

Nebraska Territory

NEBRASKA.

The south line of the Territory is the fortieth parallel—the north, the forty-ninth; Kansas bounding her on the south, and the British Possessions on the north. Her eastern boundary is the Missouri River: her western, the summit of the Rocky Mountains. Beyond the river on the east lie the States of Missouri and Iowa, and the Territory of Minnesota. Beyond the mountains on the west are the Territories of Utah, Oregon and Washington. It contains 335,882 square miles, a wider extent of country having a single government than any other on the continent.

Considering its wide extent, this country is less varied in its surface than might be expected. It has an eastern dip from the mountains to the river. Its features naturally divide it into three grand portions. The first (the only one we will here speak of), is that part somewhat triangular in form, having Kansas for its base, the Missouri for its eastern, and the ninety-ninth longitudinal meridian for its western side. The second portion is that lying between the ninety-ninth meridian and the Rocky Mountains, running from the Kansas line to the Black Hills. The third portion is the north-west half of the Territory, lying between the Black Hills and the Rocky Mountains.

The country of the first section falls into three classes. The first is the bottom lands, which are low lands lying along the rivers. They have a level, plane-like surface. They are alluvial. They may in a general way be described as sand and clay, mixed with ashes, carbon and very large quantities of decomposed vegetable matter—together forming a light, porous, black mold. This land is the deposit of the rivers, after ages of flow and overflow. It is easy of cultivation, and productive to an astonishing degree. Its fertility is inexhaustible, on account of its depth. Above these bottom lands from fifty to one hundred feet are second bottom lands, which slope back to the summits of bluffs that range with the general level of the country beyond. Now and then bluffs from the range above mentioned break these table lands by running abruptly into the river.

SECTIONAL MAP OF NEBRASKA TERRITORY

Compiled from the Field Notes in the Surveyor General's Office,

—by—
ROBERT L. REAM.

Showing the Counties, Townships, Sections, Topography,
Cities, Villages, and all Internal Improvements &c.

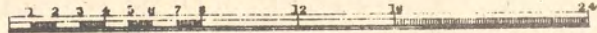
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Walnut Street, Cincinnati, O.

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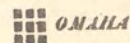
Scale 8 Miles to an Inch



Middleton Wallace & Co, Lithographers, Cincinnati O.

REFERENCES

Towns



Common Roads

Rivers

Indian Reserves

Township

in Sections

State Boundary

Boundaries of

Land Districts.

1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36

Winter, 1990

A BEAUTIFUL VALLEY THIS

1

Opening day
a new Model 12 and we
drove into Potter's yard at dawn.
Seventh-day Adventist, he couldn't shoot
Saturdays, but pointed us into the canyons.
Up that first draw south your old Fulton
doubled pheasant before I got off my safety.
The fastest I've shot with you showed me
how to shoot true and careful and that
no time remembers better than the first.

2

I was barely big enough to rig a rod and
cars were cheap and didn't bend up much.
Out of bed and daybreak still a piece away
we laughed at your kitchen-craft: pancakes
dark as rusty coffeecan lids on white plates,
a half-dozen eggs frizzled as the parched brim
on an old sun-beat fisherman's hat,
and crisped bacon. We laughed and ate it
all, with real butter and floating in syrup,
back when cholesterol and carcinoma weren't yet
blips on the radar of public conscience.

West of town a half-mile a car dived
off the bridge like a merganser at a minnow.
"That bird went to sleep at the wheel," you said.
That bird and the summer pre-dawn
half-light detoured all our trips
into the creek. He and his car
weren't bad hurt, and I learned
you have to be flexible
as an eight-foot spinning rod and fish
don't much seem to notice
what time of day an early bird dangles
a fresh-dug garden worm in their lake.

4

3

Our blind on the island
was eight feet above water, a box
hid by early-cut willow and plum.
Six mergansers kamakazied us headon,
their error giving us dawn at our backs.
We knocked three in the river, a fourth
blammed the board-face front thigh-high,
the survivors thrumming past our hats
like prehistoric hummingbirds. Nice warmup
for us and the dog, you said, counting on
mallards the rest of the day.

4

You started it.
"A beautiful valley
this Elkhorn River Valley."
We were headed for McCoy Cemetary
where your dad and brother are buried.
You don't know their middle names.
"Grandad Crook came here
one hundred fourteen years ago,
bought land for fifty cents an acre."

We drove past concrete slabs of progress
lying like alkali beds around shopping malls
and argued signs, signs of prosperity
you called them.

West of here good farm ground
goes for near four hundred
with no takers. Keya Paha pasture
might bring thirty-five,
dry years and grass fires
thrown in no charge.

Coming back the old road
you said that row of cottonwoods
was already big when you were a boy.
They reminded you to say you'd had enough

woodcutting, gangsaw and ax,
didn't think you wanted to live
that life over. The afternoon you eyed
my chainsaw like the moneyed half
an interest in a business
you were interested in once--maybe
you could ease back into it.
Then you said, "Looks like work,
I'm glad it's yours.

5

Three winters' fires
fill the ash pit to seven feet,
enough to treat the retired
neighbor's garden for more years
than he'll need. The chill
hanging in the air this evening says
the pit has to be cleaned. Elm and ash
split and cured are corded
behind the garage.
As if from a movie projector
running on the juice of your lifetime,
the flickering light and playful
shadows of the first fall fire
keep us quiet as smoke.

(for Dad)

SHOOTING

One the range
you'll need a pair of .38 hulls
stuck open-end into your ears--
big-bore muzzle-bark will set
anvils and hammers in your head ringing
louder than real ones in blacksmith shops.
You'll want a glove to handle
matched fiddleback maple grips when the shock
of 240 grains of lead forces a big frame
into your palm, Gs you'll feel all the way
to your shoulder. That's on the range
where round after round of concentration
conditions eyes and finger to pull
down on the real thing.

On stand
you'll need to feel movement,
a shadow, off to the side, still
in the brush--flick of ear, glint
of light off antler tine, leaf whisper
touched by one double-teardrop hoof.

Now you'll want to thumb
back the hammer slow, forefinger
holding back the trigger
so a cylinder packed with hollow points
will skip one click and muffle two more.
That's when movement imperceptible

as hair raising on the back of the neck
takes full shape. Wait until the buck comes
broadside, head down, then extend the arms,
off hand cradling grip hand, the two
a picture of supplication, sights lined on
where you know vertebrae will shift
smooth on cartilage-cushion to
turn his head away. That's the time
a finger's polished squeeze
will answer the brain's slight impulse.

You won't hear or feel
the jolt of a gun's jump
blot out the buck's last lunge.
You may hear, as if from a dark distance
and for the first time, your own pulse thump
against a silence of your own making.

RAINSTORM

Before it hits
I'm a garden dynamo,
pulverizing weeds
like nobody's business
in the tomatoes,
salvia and petunias,
playing goddess of the garden--
take that, sucker: die,
*or bloom, dammit--*while
thunderheads gather and loom,
spitting earthward,
getting flashy on me
until I can't ignore it,
until I retreat,
lay down my puny weapon
while the big cheese upstairs
gets serious about celestial bowling,
touching off special effects
like shear winds, straight
and/or zig-zag lightning,
45 degree angle rain, etc.,
the cats and I
cowering beneath the sofa
in the brunt of the storm,
hugging and saying how much
we love each other
until 8:45
when we crawl out to catch
the sun dipping its head down,
casting eerie sulfur light,
casting violet,
then rose-violet,
then rose, rose-blue,
blue-blue, blue-to-purple,
dark purple, bruise-purple,
dark purple-bruise-black,
black.

SCARS

It was the summer our well
was going dry and my brothers
both had jobs in town.

One evening the older one drove home
the lumberyard's ancient stationwagon,
proceeded to clean it up before supper.

Something about impressing his boss.
Only the younger one wasn't impressed,
saying Chores come first get your ass
over here and help.

The older one kept washing and washing
with the end of the garden hose.
My younger brother whirled him
by his belt loops on to the gravel.

Their fists and punches hit like
they were playing it this time for real.
Mother came screaming out of the house,
flailing about somebody getting hurt,
helpless as a hanky in a downpour.

The cows stood heavy and bellowing from
the barnyard while my brothers clashed,
their bodies rolling over and over
in the knotweed, this time
Dad not there to stop them.

We were losing the farm that summer,
my brothers suddenly grown, and
everything going down deeper
into the ditch, even
the last of the water.

HEADLINES: HOMETOWN WEEKLY

My world, back then, stretched
clear from one township to the next:

ten or so, I rode with my folks
the gravel miles to town all that summer

past a field where her body lay: six months
missing -- highschool junior who never made it

the two blocks from Little's Dry Goods
on Main Street to home one Saturday night--

but we knew she'd been in trouble before,
there was talk in the cafe, on the street;

while Sundquist's alfalfa was greening,
growing taller, Otto himself high

in the seat of his International
hauling wagons along the fencerow,

not noticing that spot just yards
off the road, until the first cutting,

until the low sicklebar uncovered
what was trying to become earth;

the name Donalyn Deeds looming at me
in tall linotype, black and bold,

still causing shivers the way we
never passed that field again the same,

after thirty years unchanged,
still unsolved.

INTO AND OUT OF DREAMS

1

Evening comes on hot and damp.
Tomorrow I need to cultivate corn,
and I hate this crazy idea my wife got
of going to some old movie.

2

In the night I dream
about lying under the tractor,
fixing a cultivator shank.
Marilyn Monroe, in the black and white
of the movie, hands me tools.
"Crescent wrench," I say.
"Crescent wrench," she whispers.
"Crescent wrench," I say.

3

In the cool morning, I work
under the tractor while the wind
rustles the cottonwood leaves above.
I'm wearing clean overalls and a fresh
chambray shirt. I never could
carry a tune but find myself singing.
My wife, on her way to feed chickens,
stops and sets down her pail of oats.
"Please hand me that Crescent wrench,"
I say. "Crescent wrench coming up,"
she says, smiling down the length
of her body in full color.

MY FIRST MORNING MILKING

I walk to the barn before a sign
of morning. The stars
are sparks in a black sky.
The snow is blue and still.

Then my father and I
carry the milk pails to the house.
We bend over the sink, our heads
close together, and scoop up water
with our hands to wash our faces.

I smell bacon. The others come
downstairs, rubbing sleepy eyes.
I want to tell them what I know,
the mystery that goes away
when everyone wakes up and the sun
is a cold fire in the east window.

A REPORT OF MADNESS

We've been neighbors all our lives.
Yesterday I saw him
at the edge of the west forty,
with his rusty fishing rod
casting into the cornfield.
When I got down there,
he was reeling in a daredevil lure
with corn leaves and bits of stalk
hanging on the hooks.
I asked him how they were biting.
It wasn't funny, I know,
but what else could I say?
A few more dry years
and any one of us might not be far
from fishing out of cornfields.
He kept casting.
His face was like one of those stones
he had picked for years from his field
and piled along the fence,
but the motion of his arm
made me think of an elegant dancer.
I stood back until he snagged
on a cocklebur and broke his line.
Then he let me
put my hands on his shoulders--
they felt warm and hard
through his denim coat--
and I turned him toward home.

Linda M. Hasselstrom

WOLVES

--for George

I know your pirate face,
your eagle nose, scarred throat,
at any time of day,
any mood or season.
I know all of you
in the dark, your cough,
your mountain scent
in a sweating crowd.
Every inch of me
would know any inch of you.

Now I know your swollen grave
by smoking red sunset,
by ice-white moonlight,
by snow drifted into deer tracks
between the rocks.
I've seen an eagle spiral up
at sunset over your mound.

In the wolf hour
I've heard you howling on my scent,
tasted your touch,
seen your wolf soul.
You find me constant,
staring into the dark.

BEEF EATER

I have been eating beef hearts
all my life.

I split the smooth maroon shape
lengthwise,
open it like a diagram, chambers exposed.
I cut tough white membranes off valves,
slice onions over the heart,
float it in water,
boil it tender.

I chop prunes, apricots, mushrooms
to mix with dry bread,
sage from the hillside.

I pack the crevices full,
nail the heart together,
weave string around the nails.

Gently,
I lift the full heart
between my hands,
place it in the pan
with its own blood, fat, juices.
I roast that heart
at three hundred fifty degrees
for an hour or two.
Often I dip pan juices,
pour them lovingly over the meat.

When I open the oven,
the heart throbs
in its own golden fat.

I thicken the gravy with flour,
place the heart with love
on my Grandmother's ironstone platter,

slice it evenly from the small end;
pour gravy over it all,
smile as I carry it to the table.

My friends have begun to notice my placid air,
which they mistake for serenity.
Yesterday a man remarked on my large brown eyes,
my long lashes,
my easy walk.

I switched my tail at him
as if he were a fly,
paced
deliberately
away.

THE WILD AND WOOLLY WEST

I

Those were the days, boys, when the West was wild,
when Jesse James rode a night-black horse
into a hail of gunfire to take money from a bank
and give it to the poor nesters outside of town,
while protecting them from the gunfighters hired
by the big ranchers who wanted the water.

Those were the days, when Yellow Hair Custer came
to the West Montana plains with West Point ideas.
He thought he'd ride his white horse to the White House
on a pavement of Indian corpses, fitted together
like parquet or the flattened bodies in an Aztec mural.
Meanwhile, Calamity Jane and Wild Bill Hickok loved
each other in the golden streets of Deadwood.

Those were the days, boys,
when the white man
civilized
the West.

II

My grandfather, coming West from Sweden,
saw a wagon full of cow guts, Indian kids
sitting on the sides eating with both hands.
He thought it was funny;
didn't know they had nothing else to eat.
Custer didn't ride far after he met Crazy Horse.
Wild Bill never cared for Jane,
and he was married anyway.
Calamity
died broke.

OF WALRUSES AND CHEESE

Milo Burney
runs the old creamery uptown
and I sell cheese there
six days a week.
I am meticulously scouring the butcher block
when
the bespectacled white whiskered walrus
strains through the door.
She lumbers into the realm
of cheddar and American,
scuffing the entire length
of the polished floor
with her dark leather shoes.
They are the same color
of those devil's food marshmallow
cookies you can buy in bulk
at the five and ten
and there is black, ribbed elastic
under each pleated, panting tongue
to keep them from slipping off
her walrus hide.
Grunting, she hefts her big coal pocketbook
with the giant brass clasp
onto the counter.
The profuse grizzled bristles
that reside above her chapped upper lip
are the color of charcoal ashes
and I wonder
if the sparse
bib overall clad husband
shadowed in the background
has ever kissed her.
Her sallow jowls waggle
as she makes her demand
in a graveled Polish accent.
The walrus requires

just one pound
of mild cheddar cheese;
no more, no less,
just 80 cents worth.
I carve a firm yellow slab
from the scarlet wax wrapped
twenty-five pound brick
and tell her it is 15 1/2 ounces.
She nullifies the order
and wags a fat sausage finger
in my dejected face,
giving me full view
of the chicory sweat stains
that have travelled from her armpits
to the girth of her beige poplin dress.
I wish that Mr. Burney,
cheese transaction overlord,
was here to endure her punishment;
it is his fault that
every ounce and nickel
must be accounted for.
Now I cleave another thick chunk
and the federally licensed table of weights
and measures
indicates I have arrived
at one pound, two ounces.
Her wary, watery eyes are upon me
and I have grown much wiser
in the past sixty seconds.
I tell the walrus
it is exactly one pound
and quickly foist the cheddar chunk
into a stiff brown sack.
Delving into the bowels
of the ebony handbag,
she emerges with last week's
egg money clenched
in her corpulent fist.
She hands me one silver coin
at a time
until she is satisfied and I am relieved.
The gant little farmer

behind her forces the screen door
open with his quivering weight.
The moustached walrus
wrenches back through the opening
and trundles to their faded Ford pickup
with the red Omaha Standard stockracks.
I grasp a dime from the coinpurse
buried in my pocket
and put it into the creamery cash drawer.
Milo Burney,
Precise Lord of Curds and Whey,
will never know.

JERSEY MILK

They buried her husband
a year ago come Tuesday.
Alone
was all Wilbur Harlow left Estey
When he hanged himself
last August.
Morning takes her first breath
and already Estey Harlow
is feeding the brown pullets.
She watches them squawk
as they scurry for the cracked corn
she cradles in her strawberried cotton apron.
With her breadcrust colored hands,
she unfurls it's rickrack borders
and the yellow kernels spill to the earth.
Back inside the weathered farmhouse,
Estey draws her once chestnut hair
into a faded scarlet kerchief
and bustles about the rambling kitchen.
The late days of summer have set a full blush

to the bushel basket of peaches resting at the screen door;
she must work them up today.

She bides the time cutting home rendered lard
into unbleached flour screened from the tin sifter.

The tender crusts are fashioned,
the amber fruit brims within.

A spatter of milk and a dusting of sugar
to each pale pastry,
she now indents the edges with her smooth, tanned thumb
and nudges each glass plate
into the toasty oven.

Estey cackles the way her brown hens cackle
as she envisions rich cream
from the doe eyed cow
slathered on the golden desserts.

An hour to linger until they're baked through,
she retires to the clapboard veranda swing.

The evening crickets sing thier legs songs
and Estey hums in the twilight,
rocking,
gently rocking.

She is waiting for Wilbur to bring in
the Jersey milk.

STARTING THE EXPENSIVE CENTER-PIVOT
DURING OFF-PEAK HOURS

Stinging song from the deep Ogallala,
the chilling rain falls, spits air, and falls again.
the wellhead whines like the worn out gears of heaven;

small bronze planets lose their bearings
and grind concentric orbits on their world.

Cams twist and relays trip;

truths, lies, truths, lies.

Every stop-start day its logic seems less clear,

but under the scorpion's tail tonight

it tells again the only joke it knows;

junk junk junk junk

junk junk junk junk.

GAMEL'S HARVEST

The last unpicked field
stands in December like accusations
against its owner.
Dark robes of snow,
swirling in judgement,
pile up the evidence against him.
The broken rows call out a verdict
of poor planning and bad habits.
It is said he let a gear run dry.
The red machine lies rusting in the weeds
as lost as a high school sweetheart
broken by abuse. In the unpainted
house a man leans back among
the handcuffed shadows of his living room,
his spirit empty as beer cans,
and, fueled by the tight bundles
of his recycled anger,
will tell his nagging wife to go to hell.

IT'S SPAGHETTI FEED WEEKEND

at the Legion Club
and the hamburger brigade is remaking
forty pounds of raw steer
into eight thousand meatballs.
The operating table is strewn with pans
mounded high
by the morning's labor.
"Need more balls!",
shouts Verna over at the gas grill.
"Can't handle what you got now,"
yells her husband Vic.

Then Verna watches 'em sizzle,
the scorching heat like a child's face
fired with fever. Across from Vic,
Frank Johnson, Post Commander,
squeezes the soft flesh
in his big-boned hands,
thinking of two small sons
who ended in war and suicide.
Off to one end
Stevie molds the meat
real slow
wondering
about the 4-H calf
haltered home
in Dad's barn.

Vic checks his watch,
figuring the hours to Sunday noon.
"Tighter and smaller," he says,
still swearing by the recipe
he used in North Africa.
Frank lobs a half-ouncer
onto the pile,
and laughs,
"Biggest balls in town!"

LOOK, HOSS, IT'S STILL
A STRANGE IDEA

Like what would ya prefer?
Thighs 'n smiles in a marble bath
(the short-haired blonde)

Or finger 'n embrace?
To tell the truth what I hate
she says is them cement condors
'n coyotes with wings

Like are we
supposed to kneel 'n pray --restored
driven home gladdened--
for pockets a cinders?

Not me
she says
(satin cowgirl shirt)
we gotta become soil
'cause sweeping scream of moon 'n whiskey barrel
wood creak of true love bed
'n you know
we can't see the burning
pure ride

Not yet Not yet
We become soil Deep at the root
is the old sound: flesh caressed

THE THERMOMETER

The thermometer stood at thirty below
powdered snow blew around in a fog.
It was the kind of day that made a man wish
he's been born a rich widow's dog!

The boys were all in the bunkhouse,
glad to be done for the day.
With the horses unharnessed and eatin' their grain
and the cows belly-deep in good hay.

When an old pickup comes rattlin' in,
and the boss steps out to the ground.
"What the hell is he doin' out on a day like this,
when he's got a nice house in town?"

Well he thinks of some things, still could be done,
that don't even pertain to a cow,
Like cleanin' the hen house, haulin' in straw,
or pitching some hay in the mow.

"My God, the thermometer reads thirty below,
the wind blowin' out of the east.
Coldest day we've had all winter,
not fit for man or beast."

But the boss is a tough old timer.
He quotes them all, chapter and verse.
For no matter how bad the weather is now,
he remembers a damn-sight worse.

So he sends em all out into the storm,
tells everyone just what to do.
Then when he gets in his pickup,
and heads back for town,
well, the thermometer goes back to town too!

SHOOTING POOL WITH BILLY BONES
AT THE MONKEY MOUNTAIN BAR

Billy thinks he's so damn good,
barbecue chips in his beard,
bottle of Bud he strangles.

When he gets beat it must be
an act of God, some divine lightning bolt
he looks for through the front window
gone rusty with smoke.

His kids call with broken arms,
the dog died, mom got hit by a train,
anything to get Billy home.

Bones shoots one-handed, old felt
sure traction, cue ball a yo-yo kept neon
in the light, soundless cushions.
He conducts combinations, straight lines.

We wait for a chance, saying under
our breath, *Billy thinks he's so damn good*,
and chalk to play something the gods

know exists, the game, and stretch night
into chorus, or something as close
to music as our bootsoles know
the jukebox delivers.

Margie knows she's way past marriage.
Her hips failed, she says it
five times tonight.

Again, no one proposes,
and Billy Bone's step home is fast,
dollar bills pocketed, a sneer
to ward off rain.

Peter Vandenberg

ON THE WAY HOME

Winding through the trees
that huddle along the road to
3 mile corner, I see splinters
of light rushing through the mist.

I slow up, pulling the car
down through the gears while
beacons sweep the night, their
bloody arms waving us to a stop.

Someone missed the curve again.

A pair of tail lights stare up
at the road through shattered
limbs, steam curls up a broken
elm between them. Without

flashing lights, or siren,
the ambulance rises slowly
up out of the ditch, passing
our line of cars on the way

back into town. I wait,
barely revving the motor,
watching my headlights bloom
and fade on the car ahead.

ANOTHER FAMOUS POET VISITS OUR COLLEGE

A University, I think, is where she came from.
She read her poems like that lady we had two years ago.
Like each word was a pall bearer
for her latest award.
Like she'd learned
to write before she'd learned to speak.

Someone's whole class was there,
notebooks open, gushing out white space,

and you could feel her straining to lift,
trying to carry us up on those flat, hollow tones,
above the page, above ourselves,
above Welch's
quick right foot, dangling
over his left knee,

finding
the rhythm
of a squirrel fight
out the window.

Shirley Buettner

AN ACRE OF SUNFLOWERS

Rigid gold collars overwhelm
their brown faces as they swivel,
small wives of the sun
ringing awake the parched hill
stretching toward September,

the only patch in Mitchell County
like trills from a summer kitchen,
my mother's song
as she bends to the flame,
stirring the oatmeal.

THE STORYTELLER

Zozobra, coyote, mesquite:
on her lap, a shallow bowl
into which the last vowels
of her story fall, ripe
to be ground into legend.

In each of her brown arms
a child struggles, one
thrashing his short legs
as if to escape the history,
the other reaching beyond
the teller to another story.

How can she know,
her storied eyes rolling upward,
groping for the heart
of the tale, that the fluid cave
of her throat flows
with such a brief melody

or that, before her story is sung,
the feet of another generation
strike the ground?

IN CASE OF MORGAN

Morgan left the house Sunday night. Seated at the kitchen table, wearing only a threadbare T-shirt and red knee socks, was Lauren Collier, his wife. She was calculating the time since his departure. Four dinners, three work days and two pans of brownies ago. She carved a generous portion from this latest, fresh batch and ate the crumbling chocolate. Not too hot. Just right, actually. She took a sip of wine.

Her husband detested her habit of eating sweet things with wine. Lauren failed to see the problem. Chocolate chip cookies or Hershey bars were perfect partners for a glass of Chablis. Still, Morgan always gave a quick shake of his head and grimaced at her.

Lauren studied the wine glass and ran a slender, bare-nailed finger around the rim. A summer rain pecked at the windows; she nodded her head with the uneven rhythm. Damp, copper curls, still wet from the shower, framed her pale face and languid brown eyes.

Lauren leaned back in her chair and stretched her arms out over her head. She was waiting for Morgan. He had said he would be in touch by Wednesday. It was now Wednesday night, and there had been no telecommunication. She could hear him saying that: "I must call Lauren. We've had no telecommunication since I left."

He was to let her know the next step in their situation. That was his word. "Situation." Lauren's word for it was --well, she didn't have a word yet. She was still digesting it. She had a feeling, though, that they would look back on this in years to come and laughingly call it something like the Ridiculous Incident. The kind of thing you tell other couples about at parties: "And there was the time Morgan took off for a week..." and everyone roars and someone else tells everyone his Crazy Episode.

Morgan should call anytime, she thought, getting up to pull the wine bottle from the refrigerator. He was too conscientious to say he'd call and then not do it. Morgan always did what he said. If, for instance, he said on Tuesday, "How about Chinese this weekend?" Lauren went right out and bought chicken and almonds and cabbage and eggroll wrappers, because once Morgan voiced a thought, it became a plan.

Yes, she thought, sliding back down into the chair and refilling her glass, this will be resolved shortly. Morgan will be home, back in their bedroom, by Friday night. From the doorway, she'll watch as he hunches over his open suitcase, unloading jeans and still-clean T-shirts and argyle socks. His fine blond hair will fall across his forehead -- it always does by dinner time, having worked itself free of the day's mousse. She'll notice the way his angular face, with its beakish nose, softens somehow in this bedroom, opens and relaxes. The way his earnest green eyes become playful and friendly and sexy. He, of course, feeling her gaze, will look up, run a hand uselessly through his hair and grin at her, just before a few strands fall back and he turns away to replace the last pair of underwear in the top dresser drawer.

Lauren looked at her watch and then cut another brownie, parking it squarely on the napkin in front of her. 9:30. One more brownie and then she was going to bed. She hadn't told her co-workers about this yet. Would the customer service department at Kriegel Software understand this Ridiculous Incident? Probably not. That Miranda girl would turn it into a federal case. Besides, what was there to say at this point? "Hi, gang, did I mention that after five years of marriage Morgan announced that he's going to live with Dee Deal?" How embarrassing then, come Friday, to say, "Forget it, he's home now, the Dee thing is off." Better not mention it at all. I would be over in a couple days anyway.

Dee Deal. Lauren remembered the first time Morgan mentioned her. A new account rep at the ad agency. Just a couple year's experience, he had said, but she seems good. And Lauren had laughed at her name: "Dee Deal? What's da deal?" Morgan had laughed too.

Then, when they saw her at the company Christmas party, Lauren asked him what he thought of Dee's look.

"What do you mean?" Morgan asked.

"You know. Her make-up. I think it's too dramatic. Her skin's too light and her hair's too dark for those gooey red lips."

"Uh-huh," Morgan replied. "She dresses well, though."

Not necessarily well, Lauren thought, but the woman was so skinny, even that clingy purple dress looked good on her.

Lauren should have suspected something when Morgan started

calling Dee Deirdre. He would say, "Deirdre and I are working on the Curry account," or "Deirdre and I are having lunch with Jerry today." At first, she thought Deirdre was another new account rep, but Morgan said, "No, you know her. Dee. Dee Deal."

"Oh, Dee Deal? What's da deal, anyway?" she laughed.

Morgan had smiled and looked into his coffee cup. "Yes, that's her. But she prefers Deirdre."

Lauren wondered, then, why everyone called her Dee. She shrugged it off as a quirk of Morgan's, avoiding nicknames. The way he often called Mike, his brother, Michael. Morgan did have that knack for knowing people's preferences.

Of course, now she knew how Dee became Deirdre. She shuddered. Had Morgan gotten angry every time she mocked Dee's name? Had he hated her for it? Laughed at her ignorance? Maybe he had merely pitied her.

When he called tonight, Dee Deal would probably be in the room, or perhaps listening on the extension, waiting for Lauren to say something stupid. Lauren wouldn't give her the chance. She wouldn't tell Morgan that she missed him or that she expected him home. She wouldn't even say she wanted him home. She would merely wait as he would hang up and gently inform Ms. Deal that he was going back to the only woman he ever loved.

Olivia, a chubby white cat, meowed and pushed her nose into Lauren's cheek. Perched on the table, her hind foot was now firmly planted in Lauren's brownie.

"Olivia Louise, you get down," she said. Her voice commanded no action. She sighed, pulled the cat into her lap and fed Olivia the trampled brownie.

From the bedroom where she had left the T.V. on, Lauren heard the news start. That opening theme, it was stolen, wasn't it? From "Star Wars" or "Rocky" or something? She nudged Olivia's rump and the cat jumped to the hardwood floor. Lauren turned off the kitchen light, detoured past the front door (yes it was locked; no chain, in case of Morgan) and headed to bed.

By the blue T.V. light, Lauren neatly arranged the top of the nightstand. There was just enough space, next to the phone, for the portable cassette player. She turned off the T.V. on Morgan's

dresser (he always watched the news in bed) and switched on the tiny pink lamp next to it. Then she pulled off her T-shirt and socks, dropped a taped into the machine, and crawled under the covers, listening to Jimmy Buffett croon from somewhere on the beach.

She slid a little further down, into the soft pink sheets that smelled of Morgan and Cling-Free, under the puffy rose-colored quilt. Morgan had bought it last year to replace that old unravelling afghan, a long-ago gift from Lauren's grandmother. She considered getting up to brush her teeth. Was that appointment with Dr. Reardon next Monday already? She should floss, too, he would scold her. She surrendered instead to sleep, dreaming of Jimmy Buffett and Grandma Stills. They were knitting a new afghan for her, Jimmy said. It was pink and green and silver and he would bring it home right away.

The phone woke her. Fumbling for it, Lauren knocked the tape player to the floor.

"Hello?" She squinted around the room. The pink lamp was still in, but its glow was diminished by the filter of orange light coming through the open weave of the curtains. Olivia had jumped to the floor to investigate the crash.

"Is Morgan there?" a man asked. "It's Jerry."

"What?" she asked. "Jerry? What time is it?"

"6:30. Listen, Lauren, I need to make sure he brings the Myers layout in this morning. I think he's workin on it at home. Has he left yet?"

"He's not here," Lauren said. With her free hand, she pushed herself up in bed, pulling the sheet with her, covering her breasts.

"Damn. Do you know if he has the Myers stuff?"

"The Myers stuff?"

"Yeah, Myers," he repeated, sounding impatient. "It's important, Lauren. I'm meeting them today."

"It's important," she echoed. Cradling the phone against her shoulder, she rubbed her eyes and yawned. There was a sour taste in her mouth.

"Hey, Lauren, are you awake? Listen, if he's already gone, I'll just catch up with him."

"He's not here, Jerry. Morgan's not here."

"Okay, fine. I'll catch him later."

"Yeah, do that, Jerry." She hung up and rolled onto her side. Propped on her left elbow, Lauren watched Olivia, who sniffed tentatively at the tape that had spilled in the fall. Then she sat up, lifted the phone onto the bed and dialed her office. She reported that she was feeling quite ill and would probably not be in for several days.

Neil Harrison

FEB. 4, 1881

That January had been the warmest anyone could recall. The early snows were all but gone, and the grass was starting to green out in the hills. Some of the cattle were already moving up out of the river breaks. Then one afternoon the boss decided a couple of us ought to ride out and start pushing strays out of the big Niobrara canyons onto the wide flat north of the river.

John and I and a couple of others were hanging around the bunkhouse playing cards. The rest had gone into Gordon for supplies and a good time. When the boss walked in and asked, John tossed in his pair of jacks and volunteered. I was holding eights, and when Ed raised me a second time, I threw in and said I'd ride along. Hugh considered things a while, then called the raise. Ed beat his treys with sevens.

Next morning John and I rode out to the old line shack in the southeast corner of the ranch. We spent the night there, and just after sunup next morning we rode down to the river. It didn't take us half an hour to gather a dozen critters down in the brush, but we were half froze by the time we started working them up that long cut west of the shack.

I was on the east side of the canyon, near the bottom. John was

riding the west side, high enough he was starting to get some sun. Then a bob-tailed steer broke from the bunch and I wheeled my horse after him. By the time I got the steer turned and headed up the canyon, John had got a little way ahead of me. It was cold and damp down where I was riding in the shadows, and when I looked again at John and saw him riding up there in the sun I felt a little green. My fingers were so cold I could hardly hold onto the reins, and he was up there rolling smoke.

I was thinking it was about my turn to get some sun, when I heard a faint crackling overhead and all of a sudden John rolled forward in his saddle. He seemed to hang there for a second, then slid off his horse. And then I heard the shot, a big rifle a long way off, somewhere behind and above us.

I nearly fell off my sorrel, but somehow landed on my feet and ducked behind a little sandstone bluff between me and where the shot had come from. I looked up where John lay next to his horse, and for a minute I just sat there dazed. Then I remembered my revolver, and I pulled the old Colt out of its holster. I made sure it was loaded, then I eased up and looked out from the bluff but I couldn't see anything.

I waited maybe ten, fifteen minutes but there was nothing more. I guessed the shot had come from near the shack, and I thought whoever was there might be waiting for me to go up to John so they could pick me off as well. I kept glancing up at the west slope where John lay, and he hadn't moved since he'd fallen from his horse. The big bay just stood there next to him, and my sorrel was right behind me. Neither of our horses had been spooked at the shot.

I wanted to go up there to John, but I kept waiting for something more to happen. When it didn't, I slipped back along the shadows on my side of the canyon and climbed up to the rim where I could see to shoot back at whoever had shot John. I was relieved when I looked over the rim and there was nothing there.

For a minute I thought somebody might be in the shack, but when I looked back at John I could see he was out of sight of the cabin. I cocked my revolver and stood up and walked to the shack. But there was nothing there.

I walked back along the rim of the canyon, and found tracks where a rider had come from the east and dismounted, then mounted again and headed back where he came from. There was nothing moving across the flat. Whoever had ambushed John had gone down one of the draws and headed for the river.

I holstered the .45 and ran back down the canyon to get my horse. Then I rode up to where John lay. From the back of my horse I could see he was dead. When I dismounted I saw the big bullet had angled in below his right shoulder, gone through both lungs and smashed his left elbow. I knelt down and rolled him over, onto his back. His eyes stared up at me, sky blue and wide open, their shine gone behind a dry film. His face was pale white, and dark blood trickled out of his nose and the corner of his mouth. I figured he was dead before he heard the shot that killed him.

I sat back on my heels and stared. John's tobacco pouch lay near his right hand, his fingers still gripping the string. His left hand was open, the paper blown away. Scattered shreds of tobacco clung to his blood-soaked coat and a sticky line of blood that ran from his neck to his chin. His lips were bloody and barely open, as though parted for the cigarette he would never smoke.

I sat there a long time, not knowing what to do. I guess I just didn't believe it had happened. I knew there were some opposed to the big ranches. I'd heard of some trouble in the past. But I never expected to see a man shot to death for doing his job.

I was a new hand on the Hunter spread; it was my first winter there. I knew John had been a trail boss on one of the drives up from Texas, and he'd stayed on for Hunter and Evans as foreman of one of their crews. At first I believed that's why he'd been shot. But when I thought about it, it didn't make sense. John was riding Ed's big bay, a horse he'd borrowed the day before. And he'd been shot from behind. The man who shot him couldn't have known who he was. It occurred to me that if I'd been riding up out of the shadows where the killer could have seen me I'd have been shot as well. If I'd been riding with John in the sun.

I knelt in the sand next to his body, and all I could think about was how he hadn't deserved to die like that, shot in the back by a man too cowardly to face him. Then I got angry. I started thinking

how I'd come back to track John's killer, how I'd shoot him so he'd die slow. I guess it was the shock of seeing John lying dead on the side of a canyon after laughing and drinking coffee with him in the shack that morning. But there was nothing I could do about it. I was no tracker. John was dead, and his killer had gotten away free.

I wiped my eyes and got up. The bay had started to graze ahead, and I brought him back where I could get John's body up onto the saddle. I tied him there with the straps off his bedroll. Then I got on my sorrel and led the bay with John's body up out of the canyon, north toward the ranch. The cattle we'd brought up had scattered and were already working their way back down the cut.

Once out of the canyon I saw the weather was changing. I noticed my hands freezing again, and sticky now with John's dried blood. Before we got across the flat the wind came up like ice, ripping out of the hills to the north. All along the flat, cattle were turning tails to the wind and heading back into the canyons.

It was a full day's ride to the ranch, but I rode straight into the battering wind without a thought to what I was doing. My mind played over things that might have gone different. Things that would have left John alive, or brought his killer to justice. It was like looking at a poor poker hand after throwing away the cards you should have kept. I couldn't stop thinking what we might have done, and should have done, as though thinking hard enough might change it.

All the while I was riding toward thick, snow clouds that were banking up in the north. I refused to accept what they meant until we came under them sometime after noon. Then I reined in and tied my hat down with my bandana. I thought how it was all one day late for John. His hat was gone, blowing away down the canyon somewhere in the distance behind us.

I brought the bay horse up beside me, knotted the reins and dropped them loose on his neck. I was thinking about our luck, John's and mine. It was all rotten luck, from that last poker hand to the grey clouds fast curling over us. I knotted my own reins and dropped them on my sorrel's neck, then tucked my hands in my armpits and touched the spurs to him. His head came up and he started north. Ed's big bay paused, snorted, then trotted up and

swung in behind my sorrel.

I started thinking about it all again, about what happened and what might have been if we'd done any part of it different. Big flakes started falling, swirling on the wind, and the hills ahead were lost behind a screen of white. I closed my eyes and laughed, shouting at the sky, cursing the day. Then I bowed into the frigid wind, and tried not to think anymore.

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Mark Sanders

THE OASIS BAR

Leaden light and smoke choke the lounge
in gloomy blue-green hue. Happy hour
is not happy but half-hearted ritual.
Old jokes have no punch. Serious talk
is the murmur of slow-moving fans.

Sometimes, a young farmer or cowboy
lust-lonely, marches across the dance floor
to meet defeat: the women here are ugly
with toughness. When pairings take,
romance is a sin of omission.

Most folks here are extensions of their chairs,
stiff, still, new moons stuck in phase,
stationary above their planet tables.
The hours shamble away like dollar bills.
Talk is the desultory chink of glass.

When the sad hour comes, when the sad songs
cease their play and everyone leaves,
the night is foul, empty as a bottle.
The moon's face is a blotter,
stained with beer, sopped with smoke.

PIERCE COUNTY SUMMER

1

My grandfather sits on the truck's running board.
Shade swallows him. A lark whistles.

2

Thunder and no lights. Candles in the kitchen,
cards on the table like orange flowers.
I stare at the flame, moth faithful.

3

Heat on the highway: a mirage of distant water.
The corn is on its knees, crawling.

4

A snake on the doorstep. Another at the gate.
I cannot sleep. The bed is a pit of snakes.

5

Rain, and rain. The creek out of its banks.
We find catfish dead in the cornfield.

6

Smoke in the poolhall. Smoke in the bar.
Smoke at Farmer's Union. Men are smoke.
More than anything I want to smoke.

7

The growl of stock cars, the thud of metal.
Number 13 rolls and flips. Oil, smoke:
smells a boy can sleep by.

8

Can't reach the pedals. Can't clutch
or shift gears. But I can steer.
My uncle walks along, pitching bales.

9

One morning my father calls. Trouble
in my grandfather's voice. Trouble
hidden in my boy's mind.

10

We bury my sister, white stones, green grass.
Next day, I am playing in the dirt.
Next day, I am playing in the creek,
the slow, opaque water.

PASSING THE BOTTLE

for an old friend

I've got the milk can, you
the melon crate. We're parked
on the porch, passing a quart
of Jack Daniels. A pickup
drives by, lifting a blanket of dust.
A hand reaches out of the window
and waves. Bees dip
into the wild flowers that own your lawn,
dip, in and out, their little oblong bodies.
Some wind throws its arm
around the trees. They lose their balance,
catch it, lose it again.
Belt after belt the bottle passes.
Each stiff sip, the hair
on my back stands erect,
a chill nibbles my neck.
The burn steals my breath
and gives me back a new one,
cleaner, happier.

But you wheeze,
"I fucked your ex-wife last night.
Now she wants to get married."
No news, this. I know the plot.
I advise, "Don't."

We drain the bottle.
You toss it against the house.
It bounces off, unbroken.
This won't do. Silence pulls us up
to drive ten staggering miles
to town for more. Our legs
soften, we catch hold of each other.
The sun sits alone, pie-faced,
green-label sky,
like he thinks he knows something.

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Karen Achor lives in Heminford, Nebraska. Her recently completed but as yet unpublished novel, *My Karonia*, portrays the life of a young Bohemian girl on the Nebraska plains. **Shirley Buettner** lives and works near Kearney, Nebraska. **Leo Dangel** is in the English Department of Southwest State University. **Twyla Hansen** won the 1988 Elkhorn Review trophy buckle. She works as a horticulturist for a liberal arts college in Lincoln. **Neil Harrison** lives in Norfolk, Nebraska. **Linda Hasselstrom** is a poet, essayist, editor and publisher. She ranches near Hermosa, South Dakota.

Larry Holland, former editor of Elkhorn Review, lives in Norfolk, Nebraska. He's recently taken to breaking gray Arabian horses. **Steve Langan** lives in Omaha. **James Luebbe** has discounted the specially engraved *James Luebbe, Nebraska Poet* vicegrips for his after-Christmas sale. **Sandy Ludington Lutz** certifies that any reference to persons in the poems is OK because either she changed the names or they're dead now, anyway.

Howard Parker, cowboy poet, singer and songwriter, makes his home at Horsethief Crossing, near Gordon, Nebraska. **Mark Sanders** lives and works in Lincoln. His poems have been widely published. **Paul "Red" Shuttleworth**, poet, playwright and raconteur, presently resides in Las Vegas, Nevada. **Peter Vandenberg** lives and works in Kearney, Nebraska.