world's only.
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.

"I am a slow starter, but eventually I catch up with the situation."

My quick gawk around the saloon confirmed what had been 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 the world's gift to mankind wasn't smugly right there beside him. "The night's still a pup."

"Uh huh. That's true, but--"

"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 Ozberskoi. He looked big as an ox. Swatted salmon out of the water and scoffed them down belly-first."

Melander pretended to ponder. "I think it was well you didn't invite him for supper tonight. He might have turned up his nose at that sea beast we've just put into ourselves."

Molander'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." 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, she then spoke her answer to me, although she didn't unlock her gaze from him at all as she said it: "Stanley and I will have to see whether we have any spare time."

So. One more topic in my already bent-over brain. Stanley Meixell and Velma Croake Bogan Sutter Simms.
"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 6:50—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 thought I'd broach to him some of all that was on my mind.

"Didn't I tell you? Pilot."

"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."

"Woe is me."

"I can't help it. With all the things I have to do—"
"What kind of things?"

"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?"

"Hey, that's just grown-ups. They're not going to tell a kid in on anything, until they figure it's too late to do him any good."

"But why is that? What is it that's so goddammm 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 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, proferring the hootchina jug.

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 squinted more than ever as he worked on his notion, and the big front teeth nipped his lower lip in concentration. "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, you'd stop and think some more. 'But if I go for a ride, where will I go?' Ray was coming deep and 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."
"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 soothes as it works."

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 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 every evening and picking up his supper fork at 10 after 6 and clicking on that Philco radio at 6:30, on into eternity. Genevieve would go on keeping this house shining and discovering new sites for doilies. Mary Ellen
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.
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 order of the begettings in the Bible. The Heaneys were not even anywhere close similar, the McCaskills, and I lacked the language to talk about any of the difference, even to my closest friend.