

the business part of the city has drained away down to the valley floor in shopping centers and motels and such, but we were in an old uptown enterprise called the M&M, which featured a fry kitchen and lunch counter on one side and a long oldstyle bar along the other and a gambling emporium in the entire back half of the room and a high, high old pressed tin ceiling, and within it all a grizzled clientele who seemed to have undergone <sup>most</sup> a lot of life's afflictions, plus a few younger people evidently in the process of undergoing that same set of travails. A kind of comfortable warehouse of so much that had been Butte, the M&M seemed to be, and I was quite taken. Of course, my mood was also helped by the fact that for the first time in my life I was eating a pasty--pronounced like past, not paste--which is a meat-and-potatoes-cooked-in-pie-crust dish that Cornish miners introduced to Butte, and it was <sup>one hundred percent</sup> ~~utterly~~ delicious. Even the rival war parties from the night in Virginia City seemed somewhat calmed by the food and atmosphere this suppertime, Mariah on a counter stool on one side of me and Riley similarly on my other. True, conversation between them still was only on the scale of "pass the ketchup, would you"

*of recently had been.*

and "here, take it," but that could have been worse. He earlier had holed up in the Bago and written his story about Butte's mining past, while she went over to the Berkeley Pit not a dozen blocks from where we were sitting and took her picture of that damn near unbelievable open-pit mine--a mile across and thousands of feet deep. Ex-mine, it now was, for the great Berkeley Pit too was depleted and abandoned, after having taken the role from the played out mineshafts everywhere under the streets of Butte. That picture by Mariah when it appeared with Riley's story was a portrait into the earth after the augur that is man had gnawed as far down into it as he could; geologic ages laid bare in an intentional crater, unforgettably. Butte seemed to know how to pose without even trying. Mariah I could tell was itching to photograph one after another of this M&M citizenry; if the saying is that at forty you have the face you deserve, a person really had to wonder just what some of these customers had been up to. Riley meanwhile was intent on the artistry of the fry cook, who one moment was flipping cheese slices as if dealing cards into a rectangle of omelette eggs, then upending a gallon can of mixed vegetables into a

steam bin, then with a flip of his wrist swooping a helping out of the constant mound of hashbrowns simmering on the left side of his grill. As for myself, all my life until actually coming here now I had been leery of Butte. Of its mole-like livelihood, as mining seemed to us surface-of-the-earth types. Of The Company, as the Anaconda Copper Mining Company was just called, because Butte and its ore wealth provided the copper collar that The Company fastened onto Montana. Of, yes, younger incarnations of the clientele around us at that moment, for in its heyday of nine thousand miners Butte was famously a fistfighting drinking whoring place; when you met up with someone apt to give you trouble from his knuckles, the automatic evaluation was "too much Butte in him." Now, however, the city's sad appearance of having worked itself out of a job, but still with a citadel of the old here in the M&M, and such food, too--my prejudice against Butte was getting radically reversed.

Until. Until, that is, I happened to glance at the latest case of thirst coming in the door of the M&M and he was the reincarnation of Ed Heaney.

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By Jesus, there was enough outfits there that we just covered that son-of-a-gun from one end to the other with brands. Then we turned him loose. Off he went into the brush like a turpentine cat-- of course, the biggest turpentine cat there ever was. Well, you know it was years later, way down in the highwood mountains, when somebody finally bagged that elk. Could not figure out how <sup>in Christ's name,</sup> that thing got covered with all those brands."

See what I mean? The guy was a specimen of mammoth mouth if there ever was one. For the life of me I could not see why the rest of the crew didn't catch on to his windjamming. I don't know, though. Even if I was only fifteen years old, I evidently was the only one on Noon Creek who didn't happen to believe in alphabetical elk.

So I was still staring, still seeing two moments a half century  
apart, when Riley finally pulled his attention from the acrobatics  
of the fry cook and asked, "Ready for Helena?" I wasn't really,

nor do I think Mariah was, but we both said we were.

Billings begins a long way out from itself, {these days.} Scatterings of housing developments and roadside businesses and billboards promising more enterprises ahead started showing up 0 miles before the city.

The Yellowstone River shies out of the picture by veering south, and so the profiles of the hotels and banks against the rimrocks are the

I wouldn't know whether it's true everywhere, but Montana feature. Money moved here during the boom in oil and coal, but

cities do okay for a while and then take an awful whacking when the its resources around them run out--Butte and copper, Great Falls and the smelter for that copper.

more

more  
desc pt

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

*train down?*

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

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

"Okay if we dance, is it?"

*wide <sup>bar</sup> woman*  
The ~~bar lady~~ shrugged. "A lot worse than that's happened in here."

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

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

Lord knows I would.

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

tangled mind for good.

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

*Naked  
smoking,*

used in S Ay? ~~WAT~~  
?

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

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

The great river of my childhood flowed in the sky. Not that other threads of current never took their way past my eyes. The valley's own dab of stream forever nosed and dithered along the flanks of the mountains, like a puppy shadowing its mother. And beyond the Big Belts and across a second valley from ours came coiling the storied Missouri, but so new and narrow from its headwaters that it too lacked the proportion to touch and turn a life. But overhead: there, mountain rim to mountain rim and stopless as the day-night blink of the earth's turn, ran the course of might beyond any other I wanted to imagine--the tidal force of weather shoaling in across the <sup>ranges</sup> ~~ranches~~ of blue-black peaks, in blizzard and thundersquall and chinook and trembling heat.

The skewed rhythm of <sup>weather that</sup> ~~the year~~ whirled down on the valley, <sup>can call to mind</sup> ~~this way,~~ I remember as if watching coastal waves comb in before me <sup>this instant.</sup> Winter, long white winter. Then a pale quick sprig of spring. Then uneven too-hot-too-damp-too-dry summer. Next an overnight autumn, and suddenly the breadth of winter once more. And remember, too--such is the eddying but detailed power of memory--precisely the crinkled dance of air as July's sun snaked moisture up from green windrows of hay. And the dour slapping push of a gray afternoon's wind, which I dread to this day. And, more indelible even than the family storm breaking under our roof at the same time, the scenes out of the relentless ninth winter of my life, with its shadowless

used  
in  
Doig

Doig/88

smothering snow across all the hills of the Sixteen country.

And, do those currents of the sky drum on and on in me, and,

and . . .

Can be put elsewhere p 2/6

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six thousand head, and the trail drive which will take them

all to summer range must wait on the search. Worse again, McGrath is, as Grandma says it, a crazy old thing when he drives the ranch to look for lost sheep. Hurrying, he will aim the pickup across bogs which would swallow a train. Raging to have lost time, he fights free of the first bog and roars into the next. The story is told that when McGrath was a young cowboy, he rode his horse into a saloon in Greybull, Wyoming, and roped the mounted deer heads off the wall, scattering drinkers and poker players like pullets. Dad says McGrath still has a hellion streak in him . . . HUNNERD! . . . The notches begin--a hundred!--to be a design on the stick, a stepway of bright slots against the gray-green bark. I hear Mickey cursing a sheep which has broken from the back of the band. <sup>Oh, how</sup> Mickey dislikes <sup>lambing</sup> ranch work, detests sheep, despises himself for knowing no job but sheep ranching, hates us all for seeing his life's predicament. ~~He is a squat man with a crumpled face, and a jabbing tongue.~~ Mickey it is who behind McGrath's back will <sup>sneer at</sup> call him <sup>as</sup> Little Jesus, and who roared out to a Saturday night saloon crowd in White Sulphur Springs that McGrath was a gutrobbing son-of-a-bitch to have to work for. I watch Mickey at the back of the sheep. He has the mean orange dog named Mike with him, a good match. The runaway ewe is being nipped savagely by Mike, to Mickey's encouragement. McGrath would blister Mickey with swearing if he saw the scene, but McGrath is too busy with his count.

Mickey knows by instinct just when he can get away with anything . . . HUNNERD! . . . The soft snick--a hundred!-- and the sixth groove from the willow peels away to the ground. These shards of wood, I notice, are the shape and size of the half moon at the base of my thumb nail. I look up from my hands and see, at the far end of the sheep opposite Mickey, Karl the Swede standing quietly and saying soft words to his sheepdog. Karl the Swede is a pleasant man and a good worker when drink isn't tormenting him. He will herd these sheep in the mountains all summer, if he can last the drought in himself. Lately to get his mind off whiskey he has spent his spare minutes chopping firewood, and his woodpile is nearly as long and high as a small shed. Oho: a ewe jumps some imagined terror as she goes through the gate, and McGrath steps back as she sails past his chest . . . HUNNERD!. . . I giggle--a hundred!--because she was a special ewe, a hundredth and flying like an acrobat as well. McGrath has kept the count steady with his chopping hand. When Dad does the count, he stands half-sideways to the river of sheep, his right hand low off his hip and barely flicking as each sheep passes. I have seen buyers, the men in gabardine suits and creamy Stetsons, with other habits--pointing just two fingers, or pushing the flat palm of a hand toward the sheep--as they count. The one trick everyone has is somehow to pump the end of an arm at each whizzing sheep, make the motion joggle a

signal to the brain. McGrath says he knew an old-time sheepman who could count sheep as they poured abreast through a ten-foot gate. Could that be: could a person . . . HUNNERD! . . . keep such numbers--a hundred!--scampering clearly in his brain? The sheep plunge past McGrath only one or two at once, because Dad is working the corral gate in a rhythm which sluices them through smoothly. He watches too for lame or sick ewes, to be singled out later and put in the hospital herd. A black ewe blurs past, a marker sheep. Dad can glance across a band of sheep for its markers--a black ewe here, over there onewith a flappy ear, beyond one with a Roman nose--and estimate closely whether the entire thousand sheep are there. The sheep don't look all alike to me, but neither do they look as separate as Dad sees them: each ewe is different as a person to him, and not even McGrath can sort them by eye that way. . . HUNNERD!. . . Now my yell--a hundred!--is louder, a signal to McGrath that we are near the end. Nine notches on the willow stick, a tight knot of ewes crowds the gate. If the count is right, no sheep lost, we will start trailing to the summer range in the Big Belts. Ten miles a day, two days of trail. Sheep are the moodiest of creatures. One moment they may cruise down the road so fast you can hardly keep up; the next, you fight them mercilessly to make them budge at all, launching the dogs into them, banging them with the noisy hoops of tin cans strung on wire, cursing, kicking.

Which will it be this time, race or battle? . . . HUNNERD!  
. . . The tenth hundred ewe-- a hundred!--gallops away as I  
press the knife for the next, last notch. McGrath counts  
out the last straggle--twen'y-two, twen'y-three, that's them--  
and whirls to me. I nod and say, a thousand and twenty-three,  
counting with the knife blade my ten notches, then doing it  
once again as McGrath looks on and Dad steps close to watch.  
They are pleased: the count is right, the trailing can start.  
I grin across from the me of then to the me of now. Another  
time, we have finished spring, begun summer.

~~Thi~~ One time, for reasons still obscure to me, I happened to ~~xxx~~ say that Loyola was ~~x~~ vastly overrated as a basketball power that season. It turned out they were so overrated they became NCAA champions. This reminded me of ~~thx~~ my most public prediction, made before the thousands of viewers tuned to a Chicago Cubs game one spring afternoon. Waiting for a friend in the box seats behind the plate in Wrigley Field, I was trapped by Wally Philips and <sup>induced</sup> ~~made~~ to appear on his "Fans in the Stands" show. Of course, he asked me my pennant predictions, and I forecast a Baltimore-Los Abgeles World Series. This would have greatly surprised those fans in New York and Pittsburgh later that fall when they lined up for tickets.