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Heart Earth synopsis

Heart Earth goes again to the territory of This House of Sky; to the landscape of fate. In essence, this book will refract a family--my own, in the last months of World War Two--trying to make a place for itself in the American West and in the post-war America that already was leaving behind the way of life of my mother and father. That spring and summer of 1945 was our collision with the future; my family's season of saga, from Arizona to Montana to a destroyer in the South Pacific, which bent all our lives from then on; and by an odd gift from the past, I now have the weave-makings for that story.

My mother departed early from This House of Sky, with her death in June, 1945. Not until nearly ten years after I finished Sky did any of her letters come to light, as a bequest to me from her brother, Wally Ringer, upon his own death. Her own voice, there in ink to Wally aboard the U.S.S. Ault in the Pacific theater of combat, sometimes brims with brio (We spent Sat. making formals and catching mice), other times will glint sharp (The herder we had planned on lost 30 lambs in about 10 days, so at that rate we'd have to buy him another band of lambs by fall), and throughout is individualistically deft enough to carry the chronology of the story in brief postmarked excerpts such as the one that begins the manuscript sample. But even more vital to me as a writer are the sparks of memory and imagination that fly upward out of her letters. Every so often Heart Earth will leap into scenes and dialogue stirred in me by some mention in those ink-of-time letters--for example, our nights in a cabin in the desert outside Wickenburg, Arizona, near a German-prisoners-of-war camp, the combination of isolated landscape and the spooky nearness of those prisoners, the heart-racing amplitude of the nightsounds of the desert... These fictional shards will need to be used sparingly, to keep the book swift and gemlike, but I believe they will refract the characters in the most memorable way possible.

I herded the sheep last Sat. while Charlie and Ivan took the herder to Bozeman, my mother wrote in her last letter to her sailor brother, just a week before her death at our sheepcamp in the Bridger Mountains. I got along O.K. When they came back Charlie and Ivan brought me the nicest pair of brown boots and a big hat, so I am kind of a combination cowgirl sheepherder now. The half-year compressed in her correspondence is the story of a family making a try at transplanting to Arizona and a Sun Belt future, failing or deciding against or in any case reverting to the old known life in Montana, only to have that life come to the disaster of her early death. I see Heart Earth as having the inexorable quality of, say, A Missing Plane by Susan Sheehan but without that book's remorseless detailing; as possessing a sense of time and place in the way Eudora Welty's One Writer's Beginnings does but with greater geographic scope, a larger sense of how the landscape fatefully enters us, holds us. And I want it to read like chain-lightning; somewhere between forty thousand and sixty thousand words, a highly-charged handful of book. As to the prospects for such a book, Heart Earth's market has been built for it by This House of Sky--and that precursor so far has sold 105,000 copies.

###

None of us ever got over the blindingly hard fact of her death on the mountain. Not my father (whose tries, Az and the Bridgers, both failed)... Not my grandmother (who had to write the most terrible sentence, penciled postscript of...) Not Wally, the news coming aboard the Ault after the war had not crossed its thwarts...(and putting the letters away, for he knew not what...)

put Dad last — + all, not...

Nor.

...now my father's lungs caving in, my grandmother past seventy, I

enlisted myself into the Montana ~~desperx~~ diaspora (that my parents had

turned ~~their backs on~~ back from at Wickenburg).

--desperate for a salary and a chance to crash upward through caste...

--My heart earth has twenty-six letters in it, (water metaphor, leading own turns out to have to Pacific-sided

to "I voyage on her ink." at last I know.

be aided by Pacific as well as Rockies.

- journeys back & forth.

America loves to reminisce, but not to remember deeply.

use Dad's and Grandma's letters as an explosive conclusion?

--my mother had been the buffer between them, and now... insulating wall their explosive chambers

--Solomonic situation, who ought to raise me, at last was solved when they both did.

The shape of a life is no longer drawn against the land as my mother's was. Here on the summer mountain, the sheep making gain with every bite of the OO grass, is the existence she has liked best, the way of life prefigured by the honeymoon summer on Grass Mountain. My mother and father on their own, Berneta not tied to the asthma invalid role, Charlie not having to yield to other men's orders. We cannot keep to it beyond summer, there is the obligation of my schooling. But Montana seasons would not let us balance on this mountain longer than for that anyhow, and she could accept that, it was in her rhythms to endure winter if we weren't utterly sealed up in ~~it on~~ some snow swamp a place like the Stewart ranch.

rusty dangers

Of these ~~relics~~ the one

~~One relic~~ I am instantly compelled to is the horse-drawn mowing machine;

its seat a naked throne between the broad iron wheels: its wicked wing,

the six-foot cutter bar with spearheaded guardplates and the slashing

teeth of the sickle blade within them: incalculable rusty danger, hurrah!

dead as

Now that we had started up our spiral staircase of summer,

(at the Rung cabin)

This was the out there that my grandmother dreaded (to see my mother go to). Distances another

The central question now was whether it would be simpler and cheaper to herd them ourselves the rest of the summer, rather than leave a herder in charge while Dad ran a haying crew and my mother took on the cooking.

For once my father was leaning away from hardest work (in choosing to summer with the sheep instead of contracting hay).

Everybody's health could ~~xxxxx~~ use a measured mountain summer...

used in Sky?

Trailing the sheep along Highway 89 was like pushing soap bubbles upstream. The sight of 4000 ewes and lambs massed on the asphalt seemed natural enough to us, but any passing tourist saw it as a rarity which demanded instant photography. Tourists driving towards the sheep would stop in front, get out and begin snapping. Since sheep never get accustomed to a fear of any sort, this would stall the band until at last they fled -- past like a current around a boulder. Bad as the oncoming tourists were, those coming up behind were worse. When these picture-takers would stop and snap, the sheep would close ranks in front of them, never to be parted. For the next ten minutes, until one of us gave up and led a way through the band, there would be a honking tourist car trying in vain to ease through the sheep.

The route began to take on familiar features, like a caraven run. The worst bottleneck came early -- getting them through the town of Dupuyer. As if steering them down main street wasn't enough, there was a long bridge at the far edge of town which they also had to be threaded through, then two more bridges behond that. After that, the route alternated between fenced lanes and open pasture which offered some leisure. Bridges were always bad, and there were several. There was a tar pit a few miles north of Dupuyer which at least one lamb would usually find, and doom himself.

The sheep, ~~who~~ focusing only from one clump of grass to the next, arrived on the summer land without ceremony, but the rest of us lef off sighs of relief. The summer had begun, and whatever the problems of water, scant pasture, there was an expanse where we could deal with it.

day's reading I skimmed into the mother phrase, probably some item about Be Kind to Animals Week. At the same time, I had been brooding about a particularly appalling siege of smog. Probably the hideous rasp of a chainsaw down the street chewed into my day. For certain, a stack of clippings about environmental battles teetered in some corner of my workroom. It all came together -- mood, material, idea -- in the phrase Be kind to your local planet, and my subsequent article about global pollution appeared in The Rotarian under that title.

Great white bones of forests is a phrase I panted into my notebook. My wife and I are enthusiastic hikers, and many times we have scrambled, under the weight of back packs, along a magnificent remote stretch of Pacific beach. All along that coastline, driftwood is slammed ashore and then begins to silver under the sun and sea water. Eventually these skeletal remnants of forests bleach to bone color.

Swale sideways made its way into the notebook the same way. Countless writers have compared the ocean to the prairie, and vice versa. What struck me was how remarkably the troughs between incoming waves resembled the dips of land we had called swales when I grew up in the high plains country.

Both of these lines went into a poem, which was published in a regional magazine called Puget Soundings. The passage spliced together with the pair of jottings reads:

Great white bones of forests
lie strewn by old storms.

I have grave doubts about meditative religions which feature years of contemplative solitude. Sheepherders too spend years alone, and their minds merely unravel.

Here is the equipment of a sheep camp:

--The herder, in my experience, is a man surly enough to want to be alone. Even when I was a boy, the old herders who knew the job were dying off, and or were too crippled up to follow the grazing patterns of the sheep. So herders were a make-do, doubtful lot.

Not that herding is an easy job. Your band of sheep will have about a thousand ewes and an equal number of lambs. They must spread out to graze. They must graze across a different area every day. They must get to water sometime during the day. All this they do in their own rhythm, leaving the bedground in early morning, grazing, shading up during mid-day, grazing, back to bedground at night. There may be constant threat from coyotes. Sheep wander off, get lost. If they have a full fleece of wool, they get on their backs helpless as a turtle and die in a few minutes. Sheep are alien creatures in the high mountains, and they must be watched. The herder must move them around not to overgraze the pasture, but mustn't dog them incessantly and run the fat off the lambs.

Some herders fight the loneliness. They will have in the wagon a tall stack of paperbacks, battered and crumpled from being carried in a hip pocket. Almost always Westerns or detective stories. A few herders will have a battery radio. Once in a while you come across a carver, or a braider. But a good many just live in their heads, and it is cramped quarters. Such men are apt to live in a pattern like a flood-plain river: months on the job day after day, then a roaring drunk in town which lasts until all the

its evening news in 1968, but their reports were not as provocative as hoped for, and the effort fizzled.

Editorials - The official opinion of the newspaper. Incisive, hart-hitting local editorials with some balance of humor are hard to find. Many papers suffer from a malady called Afganistanism -- a willingness to take a critical stand on anything controversial which is unrelated to its readers and advertisers. Others pack the space with ready-made editorials from national syndicates.

The steps from straight news through editorial opinion are not always clear even to reporters and editors, and they have been lost on all but the most analytical news consumers. Distinctive formats customarily identify editorials and columnists, but few newspapers consistently label anything else.

Some television stations, roundly criticized for mixing straight news and opinion, have developed "commentary" or "news analysis" overprints for use as their editorial voices are heard. Others, in the radio tradition, provide standard introductions that "the following is the opinion of this station's management." Because of seesaw rulings by the Federal Communications Commission, some do no editorializing at all.

The problem of unopinionated versus advocacy reporting is further muddled by the honorable tradition of contests which reward advocacy. Each year, for instance, the Scripps Howard Foundation awards $5,000 for superior work in promoting conservation. A Robert F. Kennedy award recognizes outstanding coverage of the problems of poverty and discrimination. Less highmindedly, pots of cash frequently are set up by trade associations or industries to encourage favorable stories.

Another nagging problem of the "straight" approach is that the news format can easily be subverted. "Just quote your sources," orders the

check agnst Sky for anything to me

straight deadliest
The storm drove on us from the north, the ~~worst~~ direction it could come from. The gray drapes of rain blotted ridge after ridge, the air chilling before the storm. One moment there was no rain, and the next it was falling fully.

The sheep ran as if whipped. We tried to hold them, turn them aside into circling. But still they ran, their potbellied shorn bodies joggling, the lambs following in bewilderment.

All that day they killed themselves, stampeding over the Two Medicine cliffs, finding gullies to pile up in, some only hunching to the ground, quivering, to freeze. We lost more than two hundred -- as usual, enough disaster to wipe the profit from the year.

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4 March 1977

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Dear Mr. Murray

You were mentioned to me the other day by Vernon Carstensen of the University of Washington history repartment as a good candidate for a series of interviews I'm doing. I was one of Vernon's students at the UW, and he continues to be an occasional mentor as I write on historical topics in this region. The particular reason I would talk to you is that PACIFIC SEARCH magazine has me interviewing interesting persons in the Northwest, and Vernon sketched enough for me

Killer dogs have dispatched thousands in history.

They are easy game for coyotes to run down. A bear can corner a bunch against an outcropping and kill every other one. Water is a killer; If a sheep gets belly deep in the tiniest stream, the wool becomes so heavy she can't get out. They snag themselves on fallen timber and gouge wounds which flies will infect. I have seen them piled at the bottom of cliffs after the panic of a cold rain. All else failing, they will do themselves in simply by rolling onto their backs.

~~It would make good fiction to see the herders as rascals in paradise: noble citizens fallen on hard times -- the loss of a family, the perfidy of of a wife -- who live out their self-sentence in pastoral exile.~~ Or to see them as replicas of the Basques of Idaho and Nevada, with their puzzling language, brought thousands of miles from their Pyrenees to train an eye on American plump sheep. But ~~xhxmxhxx~~ not the herders of my boyhood. ~~They were a ragged end of society....~~

--The sheepdog is usually part border collie, a middling sized dog. ~~A good one is worth his weight in shoe leather.~~ The herder sends him around the sheep, the dog ~~xxxx~~ pausing often to look back for further direction. By waving an arm and shouting, the herder send him on. When the sheep are finally turned, he whistles him back. ~~The herder is a constant diplomat with the dog, rewarding him with praise and ear rubbing, scolding him for~~ biting sheep.

A good herder can turn the sheep by shouting at them, for they know the shout may be backed up with a raid by the sheepdog.

Stephen Levin, columnist for the Des Moines Register and Tribune Syndicate: He deplores "the ready capacity of reporters and editors and publishers to hide behind a kind of cool detachment and abdicating their responsibility in society. No matter who you are and what your business is, your business is living in this country at this time, and therefore I really think if you want to continue to live in this country...and want this country to continue to live, you will have to become involved in its problems."

Ron Dorfman, editor of the Chicago Journalism Review: "Every news story that you write is advocacy of something, even if it is only neutrality." He says reporters copped out during the civil rights campaigns in the 1960s by not making a choice between such protagonists as Martin Luther King and Bull Connor.

These and other newsmen have fed debate recently in the country's newsrooms and among the ablest reporters, yet the New Journalism, as advocacy sometimes is called, has its roots firmly into history.

The first small newspapers hatched in colonial America were advocates in disagreements between royal governors and disgruntled businessmen who denounced tax and trade restrictions. When the colonists broke with England, editors avidly committed their news columns for -- and a few against -- the Revolution; then in the young nation, many became mouthpieces of political parties.

Hurrah and harangue rang through the reports, with even George Washington allowed no pedestal while he presided over the government. "If ever a nation was debauched by a man, the American nation has been debauched by Washington," Benjamin Franklin Bache wrote in 1796. His rhetoric was not unusual.

Our own century began during the excesses of yellow journalism, which soared blithely beyond accuracy. The fare in William Randolph Hearst's

Myself, I liked sheep. Or rather, I didn't mind the sheep as such, which is the best a person can do towards creatures whose wool begins in their brain, and I liked the idea of sheep. Maybe because sheep looked right to me on those slopes of the Two, looked like sage or some other natural coloration. Cattle stuck out like pepper on meringue, but sheep, under a strong-eyed herder who had them spread in grazing across a half-mile of brome grass ridge, seemed like they always had existed there and the land had been put in under them. And while sheep had to be troubled with more than cattle did, the troubling was on a smaller scale. Pulling a leggy lamb from a ewe's womb is nothing to untangling a calf from the inside of a heifer. You can brand a sheep by dabbing a little paint on her back, not needing to invite half the county in to maul your livestock around in the dust of a branding corral.

A kind of instant crop, sheep. Put them onto the land and there they are, as if generations of them had been there...

I could have furnished the Smithsonian with a large amount of valuable information relative to the Indians of the Northwest but I have been so disheartened by the long delay in publishing the Makah memoir that I determined to forward no more till that is published. Can you give one any encouragement that it will appear within the next decade. . . ?

As with ~~most~~ any # of men of his age who had grown up around stock in our part of Montana, my father had worked with both cattle and sheep. Range wars were not the Montana style; ranchers tended instead to try figure out which species did best, and often ended up with both sheep and cows. It may have been the Montana strain of... (Also, from what I can read of the Wyoming situation, we had less of Harvard men arriving with Owen Wister stories in their heads and deciding they were the lords of the frontier.) Oh, you'd find an occasional young hammerhead who proclaimed himself nothing but a cowboy and never could ~~be~~ draw breath as anything else. (Which isn't to say that most sheepherders weren't immovably sheepherders, but somehow that point never seemed to need announcing.)

WINTER BROTHERS

A season at the edge of America

by Ivan Doig

"What about you?" Riley put to me, in that way where you didn't know whether he was mocking or genuinely asking. "What's a rancher's version of hanging your voice in the air?"

I looked squarely back at him and revealed before I quite knew it:

"1959."

In '58, lamb and wool prices both were good and something in me said to take on all the sheep we could the next year. I talked it over with Marce. The girls were small yet and needed a lot of our time, we still had to pay off the ranch, there of course was no guarantee on prices staying up--just any number of other reasons were lined up against the idea as well, but it only took my wife a second to say, "We might as well go for broke." And so we bought sheep by the scads. We had been running a band of a thousand ewes, but that spring of 1959 we lambed out two thousand, and in mid-May I took my deepest breath ever and bought three thousand more ewes and their six-week lambs. Five entire bands of sheep that summer, two on the national forest and three on grazing leases on the Blackfeet Reservation, and I don't know when

any of us slept between spring and September. Marce tended the Reservation sheepcamps with Lexa beside her in the pickup in diapers, I took Mariah horseback with me up into the pastures of the Two forest. Radio station KFBB in Great Falls broadcast "The Farmers' Noon Hour," and the daily recital of livestock prices Marce and I listened to over our dinner plates as if it was holy. The taste of risk never left my mouth until the seventeenth day of September when, in clearest Indian summer weather, we threw the five bands together to trail them to the railroad shipping point. I almost could not believe the sight they made, a walking cloud of sheep.

possible technique for herding scene: crosscut in mid-sentence, using dashes, from Dad and me in Bozeman to my mother with the sheep.

Possible conjunctions: traffic in Bozeman, the sheep on the mountainside.

--my coming birthday/the gift Dad and I are getting for her
(emphasize why Dad feels he wants to get gift for her now)

— weather
— view of Bridgers from barber chair
— Ringling, Ringer, Rung.

Probably don't do more than three such crosscuts. End the scene with her letter to Wally abt being cowgirl/sheepherder.

Make the point that my mother didn't like the idea of her asthma governing our life; that she didn't like decisions made for her sake (as Arizona was, by my dad, when she couldn't logically argue against it but emotionally didn't want to do it).

– use "crowbar in her spine" line w/ this?

--sending the dog (Buster) around the sheep:

"Go way around them! Way around them!"

(imitating Dad's gesture: backhanded, open palmed, as if sweeping the air clear...)

--the dog stopping, with an enough? look back at her

(the sheep deal?)

This was their life's business, they knew it like Baruch knew Wall Street.

(except that their instruments of debenture? walked around the hills...)

7 reprise the photo of her on horseback, revealing that it was at Wall Mtn., Dad's country, her adopted country.

to work with in description of views from Rung meadow:

timber-quilled mtntops
forest-crowned forest-tipped
handsome head-in-the-air mountains

fetching ridgebacks of green grass; view, view, view, gangs of view

transition needed: dialogue about catching fish for supper?

--B: I provided lunch, supper is up to you and the fish.

--C: Lunch, ye call it. What kind of a critter is a spam, anyway?

...leading into talk about the cabin:

Berneta alone on the mountain with the sheep:

--make this a bravura portrait, the fullest, most conclusive in the book?

herding day on the mountain:

--rods of light through the trees

--rush of air (thru aspen leaves) even when there's no real wind?

--smelling of...

--pressed; grass, sheep?

--the arch of the mtns; the arched backs of... Bridgers

--sparse

--cube (of cabin)

--In June, always in June, the (specific flowers) came.

--cracked out; blatted out

--sun prickling on skin

--the undersong of (ewes and lambs? birds?)

--Noon a stripe of contentment in the sheeps' day (shaded up)

--tail of the eye

--haunch (haunches of mountains)

--the box canyon of the mind

--Hearing the silences.

--That pivot summer.

--The years peel away, (she is the Wall Mtn horsewoman again)

--The skreek of (a hawk?)

--each sun (i.e., each day)

--sift (along the mtn, thru the sheep); sift along

--Banked inside her (were other summers, the Grass Mtn summer)...

--sunlight drilling thru the ~~gxx~~ grove of trees

--she is careful not to thrust workshoe thru the stirrup, get hung up; one of Dad's poundings by a horse was when horse shied at a snake as he was mounting, his foot going thru the stirrup...

smarting

At least once a generation, a giant winter would sent the livestock industry to its knees. Farming wobbled with every dry summer. Montana's chronic spit-in-your-eye climate ~~maybe was~~ seems to be made more belligerent by (the elevation etc. of the Big Belts); maybe the Big Belt country just asked for it...

is overshadowed by the grander Bridger Mountains immediately to the south. From the air over the Big Belts, the nature of their oddly isolated sprawl becomes evident. Not particularly lofty (with the exception of the above-timberline bulk of Mount Baldy), not especially treacherous in skyline, not much noticed by history except for the long-ago goldstrike at Confederate Gulch, this wad of unfamous mountains nonetheless stands in the way of everything major around them. They haze the Missouri River unexpectedly northwest from its headwaters for about ninety miles before the flow can find a passage around the stubborn barrier of the Big Belts and down the eastern slope of the continent. By one manner of geologic reckoning, the main range of the Rocky Mountains ends, a little ignominiously, east of Townsend where the mudstone and limestone perimeters of the Big Belts begin. On the Smith River Valley side of the Big Belt range, the steady plains of mid-Montana receive a rude bump upward to a valley-floor elevation of 5,280 feet. Goblin canyons chop in and out of the sixty-five-mile frontage of the Big Belts, but a scant two give any route through: Deep Creek Canyon where the highway has been threaded between snowcatching cliffs, and the Sixteen Canyon, graveyard of railroad ventures. Weather

in the Big Belts cuts as frustrating a swath as the geography does. At least once a generation a giant winter will send the livestock industry to its knees. Farming wobbles with every semi-dry summer. If possible, Montana's spit-in-your-eye climate seems to be made more belligerent by the closed-away mood of the Big Belts.

Not immediately obvious territory to find delight in. Yet my parents' honeymoon summer on Grass Mountain [in the Big Belts] wed them to this particular body of earth.

muscular quarter-century of driving highway maintenance equipment) and avid with fishpole and riflescope, he was the only one on my mother's side of the family with the capacity for drawing as much holiday as toil out of his time on earth. The several seasons I boarded with Wally and his family while I was in grade school, that household kicked into a new gear after he finished work--often a hard day's night of blading snow off his treacherous Deep Creek Canyon road--and away we would go to a trouty creek, a high school basketball or football game, up into the grass parks of the Castle Mountains to sight deer or elk. (It finally occurs to me: that funeral share he so grudged me he'd probably already earmarked for a more advanced camera or a comelier hunting rifle.) As I grew toward college, journalism, book bylines, the bond between Wally and me may have been that there was enough of each of us unfulfilled in the other to speculate on; never showing himself the least jealous, he nonetheless must have hungered for the education I was piling up, while I looked at him and wondered why I didn't get at least a genetic pinch of his go-anywhere-but-go extracurricularism. Later his life took wide turns indeed--here at the funeral are his first and third wives, both

a saga of my family echo into the earth here, and in the glide of years since convinced myself I was safely done with Montana burials. Burying Wally seemed particularly beyond the plotline he and I had inadvertently drawn between us. For most of my life--most of his, as we were only fifteen years apart in age--he was much my favorite uncle, the salutary relative we all need beyond our immediate family, out there at just enough distance to let us think we have at least one magical kin in whom the blood always hums, never drones. But that all went, in our weedy argument over--as fate had to have it--the expenses of a funeral; Wally's tardy and grudging reimbursement to me after I'd stood his half of the cost as well as my own when we buried his mother, my grandmother, those years before. Stung, I ever after intended that whenever word came of Wally's own last rite, it would be enough if I answered with the polite excuse of a wreath.

Wally of course accomplished other arrangements. When he saw that his erosion by cancer was final, he stipulated that I was to be a pallbearer for him. So, despite myself and not yet knowing what else he was bequeathing me across the years of our rift, I had come to the Smith River valley

But that all went, in our weedy argument over the expenses of a funeral. By the time of the death of my grandmother, his mother, in 1973, Wally and I were the only ones left to shoulder the costs. Easy to misstep in that situation and we faithfully did, when I stood his half of the cost as well as my own and he grew tardy and tardier with the reimbursement he'd promised me. [Angry and hurt that] he'd administered that funeral share into a snazzier fishing pole or a more high-powered hunting scope, I finally had to ask him to pony up. He replied he didn't think he should have to but if I felt that way about it, hell yes, he'd ~~send~~ provide the money.

I hated being asked to pony up as much as I hated having to ask.

I never quite got over anger & hurt of having to ask.

~~He~~ I hated asking & he hated being asked.

hold in mind, ~~along~~ together with my go-along soberside capacity to take everything in. The attack team on life we made.

But that all went, in our weedy argument over--how I hate to say--the expenses of a funeral. By the time of the death of my grandmother, his mother, in 1973, Wally and I were the only ones left to shoulder the costs. Easy to misstep in that situation and we faithfully did, when I stood his half of the cost as well as my own and he grew tardy and tardier with the reimbursement he'd promised me. My hurt was more than sizable by the time I had to ask him to pony up, ~~because I knew~~ knowing full well he'd administered that funeral share into a snazzier fishing pole or a more high-powered hunting scope. (At last it occurs to me, no longer the overproud struggling young freelance writer I was then: fishpole and riflescope were Wally's own tools of eloquence.) I left from his own graveside half-ashamed that I had not been able to forget our rift, the other half at Wally for so uncharacteristically trying to take advantage in that funeral deal; the sum of it a bone-anger in me that we had ended up somewhere between quibble and quarrel forever, this quicksilver uncle and I.

angle akin to a hospital bed, so that she could breathe past the asthma.

People still blanch when they try to tell me of witnessing one of my mother's asthma attacks. Savage is the summary word. The act of breath suddenly had to be fought for, chased after with wheezing and a coughing so hard it bruised you to hear, as she hunched into herself to ride out the faltering lungwork--"She'd choke right down," a man helplessly remembered a half century later, still swallowing hard at the hideous clarification her spasms of asthma brought, so much peril within one so young. When my grandparents stared down into a Wisconsin cradle and for once agreed with each other that they had to take this smothering child to the drier air of the West, they gave her survival but not ease.

When she had enough air, Berneta burned bright.

herself to ride out the faltering lungwork--"She'd choke right down," a man helplessly remembered a half century later, still swallowing hard at the terrible clarification her spasms of asthma brought, so much ~~danger~~ wounded within someone so young. When my grandparents stared down into a Wisconsin cradle and for once agreed with each other that they had to take this smothering child to the drier air of the West, they gave her survival but not ease.

When she had enough air, Berneta burned bright. A grade school booklet she made about Montana has survived, report of a forthright child: There are many disadvantages to farming in some parts of Montana.... Some times there is alkali ground and in other places gumbo soil and then the chinook winds and grasshoppers and all different kinds of insects and some times not enough rainfall. From Moss Agate life she inherited the treasury of the poor, a knack for language. Her father had a gift for gab, although of that infuriating sort that turned itself on when company came and shut down when merely the family was around; her mother Bessie spoke gems right and left, so that under her example Berneta grew up saying the wonderful eartrick merseys for Moss Agate's Jersey-cows-

in-need-of-mercy, and in a feat of synonym which loses me, a mere male, the neighborhood of the body between the legs was referred to by the Ringer women as the coffee grounds. It startles me too to realize how much hers was still a horseback generation in the mountain West, saddle the main mode across country to schoolhouse and neighbors and Saturday night dances. The most haunting ~~[illegible]~~ photograph I have of my mother is a tableau of her on horseback, beneath a wall of rock across the entire sky behind her. She wears bib overalls, a big hat, and ~~[illegible]~~ leather chaps with MONTANA spelled out in fancy rivets down the leg-length and a [illegible] riveted heart with initials in it putting period to the tidings. A girl-turning-woman, in this and other pictures she is on the verge of pretty but well aware she's never going to get there past the inherited broad nose. (Wally's face was a borrowed coin of hers, both with an enlivened best-friend quality from the central slight overbite that parted the lips as if perpetually interested and about to ask.) What comes out most of all, whether the camera finds her as a sprite in a peaked cap for a grade-school play or as that rhinestone cowgirl of the time or gussied up as a very passable flapper, is that this young Berneta

invariably seems advanced beyond her numerical age at the time, at some pushed pitch of existence not available to anybody else in the picture, independent as a comet.

Enter the Doigs, at a gallop.

Their place was twenty horseback miles from Moss Agate, which my father

On a government questionnaire which once asked a listing of "racial groups within community," back from the Doigs' end of the county came the laconic enumeration, "Mostly Scotch." The country out there even looked that way, Highlandish, intemperate. Wall Mountain, a tilted crown of rimrock, sat above the basin in the Big Belt Mountains where the family homestead-stretched-into-a-ranch was located, and the Doig boys honed themselves slick against that hard horizon. A generation after the steamship crossed the Atlantic, they spoke with an inherited Dundee burr and behaved like test pilots. When the Saturday night corps of Claude and Jim and Angus and Charlie and Red and Ed hit a dance at Ringling or Sixteen or any of the country schoolhouses between, they filled the hall with cocky mischief and bandannaed gallantry--taking turns at doing the schottische with their widowed mother and between those turns dancing up a merry storm with their girlfriends, while just as zealously auditing their sister Anna's potential beaus whether or not she wanted them audited. To try to put a denominator on these scamps who also had a reputation for working like blazes, the Doigs

were something like practical throwers of flings. The common experience of people after those rural nightfuls of music and other intoxicants was to wobble home for too few hours' sleep before groaning up to milk the cow or feed the livestock or other looming chores. The Doig boys, whatever their state, flew at the chores the minute they reached home and slept uninterrupted after.

September 26, 1987. I am in a Helena bookstore autographing my latest novel, while a buttergold Indian summer such as I never remember from Montana is lavishing sunshine into Last Chance Gulch. In from that ~~beautiful~~ languid light a small gray wrinkled woman rolls in a wheelchair, brakes to a stop in front of me, gives me a look of ferocious appraisal, and delivers:

"I could have been your mother."

It was evident she was speaking in seminal terms. Here you go, Mr. Hotshot Plotwriter, have a round of chromosome roulette for yourself, that moment yelped at me. All those decades ago ~~back--one of the jolts the wheeled lady gave me was that I'd have had an instantaneous ten more years of age on me--~~when she was one of the eligibles of the Smith River country, she and my father did some sampling of each other, did

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probable insert (after "Last Chance Gulch"):

Fiction is a deliberate dream, and I had just spent three years imagining (the course of immigrants' Montana lives, from a dawn in the fire tower overlooking the Gulch)

...the printed words closing the circle

- the sounds of their Scottish burrs in my head
- young America-seekers
- fashioning lives in my mind

dancers at the rascal fair of life

of years
A loop has been made, Angus McC and Rob B of my fiction reborn here, dawn at the fire tower overlooking the Gulch. Dancers at the rascal fair of life...

A loop of years has been made, the printed ~~words~~ pages closing the circle that began when I fashioned the lives of my characters in my mind here in Helena under my pen closing the circle that began here ~~in~~, above the Gulch, when I fashioned Angus McCaskill and Bob Barclay at the fire tower overlooking ~~1889 Helena~~ this ~~these~~ same streets in of 1889, Montana being born and those two young rascals of my mind rebirthing themselves from Scotland into the ~~Montana~~ dawn over Helena. America-seekers, ~~were~~ Angus and Rob.

In from the luscious light

who usually drew
not people a much cottage [in the lives]
x no other
My parents are remembered

use in ch. 3?

grant
They wd turn me loose on hubcaps

take the Ford
We would drive to a crossing in the creek, drive halfway across, and the water touching the hubcaps like a launch of moons

stop. Peel off our shoes and socks, my father and I would roll up our

Ford to Ford (Chevy to Chevy lover)

gravel-
pebble-
pants legs and my mother... Out we step, into the OO water onto the
our version of good manners,
gravel, and begin washing the car. We did it as a mark of respect,

, much,
the way you would not go mussed to a funeral. But there was more to it.

The wiping away of the mud and dust that coated the fenders and flanks

was a handling of the country, a last chore to mark a chore-filled life.

We can at least do this for you, you carry this much respect out of

uncannily?
the world with you. And, oddly, it worked: the memory of my parents

carried within it
salted away cricks
washing the car in the creek for funerals was another way that otherwise

forgotten men were remembered.

...the abrasions of life gone

my mother maybe; only woman only there
They were men with a wire down somewhere in their lives, a lack of

capacity to work for themselves, an emigration into an America

they never managed to savvy nor to let go of, a puppy-helplessness

We hated piety (though never admitted it) It was not in us to be pious, but dedicated (loyal) is another matter
when it came to alcohol, a sour temper...

It was as close to religion as my parents ever got, and I believe they

valuable
chose well, in that streambed choice that those lives were sacred enough

to wash a car for.

bearing witness

My parents are remembered for their Ford ritual before a funeral. White Sulphur Springs' deceased actually go a last mile, the distance out from town to the cemetery, and in honor of that drive we would take the car to a creek for washing. Parked in the middle of a crossing, we would peel off our shoes and socks, my father and I would roll up our pants legs and my mother would safety-pin her dress into a culotte and out we would step into the pebbled water. I was given a rag and granted the hubcaps to wash, the steel circles touching up out of the creekwater like a launching of moons. My father and mother did the tougher grit, the mudstreaks back from the fenders, bug splatters on the hood, the Ford coming clean under tossed bucketfuls of rinse. The men who were to be buried, for they almost always were men, were the hired hands of the valley who had worked with or for my father at haying, lambing, calving; people with a wire down somewhere in their lives, a lack of capacity to work for themselves, an emigration into an America they never managed to savvy nor to let go of, most with a puppy-helplessness when it came to alcohol, some with sour tempers and bent minds; at the funeral, my mother probably the only woman there. Neither my mother nor my father could have said so

in words, but in that wiping away of the mud and dust from the car's fenders and flanks--that handling of the country--was a last chore to mark those chore-filled lives. The pair of them were saying, we can at least do this for you, you carry at least a clear car's worth of respect out of the world with you. And it worked: the municipal memory of my parents washing their car in the creek for funerals carried within it the otherwise forgotten men they did it for.

Piety every Sunday was nowhere in us, but bearing witness...
Churches were not in our life Sunday by Sunday
... were not. kind to serve up piety every Sunday
for

insert into Wally's funeral scene:

WSS's deceased actually ~~go~~ do go a last mile (distance from funeral home or church to the cemetery out of town)...

(link this, later, to my folks washing car in creek for the cortege)

They moved through our lives, more name than person, (~~Mr~~ Mulligan John etc.)...
to most people of town...

--sheepherders?
--hay hands

insert: The Ford came into our life, bran-spandy new (yr?)...

I wonder if she ever was more alone, than there amid 5,500 wartime strangers.

Wally has already had his Christmas, such as it was. (Log of the Ault,

25 December: 0549 Sighted land, distant 7 miles. 0613 Ceased zigzagging.

0738 Moored starboard side to USS GEMSBOK in berth H-2, Eniwetok Atoll,
0740 Commenced fueling.
Marshall Islands. 0910 Completed fueling. 1301 Underway from...Eniwetok

Atoll, Marshall Islands enroute to Ulithi Island, Caroline Islands.

(Whatever this is about, Anna and Joe are in for quite a surprise when they come home and try to get in.)

...at least with a caseknife in that door.

describe clothing my folks are wearing: B's dress from pics, Dad's tan workclothes, almost coming out as sepia in the pics.

– A very nice b-&-w as sepia.