winned for WORK SONG and MISS you, March 11 '08
The hell of it was, this was a perfectly fine day. The bluffs above Fort Peck never looked finer than right now, green grass tickling blue sky.
All the past. Any one life has so much in it, and you multiply

that by how many people there have ever been, and there's just no chance
we can ever savvy more than bits and pieces of all that's happened.

Yet I have always been fascinated with yestertime. I take after my father in that, and if it is so strong in the two of us, maybe it is some McCaskill trait that goes far back.
Time was doing it for me. This day was my sixty-fifth birthday.

I utterly knew the saying: you start to die when you are born. Death is a lifelong process, so to speak, the years our doses of time reward for going toward the inevitable. Yet there are instants when the last of life appears closer, breathes nearer. Remembering how death could have happened to me in the Aleutians was such a moment.

Yet

But the fact that I was upright on the ground, there a prairie museum of battle, instead of interred at Cold Mountain was the spark to go on. Maybe the momentum of life slows as the years add up on it, but it continues.
Shelby wasn't the absolute least logical place for the fight; they could have tried to stage it at the North Pole. Anyway, the notion was that people were going to flock in from everywhere to watch two guys try to pound each other's brains out.

In Doc Kearns, Dempsey's manager, the Shelbyites were dealing with a guy who knew the exact number of hairs on the buffalo on a nickel.

The arena was quite a deal. Bleachers seats built out of brand-new lumber, rising straight up out of the prairie. The boxing ring down there in the middle like the hub of a wheel. (improve)

Shelby got both worst ends of the deal. Only about a third as many people showed up as expected, but the crowd that did come knocked down the fence and flooded in for free.

Stanley and me figured Gibbons had a good chance. Your mother told us not to be silly. That got our betting blood up, so we each bet her five dollars. Of course she cleaned us out. Your mother and Jack Dempsey both—Stanley and I ought to have known we were gonna get our clocks cleaned.
While they went centennialing again, I damn well was going swimming.

The RV park's pool had been a marble of cool color at the edge of my sight ever since we pulled in; [the chance for a plunge was just too much.]

It was a mistake for humanity ever to come ashore and ambulate.

I feel at home in the water in a way earth and air do not provide.

Every tip of the body in unison, the exertion of the stroking arms and legs quickening the blood within just as the body propels through the water--the flow within a flow is a doubling of life, it seems to me.

I was taught to swim by my father, in the beaver dams of the North Fork where he himself had learned. "Stands to reason," he maintained, "a person's bound to catch the knack from the beavers." Jesus, but that was an age ago, a world ago. Between laps now I stood for breath at the shallow end of the pool and I could not but be aware of the gray hair wetly furring my chest. Not to mention the gray summit on my head and the new white beard. I am silvering, like a tree snag being weathered by season after season.

I erupted from one transit of the pool to the sight of two sets of feet and legs, small and smaller. A girl, maybe ten years old, in
a yellow bathing suit and a long-billed cap that read, I ♥ MONTANA; her little brother, a chunky seven- or eight-year-old. Both were as golden tan as honey.

"My name's Shannon," the girl informed me. "Me, I'm Peter," bubbled the boy.

"Uh huh. Pleased to know you both. I'm called Jick."

"Where're you from?" The girl took off the cap with both hands and squared it away in the exact middle of a plastic-woven poolside chair. The boy already was in the pool beside me, splashing like the first discoverer of water.

"Gros Ventre. How about yourselves?"

"Judith Gap. Do you know where that's at? Petej, don't splash so much," she bossed with natural authority. Ten-year-old girls could put the world to rights if we would let them. This one was like a lank of lariat standing upright. At that age Mariah had been the same, slim and supple as anyone can ever be, just before the topography of womanhood began curving and thrusting.
"Jick, you do one," Shannon urged me.

"Yeah, do!" chimed Petey.

"Aw, I'm kind of old for--" The flicker of disappointment in their eyes, the registering of one more grownup excuse, cut me off.

Briefly I wondered what it takes to get committed to a mental institution in Montana, then sneaked a look around the RV park. People my age of their rigs were sitting under the canopies, fighting gnats or wiggling around asking each other where they were headed. None of them seemed inside fixing my lunch and having a beer. to be paying specific attention to the swimming pool. So, I climbed out, my trunks streaming water, and went to the edge of the deep end where Shannon and Petey had been performing. Gingerly I sidestepped until my feet were together right at the brink of the pool. Thrusting my hands down at my sides I stood as if at attention. To the audience of two, I announced, "I'm a tree," and began tilting, a topping, until the length of my body hit the water with crashing cascade, followed by the amazed giggles of Shannon and Petey.
I have said; the full fact is that my parents, our family, went through a convulsion of love with Stanley Meixell such as a matrimonial pairing never does if they are at all lucky. For it was my father, at last convinced that the whiskey bottle had gotten too far in the way of Stanley's performance as English Creek forest ranger, who turned Stanley in to their USFS superiors. Of course he did it on the assumption that Stanley would be plopped into a desk job at Region One headquarters while he was made to dry out. Instead an example was made: the Regional Forester cut Stanley loose. He drifted through ranch jobs, away from Montana, for ten years before coming back into our lives, in that pivot summer of 1939 when Alec broke with our parents; and even while we McCaskills went to war among ourselves, peace was sown between Stanley and my parents and for that matter me, who spent that sudden season of last boyhood trying to figure out how the truces of life are won or lost.
Shannon and Peter had to know which rig was mine, and wasn't I married, and didn't I have any kids, and as soon as that was worked through they confided that they were traveling with their grandparents and that their granddad was uptown getting transmission work done because the trailer home he was pulling was too much for his 3/4 ton pickup—  
"He needs to have a tonner," Petey said expertly.

Shannon swam like a blond minnow, Petey dogpaddled with an energy that would have lit up a tall building.

"Let's do funny dives," Shannon decreed to Petey. She of course went first. A small plane was passing over. "Hi, Mister Airplane!" she called out. "I'm an airplane too!" Making rumm rumm noises, she extended her arms like wings and hit the pool in an impressive crash landing.

"And I'm a...I'm a..." Petey was squinched with desperate thought until he hit upon "I'm a horse!" and with a prance and a whinny he splatted in after her.

"Jick, you do one," Shannon urged me.

"Yeah, do!" chimed Petey.

"Aw, I'm kind of old for--" The flicker of disappointment in their
He arrived on the Kootenai in the middle of the fire season of 1914 and saw at once that his main job was going to be lookout stations. "I remember one place we thought we might put a lookout was in the upper valley of Libby Creek. It wasn't much of a peak but it set out away from most of the rest of the country and gave a good view of some of the side drainages, so I told the ranger there to build a crow's nest in a big old tamarack on top of there and we'd try it out for a few years, so I went out to have a look and went up with him -- he'd drove railroad spikes into the trunk as a kind of ladder -- to this little deck he'd built around the top of the tree about 60 feet up from the ground. I got up there and discovered he hadn't provided any way to get onto this platform except over the edge, but we both snaked our way on okay and were up there looking the country over with field glasses when a little squall came over the back side of the mountain and blew like all hell for about half an hour. That tamarack started swaying back and forth about 20 feet and the pair of us sitting up on that platform without anything to hold onto except the trunk of the tree, we pretty near squeezed that off. Then when the squall blew out and I started to go down I had to swing out over the side and dangle my feet in the air to find one of those railroad spikes. I looked up at that white faced young ranger and said, "Son, I'll get a lookout building crew in here tomorrow."
From what I can judge, the CCC was like a lot of those New Deal programs—it was short of perfect, so it was criticized as worthless. But if anything, I have wished since that the CCC hadn’t been the least successful it was in some respects, such as the trails those work crews of the earlier years built into the Two. They opened up a lot of country which a person should have had to earn his way into, by roughing it... This was part of my father’s mixed feelings, wasn’t too.

The improved trails would be a help in getting equipment in to fight fires, as they were meant to be, but also any lamebrain with a 2 license plate can find his way up a mountain now.
Timber was being taken on the Kootenai under a homesteading provision. Claim after claim was being listed as farmstead, logged off and abandoned. Stanley invited Regional Forester Silcox up for a look. He took Silcox to a tract on Quartz Creek where "homesteaders" were cutting clean a magnificent stand of yellow pine. Stanley led Silcox up a clearcut side hill and let him look down. Silcox asked, "This is a homestead listing?"

"Yup," said Stanley, "a pumpkin homestead."

"Pumpkin homestead? What the hell you talking about?"

"Well sir, I don't know what anybody'd use this for unless they'd grow pumpkins on it and when the pumpkins got ripe why they'd just go along and cut 'em loose and let 'em roll down to the bottom of this hill and harvest 'em from there. Don't you figure?"
A way to think of Owen's earthfill is an hourglass. Tip it end for end to start the trickle of sand, and the grains of sand are seconds of time; they mount up into minutes, and then the total hour. In Owen's dam, the seconds are the "fines," the sand that locks together imperviously; when a glance at the pile tells you minutes have passed, that equals the more coarse material; the hour-pile itself is the shell over all else, the impervious cupping the impervious core down into place. Time containing... A pyramid-shaped container of time, to withstand the river.
Owen was surprisingly well-groomed for deskwork. He could take the hours, drafting, figuring, and turn them into... He was something like a clerk of ideas. The Corps officers didn't like it that he was touchy, but were enamored of his mix of diligence and imagination. Turn Owen loose on the fill ratios of the dredges and he wove a blend of soils.

Sangster had about accomplished his bridge. It stepped across the Missouri on four miles of stilts, a mid-air miracle of railroading.

The bridge was born doomed, to be encompassed by the damfill as it rose... Sangster received a lot of durable Snagster took some ribbing about that, engineering something permanent enough to be obliterated, but he would simply invite them to transport anything bigger than a pocketknife to Fort Peck without using his railroad.
O'Connell the left-wing Congressman, the sheriff happily saw, had an expression on him like he'd been drafted into the wrong army.
Slowly they each put a hand down on the other to where things begin.

That it had taken this long, had needed...

The domestic map of the Duffs (never ran smooth)

Nothing ran smooth. Only slowly they had noticed the awareness of it particularly hearing, in each other... Like sharing a sense of smell (if any) what registered on them was (the attraction of each other). Was it their fault that the domestic map had (altered)? Worn through at a seam?

Not any more. What was at home was not this. Hadn't been for

They told themselves

Careful at family gatherings, careful at O0, they'd nonetheless known.

Plural of spouse is spice... Each wanted half a mate more, (less) silence, They were taking the oldest human route to get there, argument, momma support, aim... the map that led to bed.

Maybe it was the O0 of time, by the end of next year all or most of them would be somewhere else,
The undersheriff Peyser was privately enjoying the sheriff's agitation. Moeller, the undersheriff from the Hinsdale end of the county, and Tate, the jail deputy in Glasgow, both had been yanked in and stationed here today by the sheriff. If any crook wanted to walk off with Valley County other than Fort Peck, today was the day.

Sheriff Kinnick scowled at the poker-faced Peyser and then the other two lunkheads, trying to think how to make best use of three men against a crowd of thousands. Mostly what the sheriff wanted to have happen, only Roosevelt himself could achieve: a short harmless presidential appearance at the back end of the train, accept a bouquet and kiss Miss 4-H Beef on the cheek, and scoot back inside the railroad car. Even doing it that way wouldn't be bulletproof, but
"Nature never rejoices, and never mourns," a better writer once summed it all. Nurture, though, constantly connives at both.
cattle-like, each nudging onto the next and by doing so, gradually bending the weave of the herd. In the way the logs touch to each other, their swirl mingles into an eddy of my memory. My father is to ride in one of the last cattle drives in our region of Montana.

I am ten or less at the time, which makes this some thirty years ago, and because of school I am not to go along. He and the other riders are gone for four or five days—another day or so of commotion and preparation before they at last saddled up and jangled away—and the story comes back with him. On a bridge across the Missouri River, when Dad stationed himself in the middle of the span to haze the herd along, the cattle broke into a run. Their heavy gallop of rhythm began to vibrate the bridge like a huge twanging string, then quickly the riders slowed the herd back to safety. "But I got to wonderin' for a minute or so there whether that bridge was gonna hold up, don't ye think I didn't," I heard from Dad—hear it still—and saw forever the rapid plait of running animals. Their pattern is the driftlogs' rhythm of nudge, as if the single scene in my mind and items merely swap in and out of the logs might moo, the cattle give off splinters.
father rode in one of the last several days' cattle drives in our region of Montana. I must have been ten or less at the time, which would make it some thirty years ago, and because I was in school, I did not get to go along. He and the other riders were gone for four or five days--another day or so of commotion and preparation before they at last saddled up and jangled away--and a lively new story came back with him. On some bridge across the Missouri River, when Dad stationed himself in the middle of the span to haze the herd along, the cattle broke into a run. Their heavy gallop of rhythm began to vibrate the bridge like a huge twangling string, then quickly the riders slowed the herd back to safety. "I got to wonderin' for a minute or so there whether that bridge was gonna hold up, don't ye think I didn't," I heard from Dad when he returned home; from his friends, some who were on the trail drive and more who weren't, I have heard over the years the growing tale of the bridge stampede which nearly dropped Charlie Doig and the whole christly caboodle into the Missouri.
I am always amazed when someone from elsewhere opens his yap and begins claiming how terrifically much he likes "Montana." It tempts me to ask, Is that so? Which one? Because this state seems to me one of the more complicated collections of geography.
Keeping Days

and that... alphabet; start: summer 1940 when I came up again.

- war was on in Europe
- quite a commotion in our farm, too.
  
  (Mac's younger sister moved to town)

- it was a funny time. Not kind of funny
  
  "you laugh you shall live and all, but funny
  
  at odds with reality?

- I am not naturally an warpath against
  
  human race.

- summer of breakdowns

- crew goes to tm, gets drunk
Keeping the Days possible scenes:

--the haying crew at a meal, starting with Marie fixing the food.
--could do a long swatch of dialogue, argument.

--Pete and Jick repairing harness etc. before haying (make this chime w/ similar scene in E Crk)
  (Jick: I'd gone on over and...)

--Jick and Jim Bill are sent to Scotch Heaven to cannibalize an old piece of haying equipment.

--Jick takes over driving the power buckrake?
You couldn't even believe Jim Bill Rango when he said hello.

"Down in that musselshell country," he'd start right in as soon as we nooned up in the hayfield, "I was in on a big cattle gather one fall. All the outfits from Big Porcupine Creek to the mouth of the Marias had their crews out there. This one by-God day, right in there with the cows and calves we were shoving down into a kind of a basin, was this helluva big bull elk. Somebody got the idea-- I'm not saying it was me-- that why don't we rope and brand that elk. Well, you know that was the next thing we did. We had to swing community loops big enough to get over his antlers, of course, but by God we got him down there, and so now we got this big elk there on the ground and started bringing in the branding irons on him.
insert into Jim Bill's elk story:

"About like the kid here." (He indicates Jick, who throughout the book is ticked off at JB's calling him "kid", "kidde", etc.)

Meaning of course me.
There'd been a total turnover of the crew since the year before.

Bud Dolson, who'd always taken time off from his Anaconda smelter job to run the mower for Pete, was out on the Coast in an aluminum plant.

Texas riders Perry Fox was dead; the last of a handful of Texans who who had looped north with a trail drive and never reverted... No more would we see Perry's creaky frame on the dump rake.

So, not counting Pete, I was the veteran of the Noon Creek crew,

carrying on

at the ripe age of not quite sixteen.
While the country greened and greened, the crop and livestock forecasts had flourished, too. The radio was reporting the best wheat outlook in twenty years at Fromberg and Froid and Dutton and Wolf Point, and any number of places in between. Down on the Musselshell the big 00 outfit sold its wool for 22 cents a pound, best in years. The biggest lamb buyer operating in the Two country, Morrell Looney, had baaa recently been out for a look at the Spencer and Withrow bands, and Dode and Les each contracted their lambs with him for 00 1/2 a pound. So maybe, as the next-year-is-here prophets were claiming, prospects were truly on the rise.

Yet it still seemed to me a hall of a time to have to step out into the world. I didn't envy Alec that, at all.
A thing I will always remember from the years of the Depression and its drought was the talk of averages. How far below the average of the past ten years the lamb or calf or wool or wheat or barley price was. Even more than that, for here was arithmetic written fresh on the sky every day, how the year's moisture to date—or more likely, lack of it—compared, with the annual average. Month by month, and especially when the growing season was underway, those precipitation averages were followed in the newspapers and on the radio. And the attention to them, in fact, once caused Bill Reinking to write in the Gleaner that much unnecessary figuring was being done—all that was needed to sum up Montana's climate was to average out Hell and the North Pole.
It is similar to this: from about the fifth grade through high school, I had a real mind for arithmetic. Could multiply sizable sets of numbers in my head, and add a column as fast as I could read it. Then that skill with numbers withered as mysteriously as it had blossomed in me. I can only think that my mind must have been trying itself out, flexing itself against whatever it could find, and arithmetic served for the moment. Now it seems to be bits of memory that my mind wants to spend its time on.
Lined up prettily, the sheriff nervously noticed, for anyone up there on the bluff with a .30-06 deer rifle.

Mrs. O'Connell, a beauty, was put just to the right of FDR and slightly behind; some sharp aide knew that when people gawked at her, an eyeful they'd get a full eye-dose of FDR as well.

Over on the other side of the main platform

others

While the crowd on the platform laughed at FDR's intonation of the Congressman the rich ninny, O'Connell stood stony-faced, arms crossed and his topcoat folded over them. (O'Connell could have a gun, even, it occurred to the sheriff.)

O'Connell wanted a new gun down 6 q' down just made fun of.
Here he was, just trying to hold Valley County to proper standards with a few lamebrain undersheriffs and his own angry mettle. And look what it took for even a President: these hen herds of politicians to be catered to, to be won over with charm. Multiply the swarms of them here by nationwide and it must be staggering, the chitchat a President had to do.
Tailing around after Roosevelt, it felt to the sheriff as if the whole county was under siege. A couple hundred of the National Guard had been called into uniform and deployed to help with crowd control.

The sheriff felt insulted. What, did they think his county was so lawless they had to throw cordons of militia between its citizenry and the President?
Sheriff Kinnick thought he was prepared, after Roosevelt's 1934 visit to Fort Peck, for the commotion of it all; but the confident gaudy President and the overbearing staff of the presidency and the mob of politicians shocked him all over again.
This was different. The crowd at Glasgow had been a holiday gathering, people in their Sunday best
Get him
"Shoot when he goes to get out of that chair."

Van Dree

"It'd be interesting," (sheriff said.)

"Whoopie, daisy, " (met'l photoq said) "Give it a try now, buddy." (offer #Dr in up.)

[I cast this as flashback y. sheriff, as #Dr speaks from back of train?]
had an expression on him

O'C, sheriff happily saw, looked like he'd been drafted into a wrong army.

Mrs. O'C, pretty as a posy

'sheriff had to shift w/ wind a bit (one BK Wheeler o."

Spain, (Pueblo News) said,
The cripple bastard himself showed off at the dam again that year, to the sheriff's furious despair, after they'd managed to pen up the river. FDR at his most Franklin-Delanoian, jaunty as if he'd built the dam with his own pink hands, when the fact was he couldn't maneuver himself from his special train to the presidential car without a gang of help. Sheriff Kimmick thought he was prepared, after Roosevelt's 1934 visit to Fort Peck, for the commotion of it all; but the confident gaudy President and the staff apparatus of the presidency and the mob
of politicians shocked him all over again. As sheriff he had to be in on the arrangements, and as a Democratic officeholder like all the rest of them he was part of that, too. But [inside himself], Carl Kinnick felt fate was unfairly picking on him: a thousand counties in the United States, and here was Roosevelt majestically materializing in his roostering around.

So, he hardly knew where to start in being indignant. The throng that began gathering around the Great Northern station in Glasgow hours before the President’s train was due. The elaborate chain of command it took to get the simplest thing done, such as roping off the station platform to keep the crowd back a bit. The on-loan police from Great Falls, who figured they knew everything because they were from a city. The delegations who wanted to talk to the President about one water scheme or another; you’d think, the sheriff thought, the damned Missouri was going to irrigate this entire side of the earth.

Under it all, the real nightmare: what if somebody took a shot here at Roosevelt the way that crackpot did in Chicago?

The sheriff was no connoisseur of history, but he knew a lot about blame. Oh, sure, the gunman there at the Chicago convention in '33 got
the mayor instead; but people in Montana were good shots. Supposedly the Secret Service was to protect the President from assassin peril, but where were those boys in Chicago? No, if the President—particularly this President—was killed in Carl Kinnick's county, that would be it for his sheriffing. He'd might as well go pick grit with the chickens, if that happened.

And unfortunately he could think of just countless ways it could happen. Somebody mad about being let go from his job at the dam. Some liquored-up bottomlander who was sore about losing his land to the dam. Some Communist; you never knew what that bughouse bunch was up to, but the report was that they hated FDR for keeping the country from going far enough to the left; incredible to the sheriff.

Or some women. Women hadn't taken their turn yet at the art of assassinating. God, if they ever started cutting loose at a President...

No, there was every kind of possibility out there in the Glasgow and Fort Peck crowds, and one of the uncomfortable thoughts wasn't only the danger to Roosevelt. Supposedly the Secret Service guards were to humanly shield the President from assassin peril, but where were those boys
in Chicago? The sheriff knew that if it came to that, if he spotted somebody pulling out a gun, he'd put himself between that gun barrel and Roosevelt. He'd take death. There wasn't any choice, sheriffing.
The crippled kingpin himself showed off at the dam again after they'd managed to pen up the river, to the sheriff's steaming despair.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt at his rosiest, jaunty as if he'd built Fort Peck Dam with his own pink hands, when the fact was he couldn't maneuver himself from his special train to the presidential car without a gang of help. Glasgow, the depot sign read as the President's entourage disgorged from the train, but to Carl Kinnick it might as well have announced Nightmare.

Waiting, watching, the sheriff hardly knew where to start in being
Plentywood was a nice-looking town. I said as much to Riley, and asked, "What're you going to write about here?"

"Politics."

Something tickled in my mind, some news from far back, when I was growing up during the Depression.

"You mean, during the Depression, by any chance?"

Riley confirmed. "The Red Corner, this was called. Sheridan County elected socialists of various kinds from World War One on into the Depression. There was a Communist newspaper here."

"Christamight," I said. "People here are going to love being reminded of that."

"They don't own the past," Riley said. "It's public property."

"How am I supposed to take a picture of politics?" asked Ariah.
KOA swimming pool
- I am silvery, like a tree snag weathering
- tommor pickup
- kids from Judith Gap
- Jack was taught to swim in Y-Fake Beaver dam
- Uncle minnows
- I wondered what it takes to get committed to a mile in
- March a ski driver?
- jick change along in pool
- jick_player

"You do one," Shannon urged me. "Yeah, do!"
... my trunks streaming water,
... amazed giggles of Shannon & Patsy.
My father was not easily spooked. But in the 1930's when projects of the New Deal were being set up as fast as the alphabet could be divvied out, one of Franklin Roosevelt's thinkers gathered federal people of the CCC and AAA and FERA and county extension agents and even forest rangers such as my father, all of them summoned to Plentywood for a meeting about conservation measures. When my father came home uncharacteristically silent and withdrawn, for the first day or so my mother and Alec and I wondered if he was sick. It turned out he was, although not in any physical way. Sickened by what he had seen in that drought-devastated corner of Montana—the soil becoming dust, the spiny dikes of tumbleweeds at every fenceline, the people driven from the land.
"Hi, Gyp. The Board of Health hasn't assassinated you yet, huh?" responded Riley as he flipped open a menu. I suppose he just has an instinct for this sort of thing, for now a look of horror broke over him. "What's this I see?" In excruciating letters, Riley spelled out:

"pee ay ess tee ay! Gyp, you always swore pasta would never be allowed on your premises!"

All the affability foozled out of Gyp. "Man's gotta make a living," he muttered. "Times change."

"Tch, tch," Riley tched gravely. "But okay, I'll give the stuff a shot. I'll have the alfredo de gorgonzola alla shishkebab con rizo, please."

"Riley, it's bad enough," Gyp exploded, "me having to serve fancy macaroni, without having to listen to you talk it, too! Now goddammit, what do you wanna eat?"

Riley happily slapped the menu shut. "White cheeseburger, fries, and an Oly."
earlier elf crack, the BB was not on the newspaper premises on a holiday--into just going with the back-up piece and picking a nice one of Mariah's file photos to illustrate it with, happy Labor Day to him too. The day's wind must have sharpened our appetites, for without even any debate we all three then bypassed the bar and lounge and set ourselves for supper.

"Hi, kids. What's it gonna be?"

The quite veteran waitress dealt menus to us as if we were the week's prize customers. Which maybe was the case. The dining area, done in purple and gold, was big enough to play basketball in, but we were the only three prospective eaters.

Mariah said she'd just go to the salad bar. In answer to my suspicious squint at her, she assured me no, she was not turning into a granola, she simply wanted a green feast before it all went out of season and the High Line entered its next thirteen months of winter. Myself, I studied the menu for something substantial and chose the special.

"Same as him. He's my guiding light," chirped Riley, who hadn't even opened his menu to interrupt his yammering to Mariah about what story
A Hamm's clock above the cash register, Budweiser lampshades on the dangling overheads, other beer signs glowing here and there for attention. The jukebox had Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings singing to each other about various toots they'd been on. Wherever the Labor Day crowd was, it wasn't here; only a handful of customers in ballcaps and straw Stetsons, plus a wide young woman behind the bar who looked like she could handle any of them with one hand. Remembering the floor warriors of the Whoop-Up in Shelby, I hoped that was the case.

Mariah and I each ordered our usual and Riley had his usual unusual, you might say, by summoning up a Harvey Wallbanger.

"Whup, wait a minute here!" I jumped him triumphantly. "You already had one of those on the trip. In Ennis or Dillon or someplace back there."

"Jick, a man never wants to let himself get reliably unpredictable," he told me, whatever that meant.

No sooner were Willie and Waylon done songstering than a color television started droning in the corner. I wonder if someday somebody will invent silence.
a round, can I, Mariah Montana?"

"Best offer I've had since Shelby," she responded. Then to me:

"You don't mind if we hang on in here a little while, do you? We'll let ourselves in the Bago quiet as we can."

No, it couldn't be said that I minded. Major alarm was the more accurate description of how I felt about the two of them cozying together over glassfuls of inspiration.

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

The bar of this Lass in a Glass emporium was an average enough place.
"What exactly," a suddenly leery Riley asked, "is tonight's special?"

"You're saved," I granted reluctantly. "Chicken fried steak has
never been known to oink."

If I thought that Hutteritic Biotic videctis supper ought to be
enough birthday event to hold me for another sixty-five years, I had
another think coming. Riley of course was the culprit. The three of
us were harmlessly on our way out of the supper club, headed for the
motorhome ready to tuck in for the night, when he made the error of
trying to be nice.

"Tell you what, Jick. Just to show you my heart's in the right
place," patting 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 smart off with anything 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
By the time the bar lady brought our fluids, Riley was back to being his obstreperously curious self. "That's some sign out front," he broached to her. "How'd this place get its name?"

"You don't know the half of it. Everybody here in town calls her"—the bar lady indicated out into the night where the neon maiden was

Everybody truced while Mariah went to load up at the salad bar and 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 was just starting to dive into my dishes when the sound of German, a lot of voices' worth, cut loose in the lobby.

I knew who it had to be, but even so I could not help being flabbergasted when the men with chinline beards, from young to quite old, in their black trousers and black work jackets and bright-colored shirts, began filing in like a throng off an immigrant ship. The Hutterites
they--we, he kept phrasing it with what he must have thought was a
generously inclusive glance at me--ought to press on to next, Fort Peck
dam, maybe. I'd for damn sure guide him, I thought to myself, right out
of the vicinity of the McCaskills if I but could.

Fort Peck I knew a little something about from when I was a kid
during the Depression and construction of that earthen dam across the
Unused in W. Post review of A COUNTRY YEAR, by Sue Hubbell

This is the ultimate kind of an author's first book, one that has been being written all her life.

(In squinty type at the front, the book's lovely design is attributed to someone whose name deserves to be writ larger: Cynthia Krupat.)

The rhythm of the seasons—which after Leopold, Half Borland in 60 and Donald Culross Peattie in "An Almanac for Moderns" remains a fine logical way to do a book—

the ways in which her existence crosses that of other creatures—"chemical bundles".

it's natural to wonder how similar Hubbell's account of creekside life is to Dillard's Pulitzer-winning Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. To the credit of both writers, their modes and moods aren't much alike. Recall how Pilgrim began brilliantly but chillingly with the paw prints of blood her prowsome tomcat tracked across Dillard at night, "I looked as though I'd been painted with roses." Hubbell begins with songbirds, indigo buntings belting out "complicated tangles of couplets," that "believe they own the place, and it is hard to ignore their claim." Trying to think what it would be like to have either of these for a neighbor, I would choose Dillard if I wanted to find out what Rilke really meant, but Hubbell if I wanted help getting my pickup out of a mudhole.
Cros-ventre was in the same basic business it had been born to. When that first freight wagoneer chose the site, supplying stores operated in a way they have long since ceased to—ranch families charging their groceries all year until payday finally came, the calves or lambs were shipped, and then came in and paid off the entire bill.

Original, if this site was called anything at all it was called The Middle. You see, settlement here dated itself back to when some weary freight wagoneer pulled in for the stew. "I can tell you a time, I hired a wolf, to come up into this country. Wouldn't know it now, but there was wolves all through here, once. Anyway, the wolf showed up leading a stove-up old skinny roan he called Scorpion. I kind of studied the nag. 'He don't look as rugged as his name,' I said. The wolf says, 'Haw, I call him that for his brand.' On the left hip was that fancy M of the Mankato Cattle Company over in Dakota"—Stanley's finger traced on the table the legs and startling tail of the Mankato. "It was curious, of course, how a Mankato horse got this far from home, but I didn't figure
a merchant. If only there had been money and jobs and markets, people Gros Ventrians, and I suppose people anywhere,
deluge that floated Noah. Besides those intentional ranks, some yards also had original cottonwoods that were sizable before the town itself was ever thought of, and those trunks were huge as those of ancient elms. The tree beside the Heaneys' front gate was bigger around than the wheel of a hay rake.

That hobbled stirrups lore, though, vaults me slightly ahead of the story. For my father and my mother as well showed up at Pete's a few hours before that, toward the end of the afternoon of this first day of windrow raking by Perry and me. My father'd had to go to headquarters in Great Falls for one reason or another, and my mother rode along with him; on their way home they swung by