These pages were found on Ivan's desk at the time of his death, April 2015.

Betty Mayfield

turning doggerel into (you bet your bottom dollar, Doggerel.

Enemy, hell, if you had a lick of ambition, imaginztion, indignation, anything that pushed you upwards, sentences were.

C'n's own sentences a/bout over. sem'rs table were (dandies). Ita just cd't confine them to paper & rigor

He made a bad mistake abt me, & I an equally erroneous one abt him.... Having shaped 00 PhD studnets into profs, he undertook to pen me... While I insouciantly wrote my distm as if he was one of my old jlsm profs....I cdn't believe it. Prose I had sold for good money was being questioned in green ink because I sued Also instead of moreover. .../them union card, his phrase when he wasn't calling the calling the secular p'hood...

I was fond of him, learned a lot from him, ultimately resented him and and came arnd again to (forgive) him...& that prob'ly constituted an education (in itself).

David & Marjorie recommend for movie info: IMD.com

Carol's autograph book in archival box?

Angie, wife of Longview librarian Chris Skaugset, is daughter of a Greyhound driver.
chris.skaugset@ci.longview.wa.us

Ch Space / Trav

Richard Poirer, NY Rev of Bks, Feb. 22, '79:

"...The most obvious and powerful 'fictional substance', the substance that can be said to hit you in the face, are the sounds that come off the page, and it can be and has been demonstrated that the language in Shakespeare or Melville, in Hawthorne or James, nearly always creates its own justification for being as it is and not otherwise."

strata (the lines of the letters)
of my books

check this: Clifford Geertz the anthropolgist of "thick description"?

Thesaurus, p. 381 ftnotes

The journalists are now the true kings and clergy.--Carlyle

The newspaper-man is, more than most men, a double personality.--H. Adams

The Fiddler in the Subway--Gene Weingarten (recomnded by David Wms?)

The town of Gros Ventre was so far from anywhere that you had to take a bus to catch the bus. At that time, remote locales like ours were served by a homegrown enterprise with more name than vehicles, the Rocky Mountain Stage Line and Postal Courier, in the form of a lengthened Chevrolet sedan that held ten passengers besides the driver and the mailbag, and when I nervously went to climb in for the first time ever, the Chevy bus was already loaded with a ladies' club heading home from an outing to Glacier National Park. The only seat left was in the back next to the mailbag, sandwiched between it and a hefty gray-haired woman clutching her purse to herself as though stagecoach robbers were still on the loose in the middle of the twentieth century.

The swarm of apprehensions nibbling at me had not included this. Sure enough, no sooner did we pull out for the Greyhound station in Great Falls than my substantial seatmate leaned my way enough to press me into the mailbag and asked in that tone of voice a kid so much dreads, "And where are you off to, all by your lonesome?"

How things have changed in the world. I see the young people of today traveling the planet with their individual backpacks and weightless independence. Back then, on the epic journey that determined my life and drastically turned the course of others, I lived out of my grandmother's wicker suitcase and carried a responsibility bigger than I was. Many, many miles bigger, as it turned out. But that lay ahead, and meanwhile I heard myself pipe up with an answer neither she nor I was ready for: "Pleasantville."

When she cocked her head way to one side and said she couldn't think where that was, I hazarded, "It's around New York."

No - retain all adjectival uses on Chevrolet bus & Greyhound, too, as in my corrected ms.

Comment [R1]: "the Chevy bus" okay? Per all other instances. For flow.

Comment [R2]: Global: "gray-haired" with hyphen is per pages 245, 310, 380, and per style in *Sweet Thunder*. Made consistent throughout. Okay?

OK

Comment [R3]: "stagecoach robbers" okay? For meaning.

STET. They're not on a stagecoach

To this day, I wonder what made me say any of that. Maybe the colorful wall map displaying Greyhound routes ~~COAST TO COAST—THE FLEET WAY~~COAST TO COAST—THE FLEET WAY, back there in the hotel lobby that doubled as the Gros Ventre bus depot, stuck in my mind. Maybe my imagination answered for me, like being called on in school utterly unready and a whisper of help arrives out of nowhere, right or not. Maybe the truth scared me too much.

Whatever got into me, one thing all too quickly led to another as the woman clucked in concern and expressed, "That's a long way to go all by yourself. I'd be such a bundle of nerves." Sizing me up in a way I would come to recognize, as if I ~~were~~was either a very brave boy or a very ignorant one, she persisted: "What takes you so awful far?"

"Oh, my daddy works there."

"Isn't that interesting. And what does he do in, where's it, Pleasantville?"

It's funny about imagination, how it can add to your peril even while it momentarily comes to your rescue. I had to scramble to furnish, "Yeah, well, see, he's a digester."

"You don't say! Wait till I tell the girls about this!" Her alarming exclamation had the other ladies, busy gabbing about mountain goats and summertime snowbanks and other memorable attractions of Glacier National Park, glancing over their shoulders at us. I shrank farther into the mailbag, but my fellow passenger dipped her voice to a confidential level.

"Tries out food to see if it agrees with the tummy, does he," she endorsed enthusiastically, patting her own. "I'm glad to hear it," she rushed on. "So much of what a person has to buy comes in cans these days, I've always thought they should have somebody somewhere testing those things on the digestion—that awful succotash about does me in—before they let any of it in the stores. Good for him." Bobbing her head in vigorous approval, she gave the impression she wouldn't mind that job herself, and she certainly had the capacity for it.

"Uh, actually"—~~,"~~—maybe I should have, but I couldn't let go of my own imaginative version of the digestive process—~~,~~"it's books he does that to. At the *Reader's Digest* place."

Comment [R4]: Global: Have set all signs small caps throughout. Per common style. Okay?

Formatted: Small caps

Comment [R5]: Global: "were" commonly proceeds "as if." There are a few instances throughout the text with "were." Have changed throughout. Okay?

Comment [R6]: Global: Occasionally, em dashes or periods seemed nicer for pacing/rhythm than the commas. I have made suggestions on these occasions. Some, but not all, are queried in the margin. Please advise if you see one you don't agree with.

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There was a story behind this, naturally.

I lived with my grandmother, who was the cook at the Double W, the big cattle ranch near Gros Ventre owned by the wealthy Williamson family. One of the few sources of entertainment anywhere on the ranch happened to be the shelf of sun-faded *Reader's Digest* Condensed Books kept by Meredice Williamson in the otherwise unused parlor of the many-roomed house, and in her vague nice way she permitted me to take them to the cook shack to read, as long as Gram approved.

Gram had more than enough on her mind without policing my reading, and lately I had worked my way through the shipboard chapters of *Mister* ~~*Mr.*~~ *Roberts*, which were not so condensed that I couldn't figure out what those World War Two sailors were peeking at through binoculars trained on the bathroom ~~on shore~~onshore where nurses took showers. Probably during that reading binge my eye caught on the fine print ~~PLEASANTVILLE NY~~PLEASANTVILLE, NY in the front of the book as the source of digested literature, and it did not take any too much inspiration, for me at least, to conjure a father back there peacefully taking apart books page by page and putting them back together in shortened form that somehow enriched them like condensed milk.

"Why, I have those kind of books!" my fellow passenger vouched, squeezing her purse in this fresh enthusiasm. "I read *The Egg and I* practically in one sitting!"

"He's real famous back there at the digest place," I kept on. "They give him the ones nobody else can do. What's the big fat book, *Go* ~~*H*~~*like the Wind*—"

"*Gone with the Wind*, you mean?" She was properly impressed any digester would tackle something like that. "It's as long as the Bible!"

"That's the one. See, he got it down to about like yay," I backed that up with my thumb and finger no more than an inch apart.

"What an improvement," she bought the notion with a gratified nod.

That settled matters down, thanks to a war-time story cooked down to the basics of bare-naked

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Comment [R7]: "*Mister Roberts*" okay? The 1946 book (and film) title has "Mister" spelled out.

Comment [R8]: Global: "onshore": Adverb is spelled as one word, per *Webster's*. Okay? (Seems to also help with the flow of the "on the/onshore" in this sentence.)

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Comment [R9]: "*like*" lowercased okay here? Per common title case style and to match "*with*" in the correct title, below. Or make both initial capped instead?

Comment [R10]: Global: (next paragraph, too)

Comment [R11]: "wartime": Closed up, per spelling in *Sweet Thunder* and per *Webster's*. Okay?

nurses and a helping of my imagination. The spacious woman took over the talking pretty much nonstop and I eased away from the U.S. mail a bit in relief and provided *Uuh-huh* or *Hhuh-uh* as needed while the small bus cruised at that measured speed ~~busses~~ buses always seem to travel at, even in Montana's widest of ~~wide open~~wide-open spaces. There we sat, close as churchgoers, while she chatted away the miles in her somber best dress that must have seen service at funerals and weddings, and me in stiff new blue jeans bought for the trip. Back then, you dressed up to go places.

And willing or not, I was now a long-distance traveler through time as well as earthbound scenery. When I wasn't occupied providing two-syllable responses to my seatmate, this first leg of the journey was something like a tour of my existence since I was old enough to remember. Leaving behind Gros Ventre and its green covering of cottonwoods, Highway 89 wound past the southmost rangeland of the Two Medicine country, with Double W cattle pastured even here wherever there were not sheepherders' white wagons and the gray sprinkles of ewes and lambs on the foothills in the distance. Above it all, the familiar sawtooth outline of the Rocky Mountains notched the horizon on into Canada. There where the South Fork of English Creek emerged from a canyon, during the Rainbow Reservoir construction job my folks and I had crammed into a humpbacked trailer house built for barely two. I had to sleep on the bench seat in back of the table, almost nose to nose with my parents squeezed into their bunk. But the thrill of being right there as bulldozer operators such as my father—the honest-to-goodness one, I mean—rode their big yellow machines like cowboys while building the dam that bottled the creek into the newest lake on earth never wore off.

Next on the route of remembering, however, butted up against a rocky butte right at the county line as if stuck as far out of sight as possible, a nightmare of a place reappeared, the grim rambling lodging house and weather-beaten outbuildings of the county poorfarm—we pronounced it that way, one word, as if to get rid of it fast. Once upon a time my father had graded the gravel road into the place and dozed out ditches and so on while my mother and I spent creepy days ~~watching~~ looking out a cabin window at the shabby inmates, that lowest saddest category of people, wards of the county, pottering listlessly at

Comment [R12]: Global: "buses" okay? *Webster's* first spelling, and the one used by Greyhound, etc. (Changed throughout, to track.)

Comment [R13]: "wide-open": Hyphen with adjective before noun matches pages 57 and 218.

OK

Comment [R14]: Global: "blue jeans": Spelled as two words on pages 10, 45, and 241, and in *The Bartender's Tale*. Made consistent throughout. Okay?

Comment [R15]: "lodging house": Okay to spell as two words? Per *Webster's*. (Only instance.)

Comment [R16]: Global: "weather-beaten": Hyphenated per *Sweet Thunder* and *Webster's*. Okay? (Also applies to page 188.)

Comment [R17]: "looking" okay? To work with "at" and for flow of the sentence.

work that wasn't real work, merely tasks to make them do something.

Seeing again that terrifying institution where the unluckiest ended up gave me the shivers, but I found I could not take my eyes off the poorfarm and what it stood for. In most ways I was just a dippy kid, but some things get to a person at any age, and I fully felt the whipsaw emotions of looking at the best of life one minute, and this quick, the worst of it.

Mercifully the highway soon curved and we passed Freezout Lake with its islands of snowy pelicans, within sight of the one-room Tetonia school where I went part of one year, marked mainly by the Christmas play in which I was the Third Wise Man, costumed in my mother's pinned-up bathrobe. A little farther on, where the bus route turned its back on the Rockies to cross the Greenfield Canal of the huge irrigation project, I was transported once more to a summer of jigging for trout at canal headgates.

What a haze of thoughts came over me like that as memory went back and forth, dipping and accelerating like a speedometer keeping up with a hilly road. Passing by familiar sights with everything known ahead, maybe too much of a youngster to put the right words to the sensation but old enough to feel it in every part, I can only say I was meeting myself coming and going, my shifting life until then intersecting with the onrushing days ahead.

That near-stranger who was me, with his heart in his throat, I look back on with wonder now that I am as gray-haired as my talky companion on the Chevy bus was. The boy I see is a stocky grade-schooler, freckled as a spotted hyena, big for his age but with a lot of room to grow in other ways. Knowing him to be singled out by fate to live a tale he will never forget, I wish that things could have been different enough then to let him set off as if on a grand adventure, turned loose in the world at an age when most kids couldn't unknot themselves from the apron strings of home. He has never been out of Montana, barely even out of the Two Medicine country, and now the nation stretches ahead of him, as unknown and open to the imagination as Pleasantville. And he knows from Condensed Books that unexpected things, good about as often as bad, happen to people all the time, which ought to be at least interesting,

right? On top of it all, if worse comes to worst, tucked in those new blue jeans is a round-trip ticket home.

Comment [R18]: "round-trip": Okay to hyphenate adjective? Per *Webster's* (works with noun being two words). Also applies to page 64.

But that was the catch. Home to what, from what?

I must have been better than I thought at hiding my double-edged fear, because the chatterbox at my side seemed not to notice anything troubling me until I shifted restlessly in my seat because the object in my pants pocket had slipped down to where I was half sitting on it and was jabbing me something fierce. "Aren't you comfortable? Heavens to Betsy, why didn't you say so? Here, I'll make room." With a grunt she wallowed away from me a couple of inches.

"Huh-uh, it's not that," I had to confess as she watched my contortions with concern, because I still needed to squirm around and reach deep into my pants to do something about the matter. Knowing I dare not show it to her, I palmed the thing and managed to slip it into my jacket pocket sight unseen while I alibied, "My, ah, good luck charm sort of got caught crosswise. A rabbit's foot on a key chain," I thought up, hoping that would ward her off.

"Oh, those," she made a face. "T- ~~-~~they sell the awful things so many places these days I'm surprised the bunnies have any tootsies left." With that, to my relief, she went back to dishing out topic after topic in her chirpy voice.

"Donal," she eventually got around to pondering my name as if it ~~was~~ were one of the mysteries of the ages. "Without the *d* on the end? That's a new one on me."

"It's Scotch, is why," I came to life and informed her quick as a flash. "My daddy said—says—the Camerons, see, that's us, were wearing kilts when the English still were running around ~~buck naked~~buck-naked."

Comment [R19]: **Global: In dialogue, have encased word changes with em dashes. It stresses the new word just a bit and seems to help with the rhythm of how that would sound spoken out loud. Okay?**

From the way her eyebrows went up, that seemed to impress her. Emboldened, I confided: "You know what else, though? I have an Indian name, too."

Her eyebrows stayed lofted as, for once, I leaned in her direction, and half whispered, as if it

~~were~~was just our secret: "Red Chief."

She tittered. "Now you're spoofing."

People can be one surprise after another. Here she hadn't let out a peep of doubt about anything I'd reeled off so far, but now when I told her something absolutely truthful, she clucked her tongue against the roof of her mouth the funny way that means *That's a good one.*

"No, huh-uh, honest!" I protested. "It's because of my hair, see?" My floppy pompadour, almost always in need of a haircut, was about as red as anything from the Crayola box. And if that didn't earn me a tribal alias, I didn't know what did. Maybe, as Gram would tell me when I got carried away with something, this was redheaded thinking. It seemed only logical to me, though. If Donal was tagged on me when I came into the world bald as a baby can be, didn't it make sense to have a spare that described how I turned out? Indians did it all the time, I was convinced. In the case of our family, it would only have complicated things for my listener to explain to her that my alternate name had come from my father's habit of ruffling my hair, from the time I was little, and saying, "You've got quite a head on you, Red Chief."

My seatmate had heard enough, it seemed, as now she leaned toward me and simpered, "Bless your buttons, I have a grandson about your age, a live_wire like you. He's just thirteen." Eleven going on twelve as I was, I mutely let "about" handle that, keeping a smile pasted on as best I could while she went on at tireless length about members of her family and what I supposed passed for normal life in the America of ~~nineteen fifty-one~~1951.

Comment [R20]: Global: Okay to make "live wire" two words? Follows *Webster's*. (Also applies to page 55.)

Comment [R21]: "1951": Okay to use figures for year in narrative here? Common style and lends for easier clarity.

That fixed smile was really growing tired by the time we pulled ~~in to~~into the Great Falls bus depot and everyone piled out. As the club ladies tendered their good-byes to one another, in one last gush my backseat companion wished me a safe trip and reminded me to be sure to tell my father how much she enjoyed digested books.

Comment [R22]: "good-byes": Hyphen is per the other six instances (first one is on page 45).

I blankly promised I would, my heart hammering as I grabbed my suitcase and headed on to the next bus ride which, while way short of coast to coast, was going to carry me far beyond where even my

imagination could reach.

From: "Saletan, Rebecca" <rsaletan@penguinrandomhouse.com>
Subject: **Ivan**
Date: March 13, 2015 7:30:40 AM PDT
To: carol doig <cddoig@comcast.net>

Dear Carol,
I gather from Michelle and especially Glory that Ivan is having a rough time. Please let me know if there is anything we, or I, can do – other than stay out of your hair. You are both so dear to us.
Becky

Rebecca Saletan
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I'll tell you another thing while I'm at it," and I was all too sure she would

I was discovring he always Germaned up "thinker" that way, and though I could not have said why I thought so, "thinkerer" did seem to add a little something to the meaning. At least I took it that way, and

"You're a handful. Dorie told me in her letter you..."

She might as well have had LIAR painted on her side.

"You're storying. (lying) I just know you are."

Mr. Smarty-pants."

That's the trouble with imagination, it has more directions than the compass.

I know, I know. What was I thinking, to be so down in the mouth?

Hippo butt

after this unfathomable summer.

white lightning, what they do to a man is frightening..." The tune ran through my head as...

I gave her the full snaggle smile, like I might bite.

"Heavens!" She jerked her cards up as if shielding herself from me. "What in the world happened to that boy's t--"

"His grandmother is taking him to the dentist as soon as he gets home to Montana," Aunt Kate said as smooth as butter or at least margarine. This was news to me, but not the kind intended. She could rattle off a lie as smoothly as I could.

"You know, what's really fun is a testicle festival."

"It happens at branding time, when the male calves have to be taken care of. It's nut cutting, there's no way around calling it anything but that. Well, castration, if you want to be fancy. Anyway, all these testicles get thrown in a bucket to be washed up and then cooked over the fire. There's plenty to feed the whole branding crew. Two to a calf, you know," I spelled out because from the blank expressions around the table, maybe they weren't that knowledgable.

"Donny," Aunt Kate spoke as if she had something caught in her gullet, "that's very interesting, but--"

Herta blurted, "You actually *eat* those?"

"Oh sure, you can guzzle them right down. Rocky Mountain oysters, they're real good. You have to fry them up nice, bread them in cornmeal or something, but then, yum."

Yum did not seem to sit well with the ladies. Thinking it might be because they were used to nibbles, as Aunt Kate called the candy gunk which bite by bite didn't amount to much, I tried to present the case for Rocky Mountain oysters. "You can make a whole meal out of not that many nu--testicles, see. They're about

yay long," I held my fingers four or so inches apart, the size of a healthy former bull calf's reproductive items.

Herta seemed to take that in with more interest than did Gerda, who just looked 00.

"Whose turn is it?"

Another strike against canasta was that the game went on and on until somebody reached 5000 points.

Herta and Gerda were swamping us, 3500 to 2100. "Goodness, we've gone through the 00, haven't we. I'll fix some more."

Something I had to make sure of first. I was elaborately casual in asking, "These, ah, stamps you were talking about.. I'm just curious--can you get clothes with them?"

She stayed busy spreading the pimento cheese. "Heavens, no, why would you?"

That settled it. "You knaow what? I've got a bunch of them, not doing me any good. A whole book."

"What's a boy like you doing with all those?"

"Sixteen hundred and one miles on the bus," "I wonder if we could sort of make a deal?"

"Such as?"

"Well, see, you know how much Aunt Kate likes to win. If you could help that along a little, so she and I come out on top today, I could bring you my Green Stamps next time we play. That way, you'd get your lawn chair and I won't get my fanny chewed for a week."

"You do have a way of putting things."

"It would be a good joke on her, wouldn't it."

"A real funnybone tickler, you bet."

"Just between us, of course."

"Cross our hearts and hope to die."

"We'll do it."

"I know you'd really like to get that lawn chair. I could give you my Green Stamps if you'd let Aunt Kate and me win.

"Honeybunch, that freezes the pile, you know."

"I know."

"Donal," she began, "has your grandmother ever, *ever* suggested circumstances in which you should," she paused for breath and emphasis and maybe just to study me to see if there was any hope of changing my behavior, "hold your tongue?"

Was I going to admit to her that 00 of Gram's, *Don't get rambunctious*? Not ever. "Naw, you know how Gram is. She calls a spade a shovel, dirt on it or not, like she says."

"You are a very forward youngster."

"I thought you said I was backward, that first night I was here."

"I can't help it I'm a *young*ster."

That was about as funny as a stitch in the side.

I was being strenously nice

I was the wild card.

Kittycat

"Just an eence."

I suppose people are like that.

Relieved that it was over,...

"We play two out of three."

If only," she said, musically. "To think, what a difference it would make if Fritzie was here."

"Huh? Who?"

"Oh, the other one," she tossed that off as if it was too sad to go into.

No way was she getting away with that. My look asked *The other what?*

"Husband, who else?"

I gaped at her. She seemed like the least likely person to believe the plural of spouse is spice. "You've got another one besides Herman? They let you do that in Wisconsin?"

"Silly. Before Schmidt, I mean." She gazed through the windshield "Fritz Schulz. A real man."

Herman seemed real enough to me. "What happened to him? The other one, I mean."

"I lost him." She made it sound as if he had dropped out of her pocket somewhere.

Not satisfied, I stared the question to her until she had to answer. "Storm, slick deck."

"Really? Like when the Witch of November came?"

"He's been filling your head with his 00 out there in the garden shed, hasn't he."

Another sigh as heavy as that first one. "All right, you want the whole story. My Fritz was bosun on the 00. Washed overboard in the big November storm of '39."

My imagination running wild at that, I miraculously managed to hold my exclamation to a high-pitched "Wowsers!"

"Yes, it's a tragedy." She gazed off across the room to the Manitowoc sampler as if the thread of ship was going down. "But that's in the past, we have to put up with life in the here and now, don't we," she said as if she didn't want to any more than I did.

The other one would be out working and drawing a nice wage.

Yeah, well, I though, he had two good eyes... And I bet she didn't call him "Schulz"

She carried quite a wad. Several ones, four tens, a couple of twenties, and half a dozen fives. It looked like a fortune to me, and more than ever I resented the fact she hadn't done a single thing, monetarily or otherwise, to make good on any of my stash that she'd thrown in the garbage. Tht decided me. I took one of the five-dollar bills. If she ever noticed, she'd think she had been shortchanged.

As to the problem of my having money all of a sudden, I was pretty sure I had that figured out. I would tell her I sold my Green Stamps to Herta, but it had to be kept a secret...

It refused to match up. Taking the arrowhead which I absolutely believed was mine in the first place was one thing, swiping out of a purse was another.

"Hi!"

Startled, she whirled to me, gave me a look that had her blue eyes blazing, and plunked her purse onto the table in an ominous way. "Why aren't you out in the 00 with him as usual?"

"Oh, I wanted to finish reading about 00."

"It's just as well I didn't have to track you down," "I want to talk to you after I go to the bathroom, Mister Smarty Pants."

The instant I heard the bathroom door click closed, I leaped to the purse, snapped it open as quietly as possible and scrambled out her folded money. Thumbing into the fives, I layered mine into the middle, refolded the wad and got it back into the purse just ahead of the sound of water running in the bathroom sink. By the time Aunt Kate came steaming down the hallway, I was 00.

"Now then. I don't know what kind of a game you think you're playing, but I know perfectly I have been carrying six five-dollar bills in my mad money. And look. With you on the scene not merely coincidentally, I have only one, two, three, four, five...six." She stood holding the last one

"Donny, 00, have you seen a pair of mittenrs?"

"Hmm? Huh-uh." I thought it best to stick to syllables instead of words.

"Then what's this?"

"Oh, that. *That*, you mean. Sure, now that you mention it, there were those old things you put on your hands--in Montana we don't call them mittens, they're, uh, winter gloves. And see, I was cleaning up my room, and they sort of fell out on the floor and I saw how old they were and just lined with rabbit fur, which is real cheap, we have jackrabbits everywhere in Montana, and I figured you would be throwing them away anyway, so I made this pouch because my lucky charm is sharp.

"First of all, those *mittens* were not lined with rabbit fur. It was mink. I won those...

"And this piece of rock? Where did you get it?"

"On the ranch. It's older than Columbus."

"Every rock on earth is probably older than Columbus. This is just, just some

"No, it's not. Honest, it's--"

"I can't understand why Dorie lets you be superstitious that way."

"It's going in the garbage. Joining my *mink-lined* mittens."

"What is the matter?"

"She threw away my arrowhead! In the garbage can, and the truck's coming and--."

"Silly cow. Where is she?"

"In the sewing room....

"Is good. There she can not see us."

He stripped off his shirt

12

Herta Hostetter and Gerda Rader.

Nervous as a cat, I took my place across from Aunt Kate.

Gussied up like a hussy on circus day, Gram would have said. I was pretty sure "hussy" was one of those substitute words for something worse.

I had learned by way of Gram to call grownups Mr. and Mrs., the politest alignment of letters. "Mrs., uh--"

"Oh, don't, snickelfritz--Gerda, please.

Kittycat

"It so is." (about muumuu)

Gerda, the 00 one. "And aren't you cuter than sin."

"Honeybunch, that freezes the pile, you know."

"I know."

I gave her the full snaggle smile, like I might bite.

"Heavens!" She jerked her cards up as if shielding herself from me. "What in the world happened to that boy's t--"

"His grandmother is taking him to the dentist as soon as he gets home to Montana," Aunt Kate said as smooth as butter or at least margarine. This was news to me, but not the kind intended. She could rattle off a lie as smoothly as I could.

"Want to go aboard?"

I sure did, and that made two of us. Herman headed for...

Herta Hostetter and Gerda Rader.

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"Oh, don't, snickelfritz--Gerda, please.

Kittycat

"It so is." (about muumuu)

Gerda, the 00 one. "And aren't you cuter than sin."

"Honeybunch, that freezes the pile, you know."

"I know."

I gave her the full snaggle smile, like I might bite.

"Heaves!" She jerked her cards up as if shielding herself from me. "What in the world happened to that boy's t--"

"His grandmother is taking him to the dentist as soon as he gets home to Montana," Aunt Kate said as smooth as butter or at least margarine. This was news to me, but not the kind intended. She could rattle off a lie as smoothly as I could.

Canasta: I was being strenously nice

I was the wild card.

canasta partner: "If you sleep with a Bible under your pillow three nights in a row, you'll dream of who you'll marry."

Kittycat

"Just an eence."

Gerda was the really dangerous one. and trumped that in her sweetest tone
She gave me one of those tilted smiles that make you check yourself over for unbuttoned places.

I suppose people are like that.

Relieved that it was over,...

"We play two out of three."

into order from kings--in the girly deck, even those were naked frolickers around a throne or doing something pretty close to indecent with a crown--on down, left to right, with aces and wild cards and any jokers off the end together for easy keeping track, something Aunt Kate had never bothered to tip me off to. I will say, the bare parts of the French ladies peeking from behind the usual queens and jacks garbed to their eyebrows did cause me to pay a good deal more attention to the display of my cards.

Book open beside him to do things according to Hoyle, Herman got right down to business, with each of us drawing a card from the deck, melding any three of a kind we had, and making a discard. His eyeglasses glinting with divine calculation--or maybe it was a beam of light focused through a photographic pane of glass overhead--he instructed: "First thing after everybody melds, freeze the pile. Throw on a seven or a joker even, yah? Get your bluff in, make it hard for the hens to build their hands."

It meant parting with the wild-card seven featuring a sly-looking blonde skinnydipping in a heart-shaped swimming pool, but I reluctantly figured it was worth it to place her crosswise on the discard pile to indicate it was frozen. If I couldn't pick up a desirable card when I wanted, why should anyone else?

"Eye-dea," Herman announced in almost the next breath, running his finger down the canasta page black with rules. "Bullwhack the hens." He reached over, grabbed up the cards I had melded and tucked them back in my hand. "Hide, yah? Hoyle don't say you got to put them down any time quick."

It took me a few blinks to rid myself of the mental picture of laying into Aunt Kate and Herta and Gerda with a bullwhip--"Take that, you canasta fiends!"--and figure out he meant bushwhack. Then to grasp the advice Catching them unawares, as he explained, after I melded three of a kind by holding back a pair of the same in ambush, so I could take the pile whenever that apparently safe card was

discarded. "Surprise their pants off, hah," he formulated, already tracing through the dense print for further stunts I could pull. I giggled. That would put them in the same league

Canasta Herman style was proving to be helluva more interesting...

"That's more like it. Honeybun, I knew you could do it. All it takes is patience, mmm?"

That and whatever could be squeezed out of a lucky arrowhead.

Saturday came, the soap opera characters taking the day off to recuperate from their harrowing week--I could sympathize with them--and I was afraid Aunt Kate might grab me for an extra session of canasta drill all forenoon. Instead she let know in no uncertain terms that she was going to do some housecleaning and I'd have to find some way to occupy myself.

I was puzzled. "Can't I be in the greenhouse with Herman like always?"

"Him? Didn't he tell you? He won't be here."

Just then Herman appeared, dressed up a little. "She is right, can you imagine. Time for my medicine." Unexpectedly he turned to her. "Donny can come along."

"Schmidt, he's only eleven."

"Old enough. Up to him, it should be. You want to come?

A trip to a doctor's office did not sound like anything great, reminding me as it did of Gram's medical situation, but it would get me out of the house. "I guess so," I said.

Manitowoc was a watery place. The river with the same name as the town emptied into Lake Michigan...In contrast to the Montana wind that would peel your eyeballs.

pile and put together melds like crazy. "Surprise their pants off, hah," he formulated, already tracing through the dense print for further stunts I could pull. I giggled. That would put them in the same league as the undressed womanhood peeking various parts of themselves out at me from card to card. Canasta Herman style was proving to be worth ever so much more close attention than that of Aunt Kate.

Amazed at the progress I had made, she praised my new powers of concentration and confidence and what she unknowingly termed a better feel for canasta, in our session next day. "That's more like it," she declared, celebrating with a chunk of peanut brickle. "Honeybun, I knew you could do it. All it takes is patience, mmm?"

That and whatever could be squeezed out of a lucky arrowhead and a French Bible.

Saturday came, the soap opera characters taking the day off to recuperate from their harrowing week--I could sympathize with them--and I was leery that Aunt Kate might have second thoughts and sit me down me for one last canasta drill all forenoon. Instead she let me know in no uncertain terms that she was going to do some housecleaning and I'd need to find some way to occupy myself.

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"Old enough. Up to him, it should be. You want to come?

Herta Hostetter and Gerda Rader.

Nervous as a cat, I took my place across from Aunt Kate.

Gussied up like a hussy on circus day, Gram would have said. I was pretty sure "hussy" was one of those substitute words for something worse.

I had learned by way of Gram to call grownups Mr. and Mrs., the politest alignment of letters. "Mrs., uh--"

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I gave her the full snaggle smile, like I might bite.

"Heavens!" She jerked her cards up as if shielding herself from me. "What in the world happened to that boy's t--"

"His grandmother is taking him to the dentist as soon as he gets home to Montana," Aunt Kate said as smooth as butter or at least margarine. This was news to me, but not the kind intended. She could rattle off a lie as smoothly as I could.

"You know, what's really fun is a testicle festival."

"It happens at branding time, when the nale calves have to be taken care of. It's nut cutting, there's no way around calling it anything but that. Well, castration, if you want to be fancy. Anyway, all these testicles get thrown in a bucket to be washed up and then cooked over the fire. There's plenty to feed the whole branding crew. Two to a calf, you know," I spelled out because from the blank expressions around the table, maybe they weren't that knowledgable.

If only," she said, musically. "To think, what a difference it would make if Fritzie was here."

"Huh? Who?"

"Oh, the other one," she tossed that off as if it was too sad to go into.

No way was she getting away with that. My look asked *The other what?*

"Husband, who else?"

I gaped at her. She seemed like the least likely person to believe the plural of spouse is spice. "You've got another one besides Herman? They let you do that in Wisconsin?"

"Silly. Before Schmidt, I mean." She gazed through the windshield "Fritz Schulz. A real man."

Herman seemed real enough to me. "What happened to him? The other one, I mean."

"I lost him." She made it sound as if he had dropped out of her pocket somewhere.

Not satisfied, I stared the question to her until she had to answer. "Storm, slick deck."

"Really? Like when the Witch of November came?"

"He's been filling your head with his 00 out there in the garden shed, hasn't he."

Another sigh as heavy as that first one. "All right, you want the whole story. My Fritz was bosun on the 00. Washed overboard in the big November storm of '39."

My imagination running wild at that, I miraculously managed to hold my exclamation to a high-pitched "Wowsers!"

"Yes, it's a tragedy." She gazed off across the room to the Manitowoc sampler as if the thread of ship was going down. "But that's in the past, we have

to put up with life in the here and now, don't we," she said as if she didn't want to any more than I did.

The other one would be out working and drawing a nice wage.

Yeah, well, I though, he had two good eyes... And I bet she didn't call him "Schulz"

"Donny, 00, have you seen a pair of mittenrs?"

"Hmm? Huh-uh." I thought it best to stick to syllables instead of words.

"Then what's this?"

"Oh, that. *That*, you mean. Sure, now that you mention it, there were those old things you put on your hands--in Montana we don't call them mittens, they're, uh, winter gloves. And see, I was cleaning up my room, and they sort of fell out on the floor and I saw how old they were and just lined with rabbit fur, which is real cheap, we have jackrabbits everywhere in Montana, and I figured you would be throwing them away anyway, so I made this pouch because my lucky charm is sharp.

"First of all, those *mittens* were not lined with rabbit fur. It was mink. I won those...

"And this piece of rock? Where did you get it?"

"On the ranch. It's older than Columbus."

"Every rock on earth is probably older than Columbus. This is just, just some

"No, it's not. Honest, it's--"

"I can't understand why Dorie lets you be superstitious that way."

"It's going in the garbage. Joining my *mink-lined* mittens."

"What is the matter?"

"She threw away my arrowhead! In the garbage can, and the truck's coming and--."

"Silly cow. Where is she?"

"In the sewing room....

"Is good. There she can not see us."

He stripped off his shirt

...He plunged his arm down into the trash,

the garbageman coming up the driveway staring at the spectacle of Herman's pale torso. "Sun tan, I am getting. About time, hah?"

"Hose, please."

"Thanks.

"Manitou was with us."

Come on, Aunt Kate, stand and deliver, as a pistolero would say when holding up a stagecoach in Karl May land. Somewhere in here she had to have scissors for all that muu muu work.

upper portion overflowing the counter surface. "My little visitor here"--I winced involuntarily; that was about as bad as *my sister's grandson*--"needs school clothes. How much are we entitled to?"

"In-store merchandise is outside the redemption program," the elerk stated.

"That's ridiculous," said Aunt Kate.

"It's policy," said the clerk

"That's why it's ridiculous," she snapped.

"Lady, I just work here," he recited.

"Tsk," Aunt Kate leveled at him curtly, never a good sign for the person being *tsk*ed. "I hope I don't have to tell Mrs. Shootie"--the pronunciation trickled out sweet as molasses--"about the lack of service to a customer of such long standing, the next time we play cards together."

I held my breath, watching the clerk shift nervously. "It takes a special transaction form to substitute anything for catalogue merchandise. It's only done when the item you want is out of stock, but that doesn't quite fit this--"

"Close enough," Aunt Kate closed him off. "Let's have the miraculous form."

She filled it in quick as a wink as the clerk doggedly counted the pages of Green Stamps and told us what that added up to in money, and away we went, Aunt Kate sailing into the Boy's Wear department with me at her heels. I was in glory with all the clothes to choose from, while Aunt Kate was a sharp shopper, looking at price tags first. That meant a tug-of-war in outfitting me, but we worked it out. She persuaded me to get blue jeans a little long and roll up the cuffs, to account for how much I'd grow, which made good sense. I resisted the short sleeve shirts she tried to talk me into. "Huh-uh," I invoked Gram, "in Montana it's summer when it's summer and winter when it's winter. Those'll give me either sunburn or frostbite." Back and forth like that, we settled on a cocoa-colored dress

"Donny," Aunt Kate spoke as if she had something caught in her gullet, "that's very interesting, but--"

Herta blurted, "You actually *eat* those?"

"Sure! Rocky Mountain oysters, they're real good. You have to fry them up nice, bread them in oatmeal or something, but then, yum."

Yum did not seem to sit well with the ladies. Thinking it might be because they were used to nibbles, as Aunt Kate called the candy gunk which bite by bite didn't amount to much, I tried to present the case for Rocky Mountain oysters. "You can make a whole meal out of nu--testicles, see. They're about yay long," I held my fingers four or so inches apart, the size of a healthy former bull calf's reproductive items.

Gerda seemed to take that in with more interest than did Herta, who just looked 00.

"Donal," she began, "has your grandmother ever, *ever* suggested circumstances in which you should," she paused for breath and emphasis and maybe just to study me to see if there was any hope of changing my behavior, "hold your tongue?"

Was I going to admit to her that 00 of Gram's, *Don't get rambunctious*? Not ever. "Naw, you know how Gram is. She calls a spade a shovel, dirt on it or not, like she says."

That was about as funny as a stitch in the side.

Canasta: I was being strenously nice

I was the wild card.

canasta partner: "If you sleep with a Bible under your pillow three nights in a row, you'll dream of who you'll marry."

11

"Can I borrow... Gram will make it good."

Gram's letter.

"That Dorie, you know she's not much for writing and I couldn't wait to see how she's getting along. (It sounds good...?)

I took the opened envelope and scanned G's 00 handwriting. The operation result was good news, yes. What was not there was any money in the letter.

She finally came up with hardly the most reassuring of answers.

That slowed me up.

There is no switch you can reach in your brain to turn that off.

It ate at me like acid.

"Cat scat," I swore as Gram would have instead of the real stuff. What was I going to do?

(plays marbles with the Polish kids, wins; bets them $, putting up his jackknife. Gets to go to movie?

I reacted none too smartly, like a cat who sees a person on the sidewalk and sits down in the middle of the street to let the danger pass.

Bite your thumb, Red Chief, I warned myself.

I was nothing if not determined.

I don't care what biology says, some people have a gizzard instead of a heart. They must eat gravel at night to grind up...

Herman cleared his throat as if to spit.

2nd canasta, at Schmidts?

"You are a very forward youngster."

I hadn't the foggiest notion of what that meant, but I risked: "Better than backward, I guess?"

"There's the sort of thing I mean. You're Dorie, all over again."

Ooh, that stung. Was my imagination, as she seemed to be saying, nothing more than a gift of gab?

"I had my folks," flew out of my mouth

"Of course, I didn't know them." Of course not. She'd have had to get in a car and actually come see us in Montana.

"What am I going to do with you?"

"Board me for the summer?"

I answered quick as a shot.

I'll tell you another thing while I'm at it," and I was all too sure she would.

--At some point, the Illinois downstaters come knocking at the door.

"I'm sorry," I heard her say as if she wasn't at all, "but we don't want any religious tracts."

"Dang good thing, because we don't have any such."

My head came up like a hunting dog's. I scrambled off the couch...

It was the Zimmermans.

"We're friends of the youngster," Mae Zimmerman declared as if that was gospel. "From the Greyhound," Mr. Zimmerman added. "Old knights of the road together, aren't we, Donal." On their way home from Wisconsin Dells, just wanted to make sure he's okay.

"Lots of Schmidts in the phone book, but only one set of Kate and Herman."

"Well, come on in."

I could see Aunt Aggie starting to boil.

"You're storying. (lying) I just know you are."

Mr. Smarty-pants."

That blew back my hair.

Her own imagination had flown off to...

Hippo butt

"You're a handful. Dorie told me in her letter you..."

She might as well have had LIAR painted on her side.

"Don't ask questions there aren't answers for." Which of course were the kind I could never stop asking."

"Don't get any ideas."

Her temper was a thermometer that went full red while you watched.

This was war, now.

That's the trouble with imagination, it has more directions than the compass.

I know, I know. What was I thinking, to be so down in the mouth?

after this unfathomable summer.

But that was the catch. After. The big worry grew out of that, and it wasn't going away if I rode the dog bus around the world and back again.. .

From where I am in life now, older by far than my grandmother when a mere half a century was between us,

"Yeah. Yes."

I'd finally tumbled that my Yeah sounded like mocking his Ja.

They didn't see eye to eye; more like tooth and nail.

"You're not wearing a Kraut helmet any more."

His face darkened, aned for a few frightening seconds, I wondered whether he was going to hit her. Or she him, just as likely, given the way her fists were clenched and ready.

He was not an ordinary squarehead. He was a German. The people who had shot up my father on D-Day, the monstrous comic books Nazis.

Much fell into place. That Yah of his was Ja. And Hah? was halfway a "Huh?" and the rest the habitual "Ja?"

Another word hit me. *Dimmkopf.* The Captain was always calling the Katzenjammer kids that when he wasn't calling them "little stupids". Both fit me.

"You look not happy. Something the Kate did, hah?"

No, something you did, turning out to be a German! I wanted to shout at him.

"I-I heard Aunt Kate bawl you out. Did you really fight on the"--the words almost strangled me, but I gulped them out--"Kraut side, like she said?"

Wincing at that language, he murmured, "She should wash her tongue. But, ja. No choice did I have."

"So you really are a"--I had trouble even saying it--"a German?"

He chuckled. "What did you think I am, a schnauzer?"

"But, but how come you don't talk like they do in the movies? The bad guys, I mean."

"I am from Dansk. Danzig, it is now. We were always a little bit Pole."

Imagination did me no favors now. My head filled with scenes, of landing craft sloshing to shore under a hail of gunfire from Hitler's troops, and sand red with blood, and a figure on crutches in the hallways of Fort Harrison hospital trying to learn to walk again, which was not imaginary at all. Giving Herman the German, as he now was to me, the worst stink eye I was capable of, I demanded:

"Were you at... Omaha Beach?"

"Hah? What kind of beach?"

"You know. When they invaded on D-Day."

Realization set in on him, his face changing radically as my accusation hit home. "Donny, I am not what you are thinking. The Great War, I was in." What, now he was telling me it was great to have been in the war where my father got shot half to pieces? I kept steadily giving him the stink eye, hating everything about this

Kraut-filled summer and him along with it, until he said slowly so I would understand, "World War Ein. One."

I blinked that in. "You mean, way back."

He looked as if his cigar had turned sour. " You could say. Thirty-three years ago," which I worked out in my head to 1918. "Wearing a pickle stabber." He put his hand on top of his head with the index finger up, indicating the spiked helmet of the Kaiser's army. Comical as that was, I was not deterred from asking, "Were you in any big battles?"

He puffed out cigar smoke that wreathed his grin. "With my sergeant, many times."

"You know what I mean. Real battles."

"Shoot Them Ups, you want," he sighed. At first I thought he was not going to answer further, but finally he came out with, "I was at der Hugel des toten Mannes, was all."

"But weren't you afraid you'd get your ass shot off?"

"Soldiers think about the worst sometimes."

That Hah? of his was halfway a "Huh?" and the rest the habitual "Ja?"

That didn't sound bad, nothing like Omaha Beach. Disappointed at his evidently tame war, I said just to be asking, "What's that in English?"

"Dead Man's Hill."

Of all the words there are, I never expected him to utter those three. "Really?" My voice went way up in pitch. "The one in France?"

"How do you know where?"

"The Major was there, see."

"The Major? He is who?"

"Wait, I'll show you." I dashed up to the attic dungeon and came back with the autograph book.

Major Williamson, at the Double W. I heard Meredice tell Gram once that's where he got his limp, his wound I mean, and a big medal for being so brave against the, well, you know. Germans."

the pen is mightier than the sword

"He is a good man for thinking that."

"Even my name was against me. In Hochdeutsch, it means man of the army."

"I was a dog robber."

"You stole dogs?" "To *eat*?"

"Nein."

He was--how is it in English, snipper?" He mimicked squinting through gun sights.

"Sniper?"

...shot him out of the tree like a pigeon. I was supposed to be next. I was glad I could not shoot good."

"But weren't you afraid you'd get your ass shot off?"

"Hah? Die 00...

"Wait a minute while I go get something."

I went and dug out the autograph book from my suitcase.

He paged carefully through the autograph book, taking time to decipher things. Finally he handed it back. "Funny, ja, but good hearts, too."

"Aren't you going to write in it?"

"Not for now. It takes thought." Seeing I looked crushed at one more failure to get anything worthwhile out of a Manitowocer, he said, "I will, after while. Honestly."

"Promise?"

"I give my word."

"I think you're a storier."

I could tell she did not mean that in any good way. "W-why do you say that?"

"That tale about your 00."

"This hurts me as much as it does you," which was something people usually said when that wasn't the case at all. "I wrote to your grandmother saying I have to send you back."

Back where?

Talk about a coward's way out. She did the deed by letter so there could be no argument on Gram's part. And to keep clear of that starchy nun Carma Jean asking where here sense of charity was.

She burst into tears. "Donny, I wish this would have worked out. But you see how things are, Herman and I have all we can do to ... "I--I may be a selfish old woman, I don't know, but my nerves just will not take..."

"Isn't--isn't Herman coming?"

"That man. He says he can't bear t tell you goodbye. I don't know whynot, it's just a word." "He sneaked off forhis depth charge."

Any piece of my heart still unbroken crumbled at that. I meant less to him than a beer and a shot of whiskey.

I heard the kind of *oof* of someone dropping down next to me. Just what I did not need, a seat changer. With so much else on my mind, I'd forgotten to put my jacket in that spot and now it was too late. We were not even halfway to

Milwaukee and I was in for an endless visit from some dog bus type looking for conversation. I didn't want to turn my head to acknowledge the intruder, but I did.

"Hallo."

Out from behind the newspaper, Herman the German was giving me the biggest horsetooth smile.

I shot bolt upright in my seat. "What--what are you doing on here?"

Going to see Montana and the Wild West, of course. With Donal as his guide.

"But, but does she know?"

"Puh." That translated several different ways, as Of course not and It didn't matter. Nor will she for quite some time, inasmuch as Herman has left a suicide note saying he can't stand life with her any longer and has jumped into the shipyard bay. "She will run around like the chicken with its head chopped off. Meanwhile we are on the loose, ja?"

"Yeah, but, my grandmother is expecting me and when you show up, too--

"No, she is not."

He had to repeat that for it to sink in on me. Herman guessed what Kate was up to when he saw her writing a letter. Accordingly, he slipped around from the garden shed after she put it in the mailbox, pilfered it and read it, and tore it up.

"I got money. Not cartwheels and four bitses, but the paper kind, hah."

"How much?"

"Half for her, half for me, right down the center. What is the words for that, same-sam?"

"Uh, even-steven. But I thought from what Aunt Kate said, you were about broke."

"Pah. Woman talk."

"We can go anywheres. Just so it is west."

Talk about a coward's way out. She did the deed by letter so there could be no argument on Gram's part. And to keep clear of that starchy nun Carma Jean asking where here sense of charity was.

"Wh-where's Herman? Isn't he coming with us?"

"You shouldn't ask." She sure couldn't wait to tell me, though. "He sneaked off for that 'medicine' of his." I had lost track that it was Saturday. "Threw the car keys to me and told me to do my--my dirty work myself."

"That man. He says he can't bear to tell you goodbye. I don't know why not, it's just a word."

Any piece of my heart still unbroken crumbled at that. Abandoned even by Herman the German. I meant less to him than a beer and a shot of whiskey.

She burst into tears. "Donny, I wish this would have worked out. But you see how things are, Herman and I have all we can do to ... "I--I may be a selfish old woman, I don't know, but my nerves just will not take... It's the best thing all around. You'll be back there where people are more used to you."

Yeah, well, it was kind of late for any apology, if that's what this amounted to. The bus had pulled in with MILWAUKEE on its roller sign, and there'd be another one with WESTBOUND after that. I gave her the stink eye, not caring...

If she hadn't cried, I would have given in to tears.

I heard the sort of *oof* of someone dropping down next to me. Oh, swell. Exactly what I did not need, a gabby seat changer. With so much else on my mind, I'd forgotten to place my jacket in that spot and now it was too late. Two full hours ahead to Milwaukee yet, and I was in for an overfriendly visit from some stranger with nothing better to do than talk my ears off. *Giff me ein break, life,* which it showed no sign of ever doing, this day when I was being kicked down the road

like an unwanted pup. I didn't even want to turn my head to acknowledge the intruder, but I did.

"Hallo."

Out from behind the newspaper, Herman the German was giving me the biggest horsetooth smile.

I rammed upright in my seat. "What are you doing on here?"

"Keeping you company, hah?" he said as if I had issued the invitation. "Long ride ahead, we watch out for each other."

"Y-you're going to Montana with me?"

His shoulders went way up, the most expressive French salute yet. "Maybe not to Big Falls. We must discuss."

So flustered I was trying to catch up with things in no particular order, I craned my neck back toward Manitowoc as if Aunt Kate was on our trail. "Does she know you're here?"

"Puh." That translated different ways, as Of course not and It didn't matter, take my choice. "Left her a note saying I am gone back to Germany, we are you know what." Kaput? I goggled at him. Just like that, he could walk out of a marriage and hop on a bus in some other direction from where he said he was going? Man oh man, in comparison I was a complete amateur at making stuff up.

I listened open-mouthed as Herman continued in a satisfied tone, "The Kate will run around like the chicken with its head chopped off a while, but nothing she can do. I am gone like the wind." He included me with a wink of his bad eye. "We are on the loose, ja?"

"Yeah, that is, yes, I guess you are. But Hippo Butt, I mean the Kate got it all set up that my grandmother has to stick me in the orphanage as soon as I get to Great Falls and--"

"No, she does not. Silly idea. I kiboshed."

He had to repeat that for it to make any sense to me. As best I could follow, what it came down to was that he had guessed what she was up to when he saw her writing a letter. "Unnotcheral behavior," he sternly called it. The rest was pretty much what you would think, him sneaking around from the greenhouse after she put the letter to Gram out in the mailbox, swiping it and reading it and, he illustrated triumphantly to me by fluttering his hands as if sprinkling confetti, tearing the thing up. "Evidence gone, nobody the wiser, hah?"

It sunk in on me. No one in the entire world knew that the two of us were free as the breeze. Herman wasn't merely flapping his lips; we really were footloose, or at least bus-loose. Crazily like the comic-strip characters in "Just Trampin'" who were always going on the lam, hopping on freight trains or bumming rides from tough truck drivers to stay a jump ahead of the sheriff. Herman and I did not even have to do any of that, the dog bus ran anywhere we wanted to go. It was a dizzying prospect. Goodbye, battle-ax wife, for him and no Hello, orphanage, for me was as simple as sitting tight in a bus seat to somewhere known only to us, the Greyhound itself on the lam from all we were leaving behind.

I tell you, scratch that temptation between the ears and it begins to lick your hand in a hurry.

There was a catch, though, isn't there aways? "See, Gram has me write to her every week," I fretted. "She'll know right away I'm not back there with you and Hippo--the Kate like I'm supposed to be if those are mailed from any old where."

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"Promise?"

"I give my word."

"I think you're a storier."

I could tell she did not mean that in any good way. "W-why do you say that?"

"That tale about your 00."

"A person doesn't want to have a pie hole mouth."

That really hurt. That meant a mouth large enough to take in most of a pie at once; in other words, a big mouth.

Now who had a pie hole mouth?

"This hurts me as much as it does you," which was something people usually said when that wasn't the case at all. "I wrote to your grandmother saying I have to send you back."

Back where?

"There are foster homes. I don't know if you've heard of them. To make sure, I went to the county 00 here and got a list of such places in Great Falls. It's all there. Your grandmother will only have to fill out a form or two. I--I put in a check for the money you lost."

"The nuns will help out. They'll have to when you show up."

Talk about a coward's way out. She did the deed by letter so there could be no argument on Gram's part. And to keep clear of that starchy nun Carma Jean asking where here sense of charity was.

"You'll be there in time for the Fourth. Fireworks and all, I'm sure."

"I don't give a big rat's ass about any of that."

"Donal, please."

"Oh, and here." She pressed some folded money into my hand.

"What--how come--"

"No, no, don't thank me," she 00ed, while all I was trying to ask was why she hadn't done this in the first place, like maybe as soon as we both realized she had thrown my summer money in the garbage.

"Wh-where's Herman? Isn't he coming with us?"

"You shouldn't ask." She sure couldn't wait to tell me, though. "He sneaked off for that 'medicine' of his." I had lost track that it was Saturday. "Threw the car keys to me and told me to do my--my dirty work myself."

"That man. He says he can't bear to tell you goodbye. I don't know why not, it's just a word."

Any piece of my heart still unbroken crumbled at that. Abandoned even by Herman the German. I meant less to him than a beer and a shot of whiskey. Brave survivor of Hohe Toter Mann, hah. If there was a Coward's Corner on Boot Hill, that's where he deserved to end up.

She burst into tears. "Donny, I wish this would have worked out. But you see how things are, Herman and I have all we can do to ... "I--I may be a selfish old woman, I don't know, but my nerves just will not take... It's the best thing all around. You'll be back there where people are more used to you."

Yeah, well, it was kind of late for any apology, if that's what this amounted to. The bus had pulled in with MILWAUKEE on its roller sign, and there'd be another one with WESTBOUND after that. I gave her the stink eye, not caring...

If she hadn't cried, I would have given in to tears. As it was, I sat there trying to hunch up and take it, one more time. Two days and a night on the dog bus, doom waiting at the Great Falls depot. Convinced that everything that could go wrong was going wrong, I sent a despairing look up the aisle of the bus. All

the situation needed now was something like that bunch of hyena campers. Some men dressed up for business, a *Manitowoc Herald-Times* up in front of someone like a last mocking 00 of Aunt Kate, a few couples where the women were as broad-beamed as seemed to be ordinary in dumb Wisconsin.

I heard the sort of *oof* of someone dropping down next to me. Oh, swell. Exactly what I did not need, a gabby seat changer. With so much else on my mind, I'd forgotten to place my jacket in that spot and now it was too late. Two full hours ahead to Milwaukee yet, and I was in for an overfriendly visit from some stranger with nothing better to do than talk my ears off. Goddamn-it-aaato hell-anyway, couldn't life give me any kind of a break, on this day when I was being kicked down the road like an unwanted pup? I didn't even want to turn my head to acknowledge the intruder, but I did.

"Hallo."

Out from behind the newspaper, Herman the German was giving me the biggest horsetooth smile.

I rammed upright in my seat. "What are you doing on here?"

"Keeping you company, hah?" he said as if I had issued the invitation. "Long ride ahead, we watch out for each other."

"Y-you're going to Montana with me?"

His shoulders went way up, the most expressive French salute yet. "Maybe not to Big Falls. We must discuss."

So flustered I was trying to catch up with things in no particular order, I craned my neck back toward Manitowoc as if Aunt Kate was on our trail. "Does she know you're here?"

"Puh." That translated different ways, as Of course not and It didn't matter, take my choice. "Left her a note saying I am gone back to Germany, we are you know what." Kaput? I goggled at him. Just like that, he could walk out of a

marriage and hop on a bus in some other direction from where he said he was going? Man oh man, in comparison I was a complete amateur at making stuff up.

I listened open-mouthed as Herman continued in a satisfied tone, "The Kate will run around like the chicken with its head chopped off a while, but nothing she can do. I am gone like the wind." He included me with a wink of his bad eye. "We are on the loose, ja?"

"Yeah, that is, yes, I guess you are. But Hippo Butt, I mean the Kate got it all set up that my grandmother has to stick me in the orphanage as soon as I get to Great Falls and--"

"No, she does not. Silly eye-dea. I kiboshed."

He had to repeat that for it to make any sense to me. As best I could follow, what it came down to was that he had guessed what she was up to when he saw her writing a letter. "Unnotcheral behavior," he sternly called it. The rest was pretty much what you would think, him sneaking around from the greenhouse after she put the letter to Gram out in the mailbox, swiping it and reading it and, he illustrated triumphantly to me by fluttering his hands as if sprinkling confetti, tearing the thing up. "Evidence gone, nobody the wiser, hah?"

It sunk in on me. No one in the entire world knew that the two of us were free as the breeze. Herman wasn't merely flapping his lips; we really were footloose, or at least bus-loose. Crazily like the comic-strip characters in "Just Trampin'" who were always going on the lam, hopping on freight trains or bumming rides from tough truck drivers to stay a jump ahead of the sheriff. Herman and I did not even have to do any of that, the fleet of Greyhounds ran anywhere we wanted to go. It was a dizzying prospect. Goodbye, battle-ax wife, for him and no Hello, orphanage, for me was as simple as sitting tight in a bus seat

to somewhere known only to us, the Greyhound itself on the lam from all we were leaving behind.

I tell you, scratch a temptation like that between the ears and it begins to lick your hand in a hurry. "You mean, just keep going? Like for all summer?"

"Who is to know?"

"Yeah, but, that'll cost a lot. What'll we use for money?"

"Nothing to worry. I got plenty." Seeing my disbelief, he patted the billfold spot in the breast pocket of his jacket, where there did seem to be a bulge.

"Really truly? How much?"

"Puh-lenty," said he as if that spelled it out for me. "The bank, I went to, took out my share. Half for her, half for me, right down center. What is the words for that, same-sam?"

"Uhm, even-steven. But I thought from what Aunt Kate said, you guys were about broke."

"Pah. Woman talk. We will live like kings, Donny."

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