39 B

beer liquors cigars

meals at all NORTHERN HOTEL lunches

Hours put up

c.e. sedgwick, prop.

"Looks like it could kind of use a prop," all right, Stanley observed to a bib-overalled ~~man~~ idler leaning against one of the porch posts. Who turned out to be the exact wrong person to make that joke to: C.E. Sedgwick himself.

"If my enterprise don't suit you," Sedge huffed, "you can always bunk down there in the diamond willows," indicating the brush at the bend of English Creek.

"How about," Stanley offered, "me being a little more careful with my mouth, and you giving me a second chance as a customer?"

Sedge hung ~~a~~ his thumbs ~~in~~ into his bib straps and considered. Then decided: "Go entirely mute and I might adopt you into the family. Bring your gear on in."

The Northern burned in the dry summer of 1910. Although according to old-timers, "burned" doesn't begin to say it. Incinerated, maybe, or conflagrated. For the Northern blaze took the rest of the block with it and threatened that whole end of town; if there had been

drowsy, a blinking child somehow high as a man. Wennberg sat with a grunt, at once fed more wood to the breakfast fire as if stoking a forge for the day.

. . . May as well, get it behind us. . .

"I'll show you what we face." As the other two slurped the first of their tea, Karlsson opened the map case and pulled out the fourth map.

~~2 Xerox~~

original town
description — final
version is trimmed down

Marilyn--in typing up this hotel sign, leave out the penciled stuff: Northern Hotel and the long H and P.

40 Bb

a whisper of wind, half of Gros Ventre would have become ash and a memory. Sedge being Sedge, people weren't surprised when he decided to rebuild. After all, he went around in those overalls because what he really liked about being a hotelier was the opportunity to be his own maintenance man. But what Sedge erected still sat, this Fourth when I was atop Mouse, across the end of Main Street as a kind of civic astonishment--a three-story fandango in stone, quarried from the gray cliffs near where English Creek joins the Two Medicine River; half a block square, this reborn Sedgwick hostelry, with round towers at each corner and a swooping pointed ornament in the middle, rather like the spike on those German soldiers' helmets. Even yet, strangers who don't know that the Pondera country courthouse is twenty-five miles east in Conrad assume that Sedge's hotel is it. Sedge in fact contributed to the civic illusion by this time not daubing a sign all across the front of the place. Instead, only an inset of chiseled letters rainbowing over the entranceway:

I C K

W H

G O

D U

E S

S E

center on the page

. . . Melander. Melander fathered this, and I've to get on with it. So. Do I . . .

Karlsson knew he was not so wide a thinker as Melander. Come all the way to it, he and Braaf and Wennberg together probably were not that spacious. Melander's province of interest had been this entire coastline, and whatever joined it over beyond the bend of the world. "A roomy shore, this, aye? Here's where you needn't open

Sedge sold out in 1928, to a family from Seattle who seemed to somehow eke a living out of that big gray elephant of a hotel even after hard times hit. (Even during the Depression, whatever travelers there were had to sleep someplace, I suppose.) About 1931 Sedge died of pleurisy, and almost as if she'd been waiting just offstage, his widow emerged as probably Gros Ventre's most well-to-do citizen and certainly its looniest. Lila Sedgwick was a tall, bony woman. Her build always reminded me of Abraham Lincoln. Almost any day she could be seen downtown three or four times, ~~other~~ some days six or eight, for she no sooner would get home than she would forget ~~she had~~ about having just gone for the mail or on some other errand and would go for it again. In her long old-style dresses and with ~~that~~ those Lincoln ~~from~~ arms and elbows poking out she inevitably was a figure of fun, although the one and only time I said something smart about her my mother's frown closed me down in a hurry.

"Lila Sedge is not to be laughed at," she said, not in her ~~whetstoned voice~~ but just sort of instructively. "The clouds have settled on her mind."

I don't know where ~~she~~ my mother got that, but always after when I would

see Lila Sedge, creeping along ~~the~~ this street for the third time in an hour or gandering up at a cottonwood tree as if she's never encountered one before, I would wonder about how it was to have a clouded mind. Somewhere in there, I supposed, a bruise-colored thunderhead that was Sedge's death. Maybe mare's tails high away in the past where she was a girl. Fluffs which carried faces--aunts, uncles, schoolmates, any of us she happened to meet on the street— in and out of her recognition. Until my mother's words about Lila Sedge I had never thought of the weather of the brain, but more and more I have come to believe in it.

~~Anyway. If the Sedgwicks, C.M. and Lila, provided Gros Ventre its most notable structure and its most public figure, Tom Harry at the Medicine Lodge and Mae Sennett at the Lunchery offered it internal sustenance.~~

But enough on that. The Sedgwicks and their namesake hotel provided Gros Ventre its one titanic building and its roving human landmark. The pair of enterprises side by side south across the street from the Sedgwick House ministered to the town internally.

Since families hardly ever ate out in those days there were only two feeding places in Gros Ventre, and the other one besides the dining room of the Sedgwick House was the Luncheryx run by Mae Sennett. For any eater more interested in quantity than quality, the Lunchery was your place.

no9 Although this was before my time, I have heard from different sources that in its early days the Lunchery moment, at the , or whatever name it was under had a sign on the wall reading: Meals 50¢

Big feed 75¢

Hell of a gorge $1

no41 In short, the Lunchery's main claim to fame was that it made the Sedgwick House menu look dainty and delectable by comparison. Yet its pedigree as a going business went most of the distance back to Gros Ventre's origins; the building had begun as the stagecoach station. Toussaint Rennie perhaps was the only person old enough to still call the place the Way Stop, but guys of the next generation had the habit of calling it the Fargo House, and my father and his generation mostly referred to it as the Doozy, from when a man named Deuce Harrison ran it.

To me, though, it was the Lunchery, and Lunchery lore was a kind of an attention-getting spice, seasoning in the history of Gros Ventre. The most famous tale was that once when somebody asked an old sheepherder when he was going back out among the woolies, he said he was washed up at that, too creaky to tramp the mountains, but he figured he could always get a job herding flies at the Lunchery.

I think that exaggerates. The occasional times when I would be with my father ~~and~~ when he was on Forest Service meal money, traveling back late from Great Falls or someplace, his suggestion of "Let's go try the Doozy" never did us any real culinary harm, that I know of. Of course, that may have had something to do with the fact that what both of us always ordered, oyster stew, came from a can. I can see that deep bowl yet, the milk yellowing from the blob of butter melting in the middle of it, and if Mae Sennett was doing the serving herself she always ~~warned~~ warned "Watch out for any oysterberries," by which she meant those tiny pearls that sometimes show up.

I have to say, I still am not truly comfortable eating in any restaurant that doesn't have that ~~yellowing~~ tired ivory look to its walls that the ~~Sedgwick House cafe~~ Lunchery did. A proof that the place has been in business longer than overnight and at least has sold decent enough food that people keep coming back.

Normally, that is.

and chatted with one another.

The fact that the Lunchery and the Medicine Lodge saloon shouldered side by side provided Gros Ventre its "rough" section of town in the thriftiest manner possible. ~~I'd say~~ I would calculate that in Great Falls, it took about four blocks of First Avenue South to add up into a neighborhood of similar local notoriety. Actually, as with any pleasure emporium the wickedest thing about the Medicine Lodge was its reputation. The leading Medicine Lodge story was of ~~the~~ any innocent visitor reacting in alarm when the bartender, tall Tom Harry, leaned toward him and rumbled: "Shoot you one?" All that was being asked, though, was whether the customer wanted a glass of beer drawn from the tap.

The Medicine Lodge had waited out Prohibition behind boarded windows, but Tom Harry more than brought it back to light and life. ~~And~~ Also, maybe after those dry years the town was thirsty for a saloon with a bit of flair. He had come over from running a bar, and some said a taxi dance joint as well, at the Fort Peck dam project. Supposedly all he brought with him was a wad of cash and the picture of Franklin Delano Roosevelt which had adorned the wall of his Fort Peck enterprise. ~~Those~~, But also, as it proved out, along with him came a ~~and his own~~ set of invisible rules of saloon behavior, which every so

often somebody would stray across. I think of the night when my father and I were entering the Medicine Lodge, and met a stranger with a cigar in his mouth being forcibly propelled into the street. It turned out that although Tom Harry himself went around under a blue cigarette haze--tailormades; no Fort Peck bartender ever had time to roll his own--he would not tolerate cigar smoke. Be that as it may, in the Medicine Lodge FDR was promptly joined on the wall by a minor menagerie of stuffed animal heads Tom Harry acquired from somewhere. Several buck deer and an antelope and a mountain sheep and a bobcat snarling about the company he was in; not to mention the six-point elk head which set off arguments every hunting season about how much his absent body would weigh. In itself, this taxidermy herd populated the Medicine Lodge considerably.

But the ~~Medicine Lodge~~ place also held a constant legion of the living, more or less. The setters, as my father called the six or eight guys who sat around in there--he was not above stepping in for a beer after our Lunchery meal, and if nobody official-looking was on hand Tom Harry didn't seem to mind my being with him--the setters always occupied the stools at the far end of the bar, and anybody who entered got long gazes from them as if they were cataloguing the human race.

~~AB~~ 47

~~Immediately~~ decapitated animals and owlish geezers do not, I realize, sound like much of a decor. And yet the Medicine Lodge did three times as much business as Spenger's or the Pastime, both much more "respectable" places back downtown. I suppose it is and ever will be the habit of the race: people gravitate to a certain place to do their drinking and logic will never veer them. At least one night a week in the Medicine Lodge, ~~in fact,~~ gravitation amounted to something more like an avalanche. Every Saturday night, thirsts converged there from everywhere in the Two country. Hay hands who had come in for a bath and haircut at Shorty Stott's but decided instead to wash down the inside of themselves. Entire shearing crews one time of year, lamb lickers (as guys who worked in lambing sheds were known) another. Any season, a sheepherder in from the mountains on the Reservation inaugurating a two-week spree. (Not least among the reasons that those bands of sheep were trailed through town at dawn was that the Medicine Lodge wasn't yet open to waylay herders.)

Government men from reclamation projects. Maybe a few Double W cowpokes. Definitely the customary setters, who had been building up the calluses on their elbows all week just for this. Always a sufficient cast of characters for loud dialogues, occasional shoving matches, and eventual passing-outs. So maybe you couldn't get away with cigar smoke in the Medicine Lodge, but you could with what counted.

E'burgh: ½hr in rare book dealers, Wes fondling 1st editions of Sir Walter Scott--finally bought a scrap from Asphodel(?), Scott's own handwriting in contretemps with an editor.

--At her insistence (she wanted to watch him at it) they go into the rare book dealers? She teased him into it, and he passed an eager half hour fondling

--prostitute in a close calls out to them, "He could eat dinner off the front of me and i wouldn't mind, dearie." W's face went hot, but S only laughed, in what sounded like anticipation.

Billings begins a long way out from itself, these days. Scatterings of housing developments and roadside businesses and billboards promising more enterprises ahead started showing up 9 miles before the city. The Yellowstone River shies out of the picture by veering south, and so the profiles of the hotels and banks against the rimrocks are the feature. Money moved here during the boom in oil and coal, but I wouldn't know whether it's true everywhere, but Montana cities do okay for a while and then take an awful whacking when the resources around them run out--Butte and its copper, Great Falls and the smelter for that copper.

From what I can judge, the CCC was like a lot of those New Deal programs--it was short of perfect, so it was criticized as worthless. But if anything, I have wished since that the CCC ~~was less successful~~ hadn't been the success it was in some respects, such as the trails those work crews of the earlier years built into the Two. They opened up a lot of country which a person should have had to earn his way into, by roughing it... This was part of my father's mixed feelings, ~~mine~~ too. The ~~improved~~ improved trails would be a help ~~equipment~~ in getting equipment in to fight fires, as they were meant to be, but also any lamebrain with a 2 license plate can find his way up a mountain now.

March

He arrived on the Kootenai in the middle of the fire season of 1914 and saw at once that his main job was going to be lookout stations. "I remember one place we thought we might put a ~~ik~~ lookout was in the upper valley of Libby Creek. It wasn't much of a peak but it set out away from most of the rest of the country and gave a good view of some of the side drainages, so I told the ranger there to build a crow's nest in a big old tamarack on top of there and we'd try it out for a few years, so I went out to have a look and went up with him -- he'd drove railroad spikes into the trunk as a kind of ladder -- to this little deck he'd built around the top of the tree about 60 feet up from the ground. I got up there and discovered he hadn't provided any way to get onto this platform except over the edge, but we both snaked our way on okay and were up there looking the country over with field glasses when a little squall came over the back side of the mountain and blew like all hell for about half an hour. That tamarack started swaying back and forth about 20 feet and the pair of us sitting up on that platform without anything to hold onto except the trunk of the tree, ~~and~~ we pretty near squeezed that off. Then when the squall blew out and I started to go down I had to swing out over the side and dangle my feet in the air to find one of those railroad spikes. I looked up at that white faced young ranger and said, "Son, I'll get a lookout building crew in here tomorrow."

JB was on the stack. He was taking the place of the stacker Pete had had for a lot of previous years, Wisdom Johnson...(whereabouts of Wisdom?) I have ever wondered: Did Pete tend naturally toward strange types atop his haystacks, a kind of alfalfa roulette, or did all stackers simply have a warp in them? Wisdom Johnson had been quite a lot of candlepower short of being the brightest guy that ever came along...and now here was this Jim Bill specimen. The situation was complicated too by the fact that the man on the stack was the prime guy of a haying crew; he got a dollar more a day than anybody else and when you think about it, the whole haying season was shaped by him, every one of the dozens of house-high haystacks built according to his way with a pitchfork. With a ranch like Pete's putting up 000 tons of hay, a stacker had to be terrifically strong--which was Wisdom Johnson's case; he had muscles in places that didn't even seem theoretically possible--or damn clever. Jim Bill, I hate to say, was at nudging loads of hay into place. both.

"Okay if we dance, is it?"

The ~~bar lady~~ shrugged. "A lot worse than that's happened in here."

Riley punched a button on the jukebox and out began to come:

Ohhh whiskey, if you were a women, I'd fight you and I'd win,

Lord knows I would.

Ohhh whiskey, if you were a women, I'd drive you from his

tangled mind for good.

Talk about a tangled mind. Mine was a clump of rusty barbwire and tumbleweeds right then. There they were, Mariah and Riley, the pair that had torn themselves apart three years ago, dancing as if they'd been to the same school for it. I wanted to believe that in the war of love dancing doesn't count, but I know better.

Gros Ventre didn't have itself any great snorting tales of history, as Virginia City with its vigilantes or Butte with its copper kings or Helena with its gold strikes. Not that the town hadn't seen happenings out of the ordinary. Lieutenant Jack Pershing and his Negro troopers herding a woebegone band of Crees north to push them back across the border in 1896; Toussaint Rennie, who of course had been on hand, claimed that Crees squirted away into the brush and freedom every time the expedition crossed a creek, but he may have just been upholding the Cree side of things. World War One, when young Montana men in uniform died in astounding numbers; it wasn't until long after that it was discovered an error had been made in the state's draft quota, and that ten percent of the entire population of Montana ended up in uniform. The influenza epidemic during that war; my mother could remember the Sedgwick House hotel being made into an emergency hospital, and a truck being used as a hearse, four or five caskets at a time on its flatbed. Almost before the epidemic was over, the winter of 1919 arrived and stayed for six terrible months.

In my own time, I could remember the Depression, those years of the 1930's when commodity prices and rainfall simultaneously all but

Across the road, stretching up to the butte horizon, was a great panel of irrigated hayfield called The Bar. Ditches twisted through its full length, and Rudy would spend most of the day changing gates, sluicing water one place and letting a ditch overflow another. Alfalfa grew in a rich dark green. Moving the haying crew to ~~Putting up hay on~~ the bar was like parading to another province of the ranch. The machinery strung out in clattering file -- dump rakes pulled by horses, a horse buckrake, the power buckrake, a pickup or two, then finally the stacker, bumping and swaying, a great scaffold somehow walking itself across the prairie. It took three weeks or more to put up the hay on the bar, the crew and machines ~~edging~~ inching their way little by little across the panel of earth.

The summer pasture lay two days' trail to the west, in a set of Mountains called the Dry Range. The only water on the entire mountain was a piped spring, with a wooden storage tank and trough. It was ~~steep~~ hard country, ~~up~~ entirely up and down, and lonely, ~~the loneliest I have ever been~~ to. It was in the Dry Range that one of ~~herders~~ McGrath's herders, not sufficiently dried out from a drunk, went snakey and and began running the hills naked. He was sitting on a log ~~naky~~ playing

~~[illegible] herder~~ McGrath ~~[illegible] him and took him to town and [illegible]~~

My summer after high school, the wind flung itself ~~across~~ onto the farmland day upon steady day. As I aimed the tractor up a field, grit stung directly into my face; going down the field, the wind would swirl it in over my shoulder. When I tacked the equipment around a corner, the dust came sideways for the corners of my eyes. The tractor stopped at day's end, the wind would blow up along my body as I climbed down, the dust puffing up the length of my chest into my face. The hell, I spat; books don't blow dust at you all day long.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES TRAINING CENTER FOR CORRECTIONS

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FINAL REPORT

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PREPARED BY: William T. Adams, Project Director
Langston D. Tabor, Project Coordinator
Claudia E. Baker, Project Secretary
Margaret O'Neil, Project Evaluator

Training Section, Division of Institutions
Department of Social and Health Services
Olympia, Washington

There is drama. July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary of American independence. The very heavens seem to cut loose. At 00, Thomas Jefferson dies at Monticello. At 00, the second old titan of young America, John Adams, dies in 00. Amid the thunderclaps of history, Robert Owen rises before a crowd of 000 at New Harmony and delivers the Declaration of Metnal Indpenendence. The day lacks only the trumpets of herald angels.

There is the point that utopias have been attractive to writers. The English poets Southey and Coleridge were infatuated with Pansocracy. Coleridge rolled into his poetry the name of the promised river -- quote Susquehanna -- enthused : Quote about making money.

And there is a lovely incident recorded from the life of the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge which shows just how stunning the utopian prospect in America could be. When Taylor and his fellow poet Robert Southey were undergraduates in 1794 -- futilely, as it turned out -- they were dazzled by a proposal called pantisocracy, which they dreamed of implanting in America Coleridge, enchanted enough vowed to implant the new United States. After talking with a land agent, Coleridge wove into a poem the site recommended by worthy advisor that shrewd American: "...Yet will L love to follow the sweet dream/Where Susquehanna pours his untamed stream..." But it is in a scrap of prose, a line from a letter to Southey, that Coleridge bursts forth with ~~the~~ Aua' grandest beckon of ~~America~~ all: "That literary characters make money there."

Time was doing it for me. This day was my sixty-fifth birthday.

I utterly knew the saying: you start to die when you are born. Death is a lifelong process, so to speak, the years our doses of reward for going toward the inevitable. Yet there are instants when the last of life appears closer, breathes nearer. Remembering how death could have happened to me in the Aleutians was such a moment.

Yet
But the fact that I was upright on the ground, there at a prairie museum of battle, instead of interred at Cold Mountain was the spark to go on. Maybe the momentum of life slows as the years add up on it, but it continues.

All the past. Any one life has so much in it, and you multiply that by how many people there have ever been, and there's just no chance we can ever savvy more than bits and pieces of all that's happened.

Yet I have always been fascinated with yestertime. I take after my father in that, and if it is so strong in the two of us, maybe the yen for the past is a McGaskill trait that goes far back.

Shelby wasn't the absolute least logical place for the fight; they could have tried to stage it at the North Pole. Anyway, the notion was that people were going to flock in from everywhere to watch two guys try to pound each other's brains out.

In Doc Kearns, Dempsey's manager, the Shelbyites were dealing with a guy who knew the exact number of hairs on the buffalo on a nickel.

The arena was quite a deal. Bleacherx seats built out of brand-new lumber, rising straight up out of the prairie. The boxing ring down there in the middle like the hub of a wheel. (improve)

Shelby got both worst ends of the deal. Only about a third as many people showed up as expected, but the crowd that did come knocked down the fence and flooded in for free.

Stanley and me figured Gibbons had a good chance. Your mother told us not to be silly. That got our betting blood up, so we each bet her five dollars. Of course she cleaned us out. Your mother and Jack Dempsey both--Stanley and I ought to have known we were gonna get our clocks cleaned.

While they went centennialing again, I damn well was going swimming. The RV park's pool had been a marble of cool color at the edge of my sight ever since we pulled in; the chance for a plunge was just too much.

It was a mistake for humanity ever to come ashore and ambulate. I feel at home in the water in a way earth and air do not provide. Every tip of the body in unison, the exertion of the stroking arms and legs quickening the blood within just as the body propels through the water--the flow within a flow is a doubling of life, it seems to me. I was taught to swim by my father, in the beaver dams of the North Fork where he himself had learned. "Stands to reason," he maintained, "a person's bound to catch the knack from the beavers." Jesus, but that was an age ago, a world ago. Between laps now I stood for breath at the shallow end of the pool and I could not but be aware of the gray hair wetly furring my chest. Not to mention the gray summit on my head and the new white beard. I am silvering, like a tree snag being weathered by season after season.

I erupted from one transit of the pool to the sight of two sets of feet and legs, small and smaller. A girl, maybe ten years old, in

a boy splashing like the first discoverer of water.

Shannon and Peter had to know which rig was mine, and wasn't I married, and didn't I have any kids, and as soon as that was worked through they confided that they were traveling with their grandparents and that their granddad was uptown getting transmission work done because the trailer home he was pulling was too much for his 3/4 ton pickup--

"He needs to have a tonner," Petey said expertly.

Shannon swam like a blond minnow, Petey dogpaddled with an energy that would have lit up a tall building.

"Let's do funny dives," Shannon decreed to Petey. She of course went first. A small plane was passing over. "Hi, Mister Airplane!" she called out. "I'm an airplane too!" Making rumm rumm noises, she extended her arms like wings and hit the pool in an impressive crash landing.

"And I'm a...I'm a..." Petey was squinched with ~~desperate~~ acute thought until he hit upon "I'm a horse!" and with a prance and a whinny he splatted in after her.

"Jick, you do one," Shannon urged me.

"Yeah, do!" chimed Petey.

"Aw, I'm kind of old for--" The flicker of disappointment in their

The undersheriff Peyser was privately enjoying the sheriff's agitation. Moeller, the undersheriff from the Hinsdale end of the county, and Tate, the jail deputy in Glasgow, both had been yanked in and stationed here today by the sheriff. If any crook wanted to walk off with Valley County other than Fort Peck, today was the day.

Sheriff Kinnick scowled at the poker-faced Peyser and then the other two lunkheads, trying to think how to make best use of three men against a crowd of thousands. Mostly what the sheriff wanted to have happen, only Roosevelt himself could achieve: a short harmless presidential appearance at the back end of the train, accept a bouquet and kiss Miss 4-H Beef on the cheek, and scoot back inside the railroad car. Even doing it that way wouldn't be bulletproof, but

Slowly they each put a hand down on the other to where things begin.

Slowly their hands moved down on each other to where things begin.

That it had taken this long, had needed...

The domestic map of the Duffs (never ran smooth)

Nothing ran smooth. Only slowly they had noticed the awareness of it in each other... Like sharing a sense of smell particularly hearing. What registered on them was (the attraction of each other). Was it their fault that the domestic map had (altered)? worn through at a fold seam?

What was at home was not this. Not any more. Hadn't been for

They told themselves

Careful at family gatherings, careful at OO, they'd nonetheless known.

Plural of spouse is spice... Each wanted half a different proportion mate more, (less) silence,

They were taking the oldest human route to get there, argument, support, aim... the map that led to bed.

Maybe it was the OO of time, by the end of next year all or most of them would be somewhere else,

O'Connell the left-wing Congressman, the sheriff happily saw, had an expression on him like he'd been drafted into the wrong army.

Owen was surprisingly well-geared for deskwork. He could take the hours, drafting, figuring, and turn them into... He was something like a clerk of ideas. The Corps officers didn't like it that he was touchy, but were enamored of his mix of diligence and imagination.

Turn Owen loose on the fill ratios, say, the disposition of the dredges and he wove a blend of soils,

Sangster had about accomplished his bridge. It stepped across the Missouri on four miles of stilts, a mid-air miracle of railroading.

The bridge was born doomed, to be encompassed by the damfill as it rose...

Sangster received a lot of / Snagster took some ribbing about that, engineering something durable / permanent enough to be obliterated, but he would simply invite them to transport anything bigger than a pocketknife to Fort Peck without using his railroad.

A way to think of Owen's earthfill is an hourglass. Tip it end for end to start the trickle of sand, and the grains of sand are seconds of time; they mount up into minutes, and then the total hour. In Owen's dam, the seconds are the "fines," the sand that locks together imperviously; when a glance at the pile tells you minutes have passed, that equals the more coarse material; the hour-pile itself is the shell over all else, the impervious cupping the impervious core down into place. Time

A

containing...
pyramid-shaped container of time, to withstand the river.

Timber was being taken on the Kootenai under a homesteading provision. Claim after claim was being ~~[illegible]~~ listed as farmstead, logged off and abandoned. Stanley invited Regional Forester Silcox up for a look. He took Silcox to a tract on Quartz Creek where "homesteaders" were cutting clean a magnificent stand of yellow pine. Stanley led Silcox up a clearcut side hill and let him look down, Silcox asked, "This is a homestead listing?"

"~~Yup~~ Yeah," said Stanley, "a pumpkin homestead."

"Pumpkin homestead? What the hell you talking about?"

"Well, ~~sirs~~ Sir, I don't know what anybody'd use this for unless they'd grow pumpkins on it and when the pumpkins got ripe why they'd just go along and cut 'em loose and let 'em roll down to the bottom of this hill and harvest 'em from there." Don't you know?

He never did like the harness that went with being a ranger. The outside part of the job suited him fine, but the paperwork, any of the desk hours, all the being in charge of gear and equipment, that part of it pinched him.

. having to account for

Two days, rain blinded the coast. The men huddled under the shelter of sailcloth. You would believe it to be a time of long thoughts. Of sorting back, and ahead. But jitter afflicted them both. . .

own almanac, you might say. That being true, our specific chunk of the Rockies, the Two country, seemed to us a special gold-leaf edition: positioned as it was along the east slope of the divide of the continent, its water and welfare touching out to the plains. In spring, with the Two opening itself in newness and promise wherever you happened to glance, I believe that my father could not imagine any better neighborhood of the planet.

And finally summer. Well, we were embarking on summer now, and how it would turn out I truly could not imagine. Nor did it come any clearer to me in that span of time from supper until my father said See you in sunshine and we both turned in.

The exodus stories had been coming out of the High Line for years, tales about the furniture-loaded jitney trucks with farewells painted across their boxboards in big crooked letters: GOODBY OLD DRY and AS FOR HAVRE YOU CAN HAVE 'ER.

4 As I say, so many now gone.

nop Some went fast. By Christmas of that same year Toussaint Rennie had passed away. Perry Fox followed him before the winter was over. Pneumonia, both of them.

And something I still have trouble believing whenever I picture Dode Withrow atop that Coffee Nerves bronc. It was the very next June, 1940, that he and Pat Hoy were trailing the sheep up onto the Two and Dode called over to his herder, "I got a touch of heartburn, I'm going to sit down over here a minute." When Pat came back to see what had become of him, Dode was crumpled against the tree where he sat, his hands clutching his chest, already dead.

"How those people in the cities get by, I don't know," Stanley mused. "Not that I'm total sure they ought to. But hell, a country big as this, you'd think we ought to be able to manage a living for everybody out of it somehow."

Stepping out a door somehow seemed to change my father, tip his head higher and brace his shoulders straighter, and the farther he went from a house the more he looked like he knew what he was doing. You could see him feeling the Two Medicine country when he was at work out in it. This is hard to put into words; you would know what I am trying to say if you could have seen him...

The closest I can come is to phrase it that the land somehow touched into him; the way, maybe, that when you are barefoot in a creek the mud comes into the space between your toes. However it got there, an awareness of the land flowed up through my father...

scene to come: landfall, though the fog still is thick enough they can't make out where they are.

I believe I was about three, maybe four, when my father was assigned to English Creek and we came back up here. Alec said he remembered a little about the couple of Copperopolis years and the intervening year when my father was at Region One headquarters in Missoula, but I don't at all. The Two is the footing of my memory. Literally, for the earliest recall I have is of the ~~Meriwether Peak~~ Feather Woman fire. The commotion that swept through the English Creek station then is in my mind as a kind of album of scenes, trucks and cars bringing loads of men, and then the line of them through ~~our~~ the kitchen, and next, my mother's food, stoking up on ~~in them~~ and next, the sight of them all hiking off in long file up the north fork trail. Right after them, packstrings on their way past, which must have been my first sight of Isidor and Gabe Pronovost although ~~I didn't know~~ of course didn't realize that at the time. The smoke clouded the west for I don't know how many days.

more

Just now Braaf was the one of them to speak that dialect called if.

"Why's this deserted? If it is."

"Likely they do as the Kolosh," Melander guessed. "Hunt from a summer village right around here, in winter pull back to a main village somewhere."

In the dusk, eagle poised eternally atop bear. Whale stood on end in dive through contorted lesser creatures. One being, possibly frog the size of calf, pranced merrily upside down. Every sort of winkless forest changeling, they goggled in unison at the backs of the retreating men.

Later, the others breathing their rhythms of night beside the fire, Melander could not find sleep. His memory was at a New Archangel market morning, hubbub of Sitka Kolosh and three or four dozen visiting tribesmen from somewhere to the north. Amid the newcomers hawking their wares squatted a seam-faced carver. Word had rippled through the settlement about this man's daggers: blades of power with each hilt carved as the rising neck of some alarming beast. The head topping a hilt-neck sometimes would be a bear with glinting abalone inlays of eyes and nostrils and teeth, sometimes a long-faced wolf, again a great-toothed beaver; always, angled and fierce and magical as dragons.

The interpreter Dobzhansky tried to converse with the northern carver. Dobzhansky's first question received answer, then the native stayed silent. Melander inquired what had been said. Dobzhansky related that he had asked how many years it took to attain such skill.

use in ch. 3

I believe case was a- Maybe some accents for this

In a sense, the Two was McCaskill homeland as well as my father's job territory. Each and every one of us first saw light of day in the Two, my father there at the North Fork homestead before it became Hebnerized, my mother at the Reese ranch on Noon Creek, Alec and I on the old Ramsay homestead ~~which~~ that had become part of that ranch--

which has always allowed me to brag that I came into the world in a homestead shanty, though the Ramsay place actually had a fairly substantial house. I am told that it was only a few months after my advent that my father took and passed the ranger exam and was assigned onto the Lewis and Clark forest, down in the Little Belt mountains more than a hundred miles to the south, to the ranger station on Copperopolis Creek. Or as my mother called that first Forest Service abode of ours, Awfulopolis. "When Mac opened the door of the station a mouse nest fell down onto the brim of his Stetson," ran her rendition of Awfulopolis. "The place was a sty. Ceiling paper hung down in shreds, the greenblinds on the windows were all spotted with flies that'd got mashed when the blinds rolled up. The floor was thick everywhere with dirt and mouse droppings. They say every Forest Service wife gives her first station its first floor-wash with soapy water and tears. I never was one for tears, but I used soapy water on that Copperopolis station until it almost floated."

I believe I was about three, maybe four, when my father was assigned to the Indian Head station west of Choteau and we came back up here to the Two. Alec said he remembered a little about Copperopolis and the intervening year or two when my father was at Region One headquarters in Missoula--"learning just which fertilizer it is they use to make paper grow on desks over there," as he put it--but I didn't at all. The Two was the footing of my memory. A few beginning recollections of the year we spent at Indian Head: a windstorm one night that we thought was going to take the roof off the ranger station; a sow bear and her two cubs passing through, all four of us gathered at the kitchen window to watch them. And after that, English Creek and my father's

rangering of it ever since. Now that I think of it, that onset of our English Creek life was itself an autumn event, for I remember being irked that Alec was riding off to the South Fork school every morning while I still had a whole year to wait.

1st draft
(written in Dempsey, June '83)

Where morning is concerned, I am my father all over again. The day goes downhill after daybreak, was his creed. Out of a lifetime of early rising, I have never known better dawns than those when I rode from English Creek to Noon Creek. Pony and I would cross the ford north of the station--if there was enough moon, the wild roses along the creek could be seen--and promptly be on top of the bench of land which divides the drainages. Up there, at that almost-dawn hour, the world reveals all its edges. The dark lines of the tops of benches and buttes to the north, the Sweetgrass Hills bumping up far on the eastern horizon like five dunes of black sand, the timbered crest of Breed Butte somber against the stone mountain wall of the west--everything was drawn in heavy outline, penciled with the last shade of night.

The only break in the silence was Pony's hooves against the earth. Generally there was a west breeze atop that broad benchland. I say breeze. In Montana anything that doesn't lift you off your horse is only a breeze. My jacob coat was on me, my hat pulled low, my hands in leather work gloves, and I was just about comfortable.

Pete's haying season lasted a month or more, so I rode right through the phases of the moon. My favorite you can guess on first try — The fat full moon, was my favorite, it rested there like as if it was an agate marble which had rolled into the western corner of the sky. At the start of my route the mountains still drew most of their light from the moon, and I could watch the colors of the rock faces shift--from light gray to slightly pink--as the sunrise began to take them over. Closer to me, the prairie flowers became distinct first.

Wennberg, midway of their third day and a Melander monologue:

1st draft

The first week or so, the sun came up between the Sweetgrass Hills...A kind of film(?) appeared above the horizon, like the haze over a waterfall. Then the sun would appear, like a glowing coal burning its way up through the horizon. (shadows dapple pothole dips...)

What was most worth watching for, though, was the first shadow of the day. When the sun was about half above the horizon, that shadow appeared: a couple of hundred feet long, narrowing as it went from us. Together Pony and I looked like some new creature put together from the main parts of a giraffe and an elephant.

REVISED

Until only a few years ago my mother stayed on in her own house in Gros Ventre. "I'm sufficient company for myself," she maintained. She grew the biggest vegetable garden in town and was perpetual president of the library board and, surprise to us all, found that she had the patience for the hobby of painting. Landscapes, views of the mountains of the Two.

When her birthday came in 1980 the new young editor of the Gleaner interviewed her. Gros Ventre Woman 'Leaped In' with 20th Century was the headline. You know how those stories are, though. It is hard to fit much a life into mere inches of words.

When the inevitable happened, everybody said it was typical of Beth McCaskill. About a month after that 80th birthday of hers, she stepped out of her house to go to the library board meeting being held that night. Winter supposedly was being replaced by spring, but in the Two country that only means frost underfoot instead of snow. My mother slipped and tumbled down her front steps, breaking her right kneecap. Then she crawled into the house, phoned the doctor, and by the time he arrived had pulled herself into a recliner chair with the knee ready and waiting for him. Marce and I had her here at

REVISED OK

the ranch with us until she could get around with a cane, and then she went into the Valley View Retirement Home, at the west edge of Gros Ventre where Tollie Zane's horse pasture used to be. ~~"Scenerville,"~~

The clouds are touching into her mind now. Not that this mother of mine ~~she~~ can't still give a nurse a hard time about her medicine being a minute or two late, and the food of the place she considers "Hardly Worth Lifting a Fork For." But more and more often when I arrive to visit, some part of the past is adrift in her thoughts, and when I ~~xxxx~~ step into her room she will stand from her chair where she has been gazing out the window to the valley of English Creek and the mountains beyond, then ~~and~~ will turn and look at me as keenly as ever--but then mistake me for my brother, or my father.

-30-

indent 12 spaces and underline

"Swing, swing, and swing 'em high!

Allemande left and allemande aye!

Ingo, bingo, six penny high!

Big pig, little pig, root hog or die!"

The dance was underway, but only just, when Ray and I wandered down there to the Sedgwick House to it. Which is to say the hall--I suppose old C.E. ~~Sedge~~ Sedge or maybe even Lila conceived of it as a ballroom, but everybody else considered it the dance hall--was crammed to ~~a capacity~~ an extent that made the Medicine Lodge look downright lonely across the street, but not all that many people were dancing yet. Visiting, circulating, looking everybody else over, joking, trying to pry out of a neighbor ~~when he was going to start cutting hay~~ how many bushels-an-acre his wheat looked like or what his lambs weighed by now, but only one square of actual dancers out there footing it to Jerome Satterlee's calling. Partly, everybody knew it took Jerome a little while (translate that to a few drinks) to get his tonsils ~~warmed~~ limbered up. And then he could call dances until your shoes ~~wore out~~ fell off your feet.

"A little thin out here on the floor, it looks to me like," Jerome was now declaring, preparatory to the next dance. "You know what I mean? Let's get one more square going here, make it look like we mean business. Adam, Sal, step on out here, you can stand around and gab any time. How about all you Busbys, you're half a square yourselves. Good, good. Come on now, one more couple. Nola plays this piano twice as good when we got two squares on the floor."

At the upright, Nola Atkins sat planted as if they'd simply picked up the piano bench from the creek picnic with her on it and set them both down here on the band platform. Beside her, Jeff Swan had his fiddle tucked under his chin and his bow down at his side as if it was a sword he was ready to draw. "One more couple. Do I have to telephone to Valier and ask them to send over four left feet? Whup, here they come now, straight from supper, dancers if I ever saw any. Leona Tracy and Alec McCaskill, step right in there. Alec, you checked your horse and rope at the door, I hope? Now, this is somewhat more like--"

Stepping in from the Sedgwick House dining room, rodeo prize money in his pocket and free supper under his belt, and a grin everywhere on

his face there was any space for it, Alec looked like a young king coming home from his crowning ceremony.

Even so, to notice this glorious brother of mine you had to deliberately steer your eyes past Leona. Talk about an effort of will.

Leona took the shine in any crowd, even a dance hall full. The day's green blouse was ~~gone~~ missing--I mean, she had changed out of it. Now she ~~was in~~ wore a white taffeta dress, full and flouncy at the hem. In square dancing a lot of swirling goes on, and Leona was going to be a swirl worth seeing.

I shot a glance around the dance hall. My parents had missed this grand entry. They'd gone out to J.L. and Nan Hill's ranch, a couple of miles up English Creek, for supper and to change clothes, and ~~guess~~ were taking their own sweet time about getting back in. And Pete and Marie were driving Toussaint home to the Two Medicine, so they'd be even later arriving. I was the sole family representative, so to speak, to record the future Mr. and Mrs. Alec McCaskill come swanking in.

"Ready out there? Sure you are. You'll get to liking this so much, before the night is out you'll want to trade your bed for a lantern." Jerome, when he got to going good, put a lot of motion into his calling, using both arms to direct the traffic of dancers; kind of like a man constantly hanging things here and there in a closet. His gestures even now said he was entering into the spirit of the night. "All right, sonnies and honeys. ~~The time has come. Here we go.~~ Nola, Jim, let's make 'em prance. Everybody, here we go--

indent 12 spaces, and underline

First four forward--back to your places.

Second four follow--shuffle on back.

Now you're getting down to cases,

Swing each other till ~~your ankles~~ the floorbeams crack!"

Here in the time I am now, it seems hard to credit that this Fourth of July dance was the first I ever went to ~~m~~ on my own. That is, was in company with somebody like Ray, instead of being along as baggage with my parents. Of course, without fully ~~realizing~~ acknowledging it, Ray and I also were well on our way to another tremendous night, the one when each of us would step through this dance hall doorway with a person neither parent nor male alongside. But that lay await yet. My point just now is that where I was in life this particular Fourth ~~of July~~ night,

→

farmstead. The two brothers older than he caught America fever, put themselves into the emigrant stream coming to the prairies beyond the Great Lakes. At their urging that he come along, this brother of theirs shook his head in his parson-serious way and said only: "I am no farm maker."

closing in on fifteen years of age, I had been attending dances since the first few months of that total. And Alec, the all-winning rodeo-shirted sashayer out there on the floor right now, the same before me, each, a McCaskill baby bundled in blankets and cradled in chairs beside the dance floor.

Imbibe music along with mother's milk, that was the experience of a lot of us of Two country upbringing. Successors to Alec's and my floorside infancy were here in the Sedgwick House hall this very night: Charity Frew's half-year-old daughter, and another new Helwig baby, and a couple of fresh ones belonging to farm folks east of town, a swaddled quartet with chairs fenced around them in the farthest corner of the dance hall.

indent 12 spaces and underline

"Salute your ladies, all together.
Ladies, to the gents do the same.
Hit the lumber with your leather.
Balance all, and swing your dame!"

It might be said that the McCaskill dancing history was such that it was the portion of lineage that came purest into Alec and me. (Definitely into Alec; out there now with that white taffeta back and forth to him like a wave of the sea, he looked like he could ~~gum~~ romp on forever.) What little I knew of my father's father, the first McCaskill to caper on America's soil instead of Scotland's, included the information that he could dance down the house. Schottisches and Scotch reels in particular, but he also adopted ~~any~~ any western square dances. In his twinkling steps, so to speak, followed my mother and father. Dances held in ranch houses, my mother-to-be arriving on horseback with her party dress tied on behind the saddle, my father-to-be performing the Scotch Heaven ritual of scattering a little oatmeal on the floor for better gliding. Schoolhouse dances. In the face of the Depression, even hard times dances, the women costumed in gunnysack dresses and the men in tattered work clothes. And now Alec the latest McCaskill dancer, and me beginning to realize I was on my way.

indent 12 spaces & underline

"Bunch the ladies, there in the middle.

Circle, you gents, and dosie doe.

Pay attention to old Jeff's fiddle.

Swing her around and away you go."

It comes to me that around this exact same piece of time I am telling about, maybe even that same year, I first read what I always think of in this dancing respect. It was when the Irish poet Yeats died, and the At Random page of the Gleaner had a story on his life. From his picture the man looked like an uppity sonofagun, wearing those pinchnose eyeglasses, but I read the piece just to be reading something. And gained for all time the lines that lay at the end of that story:

"Oh hands clapped to music, oh brightening glance.

How can we tell the dancer from the dance?"

no ¶ Which ever since has seemed to me so ~~beautiful~~ fascinating, so right, I almost wish I had never come across it. For those words make one of those questions →

that slip into your mind every time you meet up with the circumstances they suggest. It was so then, even as Ray nudged me to point out the Busby brothers going through a fancy twirl with each other instead of with their wives and I joined Ray and everybody else in laughing, and it is so now. Within all else ~~those lines from Ireland,~~ that Irishman's question, a kind of beautiful haunting. But I suppose that is what poets, and for that matter dances and dancers, are for.

indent 12 spaces & underline

"Gents to the center, ladies round them.

Form a circle, balance all.

Whirl your girls to where you found them.

Promenade all, around the hall!"

The concluding promenade brought Alec and Leona over toward where Ray and I were onlooking, and spying us they trooped right up. Lord of mercy. Leona in the flush of the pleasure of dancing was ~~very~~ nearly more than the eyes could stand. I know Ray shifted a little nervously beside me, and maybe I did too.

"Mister Jick again," she greeted me. At least it wasn't "Hello, John Angus." "And Raymond ~~Edward~~ Edmund Heaney," which really did set Ray to shifting around.

Edgar?

So high in flight was Alec tonight, though, that nobody else

had to expend much effort. A lank of his rich red hair was down across his forehead from the dancing, and the touch of muss just made him look handsomer. "Here's a pair of wall guards," he observed of Ray and me while he grinned mightily. "You guys better think about getting yourselves one of these things," giving Leona a waist squeeze.

Yeah, sure, right. As if Leonas were as plenty as blackberries. (I have wondered often. If Marcella Withrow had been on hand that night instead of at the Conrad hospital with her father, would Ray have nerved himself up and squired her out onto the floor?)

But if you can't carry on conversation with your own brother, who can you? So to keep mouth matters in motion, I asked: "How was it?"

Alec peered at me and he let up on that Leona squeezing. "How was what?"

"Supper. The supper you won for handcuffing that poor little calf."

"Dandy," he reported, ~~Just dandy~~ "just dandy." And now Leona awarded him a squeeze, in confirmation.

"What'd you have, veal?" Ray put in, which I thought was pretty good. But Alec and Leona were so busy handling each other's waists they didn't catch it, and Alec said, "Naw, steaks. Dancing fuel." He looked down at his armful of Leona. "Speaking of which--"

"TIMMBERRR!"

I was not the only one whose ears almost dropped off in surprise. That cry was a famous one at any dance such as this; it dated back to Prohibition days, and what it signalled back then was the periodic availability of Mason jar moonshine for anybody who cared to step outside for a sip, and the man who threw back his head to invent the signal and just for the hell of it still would cut loose the call at least once any dance night--that man was none other than Dode Withrow.

So my surprise was double. That the cry resounded through the hall this night, and that the timber crier there in the doorway, when I spun around to see, proved to be my father, with my mother on his arm.

He brown coat,
My father wore his blue pinstripe suit coast, a white shirt and his newest Levis. She frock
My mother was in her blue conrnflower dress with the slight V neckline. It was pretty tame by today's standards, but did display enough throat and breastbone to draw second glances. Togged out that way, Varick and Lisabeth McCaskill made a prime pair, as rangers and wives often did.

Calls and claps greeted my father's solo. "You'd be the one to know, Mac!" "Hoot mon, Scotch Heaven has arrived!" "Beth, tell us fair and square: has he been up in the Two practicing that?" Even Alec wagged his head in--admiration? consternation? both and more?--before declaiming to Leona, "There's dancing to be done. Let's get at it before the rowdy element cuts loose with something ~~else~~ more."

Ray and I sifted over to my parents' side of the hall. My father was joshing Fritz Hahn that if Dode could still ~~fork~~ ride a bronc like that, it was Fritz's turn next Fourth to uphold the South Fork reputation. Greta and my mother were trading laughter over something, too. Didn't I tell you a dance is the McCaskill version of bliss?

"Here they are, the future of the race," my father greeted Ray and me. "Ray, how're you summering?"

"Real good," Ray responded, along with his parenthetical grin. "Quite a rodeo, wasn't it."

"Quite a one," my father agreed, with a little shake of his head which I knew had to do with the outcome of the calf roping. But at once he was launched back into more visiting with Fritz and Ray, and I just parked myself and inventoried him and my mother. It was plain

my father had timbered a couple of drinks--his left eyelid was down a little, as if listening to a night-long joke--but no serious amount. My mother, though. My mother too looked bright as a butterfly, and as she and my father traded gab with the Hahns and other people who happened by, both her and him unable to keep from ~~looking~~ glancing at the ~~flow~~ back-and-forth of the dancers more than at ~~the people they~~ their conversationalists, a suspicion seeded in me. ~~My mother maybe~~ Maybe, more than maybe, my mother had a drink or two in her, too.

"Where you guys been?" I voiced when I got the chance.

And ~~got~~ received ~~back~~ what I deserved. "Places," stated my mother, then laughed.

Well, I'd had one escape this day. Getting in and out of the Medicine Lodge without coinciding with my own parents there.

Out on the floor, the swirl was dissolving as it does ~~when~~ after the call and music have hit their climax, and Jerome was enlisting everybody within earshot for the next variety of allemande and dosie-doe. "Now I can't call dances to an empty ~~room~~ floor, can I? Let's up the ante here. Four squares this time, let's make it. Plenty of territory, we don't even have to push out the walls yet--"

"The man needs our help," my father suggested to my mother and

the Hahns, and off they all went, to take up places in the fourth square of dancers forming up.

The dance wove the night to a pattern all its own, as dances do. I remember the standard happenings. Supper hour was announced for midnight, both the Sedgwick House dining room and the Lunchery were going to close at one a.m. Ray and I had agreed that supper hour--or rather, an invitation to oyster stew at the Lunchery, as my parents were certain to provide--would be our personal curfew. Jerome at one point sang out "Next one is ladies' choice!" and it was interesting to see some of the selections they made, Alice Van Bebber snagging the lawyer Eli Kinder and immediately beginning to talk him dizzy, pretty Arleta Busby putting out her hand to that big pile of guff Ed Van Bebber, of all damn people. My parents too made South Fork pairings, my mother going over to Fritz Hahn, Greta Hahn coupling onto my father's arm. Then after one particularly rousing floor session, Jerome announced that if anyone could manage to cared to pass a hat he and the musicians would look the other way, and collection was taken to pay him and Nola and Jeff. As I say, all this was standard enough, and mingled with it were some particularities of this night. The arrival of Good Help and Florene Hebner, magically a minute or so after the hat

had been passed. (Florene still was a presentable looking woman, despite a dress that had been washed to half its original color. Good Help's notion of dressing up was to top off his overalls with a flat cap. My mother had once commented, "A poor-boy cap and less under it.") The departure of the grocery store family, the Helwigs, with Luther Helwig wobbling ~~seriously~~ grievously under the load of booze he had been taking ~~taken~~ on and his wife ~~Ines~~ Erna beside him with the bawling baby plucked from the far-end chair corral. (In such a case, you always have to wonder: was a strategic motherly pinch delivered to that baby?) My inspiration for Ray and ~~I~~ me to kill off the last of my fifty-cent stake with a bottle of pop apiece. ("How about ~~stepping~~ stepping across for something wet?" was the way I'd proposed it to Ray. He took on a worried look and began, "I don't know that my folks ~~are going to~~ want me going in that--" "Christ, not the Medicine Lodge," I relieved him, "I meant the Lunchery.") And through it all, dance after dance after dance, my ~~parents in motion~~ tall red-headed father and my white-throated mother in the musical swim at one end of the hall, my tall red-headed brother and Leona starring at the other end.

an almost-giddy

confusion and gut-gall from Melander's killing, a feel of ascension;
Of being up high and more alert than ever before, alert in every hair,
aware of all sides of one's self. It lasts not long--likely the human
spirit would burn to blue ash in more than moments of such atmosphere--
but the sensation expends the wonder that must course through us at

It was in fact when Ray and I returned from our pop stop that we found a lull in the dancing and made our way over to my parents, again, to be as convenient as possible for an oyster stew invite.

"I suppose you two could eat if you had to?" my father at once settled that issue, while my mother drew deep breaths and cast a look around the hallfull.

"Having fun?" I asked her, just to be asking something, while my father was joshing Ray about being girl-less on such a night.

"A ton," she confirmed.

Just then Jerome Satterlee appeared in our midst, startling us all a little to see him up close instead of on the platform. "What, did you come down for air, Jerome?" my father kidded.

"Now don't give an old man a hard time," responded Jerome. "Call this next one, how about, Mac. Then we can turn 'em loose for supper. Myself, I got to go see a man about a dog."

My father was not at all a square dance caller of Jerome's breadth. But he was known to be good at--well, I will have to call it a sort of Scotch cadence, a beat of the kind that a bagpipe-and-drum band puts out. Certainly you danced smoother to Jerome's calling, but my

father's could bring out stamping and clapping and other general exuberation. I think it is not too much to say that, ~~blindfolded and~~ eyes closed and with my ears stuffed, I could have stood there in the Sedgwick House and told you whether it was Jerome or my father calling the dance, just by the feel of how feet were thumping the hall floor.

To make sure their smooth terms could stand his absence, my father looked the question at my mother, and she told him by a nod that he ought to go do the call. She even added, "Why don't you do the Dude and Belle? This time of night, everybody can stand some perking up."

He climbed onto the band platform. "'Lo, Nola, Jeff. This isn't any idea of mine, understand."

"Been saving you the best strings of this fiddle, Mac," Jeff answered. "When you're ready."

Nola nodded, echoed: "When you're ready."

"All right, then. Try make me look like I know what I'm doing."

My father tipped his left shoulder down, pumped a rhythm with his heel ~~[illegible]~~ a number of ~~some~~ times to get a feel of the platform, then made a loud hollow clap which brought everybody's attention, with his hands, and called out over the hall: "Jerome is taking a

minute to recuperate. He ~~says~~ said he hates to turn things over to anybody with an English Creek ~~accent~~ notion of music, but saw no choice. So you're in for it."

"What one we gonna do, Mac, the Two Medicine two-step?" some wit yelled out.

"No sir. ~~I have~~ I've got orders to send you to supper hour in style. Time to do the Dude and Belle. And let's really do it, six squares' worth."

My father was thinking big. Six squares of dancers in this hall would swash from wall to wall, and end to end, and ~~whatever~~ onlookers already were moving themselves into the doorway ~~to~~ or alongside the band platform to ~~clear~~ grant space. "All right. You all know how it starts. Join hands and circle left--"

Even yet I am surprised that I propelled myself into doing it. I stepped away from Ray, soldiered myself in front of my mother, and said: "Mrs. McCaskill, I don't talk through my nose as ~~much~~ pretty as the guy you usually gallivant around with. But suppose I could have this dance with you anyway?"

Her face underwent that rinse of surprise that my father sometimes showed about her. She cast a look toward the top of my head as if just realizing my height. Then came her sidelong smile, and her announcement:

"I never could resist you McCaskill galoots."

Arm in arm, my mother and I took a place in the nearest square. People were marshalling everywhere in the hall, it looked like a major parade forming up. Another thunderclap from my father's hands, Nola and Jim opened up with the music, and my father chanted us into action.

"First gent, swing the lady so fair.

Now the one right over there.

Now the one with the sorrel hair.

Now the belle of the ballroom.

Swirl and twirl.

Swing, and promenade all.

Second gent, swing the lady first-rate."

indent 12 spaces & underline

Besides my mother and me, our square was Bob and Arleta Busby, and the Musgroves who ran the drugstore, and luck of luck, Pete and Marie, back from returning Toussaint to the Two Medicine and dancing hard the past hour or so to make up for time lost. All of them but me probably had done the Dude and Belle 500 times in their lives, but it's a basic enough dance that I knew the ropes. You begin with everybody joining hands--my mother's firm feel at the end of one of my arms, Arleta's small cool hand at my other extreme--and circling left, a wheel of eight of us spinning to the music. Now to my father's call of "you've done the track, now circle back" the round chain of us goes into reverse, prancing back to where we started. Swing your partner, my mother's cornflower frock a blue whirlwind around the pair of us. Now the lady on the left, which in my instance meant hooking arms with Arleta, another first in my life. Now return to partner, all couples do some sashaying right and left, and the "gent" of this round steps forth and begins swinging the ladies in turn until he's back to his own partner. And with all gusto, swings her as the Belle of the Ballroom.

indent 12 spaces + underline

"Third gent, swing the lady in blue--"

What I would give to have seen all this through my father's eyes. Presiding up there on the platform, pumping rhythm with his heel and feeling it multiplied back to him by the 48 feet traveling the dance floor. Probably if you climbed the helmet-spike of the Sedgwick House, the rhythm of those six squares of dancers would have come quivering up to you like spasms through a tuning fork. Figure within figure within figure, from my father's outlook over us, the kaleidoscope of six simultaneous dance patterns and inside each the hinged couple of the instant and comprising those couples, friends, neighbors, sons, wife with flashing throat.

(no 91) Oh hands clapped to music, hands of my McCaskill father, and oh brightening glance, glance of my McCaskill mother, and no, in that hall aswim in motion and music, dancer could never be told from dance.

"Fourth gent, swing the lady so sweet--"

indent 12 spaces and underline

The fourth gent was me. I stepped to the center of our square, again made the fit of arms with Arleta Busby, and swung her.

indent 12 spaces & underline

"Now the one with dainty feet--"

~~Plump~~ Grace Musgrove, plump as a partridge, didn't exactly fit the prescription, but again I managed, sending her puffing out of our fast swirl.

indent 12 spaces & underline

"Now the one who looks so neat--"

Marie glided forth, solemnly winked at me, and spun about me light as a ghost.

indent 12 spaces & underline

"Now the Belle of the Ballroom." The blue beauty, my mother. Didn't we though. "Swirl and twirl." ~~We did.~~ "Now promenade all." Around we went, all the couples, and now it was the women's turn to court their Dudes.

II

indent 12 spaces & underline

First lady, swing the gent who's got sore toes.

Now the one with the great big nose.

Now the one who wears store clothes.

Now the dude of the ballroom.

~~Swirl and twirl.~~

Swing, and promendde all.

II

slumped so she's at home

indent 12 spaces & underline

Second lady, swing the gent in size thirteens.

Now the one that ate the beans.

Now the one in brand new jeans.

Now the dude of the ballroom.

~~Swirl and twirl.~~

~~Swing, and promenade all.~~

#

indent 12 spaces & underline

Third lady, swing the gent with the lantern jaw.

Now the one from Arkansas.

Now the one that yells, "Ah, hah!"

Now the dude of the ballroom.

~~Swirl and twirl~~

~~Swing, and promenade all.~~

#

So it went. In succession I was the one in store clothes, the one full of beans, and the lantern-jawed one--thankful there, not to be the one who yells "Ah hah!" which Pete performed for our square with a dandy of a whoop.

indent 12 spaces

"Fourth lady, swing the gent whose nose is blue--"

My mother and ~~skinny~~ sallow Hugh Musgrove.

indent 12 spaces

"Now the one that spilled the glue--"

Reese

Reflections dancing with each other, ~~my mother~~ and Pete.

"Now the one who's stuck on you--"

Her and Bob Busby, two of the very best dancers in the whole hall.

"Now the Dude of the Ballroom." She came for me, eyes on mine. My father's voice, I was the proxy of all that had begun at another dance, at the Noon Creek schoolhouse twenty years before. My father's voice: "Swirl him and twirl him." My moment of Dudehood was an almighty whirl, as if my mother had been getting up the momentum all night.

"All join hands and circle to the left,

Before the fiddler starts to swear.

Dudes and Belles, you've done your best.

Now promenade, to you know where."

"I didn't know you were a lightfoot," Ray greeted me at the edge of the throng heading through the doorway to supper hour.

"Me neither," I responded, blowing a little. My mother was with Pete and Marie right behind me, we all would have to wait for my father to make his way from the band platform. "Let's ~~wait for them~~ let them catch up with us outside, I can use some air."

Ray and I squirmed along between the crowd and the lobby wall, weaseling our way until we popped out the front entry of the Sedgwick House.

I was about to say here that the next historic event of this Fourth of July, Gros Ventre category, was underway as the two of us emerged into the night, well ahead of my parents and the Reeses. But given that midnight had already happened, I'd better call this the first occurrence of July 5.

The person most immediately obvious of course was Leona, white and silver-gold in the frame of light cast onto the street by the Sedgwick House's big ~~front~~ lobby window. And then Arlee Zane, also ~~[illegible]~~ there on that raft of light; Arlee, ignorance shining from every pore.

Beyond them, a bigger two with the reflected light cutting a line across their chests; face to face in the dimness above that, as if they were carrying on the nicest of private chats. Except that the beamframe build of one and the ~~purple~~ chokecherry shirt of the other showed them to be Earl Zane and Alec and therefore they were not chatting.

"Surprised to see you without a skim milk calf on the end of a string," Earl was offering up as Ray and I sidled over beside Leona and Arlee so as not to miss anything. Inspiring Arlee ~~tried~~ to laugh big as if Earl's remark ~~[illegible]~~ deserved it.

"What, are you out here in the night looking for that cinnamon pony?"

I give Alec credit for the easy way he said this, tossing it out as a joke. "He went thataway, Earl."

Earl proved not to be in the market for →

humor just now, however.

"I suppose you could have forked him any better?" You could all but hear the thick gears move in Earl's head to produce the next remark. "You likely had a lot of riding practice recently."

"Earl, you lardbrain," this drew from Leona.

But Alec chose to cash Earl's remark at face value. "Some of us do get paid to stay on horses instead of bailing off of them. Come on Leona, let's go get some supper before the dancing starts again."

Earl now had another brain movement. "Surprised you can dance at all these days, what with marriage on your mind." He leaned a little toward Alec to deliver the final part: "Tell me this, McCaskill. Has it ever climbed out the top of your pants yet?"

That one I figured was going to be bingo. After all, anybody who has grown up in Montana has seen Scotch lawsuits get underway for a lot less commentary than that. At dances the situation was common enough almost to be a regular feature. One guy with a few too many drinks in him ~~would~~ call some other guy a name none too fond, and that party ~~would~~ respond with a fist. Of course the commotion was generally harsher than the combat, but black eyes and bent noses could result.

"Earl, you jugheaded--" Leona was responding, but to my considerable disappointment Alec interrupted her by simply telling Earl, "Stash it, sparrowhead. Come on, Leona, we got business elsewhere."

"I bet you got business all right," Earl adventured on. "Leona business. Snatch a kiss, kiss a snatch, all the same to you, McCaskill, ain't it?"



I can't truly say I saw it happen. Not in any way of following a sequence: this and then this and then this. No, The event simply arrived ~~is there in~~ into my mind, complete, intact, engraved before its realization could make itself felt. Versions of anything of this sort are naturally suspect, of course. Like that time Dempsey fought Gibbons up at Shelby for the heavyweight championship, forty thousand people were there, and afterward about a quarter million could provide you an eyewitness account. But I will relate just as much of this Earl and Alec episode as I can vouch for. Earl was standing there, one instant, admiring the manufacture of his last comment, and then in the next instant was bent in half, giving a nasty tossing-up noise, auheughhh, that made my own stomach turn over.

What can have inspired Alec, given that the time-honored McCaskill procedure after loss of temper was to resort to a roundhouse right, to deliver Earl that short straight jab to the solar plexus? How much of Alec's That economical punch yielded ~~earth.~~ ~~I can see it~~ Every bit of I can see this as if it were happening over again right now. Earl now in full light, doubled down as he was, Alec stepping around him to collect Leona, and the supper crowd ~~coming~~ in its long file out of the Sedgwick House stopping and ~~staring~~ gawking.

"GodDAMN!" exploded between Ray and me, Arlee pushing through and

combining his oath with the start of a swing targeted on Alec's passing jaw.

Targeted but undelivered. On the far side of Arlee's girth from me Ray reached up, almost casually it seemed, and latched onto Arlee's wrist. The intended swing went nowhere after that, Ray hanging onto the would-be ~~swingster~~ swingster as if he'd just caught him with that hand in the cookie jar, and by the time Arlee squared around and managed to begin to tussle in earnest with Ray--thank heaven for the clomping quality of the Zane brain--I had awarded Arlee a bit of a shove to worry him from my side.

How far the ruckus could have progressed beyond that, I have ever been curious about. In hindsight, that is. For if Arlee had managed to shake out of Ray's grip, he was elephant enough to ~~deliver~~ provide us both some pounding. But by ~~then~~ now my father was on hand, and Pete and two or three other men ~~came~~ soldiered out of the crowd to help sort us into order, and somebody was fetching Tollie Zane out of the Medicine Lodge on Earl's behalf. "Jick, that's enough," my father instructed. "Turn him loose, Ray. It's over."

This too I am clear about. Those sentences to Ray and me were the full sum of what was said by any McCaskill here in ~~that~~ this aftermath. What ~~went~~ traveled

to ~~my~~ Alec from my father was a ~~look~~ stare, a studying one there in the frame of hotel light as if my father was trying to be sure this was the person he thought it was. # And got back from Alec one of the identical calibre.

Then Leona was in the grasp of my brother, and my mother stepped out alongside my father, and each couple turned and went.

—

"Ray?"

"What."

We were side by side in bed, in the dark of his room. Outside the open twin windows, a breeze could be heard teasing its way through the leaves of the giant cottonwood.

"You helped a lot, there ~~in the hall.~~ at the dance."

"That's okay."

"You'll want to watch out Arly doesn't try get it back on you."

"Yeah." There was silence then, and the dark, until Ray startled me with something between a giggle and a ~~laugh~~ laugh. I couldn't see what he was doing, but ~~when~~ as soon as words started ~~coming~~ issuing from him, I knew. He was pinching his nose closed.

five spaces between

"He wants to watch out around me," ~~came~~ droning out in exact imitation of Tollie's rodeo announcing, "or I'll cut his heart out and drink his blood."

That got me into the act. With a good grasp on my nose, I proposed in the same tinny tone: "Yank off his arm and make him shake hands with it."

Ray giggled and offered: "Grab him by the epiglommis until his eyes pooch out."

shifting his paddle.

Regulation on Wennberg's bluster, which evidently even Wennberg had come to rely on.

The musing parleys with Karlsson, treetop communing with stone.

Day on day and all the waking hours of those days, such losses of Melander would be exacted now, ~~all of them conspicuous by their~~ conspicuous silence where there ought have been the watchword of that voice--aye? forest, grabbed down into the surf. Offshore were strewn darker

"Sharpen the point on his head," I paused for my own giggles, "and pound him in like a post."

"Kick enough crap out of him to daub a log barn," Ray envisioned. "Goddamn booger eater him anyhow."

With each atrocity on Arlee our laughing multiplied, until the bed was shaking and we tried to tone things down before Ray's folks would wake up and wonder just what was going on. But every time we got ourselves nearly under control, one or the other of us erupted again--"thump old Arlee as far into Hell"--on and on, laughing anew, snorting it out in spite of ourselves--"as a bird can fly in a lifetime"--sides shaking and throats rollicking until we were almost sick, and then of course we had to laugh at the ridiculousness of that.

Nor, when Ray finally did play out and conked off to sleep, did that fever of humor entirely leave me. I would doze for a while and then be aware I was grinning open-eyed into the darkness about one or another moment of that immense day, that never-can-be-forgotten Fourth. Here I rest world, as happy as if I had good sense and the patent on remembrance. My mother on the park stump giving her Ben

English speech and Dode at the top of that leap by Coffee Nerves and my father calling out the Dude and Belle to the dancing crowd and my brother one-punching Earl Zane and Ray pitching in on Arlee and, you bet, Stanley Meixell collecting Velma Simms. Scene by scene they fell into place in me, smooth as kidskin and exact as chapter and verse, every one a perfect piece of that day and now of the night.

A set of hours worth the price of the rest of the life, those: to wake up chuckling, give the dark a great Chessy cat grin, and drop off until my own laughter woke me again.

Marilyn retyped,
Dec '53

Mouse and I scooted right along that road toward Gros Ventre. He was a fast walker, besides elevating me and my spirits more than I'd been used to on Pony. The morning--mid-morning and past, by now--was full of sun, but enough breeze was following along English Creek for a person to ride in pure comfort. The country still looked just glorious. All the valley of English Creek was fresh with hay. Nobody was mowing quite yet, except for the one damp green swath around Ed Van Bebber's lower field where he had tried it a week too early as he did every year.

~~In most ways, then,~~ I was more than ready for the Fourth. A lot seemed to have happened since that evening back at the start of June when I looked up and saw Alec and Leona parading down the rise to join us for a family supper. One whole hell of a lot. No longer was I even sure that we four McCaskills quite were a family. It was time we all had something else on our minds, besides ruckus. Alec plainly already did, the way he intended to trig up on behalf of Leona and a calf. And given how my mother was whaling into the picnic preparation and my father was grinning like a Chessy cat about getting the day off from rangering and I was strutting atop this tall horse with coinage heavy in my pocket, the Fourth was promising to do the job for the other three of us ~~as well~~.

It is no new thought to say that life goes on. Yet that's where it does go.

In maybe an hour and a half, better time than I would have thought possible for that ride in from the English Creek station, Mouse and I were topping the little rise near the turnoff to Charlie Finletter's place, the last ranch before town.

From there a mile or so outside, Gros Ventre looked like a green cloudbank--cottonwood trees billowing so thick that it took some inspection to find traces of houses among them. Gros Ventre's neighborhoods were planted double with cottonwoods, a line of trees along the front yards and another between sidewalk and street. Then the same colonnade again on the other side of the street. All of this of course had been done fifty or more years before, a period of time that grows you a hell of a big



cottonwood. Together with the original groves that already rose old and tall along English Creek before Gros Ventre was ever thought of, the streetside plantation produced almost a roof over the town. This cottonwood canopy was particularly wonderful just before a rain, when the leaves began to shiver, rattle in their papery way. The whole town seemed to tingle then, and the sound picked up when a gust of wind from the west ushered in the rain, and next the air was filled with the seethe of water onto all that foliage. In Gros Ventre, even a dust-settler sounded like a real weather event.

The English Creek road entered town past the high school--one of those tan-brick two-story crates that seemed to be the only way they knew how to build high schools in those days--and I nudged Mouse into an even quicker pace so as not to dwell on that topic any longer than necessary. We were aiming ourselves across town, to the northeast end where the Heaneys' house stood.

Mouse and I met Main Street at the bank corner, alongside the First National, and here I can't help but pause for a look around Gros Ventre of that Fourth of July day, just as I did then before reining Mouse north along the street.

Helwig's grocery and merc, with its old-style wooden square front and the Eddy's bread sign in its window.

The Toggery clothing store, terra cotta along its top like cake frosting.

Musgreave's
~~Musgrove's~~ drugstore, with the mirror behind the soda fountain so that a person could sit there over a ~~soda~~ milkshake (assuming a person had the price of a ~~soda~~ milkshake, not always the case in those times) and keep track of the town traffic.

Grady Tilton's garage.

Dale Quint's saddlery and leather repair shop. Maybe a decent description of Gros Ventre of that time was that it still had a leather man but not yet a dentist. (A person went to Conrad for tooth work.)

Saloons, the Pastime and Spenger's, (although Dolph Spenger was a dozen or more years dead.)

The Odeon movie theatre, the one place in town with its name in neon script. The other modern touch lent by the Odeon was its recent policy of showing the movie twice on Saturday night, first at 7:30, then the "owl show" at 9.

Gros Ventre of those Depression years looked--I don't know how else to say it but roadworn. Weathered by all it had been through.

The post office, the ~~one~~ only new building in Gros Ventre since I was old enough to remember. A New Deal project, this had been, complete with a mural of the Lewis and Clark expedition portaging around the Great Falls of the Missouri River in 1805. Lewis and Clark maybe were not news to postal customers of the Two country, but York, Lewis's Negro slave standing out amid the portagers like a black panther in a snowfield, definitely was.

The little stucco-sided Carnegie library, of a shape and style that always reminded me of a fancy caboose.

The Lunchery, run by Mae Sennett. The occasional times when I would be with my father when he was on Forest Service meal money, the Lunchery was our place and oyster stew our order. It of course came from a can, but I see that deep bowl yet, the milk yellowing from the blob of butter melting in the middle of it, and if Mae Sennett was doing the serving herself she always warned "Watch out for any oysterberries," by which she meant those tiny pearls that sometimes show up.

I have to say, I still am not truly comfortable eating in any ~~restaurant~~ establishment that doesn't have that tired ivory look to its walls that the Lunchery did. A proof that the place has been in business longer than overnight and at least has sold decent enough food that people keep coming back.

Doc Spence's office. Across the empty lot from Doc's, the office of the lawyer, Eli Kinder. Who, strange to say, was a regular figure in the sheep traffic through this street, when the bands flowed through town on their way to the summer grass of the Blackfeet Reservation. Eli was a before-dawn riser and often would arrive downtown just as a band of sheep did. It was odd to see him, in his suit and tie, helping shove those woolies along Main Street, but Eli had been raised on a ranch down in the Highwood Mountains and knew what he was doing.

The sidestreet businesses, Tracy's creamery and Ed Heaney's lumber and hardware yard and Adam Kerz's coal and trucking enterprise.

The set of bank buildings, marking what might be called the down of downtown: the First National Bank of Gros Ventre in tan brick, and cattycorner ~~cater-corner~~ from it the red brick of what had been the English Creek Valley Stockmen's Bank. The Valley Stockmen's went under in the early 1920s when half of all the banks in Montana failed, and the site now was inhabited, if not exactly occupied, by Sandy Stott's one-chair barber shop. The style in banks in those times was to have a fancy doorway set into the corner nearest the street intersection--Gros Ventre's pair of bank buildings stared down each other's throats in exactly this fashion--and when Sandy took over the Valley Stockmen's building he simply painted barber-pole stripes on one of the fat granite pillars supporting the doorway.

What have I missed? Of course; also there on the Valley Stockmen's block, the newspaper office with its name proclaiming on a plate-glass window in the same typeface as its masthead: Gleaner. Next to that a more recent enterprise, Pauline Shaw's Moderne Beauty Shoppe. The story

was that when Bill Reinking first saw his new neighboring sign, he stuck his head in the shop to ask Pauline if she was sure she hadn't left an "e" off Beauty.

I heard somebody say once that the business section of every Western town he'd ever seen looked as if it originated by falling out the back end of a truck. Not so with Gros Ventre.

During those Depression years Gros Ventre did look roadworn. Weathered by all it had been through. But to me the town also held a sense of being what it ought to be. Of aptness, maybe is the term. Not fancy, not shacky. Steady.

of wares. Settlement here dated back to when some weary freight wagoneer pulled in for the night at the nice creekside sheltered by cottonwoods. As the freighters' trail between Fort Shaw on the Sun River and southern Alberta developed, this site became a regular waystop, nicknamed The Middle since it was about midway between Fort Shaw and Canada. Although some of us also suspect that to those early-day wagoneers the place seemed like the middle of nowhere. Gros Ventre grew to about a thousand people when the homesteaders began arriving to Montana in droves in the first decade of this century--my mother could remember in her childhood coming to town and seeing wagon after wagon of immigrants heading out onto the prairie, a white rag tied on one spoke of a wagonwheel so the revolutions could be counted to measure the bounds of the claimed land--and that population total never afterward varied more than a hundred either way. Nor varied much in quality either, I think it can be said. Gros Ventre simply tended to draw people who were there from choice rather than merely lack of imagination. Settlers from Scotch Heaven or

of similar local notoriety. Actually, as with any pleasure emporium the wickedest thing about the Medicine Lodge was its reputation. ~~The leading Medicine Lodge story was of an innocent visitor reacting in alarm when the bartender, tall Tom Harry, leaned toward him and rumbled: "Shoot you one?" All that was being asked, though, was whether the customer wanted a glass of beer drawn from the tap.~~

The Medicine Lodge had waited out Prohibition behind boarded windows, but Tom Harry more than brought it back to light and life. Also, maybe after those dry years the town was thirsty for a saloon with a bit of flair. Tom Harry ~~He~~ had come over from running a bar, and some said a taxi dance joint as well, at the Fort Peck dam project. Supposedly all he brought with him was a wad of cash and the picture of Franklin Delano Roosevelt which had adorned the wall of his Fort Peck enterprise. But also, as it proved out, along with him came a set of invisible rules of saloon behavior, which every so often somebody would stray across. I think of the night when my father and I were entering the Medicine Lodge and met a stranger with a cigar in his mouth being forcibly propelled into the street. It turned out that although Tom Harry himself went around under a blue cigarette haze--tailormades; no Fort Peck bartender ever had time to roll his own--he would not tolerate cigar smoke.

Be that as it may, in the Medicine Lodge FDR was promptly joined on the wall by a minor menagerie of stuffed animal heads Tom Harry acquired from somewhere. Several buck deer and an antelope and a mountain sheep and a bobcat snarling about the company he was in; not to mention the six-point elk head which set off arguments every hunting season about how much his absent body would weigh.

In itself, this taxidermy herd populated the Medicine Lodge considerably. But the place also held a constant legion of the living, more or less. These setters, as my father called the six or eight guys who sat around in there--he was not above stepping in for a beer after our Lunchery meal, and if nobody official-looking was on hand Tom Harry didn't seem to mind my being with him--the setters always occupied the stools at the far end of the bar, and anybody who entered got long gazes from them as if they were cataloguing the human race.

Decapitated animals and owlish geezers do not, I realize, sound like much of a decor. And yet the Medicine Lodge did three times as much business as Spenger's or the Pastime, both much more "respectable" places back downtown. I suppose it is and ever will be the habit of the race: people gravitate to a certain place to do their drinking and logic will never veer them. At least one night a week in the Medicine Lodge, gravitation amounted to something more like an avalanche. ~~Every~~ Saturday night, thirsts converged from everywhere in the Two country. Hay hands who had come in for a bath and haircut at Shorty Stott's but decided instead to wash down the inside of themselves. ~~Entire~~ shearing crews one time of year, lamb lickers (as guys who worked in lambing sheds were known) another. Any season, a sheepherder in from the mountains or the Reservation to inaugurate a two-week spree. ~~(Not least among the reasons that those bands of sheep were trailed through town at dawn was that the Medicine Lodge wasn't yet open to waylay herders.)~~ Government men from reclamation projects. Likely ~~Maybe~~ a few Double W cowpokes. Definitely the customary setters, who had been building up the calluses on their elbows all week just for this. Always a sufficient cast of characters for loud dialogues, occasional shoving matches, and eventual passing-outs. Maybe you couldn't get away with cigar smoke in the Medicine Lodge, but you could with what counted.

Turning east past the Sedgwick House and the Medicine Lodge, Mouse and I now were into the Heaneys' side of town. An early priest had persuaded the Catholic landowner who platted this particular neighborhood to name the streets after the first missions in Montana, which in turn bore the names of saints. This created what the current Gros Ventre postmaster, Chick Jennings, called "the repeater part of town," with mailing addresses such as St. Mary St., St. Peter St. and St. Ignatius St. It was at the end of St. Ignatius St. that the Heaney house stood, a white two-story one with sills of robin's-egg blue. Ed Heaney owned the lumber yard, and so was the one person in town in those Depression years with some access to paint. The robin's egg blue had been a shipping mistake by the manufacturer--it is a shade pretty delicate to put up against the weather of Montana--and Ed lugged the can home and made the best of it.

The place looked empty as I rode up, which was as I expected. Rather than the creek picnic, the Heaneys always went out to a family shindig at Genevieve's parents' farm, quite a ways east of Gros Ventre on the Conrad road. So with Ray out there, I wouldn't link up with him until the rodeo, and I simply slung my warbag inside the Heaneys' back porch and got back on Mouse again, and went picnicking.

#

Cars and pickups and trucks were parked so thick that they all but swamped the part of town around the park. 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 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 of Montana towns and delve around a few minutes and in all likelihood find ~~two out-~~ a public park, of some sort.

(no q) In Gros Ventre's instance, the park was a half-circle of maybe an acre, fronting on English Creek just west of Main Street and the highway bridge, one last oasis before the road arrowed north into the plains and benchlands. In recent years WPA crews had made it a lot more of a park than it had been, clearing out the willows which were taking over the creek bank and then laying in some riprap to keep the spring runoff out. And someone during that WPA work came up with an idea I've not seen before or since. There near the creek where a big crippled cottonwood leaned--a windstorm had ripped off its main branches--a crew sawed the tree off low to the ground, leaving a broad stump about two feet high; then atop the stump was built a speaker's pulpit, a slatted round affair somewhat on the order of a ship's crow's-nest. The one and only time I saw Senator Burton K. Wheeler, who some people 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.

cut in final reading
Dec, 18, '83

as a matter of proportion. There on those slopes of the Two, for instance, to me sheep somehow simply looked proper, blending with the country as sage or heather or some other normal coloration would, while to my notion cattle on the same pasture stuck out like pepper on meringue. A kind of instant crop, sheep were. Under a strong-eyed herder who had them in easy graze across a half-mile of wildflower slope, sheep seemed as if generations of them always had been right there, cloudlike yet perpetual, and the grass and the flowers just now had been put in under them fresh for the year.

Nor do I hold with the argument that sheep inevitably destroyed such pasture. Put enough white mice or ostriches or anything else on a piece of land and you can overgraze it. No, if sense was used, if the sheep were moved around adequately on the range and there weren't more of them than the grass could stand--both of those conditions were enforced like the law of gravity in my father's bailiwick--pasturing sheep on a portion of a forest was a reasonable enough proposition. Anybody who slanders them as "hoofed locusts" or "bleaters and eaters" can also explain to me a better way to transform grass into food and fiber.

Anyway, for a person partial to the idea of sheep I was in the right time and place. With the encouragement of what the Depression had done

Mouse and I scooted right along that road toward Gros Ventre. He was a fast walker, besides elevating me and my spirits more than I'd been used to on Pony. The morning--mid-morning and past, by now--was full of sun, but enough breeze was following along English Creek for a person to ride in pure comfort. The country still looked just glorious. All the valley of English Creek was fresh with hay. Nobody was mowing quite yet, except for the one damp green swath around Ed Van Bebber's lower field where he had tried it a week too early as he did every year.

In most ways, then, I was more than ready for the Fourth. A lot seemed to have happened since that evening back at the start of June when I looked up and saw Alec and Leona parading down the rise to join us for a family supper. One whole hell of a lot. No longer was I even sure that we four McCaskills quite were a family. It was time we all had something else on our minds. Alec plainly already did, the way he intended to trig up on behalf of Leona and a calf. And given how my mother was whaling into the picnic preparation and my father was grinning like a Chessy cat about getting the day off from rangering and I was strutting atop this tall horse with coinage heavy in my pocket, the Fourth was promising to do the job for the other three of us ~~as well.~~

Yet in one little way, this was also a day I hated to see come and go. It might ~~well~~ be asked how I could both hunger for the Fourth and then turn around and be leery of it. But the case was this, that for all the glory of the holiday, the Gros Ventre creek picnic and then the rodeo and then the dance and on top of that my overnight stay with Ray--at my

age then, the day that promised all this also meant to me the midpoint of the season. The bend beyond which my English Creek summer would begin to trickle away. By the calendar this wasn't anywhere near true. School had been out not much more than a month, and there still lay the remainder of July and all of August and even the front edge of September--which in fact included that 15th birthday I was anticipating, two months from this very day--before I would be in a classroom again. Nonetheless the Fourth seemed the turn of the summer. I sensed, almost the way you can feel a change of weather coming, that faster time waited beyond this day.

Life. Maybe ~~fourteen and five/sixths~~ 14 5/6 years wasn't the highest possible ground to view it from. But I was seeing enough this summer to get at least a beginner's notion of its complications.

In maybe an hour and a half, better time than I would have thought possible for that ride in from the English Creek station, Mouse and I were topping the little rise near the turnoff to Charlie Finletter's place, the last ranch before town.

From there a mile or so outside, Gros Ventre looked like a green cloudbank--cottonwood trees billowing so thick that it took some inspection to find traces of houses among them. My own hunch is that the cottonwood example was taken from Choteau, the next town south down the highway, where trees were spaced along all the streets early on so that restful tunnels of shade developed with the town. If that theory is correct, it surely follows that the early civic thinkers of Gros Ventre told them-

selves they could damn well do twice what Choteau ever could; for when they went along Gros Ventre's neighborhood streets they proceeded to plant double. A line of trees along the front yards, then another between sidewalk and street. Then the same colonnade again on the other side of the street. All this of course had been done fifty or more years before, a period of time that will grow you a hell of a big cottonwood. By now every street of Gros Ventre was lorded over by these twin files of fat gray trunks, so wrinkled and gullied they looked as if rivulets of rain had been running down them ever since the deluge floated Noah. Nor did this tree domination stop there. Together with the original cottonwoods that already rose old and tall along English Creek before Gros Ventre was ever thought of, the streetside plantation produced almost a roof over the town. This cottonwood canopy was particularly wonderful just before a rain, when the leaves began to shiver, rattle in their papery way. The whole town seemed to tingle then, and the sound picked up when a gust of wind from the west ushered in the rain, and next the air was filled with the seethe of water onto all that foliage. In Gros Ventre, even a dust-settler sounded like a real weather event.

The English Creek road entered town past the high school--one of those tan-brick two-story crates that seemed to be the only way they knew how to build high schools in those days--and I nudged Mouse into an even quicker pace so as not to dwell on that topic any longer than necessary. We were aiming ourselves across town, to the northeast end where the Heaneys' house stood.

Block on block as we made our way, the trees more than ever looked like the most thriving things around. Gros Ventre of those Depression years looked--I don't know how else to say it but roadworn. That I can remember this state of appearance in itself says something of the attraction of Gros Ventre, for I am not naturally a person who cares a lot about towns. I suppose the case is, though, that if any town stays with you it will be the one from your high school years; for good or ill, the details from then last and last, piled up in your memory by your growing capacity at the time to take them in, to realize that you yourself are lengthening out into a member of the community rather than being merely a waist-high tourist in it. Whatever accounts for it, the look of Gros Ventre then is vivid in me yet. Not a decrepit community, for the neighborhoods had been quite substantially built in the first place: a lot of dignified dormers and tidy picket fences and inviting porches. Nor even really lackadaisical. Although Gros Ventrians, I suppose like people anywhere, had had to pull back from the earlier boom mood that anybody could come to Montana and take up a homestead and prosper as a farmer, or slap together four walls and thrive as a merchant (I have always subscribed to the observation Bill Reinking once wrote in the Gleaner, that the one benefit of hard times is that they make you do some things the sensible way you ought to have been doing them all along anyway), I recall no falling off of energy during the Depression. If anything, many people were working harder than they ever had, contriving like hell to try to make ends meet. I knew without looking, for instance, that behind each house Mouse and I were passing was a vegetable garden,

and the gardens of that time were tremendous, any food that could be grown was that much less to have to buy. Too, a lot of town families still raised chickens, and quite a number had a milk cow. Besides doing as much as possible to feed themselves, people did a great deal of puttering around. Men with no other job in sight tackled house repairs, or fenced the yard, or split wood--almost every back yard held a woodpile like a small hill. The women planted flower gardens to splash some color into life. So anything that was a matter of energy, of puttering and contriving, the hard times didn't particularly quench in Gros Ventre. What had come to a standstill were the parts of life requiring actual money. Build or repair something, but then you couldn't afford to paint it. (That lack of paint, houses fading toward gray and machinery turning to rust, to me is the tone of those Depression years.) Cars got more and more jalopy-like, the triumph simply was to keep them running. And whenever somebody moved away, the house or business simply stood there empty, the life cored out of it.

Just, as I say, a roadworn town. Weathered by all it had been through in those Depression years.

Mouse and I now had crossed Main Street at the bank corner, past the First National, and were into the Heaneys' side of town. An early priest had persuaded the Catholic landowner who platted this particular neighborhood to name the streets after the first missions in Montana, which in turn bore the names of saints. This created what the current Gros Ventre postmaster, Chick Jennings, called "the repeater part of town," with mailing addresses such as St. Mary St., St. Peter St. and St. Ignatius St.

It was the end of St. Ignatius St. that the Heaney house stood, a white two-story one with sills of robin's-egg blue. Ed Heaney owned the lumber yard, and so was the one person in town with some access to paint. The robin's egg blue had been a shipping mistake by the manufacturer--it is a shade pretty delicate to put up against the weather of Montana--and Ed lugged the can home and made the best of it.

The place looked empty as I rode up, which was as I expected. Rather than the creek picnic, the Heaneys always went out to a family shindig at Genevieve's parents' farm, quite a ways east of Gros Ventre on the Conrad road. So with Ray out there, I wouldn't link up with him until the rodeo, and I simply slung my warbag inside the Heaneys' back porch and got back on Mouse again.

I figured I still ought to kill a little time before the creek picnic, plus getting all the use out of Mouse that I could, and so I rode along the far edge of town, out to where the highway comes in from the south. To me, that is the most interesting approach to Gros Ventre. What might be called the sheep's-eye view, for the bands that flowed through town every spring on their way to the Blackfeet Reservation came to Gros Ventre from this direction.

I can't really say that the sheep spent time thinking about this, but for anybody else nearing Gros Ventre the highway curving down from the southern benchland delivered you into the town in such a way that you had to wonder at first whether the place was anything but cottonwoods and houses. A community where they had forgotten to have a downtown. At least, no sign of any until the road kinked sharply to

the right, and around that bend lay the sudden straight shot of Main Street. A street, let me say, wide enough to turn a freight wagon and an eight-horse team around in, in the early days, and which now made the downtown ~~look~~ seem bigger than the half-dozen blocks it actually was. Then around another curve, this one to the left, the highway sneaked across the English Creek bridge and out of town to the north. Making the route for people traveling through Gros Ventre--or as I have pointed out that the more plentiful visitors were, sheep--a sort of long puzzling Z.

Contained between those civic curves was a community in the same business it had been born to in the early 1870's: supply. The selling of wares. Settlement here dated back to when some weary freight wagoneer pulled in for the night at the nice creekside sheltered by cottonwoods. As the freighters' trail between Fort Shaw on the Sun River and southern Alberta developed, this site became a regular waystop, nicknamed The Middle since it was about midway between Fort Shaw and Canada. (Although some of us also suspect that to those early-day wagoneers the place seemed like the middle of nowhere.) True, the first permanent structure was a more-or-less hotel and definite saloon, put up by a fellow named Luke Barclay, but before very long Barclay's spa was neighbored by a store, some other alert freighter having seen that an extra wagon of supplies could be left at The Middle--Gros Ventre-to-be--and draw the business of the cattlemen who were taking up the range north of the Missouri and the Sun. Then grew the ranches along English Creek, and with those families a post office and a high school, the Catholic church and then the Presbyterian, and businesses, more and more businesses.

If I put my mind to it, I am capable of reciting every enterprise of Gros Ventre of that Fourth of July day.

Helwig's grocery and merc, with the Eddy's bread sign in its window.

The Toggery clothing store.

Musgrove's drugstore, with the mirror behind the soda fountain so that a person could sit there over a soda (assuming a person had the price of a soda, not always the case in those times) and keep track of the town traffic.

Grady Tilton's garage.

Dale Quint's saddlery and leather repair shop. Maybe a decent description of Gros Ventre of that time was that it still had a leather man but not yet a dentist. (A person went to Conrad for tooth work.)

Saloons, the Pastime and Spenger's (although Dolph Spenger was a dozen or more years dead.)

The Odeon movie theatre, the one place in town with its name in neon script. The other modern touch lent by the Odeon was its recent policy of showing the movie twice on Saturday night--first at 7:30, then the "owl show" at 9.

The post office, the one new building in Gros Ventre since I was old enough to remember. A New Deal project, this had been, complete with a mural of the Lewis and Clark expedition portaging around the Great Falls of the Missouri River in 1805. Lewis and Clark maybe were not news to postal customers of the Two country, but York, Lewis's Negro slave standing out amid the portagers like a black panther in a snowfield, definitely was.

Doc Spence's office. Across the empty lot from Doc's, the office of the lawyer, Eli Kinder. Who, strange to say, was a regular figure in the sheep traffic through this street. Eli was a before-dawn riser and often would arrive downtown just as a band of sheep did. It was odd to see him, in his suit and tie, helping shove those woolies along Main Street, but Eli had been raised on a ranch down in the Highwood Mountains and knew what he was doing.

The sidestreet businesses, Tracy's creamery and Ed Heaney's lumber yard and Adam Kerz's coal and trucking enterprise.

The set of bank buildings, marking what might be called the down of downtown: the First National Bank of Gros Ventre in tan brick, and cater-corner from it the red brick of what had been the English Creek Valley Stockmen's Bank. The Valley Stockmen's went under in the early 1920s when half of all the banks in Montana failed, and the site now was inhabited, if not exactly occupied, by Sandy Stott's one-chair barber shop. The style in banks in those times was to have a fancy doorway set into the corner nearest the street intersection--Gros Ventre's pair of bank buildings stared down each other's throats in exactly this fashion--and when Sandy took over the Valley Stockmen's building he simply painted barber-pole stripes on one of the fat granite pillars supporting the doorway.

What have I missed? Of course; also there on the Valley Stockmen's block, the newspaper office with its name proclaiming on a plate-glass window in the same typeface as its masthead: Gleaner. Next to that a more recent enterprise, Pauline Shaw's Moderne Beauty Shoppe. The story

was that when Bill Reinking first saw his new neighboring sign, he stuck his head in the shop to ask Pauline if she was sure she hadn't left an "e" off Beauty.

I heard somebody say once that the business section of every Western town he'd ever seen looked as if it originated by falling out the back end of a truck. Not so with Gros Ventre. That is, Gros Ventre never started off from a blueprint, staked off onto the planet before the first outhouse was erected, the way Valier was laid out by its irrigation project bigwigs. But for all its make-do and mix of styles--brick for banks, clapboard for saloons; terra cotta up top if you wanted to sell clothing (The Toggery), an old-style wooden square front (Helwig's Merc) if groceries were your line--to me downtown Gros Ventre held a sense of being what it ought to be. Of aptness, maybe is the term. Not fancy, not shacky. Steady.

Once in a while things are what they seem. As Montana towns go Gros Ventre was an unusually stable one. It grew to about a thousand people when the homesteaders began arriving to Montana in droves in the first decade of this century--my mother could remember in her childhood coming to town and seeing wagon after wagon of immigrants heading out onto the prairie, a white rag tied on one spoke of a wagonwheel so the revolutions could be counted to measure the bounds of the claimed land--and that population total never afterward varied more than a hundred either way. Nor varied much in quality either, I think it can be said. Gros Ventre simply tended to draw people who were there from choice rather than merely lack of imagination. Settlers from Scotch Heaven or

other homestead areas that played out, who had come in and found some way to start over in life. Others who had moved into town for high school for their kids, then stayed on. The store people; the ranch hands and sheep herders who hung around to live out their spans when they were beyond work.

The south-to-north exploration Mouse and I were taking through Gros Ventre, I now have to say, had more than sheep-route logic to it. It also saved for the last what to me was the best of the town. Three buildings at the far end of the east side of Main Street: last outposts before the street/highway made its second curve and zoomed from Gros Ventre over the bridge across English Creek. The trio which dealt in life's basics: food, drink, sleep.

The night during our campjacking trip when I was baptizing my interior with alcohol and Stanley Meixell was telling me the history of the Two Medicine National Forest from day one, a surprise chapter of that tale was about the hostelry that held the most prominent site in Gros Ventre. Stanley's arrival to town when he first came here to ~~be the ranger for~~ the Two was along the route Mouse and I had just done, from the south, and as Stanley rode around the ~~First~~ initial curve back there and could see along the length of Main Street, here at the far end a broad false-front with a verandah beneath it was proclaiming:

beer liquors cigars

meals at all N O R T H E R N H O T E L lunches

H ours put u P

c.e. sedgwick, prop.

"Looks like it could kind of use a prop, all right," Stanley observed to a bib-overalled idler leaning against one of the porch posts. Who turned out to be the exact wrong person to make that joke to: C.E. Sedgwick himself.

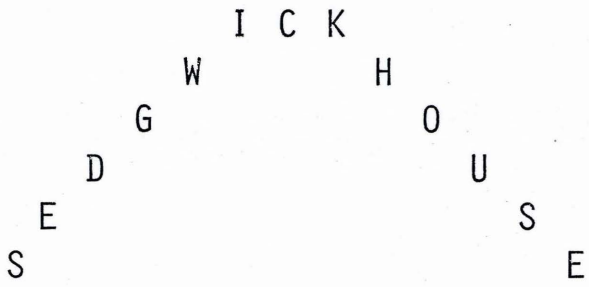
"If my enterprise don't suit you," Sedge huffed, "you can always bunk down there in the diamond willows," indicating the brush at the bend of English Creek.

"How about," Stanley offered, "me being a little more careful with my mouth, and you giving me a second chance as a customer?"

Sedge hung his thumbs into his bib straps and considered. Then decided: "Go ~~entirely~~ mute and I might adopt you into the family. Bring your gear on in."

The Northern burned in the dry summer of 1910. Although according to old-timers, "burned" doesn't begin to say it. Incinerated, maybe, or conflagrated. For the Northern blaze took the rest of the block with it and threatened that whole end of town; if there had been a whisper of wind, half of Gros Ventre would have become ash and a memory. Sedge being Sedge, people weren't surprised when he decided to rebuild. After all, he went around in those overalls because what he really liked about being a hotelier was the opportunity to be his own maintenance man. But what Sedge erected still sat, this Fourth when I was atop Mouse, across the end of Main Street as a kind of civic astonishment--a three-story fandango in stone, quarried from the gray cliffs near where English Creek joins the Two Medicine River; half a block square, this reborn Sedgwick hostelry, with round towers at each corner and a swooping pointed ornament

in the middle, rather like the spike on those German soldiers' helmets. Even yet, strangers who don't know that the Pondera county courthouse is twenty-two miles east in Conrad assume that Sedge's hotel is it. Sedge in fact contributed to the civic illusion by this time not daubing a sign all across the front of the place. Instead, only an inset of chiseled letters rainbowing over the entranceway:



Sedge sold out in 1928, to a family from Seattle who seemed to somehow eke a living out of that big gray elephant of a hotel even after hard times hit. (Even during the Depression, whatever travelers there were had to sleep someplace, I suppose.) About 1931 Sedge died of pleurisy, and almost as if she'd been waiting just offstage, his widow emerged as probably Gros Ventre's most well-to-do citizen and certainly its looniest. Lila Sedgwick was a tall, bony woman. Her build always reminded me of Abraham Lincoln. Almost any day she could be seen downtown three or four times, some days six or eight, for she no sooner would get home than she would forget about having just gone for the mail or on some other errand and would go for it again. In her long old-style dresses and with those Lincoln arms and elbows

poking out she inevitably was a figure of fun, although the one and only time I said something smart about her my mother's frown closed me down in a hurry.

"Lila Sedge is not to be laughed at," she said, not in her whetstoned voice but just sort of instructively. "The clouds have settled on her mind."

I don't know where my mother got that, but always after when I would see Lila Sedge, creeping along this street for the third time in an hour or gandering up at a cottonwood tree as if she's never encountered one before, I would wonder about how it was to have a clouded mind. Somewhere in there, I supposed, a bruise-colored thunderhead that was Sedge's death. Maybe mare's tails high away in the past where she was a girl. Fluffs which carried faces--aunts, uncles, schoolmates, any of us she happened to meet on the street--in and out of her recognition. Until my mother's words about Lila Sedge I had never thought of the weather of the brain, but more and more I have come to believe in it.

But enough on that. The Sedgwicks and their namesake hotel provided Gros Ventre its one titanic building and its roving human landmark. The pair of enterprises side by side south across the street from the Sedgwick House ministered to the town internally.

Since families hardly ever ate out in those days there were only two feeding places in Gros Ventre, and the other one besides the dining room of the Sedgwick House was the Lunchery run by Mae Sennett. For any eater more interested in quantity than quality, the Lunchery was your place. Although this was before my time, I have heard from different

sources that in its early days the Lunchery, or whatever name it was under at the moment, had a sign on the wall reading:

Meals 50¢

Big feed 75¢

Hell of a gorge $1

In short, the Lunchery's main claim to fame was that it made the Sedgwick House menu look dainty and delectable by comparison. Yet its pedigree as a going business went most of the distance back to Gros Ventre's origins; the building had begun as the stagecoach station. Toussaint Rennie perhaps was the only person old enough to still call the place the Way Stop. Guys of the next generation had the habit of calling it the Fargo House, and my father and his generation mostly referred to it as the Doozy, from when a man named Deuce Harrison ran it. To me, though, it was the Lunchery, and Lunchery lore was a kind of seasoning, an attention-getting spice, in the history of Gros Ventre. The most famous tale was that once when somebody asked an old sheep-herder when he was going back out among the woolies, he said he was washed up at that, too creaky to tramp the mountains, but he figured he could always get a job herding flies at the Lunchery. I think that exaggerates. The occasional times when I would be with my father when he was on Forest Service meal money, traveling back late from Great Falls or someplace, his suggestion of "Let's go try the Doozy" never did us any real culinary harm, that I know of.

Of course, that may have had something to do with the fact that

what both of us always ordered, oyster stew, came from a can. I can see that deep bowl yet, the milk yellowing from the blob of butter melting in the middle of it, and if Mae Sennett was doing the serving herself she always warned "Watch out for any oysterberries," by which she meant those tiny pearls that sometimes show up.

I have to say, I still am not truly comfortable eating in any restaurant that doesn't have that tired ivory look to its walls that the Lunchery did. A proof that the place has been in business longer than overnight and at least has sold decent enough food that people keep coming back.

The fact that the Lunchery and the Medicine Lodge saloon shouldered side by side provided Gros Ventre its "rough" section of town in the thriftiest manner possible. I would calculate that in Great Falls it took about four blocks of First Avenue South to add up into a neighborhood of similar local notoriety. Actually, as with any pleasure emporium the wickedest thing about the Medicine Lodge was its reputation. The leading Medicine Lodge story was of an innocent visitor reacting in alarm when the bartender, tall Tom Harry, leaned toward him and rumbled: "Shoot you one?" All that was being asked, though, was whether the customer wanted a glass of beer drawn from the tap.

The Medicine Lodge had waited out Prohibition behind boarded windows, but Tom Harry more than brought it back to light and life. Also, maybe after those dry years the town was thirsty for a saloon with a bit of flair. He had come over from running a bar, and some said a taxi dance joint as well, at the Fort Peck dam project. Supposedly all he

brought with him was a wad of cash and the picture of Franklin Delano Roosevelt which had adorned the wall of his Fort Peck enterprise. But also, as it proved out, along with him came a set of invisible rules of saloon behavior, which every so often somebody would stray across. I think of the night when my father and I were entering the Medicine Lodge and met a stranger with a cigar in his mouth being forcibly propelled into the street. It turned out that although Tom Harry himself went around under a blue cigarette haze--tailormades; no Fort Peck bartender ever had time to roll his own--he would not tolerate cigar smoke.

Be that as it may, in the Medicine Lodge FDR was promptly joined on the wall by a minor menagerie of stuffed animal heads Tom Harry acquired from somewhere. Several buck deer and an antelope and a mountain sheep and a bobcat snarling about the company he was in; not to mention the six-point elk head which set off arguments every hunting season about how much his absent body would weigh.

In itself, this taxidermy herd populated the Medicine Lodge considerably. But the place also held a constant legion of the living, more or less. These setters, as my father called the six or eight guys who sat around in there--he was not above stepping in for a beer after our Lunchery meal, and if nobody official-looking was on hand Tom Harry didn't seem to mind my being with him--the setters always occupied the stools at the far end of the bar, and anybody who entered got long gazes from them as if they were cataloguing the human race.

Decapitated animals and owlish geezers do not, I realize, sound like much of a decor. And yet the Medicine Lodge did three times as much

business as Spenger's or the Pastime, both much more "respectable" places back downtown. I suppose it is and ever will be the habit of the race: people gravitate to a certain place to do their drinking and logic will never veer them. At least one night a week in the Medicine Lodge, gravitation amounted to something more like an avalanche. Every Saturday night, thirsts converged from everywhere in the Two country. Hay hands who had come in for a bath and haircut at Shorty Stott's but decided instead to wash down the inside of themselves. ~~Entire~~ shearing crews one time of year, lamb lickers (as guys who worked in lambing sheds were known) another. Any season, a sheepherder in from the mountains or the Reservation to inaugurate a two-week spree. (Not least among the reasons that those bands of sheep were trailed through town at dawn was that the Medicine Lodge wasn't yet open to waylay herders.) Government men from reclamation projects. Maybe a few Double W cowpokes. Definitely the customary setters, who had been building up the calluses on their elbows all week just for this. Always a sufficient cast of characters for loud dialogues, occasional shoving matches, and eventual passing-outs. Maybe you couldn't get away with cigar smoke in the Medicine Lodge, but you could with what counted.

So that is the sheep's-eye view of Gros Ventre. Although one last jot of description does need to be added. A glance over the shoulder from there by the Sedgwick House and the Medicine Lodge and the Lunchery would readily provide it. The passage of a thousand ewes and their lambs through a town cannot happen without evidence being left on the street,

and occasionally the sidewalks. Sheep are nervous enough as it is and being routed through a canyon of buildings does not improve their bathroom manners any. Once Carnelia Muntz, wife of the First National banker, showed up in the bank and said something about all the sheep muss on the streets. Ed Van Bebber happened to be in there cashing a check and, I give him full due, he looked her up and down and advised: "Don't think of them as sheep turds, Carnelia. Think of them as berries off the money tree."

Cars and pickups and trucks were parked so thick that they all but swamped the part of town around the park. 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 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 of Montana towns and delve around a few minutes and in all likelihood find two outstanding features--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 outskirt

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, one last oasis before the road arrowed north into the plains and benchlands. In recent years WPA crews had made it a lot more of a park than it had been, clearing out the willows which were taking over the creek bank and then laying in some riprap to keep the spring runoff out. And someone during that WPA work came up with an idea I've not seen before or since. There near the creek where a big crippled cottonwood leaned--a windstorm had ripped off its main branches--a crew sawed the tree off low to the ground, leaving a broad stump about two feet high; then atop the stump was built a speaker's pulpit, a slatted round affair somewhat on the order of a ship's crow's-nest. The one and only time I saw Senator Burton K. Wheeler, who some people 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.