

"For Lord's sake, man, you had him sing for the Archbishop."

"Nnhnn. That was here. Under our own roof."

"Monty deserves this chance. He's not ours to do with as we please."

"Next thing to it. Monty wouldn't have a pot to piss in if we hadn't given him jobs." Wendell ran a hand across his forehead. "Aaah. There's the woman, too."

"Susan Duff came into this of her own free will. She can take it."

"So you've already proved, once."

Wes looked at him.

"What she gets out of this is the pupil of a lifetime. I'm seeing to it that she's taken care of. Wendell, I don't tell you how to run the cattle--"

"Good thing, too. When it comes to cows, you don't know which end eats."

"--and I'd appreciate it if you didn't volunteer your observations about this."

...

There were times when he wondered whether Wes was glad to have been cut out of the governor's race. Not glad, exactly, but relieved. Wendell still couldn't tell. Wes was too complicated for him.

Spring was the disappointing time. Other seasons would let you down in their own way: summer might be too rainy for good haying, autumn too brief or too cold, winter might be one blizzard after another. But spring had its special disappointments. With the cold clog of winter supposedly broken, you looked forward to warm weather and dry earth. Instead, there might be weeks of mud, every step outdoors taken in overshoes heavy with mud. Spring weather would be just warm enough to make you shed a winter coat, just cool enough to chill you into taking a cold. And a spring without rain or a late, wet snow meant the grass and hay would not be good when summer ever came. The melting snow...slush... The deep banks up the coulees could be watched shrinking, crusting into dirty iciness before finally vanishing.

Her mind was back on the summer, the situation so far and what could come in the time ahead. None of it was easy thinking.

grudge

"Person can have more than one wish in him, can't he?"

...

"Miss Susan, I don't know. I was going along in life, and the Major gets this wild hair, excuse my French."

She whirled on him. "He told me you wanted this."

"I did. I do." He gestured. "It's hard to explain."

"It has to be your idea more than his. Or we're all wasting breath."

...

He switched around to something he knew would take her in a different direction. "Why'd you ever leave here?"

"It takes terrible patience. If you don't want to go on with this, Monty, that's all right."

...

The small hours of night, here. (Wes visits Susan, alone?)

"I feel that it's due him."

"Monty in particular? I'm just asking."

"Wes? This isn't simply to...involve the two of us again, is it? Tell me if it is."

"Susan, no." I don't think so."

"I need to borrow Monty back for some driving. Two days should do it."

"Make him practice his breathing."

"It's going to be some distance."

Monty thought he was accustomed to Montana's long-legged miles. But the journey went on and on, methodically, doggedly, hypnotically.

They passed Fort Assiniboine. Abandoned

"Remember it, do you?" Wes asked shortly.

In his farthest memory the 10th Cavalry wheeled in the parade ground at Fort Assiniboine. The horses, the clatter of equipment; music of the band..."*See him, Montgomery? See your daddy?"*

"Only just barely." The fire escape (metal chute) at the hospital; could climb it barefoot...

#2
move to
p. 85
ol' pig-lio

"Susan, A
was overmas.

#3
move to
p. 80
Wood Y death

"That's something I never did get a good understanding of." (Monty about his father's fate.) Whether he jumped the country, or...

Wes, older, all too well remembered Mose Rathbun. The same dark brow on Monty... Mose's ilk, in denatured white form, he had met up with again and again in the AEF. He'd had to bust some of them so far down in rank they were saluting civilians.

"We've wondered that ourselves."

"Major? Something I did?"

"Why, is there something on your conscience?"

"Not any more than usual."

"These bastards in their bedsheets--are they making you nervous?"

"I was born nervous, in that respect."

"Do I savvy it right, that they don't have any love lost for you either?"

"A mackerel snapper like me?"

"Ask you a favor, can I?"

Was looked over at him, waiting.

"Keep Dolph at the ranch, when I go for my lessons?"..."Dolph is the sort, anything that enters his head comes out his mouth."

"Wendell insists you be chaperoned."

"Neighbors can do it. Miss Susan can get somebody every time, I bet you anything. Besides, it'd give me kind of an audience to get used to."

"Monty? Are you a praying man?"

"Some." He looked cautiously over his shoulder to the backseat.

Tawny country, flat beside the road and rimmed by benchland on every horizon. Wes caught himself drowsing, snapped awake and checked on Monty; he was peering ahead over the steering wheel the same as ever, owl in a yellow speedboat.

"Hateful weather," Monty eventually offered above the motor-noise of the Dusenburg. Wes entirely agreed. The afternoon had turned sultry, hot air blasting in through the car windows. In more than two hours they met no other travelers, black-locomotived Great Northern trains passing them by the only other moving things in the late blaze of afternoon.

The vaguely Dutch gable-top of a grain elevator appeared on the horizon ahead, Monty tiredly hoping this was the place.

"This is only Culbertson," Wes said and at the town's main intersection told Monty to turn onto a road arrowing straight north. "Another forty-five miles or so."

Time upon time now, the big car topped a rise and the two men were gazing down at lustreless expanses. There had been a distressed air to farms all along the way, the houses and outbuildings brown howls of dry wood, the fields themselves looked even more stricken. Through his sweat, Wes blinked and studied. To every horizon, the earth had been plowed and anemic grain was trying to grow, but its stalks would barely tickle a person's ankles.

And the weather, good God, how many summers of this weather were there going to be? Wes felt himself turning into hot salt soup in the stifling car. "What do you think, Monty--might this bring rain?"

"Could," Monty responded, as though anything was theoretically possible. "The air's a funny kind of dry, though."

Even though the road ran straight as a rail for a dozen miles ahead, Monty never shifted his eyes from it. Wes, gandering, was the one who puzzled at the

smudged sky to the west. The horizon there had gradually roughened with hills, breaks, coulees, and now that banked horizon of hills was dimming away into the sky's haze. He knew it had to be cloud, but the formation was strangely edgeless, almost more a tint than anything else. "Does rain always have that much trouble making up its mind in this part of the country, I wonder?"

Monty sneaked a look, then jerked his foot off the accelerator and all but stood on the clutch and brake pedals until the car slewed to a halt. He rolled down his window and stared west to be sure.

"Dust," he said as if afraid of the word. "We better get ourselves there before it does."

The butter-bright car sped on the dimming road for the next five minutes, ten, fifteen, with Monty pursed and restless over the steering wheel while Wes tried to simultaneously watch both the road and the phenomenon to the west, the earth rising in wrath. A half-light, yellow-green, descended, perceptibly darkening as if a shadow-dye from the dust storm was flowing ahead into it.

Abruptly a cascade of antelope, blazewhite at throat and rump, fled across the road, flickers of Africa in the dust eclipse.

Monty braked and veered, swearing, and just managed to miss the last leaping animal. "Your headlamps!" Wes advised in a shout and Monty already had darted a hand to the button on the dashboard and refastened his gaze to the road. Wind began buffeting the car, and the pair of men now saw in the headlight beams dust blowing across the surface of the road like wisps of brown snow.

They were in past the city limits before they could discern any of the buildings of Plentywood.

Before Monty could see it coming, a rolling washtub met the Dusenburg's radiator grill and bounced away.

He managed to steer into an alley where the Plentywood Mercantile sat broadside between them and the dust storm. The dust fury went on for nearly an hour. They could hear it stinging wherever it could find wood, scouring off the paint of buildings around them. And the two men watched, astounded, out the mouth of the alley as not just dirt but *gravel*, actual small stones, blew into thin drifts in the street. Tumbleweeds spun tirelessly through town, and every so often a stovepipe flew by.

Wes peered out into the lessening hurricane of murk. "I think we can give it a try, now."

Monty crept the car through town until Wes pointed. An aftergust of the storm caught them before they could make a run for it to the meeting hall. The brown blown grit could be heard doing no favors to the glossy finish on the Dusenburg, and they could feel the dust collecting on them as deep as their teeth. Wes tied his handkerchief over his face like a bandanna, and at a look from him, Monty quickly followed suit. They struggled against the wind to the door of the meeting hall. When they clambered in, the small crowd stared at the masked invaders. Wes yanked his bandanna down, and Monty quickly followed suit. As they swatted dust off themselves, Wes said to those assembled: "I'm state senator Williamson, here to talk about the future of Montana. We have to hope it's not blowing by, out there."

"It's not in secret. We're simply being...discreet."

(Angus dies, Susan takes the S. Fork school temporarily?)

These people had big educations and experience of the world. Why were they bothering with the likes of him?

Bailey glanced up from what he was writing, then half-rose in apprehension as he recognized his visitor. Wes gestured him back down. "As you know, I've had a taste of how well you do your work. I want you to insert someone into the Klan."

"Don't preen yet," she warned him.

"They will try your air." Monty lost the meaning in the roll of rrr's. Susan fixed him with a look. "If you don't dominate the audience, the audience will dominate you."

"If I was to go to town, that'd be fine."

"That's probably wise," Susan thought out loud. "Gros Ventre..."

"Miss Susan. 'Town,' I mean Helena."

Flanders

1919

Not for nothing was Susan minted from Scots; the first nickel she had ever earned, she knew the whereabouts of.

The French noticed the number of Montanans being interred. Bold of ill-fated...Clerical error also turned out to be in the picture; they were drafted far more heavily than the state's population justified.

She traveled with the president of the Flanders Field Remembrance Alliance and his sad-faced wife; then stayed on... Wesley went as the representative officer...

(memory of seeing Wes in the Two Medicine country when she was a schoolgirl) The Williamsons' lordly ways.

She recalled his speaking at their Equal Suffrage congress in the Helena hall. That would have been 1912. He was the state senator from Pondera County, as a Williamson or one of their bootlickers customarily was...In one of those whirlpools of politics that fascinated and rankled Susan, the hope for the vote lay in the homestead counties, the land where she had grown up. Jeannette Rankin...The enemy of my enemy is my ally, ran the rule of Montana politics-- Susan was always bemused by its resemblance to children choosing up sides at recess...But Wesley Williamson came with convictions.

One of them, his Roman Catholicism, was to cost him Susan.

His speaking voice sounded sandy, hard-used, and the more appealing for that. He spoke not in thunderous phrases, but as if concerned to find the right words, the path to their ears.

She had been amused that day. Then came the time of hating him. And then they were lovers.

Samuel came to live with her in Helena. It was with an eye to that, and the music academy, that she took the great step of buying the house on Highland Street.

Intro'd to
Wes -
"were
distantly
acquainted."

father
dickens

They walked the battlefield. Of the war that did not end all wars but definitely did take the tongues of a generation.

Samuel was plowed under here because he was Adam's ilk. Her gender had spared her.

She found herself thinking of the dead pile--the heap outside the lambing shed where the dead ones were thrown. Some still were yellow with birth fluids. Pink tongues poking out of others. Stick legs, ribs showing. Eyeless; magpies lost no time. She had never fainted in her life, and did not intend to start now.

"Bist sie Montanischers?"

"Ja, Fritz. Auf Rocky Mountain hummingbirds"

"... Alte Thunderhard?"

'Wir ...'

Wes laughed helplessly. Karl May... God help them, these Montana boys were the mould for soldiers... "Tell Private Imhoff to limit his conversations with the other side." Twenty minutes later, while Wes was inspecting a position Company A was to occupy that night, a salvo screamed in. He and Captain Olsen made themselves thin behind a big tree, shrapnel whining around them.

"What's this about?"

"The sniper over there, Major. He couldn't hit a bull in the ass with a shovel."

"How do we know that for a fact?"

"The men ran a Punch and Judy by him, sir." They showed Wes the pair of helmets strapped onto the ends of bedrolls.

"We'll try Mister Sniper again in an hour--I want to see for myself. No teasing him, any of you, and no firing back."

The bee buzz went past the helmets. "We figure he has buck fever," Sergeant Crimmins said. "The shots come awful quick."

Wes tried to put himself in the place of the German officer. The patrols that didn't go out of their way to fight. Wes could imagine that his counterpart didn't welcome the salvoes any more than the Americans did: shells that fell short, shells that were overshot... A nervous young soldier? An old soldier told to pester the Montanischers but not make them mad? A malcontent? It bought time, and Wes would take that deal.

"Have the men lay off him."

Have
men
lay off him.
Better .00
Answer

A single shot rang out.

"You're in for it now, Sammy."

"Listen to them over there--"Mein Gott, Mein Gott!"

"Too good a shot, old kid!"

Crimmins was coming down the trench crouched over. Wes reached the men first. "What's happened?"

"It's Bucky, sir. Sam Duff bagged him. He fell out of that tree like a ton of bricks."

Wes looked at the big-boned young soldier. "Duff, come with me."

He led the way into the HQ dugout, Samuel ducking his head to follow through the doorway.

We're a long way from the Two Medicine country. We're a long way from anything simple.

"Private Duff, I thought I gave orders to hold fire, where that miserable sniper was concerned."

"I...I didn't get the word, sir. I just this morning got back from the field hospital. Sir, I thought we were to kill Germans at every chance."

Wes rubbed his knuckles. Nuance didn't apply to a Samuel Duff.

The medal from Pershing. Small talk from Black Jack himself. Did Major Williamson know the Fort Assinniboine country? "I know it quite well, sir. Some of our range is adjacent to it." Coincidence, said the general. Had an interesting piece of service there himself, nothing like the Montana prairie as horse country, except of course for that vapid gloryhound Custer. "I was not aware you had served there, sir." Most decidedly, escorting Crees back into Canada. Queer sort of chore, like trying to carry water in a basket--the Crees would leak away into the brush of every creek the Tenth Cavalry forded with them

Black Jack

1888

“Sergeant, close up their ranks again. They don’t need to smear themselves across the whole blasted prairie, this isn’t one of their buffalo hunts.”

“Yes, sir. Good as done.” Mose Rathbun spun his mount from beside Lieutenant Pershing and spurred off toward his platoon. The line of march of the Crees, to call it that, had funneled nice as anything through the single street of Gros Ventre, but out here north of town the Indians were dribbling off again. The few good wagons with Little Bear and his chiefs were drifting out of line, already almost side by side across the tan grassland, and behind them kinked the long train of limping buggies and scraggly travois and even a few groaning Red River

carts, with the spotted herd of horses fanned out behind. From past experience of rounding up Crees, Sergeant Rathbun figured that the Indians gravitated out that way so as not to eat each other's dust, but this lieutenant was a stickler. Pershing in fact reminded him of the bristles on a grooming brush, with that brisk cookie-duster mustache and his parade-ground way of sitting in the saddle even out here on the march.

"Brailey, Squint, all you," Mose called to his corporals and his troopers, "poke them up in here, or old Spiff's going to have you cleaning the stables until you're gummers." He stood in his stirrups and made a bunching motion to the trudging mob of Crees, not that he expected it to do any good. "Ride herd on those women and young ones, too," he warned his men, "next creek we hit. They'll light off out of here on their own, quick as anything."

Veteran at keeping an eye on the country around him, Mose swiveled to look back toward the scanty town tucked away behind the line of cottonwoods along English Creek. Not much of a place, Gros Ventre or any of the other map specks in here along the big Rockies, but the whole of Company C had broken out in grins at the drifts of cottonwood fluff halfway up their horse's hooves and more of it sifting down on the town as they and the Indians clattered through.

Fort Assinniboine, where the Tenth Cavalry was stationed, sat on the bald prairie, the only canopy over it unreachable heaven. Mose rested his gaze on the wooded creek, vein of green on the summer prairie. He couldn't swear to it, but he thought he detected motion in the upstream underbrush. Damned if he was going to tattle to the lieutenant and be sent back to beat the bushes for stray Indians.

"Bovard!" he bellowed at the greenhorn of his platoon. "Shove them together there, or I'll curry your head with a quirt." From everything Private Bovard had heard, it would not be the first such occurrence. He threw the heavy-shouldered sergeant a flustered salute and assiduously began swatting the nearest Indian pack ponies with the ends of his reins.

Mose knew he was going heavy on his troopers. But it showed. Their blue field uniforms had never looked more crisp, every buckle and button on them gleamed with polish, they wore their campaign hats cocked just so. They looked like a hundred dollars, if he did say so himself. Give those Mounties something to see, when Company D handed these Crees back to them. Canada and the U.S. had been flinging these vagabond Indians back and forth across the border like a game of Annie-I-over ever since the Riel Rebellion, up north there. Louis Riel had found himself on the wrong end of Her Majesty's rope and the Crees had

found themselves on the losing side and without a homeland. The sergeant knew the iron rules of fate when he saw them, and he had seen them a lot. Down here, if the South had won the big war, the Tenth Cavalry, the one frontier regiment of freed black men, would have been erased and Mose Rathbun right now would be in some hopeless procession himself, with a hoe on his slave shoulder.

This was the big roundup, Little Bear's band, and Mose Rathbun's last.

His thoughts moved off east to the fort, and Angeline. He never would have believed it when he and the rest of the Tenth Cavalry pulled in there in a white-out blizzard, but Fort Assinniboine had been the making of him. Big new fort,

And pretty quickly that detail when some of the woodhawks cutting in the Missouri bottomland for the steamboats were spooked by Indians and by damn, there she was, linen maid on that steamboat. He was aboard that boat and sweet-talking her by nightfall. He had been as surprised as anyone when he married her.

There was the boy, now. Little stinker, running around the servant quarters, everybody spoiling the daylights out of him....Angeline and her churchy ways had put a crimp in ...But it made for some good sessions of being forgiven under the quilts. Mose smiled. He had taken quite a risk for that woman--hell's

bells, had risked the stripes on his shoulder--that time in the Montana Concert Hall, so-called. It had been the kind of night when it was safe to sass back a little to the Irishmmen in the infantry, say across most of the width of a parade ground, the Tenth would josh that they had started out white, before they were baked in Arizona for twenty years. When in came Pershing on inspection duty... Mose waltzed Angeline right up to the painted line that divided the white and colored sections... Pershing had been right there..."Sir, I'd like you to meet this woman of mine." Stiff little devil that he was, Pershing stepped on across the line to say hello to Angeline, exactly the kind of behavior that got him the nickname "Black Jack." To see the strapping sergeant who was known to be too ready with his fists sweep by with her in his arms must have registered with Black Jack...

C Troop had drawn the candy end of this assignment, back there lackadaisically strung out around the Indians who were herding the horses. The Crees had not raised a hand when their coulee shacks were burned and their pitiful possessions were piled into, but they were touchy about their herd of ponies. Enlisted men and officers alike, the Tenth Cavalry could savvy that. Mose would not have been surprised to learn spiffy young Lieutenant Pershing had volunteered D Troop for the harder duty up front here; it would look good in reports.

Restless, Mose rode up to Pershing. "Going to check with 00, sir."

"Very good, sergeant."

Mose rode up onto a ridge. You could see from here to Judgment Day in this

Another ribbon of willows, Noon Creek, lay just ahead. Mose grimaced. Indians who had been taking prairie squats all their natural lives suddenly were overcome with modesty and to go modestly in the brush, at each of these creek crossings. And when they go, they keep going, Mose was amused in spite of himself.

"They're taking to the brush again, sir."

"After them," Pershing said. "Detach Brailey's platoon

"We'll fetch them, sir."

Pershing watched the ten troopers, dark as shadows under their jaunty hats, peel away from the column and ride west along the creek. The sergeant was jawing at them, he was pleased to see. Rathbun was an old tusker. He had been piling into the Comanches at 00 before John J. Pershing was even a plebe at West Point. It did not hurt that Rathbun was a rascalion; the occasional empty brandy bottles in the surgeon's office... Not the usual career move, commanding Negro

presented

troops. But Pershing had not fought this assignment, he had a hunch that even this dab of service on the Indian frontier would stand an officer in good stead. The Tenth Cavalry joked that they were white before they started baking us in Arizona.

Goggins shut up and assiduously crashed through the brush.

They caught up with the Crees. A woman and two children. Mose shook his head, letting his troopers know what he thought of...

"This don't sit right. Where's the mister?"

The cavalrymen

"Hellish mess of tracks. Could all be theirs, Sergeant."

Mose rode in close to the Cree woman. "Your husband. Your man.

Where is he?"

"No man."

"Squint, you and Bovard take these back. The rest of you, start sifting through this brush. Four on each side of the creek and what I mean, give that brush a looking. He's in there somewhere."

Beaver dams complicated the creek. Eventually there was an oxbow bend, and an open stretch of water. Mose saw that the Cree had a rifle. He seated

himself, leaned his chest into the rifle as if it were a jackleg, and with a forked stick pushed on the trigger.

“Damnation.”

Something similar had happened to Pershing at 00. There, it was discovered the man was wanted in Canada. Same with this one, Mose had no doubt.

He wasn't about to ride back into several hundred Indians, even Indians as whipped as these, leading a horse with a dead brave draped across it. *Be just our luck he's some kind of Indian Jesus.* Ride back in, report to Black Jack, and that would be that. Let the Crees think what they think. “Brailey, get this man buried, up on that sidehill.” Mose Rathbun... “Pretty place for it, anyhow.”

Mustered out

By damn, it had worked. Black Jack had come through, written out the paper. To whom it may concern

“Be gone maybe a week. You take care of Monty-tana here.”

Angeline asked no questions. Here, Mose was drawn to the... She did not want that.

"Papa!"

"I found us a place. Over in the Two Medicine country. Goodbye, Fort Ass-in-a-bone," knowing it would scandalize her.

"Hush!" She looked around, but Montgomery was busy playing with the 00 his father had brought.

"Mose? Two Medicine, you say? Isn't that over by those Blackfeet? And those Crees?"

"Way south of there. I'll be riding for a big ranch, Angeline. Be driving cattle instead of Crees."

Mose Rathbun had seen them come and seen them go, and... The sergeant would take a hard-shell commanding officer over a lilywhite any day, though.

Had to be careful around these Pointers; Pershing and the C Troop lieutenant, Hardeman, had been classmates back there, worse yet.

Driving Indians through tree snow in August, it did beat all.

Blue bangles around the ragtag procession

If you are hard when those around you are soft, you'll make it.

Two Medicine country

D Troop pushed the Crees through the town of Gros Ventre. "Scanty place." Ambition poked out all over the lieutenant.

Mose kept his mouth closed.

"Madame," the waiter called her, and a smile twitched on Wes when she did not snappily correct him. After the waiter turned away, she suddenly laughed. At the split in the back of the waiter's jacket. At herself. At the idea of a Duff eating French food. At Wes... At the route from the homestead from here.

What could she tell herself? That an assignation didn't count if it occurred on foreign soil?

The noses met, she remembered. She knew she had no business falling in love with Wes.

"There's no brass plaque," Wes said reprovingly. "Don't they know who they're dealing with, here?"

The islands were a spatter of rock, and their populations were a spatter, too. She mulled the route, that took people such as the Duffs to another land. Such as the Williamsons, too.

"We don't make much of it," Wes reflected. "We've been in America since the earth cooled. Doubtless it was one of us who elbowed the dinosaurs into LaBrea."

Susan recalled Angus McCaskill's saying that the Williamson family escutcheon read: *Formerly robbers, now thieves.*

"How much longer can you fib by cable?"

Wes said nothing, then touched her cheek. "Until Monday. I have to be aboard the 00 or they'll be sending a search party for me." Wes looked out over the islands. "Ef I c'd inconvenience ye further wi' my lusty presence, Miss Duff," he said in absolutely the worst Scottish imitation she had ever heard, "whurrr w'd ye like to spend the week's end?"

"Edinburgh. Provided we can do so in sound English."

High piles of clouds over the city. The Castle various in its stone textures--all dark, but subtly different, like some natural palimpsest of the centuries. Susan felt as if she had stepped into someone else's life.

"My father marched here."

"He never did! Ninian Duff, on parade at Edinburgh Castle?!"

Susan failed to see amusement in it. "Wes, you're a famous soldier. But you're not the only soldier there ever was."

"No, no, not that. All I meant was--kilts on your father?"

"Maybe this is the clearing-up shower."

In a black taxi with *Mackay* lettered on its door in gold, they were trundled up the hill to Arthur's Seat. Standing on the promontory, Wes theorized that Scottish weather being what it was, Arthur may have frozen off that part of his anatomy there.

In the hotel in Dean Terrace, the Waters of Leith purling past.

"The shins of the fathers are not visited upon their daughters."

...as a Roman road will fly like a spear from the past through the modern English muddle.

"Your heroic side. Tell me what it's like to be famously brave."

"Accidental, mostly."

"Oh, fiddlesticks. Don't talk down."

"I am talking perfectly level."

"And Samuel? What do you think there?"

"Your brother was no doubt a better soldier than was good for him."

"I had a pupil who died of the war, too."

"In what action?"

"Alcatraz."

Wes lifted his head to look at her.

"Could I talk you into singing for me?"

"The evening brings all home, 'tis said

Those who stray, and those who roam,.

The evening brings all home.

"The untented cosmos my abode,

I pass, a willful stranger;

My mistress still the open road

And the bright eyes of danger."

The evening brings all home, 'tis said

From islands far, and Heaven's dome.

The evening brings all home."

Debut**1925**

Wes was at work, speaking into the phone.

"Major, talk to you a minute, can I?"

"Tomorrow night on your nerves? That's to be expected."

"It's not that. Just wanted you to know--I need to go out for a little while."

Oh God, why can't he steer clear of that, for once. Wes kept command of his face, but his voice sharpened. "Clare Street maybe isn't the best place to be, tonight."

"Got to do it, Major. If I don't show my face there, tonight of all nights, I'm written off. They'll think I'm uppity. Say I caught that skin condition: white-itis."

Wes flipped a hand over helplessly.

"That's just the way it is."

"Of course."

that woman and that creature. You learned things where you had to.

In the Zanzibar, the bartender...

"What's this I see around town, your mug on every lamp pole? Singer of spirit-you-alls? You been holding out on us, Sticks."

"Don't remember you ever asking, Jacob."

"What does a famous person drink?"

"A Kessler, same as ever." Monty did an estimate along the bar. "Give the Sunday school a round, while you're at it." He took out a pocket change purse, leather still new to the touch, and reached in for a trio of silver dollars. He carefully stacked them like poker chips and pushed the little pile toward the bartender.

"We need a man..."

"Not this one, you don't. What I need is my beauty sleep."

"I'll watch, a little."

Wes was dozing on the divan, a pillow under his leg. He heard the front door open and close.

"Monty?"

"How did everything go?"

"Got it done. No games of chance. Good night, Major."

Monty peered out the curtain.

"Looking for somebody, is all." The dark faces were streaks in the crowd, a row here, a row there. Leticia was stage left.

Monty held the note. The chandelier above the crowd began to sway.

"Monty, you can't let this get you down." She searched for consolation.

A bit of temperament in a singer was no bad thing. A bit. "Caruso was in San Francisco in that earthquake, and he went on to--"

"I'm no kind of a Ca--"

"Worse than this is going to happen you." She fixed her eyes on him.

"Depend on it."

“What do you mean--what kind of worse? More than an earthquake,
worse?!”

Under Steam

1925

Wes looked around at them all. "There'll be a sleeper on the siding at Conrad. Private quarters for all."

A load of worry the size of a haystack lifted from Monty. No cattle car this time. Pullman...

"Blackie!"

The bastards, Monty thought to himself tiredly. *Have to start in with that, even when we're out here like this.*

The engineer wasn't even looking his way, yelling instead to the fireman.

"Damn it, Blackie, we've got to get more steam up."

"I only have two hands, and that's a shovelfull."

"I thought we were going to have eight cars of cattle."

"Threw in a few extra."

Wes scrutinized the couple of hundred head of cattle yet in the loading pen, then his brother.

"We're running a little short of hay on the lower place, all right?" Wendell said as if it was costing him teeth. "Figured we're better off shipping them than letting them turn into hides. "

"You think Pinckney has stock cars under his hat, do you, Wendell?"

Wes went off to confer with the stationmaster.

"Poor cows."

Wes looked miffed. "Poor all of us, if we can't get rolling."

Monty studied out the window.

"What now?"

"We don't have enough power to pull through the cut. Besides that, we're going to have to flange the track. It don't take much snow covering the track for this outfit to go on the ground."

Soldiers**1890**

"I don't see the brockle-face."

"Nor my cow with the one horn," Donald said bleakly.

"Let's try over across."

They came onto the rustlers at the head of Noon Creek.

"They think it's so easy, walking over us."

"One's a black fellow, Ninian."

"Thieves are plaid."

Mose turned around in his saddle. One figure like a mop, the other like a chopping block. They stood there with rifles at port arms. "Looky here.

Farmers," Mose said to Jennings. He pulled his carbine from the scabbard.

Dropping to one knee, Ninian shot the horse from under him.

"It's been a time since the Queen's ^{target match} targetry."

"The drill stays the same. 'Ready, steady, fire.'"

"None to chair us through the town for this ~~st~~ day of shooting, Ninian."

"We've a horse to drag into a beaver dam. And another to take off and shoot."

"Williamson is going to be cross, toward us."

"I doubt that he will. I would wager that two empty beds at the bunkhouse will give him something to think about."

"We'll need to butcher it."

"That'll be twice today, won't it."

"Donald. They had rifles, we had rifles. The race is to the swift, man."

"I know it is, Ninian. It's been a while since the Crimea."

"Let's get cracking. We've still to shoot the other horse."

"Never a word, Donald."

"Jen knows my every breath."

"Jen will need to forebear. As will Flora." *They can suspect all they want,*

"Let's give Williamson something to think about. We'll leave a hat on a fencepost."

"Which one's hat?" Donald asked punctiliously.

"It doesn't matter." Donald handed him Mose's hat.

New York**1926**

“Major? Do you think we could go riding? They wouldn’t ever let me, by myself.”

“Not unless you fetch me a new knee.”

“I meant, maybe Miss Susan and me? If I put on enough of a monkey suit...I could borrow some rig from Yerby. People here don’t know how we do things in Montana, they’d maybe think I was her--what’s that the French have?”

“Equerry,” Wes rolled the word. “The English Creek equerry. I like that.”

“Do I have any say in this?”

...

They cantered along 00 early the next morning. Susan was astride in a divided skirt, Monty staying at her elbow. He wore Yerby's best bowler hat and a ruffled vest that had once graced Wes at a state dinner. They rode without saying anything for a few minutes, accustoming themselves to the feel of their saddles and fit of their stirrups. True daughter of her father, from the side of her eye she studied his potbellied mare and its plodding gait. Son of a cavalryman, he dolefully eyed her broadbeamed bay as it waddled along.

"Plugs," he said it for both of them.

They rounded the 00, a clear stretch ahead. Susan leaned forward a little in her saddle and held her horse back until his was even with hers. "Race you to the 00." She whipped his horse across the flank with the end of her reins, then hit hers on its bountiful rump.

The horses seemed to shudder into life. Grunting in alarm they bolted down the riding path, eyes wild, hooves pounding.

...

"Ah, Franz Lithp," the 00 lisped.

"Miss Duff, you are in-cor-ridge-able."

Monty had closed his eyes.

They
name
houses?
"Callie" "he
surprised her w/
"You know, like
W. many go
named?"

"Are you doing all right?"

"Just listening."

...

"Rathbun, are you asking for surefire death? The last time I looked, that woman was white, white, white."

"She's--I'm showing her Strivers' Row."

"Right. You be busy *showing* her and some ofay going to come along and blast your ass for you."

"Out--" Monty gestured west "--it's different."

"How different's 'different'? Montan-i-o or anywhere, you're still of the colored persuasion and she's Miss Pond Cream."

"She's my teacher. Wasn't for her, the most I could look forward to would be changing sparkplugs every three months."

"You got to watch your step. You'd be better off shoveling coal to him than her."

...

Wes had never had the experience of thinking of himself as one of those people that trouble follows around. Yet now it was beginning to seem so.

...

"Goddamn miracle." Wendell nodded sharply toward the radio. It was not clear whether he meant the apparatus itself, bringing song through the air, or that the voice singing was Monty's.

"He's doing splendidly," Wes chose to remark on.

"I never meant for it to turn out this way."

"Are you so sure?"

...

"Miss Duff is...with me. A friend of long standing."

*"This is a story I am more fit to tell now, through whomever
unearths this old account of the three of us, than when I was alive."*

--jotted on the flyleaf of the diary of Susan Duff