PRAIRIE NOCTURNE

a novel

IVAN DOIG

SCRIBNER
New York  London  Toronto  Sydney  Singapore
ALSO BY IVAN DOIG

FICTION
Mountain Time
Bucking the Sun
Ride with Me, Mariah Montana
Dancing at the Rascal Fair
English Creek
The Sea Runners

NONFICTION
Heart Earth
Winter Brothers
This House of Sky
Overture

A story wants to be told a certain way, or it is merely the alphabet badly recited. At the right time the words borrow us, so to speak, and then out can come the unsuspected sides of things with a force like that of music. This is the story of the three of us, which I am more fit to tell now than when I was alive.

—on the flyleaf of the diary of Susan Duff, discovered among the papers of the WW Cattle and Land Company, Wesley Williamson special collection, Harvard University, in the year 2025
THE LAST RINGLETED girl had finished off the ballad on a hopeful note—she would have given her ears for a praising word from Miss Duff—and night and quiet came again to the house on Highland Street. Regular as the curtain of nightfall was Susan Duff’s routine in closing away her teaching day. Shoulders back, her tall frame straightening expectantly even though there was no one in the house to meet for the evening but herself, she shuffled sheet music into its rightful order, tallied the hours of lessons in the secondhand mercantile ledger she kept handy atop the piano and cast an eye over the schedule of impending pupils, then the balky old doors of the music parlor were slid shut. Next a freshening of her face with a rinse of cold water; one adjusting glance into the mirror, never two; hairpins taken out, and her chestnut hair shaken down. Onward to her stovetop supper, which she raced through as though still making up for her father’s interminable graces over expiring food. Now, with a pat to the kitchen and a cursory locking of doors and windows, she was ready to ascend.

As fixed as a star, the telltale glow of her gable window appeared
over Helena at the last of dusk and burned on past respectable bedtime. You might think a woman of her early climb in life, singled out by her father's God for a soaring voice to lift His hymns and then casting away choirsong for the anthems of a harsh young century, would find it a hard comedown to be faced with a nightly audience of only herself. You'd be as wrong as you could be, Susan would have you know in a finger snap.

This night, however, no sooner was she upstairs than she whipped to a halt in front of the alcove of window, her gaze drawn down the hillside to the state capitol dome, resting as it did on the center of the government of Montana like a giant's copper helmet. The dome still was alight with the festoon of bulbs that had greeted 1924 three months ago, which seemed to her uncalled for.

"Blaze," Susan addressed the civic constellation in the coarseground Fifeshire burr she was born to, "see if I care."

She gave a throaty chuckle at herself and wended her way toward her desk. Pausing to choose a lozenge from the cut-glass jar there, she tasted it thoughtfully with the tip of her tongue, then swirled it in her mouth as if it would clear away beginner lessons and quavery approximations of high C; poor Flossie, last pupil of the day and absolute farthest from a worthwhile voice. No recital there, she reflected, except what I'll hear from her mother.

Still caught in thought, Susan automatically cast a glance around to judge the state of her housekeeping up here and reached her usual conclusion that she needed the availability of these spacious hours beyond dark more than the place demanded housecleaning. The atticlike room extended the full length of the house—loft quarters for a married pair of servants, this must have originally been—and she treated the expanse like a rambler cottage perched above the formal quarters of downstairs. The rolltop desk, a divan, a Victrola, what had been her father's Morris chair and footstool, onyx-topped sidetables, a blue-and-black knitted comforter on the sill seat of the strategically aimed gable window, swayback sets of bookshelves, a spinet piano, a typewriter sitting composurely on a rolling secretarial table, a highly unreliable new thing called a radio set standing on a sturdy side cabinet, the whopping Duff family Bible on a commemorative reading stand of its own, all populated what was in actual fact her bedroom.
This mob of comforts drew her up out of public day as if lifting her into a lifeboat, and Susan tallied the necessity of this each time, too. Liberal with the night, resourceful as she probably ever was going to be in what that Bible would have called her fortieth year under heaven, she held to the belief that she was most her reconstituted self in these upstairs hours, at this elevation where the minute hand did not count. The time of footlights and the song-led marches for the right of women to vote were tucked into the past as firmly as could be, and as to the tongues of the town down there beyond the base of the stairs, she could do nothing about those. But up here, what she could do was to get busy at life’s amended version of Susan Duff. There were encouraging letters to be written to favorite former pupils. (Tonight’s, which took lip-biting concentration, to the breathy young soprano whose recent lieder recital in Milwaukee had not found favor there; many a time Susan wished she could deal solely with the voices, shapes of sound standing free in the air, without the human wrappings.) This political city’s newspapers to be devoured, Anaconda Copper’s one for spite and the independent one for sustenance. Books in plenitude; currently she was trying to make her way through E.M. Forster and the murky doings in the Marabar Caves. Music, of course: her half-finished operetta Prairie Tide always awaited, always unnavigable; and the radio set sometimes brought in serenades from unimaginable distances and sometimes madly cackled out static; but the Victrola sang the songs of others perfectly on command, restorative in itself to a teacher of voice. Then too she still was secretary of the state chapter of the Over There Memorial Committee, which took her to a drafty meeting hall once a month and obliged her to see to official correspondence, clerical enough to cross the eyes, in between. Tonight, as always, she shifted workspots every so often, her tall solo figure suddenly on the move as if she were a living chess piece. Time did not lag here in her industrious garret; it was not permitted to.

When it was nearing midnight and she had just begun to salt away another day between diary covers, she faintly heard the turn of a key in the front door and then the rhythm of him coming up the stairs to her for the first time in four years.

“Susan? You might have changed the lock.”
He arrived on the wings of that commanding smile. The very model
It dawned on Susan that Wes was making this hard for him, depositing him out here in this magnificence, proffering him his moment in grand style, testing him. Deliberately?

"Ready when you are, Monty," issued from Wes now, not exactly an order but close enough.

Stiff as a cactus, Monty aimed himself at the crowding cliffs and suddenly let out:

"Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egypt land—"

There was a catch of breath, Monty’s and everybody else’s, then he sang on in a tone as deep as the sound of a bronze bell.

"Tell old Pharaoh
To let my people go.

When Israel was in Egypt land,
Let my people go.
Oppressed so hard, she could not stand,
Let my people go."

Wes listened with everything in him, the song taking him back through time. Back nearly as long as he could remember, Angeline Rathbun’s spirituals hovered over the white clotheslines behind the ranch house, indeed like angelic sea chanties wafting above a ship under sail. The carry of Monty’s voice, though, except when he sang while at his barn chores, had mostly been in evidence at branding time and roundup, when the other riders would encourage him to yell the cattle down out of distant coulees. That, and shouting tag-ends of jokes to his interlocutor, the announcer, in his rodeo period. This might mend that, and more. If he has it in him. If she can’t resist seeing if he has it in him. That skinny compass-needle word, if. All the directions it could waver to. But he had given this due thought, in many a long night, and come back to his starting point, the overpowering urge that now was the time if—that, again—the needful was ever to happen. It just might work. Please. Listening to Monty now, Wes put
Angus put aside the past for the moment, which was as long as he was ever able to. He remained bothered over the open hand of the Major, back down the slope where Susan was strenuously setting up shop. But Susan had always known her own mind, had she ever. Telling himself to confine his prying to the stubborn hinges of the door, Angus set to work opening the house on Breed Butte to the elements.

That night Susan put into her diary:

*So much for wishing for ghosts, when they line up in the mind to volunteer.*

*early* sun was sorting the green plaid of spring—blue-green of the timberline on Breed Butte, mossy green of her doddering barn roof, meadow green of the volunteer hay fostered by the creek—when Susan stepped out into the morning and around the corner of the house to gaze north. From growing up here, she could catch sight of a coyote the instant its lope broke the pattern of the grass on the farthest butte. So, she spotted without effort the horseback figure on its way across the benchland from Noon Creek, then could not blink away the duplicate figure next to it.

Eventually the two riders clopped into the yard and swung down, facing her with their reins drooping in their hands.

"Morning, Miss Susan," Monty said in short fashion. She could tell at a glance that he was full of second thoughts over this, about to go back for thirds.

Dolph appeared no more happy to be along than Monty was to have him. The pint-size cowboy reported unwillingly, "Ma'am, the boss says I got to tag along with Monty here, do any chores while you're schooling him up on this singing."

Susan paused over the knot of logic by which, if a woman was at risk from a man, two men were sent.

"You can chink." She indicated gaps between the logs of the house where hard weather had done its work. "The whole place can stand chinking, I'm sure. Mister Rathbun, come on in."

Looking doubly doleful, Dolph moved off in search of buckets and
“Surely you’re not afraid of a musical instrument.”
“Afraid, who said that? But . . . how do I go about it?”
The piano music startled Dolph where he was putting the weathered sash of a kitchen window. Mony’s voice thundered out sometimes atop the notes and sometimes not, the song lifting uncertainly over the valley.

A letter for you, Mister Williamson.”

Here? “Popular, am I. Thank you, Jenkins.” Wes plucked the envelope from the deskman’s hand and went on in past the oil portraits of one President Lowell after another, their own expressions carefully fixed in the obligation unto eternity to present the face of Harvard to heathen New York. Not until he reached the quiet library, deepest recess of the Club, did he hurriedly slit open the envelope with his penknife.

Her handwriting leapt to him, from love letters now consigned to ashes.

Dear Wes—

I thought you were due some accounting of our pupil, and it seemed best to send it to your lunch lair.

You will be pleased to hear we have made some strides, or rather, I have pushed and Monty has progressed in some steps. Some, I emphasize; less so in others. His vocal range is improving, although of course not yet as much as it ultimately must. His tone remains his strongest point. In presentation, he no longer stands as if he were made of warped barrel staves. All in all, after these first weeks, I can say Monty is in better possession of his voice. But his voice is not yet in possession of him, which is the breakthrough for a true singer.

You are missing quite the contest. He is a striver. Amenable, to a point, and stubborn as a stump beyond that. (He will not hear of using a music stand, insisting it flusters him to have that in his face. Besides, he indignantly tells
me, his memory is good enough for a few songs.)
Unfortunately he seems invincibly convinced that the lungs
installed in him at birth are adequate, but I am determined
to build him up, there in the solar plexus and below. The
flag of this expedition you have set us upon, Wes, reads not
"Excelsior!" but "Exercises!"
I must talk to you when you venture to our neck of the
woods again. I presume that may be soon? It is the buzz of
the countryside (I'm told) that you have bought the Two
Medicine & Teton railroad. The TM&T added to the
Double W—at this rate, you will possess the entire lower
end of the alphabet.
I will leave you with a scene of how our days go, Monty's
and mine. Yesterday when I demonstrated a note in the
uppermost range that I wanted him to practice, he balked.
"Can't reach that high one," says he.
"Monty, lacking proof that you can't, assume that you
can," say I.
"Just can't," he is adamant. "Sorry."
Such a look as I gave him. Then sprang to my feet and
dragged a straight-backed chair in from the kitchen and
climbed up on it. "This," I intoned down to him, "is a high
note." I then sang a perfectly normal lower C. "All others are
within reach without a chair."
It has been a lovely spring here in the Two, but is now
turning dry.

Sincerely, Susan

Wes assessed the unexpected flow of words from her. Soon, yes, but
not soon enough he would be back out there, over Merinell's fretful
protest and the plaints of his daughters who had their incipient debut-
tante hearts set on a European summer. Some more rounds of pacify-
ing, another spate of promising, and he would be able to head west in
relatively clear conscience.
He checked the clock ticking discreetly in the corner of the library.
He was late for his lunch with Phil Sherman, but Phil was always late
himself, entangled one sinuous way or another. He winced, catching
"That was here. Under our own roof."
"Monty deserves this chance to get out on his own. He's not ours to do with as we please, forever and ever, amen."
"Next thing to it. Monty still wouldn't have a pot to put under his bed if we didn't keep giving him a job."
"Giving him?" Wes grunted the words out. "You know better than that."
Whit ran a hand across his forehead. "Aaah. There's the woman, too."
"Susan Duff came into this of her own free will. She can take it."
"So you've already proved once."
"I told you at the time she's no concern of yours," Wes abruptly was giving this private speech his all. Whit eyed his brother there on the far side of the scarred old desk. Was his case of petticoat fever coming back? No, there had been more to the Duff woman than that. Which must have made it even worse for Wes. There were times, though, when he wondered whether Wes was secretly glad to have been cut out of the governor's race, even the hell of a way it was done. Not glad, that would be too much to say. But relieved, maybe? Absolved somehow? Whit still couldn't tell. Wes was too complicated for him.
"What she gets out of this is her damnedest pupil ever. Are you listening, Whit? I'm seeing to it myself that she's taken care of, on the money end. I don't tell you how to run the cattle—"
"Good thing, too. When it comes to cows, you don't know which end eats."
"—and I'd appreciate it if you didn't volunteer your every thought about this."
"Have it your way. But this haywire notion of Monty's that Dolph all of a sudden isn't good enough to tag along with him—does he want tea and crumpets, too? I'm not pulling Dolph off this and putting someone else to it, no way in hell. There's no sense in creating hard feelings among the crew." Whit settled deeper into the ancient office chair on his side of the desk. "Could we talk some business about where we're going to put cows, you think?"

* * *
McCaskill homestead, ghostly indeed now without Angus and the sheep. For that matter, she still was making up her own mind what to do with the lower end of the valley. Ninian's land. With more than grass and hay attached to it.

That decision would keep for now. She read back over what she had written so far today. It constituted singing the scales, warming up one's voice. With a considerable intake of air, she commenced to the next:

*Wes and I are like flighty children playing with matches. One of us ignites... and the other in scaredy-cat fashion stamps it out. Then the turns are reversed.*

She wrote in that vein until her hand began to play out.

Well, at least there was one of them who had life's ground solidly under him at the moment. She plucked up the review Monty had sent, for the sheer savor of reading it over, every blessed word:

Fate lent a hand, or in this case an appreciative ear, to the inspired program of "spirit" songs performed by Montgomery Rathbun at Aeolian Hall last evening. To this hearer, and an audience unanimous in clapping and stamping for encore after encore, the setting was as apt as if by divination: in Mr. Rathbun's wondrous presentation it is as if hitherto hidden songs have always existed just beyond us, tingling in the air, and through him they sing forth like windtunes through some great Aeolian harp.

This he achieves in a voice of dimensions that are hard to measure. His is not the welling bass-baritone of Paul Robeson, deep as the keel of a slave ship, but a built-from-the-bottom-up tone that casts long shadows and etches the ground of life under the travels of his restless songs, qualities that can perhaps be traced to his background as a man of the prairie. That repertory, be it said, is fresh, no mean feat in this heaven-sent-by-way-of-Harlem season of resurging spirituals, when almost weekly new arrangements of timeless field songs can sometimes resemble musical chairs.

The songs he brings are only an added gift, however.
Montgomery Rathbun could sing the pages of the telephone directory and lift your soul. His is the latest and perhaps most phenomenal troubador's role in the renaissance of "sorrow songs" heralded in the pre-war recitals of Harry T. Burleigh, enhanced when Roland Hayes added spirituals to his classical presentations, furthered by the innovative scorings of the piano-and-tenor duo of J. Rosamund Johnson and Taylor Gordon, and burnished to a luster now that the profoundly gifted Paul Robeson has turned from dramatic roles to musicianship. At the onset of an earlier generous artistic flourishing, Ralph Waldo Emerson proffered to Walt Whitman: "I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere." Harlem's chorus of spiritual-singing virtuosos must similarly now pay their respects to Montgomery Rathbun, who stands forth as their latest compatriot and rival.

All that and the reviewer did not even have an inkling of how rocky that bottom had been. Reading back, finding the diary days when some bit of coaching or coaxing had worked and both of them felt another breathworth of soar in his song, Susan was starved all over again for that experience of the lessons with Monty. Don't I wish there was another one where he came from. Leading the South Fork schoolchildren in "Flow Gently, Sweet Afghan" in preparation for the program all the parents were invited to, there had been times when she thought she would break off into a maddened howl. Very well then, face up and admit it, she had been spoiled by the particularities of Monty's voice. At least she was not totally bereft of it. One more time she picked up the letter the review had come with. "I did not pay the man to write this, honest." The handwriting, in pencil, was warmly familiar from the brief greetings he sent from wherever he sang; they amounted to postcards mailed in envelopes, safe from small-town post office eyes. She could picture the jackknife-sharpened stub, the earnest crouch over the stationery—somehow the words even stood slow and careful on the paper—and found it even more rewarding that he thought she was worth the diligence. This letter was almost warm
Susan. Whit had capped the pen and handed it back to her with awkward gallantry when she became aware that Wes was studying her speculatively. "Now that we're past that," she caught up to what he was saying, "this came just as we were leaving the house." He handed her a telegram.

MUST REACH MISS DUFF. PLEASE.
—JACE JACKSON
Ivan,

I know you'll want to nip this in the bud by 4/14, **BUT** since you were given so little time on the copyedited ms, you actually have until 4/28 with this. Take the time or leave it.

Thanks

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Top

Top 18 Center 1934

can’t were possible? Consistency of other changes to subjunctive

4. Monty thinking. Do you want subjunctive?

21. comma. ok to omit, although grammar book would see one.

61. Double? Should not be lamer can.

27. Subjunctives 91, 162, 163, 176, 202, 221

102. would + calibre out of 130

135. were or not?

131. bearing or exciting? convincing

198/168 agree. Set as is.

270. stet la-de-dah

271. repetition

273. he/them — confusing. Omit sentence?

235 are
subjunctive 376, 390, 394, 395, 397, 406, 422, 429 (2)

was / was

27

self Table of elements (check earlier

2 Calibre

to avoid repetition see 473

sceptre
242 subjective 241, 266, 267

2536 2006 sports coat?黎族 manuscript. ok. Found in style sheet.

but 241 to?
Looking West: a Conversation

By Kay Mills

Wallace Stegner writes about the West. Not the West of yesterday's cowboys nor today's movie stars, but the West of vast, exposed landscape, of rootless people moving from oasis to oasis in an arid land, of californians seeking to be long. It is, in short, not the mythic West, but one peopled by mining engineers and farmers and itinerant boomers who lived on land they loved yet sometimes destroyed.

Stegner's writing demands attention because he is conscientiously writing of the West as he thinks it was and is and his perceptions often clash directly with the images created by the dime novelists and then by Hollywood.

Even though he's won the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award for his fiction, Stegner's works don't crowd their way into the supermarket racks or onto the television screen. That's clearly fine with him since he thinks American cultural decisions are being made by "gossipers with nothing to lose" who don't bother with books and says, "I don't really like to change my ideas like I change my shirt."

But one must examine what Stegner and regional writers like him are doing, because, with any luck, their sense of the land will have some lasting place in literature. For Stegner is among the people who "live in places like Denver and Salt Lake City, Dillon and Boise, American Fork and American Falls, and they confront the real problems of real life in a real region, and have gone some distance to understand the conditions of Western life and accepting the agencies that have been slowly created to meet them."

These Westerners have acknowledged that they live in "a kind of little man and his consequences."

A talk with Stegner, now 70, about his own writing and Western writing is of necessity sprinkled with descriptions of the land. So in the end you can see that Canadian river valley of Stegner's youth in Saskatchewan, a valley he still yearns for after nearly 60 years away from it. You sit on the patio of Stegner's home in the hills above Stanford University, where he established and ran the school's expected creative writing program for 25 years, and you listen that here is a man who thinks more than casually about all he does to the trees and the pasture and the animals around him. You understand that he was becoming a conservationist even as he was becoming a novelist. Some of his best writing, prose most evocative of the land, appears in environmental essays in a 1968 collection, "The Round of Mountain Water: The Changing American West."

"Stegner's novels, histories and essays have an overwhelming sense of place. At times, his plots bow down or become convoluted, and a reader may not always know what the author thinks about one of his characters, but you always know what character is, physically. Stegner, whose says also analyze Western writing and what shapes it, in the aspect of work to the land and society to which he grew up.

His family moved frequently. His father was variously a deputy sheriff, bill collector, potato grower, wheat farmer, wheat futures speculator, mine owner, construction man, and traveling sporting goods salesman. Born in Iowa, Stegner had lived in North Dakota, Seattle, Great Falls, Montana, Saskatchewan and Salt Lake City by the time he finished high school.

"I agree with Willa Cather that the impressionable age is somewhere between 5 and 11 or 12. So Canada and the plains impressed me most. That's where the images came from, so that's why I dream them, I think. It's a particularly impressive country--so wide, so empty, so big and simple and British-Canadian.

"One has a "sense of exposure" on the plains, Stegner explains. "You're a terrible target. You feel any lightning that strikes is bound to hit you." So you need sanctuary, either manmade or natural, and you certainly need the sanctuary of a little green and irrigated valley with a snug and sheltered ranch in it.

Western writers develop a sense of their land. Stegner believes, because "it's more spectacular and at the same time a lot more vulnerable. It doesn't heal like grass country does. It doesn't grow back on its wounds, so you need to have a sense of guilt about helping to destroy a country, it's country you're fond of."

"Beauty is not something you can know or know in quality," to that life on the plains, however, "you grow up without history, you grew up without painting, you grew up without music except Sunday School hymns. Your architecture is in a grain elevator down the street. You read in books about different places. You want to get out and see them."

Growing up in such an open, unsettled country may give Western writers more feel for land than people, more confidence with settlings with than with characterization. "You don't see people of different kinds," Stegner says. But at the same time, you don't get tangled up in style. "You don't get involved with all the niceties of style, all the Alexander kl-ness of fineness that are likely to be very attractive to writers in cities. If a Western writer has talent and substance, then the substance is less likely to get lost in technical fineness."

Stegner himself comes across like his there is "an absolute necessity of that frail spinning together of the family" so embodied by the Mormons. If that sense of family, without which all is chaos in a country so dominated by the land, makes him a square, says Stegner with a smile, "then I'm a Utah square."

By the time Stegner moved to California in the mid-1940s, he'd written several novels. First novelists are likely to write first about things that they've been rumination over since childhood or since they first began to think, so that very likely your first books will concern your family . . . or how you hate your father or whatever."

His first big success, "Big Rock Candy Mountain," published in 1943, concerned a wandering family somewhat like his own.

When he came to California, he recedes that he had used up most of his early material and was "ready to quit writing or grow." Disappointed with the reception given his 1950 novel about "WW labor organizer. Joe Hill, Stegner became disillusioned with fiction and though "the hell with it." He had a long novel spell. He taught and traveled.

Eventually, he was able to get back into writing novels.

"The Bquare Mile," published in 1971, is one of those small collections.
In Europe, No End to the Conventional Arms Race Is in Sight

BY DON COOK

VIENNA—The Mutual Balanced Force Reduction talks that have been going on here for 665 years between the NATO and the Warsaw Pact nations have set a record for the longest running negotiations in the world. The talks began in 1973, but due to various political and military considerations, they have never reached any conclusion.

However, there is a recent development that suggests the talks may finally be coming to an end. The Western countries are reportedly seeking to replace the conventional arms race with a new system of non-military alliances.

The first step in this process was taken when the United States and the Soviet Union signed the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II) in 1979. Although this agreement was not ratified by the United States Senate, it did mark a significant breakthrough in reducing the nuclear arms race.

Another potential breakthrough could come from the talks on the European Security and Cooperation Conference (OSCE), which are currently in progress. These talks involve 57 countries and are focused on reducing tensions in Europe.

Despite these developments, the conventional arms race continues to be a major concern for many countries. The race is fueled by a desire to maintain military dominance and protect national interests.

In conclusion, while there may be hope for an end to the conventional arms race, it is clear that the negotiations will be challenging and require sustained efforts from all parties involved.
Dear Brant--

Here it all is. Pretty much the usual amount of single-word or sentence-or-two corrections, except for a slightly longer insertion needed on p. 471, where Carol caught one more dropped change from my original ms. (If I didn't already say so, please provide us two sets of page proofs so we can put her eagle eye to work again.)

A bit of logistics, in terms of your reaching me about anything in the ms; I'm going to be out of town, out of touch, this coming Wednesday, the 26th.

Anyway, all yours now, and I'm keen to see this baby in full glory of print.

Best,
Style Sheet for PRAIRIE NOCTURNE by Ivan Doig

-Sources: Webster’s 10th, Random House Unabridged, Chicago Manual of Style, WIT

-serial comma
-numbers: spell numbers, including in dialogue, unless unwieldy. Also: twenty percent; 30.06 (but thirty-aught-six in dialogue; Tenth Cavalry; 80-proof; two-thirds).
-italics: use with thoughts; for hypothetical dialogue; for unattributed remembered dialogue; for notes; in general, for words as words; for lyrics; for emphasis, per author. Song titles are set roman, in quotation marks, as are radio programs.
-no that/which distinction
-,.too,
-Jones’s
-use Mister instead of Mr.
-all caps are used to express the strength of Monty’s voice.
-no commas used with compound adjectives.
-NOTE: Author makes some unusual choices in punctuation and grammar. Please stet the following:
  1) “This all counts,” Susan came close to a coax. – and other such constructs.
  2) “They plunged that direction” – do not insert preposition.
  3) “We wouldn’t do that, now would we.” – no question marks in this and other such constructs.

Author also uses unusual spellings. His should take precedence over those of Webster’s 10th. See Word List II for help.

Word List I:

Anaconda Copper 5
Assinniboine, Fort (Fort Skin-and-Bones)

Bailey 223
Barclay, Judith 69
Barclay, Rob 33
Big Sandy Creek 133
Bovard, Tinsley, Coggins 322
Breed Butte 67
Brewster, Howard and Susetta 480
Broadwater Hotel 43

Cecil 346
Clore Street 30
Conrad 97

Dagmar 89
Doc Walker 169
Double W (or WW) ranch 22
Duff, Flora 67
Duff, Ninian 16
Duff, Samuel 63
Duff, Susan 2

Earl and Bea’s 24-Hour Buffet (E & B) 340
English Creek 16
Erskine, Don and Jen 57

Fiddle Strings 82
Flossie 4
Frew, Allan and George 35 and 288

Gardiner 353
Gates of the Mountains 36
Gros Ventre 35
Gus (Gustafson) 155

Hahn, Fritz
Hardeman, Lieutenant 324
Harris 36
Hawkins 155
Highland Street 2
Highwood Mountains 73
Hilfiger (Hilly) 353

Imhoff, Private 102
Indian Head 62
Ingomar 88

Jackson, Jace (J.J.) 345
Jacob 202
Jenkins 90

Kuhn, Dolph 18
Lake George 10
Lieutenant Olsen 102

Marias River 133
Marlow Theater 384
McCaskill, Alec and Beth 62
McCaskill, Adair Barclay 62
McCaskill, Angus 60
McCaskill, Varick 62
Mrs. Gustafson
Musgreave 35

Ned 235
Noon Creek 21
North Fork valley
Nowhere and Petaloomis Loomis 159

Over There Memorial Committee 6

Petrie 373
Pondera County 109
Potter, George 3
Prairie Tide 5

Rabiznaz 379
Rankin, Jeanette 83
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air-promised
American Expeditionary Force
Archbishop
arm-in-arm
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barbwire
barkeep
bedstand
beerglass
benchland
bib and tucker
Blackfeet
blood-boiling
bookdealer
bowtie
brakeman
breathwork
Brevoort Hotel
brockle-face
brushpopper
buckboard
buckrake
budbreak
buffalo grass
bughouse
building-stone
bunkhouse
butcherknife

carpet-beater
cartman
catalogue
cathedral-rise

cathouse
centerstage
cinook
choirsong
chokecherry
choreboy
chouser
church, the (no cap)
city-spangled
clifftop
clothespegged
cofeed
Company C
corrail sitter
Creation (as in "all of Creation")
cropland
cross-street
cufflink
day-herders
dead-level
deskmn
dibdab
dishtowel
distant-faced
downpayment
drivewheel
Drouillard
Duesenberg (Doozy)
dust storm
dustbath
el, the
empty-windowed
everyplace
eye-flicker

fantan
fate-haunted
fenceline
Field, Joseph
Field, Reuben
Fifeshire
flat-iron
folk-dance
follow-sheet
franglais
frogmouth
gandydancer
gatepost
Gatlinburg
getup
Godamighty
goodbye
go-round
Great Northern Railroad
Great War
grownup
grub line
guardhouse
guardpost
guardrailing
gunnysack
gusset

half-ass
half-dance
half-listened
half-minute
Halvers
Hayes, Roland
heebie-jeebie
Hell
hidey-hole
high C
hipper-dipper
hogback
honyocker
hoodoo
hoodoo
hotcake
hotfooting
hunky-dory

ink-teardrop
joyboy

KC boy
kiyiiing
Klavern
Ku Klux Klan

landclaim
laundrywork
lieder
lightninglike
-like (but lightninglike)
logey
longbox
longstroke
Lowlander
lungpower

Macfadden, Bernarr
man-to-man
Mass
medicoes
mid-
midtown (Manhattan)
misery-whip
museum-goer

nighthawk
nightriders, night-riding
nightsinger
Ninian's land
noonhour
no-woman's-land

Observance (Armistice Day)
oh oh, oho
one-lunger
onstage

palmline
pantleg
parade ground
parademaster
pathlength
pig-iron
play-pretty
plow
Pope
posie
posthole
Princes Street
prybar
puppet-play

ragmouth
railcar
rainbarrel
rangeland
ribcage
ridgeline
Riel, Louis
Robeson, Paul
rodeo-goers
rowdy-dow
rowhouse
runningboard
runthrough

saddlehorse
sassiety
schoolma'am
schoolyard
Schraffts
Schumann-Heink, Ernestine
scissortail
screendoor
sentrylike
sheepdip
sheepman
shinnying
short-timer
sicking
sideport
simmer-brown
sin-eater
Sixteenmile Canyon
skip-step
skunkhole
slaughter-beef
slaunched
slickback
smartypants
smidgen
sodbuster
someplace
son of a bitch, sonofabitch (follow author's lead)
songfest
songsheet
sparkplug
St. Mihiel
stand-to
stockbuyer
stockdog
stock-still
stockyard
stovepipe
straightback
suffs
sugardaddy
suitcoat
sun-up
talking-to
tallybook
tanyard
theater district
tie-cutter	
timberline
tinsmith
trapline
trooper (stage performer), trooper (calvryman)
tumpty-tump
verandah
voicebox
wage hand
washelli
washerwoman
washhouse
washwater
weedpatch
West, Western (geographical region)
Western Front
what-all
whatnot
wheeltrack
whiskey
whiteface
whoop-te-do
williwaw
windhover
windowglass
windtune
workhorse
workings-over
workshoes
workspot
workwagon

X'ed

Fictional historical references:

Cheyne
Wasson
York, Charles
Ivan-

Our copy-chief's note (in red) explains just about everything. You know this drill. Just call if you have questions or concerns.

Brant
nineteen-page fax to Brant Rumble, associate editor, Scribner

Brant, good morning--

Here are the *Prairie Nocturne* ms pp. you and the production folks may want a headstart on, before the full copy-edited ms reaches you on Monday. For all of us to keep track, here's a listing of pages I'm sending in this batch and the reasons for each, followed by a listing of the several space breaks that got dropped:

pp. 182, 188, 316-318, 394, 428: all have song lyrics that need irregular poetry-like setting to suggest Monty's innovative phrasing of them.

pp. 229-231, 480, 516: these all had material dropped in the transition from my ms to the production ms.

pp. 100, 417, 472: these are where I made changes of my own extensive enough to possibly affect pagination.

pp. 171, 414: on these I've restored paragraph breaks that got dropped somewhere along the way, and may affect pagination.

Now the list of space breaks that need inserting:

p. 33, after "mountain range."

p. 36, near page bottom after "Gates of the Mountains."

p. 61, top of page

p. 74, top of page

p. 85, after ital "only on Sundays."

p. 103, top of page

p. 112, top of page

p. 129, top of page

p. 241, top of page more
Space break list continued:

p. 261, 2/3 down the page, after “waiting glass.”

p. 352, top of page

p. 467, top of page

p. 511, top of page

And I think that does it, Brant. I’ll arrange a Saturday morn Airborne pickup of the full ms so that you’ll have it Monday morn. The copy editor did quite a nice job. I primarily ratcheted down the insertions of subjunctives--“as if it were”--particularly in the vicinity of Monty’s thinking; he’s got to stay a “was” guy. Would you please see to it that the estimable copy editor has her/his name added into the Acknowledgments after yours on p. 545? Other than that, onward to pages, huh?

Best,

[Signature]
VIA FAX

March 20, 2003

Dear Ivan,

Since these were typed up just like the rest of the manuscript, you should give them a once over. Just let me know if you spot any errors.

All best,

[Signature]

BRANT RUMBLE
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Dedication:

To Dave Walter and Marcella Sherfy

for doing half the laughing

and damn near all the history.
Author’s Note:

This work of fiction takes its cues from something once said by Peter Brook, who as a stage director has sought to imbue storytelling, as he phrased it to an interviewer, with "the closeness of reality and the distance of myth, because if there is no distance you aren't amazed, and if there is no closeness you aren't moved."

--I.D.
To Dave Walter and Marcella Sherfy
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--I.D.
2/14/03

Dear Ivan and Liz -

We love this Stephen photo and want to use it on the jacket. I'm sure everyone has an idea of what Susan looks like but this woman (who does fit my imagination) certainly is appealing. What do you think? Ever, Nan
Ivan-

Here's the sample design for your approval (or disapproval). Keep in mind that the text here is not copy edited or proofread, so no need to check for errors. This look is for design purposes only.

Brant

BRANT RUMBLE
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Brant, hi again--

Yikes, the minefields of diskography. I wish we had thought to confer about a disk earlier on--mea culpa as much as youa, because on the last book I believe I offered Nan one and was told it wasn't necessary and this time I just didn't think of checking. Anyway, here is the Prairie Nocturne ms disk plus a sheaf of ms pp. showing inserts or changes to be made. I felt I didn't dare make these myself because it would have mangled the pagination of the edited ms you and I and I suppose the copy editor are relying on. I am uneasy about the hybrid we're coming up with here--me having worked over your pencil-edited copy of the ms as the Rosetta Stone as usual, and now we have to match a necessarily less-edited disk version and inserts and changes to that--so I think we're all going to have to be super-sharp in looking over the results. Anyway, here's my methodology on what I'm providing in this batch:

--yellow-flash marked material indicates inserts or changes. The computer operator will have to be aware these are to be made in addition to the penciled-in editings we've both done.

--to avoid disrupting the sacred original pagination, I have left spaces, indicated with boldface directions, in the disk version where pp. marked "INSERT ALL" are to fit in.

--the dedication and author's note are not on the disk--again because of the pagination problem--and will have to be entered by the operator.

While I was going through all this, I made a half-dozen infinitesimal editing changes in the disk version from the ms we've been working on; it's all tiny verisimilitude stuff resulting from a reading-over a Montana historian buddy did for me--amending my description of the Broadwater as Montana's finest hotel because it wasn't, given Butte's famously ritzy ones, for instance. None of it changes the substantiality of the ms as all, so I'm not even going to bother your head with it.

And lastly, if the info is needed the disk was done on Word 6.0.1 on a Mac.

All for now. Best
“A nine-year-old girl can do a better job of it than that.” She looked stern until he inhaled lustily. “That’s not bad,” she commended. “Now put your fist in front of your mouth as if holding a bugle.”

_How does she know these things?_ His sudden little amused expression took Susan by surprise. He had a good contained grin. She felt silly. What had she expected, a minstrel show gawp?

“Mister Rathbun? What is it?”

“I have me a bugle. I do. Played it all the time when I was a bit of a thing.”

“Angeline, the boy is driving us mad with that bugle.”

“I’ll have him put it up, Mister Warren. It was his father’s.”

“Then you know very well what I’m asking of you, don’t you,” Susan swept on. “Put your clenched hand up, no, against your lips. As-if-with-a-bugle, for heaven’s sake. Now smell the rose, but put the air back out through your fist. _Deep_ breath, now blow out, make it sound like a tea kettle. Again—in, out. Until I tell you to stop. Again. Once more. Take your hand down, keep that same rhythm of breathing. There. Feel the muscles work? Down there in your flanks?”

His flanks felt as if they were an unwilling topic of conversation. “Some, I guess.” He wondered how much of this Dolph was hearing, outside.

“That’s what you must practice,” she decreed. “At home, in the mirror. Do it a dozen times first thing each morning and again over the noonhour and again at night, and I guarantee, I can tell whether or not you have been doing them.” Monty considered himself notified. “Next let’s acquaint you with the notes.”

He listened apprehensively while she demonstrated how to sing the scale. Her voice was smooth, each note up the ladder a tease of song; how was he ever
going to get there? She would hold pitch, he would frown in concentration and then sic his voice onto hers. After considerable of this she called a break, with tea
Angus's hail drew her to the window. He rode past to his schoolhouse every morning about now, but the bundled-up figure perched on the saddlehorse next to his, *those formerly auburn pincurls peeping out from beneath a severe scarf—Adair, at this early hour?*

She was more wrenlike than ever, Susan saw during the doorway effusions, the years carving her down to delicacy. Most unScottish, for a woman born not a pathlength away from her hewn husband, but then Adair had always been the other side of category.

"Come in, hang your hat on the floor," Susan fell back on the habit of the house.

"Not I, thank you just the same," came back from Angus at once. "I have to go put roundish thoughts into squarish heads."

"And you wouldn't have it any other way," Susan told him, Adair chipping in with "You'd mope like a spent rose without that old school of yours."

"Leave it to Scotch women to shed a ray over the affairs of men," he jested. "If one of you doesn't tell me what I'm about, the other one will."

It took two to set the likes of him straight, they assured him, and off he went to his schoolday. Susan turned and groped at the cupboard.

"Adair? I have coffee on, but beyond that, I'm afraid it's graham—"

Adair produced a dishtowel bundle. "I brought you a loaf."

The bread was still warm from the oven. Susan sent her a look. A woman who had baked bread before breakfast? And then ridden down here in the dew hours to spend, what, the day? Ever since Susan had sung at the wedding of Angus and Adair, *when even to a knockkneed schoolmaid it had been obvious how Angus's eyes searched past his bride of convenience to Anna Ramsay, Susan had tried to fathom what this person's view of things must be. But there seemed no knowing, no way in past those deflecting gray eyes with their odd guardpost*
of freckles directly beneath each. In the time after Adair’s second stillbirth when the women of the other homesteads would visit in and always find a deck of cards laid out in columns in front of this woman, Susan’s mother would come home shaking her head and say, “Adair and solitaire,” not a commending rhyme. Now Adair was fixedly saying, “It’s so fresh, it may be hard to cut.”

“No, no. It’ll be a treat.”

Susan mauled off two large floppy underdone slices and the two women silently buttered and ate. They brushed their hands of that, and took up one of those dutiful conversations about the how of things, how was the Rathbun man doing, how were the further generations of McCaskills coming along. Susan was delving desperately—she was relieved out of all proportion when a gust rattled the kitchen windowpane as if wanting to come in out of its own weather and join them, and the two women were able to say almost in chorus that today’s was a thieving wind, it had stolen through snow somewhere—when Adair came out with:

“Susan, I’ll not keep you from yourself.”

With a start—written all over me, is it—Susan began to say something patently insincere about company other than herself being good for her once in a while. The other woman interjected:

“I only came to ask a bit of a favor. I would like lessons.”

Serves me right, Susan let herself have, suddenly longing for the procession of sugarplums with ringlets through her Helena music parlor. “Adair, really, I’m just here to tutor this one pupil.”

“Every other day, according to when I see him and his wetnurse riding across the bench.”

“Th’That’s so. But—”

“That leaves the other days.”
Susan gave up any pretense of politeness. “What brings this on?”

“I’m not asking you to make me into a fine singer or famous or anything of the sort.” I’m spared that, at least, Susan thought with relief. “It would be something to do with myself, is all.” Adair spoke this as if from a slight mocking distance away from herself. She floated a glance to Susan. “A person can sing to herself and not be thought soft in the head, can’t she.”

Susan blinked a couple of times. “It’s a help, I suppose. Music is delirium on purpose.” She wrinkled her nose. “Who came up with that? Chopin? Puccini? Madame Schumann-Heink? Me?” In the bit of time this had bought, she made up her mind to the songless soul across the table. “Adair, I always need to know—what manner of music do you have in mind for yourself?”

“Songs with the old country in them,” Adair stated. “Your mother’s songs would do me.”

Susan that night thought long and hard about the populace of solitude. About the dots of humankind, connected and not, strung through the weathered valleys and across the girth of prairie like constellations reflected on the ground. The Adairs, the Anguses—and those between them even when no longer there—of the flivver trip: the women hungry for any other women to talk to, even dressed-up ones from Helena; the men half-bemused and half-alarmed that they would be hearing these suffrage arguments from their wives and daughters forever after. Then episodes began to come back to her, the elongated memory shadows from the dots. The syrup sandwiches that were all the supper that could be mustered by the host family fresh from their emigrant railcar near Ingomar. The proud pledge of allegiance in Danish by the Frisian colony gathered civically in their church in their fledgling town of Dagmar. The way smoke would fall to the ground before a storm, the smell of the weather riding out to the road to meet them as the Nina.
Eventually the fireplace had to be fed. Susan said it was her turn and Wes lay watching and making her laugh with his preaching of admiration for her, high and low. "The shins of the father are not visited upon the daughter."

"You." She returned to bed with a flounce, but there was something serious to be asked. "How soon will you be in Helena?"

"It'll have to be after New Year's."

"That's a scandalous length of time." No sooner was that out than she regretted her choice of word.

"The best I can do. Susan, you have to know--there's going to be a lot of that."

"I didn't exactly think I had title to you all of a sudden."

I...you...sudden. All this was a field of thought that his imagination at its most wild could not have led him to, back when he had been safely loveless, with only a war to worry about. But here Susan Duff indisputably was, next to him in their mutual state of altogether. A woman a man could make love to six directions from true north and she would slyly keep track of the compass for next time. And each time, after lovemaking, he knew that everything outside of that was stacked against them. An incurably married man (doubly wedded, actually, given what could only be called his inbred necessity for a faith; he regarded the church much as he had the army, cumbersome but the only thing on the particular job), politically on the rise, fortune's palmlines clear as a map on him--and this woman who stood out a mile, as Duffs always did. Again now he traced tentative loving fingertips over the features of her face up to that distinctively Scotch high forehead, vault for a canny brain; her expression told him she knew the odds as fully as he did, and he despaired. Throughout these past two weeks he had tried to break through rationality--it was surprisingly like the coldness of combat bravery, a pane in him that covered as if with frost and that he could not see beyond--and
make himself give up everything for her. Pull a Robert Louis Stevenson, flee off with her to the South Seas, why not. And vegetate happily ever after; that was why not. Grasping this, knowing it in himself as deep as the fissure in the heart where the soul pools up, he even so could not let go of the anguished wish to be otherwise than he was. He hated being incapable in any capacity, especially the one—call it flight—needed to leave behind all the others in his life. Now the mustered words came out of him haltingly:

"I'm not much at this, you know."

By now Susan had learned that like all heroes, Wes had a side to him that didn't always come into daylight. She could have told anyone interested that he liked to fool people by going around as if he were the pluperfect example of a stuffed shirt; until the shirt came off him.

"No, I didn't know that at all," she issued back to him. "Here I was hoping for a cross between Sergeant York and a sultan who knows his way around a harem. Why, Major, you're blushing. All over, I do believe."

"You're a handful."

"What, me? 'Jaunty as a feather, faithful as the heather.'" There was another of those cloud-bringing words, faith.

Wes shifted his lower part carefully on the bed. To preserve the night, he said:

"The martial music about did me in. Could I talk you into singing something for the occasion? Us, that is?"

"Ah. All this is a plot to coax me, is it." Susan gave him a mock discerning look, like an abbess who knew very well what Chaucer was up to. Then laid a solemn finger on his lips, as if marking her place, and was up and searching for her nightdress. More or less sufficiently attired, she strode back, performance already perking in her, came to the foot of the bed and folded her
hands in professional ease on the bedstead there. She gathered herself, with the slight lift of her chest that drew breath in, and softly delivered:

"The evening brings all home, 'tis said
Those who stray, and those who roam,
The evening brings all home.

In the restless light of day,
We abandon ourselves to quest.
When the blushing sun kisses the west,
We awake and find our way.

The evening brings all home, 'tis said
From islands far, and Heaven's dome.
The evening, the evening,
The evening brings all home."

There on the picnic tarp, Wes immediate and intent across from her, Susan knew better than to remember a golden blush over that time. The two of them had been no perfect fit, from the start they had known which parts were ill-suited for the other. It can grow musty in the loft of the mind; Wes, when he wasn't activated by politics, tended toward an attic-headed collecting habit: rare books, manuscripts, scraps of language that pleased him, property. Herself, she had constantly had to wonder, another possession in among those? In turn, Wes understood of her that she was of brusque blood, given to directness when that wasn't the route that had come to be expected, as a Roman road will fly like a spear from the past through the modern swerving muddle. Not a match, a
Williamson and a Duff, that either of them would ever have dreamed of. Yet they had coupled as naturally as wild creatures, until they were found out.

"Susan? Something?"

"Yes. We should be getting back."

P. 138 [below]
squadrons of soft-edged little clouds dragged disconcerting shadows across the prairie anywhere he looked.

He reluctantly resigned himself to a climate only rattlesnakes could prosper in. His eyes joined the others in trying to take in the mass of deserted habitations over these arid acres. Ranked across from the ramshackle barracks and seeming to squint toward them in disgusted inspection stood prim old house after house of officers' quarters with randomly broken windows and shutters half gone. And down the middle the wind blew, the parade ground its permanent right-of-way.

Bailey gestured to the barracks building closest to them as though shooing it out of their way. He murmured, "My fellows picked this one for theirselves, because of," indicating upward. A three-story tower, its parapet crowned with castle-style battlements, buttressed the near end of the building. Susan, Monty, Wes, all three goggled at this. Rapunzel could have let down her golden hair perfectly in character with the odd medieval aspect, except for the mat of buffalo grass beneath. Bailey whistled through his teeth, and a lookout carrying a rifle peered down at them through one of the battlement notches. "That's Ned," said Bailey, and left it at that.

Susan drew in her breath, as if she had stepped by mistake onto the stage of some fantastic opera.

Wes fell into logistical conversation with Bailey while the four of them trooped off toward further batches of buildings. Monty thus far had no sense of recaptured past such as the visit during the dust storm had whirled up for him here, his mood too heavy for memory to make any headway. Behind the backs of the other two, Susan and he exchanged a look as castaways might have. They had compared, and in the session of argument each of them had with the Major against being made to hole up here, the Major could not have been more highly reassuring: "You're just going to the other ranch." Some ranch; you could lose
track of cows for a week just in the jumble of these buildings. Although right now, both of them saw, a couple of the hands were down at the road putting up the set of gateposts where the freshly done Deuce W sign would hang. The Williamsons never wasted any time in putting their brand on anything.

A wrangling corral, holding a restless new saddle string of mares and geldings, loomed into their path now, and beyond it, a tumbledown blacksmith shop for horseshoeing and enough stables for a major racetrack. Susan was impatient to scoot on past these, but the men were not.

"Barns aren't in any too bad a shape," Monty at length was moved to remark to the Major, one connoisseur to another.

"That was the cavalry for you," Wes assessed, "the horses lived better than the troopers."

Susan was not growing any more patient. "Wes, you said a fort." Directly ahead there was another tower, and probably another Ned, in a further contingent of barracks and other buildings beyond the stables. "This is like a military city."

"They did go at it a bit strong," he could only agree. "Maybe the War Department thought it was making up for lost time. Custer would be cleaning spitoons at West Point right now, if all this had been wangled in here before the Little Big Horn."

"But what were they thinking of, building all this that late?" Susan persisted as if the prairie deserved an explanation for all this intrusion on it. She
Wes in that instant wished bayoneting was legal without a congressional declaration of war. He looked at Potter as he would a gob of spit on a dinner plate. "Even if there was anything to it, you yellowbelly," the words snapped out of him in pellets of cold rage, "there's no witness." Dolph, for safekeeping, by now would be halfway to Chicago on the cattle train, his conscience long since repaired—"Major, I better tell you, there's some bastards in town trying to get me in on their funny stuff"—and his wages handsomely upped for stringing the Klan along while the Williamsons readied their fist. His Klan card, Wes would tuck away for him as a souvenir and reminder, but the one on the desk stayed pointing at the pale-faced banker like a deadly warrant. "And don't count on any others of that skulking bunch you head up. They're busy being reasoned with."

Potter glanced involuntarily at the clock behind Wes. "That includes that henchman of yours," Wes took extreme satisfaction in letting him know, "the one you sent off into the brush with a hunting rifle. It's not hunting season any more, Potter, particularly that kind." Caught and hogtied and ready for delivery to the sheriff, the Klan's second-in-command was in for the rare privilege of having a Duesenberg serve as his paddywagon. The rest of the pack were having the run put on them. Whit and his men right now were going name to name from those cards through this town. The remainder of Bailey's force was doing the same in Valier, the rejuvenated sheriff and muscular deputies were spreading the gospel of persuasion in the town of Conrad. Across the state at this hour, Wes's old political allies were hitting the Klan with what he knew would be varying effectiveness, but some of it was sounding effective enough; the sheriff at Butte had put out a public declaration that any Klan members caught lingering would be shot like wolves.

The specimen across the desk from Wes made another try at dodging. "I have standing in this town, you're dreaming if you think you can turn people--"
"Potter," Wes said as if instructing the clumsiest member of the awkward squad, "half the banks in this state have gone under in the past couple of years."
She made a conceding murmur and ducked onto surer ground. "At any rate, you can quit worrying—I'm going to lease out the homestead. Helena has me on her hands again, poor old town."

Now Monty was the surprised one. "The Major didn't say anything to me about you giving up the place."

"No? Did you check the reflections in his vest buttons?" Fanning a hand and holding it with her other, Susan expertly mimicked a person playing cards close to the chest.

He acknowledged that with a slow nod. "I'll need to do that when he comes in from the ranch tonight, you think?"

"Whit's, too, while you're at it. You knew you're going to be honored with his presence, didn't you?"

"You must be kidding. He's setting foot off the place when there's no livestock involved?" It was on the tip of his tongue to say what next, the ghost of old Mister Warren showing up along with them tonight at the Marlow Theater and growling out I take it back, Monty, go ahead and blow your bugle, boy. But her and the Major, as close or apart as rails of a railroad track, depending on when you squinted in their direction--right now she was really up on the doings of the Williamson, and he didn't want to tramp flatfooted into whatever that meant. He switched back over to his original intention. "I started to say, it's bothered the living daylights out of me that you were where the Klan hoodoos could have got at you. I know you wrote that the Williamson made it too hot for them, but--"

"Scalding, was more like it." Departures in the night. Examples made by Whit and his ax-handle crew. Sheriffs and county attorneys suddenly rigorous. Wes and the influences he could bring to bear had taken the Klan out of the prairie heartland of Montana like lice soaked out of sheets. "My neck never felt at risk, any of the school year," she maintained. Monty watched the familiar way she
arched that neck, ivory as a carved rarity, as she pronounced on that chapter of the past. "No excitement except the boys tipping over the girls’ privy, and that's eternal. No, I've done my bit in memory of Angus and helped Adair close up their place, and I'm tucked back into the house here and the Double W's cows inhabit the North Fork, end of story. Now you." She sent him a mock haughty look intended to let him know she was inspecting his progress. He had filled out somewhat, but solidly, no jowls or paunch. His fetching blue pinstripe suit would not give any of Wes's a run for the money--whose would?--but it had a tailor's touches. All along the line, so far as she could see, he looked as if New York life agreed with him. Still, he was here, not there. "Somehow I didn't expect to see you back, this soon."

"Denver is next on the tour." He grinned. "I convinced my manager this is practically on the way."

Susan's eyebrows were up. "I must have left geography out of those lessons of yours."

"That'd be about the only thing. Say, you know what works slick? That music stand." He had particularly wanted to ease her mind about the audience problem. "Can't explain it, but I don't get choky with the songsheets right there, even if I never need them."

"Told you." Her face lit, she urged: "Your turn. Those fancy-pantsy musicales of yours--tell all."

From there on their conversation kept jumping its banks. He told her about hobnobbing with the Rabiznaz, wanted to know how her own music was coming. She told him she was within shouting distance of the end of the operetta if the shout could be a better song than she had managed to come up with yet, and what were his living arrangements in Harlem like? They were back and forth at
this a mile a minute until they heard a notifying cough. In the doorway of the
parlor stood J.J. and Cecil, fluffy baftowels over the arm of each.

“This is Miss Duff, my teacher I told you about,” Monty said, reeling off
the introductions. “Wasn’t for her, the most I could look forward to would be
changing sparkplugs every three months.”

“Ah? Then the ears of the world are in your debt, Mrs. Duff,” J.J. said
with something between a nod and a bow. Cecil’s wordless acknowledgment of
her certifiably amounted to no more than a nod.

“It’s Miss.”

“Mizzz Duff, excuse me all hollow.” J.J.’s sibilant antic made Monty
want to bat him one.

“Sorry to interrupt,” J.J. swept on, “but we were just passing. We are off
to the waters,” meaning the Natatorium across the hotel grounds. “Cecil here
needs to cook like an egg to thaw out from this Rocky Mountain air, he claims.
We are told we will have a pool to ourselves.” J.J. smiled as if at the wonder of
that. “Which will then be drained after we use it, I gather the procedure is.
Western hospitality is really quite something.”

“We did give the world Monty, from out here,” Susan offered as though it
were a neutral observation. “We may be coasting a bit much on that.”

“That was generous, I can’t help but admit.” J.J. fussily checked his
watch against the parlor’s grandfather clock as if two opinions were needed on the
hour of day, then recited: “Keep an eye on the time, Montgomery, don’t forget to
catch some rest.”

“It’s as good as caught, J.J.”

“Good day, Miss Duff. Been our pleasure.”
Monty watched the pair of them go, shaking his head. “See what you and
the Major got me into? They both know their stuff, but—what’re you laughing
about?”

“I just realized. Here you are in the Broadwater with a manager and an
accompanist and Bailey and bruisers, all the trappings I could have dreamed of for
you, and I’ve never even heard you in front of an audience.”

“You have so. Not their fault they were pigeons. Toughest critics I’ve
had yet, though.”

Susan surprised herself as well as him by giggling. Monty chuckled at the
scale-like run of that, which tickled her some more, and then they were both in
helpless gusts of laughter, two Two Medicine ragamuffins carried up past Fort
Assinniboine’s pigeon droppings and all other mires to make their marks on life
by the glorious force of music.

Susan at last wiped her eyes. “Stop. Halt. Enough. I really should be
going.”

“But before I put you to work a little.” Before she could blink, he reached
something out from behind his chair and rested it in his lap. “Do you mind?
Wanted to show you a change in Mouthful of Stars—and I think I misremembered
how the holy rollers used to do the chorus of that.” As he dug out the piece of
music she saw that he carried the songsheets in a leather case embossed with the
initials MR; cowhide had a different place in his life now. “I think it should go”—
at the back of his throat he deeply crooned down, then up, up, instead of up,
down, up.

Susan hesitated. Was this something he needed done, or a pat on the head
for her? He had not been the butter-spread type before, but that was before.
The question lasted no time before giving way to the spell of music in his throat
and his hands. “Let’s just see,” she said, a bit out of breath, and was up from her
chair and confronting the upright piano, its teeth yellow with age, that claimed a corner of the parlor.

Plinking until she found a reasonably reliable run of keys, she coaxed out an amendment to the tune, Monty at the end of the piano listening keenly. At her nod, he sang the chorus that way atop her playing. She knew she probably shouldn’t—the justifiable wrath of his manager was somewhere between there and the Natatorium—but she plunged into the whole song, Monty’s voice all but taking down the walls of the parlor.

“There, then.” Past the ache at the back of her heart for more of this, she made herself quit, saying she would fix up the follow-sheet for his accompanist if he liked. Monty dug in his shirt pocket, came up with a stub of pencil. With great care she wrote in the notes, guided by her own hum now. One last thing and then she would go. “Could I take a peek at the songsheets? It would be fun for me tonight to know the order of songs.”

“You bet.” He gravely handed her the sheaf that represented all their work together. “That’s how I’ve got it put together for here. Oh, and over Cecil’s just about dead body, I always stick in the Medicine Line one wherever the program feels like it needs a lift.”

“Why doesn’t he want you to use that one?”

“Because he doesn’t like it.”

“So then why do you use it?”

“Because he doesn’t like it.”

That set them off riotously again. Susan sobered an instant before he did—what am I doing, this man has a performance tonight—and resolutely stood up from the piano stool. But invoking a teacher’s privilege, she took a last memory-book look at him, storing away the prospering dark features that were as heightened and polished as his voice now. Not much more than an arm’s length
away Monty was gazing at her as if trying to remind himself of something. She held still, P. 314 follows
she had already arranged to sail from Montreal to have a headstart on French, thank you very much. Now, though, here she sat, running a caretaking eye over his view of the ocean liners and the docks they were nuzzled to, as if they were her personal aquarium. He cleared his throat. "Susan, may I ask--what brings you to New York at last?"

"Recuperation." When she realized Vandiver had no idea what to make of that, she tacked on: "A friend's, after a bad accident. I came to help with the care."

Vandiver waited, but that appeared to be all. After a bit, he ventured:

"You're available to us, do I gather?"

"I apologize, Van," she said with a start. "Talk about out of practice--it's been an age since I was any kind of job applicant. But yes. I need a steady wage while I'm here, and I thought--"

The big hands spread apart on the table as if measuring out the invitation. "We can always use your talents," Vandiver delivered it along with the practiced smile, "I've told you that before."

"Fine, then. Oh, did I mention, I must have mornings for myself. The, ahm, recuperation situation. Although if you'll furnish me a typewriter, I can take any amount of work home and do it at night."

That set an executive nerve to twitching in him, she could tell. But when he spoke, it was to say he supposed they could work around that, since it was her. As if that reminded him of something, he cocked his head to one side again. "You'll need to find lodging, I suppose? Miss Cooper or Mister Lehrkind could go around with you. Or, my wife's mother knows Mrs. Maeterlinck in the Village, she might take in--"

"That's quite all right. I'm taken care of."
Susan's return glance having firmly sealed off that topic, Vandiver cleared his throat more extensively. "It's really quite lucky, for you to show up just now. I know you have a particular interest in the archive. It's become a struggle to keep up with it." Hearing what was coming, she resigned herself to sorting paper; cataloguing, to put the most elegant job-name on the driest task. Well, she told herself, somebody had to do the chores. "Susan, I spend what seems like every minute of my life raising funds," Vandiver seemed to be going a long way around to get to the point. "The monument, the Armistice Day observance—they take everything we've got. The archive collecting, I'm ashamed to admit it, has had to be neglected. Other chapters weren't as quick off the mark as you were in Montana." He gave her another of his off-angle looks, but this time she didn't care, she could already tell she was being spared from paper-sorting. Vandiver got up as if it was time for both of them to go to work. "I would ask you to apply your knack at rounding up war letters and diaries and what all for us."

It was a week later, although to Monty it seemed a lot more than that off his life. The doctors had counseled that he not use his voice for at least another week, and all they could do then was to test his windpipe capacity. He couldn't help thinking that while they were waiting on a medical miracle that way, they ought to try to come up with one that would take the pester out of Susan.

There she sat, same time, same place, those simmer-brown eyes of hers giving him no rest. Behind the closed kitchen door J.J. could be dimly heard trotting the virtues of one of his other acts past some theater owner or another. Monty started to write, made an impatient face and scratched out the first word of the salutation needed for him to frame this the right way. With quite scholarly care he formed down onto the paper a fresh version:
Susan. Can I call you that? Saves words.

"You may. You'd better."

Susan, listen for once.

"I take it you mean, don't spout back until you're good and done."

He nodded with more vigor than had been possible the week before and went to extended writing.

J.J. and you deserve all the credit there is for thinking I am worth one more try. But what's happened is something I don't think my voice can ever get over. I don't much like the idea of going out in front of an audience and wondering if somebody out there is going to clobber me, either. You have your own notions of what a person can and can't do, and good for you, but I can only tell you how it feels in my windpipe and for that matter the rest of me. No good.

"You've had worse."

Worse? The pencil was nearly burning holes in the paper. Worse than an earthquake worse, and a crazy SOB trying to separate my head from my shoulders as soon as the shaking quit?

"That bull's horn. I didn't see any reason to tell you at the time, but that goring should have finished you as a singer, before you even started." She watched him rock back from the table at that, staring at her as if she had put over a swindle on him. "And somebody gave you an earlier working-over in Helena, I remember," she kept right on. "Those bruises?" She mapped them out on her own ribcage and chest frontage as if he needed reminding of each contusion.

Monty absorbed with interest her pantomime of that particular pasting the Zanzibar Club had handed him, then went to work on the tablet again.

Any of that, I brought on myself. But this--it's like terrible weather that just never quits.
"It'll clear up when--" she began, and he threw down the pencil at having handed her that opening.
"That's the catch. Half a year. I hate it like blazes, but J.J. claims that's what it takes to cover the ground, over across."

"That sounds right." In that instant, Bristol, Cologne, Brest, the tens and dozens of provincial stages where she had toured, came alight in her memory like a stained-glass window; and the greater halls, the leading cities, would be thrown open to his voice. "You have to write me from everywhere or you're in for it," she tried to sound full of anticipation.

"That's a ways ahead yet. Friday, though--"

"You're right, that's almost in sight. Down to business, you. We'll put off that session to save you for the evening," she made the decision a voice teacher had to. "You feel perfectly ready to sing at the musicale, don't you?"

"I wouldn't say perfectly. But do I want a chance to let the songs out, Godamighty, do I ever."

"Party bunches, those can be uncomfortably close quarters."

That produced a significant silence at his end of the phone line; one more instance when she had hit the nail on the head in the dark. "Funny you say that," he mustered after a bit. "Let's just say I'm not overly comfortable with these sassity shindigs, but I can swallow them."

"Bigger crowds," she said as if speculating. "You told me back at the Broadwater that having the music stand took care of the nerves you had about those."

"That could have been truer."

"Monty, wait, you aren't still bothered by having to face a genuine audience, are you?"

"Sometimes."

"Often?"
“Just about always. Susan, I get myself by the scruff of the neck and make myself face those audiences, okay? Did it before, every damned time, and I have to figure I can again. Question for you now,” his voice warmed. “Do you ever let a poor beat-up singing pupil alone?”

“In this case, not until he’s perfect. You’re within a spoonful or so.”

“Right. Try several shovelfuls. Susan? It’s only been a few days and I already miss you like everything. Any hope for the patient, you think?”

She responded as if he was not the only one who needed steadying.

“Cures like this always take a while.”

After the silence that followed that he said he had better get going on his daily constitutional or Strivers Row would be sending a search party for him, she said she had absolute mountains of work to do, and they hung up. Both of them were wet-eyed.

J.J. boiled into her office the next day.

“What’s this about our Harlem letters?” He flung down her message.

“‘Problem’ with them, what kind of all of a sudden ‘problem’? The color of our stationery, maybe?”

“Insufficient recognition.”

“Say that again?”

“The Harlem collection deserves—what do you call it when you want notice for Monty or one of your other performers—push?”

“Push it till it smokes, if that’s what you want,” he responded, crinkled with puzzlement. “I can help you pitch it to the newspapers some, if that’s what you’re after, but—”

“I have to wonder, J.J., if your sense of push is working the way it should these days.” She had spent nearly all night thinking this through, and even
so she found herself desperately having to ad-lib it all. "Scooping Monty out of
the country before you put him in front of a real audience, for instance."

For a moment the impatient manager went still but alert, as if figuring out
the crossfire she had him in. Then he moved to the side of her desk, leaning in a
bit to deliver each sentence piece by articulated piece. "All right, Miss Duff. Feel
free to tell me my business then, why don't you. Where would you book a
colored singer who has every right to have the heebie-jeebies after what's
happened to him?"

"Carnegie Hall. On November eleventh."
Afterward, the surprise on her this time, he took her to dinner at the
dining room of the Brevoort Hotel. Quite possibly on the basis, it looked like to
Susan, that this was the nearest palace he could think of. The headwaiter fussed
them into place, chanted Monsieur and Madame while enthroning them at the
nicely placed table which one glance at the cut of Wes's suit evidently had entitled
them to. Something was whispered in Wes's ear that made him nod gravely,
menus were conferred on them, and then they, like the other dining couples,
were by themselves in the sea of ice-white tables. Glancing around at the
murmuring class that obviously frequented here, Susan wondered how far back in
history the rule ran that as the calibre of the family name goes up, the velocity
goes down. Wes could be counted on to be the exception.

"Too bad Montana doesn't have a seacoast," he was saying as if
something should be done about that. Running a finger rapidly down the seafood
side of the menu, he chose clams, specifying a la crème.

She ducked her head to the menu, not fully trusting her expression in front
of a man whose version of eating fish on Friday was clams prepared in cream.
"I'm hopelessly carnivorous." In French probably better than Wes's and the
waiter's combined, she ordered the loin of lamb, done just pink. "Back home we
never ate the little dickenses, you know, or maybe you don't," she rattled on to
Wes to be saying something. "Mutton, yes. Religiously. So to speak." She
didn't want to babble at this, but words were not the surest part of her at the
moment.

Wes felt around under the draping tablecloth and pulled out a champagne
bottle. "Louis informs me the only available wine is on the order of glycerine, but
this isn't bad." He poured the sparkling liquid in their waterglasses. Susan was
constantly astonished at the hiding places of alcohol in the public venues of New
York.
While they sipped and maintained a patchwork conversation, she kept on questioning what she had done back there in the sunlit bedroom even though the answer always was that she'd had to. A holding action: Wes himself doubtless had employed such a maneuver sometime or other, in whatever manual of arms men resorted to. That he had to be held, until Monty's opening note resounded at Carnegie Hall, was nobody's fault but fate's, she was quite sure. Well, not that sure, really. But at least she had herself sorted out about the afternoon's particular declension of *fond*, which she was relieved to find was the one that wears itself out naturally. She had launched into their bout of mutual want as if driven to prove something, and while it no doubt could be said better in French, proof was there to take its turn when the bedsheets cooled. The afternoon with Wes had not changed anything but her pulse rate.

The soup course was bestowed on them before she gave in to curiosity:
was grabbed up to admission. "The ones...
from the labors of their homesteads to check on the livestock, and they long since had absolved bears, wolves, and other four-legged suspects. Much the greater likelihood, they were by now convinced, was a little corral somewhere considerably to the north of here near the agency for the Blackfeet Reservation, where a few cows at a time were butchered, their hides burned, and the cheap rustled beef doled out as tribal allotment by some conniving agent who booked it at market price and pocketed the difference. Scottishly numerate as they were, Ninian and Donald had worked out that the economics of someone stealing their cattle only by twos and threes must necessitate a regular wage elsewhere for the riders involved; rustling as an encouraged sideline, a bit of a bonus. It weighed constantly on both men: encouragement of that kind had only one logical home in the Two Medicine country, and its address bore a double set of the letter W.

Donald dourly glanced across at the thundercloud that was his oldest friend's bearded face. These were men who at the best of times were not happy with the thought that they were being toyed with.

"Ninian, are you lighting on what I am, though? That obstinate brockle of yours--"

"Ay, her natural element is the brush, isn't it." Ever a verifier, Ninian glanced behind them at the North Fork's coil of cottonwoods and willows where the brockle-face herd quitter liked to lurk, fly season or not. He and Donald had had to fight her out of there to bring her to fresh pasture with the others. Now he turned his eyes in the direction that led to the Reservation. "Let's just see if our callers are earning misery by trying to drive her."

"Old Williamson thinks it's so easy, walking over us," Donald mused. "*Sheriff in his pocket, and us thin on the ground.*"

"One day he's going to have another think coming." Ninian rose in his saddle a little as if testing the air. "Just possibly today."

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*I'm pretty sure I know what this means, but it took some going over.*

*This is the way these Scotch gaizers would talk.*
“It doesn’t much matter. I suppose the one with the play-pretty on it stands out a bit better.” Donald handed him Mose’s hat with the crossed-swords escutcheon of the Tenth Cavalry pinned front and center.

For a moment Ninian held the well-worn hat as if it deserved better, then hung it on the barrel tip of his lifted rifle. “Just so there won’t be any doubt about how this came out.” Pointing the gun off across the prairie, he blasted a hole through the hat with one last shot.
stage, the slight hitch in his gait made increasingly plain as he covered the desert-like distance from centerstage.

_Been around the man since he came back with that in '18 and never noticed it that much._ That told Monty something about the proportion of matters here. One more time he studied around at the amplitude of Carnegie Hall; the place was the definition of big, all right. Extra-tall fancy-peaked doorways with what looked like lions' forelegs carved high up on the frames, huge columns of some Greek kind set into the walls, atmosphere of a mansion about to be toned up for a party—and all that was simply on the stage. Out front, the gilded horseshoe balconies were banked, up and up, like decks of a topheavy steamboat. Not long from now an audience would squish into that expanse like the representation of everything on two legs; even here at rehearsal this place had a couple of rows full, as if the listening level always had to be kept going like a low fire. J.J. had whispered to him that Vandiver had salted the rehearsal with any of Over There's big givers—"the Major's crowd"—who wanted to come and gawk, and the Carnegie Hall management was there in force as a mark of respect to such wallet power. In his performance tux as he waited with the others in the wings to step out in front of this chosen bunch, Monty felt very nearly underdressed.

Susan and he were not standing near each other in the gaggle in the wings, they were mutually showing at least that much common sense. Cued now by the stage manager, she stepped out, heart pounding in spite of her willed poise, strode smoothly to the microphone stand there beneath the proscenium of all American prosceniums, and delivered a ringing recital about the Harlem letters. She made way for Tammany's man in Harlem, whom no one expected to follow Wes's example of deferring a speechmaking chance until the house was full. Nor did he.

_In the comedy spot, Butterbeans and Susie strolled on and traded contentious married-couple wisecracks._ Then Susan once more, to introduce the

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Lincoln Theater house announcer, Charles York, for the reading of selections from the Harlem war archive in his basso profundo.

Vandiver was to follow this with his spiel for Bonds of Peace and as he zeroed in on the microphone, J.J. slid over by Monty and murmured, “You’re up next.”
“All is forgive,” Susan resorted to a comic tragic accent that could have got her hired on the spot at the Brevoort. She felt a last genuine pang for Wes, and what might have been if they had dined together here when she was in her Village days and he was unattached, but left that for the diary page to handle and went to fix her face for Monty’s musicale.

The grand piano at the Brewsters’ had the type of gleam to it that comes from that assiduous polishing agent, old money. Cecil hung around the great dark lustrous instrument looking as pleased as if it was his to take home. Run your hands under hot water before touching it, did you, Cece? Monty stood by, anchoring himself into what seemed the best spot to sing from, watching as Cecil enthroned himself on the piano bench and began manipulating the follow sheets, and along with them his third beer. Prohibition, in Cecil’s opinion, had made brewing an uncertain art, and as usual he plopped a cough drop into his glass to give the beer some snap.

J.J. was down at the far end of a living room that at a minimum had to be called sumptuous, making chitchat with the heir to something or other. Monty never liked taking it on himself where Cecil was concerned, but an accompanist who was not up to the mark was the last thing this night needed. He pattycaked a brief drumbeat on the piano top, leaving fingerprints that drew Cecil’s instant attention. “Easy does it, partner,” he issued. “Those cough drops can get you.”

The pianist looked up, irked, and just as quickly learned he had better not be. Cowpoke or wrangler or whatever he was, Monty had a set to him that suggested you really ought to start herding yourself in the direction he wanted you to. And he hadn’t come out of that beating any less determined to have performances done his way and no other. Privately Cecil had figured Monty was headed for the scrap heap. But that woman, whatever kind of music witch she
was, and him, however they did it the pair of them had come up with renditions
that made Cecil’s fingers itch, they were so choice.

“Only oiling up enough to be loose, Monty,” he soothed. “I’ll be right on
soon as we start.”

“That’d be good,” Monty said deadpan.

He turned away from Cecil and scanned the party-comers as they gathered
in flocks of four or six. Pompadoured men and bobbed women, about like the
last one of these all those months ago, but none of these evenings quite mirrored
any of the others; he was pretty sure that was their point. Costumes, sometimes—
once there had been a hat night, with half the crowd in sombreros and hawkshaws
and he sang in his tux and Stetson—and more generally some ins and outs to the
mix of the invited each time. High society constantly put itself through a strainer,
it looked to him like, and keeping track was J.J.’s job and thank heavens not his.
He did know that without coming out and saying so J.J. had wanted tonight’s do
to be out of Harlem, to see how the resuscitated voice and redone songs went over
with white hearers. Got his wish on that, for sure. Tonight’s guest-list sift had
shaken out like pure flour. The only dark skins in evidence anywhere in the room
were J.J.’s and his and Cecil’s, except of course those of the serving staff, as
carefully distant-faced as Eskimos.

At the point now where his music was ready in him and the waiting had to
be got through, Monty occupied himself by watching the faces, all the rituals of
expressively widened eyes and laughing lips and butterfly kisses on cheeks.
Tonight’s host and hostess were the type who pollinated the party by staying on
the move, shunting this famous couple over to meet that notorious one, bringing a
hipper-dipper with the ladies over to meet the newspaper versifier who had
recently left her husband. He knew there were places in the world where people
like these would be taken out and shot, but at the moment he found it hard to hold
much against anybody whose worst quality—at least out in public—was trying
everything in order to have a good time. Quite a few of these, he figured, were
the sort of person who would be fun on a picnic, if it was a short enough picnic.

At last he saw Susan come in, on the much-used arm of Phil Sherman.

*Here we go, hon,* his thought cried across the room to her. *Someplace
we never thought we'd get to, let alone in a bundle.*

*Two-faced as I've been today, do I have enough left for this?*

Looking at herself in the abstract, which was currently the only way she
could stand to, Susan believed herself to be as revealing and moment-by-moment
duplicitious as a mirror with multiple panels. The first reflection showed a man her
heart went to, across the room there. Somewhere on his way up Park Avenue to
join the picture, a man whom every other part of her had been entwined with that
very afternoon. *As she stepped into the stratospheric evening where they would
both be, she had to hope this divided version of herself would not fall apart.*

First of all, though, she had to survive the onslaught of hospitality.

*"Delighted to make your acquaintance...welcome to our little evening,"* was
luxuriantly drawled at her from both sides before either she or Phil could put a
name on herself. When he managed to, the hostess and host beamed expertly
while they tried to place it. Even the muscles of their smiles, Susan sensed, had
pedigree. Susetta Brewster was of an old Virginia family, Tidewater roots as far
back as the first anchor splashes, and slender and decisive as a sceptre. Her
husband, older, possessed a high stomach, on the style of a pigeon, and had a
way of leaning in on whomever he was talking to as if offering the comfort of that
hearty bosom. *As the Brewsters' gracious hovering elongated into hesitation,*
though, Susan realized that her showing up with Phil Sherman did not fit
expectations, rather like a kangaroo print in the snow. She fixed a shielding smile
against the determined attention Susetta Brewster was giving her—with just a tiny stitch of wariness at the corner of each eye—as Phil yattered an introduction that didn’t make much sense until he invoked Susan’s work for the Over There Committee.

At once that pegged her for Susetta: doubtless a war widow, tragic as a mateless eagle from the look of her, most likely an heiress from the West on top of it all or why else would Phil Sherman bother to be convoying her around town? With relief she burst out to her husband: “Oh, then, Howard, you must see to it that she meets Major Williamson.”

“Shall!” promised Brewster.

Until that could be made to happen, she and Phil were shooed into action in the crowd. Phil did not abandon her, but in this atmosphere of excess money and women with telltale sidling eyes he had trolling to do and often worked with his back to her.

In the course of the evening she jumped whenever Howard Brewster shouted “Sooz!” which each time turned out to be robust abbreviation of his wife rather than the start of summons of herself. Maybe it was the marinade in the Brevoort lamb, but in this gathering Susan felt temporarily French. The slightly wicked but of course apt salon saying over there could just as well have been stenciled on the penthouse wainscoting here: “On the ladder of life one must climb like a parrot, with the help of beak and claws.” Tonight’s rungs were perilously close to the top of New York. She drew on resources she hadn’t used in a dozen years. After all, a certain pang kept reminding her, she had been through this before, in the Village; there had been nights then when she was the one standing ready by the piano. So, tooth and nail, she set to socializing in this altitudinous throng. She had a good pithy conversation with an old growler who had started as a rigger in the Oklahoma oilfields and wildcatted his way next door to the
Rockefellers. Next she was trapped in one that spun in circles, with a crottontopped young actress who had been the stand-in for Jeanne Eagels in Rain. Susan politely peppered her with questions, but what she really wanted to know was what it was like to play a role off a piece of paper instead of from the scraps of one's self.

Wes paused in the doorway. In the bit of time between the butler spiriting his hat from him and Howard Brewster having to, he performed a rapid surveillance on the room, best chance to do so on evenings of this sort. Utrecht velvet on the near wall, making that statement in a hurry. The newer decorating touch was paisley shawls adorning the backs of all the furniture, as if peasant women the size of gnomes were stationed throughout the crowd. Over the fireplace blazed one of Nikolai Fechin's Taos paintings, a pueblo woman in a dress of many colors and holding out a golden peach. The rest of the significant interior decoration was wall-to-wall people. His scan sorted them in a hurry. Half a head taller than nearly all the other women, Susan, intently mingling. And poised beside the piano, Monty. Seeing them both here, Wes had a moment of he wasn't quite sure what: abashed self-congratulation? Then Howard Brewster clamped his arm and swirled him into the party.

"Wes of the West!" Phil greeted him. "Welcome back to civilization." Phil was languidly sandwiched between Susan and a flushed woman with a feathery little headpiece in the assisted red of her hair. His practiced hand, Wes noted with due relief, was in the small of her back rather than Susan's. When presented to each other, once again Wes and Susan exclaimed for everyone else's benefit that their families had been acquainted. Brewster hung on with them, proud of his prowess at putting people together, until he could not resist foisting other couples into the conversation.
Wes took the chance before the impending blizzard of introductions to say in Susan’s ear: “I meant what I said, at dinner. Stay in New York and see the world.”

Just then the piano announced itself. Not trusting herself to say anything, Susan brushed fingertips across the back of Wes’s hand and slipped off to listen from the far side of the room.

As he squared up for his opening number, Monty knew the work cut out for him. This wasn’t a particularly hard audience, but not an automatic one either. Gin had made its inroads in attention spans. Right off, he let them know what they were in for with the newly sneaky *End of the Road*, his voice effortlessly peppering the song just enough. He was relieved to see heads begin to bob in rhythm with his sly phrase breaks by the second verse. Song after song caught them by the gills the same way; the crowd seemed to be breathing the music rather than air.

Listening, watching, exulting, Susan knew with satisfaction that he could sing his way to the top of anywhere when his voice was on, the way it was this penthouse night.

He was happily readying himself for his finale when a hand plucked his sleeve. “Excuse me all to hell, Montgomery,” J.J. whispered, holding on to a tiniest inch of fabric to show he was interrupting only to the absolute minimum. “But I have to hit them with this before the night goes to pieces.”

Monty backed up, knowing J.J. would not do this if it didn’t count.

“Good people,” J.J. raised a hand as if swearing an oath, “I need to make an announcement. Would you believe, I get paid to spill the beans and these are some delicious ones. On the eleventh of November, Montgomery and Cecil have another little do.” He gave an indicating nod to one and then the other of them. “They’re hearing about it for the first time along with the rest of you, look at their
faces. They know something is up, all right, but they don’t know it’s going to be them. They will be performing that night,” he bulleted the news with pauses, “at a place...called...Carnegie Hall!”

An ahh like an ascending run plucked on a harp zephyred through the room. Skillfully J.J. went on to make the pitch on behalf of the Observance, singling out some in the room who had cut their teeth over there in the trenches—Major Williamson, Phil Sherman, “and for that matter yours truly”—and who now felt prepared for Carnegie Hall. “So come be with us that night, hear? And need I say, bring any money you’re tired of having laying around. Now for another good cause, the way these two are flying high here tonight, back to our music.”

Monty had barely heard the last of J.J.’s spiel, swept up as he was into the thin air at the peak of the announcement. Carnegie damn Hall, whoo. About the next thing I better do is check myself for nosebleed.

Instead he squared up again to sing.

“Forty miles a day...”

Something phantasmal came into the room now with the first words of the Medicine Line song. Wes felt it as a chin-level chill, up around where his officer tabs used to be. Hauntingly, tinged with rhythm beyond mere tune, some note of the ancient fate-haunted trade of being a soldier came through in Monty’s voice when he sang that song now; Homer sang so in his epic lines, and kilted footsloggers in accompaniment to bagpipes. Monty’s every previous performance of the ballad, Wes had listened to with something like fascinated reluctance, but never with the thought that "Sergeant Mose and old Black Jack" would force a way into musical canon. But this evening, knowing that his was not the keenest musical ear in the room by far, Wes with a shock understood how the earned magnificence of Monty’s voice elevated the tune from the Fort Assinniboine
barracks. Until now, the classic parade song of the prairie wars was that of the Seventh Cavalry, Custer’s outfit, the spirited “Garryowen.” Until now.

When Monty finished and stepped back with a bow, the applause beat and beat against the walls and city-spangled windows of the penthouse. Then it was time to circulate, take plaudits, make modest conversation. Without seeming to, he managed to work the route around to the vicinity of Susan.

She had been cornered, no small feat in the middle of a room that size, by the big Dutchman he had been warned about. Artist of some kind, no one seemed quite sure on what basis. The man’s wife was across the room, although her hard dark eyes were not. She watched, Monty watched, as he leaned intently in on Susan. “So you are from the wilds of Montana, ha. Had you heard of this musical gentleman out there? His singing is amazing. So—so natural.”

Over the man’s shoulder Monty traded a sneaking glance with Susan, knowing she had caught on in the same instant he had as to how close that was in the alphabet of fate to naturally so-so.

“Only barely,” she answered about Monty’s voice having made its way through the wilds to her, “over the sound of the tom-toms. Wouldn’t you say, Mister Rathbun?” The Dutchman sputtered a laugh and moved on.

Watching his chance, Monty caught her alone for a minute at the extensive table of food.

“Carnegie Hall, that’s pretty foxy,” he said low and offhand as though consulting her on whether the Pecorino cheese carried any advantage over the Stilton. “Wonder where the Over Theres might’ve got that idea.”

“I’ll never tell.”

“Susan, good Godamighty, you know I’m sort of leery on big audiences yet and you’re going to plop me in front of—”
“You’ll get over it,” she assured him, confident enough for both of them.
“You’ll have to.” She slipped him a smile that went to the heart of things. Love
was her silent apology for what she had done this afternoon. It had to be. “Now
shush about being leery. Your following wants petting, here come some now.
And just so you know—you were everything I could have hoped, tonight.”

Past one in the morning the evening began to break up, as raggedly and
inevitably as floes calving off an iceberg. The noisiest contingent wanted to go up
to Harlem. Cecil immediately enlisted as guide. When they swept by Monty he
deprecated by rote, saying the only place up there he wanted to see this time of night
had a bedpost in each corner and a pillow to welcome him. From her windowseat
Susan sat watching what happens after the finale, content to her core that Monty’s
music—their music—had reached into this gathering.

Before long, Phil detoured over and manfully asked her to come along
with a bunch he had assembled to go to the Kit Kat Club where the liveliest
hoofers from Flapper Revue congregated after the show, there would be
dancing—“Phil, I’m sorry, but I don’t flap.” He offered to flag her a taxi for
home, and out they went, she once again on his arm, past the indefatigable
cordialities of the Brewsters.

Wes had waited for the party to thin out before going up to Monty.

“Major, how you doing, how’s the ranch? Hoped we’d have a chance to
shoot the breeze,” Monty fended industriously while thinking How over is it with
her and him? Susan would do her absolute best, he didn’t dare doubt but—
Williamsons don’t any too often say ‘uncle.’

“I’m calling it a night,” Wes surprised him with. “I just wanted to add my
bravo to all the rest. You and Susan have done wonders.”
“She’s one of a kind, for sure,” Monty testified, feeling he could afford to say that much. “The Lord Himself wouldn’t know how to put a price on her, don’t you think?”

J.J. was in a purring mood when he met with Susan to work out the Observance details from his side of things. “The newspapers will lap it up. ‘Negro singer shrugs off Klan beating, reaches heights of Carnegie Hall.’”

“As you say, Vitamin P,” she said, meaning the power of push.

“You know, I can sort of see the audience that night in here,” he palmed his forehead like a phrenologist. “You ever do that?”

“Only before every time I ever performed.”

“Then let me tell you the kind of thing I see there in great big gorgeous Carnegie Hall.” He sketched dreamily in the air with his hands. “People dressed to the nines, Vandiver and the Major’s people wearing their money on their backs, they got every right to. Lots of medals catching the light, I may even put on my set. Montgomery and Cecil up there on stage, looking so fine--oh, by the way, since it’s the finale, we’ll hold them to half a dozen songs, tops. Double encore that way, if the whole crowd isn’t out there sitting on their hands.”

“Right,” Susan muttered, writing down the six-song stipulation on her list.

“All that, then,” J.J.’s voice pussyfooted on, “I can see just as plain as anything. And all of us of a certain shade up, ever so high, up there in...peanut heaven.”

Susan’s head yanked up. Cinnamon eyes to almond eyes, she and he stared to a draw. After a while she said, “No one has told us the seating has to be that strict.”

“There is a way to encourage it not to be.”
"J.J., I'm no good at mind-reading."

"Round up the cripples."

Susan had to swallow hard. She kept still, so he would go on.

"Ours and yours both. Crutchers, one-lungers, blind beggars, any of the wounded vets." He clicked these off like an abacus. "Make them honored guests, put them in the front row, mix them up. Speckle the place with them, that way. How can Carnegie Hall make a fuss about where anybody else sits if those are up there together, I ask you?" He didn't even stop for breath. "Another thing. Welcoming speech from Major Williamson. Hero and big giver and all, it would be good for the crowd to see him gimp across the stage."

"But he doesn't--" She realized she had never thought any gait of Wes's could be called that. "I'll see that he's asked."

After the last musicale--it had been at the Dutchman's place on the Upper West Side; the man went around sputtering like a tea kettle, but he knew how to throw a party--Monty was already fondly missing them when J.J. gave him a lift home as usual. He didn't even much care that the weather had turned nasty. November had come to New York as if colliding with it, rain pouring down like the clouds were being punctured by the high buildings, but slick streets were nothing new to J.J.. Monty sat back perfectly glad to be gliding up to Harlem on a night such as this as a passenger instead of a chauffeur. "Good do tonight," J.J. was musing out loud over the working of the windshield wipers. "Nice and speckled," his term for a mixed audience. "Your better class of ofays, but you couldn't swing a cat in there without hitting a hushmouth poet either." He added a short knowing laugh. "Not to mention the fine assortment of brown honeys. Wouldn't hurt you to get yourself one of those, you know."
Monty made an amused sound at the back of his throat and was about to rib back by asking him what sort of manager he was, trying to push a poor angelic recuperating singer into the clutches of wild women, when J.J.’s next words hit:

"Because you ought to lay off the white lady."

Monty swung his head around the guarded way he used to when there was trouble in the vicinity of the bull chutes.

"Goddamn it, J.J., where’s your evidence on that?"

J.J. tapped his temple impatiently and then went back to squinting past the wipers into the torrent of taxicabs the rain had generated. "Too careful says something, too, you know."

"I thought you got along with her."

"Getting along with her isn’t the same as getting in deep with her. Montgomery, the last time I looked half an hour ago, that woman was white, white, white. Mingle with them, chin to chin, elbow to elbow, that’s fine. But draw the line where the skirt starts, okay? You got no business up there anyway. Whatever you may have heard, that pink thing of theirs doesn’t run sideways in them. At least not in the French ones, I can speak from experience. So don’t go being curious."

"She’s—the music—" Monty fumbled for how to say it. "We’ve gotten to be friends, her and me. Been through damn near everything together, trying to bring the songs up out of nowhere and me along with them. Godamighty, J. J. You know most all of that. I don’t see why—"

"You are not seeing, that’s why I have to bring this up. Christamighty yourself, Montgomery. You can’t count on the rest of the world going around blind. Cecil’s noticed, too."

"Cecil is going to be counting his teeth in his hand if he—"
"This isn’t about Cecil. It’s about the fact that you and her can be mental kissing cousins over the songs, if you have to, but you’re still of the colored persuasion and she’s still Miss Pond Cream. Bruise around among the ladies if you want, you’re entitled. But you’re plenty bright enough to tell black from white.” J.J. delivered the next with the finality of slamming a door: “Don’t let these lah-de-dah musicales fool you. This is still a country where they run one of us up on a rope every couple of days, and making eyes at their women is one of their favorite excuses. Didn’t that axe handle give you enough taste of that?"

Helpless on his own part, Monty tried to defend hers. “You wouldn’t be creaming off your cut of the take, every time I sing a note, if it wasn’t for her.”

“That’s as may be. I figure I’m doing her all the favor I can by trying to clout some sense into you.” J.J. changed lanes as deftly as a jockey. “You got to watch your step, man. You’d be better off shoveling coal to Major Williamson than to her.”

Now that rehearsals and musicales were at an end, meeting without drawing notice was desperately hard. They resorted to the bridle path at first light.

“Any trouble?” Susan asked as her horse caught up to his, the countless seagulls and pigeons staking early claims to one of Central Park’s nearly countless monuments their only spectators.

“They figured I was looking for a job as a stable hand, is all.” Monty cast an eye over her riding outfit, a purple velvet divided skirt. “Bet they didn’t ask you that, did they.”

“Grace Vandiver loaned it to me. It makes it, but it’s snug.”

His evaluating smile said all that was necessary.
"They'll maybe think I'm your--what's that the French have?"

"Equerry," she rolled the word. "A Two Medicine equerry, first of its kind in the world. You're rare enough for it."

They rode without saying anything for a few minutes while they accustomed themselves to the feel of their rental saddles and fit of their stirrups. True daughter of her father, from the side of her eye she studied Monty's potbellied mare and its plodding gait. Son of a cavalryman, he dolefully eyed Susan's broadbeamed bay as it waddled along.

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

"And they call these silly things spurs."

They cantered along as best they could make the horses move, well ahead of other horseback denizens of dawn and those were few. At that early hour, the stilled park seemed something central to not merely the metropolitan island of Manhattan but all the kingdom of autumn, the ramble of its gravely outlined barebone trees and subdued lawn greenery and quiescent waters where even the mallards still dozed a portal between the summer that had been and the winter well on its way. Let dark winter come its worst/we minor suns were here first.

Susan's memory was jogged by the rhythm of the hooves. I'm getting as bad as Angus, she told herself, and brought her thoughts back onto the immediate calendar. Ten days into November now, and tomorrow one of history's steep ones.

"More newspaper people coming this afternoon," Monty was saying in a fog of breath. "I feel like one of your records." He slowed down his voice as if a mighty finger rested on it: "Leht Cahrnehgie Hawl gahthur uss tooomaththur..."

"It all helps."

"Something you better know," his tone dropped until it was all but lost in the clop of the horses. "I'm catching hell from J.J."
“About us, naturally.”

He nodded. “Funny how we can get on people’s minds in a hurry.” He started to say something more but held it as a mounted policeman on his morning round crossed the riding path ahead of them. Susan gave the officer a look of such imperturbable ladyship that he may well have figured Monty was along to help her on and off the horse. As he rode away from them, Monty retrieved what had been on his mind:

“Susan? J.J. does have a real question there,” he was trying to put it delicately, “whether two like us belong together.”

“I categorically—”

“—disagree, don’t I know. But that doesn’t change—”

“Skin and hair,” she said as if heartily tired of hearing those words, “that’s not all we’re made of—why should those rule all else of life? We are not some kind of a stain on other people’s notion of things, we amount to more than that.”

“You’re sure as you were that first day? About us keeping on?”

“I’m set in stone.”

“Just checking. Wanted you to have a chance to cut me loose with no hard feelings.”

“Put that in the poorbox,” she told him warmly. “We each have a fair idea of what we’re getting, Monty.”

“I hope you’re right about that,” relief and rue mixed in his voice. He glanced over at her as if making sure one last time. “J.J.’s not the only one who’s ever going to have an opinion on this, you know. I’ll bet the Major wouldn’t figure this is what he bargained for, either.”

“He’s the one who tossed us together,” she said speculatively as if the words would stand clear in the chill air, “he must have figured he was getting something out of it. The Williamsons generally do.” She turned her head and met
his look with one that said that was as far as she should go on the topic of Wes. “We have to give this some time, Monty. Tomorrow night will carry you a long way. After that, let’s—let’s see what happens after your tour of Europe. That’s the vital thing. You should be fine over there. There won’t be any”—she gestured toward the side of her throat.

“That’s what J.J. keeps saying,” Monty shook his head as if it was too good to entirely believe. “Of all damned things, colored performers are—how’s he put it—at a premium in those countries. Tells me they practically made Robeson the second king of England last winter, and the French upped the ante. Bricktop, Jo Baker, they’re all learning to eat snails.” He was silent for several moments, then said as if putting that away: “Doesn’t help us any here, does it.”

They rounded a last seasonally solemn grove of trees at a bend of the path, a clear stretch ahead. Susan leaned forward in her saddle and held her horse back until his was even with hers. “Race you to the stable.”

“Think so?” His sudden grin expanded into his voice. “You know I wouldn’t have a chance against a fancypants rider like you, I’m just the eq—”

She whipped his horse across the flank with the end of her reins, then swatted hers on its bountiful rump.

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

“It’s on me today.” Phil palmed the meal chits almost before they had settled to the table. “If you don’t look back in your checkbook, you can pretend it’s a free lunch. Cheap enough for me, too, considering you’ve roped the Governor into the Observance. I kowtow to anyone who can get Ashcan Al inside a concert hall.”
five-page fax to Nan Graham, Editor-in-Chief, Scribner
(hard copy on its way by mail; I know the last 2 pp. may be muzzy)

Nan, hi once more--

I know we all need to move nimbly to put *Prairie Nocturne* in the hands of book-buyers in what is now less than a year, so here are such notions as I can come up with about how I could possibly pitch in on selling the book, on the chance that they’re any help to you in preparing for sales meeting etc. You and Susan and Pat Eisemann should winnow these as you will; I’m simply passing them along in the spirit of the bookly philosophy I’ve always held, that while we’re all doing our damnedest to create literature, I know the economic fact is that we have to try to sell as much of the stuff in the form of Christmas presents as we can. And so--

**Interviews:** The response of all of you who have read the book in-house so far indicates some welcome surprise about its treatment of the little-known spread of the Klan in the West, the fate of African-Americans in prairie corners out there, and the WWI swath through people’s lives. This all seems to me good grist for interviews, along the line of the publicity opportunities you mentioned in your Nov. 4 letter. You’ve said that you think the book plays to my strength, handling history, and I do have good deep material backgrounding damn near anything in the book. And at the risk of patting myself on the back, I’m good in interviews: my secret early life as a broadcast major in journalism school--an Edward R. Murrow wannabe--tends to come out then. I can stick to message, I know what a soundbite is, and so on. At whatever levels Pat’s troops can arrange interviews, I’ll pitch in to the best of my ability. There’s handy anecdotal material on almost any historical angle of the book. A few quick samples:

--The Montana Klan was so race-befuddled that it turned down an American Indian who wanted to join, on the grounds he wasn’t a “native” American by their standards.

--On the World War I front, the officer whose once thrown-away diary I uncovered went off to war, and his doom, by way of a swanky reception held in the midtown New York mansion of Montana’s copper-king U.S. Senator William Clark.

--I don’t know if it’s enough of a tease to interest Terri Gross or other NPR types, but as regards the Harlem Renaissance, I apparently was the only person to interview one of its fallen comets, Taylor Gordon, thirty-five years ago, not long before his death. He and I were born in the same town in Montana, and I gave Monty his arc of singing career, although no other similarities. Gordon gets sniffed at by David Levering Lewis in *When Harlem Was in Vogue* as “a very dark decadent” who “greatly distressed respectable Harlemites,” and while I’m bemused by the notion that it took a guy from my hometown to scandalize Harlem, there was plenty of piquant material in the interview with him--memories of singing hymns with Sinclair Lewis at parties, for example--and in his correspondence with Carl Van Vechten that I immediately nosed into at Yale. To show you how they used to do things in New York, I’m sending along Taylor Gordon’s account of a Harlem rent party he threw (notice Blanche Knopf and Madame Alilia Walker among the luminaries) and managed to lose $10.20 on.
**Book tour:** I gather from your comments that publishing folk are gagging over wan results at readings and signings lately. Shocking, Nan, shocking. I think you know, and Pat will have to be apprised, that because of bodily crankiness I don’t want to camp out in as many airports as I used to on book tours anyway. But we do have the lingering fact that the books-sold total at most of my signings aren’t wan, so in sorting out the possibilities, here’s my two bits’ worth:

—Right off the bat, I’d suggest dropping, or at least putting off until the paperback, any thought of the Midwestern round--Minneapolis, Iowa City, Madison and so on—that I’ve done a number of times. Good stores, in all those places, but wow, it’s a ton of schlepping for the results we get.

—Farther west, we’ve done well in the past at the Tattered Cover in Denver and the Boulder Bookstore, and the King’s English in Salt Lake City, and I’d consider doing some combination of those stores for you if you really want, if it could be done before November 1, because of weather considerations. (Yes, I know that’s before the pub date, but I hope we don’t need to be constrained by that, or waiting on reviews; if you end up wanting me to do any meaningful touring, I think we’ll have to sneak a lot of it in before Nov. 11 or we’ll run out of time before the Xmas shoppers trample us.)

—The San Francisco Bay area: what can I say, it’s always one of the most pleasurable legs of a tour and I’ve always filled all the seats and then some at the Black Oak, Kepler’s, and Clean Well-Lighted Place readings; but in terms of bang for the Scribner buck, it does take two or three days to do two or three stores.

Moving on to feasible events I could do without big expensive plane tix:

—Pacific Northwest Booksellers fall meeting in Portland, Oregon, in mid-September. Best chance I know of to whip up interest in the book among booksellers here in the heartland of my readership. The exec director, Thom Chambliss, has already asked me to come and would like an early reader’s copy.

—Seattle Bookfest, third or fourth weekend in October, they haven’t decided yet. If it’s the former, Oct. 18-19, that’s in direct conflict with the Montana book tour option outlined below, and you folks would have to decide which one seems most beneficial. These bookfests are not my favorite gigs—kind of like preaching to the choir, and I can never identify any specific payout from the colossal effort everybody puts into these festivals— but it’s only half an hour from my house. If I do this event, I would ask Pat and her troops to insure that I’m not simply plopped on a panel. I’m game to do a reading, make a talk, be interviewed on-stage, dance and sing, but at this point of graybeard career, no woozy panels, please.

—If books can be shipped to arrive in Spokane and selected Montana stores no later than October 15, I and my highly unpaid literary escort, Carol, are willing to do the driving tour that in the past has sold an average of more than a hundred hardbacks per store, in about a week’s worth of signings. But that circuit of proven stores in Spokane-Missoula-Bozeman-Great Falls-Helena (we can probably sneak in a total of 8-10 signings) would need to be done in the week or so from October 15 on, or postponed until the paperback comes out; the first nasty winter weather generally hits Montana about October 25, and Carol and I simply shouldn’t be driving around out there amid black ice and drifting snow any more. My expense records indicate this trip can be done for under $200 a day, probably a total of about $1500.

—As to the Puget Sound region, the venerable Michael Carley would have to be consulted to be sure, but my impression is that a surprising number of
bookstores that are accustomed to me are still on the scene. The big three independents in Seattle—University Bookstore, Elliott Bay, and Third Place—are in easy reach by car, and simply need to be diplomatically spaced apart a bit on the calendar. I already have invitations from a couple of sturdy outlying stores—Eagle Harbor Books, across Puget Sound, and Parkplace Books in Kirkland—that can be done at the cost of a couple of ferry tickets and dinner. And we of course want to accommodate Pennie Clark Ianniciello’s Costco clout with such signings as she might want. (Could also do one for her in Missoula if there’s a Montana tour.)

A bit farther afield, there’s a mini-tour north of Seattle that I’ve always done for a quartet of salt-of-the-earth bookstores—in Bellingham, Mount Vernon, Anacortes, and Stanwood—that are chronically off the national grid; I think it would professionally behoove us to support them again, although I do have to tell you the tab may look a little high for the total of books sold at these signings. The area is just far enough away that it takes an overnight, and the one good place to stay ain’t cheap even on the business rate I customarily wangle, and there’s at least a day and a half of meals for Carol and me as well: could come to $300 or so for maybe 100 handsold hardbacks. The sell-through of signed books would be the point of doing this; a store like the former ABA prez Chuck Robinson’s, Village Books in Bellingham, has always done hefty orders of my books and hung on to ‘em until they sell.

--The Oregon Historical Society in Portland: as signings go, I just don’t know of any better shot than this. Two or three thousand of their members troop through, all afternoon on the first Sunday of December, buying books at a discount. I’ve sometimes sold 150 books, half of them hardback, at this event. Oregon is one of my readership strongholds—more so than the Puget Sound region, in terms of speaking invitations, big signings, etc.—and we could try to piggyback another venue or two onto this OHS trip. Within the Portland area, there’s a Borders in the suburb of Tigard that has turned out a big crowd for me; and there’s always Powell’s, although I tend to think my books sell okay there without us having to fuss with that store. Another possibility is Corvallis, two hours south of Portland, where the Oregon State U. bookstore has been wonderful toward my stuff. Partly through its sponsorship, This House of Sky will be the “community read” in the Corvallis area in April, and I’ll be there for a couple of days of speechmaking and schmoozing. In any case, while a Portland trip isn’t utterly cheap—I’d need an escort to get to the Borders store in Tigard, for instance--these have historically been among the best readings/signings I’ve done.

A couple of concluding thoughts to throw into the mix:

--If Prairie Nocturne takes off like a rocket and you think its whoosh is sufficient to bring me east, I am game—continentally challenged but game—for whatever you can contrive in New York and East Coast environs. Susan Richman was the last person to trot me through any publicity paces there, I can’t even remember for which book.

--In marketing, publicity, whatever, we shouldn’t lose sight of the angle that Prairie Nocturne is an extension of my best-selling work so far and favorite of readers’ groups, Dancing at the Rascal Fair. In other words, there’s a considerable built-in audience for this novel, which picks up lives from Rascal Fair, most particularly that indelible schoolgirl.

Yours for inspired book-peddling,
June 6th 1931

New York City.

Dear Carlo,

I'm sorry to be so late in getting you this report, but I had to move the next day. That's why I wrote that penny letter. Please forgive me.

Below you can read what happened to the party. If the people who have been nice to in Harlem would have turned out as my real friends did downtown, the party would have been a big success. However, I'm glad that it didn't turn out worse.

You were the sweetest thing in the world when you could see that the investment was going to be a lose. However, I swear by my life that I will pay every cent that I owe in time.

Yours sincerely,

Taylor.

---

The Paid GUESTS at the PARTY.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>Eddie Wasserman</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs Regent</td>
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<td>Mrs Mc Lean</td>
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<td>J Clifford</td>
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<td>Evelyn Huntly</td>
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<td>Mr. Odell and Jack Carter</td>
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<td>Louis Mitchell</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miss Brown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lloyd Thomas</td>
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TOTAL: $147.00

Expenses: $157.20
Recites: $147.00
Losses: $10.20
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<td>White Rock and Ginger Ale</td>
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<td>To one of the Africans</td>
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**Total:** $157.20
Prairie Nocturne: publication and marketing ideas
Memo to Ivan, 12/20/01

Random thoughts for you to consider when you’re ready to take these steps:

Call Liz for a strategy session, including the following:

--Film rights. PN could get a boost within the publishing house if there were to be some action on film rights. You’ve not have any active agenting from Richard. Would it be a good idea for you to call Zeismer and find out if he’d show an early ms. sample around? If not, then what else could be done? This novel has three excellent leads, some good character parts, and all sorts of scenery and plot twists.

--Ms. strategy.

    When is the Hilary book due for publication, and what can you do to maneuver around that? Submit it earlier? Later?

    As a matter of background, Liz should know that you’ve not heard a word from Nan since signing the contract. That’s fact, not complaint. You don’t need your hand held, but this whiteout is new territory, and what does Liz think this means? What you do want is one competent read-through of ms., and strong marketing support.

    As to marketing, this book should be promoted as you’ve described it: as a novel of motives. It should be presented to the publishing house and the public as having epic sweep from the trenches of World War I to the suffragist movement, the Ku Klux Klan and the Harlem Renaissance. Should you write some of this in a cover letter to Nan, or perhaps in a letter to Liz which she could forward?

Other marketing ideas:

--While it ranges from the Rocky Mountains to France to Edinburgh to Harlem, PN is also an extension of your bestselling Rascal Fair. Cite sales figures for that. Also mention Sky’s #1 pick by readers, and cite sales figures. In other words, there’s a major built-in audience for this novel, which picks up lives from RF, most particularly that indelible schoolgirl.