

## The End Toward Idaho

The Fourth of July has turned up on the calendar a hundred times since Montana's statehood year of 1889, so wouldn't you think we could do the holiday <sup>with some style</sup> properly by now? But no, today and all day it's going to be more of the usual. From Ekalaka to Yaak, we Montanans will bake our brains in the sun at rodeos, meanwhile downing enough beer and fried chicken to cholestorate a vegetarian convention, waiting for dark so we can try to burn down our towns with fireworks. A centennial of the same old stuff; is this the best we can do? Maybe it's an American condition, in this strange nation we have become, all helmet and sword and no brain or heart. In any case, the calendar this morning says "Independence Day," but I wonder. Nowhere in the doings of Montana does there seem to be a really independent idea--like changing the name of the state to something more appropriate, such as Destitution.

--"The Life of Riley" column  
in the Missoula Montanian,  
July 4, 1989

Click. From where I was sitting on the bumper of the Winnebago I was doing my dammedest to outstare that camera of hers, but as usual, no such luck. You'd think a person with an entire rodeo going on around her could find something better to take a picture of than me.

Huh uh, not this Maria person. About an arm's reach away she was down on one knee with the gizmo up to her eye like she couldn't see without it, and just as soon as she'd shot she said, "You're not a bad-looking old coot, you know that?"

"The old part I do, yeah."

Click. Her next snap of the shutter caught me by surprise as it always did. After all these years, why didn't I know that the real picture Maria wanted was always the unexpected one, the one after you'd let your guard down.

As she came up out of her picture-taking crouch, a red-and-white calf sleepily trotted past us into the catch pen at the end of the arena. "And Shaun Busby has missed with his second loop!" the announcer recited the obvious in that tin voice we'd had to hear all afternoon.

By habit Maria fitted a long lens onto her camera and aimed out at the horseback figure who was disgustedly coiling his spent lariats, but didn't bother to take the scene. "Folks, let's give this hard-luck cowboy a big hand of applause! It's the only pay he's going to take home from here today!" My thumb found the

*Christa mightly,*

Busby boy on the program, he was only the first contestant in the third section of calf roping. Down through the years, if I had a dollar for every guy who entered the Gros Ventre rodeo under the impression he was a calf roper, I could buy up Japan.

*all. Truth of July*

I stood up, partly to unstiffen but mainly to ~~make it~~ <sup>turn into</sup> the opportunity to announce, "I've had about enough of this." Of course my words meant the calf roping and the rodeo, but more than that, too.

Maria ignored the more and ~~answered~~ <sup>responded</sup>, "What's your rush?" She made that gesture of swinging her hair out of her eyes, the same little tossing way she did to clear her view into the camera. Hair deeper than red;

*pie*

the richer color that on a fine horse is called blood-bay. Maria's mare of it was atop a plenty good-enough face and the lithe figure that in its faded blue jeans and purple rodeo shirt was both long-legged and thoroughly mounded where women are supposed to be mounded. No wonder every man who ever saw her sent his eyes back for a second helping.

But I might've known she'd start right in on me again. "I'll tell you another thing while I'm at it, Jick," and I was all too sure she would. Only one other person was anywhere in

the same race with Maria when it came to prescribing behavior for me and I wasn't going to hear from that one ever again. ~~From the look~~ of her, Maria seemed determined to take up <sup>the</sup> any slack right here and now. "You can't keep on the way you've been," she was informing me. "Sitting around like your tail is caught in a crack--that's not the usual you. You're going to have to roust yourself out into life again sometime or other. Here's a chance ~~just~~ being handed to you, so why not glom onto it?" She let up just long enough to see if any of that was registering on me. Then here it came again: "Jick, you've got to go with me on this."

There is a sort of satiric/satire in just being shot at by some. To right back to Topic 6.

more - me LHS at him it was - there - some

detail? all damn afternoon, M had seemed detail

You haven't even been fishing yet 9:00 AM, how you... She knew - hadn't

you haven't seen was fishing yet this year

Topic it one

I'd already told her no. Three times, N-O. Actually I guess it must have been four, because Maria never even starts to listen until you say a thing the third time.

"Sitting sounds good enough to me," I tried on her. "The world can use more people who stay sat."

All that drew me was the remark that I might as well sit behind a steering wheel where I'd at least be doing somebody some good,

instead of holing up in my own living room like I'd forgotten how the front door.

~~to work a door.~~ How could I make her savvy <sup>the situation</sup> it? Everything had changed

on that night six months ago, none of it for the better.

(You can  
be told  
it all  
all  
but  
not  
else-)  
make  
it  
happy  
any  
told

No sooner was the camera <sup>away</sup> down from her eye than she was right  
back on Topic One. "So I can count on you coming?"

Nothing else having helped, I resorted to reason. "Like hell  
you can. This big trip of yours--if it was just you involved, I'd  
maybe see it different. But goddamn it, Maria, you know I don't even  
want to be in the same vicinity as that dingbob." *w/ date*

*for a few months,*  
"If I can put up with Riley, ~~himself~~ it shouldn't be that big  
a deal for you."

✓

She had me there. Of all the people in Montana who'd gladly buy a ticket to Riley Wright's funeral when the time came, Maria was entitled to the head of the line.

"You and him, that's up to you," I answered as I had any number of times before. "Though I personally can't see why you'd spend half a second with him, let alone from now to November."

*no 91*  
~~November.~~ The rest of July, August, September, October, the first week of November, four months, Maria's version of "a few."

"Because it's a chance that'll never come again." She still was working me over with her eyes. "Or anyway not for another hundred years, and I'm not famous for waiting, am I."

No, but she sure as hell was getting notorious with me for persistence. How many ways did I have to say no to this woman?

One more:

"Christamighty, Maria. Just take the rig yourself, why don't you." I fished into my pocket for the Winnebago keys, then held them out to her. "Here, the rig is yours for however long you're gonna be chasing around to this Centennial stuff. But as the guy said, include me out, okay? I'm not in any mood to go gallivanting all over the state of Montana with you and that Missoula whistledick."  
*Riley Wright*

"I need to have you with."

If she really meant it.

This put a different light on the matter. I shot her a hard look.

(more) Need. Did people really know what they were trying to say with that word? I wasn't sure I could tell, any more.

"Maria. You're not just saying that, are you?"

Our looks held each other. Then she gave me a grin and provided:

"If I was it'd be the first time, wouldn't it?"

God, that grin. That world-by-the-tail grin that brought back what I was missing, these months since.

I still didn't want to do it. The fact is, I'd rather have kept on doing what I seemed best fitted for these days, exactly nothing.

But I need to have you with. How can you turn down somebody when it's

put like that?

Finally I said:

Sitting in a Winnebago is something I guess I can manage to do.

"Well, hell, okay then. (If I've got to, I've got to.) As long

as nothing physical or mental is required, I'm your guy."

Especially  
when it's  
about

I can  
see  
this  
is  
my

more?

"That's more like it." She <sup>came up out of her picture-taking crouch</sup> came across the room and gave me a

kiss. One of the things about Maria was that she closed her eyes  
but I guess kissing has a life of its own.  
to kiss. I always thought it was uncharacteristic of her. Now she

informing was busy ~~telling~~ me, "None of it's going to cost you a nickel, did

I tell you that? The newspaper will pay for ~~it all~~." <sup>use of yr rig of everything.</sup>

"Free stuff is generally overpriced," I pointed out. But she

didn't bother to hear and was gathering her camera gear, simultaneously

saying, "I've got to get back, Workday tomorrow. So it's set? All <sup>13</sup> put the  
Monday noon. You can ~~noon~~ noon.  
you've got to do is drive over and meet us in Missoula, ~~next Monday~~."

See you then. 'Bye.'

~~rig in the lot next to the Montanian~~

That's how it started, four months ago. How I ended up seeing

enough of Montana's Centennial doings to last anybody a hundred years.

How I got myself ~~into~~ where I ought to have known <sup>n</sup> not to get, <sup>penned in</sup> caught

between the pair of them. Maria the newspaper picture-taker, my headlong

daughter. And writing Riley Wright, my goddamn ex-son-in-law.

You had enough  
nodes?  
a 8+ party.

a last bit  
to make  
sure the  
miracle  
a look from  
today.

more >

to morning  
it'll finally  
be over  
but not  
now

padding ideas  
on track  
concept &  
style  
it'll finally all be  
tomorrow

Odd, but when I think of Gros Ventre, it is as a town of nearness  
to the mountains, even though the site more closely neighbors the  
farming plain. You had only to pass Lawrence van der Post's place  
with its few dairy cows at the eastern edge of town and the patterns  
of cultivation began. Grain was the ~~sole~~ word from then on, echoing  
and echoing ~~and the way~~ across northern and eastern Montana and the  
Dakotas all the way to Minneapolis where the giant elevators rose in  
response. For it had been found out, by the trial and error of the  
homesteaders, that you could <sup>grow</sup> things in some of the soils of Montana.  
Provided that <sup>swallow</sup>  
~~If~~ some of the weather of Montana didn't ~~wipe~~ you ~~out~~ first.

base  
willow

imaginable are engendered somewhere along its horizon of coast, from polar chill to the stun of desert heat. The North Pacific's special law of gravity is lateral and violent: currents of water and weather rule. The most tremendous of these, something like a gigantic

permanent storm under the water, is called the Kuroshio, the Japanese Current, and puts an easterly push into several thousand miles of

ocean. ~~Melander and Karlsson and Wennberg and Braaf~~ <sup>Even</sup> here at the ~~Melander and Karlsson and Wennberg and Braaf~~ farthest littoral from the current's origins, ~~will~~ feel Kuroshio's

shove against their journey without <sup>realizing</sup> knowing it.

These four Swedes in a Tlingit canoe are attempting a thousand miles of this North Pacific-world. Not all that much, you <sup>may</sup> might say,

a fraction of a fraction, after all. One thousand miles: in forty or fifty sturdy days one could walk such a distance and perhaps yet have

~~a wafer's-worth~~ <sup>wafer's-worth</sup> of leather on one's boot soles. Except that this

particular distance is exploded into archipelago; island, island, island,

like a field of asteroids. Or thickly bristled with forest, <sup>when</sup> ~~where~~ not

riven with channels. Except, too, <sup>for</sup> ~~that~~ season <sup>being</sup> ~~is~~ fully against these

men, the winter weather capable of halting them any hour of each day.



by triple tines of exile. A most restless position.

One of the first lengthening evenings of summer of 1852, the time of year when New Archangel's twilight began to dawdle on in dusk until near midnight, Melander declared to no one in particular among the card-players and conversationists in the workmen's barracks: "A seven-year man is a bladeless knife without a handle."

Then he stood up, a process like staves suddenly framing themselves together into a very large scarecrow, and in his galumphing strides went from the building.

Only because it afforded the most distance for his impatient boots, Melander roved west through the narrow shoreline crescent of settlement. In about three hundred paces his traipse necessarily ended, the high timbered gate of the stockade there stoppering New Archangel until morning. Melander still needed motion. He changed course to the north. Rapidly passed the gate watchman yawning within his hut. Climbed the short knoll where the first of the stockade's blockhouses overlooked the gate. In long pulls clambered up the ladder to the catwalk beside the blockhouse. Here met the quizzing glance of the Russian sentry and muttered: "The Finns are singing in the barracks again. They sound like death arguing with the devil."

The sentry nodded in pitying savvy and returned to his watching-slot within the timbered tower. Leaving Melander solitary against the dusky sky, scanning out beyond Sitka Sound and its dark-treed islands schooled like furry whales, to the threadline of horizon

"I didn't know you have a brother."

"No, I don't guess you did. He was killed in the war. Although these days I guess you have to specify which one. WWII."

"My father knew him."

"Knew who?"

"Bob Marshall."

"You're kidding."  
*me(?)*

"Hell I am. Fact of the matter, I knew him myself. At least was  
around him, some times. When I was <sup>a</sup> skim milk kid."

*Now I know you're  
pulling  
my leg.*

Actually,  
"Yeah, well, I do have one idea."

"Trot it on out."

"You maybe won't like it."

won't  
"Why ~~wouldn't~~ I? Come on, let's hear it."

"Promise not to get sore?"

"Riley, will you quit futzing around and just come out with it?"

*I promise [cross my heart & hope to die,*

I'm not going to get sore, okay? Now then, what's your Helena story idea?"

"Whores."

"What?"

See,  
"You're sore. I knew you would be."

*Mr. Smooth*

*...  
I am.  
Not.  
Sole*

"Okay, let me put it another way. Businesswomen."

"Not hardly," she said in words 7-11.

"Riley, get real, will you. ... h/s 7 gold  
male pantony

that's just it.

*R: No, wait,  
just listen  
Businesswoman  
H: that better*

Click. From where I was sitting on the bumper of the Winnebago  
 I was doing my <sup>utmost</sup> ~~damndest~~ <sup>damnedest</sup> to outstare that camera of hers, but as usual,  
 no such luck. You would think a person with a whole rodeo going on  
 around her could come up with something more fascinating to take a  
 picture of than me. Huh uh, not this Mariah person. No more than an  
 arm's reach away she was down on one knee with the gizmo clapped to  
 her eye like she couldn't see without it, and as soon as she'd shot  
 she said as if it was something the nation was waiting to hear, "You're  
 not such a bad-looking old coot, you know that?"

"The old part I do, yeah."

Click. Her next snap of the shutter caught me by surprise as it

*would you, that*  
*suitable*  
*to spend*  
*him*  
*on*

*interesting capture*

Eventually, after an <sup>new</sup> extensive sugared conversation with his <sup>trying to sound matter of fact, he asked:</sup> story topic, Riley sashayed back to our table. "What about a picture?"

Mariah eyed him as if he had slithered up through a crack in the floor. "What about one, cradle robber?"

"Come on, Mariah, don't be that way. Honest to Christ, I was going to do a bartender story even before Kimi happened to come on shift."

"Kimi!?" Mariah voiced disbelievingly. "Riley, the only taste you've got is in your mouth."

Riley rolled his eyes and looked at the ceiling as if the letters p-a-t-i-e-n-c-e were inscribed up there. Then he blew out some breath and met Mariah's gaze, dagger for dagger. "Just out of curiosity, Flash, what're you going to tell the BB tomorrow when my story lands in there and no picture with it?"

Mariah gave him a world record glower. Then she got up, tornadoed over the end of the bar, loudly plopped her camera bag on it, and began exhuming some electrical cords and small spotlights which she proceeded to clamp and aim into the targeted area of the brunette bartender.

"Kimi, sweetie, just give us your biggest smile, if you know

As innocent as a cat can be  
still in the  
R asked:

Method  
Munell

75  
imagination going, I suppose. No, wait, not this bar but the Medicine Lodge, not this Riley-Kimi recipe but Stanley Meixell and Velma Simms.

Velma in that long-ago time had been Gros Ventre's divorce champion, thrice married in an era that believed once ought to be enough for anybody. That Fourth of July and others of the Depression years, she served as timekeeper at the Gros Ventre rodeo, in charge of the whistle that signaled time's up during bronc rides; as one of the yearning hangers-on around the bucking chutes pointed out, "Think of all the pucker practice she's had."

*in her  
stockings of  
macy  
high heels*

Stanley was...Stanley. And there in the heat field between them, after I had popped in innocent as a day-old colt to discuss a matter with Stanley, I was the neutral element. Rendered neutral by circumstances. Circumstantial youth, in that fifteenth summer of my life. Circumstantial widowhood now.

*no man  
of  
that woman*

"Jick?" Riley was asking. "Jick, are you okay?"

"Uh, you bet," I answered. "As good as a square guy can be in a round world. Just wanted to tell you, I'm calling it a night."

"Good idea," he said.

"Going on out to the Winnebago," I said.

P.75A follows →

Click. From where I was sitting on the bumper of the Winnebago

*utmost?  
damnedest*

I was doing my best to outstare that camera of hers, but as usual,  
no such luck. You would think a person with an entire <sup>a whole</sup> rodeo going on  
around her could find something more worthwhile to take a picture of *suitable  
maggie?*  
than me. Huh uh, not this Mariah person. No more than an arm's  
reach away she was down on one knee with the gizmo up to her eye like  
she couldn't see without it, and just as soon as she'd shot she said  
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such a bad-looking old coot, you know that?"

"The old part I do, yeah."

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always did. After all this while, why didn't I know that the real picture Mariah wanted was always the unexpected <sup>ever</sup> one, the one after you'd let your guard down.

surprise

like glory unfolding

desc. Mariah - a cowboy - ambly

whiteface

stroke?

imposed long

am?

detail of Mariah - unfolded, she whole hell of a bit prime of a woman suddenly assembled,

She rose up out of her picture-taking crouch just as a red and white calf sleepily trotted past us into the catch pen at the end of the arena. "And Kevin Frew has missed with his second loop!" the announcer recited the obvious in that tin voice we'd had to hear all afternoon. By habit Mariah fitted a long lens onto her camera and climbed atop the arena fence to aim out at the horseback figure who was disgustedly coiling his pair of dud lariats, but then didn't bother to take the scene. "Folks, let's give this hard-luck cowboy a big hand of applause! It's the only pay he's going to take home from here today!" My thumb found the Frew boy on the program.

Christamighty, he was only the first contestant in the third section of calf roping. Down through all the Fourths of July, if I had a dollar for every guy who entered the Gros Ventre rodeo under the impression he was a calf roper I could buy up Japan.

Mariah was staying perched on the top fence pole while she scanned

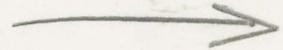
"Somewhere south of Browning, along Highway Eighty-Nine!

Just another roadkill, beside life's yellow line!

But morning sends its angel in a hawk-quick flash of light!

Guiding home forever another victim of the night!"

Some angel, her. Leaving the music on, considerably toned down,  
I seated myself to do justice to my plateload of lunch and the question  
of what I was doing sitting here in a Missoula parking



lot eating eggs a la baloney.

Every family is its own kind of riddle. Any that I've ever had anything to do with, at least. People on the outside can only glimpse enough to make them wonder what in the name of Jesus H. Christ is going on in there behind the doors of their neighbors and friends, while those inside the family have times, sometimes lifetimes, of being fiercely baffled with one another. Can this one really be mine,<sup>?</sup> parent and child think back and forth, eyeing each other like foreign species. Knots in the <sup>blood</sup> family line; the oldest story there is, and ever the freshest.

We McCaskills are not immune. I still wished that I had stuck with my original inclination and just kept saying no, daughter or not, to Mariah's big thee-and-me-and-he-in-a-Winnebago idea. I mean, it's not as if I had no grounds for staying clear of this trip. There wasn't some kind of family vacation etiquette that had to be observed here:

"Sure, you bet, Mariah darling--if there's one thing I ever did want to do, it's to circumnavigate Montana." No, what Mariah and Riley were out to perform in their series of stories and pictures of the state as it went through its centennial commotion was purely part of their

"She looks sweet enough to melt in your mouth, don't she," said  
the first bar stool cowboy.

"I'd sure like to give that a try," ~~said~~<sup>verified</sup> the second.

<sup>sent</sup>  
I gave them a glower which should have melted their vocal cords shut,  
but it is difficult to penetrate that much haze of beer and intrinsic  
stupidity. Nor was Riley any help. "Don't look at me," he murmured.  
"She was only ever my wife. You're stuck with her as a daughter permanently."

When Mariah came back I climbed off my stool and moved to take hers,  
to put myself between her and the pair of shagnasties as what I hoped  
would be a barrier of at least age if not dignity. But she gave the  
situation a glance and shook her head emphatically, meaning

I was to stay where I'd been. Sidling onto her stool, she remarked to  
the nearest bozo, "You seem pretty interested in what I'm wearing."

"Yeah. And what you aren't."

"Aw, crud,"  
~~"Oh, Christ,"~~ Riley uttered wearily and began to get off his stool  
in the direction of combat.

<sup>a doubly</sup>  
Mariah halted him with another emphatic look and headshake. Turning  
back to her admiring spectator, she said, "Well now then, what's on  
your mind besides what's on my chest?"

He blinked a number of times. Then: "I was wondering if you'd, er, want to go out."

Mariah gave him what I recognized as her most dangerous grin. "Now that sounds interesting," she said. "I'll bet you're the kind of guy who shows up for a date wearing his ready-to-go tuxedo."

"Er, I'm not sure that I've got--what's a ready-to-go tuxedo?"

Mariah swirled her Calvert and water, took a substantial swig, then delivered in a tone icier than the cubes in her glass: "A ten-gallon hat and a hard-on."

Into our drinks Riley and I simultaneously snorted aquatic laughs which doubtless would have drawn one or the other of us the <sup>wrath</sup> anger of the red-faced bozo except that his buddy on the other side of him <sup>gave</sup> let out a guffaw that must have been heard in northernmost Canada and then <sup>crowed</sup> yanked, "He can at least borrow the hat someplace, lady!"

"Screw you, Melvin," the bozo gritted out, in a 180-degree turn of his attentions. Then he swung around on his stool with his right fist in business, <sup>smacking</sup> ~~smacking~~ Melvin in the middle of his hilarity and sending him sailing off backwards. Melvin rebounded <sup>off</sup> from a ~~nearby~~ pool table and with a roar tackled Mariah's suitor off his stool. They rolled



the summit of Red Sleep. Game abounded; we drove past antelope curious

about us and elk wary of us and a few more clumps of buffalo who blankly

ignored us and every so often flocks of sage chickens would hurl up into

a panic of flight at our coming. <sup>Even so, even c. wild world in at least a all around,</sup> Part of me was still distracted, still

spooked by the morning's encounter with Shirley; that main heavy mood

I'd been in ever since Marce's death, and now the Shirley dumpload of

bad past. Life seemed to be saying under its breath to me, is that all

you can do, lose wives? At least here on Red Sleep my eyes could enjoy

what my mind couldn't quite, <sup>Id</sup> Montana west of the Continental Divide,

the end toward Idaho, always feels to me as if the continent is already

bunching up to meet the Pacific Ocean, but even though this was not my

part of the state I had to admit that the scene below us was A-Number-One

country. North from the buffalo preserve the Flathead Valley stretched

like a green-tile floor, farms and ranches out across the level earth

in highly orderly fashion, and to the east the Mission Mountains teeped

up in single long slants of slope from the valley floor to peaks a mile

and a half high. Extreme, all of it, to an east-side-of-the-Divide

resident like me accustomed to comfortable intermediate geography of

P. 354 follows →

I take  
my head  
against east.

more  
to  
see.

more  
transition

Riley simply ran a list of the 00 counties, out of Montana's total of 56,

that had voted for Reagan and put at the end only the words, How do you

like him now? Or the time he wrote about one of the big farming operators

who was plowing up thousands of acres of <sup>virgin</sup> grassland to qualify for

*then letting it sit below & victim to wind*  
federal land loans. When he becomes dust himself, the earth will spit

*When he was armed & ink*  
him back out. *over* In his nonwriting mood, I had better say, Riley looked

*prime* like a premier son-in-law. Oh, sure, any moment of the day or night

he was <sup>turning</sup> ~~always~~ capable of being a [bit of a] smart aleck. But better

that than ~~being~~ <sup>always</sup> a dumb one, I figured. No, exactly because Riley was

*serpents toward life*  
the kind of person he was--his natural Rileyness, call it--I made my

offer.

dash - eastern Mont.

The steering wheel wobbled in my hands. I <sup>gave the news</sup> announced, "We've got ourselves a flat," and pulled the Winnebago off onto the shoulder of the highway.

"The end of a perfect day," Riley grouched as he and I went to get the spare tire from under the OO. "Shove it, Riley," Maria said to him, and from the look of her she quite possibly meant <sup>entire?</sup> the spare tire.

"Will you two lay off" <sup>long enough to</sup> --I began, and was interrupted by a car horn's beep beepitybeepbeep...beep beep! Shave-and-a-haircut, <sup>six</sup> two-bits, my

<sup>approaching</sup> rosy rear end; I irritatedly waved the car past us but no, here it <sup>scarpation</sup> pulled off onto the side of the road <sup>just</sup> in front of us, an '84 <sup>hatchup-</sup> red Corvette

driven by an old guy. As I was about to shout to him that we were okay, <sup>winding down</sup> there was the sound of another slowing car, and an '87 Buick <sup>beeped past and</sup> ~~OO~~ <sup>LeSabre</sup> <sup>ground</sup> pulled <sup>onto the shoulder gravel</sup> ~~over~~ in front of the Corvette.

<sup>March to</sup> Riley and I turned our heads to the highway behind us as if we were ~~am~~ both on one swivel. ~~Hummerd~~ <sup>Hummerd</sup> "Humnerd percent," he said sarcastically and pickups, <sup>cavalcade</sup> at the sight of the approaching ~~line~~ <sup>line</sup> of cars, all slowing. "Just what <sup>is this,</sup> we need, geezerville on wheels."

<sup>what seemed to be</sup> By now the first of the Toothless Ferries, the Corvette pilot, <sup>was</sup> ~~had~~ <sup>ing</sup> gimped his way to us. "Got some trouble?" he called out cheerfully.

There is nothing left standing of my father's English Creek  
ranger station. The station, the house behind it where we lived, barn,  
corral, all of it is gone except for the fallen-in mound of the root  
cellar. Which is just as well, probably; the Forest Service extinguished  
that site from our lives in 1940 when they made my father move the  
ranger office into Gros Ventre, and so it may as well be obliterated.

not a  
stick  
left

Its thoughts, though, do not go. The argument clangs like iron  
against iron in my memory. "You're done running my life," my brother  
flinging behind him as he stomped from that vanished house. "Nobody's  
running it, including you," my father hurling after him. The issue  
was warm and blonde, her name Leona Tracy; she and Alec vowed ~~that~~ they  
were going to get married, they would find a way of existence different  
from the college and career that my parents were urging onto Alec,  
they would show the world what permanent love looked like. None of  
it turned out that way. By that autumn Alec and Leona were split.  
Her life found its course far from the Two Medicine country. And  
Alec's--

delicious  
soft  
homemade

I was remembering the day of Riley and myself at Alec's grave.

When I swung around to signal for another round, the bartender had changed sex. <sup>9</sup> That is to say, the ~~handlebar~~ <sup>specimen</sup> ~~mustached~~ orator was gone and the ~~tender~~ now was a young woman--I say young; they ~~almost~~ all look young to me any more--with ~~long brunette hair and~~ <sup>brunette hair down onto her shoulders and a smile you</sup> could see from an airplane.

A quick glance at Riley told me the change of bartenders' shifts had not been lost on him, and indeed was the likely inspiration of his story idea.

"Miss, we'll have another round of jelly sandwiches here," I called across to her. *insert*

I thought she looked at Riley a little quizzically when he specified another G-ball, but maybe she was just that way, because when she stated the tab it too had a question mark on the end of it: "That'll be five dollars?"

I don't know, do plays these days have what are called ingenue roles? If not, this young lady was doomed to a lifetime of being miscast.

*a brain light lit in me.*

*smile-a-while bartender*

"Oh, right," she said <sup>caustically</sup> with sarcasm. "What about that blond

in Classifieds?"

"That doesn't count," he answered, as highly offended as if she'd <sup>orphaned out of</sup> accused him of cheating at marbles. "You and I were already separated ~~in the past~~ then."

With deadly evenness Mariah told him, "It all counts."

Riley <sup>seemed</sup> looked honestly baffled. "What's got you on the prod?"

If it bothers you to see me have a <sup>direction</sup> "social life, then look the other way."

"It wouldn't work," she levied on him next. "I'd just see you circling around to <sup>your candidate to fuck</sup> the next piece of tail."

"Goddamn it, Mariah, you know I never played around while we were married. You know that." He waited for her to confirm, but silence

was <sup>best</sup> as good as he could get. "What I do now is my own ~~affair~~ aff-- business."

"Not if it interferes with the series. You said we were going

to talk over tomorrow's story."

"All right, let's talk about ~~it~~ <sup>it</sup>, and get this over with."

"Not with you standing there hot to trot."

*try to be a bit modern, but... all words out of my own daughter*

*M. settled ice to her glass every content.*

*R abruptly sat.*

"Can't Flora fill in as well as I can?" I astutely asked him, citing the only other person in the vicinity who had experience in standing at the front of a classroom. Willy tittered, cast a glance toward Ninian, then looked at me severely. I now remembered Flora Duff was currently a prominent six months in the family way.

"There is of course the matter of the teacher's wage," Ninian at last found around to, and there he met me coming, I do have to admit. That year of 1893 was the sour kind that we hadn't known was in the calendar of America. Prices of wool and lambs both were falling through the floor while I still was trying to climb out of Lucas's wallet. (Already I could hear his reaction to my new career: By Jesus, Angus, you're the first swamper the Medicine Lodge ever had that's turned out to be a schoolmarm.) No homesteader was ever his own best paymaster. Besides, I had come across the bend of the world looking for new, had I? The one thing certain about a year as the South Fork teacher would be its newness every day. Alexander Angus McCaskill of Bell Rock, were you watching this wade of mine into new water?

"All right then," I said to my electors. "If you haven't come to your senses in the last minute, I'm your schoolkeeper."

"Anguss, you are chust the man," Willy ratified, and I swear Ninian very nearly smiled at me.

That first South Fork morning. The Hahn brothers were the earliest to trudge down the road toward the waitful school and waitful me, dragging with them that invisible Gibraltar of burden of

*started to*

*I was only  
ever a  
pupil  
teacher,  
not  
schl / heavy  
marm*

*more?*

"Just out of curiosity, what're you going to tell the BB when my story shows up and no photo with it?"

Mariah gave him a glower. Then she got up and went out to the Bago, returning with some lighting equipment which she proceeded to clamp and aim into the targeted area of the brunette bartender.

"Kimi, sweetie, just give us your biggest smile," Mariah directed in a kind of gritted tone. "Jick, I need you to hold this for me."

She handed me a shot glass an empty beer glass. "Hold it up right there," she

instructed, positioning ~~my~~ the glass in the air in front of me and then sighting through the glass at Kimi.

Being in the focus of the lights was making Kimi positively radiant.

Through her smile she said, "Gosh, <sup>isn't this</sup> ~~this is~~ exciting?"

Click, and then a few more <sup>triggering</sup> snaps of the shutter, and Mariah was stonily informing Riley the photo was <sup>achieved</sup> got, and she unplugged and unclamped the lights in <sup>flaw</sup> about a second and a half and went back to our table and her Calvert and water.

I joined her, but Riley of course still hovered at the bar. After a bit, Mariah declared: "If I have to watch any more of this I'll throw up." Out she went to the Winnebago.

I gingerly  
went over

if you know which one that is,

could you come

in candles cant

He's not laugh  
or even she not laugh,  
I smile

omit

more

Baxter Bolitho's office was in the turret of the Montanian

building, ~~with a view~~ looking out over the Clark Fork to Mount Sentinel.

*That round seemed to me*

The room was round, like being in the top of a lighthouse; if I ever

had to make a living indoors, that's the kind of place I'd want to be

in.

The main decoration was stuffed animal heads. They formed a circle

around the room, a O-point buck deer and an elk and a moose and a bear

and a couple of African creatures I couldn't name. A lot of bars in

Montana used to have head collections on their walls and <sup>at first</sup> I figured

Bolitho maybe had bought one of those collections when a bar was turned

into a fern cafe. But then I saw there was a little nameplate under

each head: O-point shot by Baxter Bolitho in the OO Mtns, (date).

He was kind of a pale little guy, but evidently he did his own killing.

When the three of us walked in, Bolitho plainly wondered who in the

hell I was, but when Maria introduced me, he automatically got up, gave

me a <sup>pump handle</sup> handshake--possibly a guy in his position gets paid by the handshake--

and said, "Call me Bax."

Bax? Well, hell, who's a guy called Jick to cast any aspersion.

I found a chair and did what I could to make myself inconspicuous.

*less than reluctantly*

*did do thing  
decorative  
change*

*I suppose  
introduced*

quote BB  
zeiger  
storia

Bolitho started giving them undiluted hell. How come Riley's  
pieces were ~~all about dead buffalo~~ <sup>angelic qualities of</sup> and hangings and bartenders and,  
~~on the grim side of~~ <sup>heaven's</sup> for Christ sake, the Vietnam War? And where was Maria getting picture  
ideas like the bartender seen through the ~~shot~~ <sup>wornily</sup> glass, <sup>beer</sup> for <sup>heaven's</sup> Christ sake  
again? <sup>panies of geegles?</sup> "Look at this stack of letters from readers."

<sup>Maria</sup> Riley said, "Bax, in Missoula people will write <sup>a sackful of</sup> letters to the  
editor if they think a stop light is a couple of seconds slow."

She did -  
dissuade.  
BB, was -  
dissuaded  
"A have  
never seen  
anything else

I have to admit, my feelings were more mixed than I expected,  
sitting there listening to Bolitho give Riley and Maria a reaming <sup>out</sup>  
Any time Riley got a tromping, it was fine with me. But I hated to  
see Maria catch hell along with him. The way Bolitho was going, our  
sojourn around Montana was about to <sup>come a thing of post</sup> be called to a halt. But for a  
guy in <sup>an</sup> office to tell Maria <sup>or</sup> and for that matter <sup>even get</sup> Riley, what they  
were supposed to see, when they were the ones out there doing the actual  
work--

I gandered around at the stuffed trophies. ["Dead heads," Maria  
called them, "symbolic."]

cut? or  
... and  
just  
hear  
maria  
think  
to hear

~~I broke in on ~~them~~ Bolitho and Riley. "Excuse my asking,  
Bax, but where's your mountain goat?"~~

Bolitho gave me a look as if I'd just come up out of carpet in

front of him. Riley, damn him, gawked around into the corners of the room as if the creature might be hiding behind a chair. Maria blinked and started, "Jick, this isn't--"

*Jack -  
"Jick" I  
corrected*

*started  
instantly  
paled  
a  
little  
you're*

"My friend, if you do any hunting yourself--" Bolitho started answering me in a frosty way--

I shrugged and put in, "Not quite fifty years' worth yet."

*as markedly  
as possible*

Bolitho blinked and amended his tone a little: "Then you'll know <sup>it's very hard to achieve</sup> the difficulty of getting a mountain goat. I've never been privileged to shoot one."

"The hell!" I said. "Christamighty, we got them hanging like flies on the mountains up behind my place."

*at claimed  
confounded as if he'd  
tasted never  
chore ice cream*

"Your place?"

"Yeah, my ranch, up along the Rocky Mountain Front. I can sit in my living room with a half-decent pair of binoculars and watch goats till I get tired of them."

*Yeah,*

"That's interesting, Jack. That's very interesting. But I imagine getting to them is another matter."   
within range of

*sick*

"No problem. Anybody who's serious about his hunting"--I nodded to the dead heads along the walls--"and I can see you <sup>definitely</sup> are, I usually let them onto the place. The fact is, why don't you come up this fall

*why?*

and we'll get you a goat?" I gave him a look overflowing with enthusiasm.

"In fact, how about right after these two"--I indicated Riley and Maria with the same kind of nod I'd given the stuffed trophies--"get done with ~~this~~ <sup>of theirs</sup> centennial stuff in November?"

Bolitho kept looking at me a while, then he glanced at Maria and Riley. All three of us could see him working on the choice: mountain goat or sacrificial sheep. At last he said, "That's a very generous offer, Jack. I'll take you up on that." He turned to the other two.

"Riley, as I was getting to, there's been some reader reaction to your centennial pieces. Of course, one way of looking at ~~that~~ <sup>it</sup> is that you ~~are~~ <sup>people's</sup> provoking readers' attention. The same can be said of your photos, Maria. Anyway, I thought the two of you would want to know you are being read, out there in readerland." I give Riley

credit, he managed not to look mock astonished that newspaper readers ~~was~~ were reading newspapers. He stood up, and "aria <sup>was already onto her feet</sup> did too, and even

I caught on and got to my feet, as if Bolitho had told us that was all.

*that while maybe a mtn goat was in <sup>an essential</sup> / or of hand time, centennial series had a stay of execution*

*mtn goat & mtn w/d descent,*

*put in for a permit*

*reusing*

*shuffled letters, signed into a file & put away*

*is a hurry  
No, instead he said in a hurry "That's an inspiration 10-22. Boy."*

*BB*

*long tall*  
Bill Bradley, I am. Not the senator, as you may have noticed.

I guess I would ~~like~~ <sup>want</sup> to tell o' grasshoppers.

2 Woblers  
4' m 00  
My name  
is Jerome <sup>Tony</sup>  
~~Russell~~ <sup>Russo</sup>  
~~Wright~~ <sup>Wright</sup>  
I came into  
some country  
after ~~the~~  
5 second W War.  
I saw it from  
a thump train.  
Sgt...  
I'd gone  
into Army  
out of CCC's  
when I saw DC,  
that was it for me.

when my time was in -  
if I lived to get my time in -  
I'd come

7 #s of story: h'older 1916-20s  
'30s grasshoppers 1930s  
WWII 1940s

heavy eqpt - Bklyn? at 50's (Not ev'body in world  
knows we began  
digging mo in  
1952?)  
60's  
70's These guys been wandering  
41 ear & nobody  
80's (y'day) told o' a writer  
yet.

Julius  
perone  
lost a daughter  
in UK  
writer.  
What I notice  
is how different...  
bye bye

seem to be  
I'm oldest  
of 3 no bunch, crowd.  
if truth be told.  
That's why they  
set me drive.  
Or maybe it's  
fact mo it's  
my van

"Aw, hell, Helen. You don't want to do that.

I'd see those cowmen come into Pendroy when they shipped  
their stock, they'd be pretty sorry lookers, cook over a campfire and  
sleep under their wagons and kind of slink off home the next day. But  
sheepmen, hell, they'd arrive and ship their wool and then hang around  
and drink and whoop and raise general hell, maybe party for ~~three or~~ a week  
~~four days~~ before they'd drive off in a fancy car of some kind. And  
~~three~~ ~~five~~ months later they'd be back to ship their lambs and do it all  
again. Right then, I figured out that the money was in sheep.

based on  
Jim Skelton  
tape, 494

The sight of the sheep sent my spirits up. In a nice scatter

along the saddleback <sup>ridge</sup> between Breed Butte and the foothills, the thousand  
a <sup>thousand</sup> clumps of soft gray <sup>against</sup> <sup>the</sup> grass, <sup>of</sup> grazing, <sup>down</sup> ewes had their noses down <sup>into</sup> business in the grass and their lambs  
their disorderly <sup>in</sup> <sup>of</sup> them.  
were smaller livelier gray shadows beside them. I looked forward to  
walking through the band, <sup>to inspect,</sup> the iron  
but etiquette between camp tender and sheep

herder decreed that I had to go visit with the herder first. I climbed  
out of the Bago and <sup>started up slope</sup> walked over to her.

~~Helen Ramplinger was my herder this summer and the past two. It  
bothered me some to have so skinny a sheepherder, for fear people would  
blame the way I <sup>at on</sup> <sup>fed</sup> provisioned her. But I honestly did provide her whatever  
groceries she <sup>ordered</sup> wanted; it was just that Helen was a strict vegetarian.  
She had come into the Two country <sup>to</sup> join up with <sup>with</sup> some back-to-the-earth health-  
foody types--granolas, as they were locally known--out of a background  
of drugs and who knew what else. I admit, it stopped me in my tracks  
when she <sup>Helen</sup> heard I needed a herder and came and asked for the job. Marcella,  
too; as she said, she thought that as Dode Withrow's daughter she'd  
listened to every issue involving sheepherders that was possible, but  
now here was gender. It ended up that Marce and I agreed that while  
H's <sup>made her</sup> past of drugs had <sup>left</sup> Helen into a bit of a space case, she seemed~~

reflects  
clanking  
metal  
w's bell

stage of  
estimate  
always  
pleasure.

for a  
woman  
saw my  
some  
well  
not a  
bad  
face  
but  
long  
hair  
with  
it  
long  
hair  
can't  
be  
leaving  
across  
it  
like  
strands  
of a  
web.

In the valley next to this one, a man named Angus McCaskill has died. You may recognize from his name that he was my Lisabeth's father-in-law. The report is that he was at work fixing a fence when his heart gave out. <sup>as he had lived,</sup> ~~And so he died,~~ neither a young man nor an old, there amid the exertions of his homestead.

beside  
N 7th

Until now I have not told you much of this man, dearest sister, because I believed the time would come when I would need to tell you all. Angus McCaskill was more than another neighbor, more than a familiar face to whom I sold a horse. For the matter is, he was in love with Anna. He tried not to show it, and I never had cause

to believe there was anything improper between them, but

~~he was in love with her~~ I am most certain he loved her in a helpless way. I tried never to show him that I knew, believing that when Anna chose me over him the bargain was struck and we all three had but to live by it--yet I felt sorry for him, unable to have <sup>Anna</sup> in his life.

as a  
simpler  
cannot  
but keep  
its face  
to  
day

Yet--only now can I bring myself to say this--I believe that if Anna had lived, she would have left me for Angus. I could see it in her. She had a ~~strong~~ nature all her own, my Anna did--as measured

of only  
to give  
on this  
paper,

coming

Let--only now can I bring myself to say this--I believe that it

is by it--let I felt sorry for him, unable to ~~make~~ <sup>make</sup> it.

I got up from the bumper of the Winnebago where I'd been sitting  
to believe there was something improper between them <sup>make it</sup>  
I stood up, partly to unstiffen but mainly to take the opportunity  
in tone with him. He tried not to show it, and I never had cause  
to announce, "I've about had enough of this."

rather face to whom I sold a horse. For the matter is, he was  
all. Angus McSkull was more than another neighbor, more than a  
because I believed the time would come when I would need to tell you

until now I have not told you much of this man's dearest estate,  
in old, there and the exertions of his household.  
when his heart gave out. And so he died, neither a young man nor  
father-in-law. The report is that he was at work fixing a fence  
shed. You may recognize from his name that he was my father's

In the valley next to this one, a man named Angus McSkull has

as a judge in making her mind up, but ~~passionate~~ <sup>in her decision</sup> once she had done so.

The time would have come when ~~she~~ <sup>Anna</sup> decided that she and I had had all of

life together we could, and then she would have turned ~~to~~ to Angus. I

believe she was nearing that time just before she died--Lisabeth was

pic

use

Eventually Maria and Riley showed up. "Let's go down to the Windbag for lunch." ~~It was so hot~~ But before we could get out the door the beeper on Riley's belt went off. The goddamn guy was a human alarm clock.

"I'll catch up with you at the rig," he said and headed off for a phone.

opened the Maria and I ~~got the~~ doors and windows of the ~~Winnebago~~ cab of the Winnebago, to let the heat out. She looked at me. "How you doing? Did you manage to keep yourself entertained in the library?"

"It was interesting enough, yeah." The morning was more major than I could put into words for Maria right then. The noon sun was beating down on us. I wished Riley would hurry up with his phoning.

When he did come out of the Historical Society <sup>building</sup>, he had a frown on him you could have plowed a field with. ~~Max stopped~~ <sup>4</sup> "That was Bolithe," he told Maria. <sup>the BB</sup> "He wants to see us, back in Missoula. Today. If not sooner."

"What's he want?" she asked warily.

Why?  
what's on  
his mind?

~~He~~ "You know the BB. Even when he tells you something, you're not sure what the hell he's saying. But this time he wasn't even saying.

can't be

In the valley next over from this one, a man named Angus McCaskill has died. The McCaskill name ~~you~~ <sup>is one that you know to you</sup> of course will recognize, as he was father-in-law to my Lisabeth. The report is that he was fixing a fence after supper when his heart gave out. I find that ~~not~~ <sup>less than</sup> surprising; he was a ~~man~~ whose hands were full of work from daylight to last light. Still, although we know that all things ~~come to an end~~ <sup>find their</sup>, it is sobering to me that he has gone from life at ~~an~~ an age very like my own, neither a young man nor an old.

such a  
poor  
Angus  
how  
sobering

Until now I have forborn<sup>e</sup> from telling you anything of Angus McCaskill, dearest sister, because I believed the time would come when I would need to tell you all. He was more than simply a neighbor, more than a familiar face to whom I ~~sold~~ <sup>an occasional</sup> horse. Greatly more, for the matter is, Angus was in love with <sup>my</sup> Anna all the years of our marriage. ~~He~~ <sup>ever</sup> manfully tried not to show it in any way, and never did I <sup>took place</sup> have cause to believe anything improper occurred between the two of them, but I could tell he loved her <sup>from afar</sup> in a helpless way--as a sunflower cannot but turn its face to the sun.

close fr  
of  
Angus -  
a man  
c poetry  
on his  
thought

improve?  
at  
dances,  
gatherings

~~day~~ ~~was~~ ~~be~~ ~~out~~ ~~in~~

It was too hot to walk. I sat down in the corner where they

<sup>couple of</sup> had a rack of magazines that included the Montana ~~Farmer Stockman~~, <sup>Woolgrower</sup>

78' ~~Libra~~ ~~El~~

<sup>we</sup> and read up on the latest ~~bad news~~. Jesus. What was I going to do with the damn ranch.

<sup>doing nothing</sup> Sitting around ~~waiting~~ is not my best pastime. <sup>Particularly not</sup> ~~Being in the~~

~~in a library, because it reminded me~~ ~~room reminded me of Marcella~~ too much of Marcella, when we

started going together. ~~But~~ I looked outside and the glare was

enough to make a person wilt. Over behind the desk was a guy with

<sup>and a mustache both,</sup>

~~a mustache and a tie~~ but he looked more or less civil. I went

~~a tie + a mustache~~

over to him and asked, "I wonder if you'd <sup>got</sup> have anything here about my family."

Why don't I even so.

One name's McCaskill."

~~took me over to a card catalogue he said was~~ He ~~showed me what he called the biography~~ Biography. <sup>change</sup>

"We have the newspapers on microfilm, if you find anything."

I found two. McCaskill, Lisabeth, Gros Ventre Woman has 'fooled'

the 20th century, about her having been born on April 1, 1900. And

McCaskill, Varick, Ranger Has <sup>30</sup> ~~40~~ Years on District. He got to <sup>35</sup> ~~40~~ before

he retired. You wonder how time will see you. In all likelihood I

wouldn't have as much as either of them. <sup>newsprint</sup>

"Any luck?" the library guy asked.

I had skyhigh hopes for Riley <sup>Wright</sup> originally. I mean, what daddy-in-law wouldn't?

<sup>with him & me</sup> Matters, took a few yrs to entirely progress to marriage

Carefully nothing was said by either us or them, but Marcella and I

knew that Mariah and Riley had been living together, and we were glad

~~to have the end of that.~~

~~enough to see that end.~~

~~that was ended.~~

A semi-famous guy because of his newspaper column, although there were

plenty of people in Montana who'd like to have given him a knuckle

sandwich ~~xx~~ for what he wrote. <sup>yearning to give</sup> ~~in~~ A few years ago when agriculture was

<sup>rock bottom</sup> at its worst, Riley simply ran a list of the 00 counties, out of Montana's

total of 56 that had voted for Reagan and put at the end <sup>only</sup> ~~just~~ the words,

<sup>Rancher Ronnie</sup> ~~him~~ "How do you like it now?" Or the time he wrote about one of the big

farming guys who was plowing up thousands of acres of grassland to qualify

for federal land loans, "When he becomes dust himself, the earth will spit

him back out."

Riley in his nonwriting mood, I had better say, looked like a pretty

<sup>premium</sup> ~~good~~ husband. <sup>Oh, sure, was always capable of being</sup> He ~~could be~~ a bit of a smartass; but better that than being

a dumbass, I figured.

That day

locally

Mariah was on hand in both her capacities, so to speak--as somebody

who was born and raised here, and for the Gros Ventre Gleaner as its

photographer. She was in natural orbit here; it was Riley who ricocheted

in, ~~was~~ I'd like to say by accident, but there was more to it than that,

~~there always is.~~ <sup>because</sup> His mother's side of the family was from Gros Ventre,

<sup>naturally had every eye out</sup> looking for something and so it was when he came to write about to write about, he

hooked up with Mariah. I know the exact damn minute of it, too. It

was late in the afternoon, after the parade and the creek picnic, and

people were visiting ~~the~~ on the street or having a beer, when all of a

sudden there was a commotion at the Medicine Lodge saloon. [What had

happened] was, <sup>young who never could handle his booze,</sup> Tim Kerz passed out drunk and his buddies decided a

ceremony was called for; somewhere they got a sheet of thick plywood,

laid out Tim as if he was on his bier--they even folded his hands on his

chest and found a gladiolus to ~~stick~~ put on his chest--and carried him

Mariah seemed to sense stuff like this; she was out over their heads. Maree and I and whoever we were talking to

<sup>up</sup> in a window of the Sedgwick House hotel by the time the procession

was coming out the door of the Medicine Lodge. And I saw the guy with

the notebook, and that applesauce head of hair, look over the tableau

<sup>tenderly held</sup> of Tim and his gladiolus, at Mariah, up there picture-taking.

He was already column-writing

his beer brain called it in col he wrote

on the top left of her m paper carrier.

1st casualty of day

before it'd quite happen

<sup>2nd floor</sup> in a window of the Sedgwick House hotel by the time the procession <sup>old</sup> was coming out the door of the Medicine Lodge. And I saw the guy with <sup>noticed</sup> the notebook, and that applesauce head of hair, look over the tableau

blazeface black worth more than the rest of the Speddersons'

homestead combined. Davy Erskine on his fast-stepping roan with small sister Rachel clinging behind him.

I let out a breath of thanks. But to show them I did not intend for tardiness to become habit, I stood conspicuously waiting while they put their horses on picket ropes. Already there on a length of grazing tether was the Dantley mare Patch that I still rode, and with all our horses picketed around the schoolhouse, the scene suddenly hit me as one of life's instants I had been through before--Rob and I gawking at the Floweree outfit's cow camp the day we arrived green as peas into Gros Ventre. I reminded myself how greatly more veteran in life I was by now, and tried to believe it in the face of what advanced on me here, Susan Duff.

She poised below me as if she had borne the message from Aix to Ghent. "We cut through our lower field and couldn't get the gate open and the top loop was too tight and barbwire besides," she reported in funeral tones. "My father will need to fix that gate." Unaccountably my spirits rose as I thought of Ninian having to deal with this daughter. "Meg Findlater's nose is running and she doesn't have a hanky, and Davie Erskine forgot to bring his and Rachel's lunch." This seemed to conclude Susan's docket, and up the porch steps and into the schoolhouse she marched with the other Scotch Heaven children in a straggle behind her.

I kick myself yet for not anticipating the next snag of that morning, although I am not sure what I could have done about it. My

*Cassan  
change*

have to be much of a betting person to figure I'd go off the living list considerably before Marce.

But cancer.

~~Goddamn the stuff anyway.~~ # It seems to know when people are least . stuff  
 expecting the worst, and then it hits. <sup>Only</sup> A year or so ago, Marce and I  
 thought we were on the verge of getting life solved. By then we had  
 adjusted, as much as anybody ever does, to the breakup of Maria and  
 Riley's marriage. We'd hired a young couple from Choteau, Kenny and  
 Darleen Rice, to take the worst of the ranch work off our hands from  
 here on. And we'd bought the Winnebago to do the traveling we had always  
 promised ourselves--Alaska to see Lexa and Phil, and then somewhere away  
 from Montana winters, maybe Arizona or even California. The brunt of  
 our forty years of effort daylight to dark on the ranch seemed to be  
 lifted at last, is what I am saying. So when Marce went in for that  
 examination and was diagnosed as having lung cancer, it was one of those

unbelievable can't-happen situations that a person knows all too well

is true. ~~The bastards stuff that steadily ate the air away from her.~~ . breath on  
next  
of my  
days

If only there had been some way for me to share my breath with Marce,

to will it--

P. 17A follows →



I stopped the cart to look over the liver, then remembered:

"Hang on to the receipt, the ~~Montana~~ newspaper is paying for it all."

I put back the liver and got <sup>the</sup> three biggest steaks I could find.

There were a couple of other loaded carts in the checkout line--  
I guessed this was city living, people buying stuff in the middle of  
the day--so I parked the cart and settled to wait.

The woman looked familiar. I got a look at ~~her in profile, and~~  
~~that snub nose~~  
that snub nose told me with jolt. Christamighty. Blondina. My  
first wife.

~~Most of that marriage had <sup>happened</sup> been right here in Missoula. I was  
at the university on the G.I. bill, my last year in forestry school  
when we came across each other. Blondina Dabney, from <sup>farther south</sup> Hamilton right  
~~here~~ <sup>at Hamilton,</sup> in the Bitterroot Valley. She'd attracted notice; in the student  
~~apartment~~ apartments one of the guys, a theatre arts major, used to say:  
"She had <sup>S</sup> the power to cloud men's minds. Blondina Dabney, oh dab me,  
grab me, Blondina Dabney." I met her at a party, and it all happened  
fast after that. The day after graduation in 1949, we were married.  
We stayed on in Missoula that summer while I smokejumped <sup>it</sup> it was a  
hell of a fire summer, but the main thing I remember about being married~~

*more*

*Shirley  
father  
Havelly?*

*Janie*

*change  
Dabney*

*her  
society*

*smoke  
jumper*

Shirley Havelly, from Hamilton down toward the southern end of the Bitterroot Valley. She attracted other notice besides mine. One of the guys who was in drama classes with her lived on the same floor with me in the veterans' dorm and he used to go around saying in a moaning sort of way, "She has the power to cloud men's minds. Shirley Havelly, oh, have me, have me, Shirley Havelly." She had a strong head, in more ways than one: a black cloud of hair that began unusually high on her forehead, a line across there like the top of a full-face mask, a smile like a lipstick ad; black eyebrows that curved perfectly over her OO eyes. Her figure was more on the tidy side than generous, and her head was actually a bit big for the rest of her, but it was such a terrific head no man ever cared. She was a Theta and a drama major, <sup>and ordinarily</sup> ~~so it wasn't~~ <sup>maybe</sup> our paths wouldn't have crossed, but Shirley had a taste for ~~the party~~ <sup>on the fringe of campus.</sup> life. The married veterans lived in prefab housing called Splinterville, and at a <sup>Sat. night</sup> party there ~~we~~ <sup>the two of us</sup> found ourselves at the beer keg at the same time and she said to me, "You're the smokejumper, aren't you." I surprised myself by saying back to her, "Yeah, but that ain't all." It happened fast after that. There was a weekend when my Splinterville buddy and his wife were away, and Shirley and I had the privacy of their place.

insert something

in a OO  
way  
an  
indelible

to Blondina was that whenever I got home from a smokejumping job,  
whatever time of day it was we went straight to bed. When that wore  
off, so did the marriage. I passed the Forest Service exam and was  
assigned onto the Custer National Forest ~~xx~~ over in eastern Montana, *but*  
Blondina didn't last out ~~the~~ <sup>our</sup> first summer. <sup>there</sup> It tore us both up pretty  
badly, divorce was no everyday thing then.

That was then and this was now, me standing in a checkout line  
gawking at some aging ~~lady~~ <sup>lady</sup> woman with whom I'd once ~~done everything~~ <sup>popped into bed</sup>  
whenever it crossed ~~no~~ <sup>we</sup> could think of. either of our minds. I tried to think of anything  
while trying not to seem to be,  
to say to her. There was nothing. While I was gawking <sup>she</sup> did give  
me <sup>one</sup> quick glance; but with my hat on and sunglasses and the <sup>struggling</sup> whiskers,  
must have  
I looked more like a blind guy <sup>wanting</sup> ~~who'd~~ <sup>would</sup> try to sell her a pencil than like  
at all  
anybody she'd ever ~~been~~ <sup>been</sup> interested in.

"There you go, Mrs. Nellis," the clerk said to ~~her~~ her and away  
Blondina  
she went, out of my life just as she had almost forty years before.

Well, old buddies, I am not a happy camper this morning. What we've got here is the Fourth of July, the hundredth time it has turned up on the calendar since the U. States of A. decided to let Montana in, so wouldn't you think we could do the holiday with some vim and vinegar by now? But no, today and all day it's going to be more of the usual. From Ekalaka to Yaak, we Montanans will bake our brains in the sun at rodeos, meanwhile consuming enough beer and fried chicken to cholestorate a vegetarian convention, waiting for dark so we can try to burn down our towns with fireworks. A centennial Fourth of the same old guff: hip-hip-hoorah, flap-the-flag-and-pass-the-swag. This is the best we can do? Maybe it's an American condition, in this strange nation we have become, all helmet and sword and no brain or heart. But does Montana have to be in a patriotic coma too? Take it from Riley, friends: the calendar this morning says "Independence Day," but you can look high and low in the doings of Montana this centennial year and nowhere find a really independent Montana idea--like changing the name of this state of ours to something more appropriate, such as Destitution.

--"The Life of Riley" column  
in the Missoula Montanian,  
July 4, 1989

Click. From where I was sitting on the bumper of the Winnebago I was doing my best to outstare that camera of hers, but as usual, no such luck. You would think a person with an entire rodeo going on around her could find something more worthwhile to take a picture of

out there  
other side  
of. into

Treasure  
State

than me. Huh uh, not this Maria person. No more than an arm's reach away she was down on one knee with the gizmo up to her eye like she couldn't see without it, and just as soon as she'd shot she said as if it was something the nation was waiting to hear, "You're not such a bad-looking old coot, you know that?"

"The old part I do, yeah."

Click. Her next snap of the shutter caught me by surprise as it always did. After all this while, why didn't I know that the real picture Maria wanted was always the unexpected one, the one after you'd let your guard down.

She came up out of her picture-taking crouch just as a red and white calf sleepily trotted past us into the catch pen at the end of the arena. "And Kevin Frew has missed with his second loop!" the announcer recited the obvious in that tin voice we'd had to hear all afternoon.

By habit Maria fitted a long lens onto her camera and climbed atop the arena fence to aim out at the horseback figure who was disgustedly coiling his pair of dud lariats, but then didn't bother to take the scene.

"Folks, let's give this hard-luck cowboy a big hand of applause! It's  
the only pay he's going to take home from here today!" My thumb found  
the Frew boy on the program. Christamighty, he was only the first  
contestant in the third section of calf roping. Down through all  
the Fourths of July, if I had a dollar for every guy who entered the  
Gros Ventre rodeo under the impression he was a calf roper I could  
buy up Japan.

Maria was staying perched on the top fence pole while she scanned  
through that telescope of a lens at the bleacher crowd across the arena.  
She of course came to the attention of young Frew, who halted his horse,  
doffed his hat and held it over his heart in a mock pretty way while  
he yelled over, "Will this smile do?" Maria delivered back to him,  
"The calf had a better one, Kevin," and kept on scoping the crowd.  
Young Frew shrugged mournfully and went back to winding up his spent  
ropes.

I regarded Maria there above me, that pert behind of hers nicely  
enhanced by faded blue jeans, and her purple rodeo shirt like some

runaway blossom against the sky. Up there in sight of everybody for a mile, but oblivious to all as she searched for the right picture chance. Not for the first time, I wondered if her behavior somehow went with her name. Maryea when most others of the species were Mareea. She was a singular one in every way I could see, sure as hell.

I stood up, partly to unstiffen but mainly to turn it into the opportunity to announce, "I've had about enough of this." Of course my words meant <sup>this</sup> the perpetual damn calf roping and the rodeo, but more all afternoon than that, too. Maria ignored the more and wanted to know, "What's your big rush?" - Mike? As she alit from the fence and turned to face me she made that gesture of swinging her hair out of her eyes, the same little tossing way she always did to clear her view into the camera. As always too, that sway of her head fired off a flash of earrings, silver today, against hair deeper than red; the double-rich color that on a fine horse is called blood bay. Maria's glorious mane of it was atop a narrow but good enough face and the figure, lanky for a woman, that somehow managed to be both long-legged and thoroughly mounded where women are

supposed to be mounded. No wonder every man afoot or horseback who ever saw her sent his eyes back for a second helping.

I might have known she'd start right in again on Topic Number One. "Jick, you can't keep on the way you've been. I had to half drag you here today and now you can't wait to get back to the ranch and start feeling sorry for yourself again. That's just not the usual you. Since when does Jick McCaskill sit around like his tail is caught in a crack?"

She let up just long enough to see if any of that had registered on me. Only one other person was anywhere in the same race with Maria when it came to prescribing behavior for me, and I ~~wasn't~~ <sup>wasn't</sup> going to hear from that one ever again. All damn afternoon Maria had seemed determined to take up the slack. I was all too sure what was due next from her, and here it was. "You know as well as I do that you've got to get yourself going again. That's why I want you to come along with me on this."

I'd already told her no. Three times, N-O. Actually I guess it must have been four, because Maria never even starts to listen

Jick  
a  
7

until you say a thing the third time.

"Sitting sounds good enough to me," I tried on her now. "The world can use more people who stay sat."

But all that drew me was the retort that if that was the case, then I might just as well sit behind a steering wheel where'd I'd at least be doing somebody some good instead of holing up like I'd forgotten how to get out my own front door. Oh, Maria had more in store <sup>depend</sup> too, she <sup>on it</sup> always did: "None of the trip is going to cost you a nickel, did I tell you that? The newspaper will pay for it all, the use of your rig and everything." Before I could point out to her that free stuff is generally overpriced, she was busy informing me: "All you've got to do is drive over to Missoula and meet us Monday noon. Just put the rig in that lot next to the Montanian building, and the scribbler and I will find you there, okay? Is that so tough?"

How could I make her savvy the situation? Everything had changed on that night six months ago, none of it for the better. You can be told and told it will all heal, but that doesn't make it happen any faster.

Maria wasn't interested in waiting for my deep thoughts to swim to shore. Gathering her camera gear and giving the rodeo a last look to make sure there wasn't some calf-roping miracle to be recorded, she simultaneously was saying as if everything was settled: "I can count on you coming along, then."

"Like hell you can. Maria, have you heard one word I've said all goddamn afternoon? If it was just you involved, I'd maybe see this different. But goddamn it, you know I don't even want to be in the same vicinity as that Missoula whistledick."

"Jick. If I can put up with Riley for a couple of months, it shouldn't be that big a deal for you to."

She had me there. Of all the people in Montana who'd gladly buy a ticket to Riley Wright's funeral when the time came, Maria was entitled to the head of the line.

"You and him, that's up to you," I answered as I had any number of times before. "Though I personally can't see why you'd hang around that guy any longer than it takes to cuss him out, let alone from now to November." The rest of July, August, September, October, the first

*calf-catching?*

*all-way?  
to The Day  
as you  
call it.*

week of November. Four months, Maria's version of "a couple."

"Because this centennial series is a chance that'll never come again." She still was working me over with those gray eyes. "Or anyway not for another hundred years, and I'm not famous for waiting, am I."

No, but she was definitely getting notorious with me for knotheaded persistence. How many ways did I have to say no to this woman? One more:

"Christamighty, Maria. This isn't getting us anywhere. Just take the rig yourself, why don't you?" I fished into my pocket for the Winnebago keys and held them out to her. "Here. The rig is yours for however long you're going to be chasing around to this centennial stuff. But include me out, okay? I'm not in any mood to go gallivanting all over the state of Montana with you and that Riley dingbob."

She didn't take the keys, she didn't even answer my offer of them. All she did was that little toss of her head again, as if clearing her hair out of the way would clarify me somehow too. People either side of us sitting on fenders and bumpers were starting to watch the pair

pricked  
7

of us more than the rodeo. Wonderful. See the geezer and his girl while they duke it out on the glorious Fourth; we ought to have sold ringside tickets. I started to turn away and do what I should have done an hour ago, stick the key in the ignition of the Winnebago and head home to the ranch. Try that sometime when the next thing you hear is Maria saying slowly, in a voice not her usual one:

"Jick, I need to have you along."

It stopped me. It would anybody, wouldn't it? Need instead of want. Was that what was involved here? If so, it put a drastic new light on the matter. I scrutinized Maria. Need. Do people really know what they are trying to reach for with that word? I wasn't sure I could tell, any more.

"Maria. You're not just saying that, are you?"

Our eyes held each other for a considerable moment. Then she gave me that all-out grin of hers, honest as the sun, and admitted: "If I was it'd be the first time, wouldn't it?"

God, that grin. That world-by-the-tail grin that brought back what I was missing, these months since.

Going Winnebagoing around the countryside with her and the other one was still the last thing on this earth I wanted to do. Christamighty, four entire months of letting myself get just exactly where I knew not to get, between the pair of them. Maria the newspaper picture-taker, my headlong daughter. And writing Riley Wright, my goddamn ex-son-in-law.

But I need to have you along.

In back of Maria, out in the arena dirt a grunting guy was kneeling on a calf, trying to collect three of its legs to tie together. I knew how that caught calf felt.

#

—

Missoula was sizzling. A temperature sign on a bank kept spelling out 94 in blinking lights, as if it needed any spelling out.

*dealing*

Riley's beeper went off. "Can't the world let a man enjoy his Wallbanger in peace?" he said, and headed for the pay phone at the ~~bar~~<sup>rear</sup> of the bar.

He was back in a minute, with an odd look on his face. "It's for you, Jick. Somebody you know."

I figured it had to be Kenny, telling me some catastrophe on the ranch. Even the phone earpiece didn't sound good, full of those frying sounds of distance. Apprehensively I said into the phone, "Lo?"

Apprehensively I said into the mouth part, "Lo?"

"Hi, Dad. Happy birthday."

~~Transmitted from Sitka~~<sup>Lava</sup> "Tam! Christamighty, it's good to hear you!"

What I could hear, that is, through all the swooshes and wishes across the miles to Sitka.

"Where are you, anyway?" she asked.

"In Havre. In a bar." I squinted at the front window, but couldn't make out the script lettering backwards. "I don't know the name of it, but it's probably a Mint or a Stockman."

"What's it like, traveling with those two--the Civil War?"

"More like watching a bad dream start itself all over."

Distance hummed to itself while ~~Tam~~<sup>Lava</sup> took in my news. Then she was saying: "Maria ~~isn't falling for~~<sup>isn't falling for</sup> ~~she's not called~~ that mophead again? She can't be."

Did you  
get...  
A...?

*warned*

The videotape voice sounded like God's older brother. "Swine diseases," the deep and important tone began, "are ever lurking. Parasites, bacteria and viruses are always on the attack, and ~~the~~ <sup>each and every</sup> pig in your swine ~~herd~~ <sup>yard</sup> ~~shed~~ is their battlefield."

"Here you go, kids," ~~sliding~~ said the waitress, sliding plates of dinner in front of Riley and me. Mariah already had her salad pile. I manned my knife and fork and enthusiastically began. Riley was about to follow when the video <sup>one</sup> tape voice rumbled, "Leptospirosis. When leptospira organisms enter ~~the~~ pig, it may be only a matter of time before your entire herd is infected." <sup>Here</sup> (conversation)

*on my pork*

"Well, yeah," said Riley, sawing off a bite of his ~~pork~~ pork. Just as he began to chew, "Transmissible gastroenteritis," announced the video voice. "This devastating virus induces dehydration, diarrhea, and vomiting. Your piglets are dangerously susceptible to this viral wildfire."

*without quite cooking*

Riley managed to swallow. (Conversation) He put down his fork and listened warily. The voice through the partition was extolling the products of Biotic Betterment, the years of laboratory search that had gone into... Riley rapidly stabbed a <sup>piece</sup> ~~bite~~ of his pork. Just as

he got it into his mouth, "Erysipelas," the video voice warned.

"Nodules, discoloration, lesions--this dread disease afflicts swine  
at any age."

The wind <sup>here</sup> was just short of lethal. <sup>Whistling</sup> ~~bursting~~ out of the west,  
The three of us stepped out

of the Bago, then stepped right back in and swapped our hats for caps  
and pulled out winter jackets. Even so, it was nasty enough outside

that we <sup>muddled</sup> headed straight for a little <sup>wall of</sup> shelter that had been <sup>erected</sup> built so

<sup>here</sup> visitors wouldn't be spun away to North Dakota like tumbleweeds.

"The battle was in 1877 and this place is still in a bad <sup>mood</sup>,<sup>nothing</sup>" observed Riley.

"It's still a furious place," ~~remarked~~ Riley. Mariah said, "I

~~wish there was some way I could get a picture of it.~~" The dead grass,

<sup>flowed</sup> tall as flame, ~~everywhere~~ rippled in the wind. The ~~low~~ coulees and

little benches of land merged against each other, and the tan horizon

did not stand out against the gray sky. I am not a camera person,

but I could see that for Mariah's photography purpose, <sup>glory</sup> everything of

this site was <sup>all</sup> smudged together.

I knew enough of the Joseph story to savvy that after a 1,600-mile  
<sup>of 9 months & more than a thousand miles,</sup> retreat, <sup>only</sup> the Nez Perce had been defeated and captured here forty miles  
<sup>forced into sun</sup> from Canada. What I saw now, from ~~the~~ the actual place, was that Joseph

and his tribe had two more horizons to get over--up onto the little benchland

above the Snake Creek bottomland where they camped, and then ~~the~~ over the

<sup>skyline</sup> wider rim of ridge all around. They didn't make it to the next day's,

take a walk  
some place  
- taken  
top of  
wondering  
a dumb.

our ride back down the mountain with him, and off we trooped, each of those two in their separate mads and me perturbed at them both.

Been done? Christamighty, you could say that about any awaiting task. *clarify*

Back in the Winnebago, silence now as thick as their argument had been, I informed Riley and Mariah that maybe one <sup>update</sup> look at ~~a~~ buffalo herd <sup>close</sup> in a lifetime was enough for them but not for me. I meant it, too; *let them know* when I was but a shavetail kid, fourteen or fifteen, I'd heard my father's friend Toussaint Rennie tell of having seen buffalo in their original thousands and thousands when he himself alit in Montana as a youngster. "Before Custer," as Toussaint dated it. "Before those Indians gave Custer his haircut, Jick. I was like you, young. My family came in from the Dakotas. We saw the end of it, do you know. Buffalo, then no buffalo."

"Yeah," I kept on as I drove toward the dark little herd beyond the high fence, "Toussaint said the Two Medicine country was absolutely buffalo heaven at first." I guess I was laying it on Riley and Mariah a little, dwelling on Toussaint and what a sight the buffalo were to his fresh eyes, but I did feel justifiably peeved about having been

"In this case, I got my reasons," I said while trying to think what was the unseen problem here. It's not every day a guy turns down a ranch.

"Jick," Riley abruptly answered all mental questions, "Mariah and I are splitting up."

Right out of <sup>April before they</sup> ~~nowhere~~ like that. Whatever is the biggest size of fool a person can feel like, that was me, there in the spring sunshine of the ranch I had just tried to give him, as Riley dropped the end of their marriage on me.

I turned away toward <sup>from him</sup> the mountains, my eyes <sup>stinging</sup> smarting. By God, I would not bawl in front of this person.

Three years that had been now, since everything went crash. And  echoing even yet, here on Red Sleep Mountain.

"What, you want to give the BB the satisfaction of telling us he knew we couldn't team up for this?" Mariah's latest interrogation of Riley came to me across the grass.

"The BB might be right for once," Riley delivered in turn.

Just then the federal guy beeped the horn of his pickup, <sup>van,</sup> signal for

Gyp slapped ~~down~~ our cheeseburgers in front of us.

"Uh, Riley..."

R: "It'll be just our secret, Gyp." (R whispered dramatically)

"So what did you tell the BB?"

Riley took a long gulp <sup>from</sup> of his beer. "I told him we had something to finish first."  
*naturally - context sense.*

"Who's 'we'--you got a frog in your pocket?" It was an old joke but the way Maria said it it ~~asked~~ carried all the seriousness in the world.

*Marion,*  
Riley looked steadily back at her. "My notion is for you to come too."

Why did that hit me so? Because of Riley, or of California, or of <sup>because</sup> was it

the two put together? I mean, Maria was already gone from home, her life had been here in Missoula for a lot of years. Yet, the fact that she was in Montana felt to me as if she was still in the neighborhood, so to speak. Los Angeles was another planet. <sup>himself</sup> Hell, Riley was another planet, one <sup>Marion had</sup> she'd tried already once and couldn't exist there.

I put my half-eaten swissburger down on the plate. "Do you two want me out of here?"

"Sure do," said Riley, in what was maybe an attempt to be funny.

"No," said Maria.

"Tie vote," I <sup>elucidated</sup> spelled out for Riley. "Guess <sup>I'm staying</sup> I'll stay."

*is called out of...  
I act as quizzed my challenge to meet.*

*This is all getting pretty personal.*

*just like always*

*like grades stood a Maria?*

✓

*Adrian  
R. Owen*

Riley listened in that sponge way he had, as if every word was a droplet he had to sop up. His eyes, though, never left Alec's grave.

"His stone," he said. "It's--different."

*He meant by  
that*

*Yes, much so.*

Starkly so, yes. No epitaph, no pair of years summing the short span of life.

*a if  
stone  
had  
come up  
out of  
ground  
a part of  
name  
nothing of.*

"I guess maybe the folks"--I indicated the side by side graves of my mother and father--"didn't feel they were entitled to any last word

on Alec. There was a family ruckus long before he went in the service.

Over somebody"--I swallowed hard, thinking of Alec and Leona, the couple

*too  
pretty  
to last*

too perfect to exist in a hard-edged world--"somebody Alec wanted to

marry, instead of going on to college the way they wanted him to. It

was just one of those situations that turned out bad for everybody

*, in all. (?)*

concerned."

"Including you, from the sound of it."

*rising out of me ~~to~~ toward*

"That is true." Unexpectedly it was coming out of me, to Riley

*more?*

of all people. "I was only a shavetail kid at the time, trying to be

on everybody's side and nobody's. But Alec and I somehow got crosswise

with each other before that summer was over. Our last words ever

rewrite this to trim rhetoric  
 & strengthen Jack's emotional  
 upset  
 My mind was still  
 racing at all.

Plenty.

"Uh, yeah." And then some. Shirley and I, the married youngsters we had been. Why was all of that back into my life? What right, even, did that episode have to come swarming back at me again? Doesn't time know any statute of limitations, for Christ's sake? After I found my way out of the Forest Service and into ranching on the same land where I was born, after I at last had the good sense to muster myself and marry Marcella in the springtime of 1953, I put that failed first try with Shirley out of memory. Marce did the same with her own dud early marriage to the young dentist in Conrad. We were alike in that, too. But now here in Missoula where that mutual wrong guess with Shirley began, where education took on a darker meaning than a dramatic girl or a green fool of a smokemumper ever bargained for, that long-ago error was preening its profile to me. I like the past as well as anybody, but I can tell you this was a hard dose of it.

Out of memory. It chilled me, there in the blaze of that Missoula day, suddenly to be aware that there may be no such place.

"I can tell by looking that you're antsy to get going," Mariah was saying over her shoulder as she busily stowed camera gear. I was

of a technical  
 Helen is  
 a woman

I passed the U.S. Forest Service exam and was assigned onto the Custer National Forest over in eastern Montana, but Shirley did not last out our first summer there. It tore us both up pretty bad. Divorce was no everyday thing then.

That was then and this was now, me standing in a checkout line gaping at some grayhaired lady with whom I'd once popped into bed whenever it crossed either of our minds. I tried to think of anything to say to Shirley now, any words to make up for the mistake we'd made with each other. There was nothing. While I was gawking and trying not to seem to be, she did give me one quick wondering glance; but with my everyday Stetson on and sunglasses and the struggling whiskers, I must have looked more like a blind bum wanting to sell her a pencil than like anybody she'd ever been at all interested in.

"There you go, Mrs. Nellis," the clerk said cheerily as he positioned the final sack of groceries in her cart, and away Shirley went, out of my life just as she had almost forty years before.

"Get everything you bargained for at Buttrey's?" Mariah asked when she and I reconvened in the Montanian parking lot.

not have crossed in a million years, but Shirley had a taste for life on the fringe of campus. The married veterans lived in prefab housing called Splinterville and at a Saturday night party there the two of us found ourselves at the keg of Highlander beer at the same time and she said to me in a voice as frisky as the rest of her, "You're the smokejumper, aren't you." I surprised myself by cracking back to her, "Yeah, but that ain't all." It happened fast after that. There was an indelible weekend when a Splinterville buddy and his wife were away, and Shirley and I had the privacy of their place. Then the day after graduation in 1949, we were married. That summer we stayed on in Missoula while I smokejumped. Nineteen forty-nine was a hell of a fire summer--on the Mann Gulch fire thirteen smokejumpers died when the flames caught them one by one on a tinder-dry slope; ever after, I carried the thought that I could have been one of them if I hadn't been on the Kelly Creek fire instead--and whether it was that we imagined we were living with danger or it simply was the bodyheat of being young, whenever I got home from a parachute trip to a forest fire, whatever time of day it was, Shirley and I went straight to bed. When that wore off, so did the marriage.

started  
to wear  
off

temperature  
wore off  
bodyheat

Still wondering to myself what order of fool I was for turning  
the BB around with goat bait the way I'd done, the next afternoon I  
deposited Mariah and her haywire companion in Helena once more and pointed  
my nose toward home, to the Two Medicine country. While she and Riley  
got back to their disquisition on female capitalists who had earned their  
fortunes on top of mattresses and then socked it away underneath them,  
I was grabbing the chance to go home to the ranch overnight and reassure  
myself that the place had not gone to utter ruination in my absence.

91 Not that my mind gained any rest on that score when I phoned my hired

*locusts  
was  
up*

*before lvs H*

man, Kenny, to ask if there was anything wanted from town and learned that, uhmm, well, actually there was--he hadn't gotten around to tending the sheepherder yet that week. I somehow managed not to give Kenny my full opinion of that, only told him aw, hell, read me the list of provisions needed and I'd do the campending myself on my way to the ranch.

The sun just was flattening down behind Roman Reef for the night

as the grocery boxes and I arrived to the valley. A pretty time of day, when the peaks and crags of the Rockies seem at their tallest and most jagged. Under the sunset outline of the mountains the Two Medicine country already lay in soft shadows and sharp horizons. To the north where the Two Medicine River carves its canyon through the prairie of the Blackfeet Reservation, flat-topped benchlands appeared as if they had been drawn onto the sky with a yardstick and blackest ink. Through the windshield,

the local landmark Breed Butte <sup>grew</sup> arced ahead more and more prominently as its timbered summit darkened with the end of daylight. Most distinct of all to me, <sup>as I drove, ~~with the~~</sup> though, was the column of tall cottonwood trees threading west alongside the road, <sup>country</sup> through patch after patch of hay meadow until at last thinning into a pair of willow lines that curved down out of

*Which I  
use as  
lead sentence  
for  
which?*

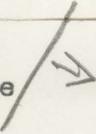


*of. m' home*

*arc of*

*pronounced*

the mountains--English Creek, its main channel and north and south forks  
like a handle and tines to uncover the past with.

There is nothing left standing of my father's English Creek ranger  
station. I <sup>incompletely</sup> entirely know that, and I could see so, yet again, as  
the Bago topped the rise of the county road and started down the long  
slow slant of grade to the forks of the creek, but the absence always  
registers <sup>hard</sup> on me. The station. The house behind it where we lived from  
my fourth year of life through my fifteenth. Barn, corral, sheds,  
flagpole. Not a stick of any of those is left. ~~Which~~ <sup>in</sup> one way of  
looking at things is <sup>this</sup> appropriate, really. The U.S. Forest Service  
extinguished that site from our lives in ~~the~~ winter of 1939 when it  
directed my father, over his loudest kicks against the policy, to move   
his district office of the Two Medicine National Forest into town in  
Gros Ventre, and so the facade of that earlier time may as well be gone.

Its thoughts, though, do not go.

"Mac, if headquarters doesn't send us out some new oilcloth one  
of these years, they are going to get A Piece Of My Mind." My mother,  
Lisabeth Reese when she began life and Beth McCaskill from her nineteenth

Age is humped on her small back. It began to descend there in 1933,  
*in hours over a workboard*  
at the biggest earthen dam in the world. Fort Peck... (quote laundry

prices) (putting up sign?) ("J.L. ~~was~~ got on as...)

*like  
Tough as  
sparrows*  
Asian delta people, now come to American headwaters. The journey pivots  
now on these children, the 10-year-old girl made solemnly older by two  
cultures within her, the distancing... She listens to the words known  
to us, says something unfathomable to her mother and father (that they  
understand: fathoming this land of strangeness.) Television, driver's  
license, (other examples) all must come to the parents thru the prism  
who must be the mother of words  
of that 10-year-old woman, word parent to her <sup>own</sup> parents.

They have known each other since high school

He himself tells the joke <sup>one of those towns</sup> that Gros Ventre is too small for one lawyer  
but ~~is~~ big enough for two. His opponent (is son of lawyer mentioned in  
Eng Crk) (Jick notes both lawyers at the meeting, both in suits, maybe  
having been in court against each other in Conrad that very day. It  
is his wife, teasing (in a pointed way), who tells that he struggled with  
that mustache decision when gray showed up in it.

*2nd  
wife,  
2 children*

## Sequence

- be part: ~~Marian & Riley~~

- Marie

~~Althea~~ people gravitate to music, the us, thing out  
Jick goes to car @ band; desc band

- Rd Kill Angels comes & listened to (rest of song)

- Althea

Marian & Riley

Marian & Jick dance (When & dance c. wind)

Riley pays Jick

speech - R's itals  
Beth odometer

ranch

Shaun

~~R's itals~~ Conroy call - buffalo  
Memories are stories

Marian & Riley (what they told Jick after M & J danced) they're Kapil)

~~R's itals~~

J's 2nd phone call 7 last night: Leona

J told M & R

J flashback - Alec & Leona

R's reaction

R's itals of Jick finishing speech; new day

flag-raising "

flag blows into banners

R's itals descrip of Marian & Jick, to final line @ sun.

12 ✓

grizzly bear in a band of sheep is dynamite. It butchers as many sheep as it can reach. So my mind flew automatically to the bunches of ewes and lambs scattered across the ranch--late April this was, the tail-end of lambing time--like clusters of targets. But before that thought was fully done, the feel of invasion of our family was filling me. The creature that slurped the chickens' milk and casually tromped through the still-damp pan had

been here astride the daily paths of our lives. Marcella merely on her way out to the clothesline, Mariah simply on her way to the chickenhouse, Lexa in any of her scampery afterschool roamings--any of those random goings surely crisscrossed whatever route brought the grizzly, coming out of hibernation hungry and irritable, into the ranch buildings. Nor was I personally keen to be out on some chore and afterward all they'd ever find of me would be my belt buckle in a grizzly turd.

So when I phoned to the government trapper and his wife said he was down at the other end of the county for the rest of the week, I did not feel I could wait.

"Then why in goddamn hell didn't you keep it that way?" I erupted.

~~You wonder how life singles you out for something like this.~~ The majority of parents my age were wildly worried about their married kids breaking up. Why was I the one to have to throw a fit that mine would get back together? *were not*

"You both were managing to get done what you wanted to, without having to tumble"--into bed, into the jungles between the legs, into an old fever newly risked--"all over each other just the way you originally did. I don't understand why you're willing to set each other up for ~~hurt~~ <sup>grief</sup> again."

"Last night didn't remake the world," Mariah protested in a perplexed tone, drawing a startled glance from Riley. "I don't know that we're--"

Riley held up both hands as if stopping a shove. "This must be the ultimate definition of the morning after," he said to Mariah. "We've got Cupid's conscience right here with us and the BB waiting his turn."

"The BB," Mariah echoed, her perplexity giving way to something worse.

"The very guy," Riley said wearily. "He wants to see us back in Missoula again. Yet today." 

As usual now, the

The rancher can begin his day with a choice of frets. <sup>start</sup> ~~as usual now~~ Drive

Play

to an upper pasture

the endless guessing game of climate, - is the drought <sup>iness of the 1980's</sup> over or just (the 1890's, the ~~1890's~~ skein from 1917 into the 1920's, the 1930's resting or merely starting to heat?

his grandfather's numerals identical  
the numerals in this thought were the skein from 1917

into the 1920's, <sup>in</sup> his father's <sup>they</sup> were the 1930's) or merely resting

firing up for more years of grass-khriveling heat? An open or only starting to heat?

winter ahead, or another Alaskan Express? Or run through his

Calculate one more time

wish list that livestock prices

what the latest sag in livestock prices is going to cost him.

Try to figure <sup>out why</sup> ~~if~~ how hired help has become such a rare commodity.

Run on through the wish list to where he always ends up, yearning

for ~~somebody to carry on what he has built~~ <sup>those</sup> ~~damning~~

his bones for their increasing complaint against the daylight to

ranch <sup>can't do anything in him</sup> dark life, ~~if~~ yearning for somebody to <sup>shoulder all this after he</sup> carry on this place <sup>even can't</sup>

Mariah and Riley fashioned themselves to each other as those who've danced together do, her thumb hooked in a remembered kidding way into one of his rear belt loops, his spread hand in the natural place in the narrow of her back.

"Time out," you called just when

I'd chosen you by name.

Both tall, both more lithe-legged than you'd expect of a lanky couple, they circled together in the slow repeating spin of the song.

"No fair," I called out after

you changed the loving rules.

Mariah's shoulder-long hair moved with the action of their bodies, now touching one blade of her back, now the other. Riley held his head in slightly tilted orbit as if accommodating down to hers.

"Don't cheat," you heard the warning,

that's only the game of fools.

What true dancers know is to never forget each other's eyes.

Mariah and Riley read there as if they'd been to the same school for it as they drifted ~~to~~ with the music.

without any other candidates around to button their bellybuttons to,  
and figure they're magically back in love. <sup>again</sup> That'll only last as  
long as the bedsprings squeak. Then they'll be dishing out hurt to  
each other again, which is what I dread. And I don't see why you ~~don't,~~  
~~aren't~~  
too. ~~Maybe I've been misreading, Leona~~  
leery of that, too,. For Riley's sake, if nothing else. Maybe I've  
been misreading, ~~Leona~~, but I somehow got the impression Mariah is not  
your favorite person in the universe."

She stood her ground.

"I have my differences with Mariah, that's true. We all side  
with our own children when a marriage of theirs breaks up, ~~is~~ After  
all, we're parents, not <sup>neutral</sup> referees. But I'm not the one who wants to  
try married life with Mariah again, am I. Riley is. I know you think  
he's ~~been~~ <sup>gone a little goofy</sup> about this"--understatement of the century--"but Riley's  
instincts are generally right. Usually <sup>more right</sup> ~~righter~~ than mine." Her ~~eyes~~  
expression suggested the <sup>not remote</sup> ~~possibility~~ <sup>that</sup> they might be righter than my own,  
too.

<sup>At we expected that to get a mile out of me, it did,</sup>  
<sup>just</sup> "Let's <sup>just</sup> back up here, <sup>gdm</sup> a minute. Didn't I <sup>just</sup> hear you ~~say~~ pugging  
<sup>what's deal</sup>  
remarrying out of your own picture? If that's true for you, why in  
all hell isn't it true for Mariah and Riley after they've already  
flubbed the dub with each other once?"

Out here roads ran straight, only enough rumple in the earth  
to give the pavement a chance to <sup>hook onto the</sup> ~~the horizon~~ horizon a few miles  
ahead, then another straight run until the highway clipped across another  
little rise. The gray grain elevators of <sup>Culbertson</sup> ~~Freight~~ we passed, then those  
of Freid, the land around farmed in strips <sup>quiltlike</sup> to all horizons.

Strip farming is like quiltwork,  
<sup>plowed</sup> brown panel next to <sup>fallow</sup> straw-colored one, and I suppose that is apt; those  
alternating panels help to keep the soil from blowing away, and give half  
the soil a ~~year's~~ rest each year; ways to farm these high plains have  
had to be pieced together.

try  
+0

to. A shadow in other time. Yet here Angus McCaskill suddenly was, right out of nowhere, or at least the portion of him that echoes in my own birth certificate. And with him, but evidently on her own terms, was my grandmother I knew even less of; so scant was any mention of Adair McCaskill by my parents that I sensed she and my mother had been in-laws at odds, but that was all. I'd thought the North Fork homestead claimed her as it did Angus; willing reversal to Scotland was new lore to me.

I read on.



# But of them all, people in costumes of the past century, people dressed in everyday, people with generations behind them in the Two country, people newer to its demanding rhythm of seasons--of them all, I concentrated on ~~the face of Mariah McCaskill~~. I could not but think to myself, how did Marce and I ever do it, give the world this flameheaded woman?

"They'll say of us that

we had a past,

but we know our way

to now at last. . ."

this, like being swimmers through water controlling itself into small bobbing waves, hundreds of them but each one head-sized. I started to say something to Mariah about the specialness of this a.m. scene, but saw she was immersed in it too, her eyes alight as our slow tour of the floor in each other's arms brought us past what seemed the entire community of the Two Medicine country. Elbow to elbow, wall to wall, the Medicine Lodge was a rainbow swirl of twined couples. Dancers came in all varieties. A tall young woman with a ponytail stared soulfully over the hairline of her partner half a head shorter than her. Althea Frew freighted me a chiding look as she steered an apprehensive Fred Musgreave <sup>by us</sup> past. Of the English Creek contingent, plaid-shirted Harold Busby, with an Abe Lincoln beard since I'd last seen him, twirled by with his wife Melody in a swishing black skirt with white fringe. I felt a rump bump and glanced back to find it was Kenny, his jeans tucked in the tops of his boots, earnestly waltzing with his arms cocked wide and his behind canted out, as if about to grapple with Darleen as she tried to match steps with him.

more close?

far end of the bar. Behind and a little higher sat a drummer in a black plug hat with an arrow through it. Amid this onstage <sup>aggregation</sup> congregation the woman singer didn't look like much--chunky, in an old gray gabardine cattledealer suit, her blond hair cut in an approximate fringe--but her voice did, so to speak. She sang, my God, she sang with a timbre as charged as heat lightning. Holding the microphone as if she was sipping from it, she sent her voice surging and trembling, letting it ride and fall with the cascades of the instruments but always a top, always reaching the words out and out to the crowd of us. She activated the air of the Medicine Lodge: the floorful of solos being danced in front of the band was magnificent, the FFA kids especially shining at the quick-limbed undulations this music wanted.

Up near the bandstand I spotted Mariah and Riley in conference, I assumed about their coverage of this spree. But then he looked at her for a moment and put his <sup>nodded,</sup> notebook in his pocket while she went over along the wall to where Howard Stonesifer and his ancient mother were sitting, Howard watching the dancers and his mother watching the dancers and Howard. To old

Mariah, of course operating as if she and I and the camera were  
the only three for miles around, had climbed up on the front bumper  
of the auctioneering pickup <sup>a fender</sup> come climbing over the bumper  
onto a <sup>impersonally</sup>  
and was kneeling there for a closeup of me framed between the loudspeaker  
horns.

"Speaking of lineage. . ." I resorted to with a rueful glance  
down at ~~her~~ this ambushing daughter. <sup>impersonally</sup> When the laugh at that  
audience had its laugh  
at that, I looked from Mariah to them and back to her again before  
I could resume.

"Mariah here is going into the next hundred years in her own  
style, as you might expect. She begins it immediately after our  
ceremony today. ~~I don't know~~ <sup>- our loss to Cal's gain, but they need all they can get -</sup> with Riley leaving, maybe the Montanian  
figured it might as well trade in Mariah's job too. In any case,  
her new arrangement is--I don't know what something like this is  
actually called, but Mariah's ~~being~~ <sup>is</sup> being turned loose on this  
state as the Montanian's photographer at large."

Riley dug in the front pocket of his pants. "Before I forget, here," and he handed me a folded wad of money.

By God, currency was del'ly notes up in Mt. 3rd hwy. had to be

The question must have been written on me as large as the <sup>bankroll</sup> sum I was ~~dumfoundedly thumbing~~ <sup>gaping down at</sup>. "For Bago repairs, courtesy of the expense account," he droned in what was probably a bean counter voice.

performed thumbed - about 2000 paper authentic

At that I ~~counted~~ <sup>thumbed the currency</sup> rapidly and sure enough, hood-hubcap-assorted windows-and what all, it was the whole damages. I had to ask. "What'd you make up to charge this much off to?"

dented pull out

just out of currency

"Helicopter rental."

"Heli--? Christamighty, how are you ever going to get the BB to believe that?"

"By the note I stuck on that says we also used the flight to spot mountain goats up behind your ranch."

## EAST OF CRAZY

..Wind is the ventriloquism of Montana's seasons. In  
 west--the mountains--  
 utter summer it can blow in from the mountains to the west  
 and convince you November is here. The other way around,  
 the real recital: the chinook breathing springtime into  
 deadest winter. <sup>just</sup> In such a wind, <sup>toasting</sup> ~~here in the Shields River~~  
~~country,~~ we found my father, slumped onto the steering wheel  
 of his pickup after the exertion of putting on chains to  
 navigate the instant new mud from the ~~dead~~ <sup>east-pasture</sup> East Pasture bale  
 stack to home. . . .

--Riley Wright's notes,

en route from Missoula to Clyde Park,

September 6, 1989

"I don't really have the best feet for it, but I'm following in my mother's footsteps here. Hers was a Fourth of July speech, more or less in commemoration of the pioneer Ben English and the creek ~~here~~ that carries his name. <sup>X</sup> Most of you knew my mother, at least in her last years, so you know that from Beth McCaskill you customarily got more of ~~what~~ <sup>So</sup> was on her mind rather than less, ~~and~~ <sup>X</sup> I suppose it should have been no surprise"--although it mightily had been; I could yet remember my father in breathless freeze beside me on the picnic grass as we heard her turn that occasion from mere ritual--"When she began to speak not only about English Creek, where we lived at the time, but of Noon Creek, where she was born on the ranch I operate now. 'Two creeks, two valleys, two claims on my heart,' she said ~~here~~ on that 1939 day. <sup>in 1939</sup> And being Beth McCaskill she was not about to stop ~~there~~ <sup>at that</sup>. No, she proceeded to call the roll of dead ranches along Noon Creek--of the families who had to leave those places during the Depression with the auction hammer echoing in their ears. The Torrance place, the Emrich place, the Chute place, old Thad Wainwright's place. The Fain place, the Eiseley place, the Nansen place.

The crowd began to move out of the Medicine Lodge into the street,

*Althea Fnd M*

Merle and I at the door handing out to everybody, man, woman, child,

whatever, the Dawn of Montana ballcaps. Riley of course wanted to know

*then use* if we had any with earflaps, but then clapped a cap onto his frizzhead

insofar as it would go and followed the crowd.

It was breezy and then some, I will say. People bunched in front

of the Mercantile or the Gleaner office, the empty lot with the flagpole

between them, in a way that reminded me of sheep on either side of

a creek. Meanwhile three trucks from the Seven Block Hutterite colony

had arrived, the dozens of and boys and girls black-clad men and the women in patterned scarves and

long dresses climbing down from the truckboxes looking as the ancestors

of some of us must have looked before boarding the boats ~~to~~ America.

~~Shaun~~ hustled over to old Jacob Stapfer, Jacob listened and nodded, turned

and gave orders in German to the trio of younger Hutterite men who'd

driven the trucks, and immediately the trucks ~~were~~ pulled around to the

*alley* ~~street~~ behind the Merc and the Gleaner and were positioned broadside

across the back of the flagpole lot as a windbreak. Above, the ropes

sang in their pulleys on the pole, but Althea seemed to regard it as

"Uh huh," I acknowledged cheerfully and began forking.

A fresh gust rattled the plate glass window. "At least it isn't snowing," Merle granted.

"Shhh," I cautioned him against hexing the weather.

Merle gauged me and my steady progress through the pancakes and said, "I gather you're saving up your word supply for your speech."

I suppose I was. But also, by now a lot of the essential had been said. Said and done. I forked on and watched Mariah aiming her camera at Bill Rides Proud, his Blackfeet braids spilling down his back.

Inventory  
stock  
of  
words

↑  
comprised

The road was a dike through the dark as I headed the Bago in from the ranch toward Gros Ventre. The only other creature up this early was at the crest of the Noon Creek benchland, a jackrabbit that leapt in panic in front of the headlights and skittered back and forth in the tunnel of light. I switched onto dim and he managed to dart free into the barrow pit. Otherwise, nothing but before-dawn blackness on either side of the road until the high gateframe at the turnoff into the Double W came into the headlights. I flipped onto bright again,

Bumpy country, this. The hills, the road; probably the lives.

I recognized King Mountain, ten or a dozen miles ~~to the~~ southwest of ~~us~~.<sup>to</sup>

Ever since the four of us headed into ~~this part of the state~~, I had hoped

Mariah and Riley would not choose this <sup>particular</sup> area for a story. And so, Now that I

was free of accompanying them, how do I account for what I suddenly blurted to Leona?

<sup>Leona, wd</sup> "Do you mind a <sup>little</sup> sidetrip? It won't take long." <sup>- just des-country here a ways.</sup>

Leona looked at me from the passenger seat. "If you want to, Jick, that'd be fine."

The road south off Highway 212 was another of those dropped-string routes, trying to get across the land as quick and straight as possible.

*change?*

The badlands made me as uneasy as ever. <sup>Dry gulches and stark buttes</sup> Country like this might

be okay in Arizona or New Mexico where they're geared for this sort of

*like  
lines of  
scenery*

<sup>country</sup> stark scenery, but here <sup>starkness</sup> it made me feel a stranger in my home state.

*more*

The Fort Howes Ranger Station <sup>was little</sup> had changed. The stockade-like fence ~~was gone~~ of pointed posts ~~was~~ gone, replaced by a more peaceable rail and some sheds had been added, but the main buildings were the fence, ~~but the buildings were the same~~

same as then--the ranger station, the house, even the small gas shack.

The Holiday Inn was quite the extravaganza, whether or not you were about to get your nuptial knot tied there. Walk in <sup>an. 20 of us were dining</sup> and the lobby hugely soared all around you; in fact, that cubic center of the enterprise at first encounter seemed to be universally lobby, a hollow square the entire six stories to the roof and equally out to the perimeters of the half-acre carpeted-and-plantered expanse. You had to wonder where the

<sup>motel</sup> rooms were hidden, until you discerned that the half dozen beige facings that ran all the way around this atrium at equal heights <sup>apart</sup> [from floor to ceiling] like the ribcage of the building were actually balconies, Up <sup>or. antiprism whole deal says that</sup> one side <sup>apartly</sup> stood a glassed-in elevator shaft outlined with dressingroom-like <sup>delib</sup> lights the full <sup>altitude</sup> distance to the ceiling. Natural light descended through <sup>into. big cube</sup> a skylight, I suppose for the sake of the trees--some of them fairly lofty--in eight-sided containers near the middle of the atrium. At the <sup>exp. panel</sup> far end was a waterfall. <sup>lolle...</sup>

I fingered my bowtie. A tuxedo was a new sensation for me. Beside me <sup>later</sup> as we trailed the Mariah-Riley vanguard into the assemblage, Leona <sup>her silver hair probably done</sup> behaved like she went to weddings in the atrium of the Holiday Inn every day of her life.

tuxedo already plenty on my mind, but I did notice Leona a couple of times  
open her mouth as if to say something and then not. At the time I figured  
she was just running Russian through her head, But I now know <sup>e that</sup> those  
unspoken remarks had to do with Mariah's ~~choice~~ <sup>selection--</sup> too strong a word,  
~~honestly,~~ ~~really,~~ for shopping was nowhere on Mariah's list of priorities and  
she had simply grabbed out a dress and tried it on and said "Okay,  
this'll do, let's go"--of an eyestinging pink outfit versus her deeper-  
than-red hair. I wonder, what is the Moscow phrase for Those colors  
clash so much they're audible.

Nor for that matter was any other woman at the wedding carrying  
an Appaloosa camera bag the size of a satchel as an accessory to her  
outfit. <sup>Really, to</sup> ~~to~~ capture the main sensation of these nuptials <sup>Mariah</sup> ~~she~~ should  
have been shooting herself, for in those high heels and her pink number  
she stalked among the wedding-going youngsters trailing every kind of  
reaction behind her. Multiply Kevin Frew's calfish gape at her atop  
the rodeo arena fence, back there on the Fourth of July, by about twenty

and you have the general expression of the groom corps. The bride's maidens on the other hand ~~didn't~~ seemed torn between disgust at such electric fashion and wishing they'd thought of it themselves.

After Mariah had parted the crowd waters all the way across the room

and ended up at the revolving Elvi, I felt so sorry for her I sifted over to try and hearten her.

"I haven't seen you so dolled up since your high school prom, petunia."

"This get-up. I feel like a pink flamingo on a stepladder."

"Well, you look like society to me."

Mariah fired a glance to the far end where a particular regal silver head and matching dress stood out resplendent against the atrium's cascade, as if Leona had magically materialized there out of spray wafting off the spilling wall of water. Mariah said with more rue than she probably wanted to admit to, "Not nearly as much as some. How did she manage to coordinate her dress with that fucking waterfall, I ask you."

"Leona would look dressed to the teeth with nothing on but her birthday suit," I attested, which drew Mariah's eyes immediately back to me.

Well, I had given words a try. "How about a snifter of this?" I offered her my champagne glass.

She considered it longingly, but shook her head. "Not until I figure out some kind of a picture of this soiree. Then I'll be ready

riched  
off a  
high-heel  
toe to  
managed  
a ft.

snifter

aggravating  
the picture?

hair  
color of  
cloud

seasoned  
water

1 number

for a swimming pool full of that stuff."

"So," strolled up a swanky specimen of dove-gray tuxedo which of course was Riley. "Quite a shindig, hmm?"

My R  
Touch  
about Ellen?  
plum

Mariah let out her breath. "My God, this is a tough sucker of a shoot. Everybody keeps looking right at me, right down the old lens hole. It's all going to come out like driver's license photos."

"Maybe you should have worn blue suede and a guitar and blended in as the fourth Elvis," I suggested to her.

"Come on, shooter, you can do it," Riley dismissed her photographic fret with the world's most unworried smile. At first I thought he'd been too deep into the champagne, but no, this beamy version was merely Riley rediscovering wedded bliss, even when it wasn't his own, quite yet.

I yearned for the old days of Moiese and Virginia City when Mariah would have handed him his head for noodling along like this, but the worst she could summon in this new phase was to cock a look at him and ask with just a little hint of a point on it, "How're you coming with your part of the piece?"

"Got it writ," Riley said to her surprise and mine too. "I've turned Biblical."

"He was a holy terror even when he was little," Leona brightly informed us. "The summer he was three, his father started taking him with, out to the cattle. <sup>dad</sup> ~~Here~~ The next thing I knew, Riley was refusing to pee in the toilet. The only way he'd go was outside, his legs spraddled out like he'd seen his father do." She looked at Riley as if he was on exhibit. "He killed off my entire bed of pansies that summer."

exhibit  
him at  
a court  
fair  
petunia

"Mother, will you kindly lay off my urinary history and--"

something about  
"Must be ~~their~~ generation," Leona," I put in remorselessly. "Maybe the doctors in those days fed them orneriness pills before they sent them home with us as babies from the hospital. <sup>you suppose?</sup> Mariah now, the story on her is--" and I of course proceeded to tell the tale of ~~the~~ the time she spit down the front of herself and got Lowell Zane the spanking he was owed.

Stanford  
overdue  
107.

Leona laughed as long over that as I had over Riley taking a cowboy pee in the petunias, our offspring meanwhile stewing in silence. Eventually, though, Riley glumly thought out loud for our benefit: "You know, folklorists just put numbers on stories that crop up time and again. Number 368,

368  
eighteen, The-Chihuahua-Who-Took-One-Nap-Too-Many-In-The-Microwave-

Oven. Parents ought to do that. Just call out the numbers. Save yourselves the trouble of doing the telling."

"But  
"Riley, hon, the telling is the fun of it," Leona told him.

"Besides, numbers don't go high enough for all the stories <sup>parents</sup> they've-

accumulated," Mariah noted with a censorious glance at me.

Routine commotion started each morning in the Bago. The minute there was enough dawn, Riley was Spandexed up and out running the ridgeline. Mariah Janed on the floor between the cab and the OO. Leona tucked herself into the breakfast nook, put her headset on like a tiara, and <sup>unleashed</sup> listened. <sup>meanwhile</sup> I did breakfast duty and tried to stay out of the various lines of fire.

Strange, what will bug a person. So as not to fill the ears of the rest of us with constant Russian, Leona did silent recitation; that is, simply moved her lips in answer to the headset questions. Myself, I ~~thought~~ considered it downright thoughtful of her and probably so would have Mariah, if ~~had~~ she hadn't popped up in exercise repetitions to see Leona wordlessly mouthing something. She finally had to ask:

Mmm,  
"Uh, Leona?"

The older woman blinked down at her, lifted off the headset and automatically palavered: "Poozhahleestah, pahvtoreetzya vohpros escha roz. 'Please repeat the question again.'"

"Uh huh, right," Mariah said. "What I'm wondering is, how can you learn to say a word without saying it?"

Leona smiled while she considered. Then unloaded it: "I suppose

improve  
mutes  
appeals  
alt,  
way to  
train  
station  
or  
pass  
idit

the same way you can put yourself through Jane Fonda's exercises without  
being Jane Fonda."

It had been one of the long days of prowling around with Mariah and Riley as they worked out what they were going to do for their next story, and so I ~~just~~ <sup>that night</sup> simply nuked some frozen dinners. Leona ~~took~~ tasted the first forkful of hers and asked: "What is this guck?"

"Soybeans Incognito, would be my <sup>best</sup> guess," I told her, although the label ~~is~~ announced veal patties a la something-or-other.

"You people," Leona said more in sorrow than in anger, "eat like gypsies."

"That's funny," Riley answered and gawked out at bare hills beyond the RV park. "You suppose maybe it's because we live like gypsies, Mother?"

Protocol when four people are packed into a motorhome and none of them are married to any of the others is tricky, I will admit. Leona gazed from Riley to Mariah to me, then simply asked it <sup>us all</sup> of ~~the general~~ at large: "Would anybody mind <sup>overly much</sup> if I did the cooking?"

At ?

have  
or  
say.

Hall  
Cook  
dinner?

The day before my lambs were to be shipped, Riley borrowed a  
Ford Torino for me from a Billings Gazette sportswriter who used to work  
at the Montanian and whom Riley must have had something on, and  
I scorched road home to the ranch. Once I

change  
to  
rental  
Ford  
Torino  
with  
Lugo

scared?

arrived at Noon Creek, events kept on at about the pace of a catfight

in a rolling barrel. The next morning, typical of shipping days, a

bonechilline

cold squall swirled down off the mountains and we didn't even

have the lambs started into the trucks before Sean Finletter drove up

and said his TriGram bosses just couldn't understand why I wasn't ready

not

to sell. Right then, with sleet sifting down the back of my neck and

a thousand lambless ewes blatting and Kenny profanely trying to fill

the loading chute with lambs who had decided they were afraid of the

color of the truck, I couldn't understand why either. That suppertime,

not

Darleen informed me she and Joe Rellis at the Gros Ventre Mercantile

no longer

even to argue

were not on speaking terms, but before achieving that state Joe made

it known the Merc would no longer carry us on a monthly credit account

and all groceries hereafter were strictly cash basis. I hadn't digested

was still

that before Althea was on the line--plain telephone, this time--offering

herself as audience for me to rehearse my centennial dawn speech on,

of Helen's  
down  
away  
full-blout  
kenneth  
ham. near  
H  
away  
in

and I had to invent that I'd left my only copy back in the Bago, which  
even as we spoke was being driven by Mariah and Riley to a remote site  
on the Yellowstone River where Lewis and Clark had once camped, thus  
regrettably out of range of fax.

change?

And the morning after we shipped the lambs, Helen departed from  
her herding years, riding <sup>with me</sup> beside me in the borrowed car as far as Great  
Falls where she gave me a last remembering look through the blowing  
web of her hair and boarded the bus for Oregon and gemology.

Amtrak  
B'n D'n  
in SW  
station

train

# —

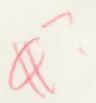
Q1: pick recognizes soundless face on TV



I could have sworn I <sup>kept</sup> was hearing a familiar voice. But none of the partakers strung along the bar was anybody I recognized, nor did they look like logical discussants of...

"...eating dust and braving the elements," Tonsil Vapor's tone resounded in a break in the bar conversation. Sure enough, he was in the tube in living color, not to mention a high-crowned hat. "This cattle drive from Roundup to Billings involves 0000 head of cattle and 0000 men on horseback."

Yancy  
TV Printer



At least it was an interruption of the two-member <sup>reunion</sup> ~~group~~ busily being created by Riley and Mariah. I figured this was a chance to further divert. "Somebody tell me this. One shepherd can handle a thousand sheep, but here they got <sup>fifteen hundred</sup> ~~one thousand~~ cowboys for the same number of cows. So if they call shepherders dumb, where does that leave cowboys?"

"Now, now," Mariah said as if running over with sympathy for the television ~~man~~ buckaroos. "Don't be mean to those poor cowpokers."

"Hey, better to be a poker than a pokie," Riley drawled in a <sup>croaky</sup> trailhand voice.

discussion between Mariah and me, because Riley stopped as if he'd  
walked into a glass wall. "Ahhh," he evaluated. "A family conference.  
I'll just wait outside until the blood quits flowing."

"Why don't you hang around?" I offered. "You might learn something  
about yourself."

"Depends on the source," he replied warily as he regarded me and  
then Mariah.

"He thinks we're crazy to {give each other a second try}," Mariah  
summed up my views for him.

"Never heard of try, try again, hmm?" Even though the words pittered  
out of him as syruplike as ever, Riley looked totally serious. "It  
wasn't anything I intended--you better know that, Jick. ~~Probably Mariah~~  
We both came to this trip despite the other one."

"Then why in goddamn hell didn't you keep it that way?" I erupted.  
"You both were managing to get your jobs done, without having to tumble"--  
into bed, into the jungles between the legs, into an old fever newly  
risked--"all over each other. I just don't understand why you're willing  
to set each other up for hurt again."

"This must be the definition of the morning after," Riley said  
to Mariah. "We've got Cupid's conscience right here with us and the  
BB waiting <sup>his turn</sup> down the road. He wants to see us back in Missoula again.  
Yet today."

giving us  
hell  
him on our  
case

Missoula was <sup>a whole</sup> ~~one hell~~ of a drive from Chinook, What did this  
Bolitho think, that we were trout he could just reel in whenever he  
felt like it? Or as I put it now: "Can't that guy say what he wants  
to say on the goddamn telephone?"

Mariah and Riley exchanged <sup>cloudy</sup> ~~grim~~ looks. He was the one who at last  
said, "The BB is a Bunker Hill type of boss. He likes to see the whites  
of our eyes before he fires."

#

Hours and <sup>of 304 miles</sup> ~~hours~~ later, the roadweary three of us filed into  
the Montanian building.

a lot of  
travel  
was  
later

"Tell you what, Jick. Just to show you my heart's in the right place"--he patted his rump pocket where his billfold resided--"I'll buy you a birthday drink."

"Naw," I demurred as civilly as I could, "it's been kind of a hefty day. I think I'll turn in early."

Say for Riley, he didn't come out with anything smart-mouthed about somebody my age needing his sleep. Instead, worse, he turned to Mariah and invited, "At least I can keep my reckless generosity in the family. Buy you a round?"

"Sounds like the offer of a lifetime," she responded. Then to me:

"Do you mind if we hang on here a little while?"

No, it couldn't be said that I minded; utter alarm was the more accurate description of how I felt about the two of them cozying together ~~over glasses~~ <sup>glassfuls</sup> of inspiration.

"Actually, the night still is a pup, isn't it," I said, letting my gaze rest on Riley. "Where's that drink ~~you're financing~~ you're financing?"

The bar of this Lass in a Glass emporium was an average enough place. A Hamm's clock above the cash register, Budweiser lampshades on the

Best offer  
I've had  
in a while  
You don't mind  
if we hang on  
do you - We'll  
sit ourselves in  
13000 grand as  
we can.

117

The day was hazy and dull. No trace whatsoever of the hundred-mile face of the Rockies behind us to the west, and on the northern horizon the Sweetgrass Hills were <sup>blue</sup> ~~only~~ ghosts of themselves. With only the plains everywhere around I began to feel adrift, and Mariah and Riley too seemed logey and out of their element. I wished the day could be rinsed, to give the High Line country a fairer chance with us.

Soon we were in the wheat sea. Out among the straw-toned fields occasional round steel bins and tall elevators bobbed up, but otherwise the only color other than basic farming was the Burlington Northern's roadbed of lavender gravel, brought in from somewhere far. That railroad, when Jim Hill built it as the route farthest north on the American map, the "High Line," cleaved open this land to settlement in the first years of this century, and even yet the trackside towns are the only communities in sight. One after another as you drive Highway 2 they come peeping over the lonely horizon, Dunkirk, Devon, Inverness, Kremlin--a person would think he really was somewhere. Which can only have been the railroad's idea in naming these little spots big.

Labor Day,  
Sept. 4, which  
also  
happened to  
be  
L Day

✓  
improvement?

Foot out

The day had me disturbed. I was trying to rein in my mood, but  
I suppose some of it did work loose in my remark: "Whatever you two  
manage to come up with, I hope to Christ it's got some mountains somewhere  
around <sup>a bit</sup> for a charge. This country where there's nothing to lean your  
eyes on is getting me down." <sup>gen'l comment</sup>

Riley's pen quit tapping the notebook, and when I glanced over  
at the unaccustomed welcome silence, he had the pen angled down onto  
a spot on the map like a pointer. Mariah's index finger was there from  
the opposite direction. Both their faces looked lit up as if they had  
hit the same socket at the same time.

It was Mariah who gave me a thankful grin and said, "Great minds  
run on the same track."

"What, me and you two?" I said skeptically.

"Better than that," Riley chimed in. "You and the Nez Perce."

On that map, a road dangles south from the town of Chinook. Fifteen  
miles down it, <sup>beside</sup> alongside Snake Creek [almost at the foot of] the Bearpaw  
Mountains, is the Chief Joseph battleground.

Was  
pulled  
in  
at...

The wind at the battlefield was just short of lethal. Often as not, Montana weather turns chilly around Labor Day, before relenting into Indian summer, and this year the cold reminder had chosen the exact holiday itself to pivot on. *climate at least matched my disposition right then* Mariah and I stepped from the Bago into gusts whistling out of the west, then stepped right back in and swapped our hats for caps and pulled on winter coats, while Riley ~~acted like~~ *he was going to brave it* in just a light jacket and headed on over to ~~study~~ study the site's memorial markers. By the time Mariah and I joined him at the markers--there were three, ~~of them~~, with a plaque apiece in honor of the Indians, the U.S. soldiers, and the Chinook <sup>Townsman</sup> ~~man~~ *a combat site* who'd helped preserve the site, about as democratic as you can get, I suppose--Riley <sup>gave</sup> ~~of course had given~~ up on the act and wanted to borrow the Bago keys from me to go back and don a heavier coat. ~~Therefore~~ I handed them to him along with a look that said I hoped he wasn't going to keep diddling around out here in weather like this, then as he scooted for the motorhome Mariah and I ducked in front of a little wall of shelter that had been erected so that visitors wouldn't be spun away to North Dakota like tumbleweeds. *his polar bear*

I reached in my pant pocket for the keys, then remembered. "Oh yeah, I gave them to you, Riley."

"Hmm? So you did." He reached a hand into the side pocket of his coat and froze in that position. He cast an uh-oh look at Mariah where she was jiggling in place, then one at me.

"Christamighty!" I yelped. "You didn't lose the goddamn keys, did you?"

"No, no, of course not," Riley said with a swallow. "They're, ah, just in my other pocket, is all."

"So dig them out," I urged, "it's colder than the moon's backside out here."

"The pocket of that jacket," Riley indicated toward the Bago. The jacket he'd changed for a heavier one. The jacket he'd left in the Bago. The jacket he'd locked in the Bago.

Right then I could have gladly mangled him. Riley Wright <sup>Ground</sup> Sausage, Handmade on Snake Creek. But Mariah put herself between us and headed off the second battle of the Chief Joseph battleground, and eventually I cooled down--in that wind it didn't take all that long--enough to agree

weather;  
wind  
blowing

of man...

admitted;

?

we had to do something drastic.

and

It is a drastic amount of work to break out a rear side window of a motorhome in a cold blowy dusk, just as it is an even more aggravating chore to pluck and dig the shards of glass out of the windowframe, as we stretched and shivered and did until at last the frame was clear enough for Riley and me to boost Mariah through.

and the keys were retrieved  
After she'd unlocked the doors and Riley sheepishly fished

and I'd put the heat<sup>er</sup> on full blast to start thawing us out, Riley assured me he knew just what to do next.

"Do you," I said icily.

"We'll just go to a hardware store in Chinook and get some weather glazing to put over the window until we can get it fixed. Uh, which reminds me," and he flipped open his notebook to the page of the buffalo-bashed grill, the absent hubcap, the cracked passenger-side windshield and dented chrome, and added the side window to those Accounts Outstanding.

Riley's <sup>brilliant</sup> blithe notion of <sup>weatherizing</sup> sealing over the broken window lacked only one detail. By the time we got into Chinook, the hardware store was closed. ~~As was any other conceivable store except the IGA food store.~~

at 47 age  
it's probably too  
late to get in  
line for a brain

under my  
control store  
col. motorhome  
lost until he  
was out of  
page?

"Pull in here," Mariah directed, pointing with great definiteness at the IGA food store. In she marched while Riley and I sat in mutual stiff silence, and in a minute she was back with a roll of freezer tape and a box of surprisingly ~~stout~~ stout clear~~y~~ crinkly bags. Riley and I piled out to help her tape the bags over the window. I can testify there is some justice in life, because he was the one who broke down and asked what they were.

"Turkey basting bags," Mariah told him.

gave in  
to  
curiosity

✓

The waitress brought Riley and me our soup, salad, fondue and breadsticks and asked if we needed anything else for starters. We told her we couldn't imagine what, and I had just started to dive into my dishes when the sound of German, a lot of voices' worth, <sup>resounded</sup> ~~came from~~ the hallway. # I knew who it had to be, but I still couldn't help being <sup>flabbergasted</sup> ~~startled~~ when ~~all~~ the men with chinline beards, from young to old, in their black trousers and black work jackets and bright-colored shirts, began filing in. The Hutterites are a population all their own across Montana and the Dakotas and up into Canada, living in farm colonies of a hundred or so people and following their ancestral German religion. They keep their way of life by avoiding things of the world that might infect it--TV, radio, public schools--and I'd always supposed supper clubs would be <sup>prominent</sup> on that list. But here were Hutterite men from near and far, trooping in and in. I'd counted almost to sixty when I halfway between Gros Ventre and Valier. recognized white-bearded Jacob Stapfer of the Seven Block colony. "How's t'ings, Jick?" he sang out.

out  
way  
of  
64

"How you doing, Jacob?" I called back. Jacob was plainly doing topnotch, cruising into the banquet area just as if a Hutterite in a

✓  
supper club wasn't as unlikely as me in a monastery.

*a thousand percent?*  
The Hutterites are thoroughly modern about their agriculture, though,

and when I saw a couple of civilian guys in leisure suits pushing film

equipment into the banquet area where the Hutterite legion was congregating,

I caught the drift. Fertilizer salesmen or some such, come to preach

the virtues of their product to an audience lured by a free supper.

The platoon I was in went out hours before daylight the morning of the attack on Cold Mountain, to sneak into position where we could work on a place <sup>that</sup> ~~where~~ the Japanese had heavy machine guns, at least three of the goddamn things. That mountain was cold, all right. Ice on the tundra as we climbed up the slope, and that wind steadily trying to blow us off the face of the earth. Just in the earliest minute <sup>grind</sup> or so of when it was light enough to see, we spotted the first enemy, a sentry about fifty yards away. I <sup>suppose</sup> ~~guess~~ he wasn't <sup>not</sup> the greatest sentry there ever was, because he was standing against the skyline shaking out a grass mat. Our lieutenant motioned the rest of us to take cover under a cutbank. Then he laid down in <sup>new</sup> firing-range position with his legs carefully spraddled and shot the sentry. I have wondered ever since if that is pretty much what war is: some ninny stands up when he shouldn't and some other ninny shoots him when he shouldn't. What I do know for <sup>definitely is</sup> ~~sure was~~ that our <sup>deared</sup> plan of attack, to grenade those machine guns, was now defunct before it even started because we were way to far away to throw. Yet, for whatever reason, all at once here came four or five Japanese soldiers and an officer with a sword,

kiyi-ing down in a bayonet attack on us. Our BAR man opened up,  
the Browning Automatic making that kind of regretful tuck tuck tuck  
sound as it fired, and that took care of the bayonet idea. While the  
Japanese were thinking matters over, our ~~dedo~~<sup>g</sup> lieutenant started sending  
some of us around to a little knoll so we could pinch in on the machine  
gun position. I was the third guy who had to sprint maybe ten yards  
from the end of the cutbank to the cover of the knoll, and I was ~~one~~<sup>only a</sup>  
step from ~~making it~~<sup>having it made</sup> when a bullet whammed into my left leg not far  
above the ankle. I fell and rolled for a long way down the mountainside.  
Not that I know much about it, except for the skinned up and bruised  
places all over my body, because the pain of that smashed leg made me  
pass out. The other men of the platoon assured me later I'd been the  
deadest-looking guy they ~~had~~<sup>had</sup> ever seen, flopping down the slope like a  
rag doll that way.

~~So~~ that was my combat career, quick.

next  
man  
was  
to  
stand

"Naw, Jack Dempsey has been written to tatters."

improve

Mariah and I had the thought at the same ~~instant~~ instant. Riley must have wondered what sudden phase of the moon had the two of us grinning sappily at each other. Heritage demanded that the <sup>family</sup> bywords be said in a woman's voice, and so Mariah tossed the hair out of her eyes and cocked her head around to deliver to Riley: "What about the other man?"

"The other man." Riley blinked back and forth between Mariah and me. "Who, Gibbons?" He quit blinking as he began to get the idea.

"Gibbons. What about him?"

Mariah told him the tale just as I had told it to her, just as I had heard it from my mother. When she'd finished, Riley expostulated: "Jesus H. Christ, that's a better story idea than we've been able to think up in two weeks! Maybe we ought to buy a ouija board and let your grandmother do this whole series." Before he and Mariah headed off to the Toole County Museum to get going on Gibbons, though, Riley said quite quietly: "I wish Granda would have ever let me interview her." Surprising to hear him speak her nickname within our family, as if he and Mariah still were married. As if Beth McCaskill still were alive.

expelled

expand improve

and their conversation going a mile a minute and the radio yakking right along with them. I know there is no one style for marriages, but theirs always ~~startled~~ <sup>amazed</sup> me. While Kenny was forever doing his conversational perambulation or bringing a hand up to rub the back of his neck or swinging his arms or casting a look out the nearest window to get his eyes fidgeting along with the rest of him, Darleen just matter-of-factly sloped through life.

Right off, I noticed that Kenny now sported muttonchop sideburns-- they made him look like a ~~distraught~~ <sup>shampooed</sup> lynx--for Gros Ventre's centennial beard contest. But the moment I stepped in the kitchen, it was my countenance that received a startled going-over from Kenny and Darleen both. I wondered what secret from myself was showing there, until I remembered my own accumulating snowy whiskers. [Well, what the hell, what's wrong with having a face that admits it's had a life lived in it?]

The two of them gave each other a side glance, then Kenny earnestly desired to know, "Jick, how you doing this morning?" while Darleen chipped in, "You must have seen a <sup>bunch</sup> lot of Montana by now."

"<sup>OK</sup> Could be worse and probably will be" and "quite a <sup>grab</sup> goddamn bunch"

I recited to those and while we were getting coffeed up for the day,

compounded

one marriage, they are at each other's

perplexed

through:

one each other out

under tinfoil.

And ~~there~~ during food, which I have always liked to believe is inspirational, I finally figured out Riley's case of topical lockjaw.

The expression on him--which I can only liken to the proverbial ~~flummoxed~~ look of the man in a crisis <sup>such</sup> who didn't know whether to shit or go blind--

I knew I had seen before, but when? Twice, actually. The day of spring <sup>delivered</sup> three years ago, when Riley ~~had brought~~ himself <sup>down</sup> to the sheepshed beside Noon Creek to tell me he and Mariah were splitting up. And ~~more~~ more recently when Good Help Hebner brayed out to him amid the Gros Ventre assemblage in the Medicine Lodge to be careful of his aim in the men's room because the next fellow up to the trough might be barefoot.

<sup>, though?</sup> Could it be? Such a garden-variety emotion behind Riley's quandary?

A diagnosis can be simple yet <sup>complete</sup> monumental. No, I now knew: more than anything, more than fear, fire, flood or blood, Riley Wright hated to look like a sap. \*

That condition inevitably awaited him here, one way or the other.

Trotting around ~~Montana~~ with an ex-wife, as though he couldn't get away from the situation Mariah represented, plainly stood out to Leona as

forbore and resorted to manners instead. "Jick, you ever meet my brother Morgan? This is none other."

Morgan Wright and I shook hands <sup>mutually</sup> and murmured, "How you doing?" As soon as that was over, Riley repeated his bulletin about going to the job in California.

Morgan asked with concern, "Has California voted on this statewide yet?" which proved to me they were full-blooded brothers.

With a merry growl the pup attacked the cuff of Mariah's bluejeans in a spontaneous tug of war. Standing on the attacked leg as ~~calmly~~ <sup>resolutely</sup> as a heron, Mariah lifted the other foot behind her and gave Manslaughter a mild crosskick in his furry little ribs. The pup let out a surprised wuh! and <sup>ad</sup>back off to regard her with abrupt respect.

The Wright family conclave didn't even notice, what with Riley giving Morgan the whys and wherefores of California while Leona <sup>took it</sup> listened to <sup>in</sup> it all again with the same regretful smile. Suddenly she turned toward Mariah and me as if utmost revelation had hit home. Mariah tensed defiantly as Leona said out with urgency:

"Have you had supper?"

more description of Morg.

transition?

methodically

was company of J. J. Adams & I had a little in hand in sympathy

River country as fetching as Switzerland, a person did have to be more than a little screwloose to talk about living anywhere else. Riley drew in a mighty breath and performed his explanation to Leona that

at the Globe he'd have twice as many readers as the total population of Montana, that the salary there ~~would make~~ <sup>made</sup> the Montanian look like the two-bit outfit it was--I waited for him to get to the part about California being a more actual ~~part~~ <sup>specimen</sup> of the world than Montana is, but he never did.

Mariah most notably was waiting too, for her rebetrothed to find his way around to that other announcement. Now, however, ecstatic yips from the pooch directed our attention to a ~~ha~~ <sup>e</sup>ftier version of Riley making his way across the yard from the newer house to our powwow.

"Hey there, Morg, you're just in time for the family reunion,"

Riley greeted him in what was at least distraction if not relief.

The other responded in a tone that eerily echoed Riley's voice,

"What's going on, Riler?"

I could see Riley barely resisting some crack such as Don't beat around the bush that way, Morg, just come right out and ask. He somehow

quote  
a brother  
Pete's dad

umhh. . . umhh grunts which somehow kind of hummed on in the air after you heard them. I noticed even Riley keeping half an eye on Mariah despite his unsought advice that there was nothing in her behavior to sweat about.

She did nothing too suicidal, though, in firing off her clicks as a pony-sized calf suckled on its mama or the proddy old bull laid down and rolled, kicking all four legs in the air as he took his dust bath--up until the point where she climbed onto the top of the Winnebago to see how the buffalo scene registered from up there. <sup>41</sup> My heart did some flutters as Riley and I listened to her prowling around on that slick metal roof. I mean, oughtn't there be some kind of hazard rule that a photographer never do anything a four-year-old kid would have the sense not to?

My flutters turned into genuine internal gyrations as the old bull shook off the last smatters of his dust refreshment and in a belligerently businesslike way <sup>began</sup> came plodding directly toward the motorhome. <sup>stare his head in and pondering - then</sup>

"It must take nerves of utter steel," Riley <sup>observed</sup> intoned to me.

"What, to be a photographer?"

"No, to be Mariah's father."

spoke

None of us ~~said anything~~ while the songs of birds poured undiluted into our ears. I suppose we were afraid the spate of loveliest sound would vanish if we broke in on it. But after a bit Mariah and Riley and I realized that the music of birds was a natural part of this place, constant as the glorious grass that made feathered life thrive.

I take pride in the fact that while we three listened in our various ways, I was the one who detected the promising scatter of dark specks beginning to appear on the big ~~slope~~ <sup>slope</sup> to the west; at least my eyes aren't lame. After I wordlessly pointed them out to the newspaper pair, those dots grew and grew to become a herd of a couple hundred buffalo. Dozens each of bulls, cows, calves, all spread out

in a nice graze with one of the stout pasture fences <sup>blessedly</sup> between them and us so Mariah couldn't flounce out there and invite a stampede onto herself.

Of course, even this pepper pattern of a herd across an entire hillside <sup>amount</sup> <sup>to</sup> was only a fingernailful compared to the buffalo millions back in the last century. But I thought them quite the sight.

Mariah broke the spell. Doing that quick little toss of her head <sup>cut?</sup> as if that would help to sight in on him, she turned and spoke to Riley:

P. 47A follows →

rewritten 3/30/89

47A

"Decision time. What are you going to do in your Great Buffalo  
Story?"

Riley's pen stopped tapping his notebook. "I won't know that



until I sit down and do the writing, will I."

"Come off it, Tolstoy," Mariah said as if telling him the time of day. "Since when don't you have a story angle to pull out of storage? Here's-my-big-idea-about-buffalo, and then plug in the details."

"Oh, it's that christly easy, is it," he retorted, sounding steamed.

Mariah sailed right on, "So, what do I shoot to fit with your story? The country, or the buffalo, or the grass, or what?"

He gave her a malicious grin. "The birdsong. Get me that, that'll do."

For half an instant, that put me on his side. I wished they'd both can the argument or discussion or whatever kind of newspaperperson conversation this was, and let the air music stream on and on.

But Mariah was going into her instructive voice now, not a good sign. "Don't be crappier about this than you ordinarily are, okay? I've got to have some idea of what you're going to write."

"Buy a copy of the newspaper tomorrow and find out."

"Riley. I know it goes against your grain, but try not to be a total dip for a minute and let's get down to work."

can't  
wait

"I am working! At least when you're not yapping at me."

"Then let's hear some of those priceless words. What's your story angle going to be?"

"I'm telling you, I don't know yet!"

"Tsk," she tsked briskly. "A little rusty out here in the real world after all that sitting around the office dreaming up columns, are you?"

"Mariah, just bug off. Shoot whatever the hell you want, and they'll slap it on the page next to whatever I write, and that'll be that. Simplissimo."

"Two half-assed pieces of work don't equal one good one," she said, all reasonableness.

"We are not going to be Siamese twins for the next four months!" he hotly informed her. "You do your job and I'll do mine."

With equal heat she responded, "No! The series won't be worth blowing your nose in if we do it that way!"

parachute trip to a forest fire, whatever time of day it was, Shirley and I went straight to bed.

When that wore off, so did the marriage. <sup>after</sup> I passed the U.S. Forest Service exam and was assigned onto the Custer National Forest over in eastern Montana, but Shirley did not last out our first summer there. It tore us both up pretty bad. Divorce was no everyday thing then.

That was then and this was now, me standing in the land of groceries gaping at some grayhaired lady with whom I'd once popped into bed whenever it crossed either of our minds. I caught my breath and tried to think of anything to step forward and say to Shirley. Remember me? logically invited some response along the lines of I sure do, you sonofabitch. Or How you been? was equally meaningless, for it was plain that the same total of forty years had happened to her as to me since that altar mistake we'd made with each other. No, search as I did in myself, in my memory of when she and I were <sup>molten newly weds</sup> together, there was nothing <sup>fitting</sup> new to say to each other. While I was gawking and trying not to seem to be, she did give me one quick wondering glance; but with my everyday Stetson on and sunglasses and the struggling whiskers, I must have looked more like a blind bum wanting to sell her a pencil than like anybody she'd ever been at all interested in. <sup>last</sup>

"There you go, Mrs. Nellis," the clerk said cheerily as

Naturally Mariah had come to the attention of young Frew, who halted his horse, doffed his <sup>rodeoing</sup> hat and held it over his heart in a mock pretty way while he yelled <sup>across to her,</sup> ~~over,~~ "Will this smile do?" Mariah delivered back to him, "The calf had a better one, Kevin," and kept on scoping the crowd. Young Frew shrugged mournfully and went back to winding up his spent ropes.

I regarded her there above me. That pert behind of hers nicely enhanced by faded bluejeans, and her turquoise-colored rodeo shirt like some runaway blossom against the sky. Up there in sight of everybody for a mile, but oblivious to all as she waited for the next picture to dawn. Not for the first time--more like the millionth-- I wondered whether her behavior somehow went with her name. That eye sound there in Mariah, while any other of the species that I'd ever encountered was always plain ee Maria. She was a singular one in every way I could see, for sure.

I stood up, partly to unstiffen but mainly to turn it into the opportunity to announce, "I've had about enough of this." Of course my words meant the all-afternoon rodeo and this perpetual damn calf roping, but more than that, too.

Mariah ignored the more and wanted to know, "What's your big rush?"

As she alit from the fence and turned to face me she made that gesture of swinging her hair out of her eyes, the

same little tossing way she always did to clear her view into the camera. As always too, that sway of her head fired off a flash of earrings, silver today, against the illustrious hair. As if just the motion of her could strike sparks from the air. No wonder every man afoot or horseback who ever saw her sent his eyes back for a second helping.

"Jick, you can't keep on the way you've been," she started right in again on Topic Number One. "I had to half drag you here today and now you can't wait to mope along home to the ranch and start feeling sorry for yourself all over again. I mean, what is this, suicide by boredom? It's not like you to sit around like your tail is caught in a crack."

I was all too sure what was due next from her, and here it lit. "You know as well as I do that you've got to get yourself going again," she said as if I was running a want ad for advice. "That's why I want you to pack your socks and come along with me on this."

I'd already told her no. Three times, N-O. Actually I guess it must have been four, because Mariah never starts to really listen until you say a thing the third time.

"Sitting sounds good enough to me," I tried on her now. "The world can use more people who stay sat."

~~But~~ ≡ wouldn't you know, all that drew me was the extended comment that if such was the case then I might just as well plop my butt behind a steering wheel where I'd at

rewritten 3/27/89

THE END TOWARD IDAHO

Well, old buddies out there the other side of the ink, I am not  
 a happy camper this morning. What we've got here, is the Fourth  
 of July, the hundredth time it has turned up on the calendar  
 since the U. States of A. decided to let Montana in, so wouldn't  
 you think we could do the holiday with some <sup>hiss</sup> ~~vim~~ and vinegar by now?  
 But no, it's going to be more of the lame old usual. From Ekalaka  
 to Yaak today, we Montanans will bake our brains in the sun at rodeos,  
 meanwhile consuming enough beer and fried chicken to cholestorate  
 a vegetarian convention, waiting for dark so we can try to burn  
 down our towns with fireworks. A centennial Fourth of the same  
 old guff: hip-hip-hoorah, flap-the-flag-and-pass-the-swag. [This  
 is the best we can do?] Maybe it's an American condition, in this  
 strange nation we have become, all helmet and sword and no brain  
 or heart. But does Montana have to be in a patriotic coma too?  
 Take it from Riley, friends: the calendar this morning says  
 "Independence Day," but you can look high and low in the doings  
 of this centennial year and nowhere find a really independent idea--  
 like changing the name of this state of ours to something more  
 appropriate, such as Destitution.

even 7  
July  
more

perform?

with

--"The Life of Riley" column  
 in the Missoula Montanian,  
 July 4, 1989

you want it and I don't give a good goddamn how poor a specimen of mankind you take along with you. Okay?"

She didn't take the keys, she didn't even answer my offer of them. <sup>No,</sup> All she did was that little toss of her head again, as if clearing her <sup>hair</sup> hair out of the way would clarify me somehow too. People either side of us on their perches of fenders and bumpers were watching the pair of us more than the rodeo. Wonderful. See the world champion moper Jick McCaskill and his girl while they duke it out on the glorious Fourth; we ought to be selling <sup>resigned</sup> tickets. I started to turn away and do what I should have done long since, stick the key in the ignition of the Winnebago and head home to the ranch. Try that, though, when the next thing you hear is Mariah saying ever so slowly, in a voice not her usual <sup>bulletproof</sup> one:

"Jick. Jick, I need to have you along."

It stopped me. It would anybody, wouldn't it?

I scrutinized Mariah. Damn. Double damn. Going Winnebagoing around the countryside with her and the other one was still the last thing on this earth I wanted to do. But need instead of want. Need. Do people really know what they are trying to reach for with that word? I wasn't sure I could tell, anymore.

"Mariah. You're not just saying that, are you?"

Our eyes held each other for a considerable moment.

had to  
ask her  
outright  
+ with  
oh  
my  
act?

That marriage had happened right here in Missoula. I was at the university on the GI bill, my last year in forestry school when Shirley and I came across each other. <sup>of course</sup> In that college time she still was Shirley <sup>as she was then</sup> Havelly, from Hamilton down toward the south end of the Bitterroot Valley.

She attracted a lot of other notice besides mine. One of the guys who was in drama classes with her lived on the same floor as I did in the veterans' dorm and he used to go around intoning in a moaning sort of way, "She has the power to cloud men's minds. Shirley Havelly, oh have me, have me, Shirley Havelly."

His wasn't the brand of drama that interested her. Shirley had a strong head, in more ways than one: a black cloud of hair that began unusually high on her forehead, creating a perfectly straight line across there like the top of a full-face mask; then black eyebrows that curved winningly over her bluebird-blue eyes; then that snub nose; then a smile like a lipstick advertisement. Her figure was more on the tidy side than generous, and her head was actually a bit big for the rest of her, but it was such a terrific head no man ever cared.

She

~~Shirley~~ was a Theta and a theater major, and ordinarily our paths would

another line or so of description of bartender; then Mariah's realization

--thru dialogue?--of Riley's noticing Kimi.

*\*That idea walked right up to you out of nowhere.*

include, perhaps after "blackest ink", Jick's musings that this is the kind of evening that makes you forget how much the wind blows and what a flop spring can be (or how hot it was the year before, in drought summer of '88) and that 6 months ago (check: Feb. '89 cold snap) it was 35 degrees below zero for 00 days.

↑ improve transition into next graf, Breed Butte etc.

Amnesia scenery

the seed of that (Big Hole) dream

spending a bunkhouse summer there in that temporary nation of

work  
hayhands and horses. Possibly even take a summer name for myself,

for even there on Pete's ranch you might put up with a hay (name on the check)  
(paying-off day)

As I say,  
A dream, in one sense  
the that a war and other matters claimed the summers

when I ~~was~~ might have gone to the Big Hole; but a seed of who I am,

too, for imagination does not sprout out of nothing.

I was still back on the... ..

add to next page, after "Horse":

There'll be some intervening pages between the grizzly scene and this, of Mariah and Riley flummoxing around for stories, unsuccessful until the Bago crosses the Marias River--Mariah's namesake river--and they pull into Shelby. It will occur to Jick that Shelby is where the heavyweight championship fight between Jack Dempsey and the extreme underdog Tommy Gibbons was held, and that Jick's parents, Mac and Beth, came to that fight with Stanley Meixell. Jick has just blithely suggested the newspaper pair ought to write about the famous Dempsey, and Riley responds:

who's head  
an icicle dropped on  
like a kid who falls an icicle <sup>back of</sup> in neck

<sup>in a squaring way,</sup> <sup>modded from a couple of</sup> <sup>a pointy stick,</sup>  
Riley ~~evently~~ stared as if he'd been on top of a bear  
"S' thing ~~a skull b.~~ <sup>it?</sup>" he inquired of M,  
casting a look around for a deceased b's cranium

"Been done," she retorted.

"Maybe do a Yuck, if we can come up a good bleached skull?"

For all the ~~pecking~~ <sup>pecking</sup> & ~~peering~~ <sup>peering</sup> pair of them we doing,  
it was one who <sup>eyes</sup> spotted <sup>at base</sup> scatter of dark specks <sup>on a distant slope.</sup> Sure enough, when we trundled over  
~~across~~ <sup>across</sup> ~~lowland~~

the b. <sup>dots</sup> ~~to go~~, those ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> grew & grew to become a herd  
of a couple hundred buffalo. Bulls, cows, <sup>all spread</sup> calves, <sup>out into</sup> the <sup>solemn</sup> <sup>grave</sup> <sup>greatest</sup>  
& deliberate head-down way of walking they were a multiplied  
version of <sup>of</sup> oblivious mood <sup>of</sup> original little <sup>of</sup> ~~beast~~ <sup>beast</sup> had shown us.

Even since dark scatter was only a handful compared to  
buffalo millions back in history, but I thought them quite a sight,  
[Marion checked away for a while & R]

Two time his turn to issue, "Been done."

buffalo behind fence  
quite the sight

drift  
gentle cattle

Now,

~~Now,~~

old

"Not really. Just some stuff I've already got at home, is all."

Why don't you try

"You might try in here." He showed me a set of notebooks with

Small Collections on their covers. "Letters and so on sometimes end  
in  
up here."

I sat down with the J through M notebook and had a look. Plenty  
of Mc's but no McCaskills. That didn't surprise me. The only real skein of  
writing either of my parents did was my father's Forest Service diary,  
and I did a lot of that for him. (memory)

a world of

as far as I know,

N through R was the next notebook, and I opened it up to Reese.

or Anna

There were three or four, but none of them Isaac. Then I remembered.

An immigration official had decided to do a little Americanizing

some instant

on my Danish grandfather when he stepped off the boat.

I thumbed deeper into the R's and just past Rigsby there he was, Riis,

in his original form,

Isak.

(Sends for letters)

Dearest sister Karen (in Danish)... The handwriting was slanting

but smooth. Old Isaac chewed his way through English when he talked, but...

I sat up  
straighter.  
My father's  
father...  
my eyes  
widened  
in amazement,  
if it can  
be said  
no way.

all of them  
in fact  
Cathy  
action  
no many  
no am/1000.

as if  
but it  
was  
fine