

The Montanans

--Tam is a photographer for the Billings newspaper, her ex-husband Nelson a columnist or feature writer. They're sent out together to tour the state to do centennial series--statehood anniversary date is Nov. 8--and Tam persuades Jick to come along. Perhaps Jick and Tam in his camper--he got it for a trip he made to Alaska, a la Clifford Shearer, to see his second daughter up there, perhaps in Juneau--and Nelson in his own rig of some sort, fixed up with typewriter and place to sleep.

Jick is persuaded to come because his wife has recently died and Tam insists he needs to get out of his funk, and will also be useful to the trip because of all he knows of Montana and its people.

Tam is perhaps forty, or nearing it. (Jick is 65 in 1989) She and Nelson were married for 6 or 8 years, split up 2 or 3 years ago but still are on speaking and working terms, if a bit tartly. The book should use the scenes she is ~~photo~~ photoing; Jick perhaps can be record-keeper of her pics.

They perhaps encounter a tv crew at various times, out doing the same as they are. Either the tv crew or them has to fend, in an interview, with a logging buddy of Jick's who when asked what he did in the woods straightforwardly says he was the pigfucker, and won't be budged from that singular term.

The Montanians;

--shd the 100 years that Jick et al. or retracing follow a geographical path--
Va. City (which predates statehood; maybe Butte instead?)
--Plentywood for the '30s
--Colstrip for '70s

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--the Montana towns Jick, Tam & Nelson visit could each be given a fictitious cafe, bar, hotel, whatever--my version of centennial library projects, etc. When possible, it could be a place that burned down, went out of business, was torn down, in the town's actual past? In any case, these created places could be simply fit in beside or between existing businesses, and the acknmts make it plain what I've done.

~~The Montanans~~

(possible lead:)

^{I'd} ~~I had~~ told her no. ^{N-O} Three times. Actually, It must have been four, because
Tamsin never began ^{even} listening until you ~~din~~ ^{kn} it into her at least ^{A duplicate} three times...

(after a page or two, reveal who Tamsin and Nelson are:)

...my everlasting elder daughter and my ex-son-in-law.

in the same vicinity, show that Jick's wife died not long ago; someone else is running the ranch for him now, he is at loose ends, and Tam is therefore determined to drag him into the trip.

~~REVISOR~~ better version of lead(?): I told her nothing doing, I wanted no part of this.

any of

To the Two

(possible section heading instead of High Line; also, Central could be dropped and everything of their travels beyond Missoula III put into Everything East; final section still would be The Day.

C-Day (Centennial Day): possible title for final section.

The Montanians

Have Jick say something to the effect (keeping hidden that the writer is Leona's son): His mother's side of the family was from Gros Ventre, and it was ~~at the~~ ~~town centennial~~ when he came to write about the town centennial that he hooked up with Tam.

--Developments such as this are to plummet into one book from another, as odd pieces of the past do in life; as I write this (Jan. 23, '86) I'm waiting to hear of Wally Ringer's death and the funeral plans, which will plunge me back into White Sulphur Springs, the Ringer (and McAfee) side of the family, memories of all the burials I've already been to there.

Jick begins the centennial trip not regarding himself as a participant, simply a kind of protector of Maria--a chaperone, maybe--but he early finds that the past is confronting him: glimpse of his first wife in Missoula Buttreys, memory of Wisdom Johnson as they drive through the Big Hole, of Ed Heaney as they're in Butte, and then the discovery of Angus's fate in the cache of Isaac Reese letters at MHS in Helena.

in High Line ch., the past continues to work on him as they arrive at the St. Mary divide--the Reservation, the Rockies; to Gros Ventre and the cemetery, where Toussaint is buried near the Cree crosses (and Alec's grave); to Pine Butte, and memory of Bob Marshall; to Shelby and story of Stanley Meixell being there (along with Mac^{Beth} and Beth?) (use story of someone--Beth?--dancing with Dempsey's brother; and of Stanley being in bed with local girl when her friend or sister comes by and uses her chamberpot. Stanley: "I will always believe something was missed, by not inviting her into bed.")

Central: the past really catches up with Jick when they go to the Crazy Mtns, for Riley to stop off at his family's ranch, and Jick meets Leona again. As they head on to Lewistown, the Missouri River, the Russell Refuge etc., she ~~dx~~ comes with them?

over

Everything East, Jick is returned to the Ekalaka area, where he was on the Custer Nat'l Forest in his brief FS career; they go to the Custer battlefield, he recalls Toussaint's story of hearing of Custer's defeat--dance at Hardin, where the Roadkill Angels play, and Jick and Maria dance together. Does this part of the trip include Jordan, faded symbol of homesteading that brought the McCaskills to America and Montana?

The End Toward Idaho
High Line

Central
Everything East
The Day

turn around

C suggests: put in more "character" moments, personal moments of the characters,
such as the WW gate scene.

cd 1 73

Linda Bierds ms comments

Linda's points, June 7 '89, after re-read of ch. 1, a committee meeting scene, grizzly and Shelby scenes:

--move info on ~~reenter~~ Mariah's bgnd out of Baloney Express scene, to keep the Jick-Mariah dialogue as keenly paced as the drive and the geezers' stories. (my notion is it may go between Moiese and Virginia City scenes)

--quicken the pace of the cent'l committee meeting, possibly by cutting Nan Hill, trimming the Good Help interview, seeing if Merle is necessary. (I'd seen this as a big set piece to match the rodeo in Eng Crk or the schoolhouse dance in R Fair--but there's no actual reason why it has to be. Linda points out there's an inherent lack of physical action in the committee meeting, compared to those other set pieces. This could be quite liberating--get the ranch scene and committee scene zinging along closer to the pace of the traveling scenes.)

cd 2 of 3

Linda Bierds' comments continued:

She points out that the 1st ch. had a strong ruminative scene by Jick about every 40 pp, powerful undertheme, and that ch. 2 doesn't yet have that.

(I haven't yet written one such intended ch. 2 scene, Jick alone out on the ranch. Linda did see one of these ruminations within Jick's memory of killing the bear. He'll have another at Chinook. I'll have to see if another is necessary before Chinook, while they're traveling toward there--Gt. Falls etc. Make use of swimming pool scene for one?)

cd 373

Linda Bierds' comments continued:

She sees the book, as I do, as a braid of three themes: most ostensibly the centennial, and the Mariah-Riley relationship, and Jick facing his own mortality. She admires the way I've woven these in and out of the 1st ch. by now, and urges it be done in rest of book as well.

(Talking this over with Carol, C sees this as primarily Jick's book, as Linda does. I know that emotionally, but must watch my tendency to have the major characters all equal in time and attention. Must do the same in regard to the centennial and the history; they're to be the occasion for the book, not its main point. All proportions and attention must lead toward Jick's role, which grows to become his and Leona's.)

mention earlier in the book how Montana is emptying out.

Don't overload the ms--resist the temptation to use good file card material just because I have it; test it against pace and scope of the book, all the time.

loosen the time frame; take out specific calendar references etc. and just measure things in terms of Mariah and Riley being up against deadlines (which are apparently weekly, but maybe don't need to be designated either). Occasional comments about season, through weather or what people are doing--schoolbusses appear, for instance--should carry the sense of time, less calendar-driven than English Creek or even Rascal Fair.

or weathermaker

Jick as lightning rod: Mariah and Riley are able to do stories only where he has one of his timestorms of history.

--this could tie back into Eng Crk and Jick's remark about the weather of the mind when he saw Lila Sedge on the street.

The centennial trip is to be an epic for Jick; an odyssey.

There must be ferocities among Jick, Riley and Maria.

be unabashedly anecdotal; people are.

This book shd be my contemporary House of Sky; whatever I feel about Montana now,
shd animate Jick and his story.

The Hills West of Noon; or, West of Noon (alternative titles for Maria)

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--tv crew that Jick, Tam & Nelson keep encountering could be from KUSA-TV; Jick nicknames them the kussers.

--check nat'l call letters to see if KUSA actually exists; other possibility, KUZN; or KYO (coyotes) .

Ride With Me, Blonden Montana

The Roadkill Angels

When Jick agrees, Maria tells him to meet her and Riley in Missoula in a week.

During that week, Jick:

--goes out to his ranch

--attends GV Centennial Committee meeting

--then drives over Rogers Pass, on 200: describe in an evocative graf, weather different on one side of the Divide than the other, etc. Drier?^m

Centen'l Com'tee meets in back rm of Med Lodge?

I went uptown (after Maria leaves) (to the Medicine Lodge?)

--"I'm goin' on a trip." (Jick tells bartender) (He can then explain about the Centennial)

--(Out of ~~that~~ comes his reason for going to the GV centen'l committee meeting in a night or so.)

possible revise: move Jick's visit to his herder and his ranch into 2nd section of the book, "To the Two". Opening line, "The next evening I was on home ground," could begin the section.

If this is done, some other scene(s) of the first section need to be strengthened--they maybe need it anyhow. One option: have them, and unfortunately me, go down a mineshaft in Butte, if that's still possible. Such a scene could make use of Jick's (and my) fear.

Another possibility: scene at Beaverhead Rock n. of Dillon, for Lewis & Clark resonance.

--call Mindy and Fred Quivik abt mineshaft possibility?

2nd section, "To the Two," perhaps shd include a trail ride up into the mtns, for Bob Marshall material; cd draw on our '77 hike material and anything in my Marshall file.

--if done, this wd put Marshall along with Chief Joseph and Dempsey-Gibbins in this section. The 1st section thus wd look at some chronology--buffalo, Va. City, Butte, historical reflection in Helena--and the second at some personalities; the third cd look at present topics, such as coal, discontent with history as in the Muster Out Custer group.

The Toothless Ferries could be met up with again at a rest stop on the way to Billings, along the Yellowstone--there's a nice one somewhere there that we stopped at on our way to Sept. '87 conference in Billings. The Ferries could be making a toilet stop, or helping somebody jumpstart a car; maybe better, have them congregate in the toilet, while Jick is in the stall, around the "will you help me out with a loan?" letter on the wall, such as we encountered in March '88 Calif. trip? Jick cd notice, without particularly commenting on, a # of cars outside when the Bago pulls in; or better, he begins to overhear the Ferries comment as they ~~line~~ file in to take a pee.

does Riley have to refer at some point to Jick's feelings of loss about Alec?

Making Montana sit for its portrait.

make something of the fact, by Jick's musing or dialogue, that Riley for yrs slept next to another McCaskill--^{Mariah}--and now is reduced to sharing bed with Jick.

--this has a reversible implication: Jick sharing bed with Riley, eventually is to end up doing so with Leona.

Make sure the last few pages have some fulsomeness; don't just end as quickly as I can, a tendency Tom Stewart caught me at in Sea Runners and Rascal Fair.

if the Roadkill Angels don't work for the cent'l dawn scene, put them in the
Chinook supper~~x~~ club scene?

Riley, and to some extent Mariah, must be the smartmouth of this book; Jick has to lay back a bit from what he was in Eng Crk, be the straight man or wry observer, so the book doesn't become too jokey.

(wd-be actor)

Jick, Tam and Nelson begin in a Va. City bar. Young bartender asks them:

~~He asks~~ "Gentlemen and lady. How can I alter your consciousness?"

Jick: You can start by not talking that nasty way. Then you can get me a Scotch
ditch, (remembers the Montanian pub'g co. is paying for their trip)
light on the moisture. Make it a Johnny Walker Red.

Tam specified for herself: A Lord ditch.

Nelson: I'll try a G-ball.

Jick wonders, as he and Tam are downing Johnny Walker and Calvert, how they ever
let it into the family a guy who ruins whiskey with ginger ale. But Nelson orders
a different drink every place they go in Montana, trying the dustiest most obscure
bottles on the shelves. (Somewhere a bartender asks him hopefully, "Need another
OO, mister? --sloe gin, or some such. In Havre or Harlem, he orders a creme de
menthe, looks at Tam and quotes from Winter in the Blood, she was a Cree and no good.)

Eventually Nelson orders something he'd had before, and Jick catches him at it:

"Wait a minute, you had one of those. In Townsend. Or OO or someplace."

"Jick, you never want to let yourself get reliably unpredictable."

a man

himself

over

Nelson begins his centennial series out of that Va. City bar, with a lead something like: "Bartenders are earth's angels." It goes on to celebrate Montana's first bartender, whoever he was; and his ilk ever since, who forgive you when you're not coloring inside all the lines, etc.

Tam has muttered, that night, about ~~the problem~~ problem of illustrating: she does a Weegee-like shot (through an upended glass, or some such). Jick reads the column and sees the pic, ~~then~~ asks if the publisher is really going to pay her and N. for going around the state doing stuff like this? We'll find out, she replies.

make the Bago more of a character in the last third of the book, to stick in the reader's mind?