Heart stains| A novel excerpt

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*The University of Montana*

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HEART STAINS

A Novel Excerpt

by

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Heart Stains

A Novel by
Dugan Brown
Part 1

1930, Black Hills
Chapter 1

Gold (Au)

Drycleaning, or the cleansing of textiles in an organic solvent, apparently originated in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century. A can of fuel oil for lamps was accidentally knocked over onto a miner's badly-stained garment. The stain miraculously disappeared, overwhelming the owner with joy! -- from *The Compleat Dry-Cleaner*.

The Summer sun shone hot on the gold in Dall MacKenzie's cradled palm and he smiled. The coin was a thing of beauty, he thought, worth far more than its weight or the "Twenty Dollars" it claimed to be worth. It wasn't enough pay for the work it had taken to get it. There had been stables, old even in his father's boyhood, where manure had liquefied with urine and soaked into
every pore of the barn's boards. *Petrified wood,* the ancient livery hand called it, laughing, *Cuz them hooty-darn tourists oughta be petrified to even touch it.* Wild Bill and Calamity Jane had put their horses up there in the boom of the 1870's, and Dall figured from the stink of the place that he must have been the first to shovel it out since then. There were probably still crusty apples lying around somewhere that had been shot out of old Wild Bill's gelding. Talk about your tourist attraction, Dall thought. He saw himself tall and thin with a derby under one arm, hawking horse apples to city folk who oohed and aahed and roared off in their new Model A's in a cloud of South Dakota gold dust or huffed there way toward the rising sun in elaborate pullmans. But the truth was, there had been no tourist sales. Just flies. All summer long there had been flies swarming on his tanned skin, living in the dark hair beneath the battered, salt-rimmed Stetson, chewing at the corners of his eyes until the fifteen year-old thought they'd bleed the brown right out of his irises and he'd walk around with nothing but whites showing like a blind man. Whenever he couldn't stand it anymore, he reached up to swat and scratch and scrape them away, but his fingers only spread fresh manure wherever he
touched, and so the battle began all over again. No,
Dall thought, *there was no way in hell after that summer
that the two bit, close-up-and-leave-National Bank was
going to get his twenty bucks. No way. He'd gotten there
early enough. Hell, chances were it wouldn't even close
down; it was probably just another one of those Jesus H.
weird things his grandmother came up with, from time to
time, like swearing she could make people sick by sticking
hat pins and knitting needles into the ground. But here
he was outside the bank holding his gold. Old man
Thermopolous had been ahead of him, full of a sales pitch
to every customer in the place. The old man's father,
Socrates Thermopolous, had started the town, and now his
son owned about half of it and had to let everyone know.
Ah, what did it matter? It was just a few minutes. Dall
smiled and looked at the coin again. There was something
about the way the robes flowed on the lady, the golden
folds caught forever in a whiff of a breeze and the Dakota
sun. It reminded him of the dim picture on the wall at
home. It showed his dead mother in her store-bought
wedding dress, flowers in one hand, and eyes that were
blank with exploding flash powder. In the back, just out
of sharp focus stood a man everyone claimed was Jesse
James, not shot and killed as the newspaper had it, but older, graying, come to the Greek columns and false fronts of Hades, South Dakota to gamble away his loot and die peaceably. The gold made Dall think too of his father, deep in the 'Stead mine shafts, banging away at the rock, day after endless day, finding a glint here and there in the milky quartz veins that carried the life of the Black Hills as surely as if they were real veins, full of blood. Hades, Tucker Camp, Hill City, Deadwood, and a hundred others -- all relying on men with hammers, drills, picks, and shovels. Maybe his father had dug this gold. Dall looked at the mint mark. San Francisco. It was possible. His dad could have dug it out, had it smelted, poured into bars, stamped into coins. It could've come eastward on the train to the bank, or westward in some tourist's deep pockets, just begging to be spent on Miner's Days or a tour of old man Borglum's crazy carvings on Mt. Rushmore. Now the coin lay in Dall's outstretched palm, and no matter how it got there, one thing was for sure: it would never see the inside of a bank again, not if Dall MacKenzie had anything to say about it.

The lunch whistle blew at the mine, its long, steady note carrying easily through the three miles of clear air.
Dall knew he'd be late with his father's lunch now. Maybe he should've done as his grandmother said, going to the mine first. No, he couldn't chance it. Damn. Dall felt guilt wrapping around his stomach and squeezing a little. He thought of the man who might've pulled this gold from the earth, looking for his son, saying, "No, thanks anyway" to offers of shared lunches. "No that's alright. Dall'll be along. Never missed yet. He's a good boy. Steady, he is." But Dall knew that no one hardly ever spoke to his father. He was a half-breed, and the only one who ate lunch with him was Big Billy Mezzuto. Mr. Garlic and the Red-headed Injun, the other miners called the pair. Well, Billy would probably share with him anyway. Dall looked around, hoping for a wagon or a pick-up headed toward the big hill the mine was gutting out, but the town was pretty-well deserted. Too hot for anybody to be out, he figured. He could go get Jenny, the tired mare that his older brother Brock rode into work everyday. Yeah! That'd speed things up. No. He couldn't. Then Brock would know he went to the bank. His older brother would clobber him, storming out of the dry cleaners where he was apprenticed, his white apron still tied tight at neck and waist. The hands that would hit
Dall would smell of strange chemicals, of perfumed gasoline and soap, or ether like the doctor'd given him once when he had to have a busted tooth cut out. Above the fists, Brock's eyes would be red, watery. Dall shook his head, turned toward the mine and began to trot. He stuffed his hand into his ratty Levi's pocket as he went, his fingers groping for holes. There weren't any. Good. Grandma must have sewn them up. Dall jammed the coin down next to his skin, but sealed the top of the pocket's entrance with a calloused hand just to make sure. A summer's work; a dollar for every thousand flies he had killed.

The miners would be pouring out of the adits by now, drifting out of the tunnels, up to light, through the main shaft riding skips or in the cage itself. They would cough and laugh, roll cigarettes, hit each other on the back with dusty hats as they squinted in the bright sun and felt the warm wind finger the creases in their faces. They would look for their sons and daughters to bring them their lunches. The lunches, like the one Dall held in his hand, would be hearty, full of beef and mutton, on homemade bread or like his father's, in a pastry shell,
with vegetables, a pasty it was called, lunch from the old country, miner's food, stockmen's food.

The whistle blew. Damnation, Dall thought. Could lunch be over already? But when he looked up he was almost to Miller's Creek. That was about a mile, he figured. It'd probably only taken him ten or twelve minutes to get where he was. The whistle blew again. No! Dall held his breath. Two whistles: clear the area for blasting, but three whistles -- the sharp third note came to him, urgent, pleading now. He'd heard it before. But he waited just in case. Please, he begged in his mind, Let there be a fourth. Two sets of two, a total of four, but it didn't come. It meant only one thing -- three blasts -- cave in. Men trapped under the mountain like adult corpses stuffed into children's coffins, men whose only air was now solid. They would have to breathe granite, quartz, limestone and gold, and failing that, they would die. Two more miles to go. The whistle was howling at Dall in groups of three as it pulled him on, a chain whose links looped around his neck, and wormed in the townspeople's guts. It urged them to bring shovels, picks, axes, to man the big compressed-air drills. Come, the whistle said, Dig out your loved ones, unearth your
fathers, your brothers. Tear the timbers from their throats, the rock from their stomachs. Give them smooth pine boards, the whistle whined, and silk, and soft dirt with flowers above their heads.

Dall ran. He expected Brock at every turn, pushing the old paint to her limits, the ratty tail blowing behind her. Brock would come all right, stinking of chemicals Dall couldn't pronounce, smelling of sweat and roses in kerosene. He would ride in with his close-cropped blonde hair stuffed under a campaign hat, and his face would be set as solid and eternal as the granite of the Harney Needles. The smile would be gone, the jokes put aside. But his brother wasn't there, so Dall ran toward the 'Stead, the warm gold in his pocket turning heavier and hotter with each step, driving his feet deeper into the yellow dust with each stride.

Dall saw the dust rising in the too blue sky, billowing into a thin, brown finger of a cloud, but he could not yet hear the men yelling at the dirt below their feet, cursing at the same ground that put meat on their supper plates and food in their babies' mouths. Dall's mouth was dry with the dust kicked up by his running, and his breath was coming hard now, but he could just barely
make out the grumbling of the steam shovel as it snorted to life, groaning like some terrible, tired dragon, squealing as the rusty cables slid through pulleys like steel tendons moving iron limbs. Good! It wasn't far now. If he could hear the machinery -- he looked up thinking he might be almost there, but the hills loomed back at him, barren save for the countless stumps of trees hewn down to make headframes and support timbers for the boom of the last century. He felt trapped, always had, in these tall hills that crowded in and looked down upon him like mourners staring into a coffin.

The dust still pointed the way, coiling high into the sky, thinning then thickening as he imagined the big dragon eating the ground, swallowing tons of rock with each pass. Dall followed the line of the trail with his eyes. It wound up and over the next knob, he knew, then down into a swale and back up to the headframe of the mine. In a few minutes he'd be able to see, but for now, he was alone on the steepest part of the trail, winding so tightly that neither Lizzies nor ox wagons could negotiate it. Only a person on foot could make it. *Or someone on horseback,* he thought. Like his brother, maybe. But he'd probably taken the main road, and Dall had a jump on him.
anyway. Too bad. It would've been easier and a lot faster to ride. It didn't really matter though. Their father and the two of them would be so busy helping to dig, that lunch would be forgotten completely. And the bank. No one would ask, now. He was safe after all.

Dall ran up the slope anyway, driven suddenly by something his grandmother had said. Yes, she'd told him about the bank, but she'd said something else. What was it? His grandmother's heavy, weathered face hung in his mind, her Lakota braids gray and shaking as she'd coughed and gasped for air that morning.

"It's a sign," she'd said between spasms. "Not enough air."

Yeah, it's a sign, Dall thought, to quit smoking, Grandma.

"Has your father gone to that hole in the ground, already?" She'd paused, rolled a cigarette and lit it.

Dall nodded. "Yes, ma'am."

She whispered blue smoke into the air and squinted, getting that far-off look that always spooked the boys, and made them think of blind snakes rattling, or the buzz of electrical storms. "Make sure your father gets his
lunch today," she said, then smiled and walked outside into her garden. "Make sure."

A tailing stone bloodying his foot snapped Dall's attention back to the trail. All the stones this high up were crushed rock that had been through the stamp mills, and many were so jagged they could cut leather like a flint knife, slicing easily through the sides and bottoms of the boy's old hand-me-down boots. It didn't matter. It was just a cut. Pain didn't matter. It would heal, but the young man picked his way more carefully nonetheless.

The scene from atop the knob was what Dall had expected. He could see just enough through the dust to sense the fear of the frantic men, and it was like a thing alive, transmitted through the ground to his legs, perhaps running through the blood he spilled from his foot, a sudden icy trembling in the heat that made him shake all over. Men were running everywhere, and Dall wanted to join them, to be doing something, to help. He'd find his father and they'd work together. The whistle kept blasting out its trinity, Death, Destruction, Disaster, and it filled every pore in Dall's tanned skin, pierced through every inch of his brain. The steam shovel worked
ponderously across the swale, taking huge bites out of the landscape, digging, replacing rock with air, trying to get the rescue teams close enough for pick work and digging bars, levers and calloused hands.

Dall trotted down the slope, looking for the familiar outline of his father, or the silhouette of a horse and rider that might be his brother. An old face came out of the dust and a hand pointed. It was Ole Johansen, the foreman for his father's level. "Over dare," he said. "You grab a shovel. Maybe level two or tree. We don't know yet."

"Where's my father? I'll work with him," Dall yelled over the steam shovel.

The old man shook his head. "We don't know what was happening. Some of the boys, they say your papa and Big Billy just get up and leave, like maybe they going back to work early, you know. The other men say they're crazy in the head. Your papa look kind of mad and say to hell with them, anyhow. They hear Billy giving your papa a real hard time, telling him, 'Boy that wife of mine sure makes a good lunch, Ian. Lotsa food.' Your papa elbow him hard and they get in the cage and start down. Then the whole thing, she just fall in you know? Don't worry, son, we
get him out. He's a tough man your papa is. He only down maybe two-tree hundred feet. We get him out, for sure, you betcha." Then the old man was gone, and Brock and the mare were still nowhere to be seen. The tears began on Dall's face, streaking yellow through the dust and he suddenly turned and threw the lunch as far from him as he could, but the paper bag broke open and the contents scattered through the air, the venison pasty, the apple, the sourdough bread arcing down into the dust and confusion. Dall grabbed a shovel and began to dig, but the screaming of the whistle was inside his head, and the sound of scrabbling fingers and rasping breath, and the coin in his pocket was far too heavy now. Heavy beyond a summer's work, or golden robes, or biting flies. Heavy beyond the strength of his legs. Dall toppled to his knees, where he lay hunched over, holding his ears until sometime later a man helped him limp off into the silent dark.
Chapter 2

Toluene

In the West of the early 1930's, two drycleaning fluids predominated the trade: Carbon tetrachloride and Trichlorethylene. These were a far cry from the earliest solvents used, namely gasoline, benzine, and oil of turpentine. Although both are non-flammable, eliminating many of the sudden explosions and flash-fires that made dry-cleaning an extremely hazardous profession, they do have their disadvantages: Carbon tet (as it is known in the trade) poses a health hazard to the operator and corrosion to equipment, while Trichlorethylene causes the bleeding of many acetate dyes during summer or when temperatures exceed 75 degrees Fahrenheit. 

-- from Drycleaning History and Technology, Report #5, South Dakota Dry Cleaners' Society.

Brock MacKenzie stood sweating in the front window of the dry cleaning store, looking around to see if anyone was watching him. He mashed his lips into a fine line,
and stared down at the filthy buckskin jacket he was supposed to be working on. God, he hated standing up in the window like this. Not only was it hotter than a cast iron skillet with the sun slashing in and the steam coming out of both the gun and the board at 300 degrees, but Brock always felt like a piece of merchandise for sale, like a new shovel or a double-bit axe on display down at the mercantile, and if a girl walked by -- Jesus H. that was the worst, the absolute flippin' worst. How in the world old man Thermopolous had come up with this idea, Brock figured he'd never know. The bald man just walked in one day and said, "Brock, I think we try something different, here. Maybe get a little more business, eh? We work in the window and the people will stand outside and say, 'Oh, they work so hard --Look! It's worth every cent! See them sweat in there. I never knew!' Make sure you don't smile at them, now. Just give them a nod and keep cleaning, eh? Show some dignity."

Not much chance of a smile, Brock figured, or of business picking up any time soon. Fancy clothes went with fancy places, and it took money for both. Since Black Friday, and the slowdowns at the mines, folks didn't seem to be too bent on running all over the countryside in
tails and tophats. Brock shook his head and looked back
down at the jacket. Well, at least the job was
interesting, he could listen to the radio, and he wasn't
down in some dark, stinking hole. Brock had tried chasing
gold, following the milky veins like his father and Big
Billy Mezzuto, working side-by-side with them in the guts
of the 'Stead, hammering at the quartz, listening to Billy
singing arias in the dark, and loading the ore carts a
shovelful at a time. It hadn't been too bad when the
level was opened up by work overhead in a stope, then
there was breathing room, a little light to see by, and
something besides Billy's garlic sweat to smell, but when
they had to follow a drift, and the ancient rock pinned
them on all sides, making their breath come short and
ragged in the stale air, and the walls pinched their ribs
in, that was a different matter completely. At times like
those, Brock could feel the coldness of the stone shadows
pressing in, worming their way into his arms and legs,
holding him fast to the rock below his feet, as if he were
no longer flesh and blood, but granite, a strangely shaped
outcrop to be tunnelled through, or chiselled out. He
made it for almost the whole summer before the mountain
told him to leave. That was when he was sixteen. Now,
two years later, here he was, baking at the dry cleaners.

The sounds of an announcer hawking something on the radio drifted through the store, and Brock felt the buckskin. Under his fingertips, it was hard and slick where it had been worn close to the body, anywhere the arms rubbed, or a hand slipped past and into a holster. The thing was old, he'd been told, from the boom days, and as grimy as the garment was, it was easy to believe the story. It had supposedly been worn by a performer in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. The jacket's owner had been Left-handed Jack, and local legend had it that he was so smooth on the draw that any time he called to it, the big Colt just appeared in his hand silently, like a fat, blue index finger that spouted flame and hit exactly what it was pointed at: bullseyes, silver dollars, tossed hat pins, men's jealous eyes.

There was a tapping on the window, and Brock looked up to see a little girl peeking in. She was maybe six or seven years old with dark hair in pigtails, and a wide, goofy smile where she was missing a tooth. It was Beth Mezzuto. "Hi, Brock," she said.

"Hi, right back at ya'" he yelled through the glass. "Where's your mama?" Brock always liked to see Mrs.
Mezzuto whenever she came into town. She was an absolute knock-out, with good hips, a tiny waist, full breasts and long, luminous black hair that cascaded down her back. She looked too young for Big Billy, too young to have a son the same age as Dall. Every time she came in to the cleaners, Brock would stop whatever he was doing, run a comb through his short hair and come to the front for more hangers, or maybe a fresh cloth. Brock could see the resemblance now in her daughter. She'd grow up to be a beauty one day, with her mother's full lips and those deep brown eyes framed by thick, dark lashes. Beth pointed down the street. "She's at the mercantile," she shouted, "buying some new material for Papa's shirts." Great, just great, thought Brock, I gotta get outta this window before she gets down here. Brock looked down and shook his head again. The white apron was black all across the middle where the buckskin had rubbed against him while he worked on it. Stepping off the platform, Brock tried to undo the knots, but it was no use. Earlier when some of his friends had stopped by, they had pulled the strings so tight that he'd probably have to cut them out. He tried ducking out of the apron, pulling the knotted neck strings over the back of his head. He had them worked halfway
over, when he heard the bell tinkle as the front door was opened, and a perfume like fresh oranges engulfed him. It was Mrs. Mezzuto without a doubt. He was stuck. Brock felt the blood rushing to his face and tried to turn away, but it was too late. Brock felt her hands on the string, tugging at the knot. She laughed, and he thought he'd never heard anything either so beautiful or so horrifying in his life.

"There you go," Mrs. Mezzuto, said, smiling at him. "How'd that get so darned tight, Brock?"

The apron hung down to his knees until he managed to wriggle out of it. "Long story, Mrs. Mezzuto. Long story. I know a couple of punks that're gonna pay though."

She laughed again, and asked, "Where's Mr. Thermopolous? It's not like him to be gone in the middle of the day, is it?"

"Oh, he should be back soon. He went to the bank to get change. Why?"

"It's nothing really. Just a bad stain on one of my dresses. I thought maybe Mr. Thermopolous could have a look at it."

Brock swallowed. "I, uh, I could maybe take a peek."
What kind of stain is it? I been learnin' quite a bit, you know." He tried to smile self-assuredly, but he knew the words had come out too fast.

"That's all right." She looked embarrassed, Brock noticed. "I'll just catch him later. Bye now. Tell your father hello for me. I'll bring around some of those peach preserves as soon as I get them put up." Then she and Beth were gone. Before Brock could think of anything else to stop them with, the door bell tinkled again, and all that was left was the scent of oranges, and the afterglow of Mrs. Mezzuto's dazzling smile. Probably menstrual stains, he thought. They always get nervous about that. He thought for a moment about the source of those stains, and his pulse quickened. Oh, sweet Jesus, Brock thought, If I were a little older, or her a little younger. But then he thought of Big Billy's massive arms and his 300 pounds or more crushing the life out of him, dancing on his chest, all the while singing Danza, Danza, Fanciula Gentile in that tenor voice that never quite fit his looks. People with beards and barrel chests did not sing tenor, dammit. Oh well. The buckskin was still on the spotting board. He was supposed to be cleaning the jacket, getting it ready for Hades Days in another week or
so. A strange old guy had dropped it off, limping in with a cane in each hand. He'd seemed familiar somehow, but the geezer must've been eighty or so. Still... Where had he seen him before? He wasn't from Hades, that was for sure. Maybe Deadwood? But then why bring the buckskin here? They had their own cleaners over there. Brock looked for the receipt. Jones. No first initial. Odd. Well, it wasn't Left-handed Jack's that's for sure. He'd gotten run over by a train, stone drunk on the tracks, or so the story went. Yeah, well, looks like he could've been wearing this when the train hit him.

Brock walked back up into the window display and began working the old leather with puffs of steam and a fine brush. He was just putting a few drops of peroxide onto a dark stain to test for the presence of blood, when the first faint sound of the lunch whistle at the mine drifted in over the radio. The sun was now overhead, so it no longer streaked through the window, but the temperature had risen enough overall that the spotting agents on the board would've dried almost before each bottle was put back in its holder. It was probably blood on the leather, Brock figured, but it didn't act like blood. The peroxide didn't foam-up. Jumpin Jesus. If I knew a little more of
this crap, maybe I could have stopped Mrs. Mezzuto. Mary. Maryanne Mezzuto. You bet, he'd say, I can take care of that. Just step right over here, and hold the shirt like this. Mmm... nice perfume, Mary. Have I ever told you what an attractive young woman you are?

Brock looked back at the board, up at the tools on the wall behind it and finally at the racks that held bottle after bottle of different chemicals. He knew better than to just start trying out different spotting agents. Some might burn a hole in the leather, some would crack it, others might stain it blue or red forever. Brock pulled up the amyl acetate and sniffed it. Banana oil. He knew this one was safe on just about anything. He put a few drops of it onto the dark, reddish-brown stain. Nothing. Dammit. What was this stuff? Brock looked out into the street. No one looking, no one walking around. Good. Maybe it was paint or some kind of ink. He pulled the toluene out of its holder and dribbled some onto the stain. No reaction. Not on the leather anyway. In Brock's head, however, the lights were beginning to pulse. This stuff was too good to work with. He smiled and poured some of the toluene onto a spotting rag, then acted like he was rubbing it onto the leather. Instead, he bent
over close to the table and hit pedal below the table with his right foot, sending a 300 degree jet of steam up through the center of the rag. The heat evaporated the chemical instantly, then cooled as it caressed Brock's face. He smiled then started coughing. Still hacking, he repeated the procedure a second and third time until the room was blurry before his watery eyes. He might not get the stain out of the buckskin, dammit, and he might not get to see Mary Mezzuto, or even know who the hell Jones was, but he'd enjoy the rest of the afternoon. What did old man Thermopolous think he was doing running off and leaving him to keep the place open like this? Sure, Brock thought, I can load the extractors with the dirty stuff, I can dry them in the tumblers, I can even steam-press most of the clothes when they're dry, but Sweet Jesus, this spotting crap! How in the living hell was he supposed to know how to do this? You'd think the son of the man who started this town would know better. But Brock knew George Thermopoulos was only half the man his father had been. Even as a man in his nineties, Socrates Thermopoulos had hobbled from store to store, from one holding to another, rapping at the wooden columns he had insisted be put in front of every new building in town.
If the Greek columns weren't painted shiny white or up to his standards, the cane he carried -- carved as a miniature column itself -- would find its mark, barking shins and elbows alike. But this man, George, he had no sense of history, Brock decided. For godssakes, his father had started this town, made it big, stolen the major stage and rail traffic from Deadwood, Lead, all the rest. He'd had the Hotel Kronos built, with its fountains, and imported marble, its crystal chandeliers, and, Brock laughed, its own still in the basement. By god, now there was a man who knew how to build from the ground up!

Brock stopped when he heard the whistle blow again. He tried to focus his eyes on the clock in the corner, but its pendulum made his head light watching it swing back and forth, back and forth. He giggled, the toluene hitting him full force behind the eyes. He felt numb and happy, and tried the clock again, walking carefully closer to it, and leaning toward it. It was dark in the corner, and he reached into his pocket for a match. Whoops! Whoa-ho fella! He said to himself. No live flames in here! Old George'd have kittens if he came back to a burnt-out hulk of a building and me draped over the
hitching post. Ha! Brock's eyes cleared for a moment. 12:15. What? Must've been a short lunch at the 'Stead. Dad'd be pissed off. Fifteen minutes wasn't near enough time for the air to clear the rock dust out of his lungs, or the sun to loosen-up his tired muscles. The whistle blew again. Oh, so that was it. Blasting. Over lunch? But when the whistle cried out a third time, Brock knew. Cave in. He had to get up there right away! But he couldn't just leave the store. He didn't have any keys for one thing, and for two, he knew he could barely see. Godammit! Why had he used that crap again? He couldn't even ride old Jenny up there, he was certain of that. Damn! They need me up there. I'm strong. I can dig. I've been in the ground. The toluene took him even deeper, his nose running, and the anger building until he lashed out with his foot at the reflection in front of him, wanting to kick himself so hard that he would fall down and not have to see his face again. Too late, he realized where his foot had gone, and the shards were crashing down around his outstretched leg. Something seemed to brush his thigh, and he fell backwards, bright red appearing and spreading on his pants leg. Aha! It is blood! I'll just put some protein digester on it, that'll
fix it. Brock strained for the bottle in the rack, but couldn't reach it. When the pain came, the darkness flowed into Brock's mind like a backcurrent of a river at night, full of eddies and swirls, and they all got larger until it was just one pool rotating, round and round. The last thing he saw was a man's weathered face leaning over him, and two hands, each leaning on a cane. "Hold on there young feller. I seen worser in my day, I kin tell you. Just keep still."

The face was out of focus now, and as Brock's vision went finally, ultimately black, he knew where he'd seen the face before. It was at home on the wall.
Chapter 3

Rust

**Rust stain removal:** *Cream of Tartar method* -- If the fabric will stand it, boil the stained article in a solution of one pint water, 4 teaspoons cream of tartar. Boil until stain is removed. Rinse thoroughly.

*Lemon-juice method* -- Spread the stained part of the garment over a pot of boiling water and squeeze fresh lemon juice directly on it. You may also sprinkle salt on the stain, then the lemon juice, then lay out in the sun until dry. Rinse well. Repeat as necessary.


Crazy Ermine sat on the edge of her bed, braiding her gray hair, and stared out the window at the dark sky. It was turning from black to an ominous green. Tornado weather. Outside, she knew, the air would be almost too heavy to breathe now, charged with a kind of energy that
stopped every sound a few handbreadths from where it had begun. Inside, the air was hot, but better. The house smelled not so good today, she thought. There was no after shave odor of cloves, no man-smell, just the stench of burned loaves of bread still in the old cookstove, and the deep muskiness of plucked pheasants. Her only son was gone now, swallowed up by the earth he had given so much breath and sweat. It was a circle, she decided. Someday they would mine him, not knowing that inside him there would be only worms and crystals of quartz. Maybe they would find a little gold where he lay, some fillings in his teeth, a pocketwatch from his father, and if he wasn't worth too much, they'd break him down with the pounding of the huge rams at the stamp mill, or they'd leach him out in the cyanide vats, or mix him with water and muck him out into the settling ponds. At least then he could breathe. Ole Johansen had come to her with his head bowed, to return her son's floppy brimmed Stetson. It had once been a light brown, but as she held it in her hands, turning it, she saw it's blackness and the line of white salt that ringed it. Look, she thought, Look at this, Mr. Foreman. He sweated just like a white man, didn't he? Inside the hat there were still a few of the
short, red hairs that had helped to label Ian MacKenzie an oddity. Dark, Indian skin, hair the color of rust, blue, watery eyes, his father said, like the vurry depths of Innismere in the Highlands. They'd never get the body back, Ole said. He was sorry. It hadn't been level two after all, but level five, and everything above had crashed down upon her Ian and the one they called Big Billy. Ian left the hat above, he said. Here it is. Here's his final pay. And Ole had walked off, out to the clattering truck. It wasn't right. Her son should have been able to come up for one last breath. She pulled the small buckskin bag that contained tobacco and rolling papers from around her neck and looked inside. One of Ian's baby teeth was still inside. The dryness had kept it from rotting out over all these years. She blinked back tears from her seamed eyes. *It's all I've got left of him now, all I've got left of his father.* Yes, there were the two boys, Brock and Dall, but they were neither of them much like their father or grandfather had been in looks or spirit. They were neither dark-skinned like her son, nor completely white like her Highlander husband had been. Dall maybe showed some of his Lakota blood in his thin and wiry build, his high cheekbones and the angular
nose, but it wasn't much. It wasn't enough to cause him much trouble. Not like her son. Brock...well, Brock was square-jawed, and heavily-muscled like his grandfather, but with blonde hair instead of red. Because of the blue-eyed Christ above the door, there hadn't been much tradition in the house for her son or his sons, not much Lakota singing or dancing, few stories. It was bad to be an Indian here, especially Lakota. The white people still remembered Custer's defeat and raids on farmhouses, white men gunned down. They forgot, or never knew that Irma's grandfather had hunted buffalo in these hills, this place called Pahasapa, had raised children here when the idea of people with white skin was just a story told to children in the winter. The white people forgot the Indians they had skinned alive, tearing strips of flesh from their arms and thighs for trimmings on boots, or to make razor strops and shot bags. They forgot these things, but they never failed to remember the color of her skin. She fought back in her own way, from the dark insides of the shabby company house. She knew things whites thought she shouldn't. Good things, bad things, some of both. She knew how to make people sick when she had to, and she knew a little about the power of love medicine. Maybe if she
still had a tribe they would have called her a medicine woman, or maybe they would have forgotten that her white name was Irma and just called her Crazy Ermine like everyone else did. Even when her husband forced her into the sad religion of the man nailed to a tree, she never lost her feel for the power beneath her feet, her sense of the live earth, of the secrets that tree leaves and scurrying mice could whisper to her, of the songs written on rocks. It didn't matter, now, she thought. None of it. Not the religion, not the secrets, not even her son's death. Oh, she had felt it when it happened all right. She had been out back hanging laundry when a weight dropped on her chest. She had fallen to the ground and rolled in the dirt, clawing at her throat and screaming "No! No!" in Lakota and English before the first notes of the cave-in whistle even reached her old ears. Cra-zy Ermine, Cra-zy Ermine, 's gotta house that's full of vermin. Children's voices. She scrabbled in the red soil, gasping for air and thrashing until she was encased in the wet and now muddy laundry like a mummy or a caterpillar. Yes, that was it, she was a caterpillar, a little worm waiting to emerge as something beautiful, to fly away to a land of sweet flowers and places where men
didn't dig holes in the ground and jump into them. Crazy Ermine, Crazy Ermine.

She got up off the bed and walked slowly to her small chest of drawers, and pulled out a long, hooked gutting knife. Its blade was blue and thin with a brass guard and an elk-horn handle wrapped in rawhide. She laid the flat of the blade on her hot cheek. It was icy to the touch and smelled of old oil and leather from its sheath. It didn't matter. She'd told Dall to go to the bank afterwards. Had he? When they dragged him home, she had given him broth and coffee and let him sleep. The next day he said he never went, that he had lost his money like all the rest, that the National Bank had taken advantage of the cave-in and closed up when no one was looking. But had he gotten the money out? Or had she just been wrong, deadly, finally wrong? It didn't matter. Dall said he'd gotten the lunch there, but if he had, why did some people say Ian went back to work early? But even if Dall had been late, it wasn't like her son to leave the fresh air and sun any earlier than he had to, unless -- unless the other miners had started insulting him or Billy. Calling them names. It had happened before. He'd told her. That was probably it. Her grandson was a good boy. He always
did as she told him.

She set the knife down, rolled a cigarette and lit it. The smoke felt good inside her, warm and soothing. She thought again of the baby tooth. How old had Ian been when he lost it? Five? Six? About the same age as the little Italian girl who was now as fatherless as her two grandsons. Letting the cigarette dangle from her dark lips, she picked the knife back up and rested it on her heavy thigh. Maybe she was crazy; Crazy Ermine the Indian with the gray braids. Maybe she looked like an ermine to them, a fat weasel with its winter coat on, saying *trap me, trap me*. No, she was just an Indian, so her name had to be that of an animal, didn't it? Ha! *These white people, they are not so smart, after all,* she thought. She blew the thick smoke out to the above ones, the below ones, and the four directions, then tried to spit a little piece of tobacco out that had gotten stuck to her tongue. She finally had to reach a wrinkled and shaking hand up and scrape it off with a horny fingernail. She laid the cigarette down, and for the second time in her long life, took the knife next to her throat, began humming, and sawed slowly through her braids with the thin steel blade.
Chapter 4

Adsorbent

A modern, well-equipped dry-cleaning plant uses a combination of three methods for reclaiming its solvent, regardless of whether it is employing a petroleum solvent or a chlorinated hydrocarbon solvent: distillation to remove non-volatile matter; filtration to remove insoluble soil; and an adsorbent such as activated carbon to remove color. — from Modern Drycleaners Annual

Dall and Brock stood side by side in the funeral parlor and stared down at the silk lining of the casket where their father should have been. Brock leaned heavily on his crutches, his bandaged leg held half cocked off the floor. A dozen paces away, in the other room, the Mezzuto's stood, some silent, some sobbing.

The lining of the casket was colored like the metal their father had died chasing, but was soft-looking, Dall
thought, like the dresses the girls wore down at the dance hall on Saturday nights. It looked too shiny to throw dirt on top of, too pretty to cover up. Dall put his hand in the pocket of his good pants. The coin was still there, and he began to rub it between thumb and forefinger. He'd make it right somehow. How could he have known? He'd asked himself the same question everyday for the last week, How? How could he have been so stupid? It was just lunch. His father would get it on time. He'd just stop by there for a moment. Not gonna let those guys get my money, no sirree. But he hadn't counted on the line of people waiting to do business inside the bank. Mr. Thermopolous, held him up for a good ten minutes alone, talking to the teller, getting change, making sure everyone in the place knew about the new machines at his cleaners, the new talkies coming to his theater, and all the new merchandise at the mercantile, every last item of it, "Come!" he said. "Come see, my friends, all the new equipment to serve you better! Cleaner clothes! No spots! We get them all. You pick up your fancy clothes, then you go see "Hells Angels" on Friday night at my theater." He paused and winked at the younger men. "It's got Marlene Dietrich in it, eh?" When he laughed and was
finally on his way, Dall came out of the corner where he'd been very interested in some "wanted" posters. Of all the people not to be seen by... Ten minutes there. And hadn't his grandmother held him up at the house, making him split kindling for her baking? Sure, she had. Ten minutes there, maybe even fifteen. And what about the horse? Dall glared over at his older brother. Damn him. If Brock had let him use Jenny for a change, hell, he could have made it there in no time. Here's your lunch, Dad, nice and hot, a good pasty for you since you're working so hard for us. Oh, shoot, it was no problem, I got here early -- been waitin', for you.

But it hadn't happened that way. He hadn't gotten there on time, and he'd have to spend the rest of his life thinking about it. No one else knew. Maybe Mr. Johansen or one of the other miners might figure it out, but probably not. His father was just a face to them. Dall knew he'd have to quit school now, get a job, work his tail into the ground day after day. Sure, he'd make it up to the family, that's what he'd do, he'd work so damn hard he'd forget about the gold in his pocket, and his father's body slowly decomposing under the thousands of tons of granite boulders, veins of quartz, ounces of gold.
But, Christ, it wasn't really his fault, was it? He didn't arrange for the earth to fall in on itself like some whirlpool sucking his father under. He'd asked for the horse. He couldn't very well push Brock's boss out of the way at the bank, now could he? The baking could have waited. Go to the mine, first she'd said. Your father needs his lunch. Not enough air, hard to breathe. Goddamn her! Crazy old bat!

"What'd you say, Dall?" It was Brock, and they were still staring at the coffin. Music played on the phonograph, low and sweet, some kind of classical music with lots of violins, and though there were no bodies in the caskets, the viewing chamber was cloyingly thick with the odor of formaldehyde and flowers. Dall just looked at his older brother. Tears were forming in the corners of his eyes.

"Spill, Dall. What were you mumbling about? Sounded like you said "Crazy old bat'."

"Nothin'. I didn't say nothin." Dall peered into the coffin. There was only a single red pillow in the bottom, with a large black and white picture of his father, Ian, propped against it. He was young again in it, standing next to a stream that was just a white blur.
His hat was propped back and a long droopy mustache framed a wide smile, while his right hand balanced a shovel across his big shoulders. The shirt seemed too tight, and the suspenders ready to pop, but he smiled nonetheless. In his left hand he held something that was too tiny to see. It was the nugget that had gone into his mother's wedding band.

It wasn't really his fault, and even if it was, he couldn't be blamed for Mr. Mezzuto going down with his father into the mine. No, that wasn't quite true. They had the buddy system. Alright then, it was all or nothing. Dall felt the coin again. Twenty Dollars. How much was a life worth? If Brock would just leave, he could get rid of it, finally, lift the weight from his leg, his guts. Maybe he could cut a little slash in the underside of the pillow with his jackknife and stick the coin inside, get rid of the evidence. Yeah, that'd make it all right. Yeah, actually that wasn't too bad, the gold could go right back where it came from.

"Gonna miss him," Brock whispered.

"Yeah, me too." The tears were sliding down Dall's tan face and he fumbled for a handkerchief, and suddenly heard a metallic thump on the rug below his feet. Dall
froze. Oh sweet Jesus. What have I done? Did he hear it? Dall wiped his eyes and nose and tried to look down without bending his head any further, but it was too late, Brock was already balanced on one leg, bending, bending ever so slowly to the floor, and reaching out.

"Dropped your knife, Dallyboy. Here. That the one Dad give ya?" My knife! Ha! Is that all? But of course it was just his knife. How could he have panicked? The handkerchief had been in his back pocket, for just this reason. The coin was still between his fingers in his pants pocket.

"Thanks. Yeah, that's the one. I sure wouldn't want to lose it -- especially now, you know?" Not when it has work to do still. Now go the hell away Brock. Go away so I can give this gold back to our father. He died for it. I killed him as sure as if I'd stabbed him with this jacknife. "Sure wish you could have been up at the mine with me, Brock. It would have made things easier."

"Easier! What do you mean easier?" His face was turning red, and Dall could see his fists knotting up. "What could I have done? I was working! I didn't know it was Dad, you shit. I couldn't very well get on the bloody
horse while my leg was leaking all over the floor, now could I? Jesus, Dall!" Brock turned and hobbled off, the crutch tips pounding on the floor in an uneven rhythm.
Yeah, Brock, and they said you were higher than a kite, too, when they bandaged you up.

Dall opened the jackknife and was just bending over the pillow when his grandmother shuffled up. The odors of tobacco smoke, burned bread, and perspiration were heavy on her clothes. A black veil hung low over her ragged gray hair.

"How did you make my other grandson so mad, Dall? Maybe not such a good time for that kind of thing." She looked in his hand, and her eyes narrowed, but she smiled. "What are you going to do, grandson, stab me? Or was that maybe for your brother?"

"No, I...I was just looking at it." Dall scrambled to cover. "I thought maybe I'd put it in the casket. That somehow Dad might get it, that he might need it wherever he's at." There -- she likes that after life stuff. He tried to smile at her.

"I think Ian wanted you to have it when he was here. Now that he is not here, you can remember with it, eh?"

Nodding, Dall folded the knife up and put it away.
"Dall?" his grandmother whispered. "Grandson, you did give your father his lunch didn't you?" She squinted up at his face. "I had a dream last night. Your father, he looked hungry, small, cold. Like in the hard times when he was a boy. He kept saying Mother, Mother, when will supper be ready, when can I eat? Over and over again, all night long, a cry with no beginning or end."

Dall turned, his eyes averted. "I delivered it, Grandmother. I said I did, didn't I?" He kicked a chair over and strode for the door, and the clean air outside. Dall turned once more and glared at the old woman who was all the two young men had left now. "Don't ever, ever ask me that question again." Then he was gone from the candlelit vibrato, the questions, the stench of formaldehyde, and the hot evening air slapped him in the face. The sky was green. Too green, and that had meant only one thing for as long as Dall could remember -- Death, Destruction, like the mine whistle blowing its wails into the summer air, into his ears, filling his brain with a thousand straight razors all whirling and slicing at the same time, too sharp for pain, just numbness and bleeding, bleeding and pieces of his mind scattered in the swirling currents of air or water, his
life inside a funnel so green it was black, so big it
blotted out the stars, so hot that his blood boiled and
disappeared, condensed, froze, rained back down on the
earth as hail, cold and red. Dall ran up out of town and
into the hills and stood on the highest one he could find.
The lightning was beginning, flashes in the distance,
bright as carbide lanterns, strings of electric lights
blinking in the adits. Come for me, he thought. Come and
get me. He pulled out the coin and tried to throw it, but
he couldn't, would never be able to, he knew. He put it
away, slowly, ritually, patting his pocket. The wind
began, slow and low at first, then with a howling that was
him, the storm, both, he raised his arms out to the sides
and with tears or rain or both running in rivulets on his
thin face, he waited for the whirlpool of air to come for
him.

The first blow broke three of his ribs. The second,
his angular nose. "Good!" Dall cried out, rasping for
breath, lung aching, nostrils full of blood. "Good!"

"Crazy son-of-a bitch!"

Dall's eyes went wide. It was too dark now to see.
The lightning flashed. Someone bigger than him. No face.
Blackness. Another flash and the wind roaring in his
ears.

"You killed my father! You killed him!" That voice. Dall knew that voice.

"Yes," Dall said. "Yes."

"Thermopolous told me you were at the bank. He saw you, Dall MacKenzie." Another blow, this one to the stomach.

Dall brought the coin out again. Held it tight in his fist. "Take the money, brother. Take it. Please."

"I ain't your brother."

Fine. It was better this way. Dall thought of the knife in his back pocket. That was it, he'd make his brother leave before the storm got them both. The blade was in his hand, pressed tight against the gold piece.

"Go. Leave me. The storm is coming. This is what I want. Leave!"

Another flash, close, bright. The blade reflected into the other's dark eyes. Black hair. It wasn't his brother. Then it had to be -- a kick to the groin -- Dall dropped the jackknife, doubled over and looked up. It was the Mezzuto boy. Lorenzo.

"Go," Dall whispered. "The storm."

"Like hell." The leg pulled back for a kick to the
ribs. Dall winced, expecting it, waiting for it. Somehow it was right that it should end this way. He waited in the dark. The blow never came.

Brock stood outlined in lightning over Lorenzo's body, the broken crutch still in his hands. Brock opened the flaps on the lantern he carried. It flickered and tried to blow out, but he shielded it. In the dim light, Dall could see that Lorenzo wasn't moving. The back of his head was caved in, the rain washing the blood into the ground. "Shit!" Dall yelled. "You killed him. You killed him, Brock. What the hell for?"

"Grab your knife, little brother. We got to get to low ground. Over there, that gully!" Dall felt nothing but pain as he was suddenly lifted and slung over his brother's shoulder. There was a roaring and screeching in his ears, like the sound of a runaway ore cart in the mine, or the tumbling down of a thousand tons of granite, tearing steel and timbers as it falls on silent men.
Part II

Aurora, Idaho
1935
Chapter 5

Silver (Ag)

One of the greatest developments for the drycleaning industry was the introduction of the steam pressing machine in 1903. Most pressing of men's suits today is carried out on a machine that has changed very little indeed since that time. There have, however, been many developments in equipment for pressing women's garments. One example is the hothead press used to finish skirts. The portion of the press that contacts the garment is a polished metal surface, and the head of the press is heated by steam at regular line pressure. -- from Drycleaning Technology and Theory

Dall knocked another chunk of the rock off with his hammer and picked it up. Damn. This outcrop had looked so good from down below. Lots of color, good mineralization, reds and yellows from the iron, greens
that could be from copper. But no silver, no lead, definitely no gold. Nothing of any real worth, nothing a man could sell for food. Dall pulled himself up onto the top of the outcrop and looked out into the smelter haze in the Argent Valley far below him. There were trees where he stood, tamaracks, a smattering of yellow pine, a few silvertip firs, but below him, the hills were barren. It reminded him of the treeless mounds back home near the 'Stead. Anyone who didn't know about mining towns always assumed all the trees had been clearcut to build the first shacks in town. It made sense, he thought; there were always trees up high where they were hard to get at, where it took heavy equipment or men with old-fashioned oxen teams to skid the logs down to the mill, but there was never a scrap of a tree left down close to the towns. The truth was that the trees had been cut, but only after the smoke from the smelters had killed off everything green it touched. The black smoke would rise from the smelter stacks, up into Aurora's cool, blue sky, then as it lost its heat, sink back down to the ground, energyless but not less toxic. Dall had seen a couple of fuzzy photographs of the area taken by mail planes. There was a ring around Aurora where nothing grew, the town a tight bullseye
surrounded by a shotgun pattern of black dots, each one the headframe of a silver or lead mine. He looked down from the rock he had climbed and experienced a moment of vertigo. The outcrop stuck out farther into the sky than he supposed, a knife edge really, cutting into the last warmth of the evening air. The town was barely visible from here, but Dall propped his father's stetson back, wiped his eyes with a rough hand and squinted into the distance. Miles away, the red of the setting sun painted the twisting Coeur d'Alene River alive, a scarlet snake racing west away from Aurora to the nighttime safety of its den. In the morning it was a yellow snake, that coiled and struck the miner's houses, knocking on doors, its scales glinting through windows, as men groaned with aching muscles and the slow death of life underground. When they could afford it, coffee perked and bacon sizzled and splattered hot, stinging grease in cast iron fry pans, some heated by oil or gas, many by the old wood cookstoves in the company shacks. Since the eight-hour rule took effect, the miners of the day shift would see things their fathers never had on a work day. They saw the snake of a river turn blue, and by the time they rode the hoist down into the darkness below, the water was brown from the muck
and tailings carried down into it by streams cascading in nearly every ravine. Silver blurs, Dall thought, like in the photo in the casket. "No silver here, though," he whispered, and lofted the sample he'd knocked loose in a high arc that thudded quietly in the trees far below him, then rolled down the slope, clacking against other cobbles until the sounds finally muted in the cooling air of evening. Dall patted his chest and felt the warm metal heavy against his skin, and the leather thong hung taut around his neck. It was still there. Good. He never wanted to forget. He never could.

Sound was disappearing as if it were light and could vanish at the end of the day. Soon the sun would settle below crests that Dall had been told were ground out and sharpened by glaciers in times past, by blue ice nearly a half-mile thick. The gradual silence on the mountain would build until Dall imagined himself to be alone, the last person living on the face of the earth. There could be no others alive, he reasoned, for he would hear them in that infinite silence, but every sound he made was swallowed by the thick branches and the carpet of pine needles on which he placed each careful foot. There could have been ten thousand others like him in that forest, and
they all would have thought the same thing. *I'm alone.* A chorus of "I'm alones" absorbed by the trees, every crackling of a twig, the rasp of heavy breathing, the scratch-slide whisper of his knapsack on fir limbs, all would disappear, held in the still, heavy air of summer twilight. It was during these times that Dall watched the trail most closely, waiting for something magical to happen, for the impossible in all that silence, for a big vein of silver to suddenly crop out, or for him to stub his foot on the most spectacular find since the opening of the Argent Queen, the Lucky Annie, or the Big Moonshine. He'd better get back. It would be dark too soon, and Brock would probably be home from his prospecting by now. Maybe he'd found something. They didn't need a bonanza, a big strike, all they really needed was something to augment their pay from the cleaners, a little something extra. For god's sakes, things had to get better soon, didn't they? Six years since The Crash, five since they left Hades' white columns in the middle of the night, running from Lorenzo's ghost, tornadoes, a dead father and maybe the law. They didn't know for sure. There were no wanted posters in the post offices they visited, but there was the occasional knock on the door. Everyone in the
house froze when it happened. Only eyes moved, flickering from face to face, then to the door, questions forming on the lips. "Expecting anyone?" The whisper.

"No. Prob'ly a peddler. Bibles or somesuch. Whyn't you get it?"

"Whyn't you?" But there was never any answer to the question.

Since the night they had fled the Black Hills, they'd wandered all over hell and back again, looking for work, mostly in dry cleaning plants, because somebody always seemed to have the money for fancy clothes. There'd been Billings and Missoula, Kalispell, but the only places they felt safe were in mining towns. If a person wanted to be left alone, he was, and names never mattered too much. Everyone had a nickname or two. The miners were tough as the rock they drilled through, and tighter than a leather drumhead when they wanted to be. No one found out anything the miners didn't want them to. Dall, Brock and Crazy Ermine had run into some dandies over the past few years, he thought: Weasel O'Leary, Shorty Daniels, Bullets Mikkelson, miners, rum runners, mechanics, grocers. Dall shook his head. All tough men, like his father had been. His father. The man he buried under all that ore. They
said they'd never get him out, that he was locked in stone forever, but Dall knew they'd mine that level one day, maybe already had. They'd have to, if they wanted to follow a drift. What if they enlarged a stope and his father's body or Big Billy's just dropped from above onto the drill operator? Would they haunt him? Five years. The bodies were nothing more than skeletons, now. Bones, dark dirt, empty eye sockets, eternal grins without mirth.

He slid his hand inside the worn flannel of his shirt. Cooling sweat from his exertions met his rough fingertips. He rubbed the coin between his thumb and forefinger, like some people might a rabbit's foot. My bad luck charm, he thought. He couldn't forget. It wasn't possible, but each year on the anniversary of the cave in, he tried to throw the coin away, to pull the weight from around his neck and throw it as far away as he possibly could. Four times he'd tried in the past. This was the fifth, and he couldn't even take it from around his neck. Goddammit! Goddamn him! Dall wanted so much more for himself, for his family. He had been going to finish high school and then try to get a scholarship to Montana State University in Missoula, maybe study Geology or Forestry or maybe go to the School of Mines in Butte. He wanted to be a
foreman or an engineer, wear ties around white collars, come home to a nice house, a pretty wife, kids running around. "MMM... That smells delicious, Darling. Pork roast? Gravy? Mashed potatoes? Ahhh... looks like peach cobbler for dessert. You've outdone yourself, my dear." Dall could hear the echoes of what might have been, could almost taste the juicy pork roast as he chewed and swallowed, the meat seasoned with pears and cloves. The glass of wine to wash it all down. How long had it been since he'd had a decent meal? It felt like years. He was thin now, as thin as he'd been the night of the tornado, but Jesus, at fifteen you're supposed to be thin. Now, at twenty, he looked almost a decade older, and what was he doing? Not wearing the white collars, but cleaning them instead. Many times when a men's dress shirt would come in to the cleaners, Dall would pick it up and press it to his angular nose and smell the stains, guessing at what the man had for dinner, imagining the tenderness of the meat, the juices flowing down his own chin, the heat of the burning brandy on the cherries jubilee. Later, he would amaze the customers by telling them what had caused the stain. Dall was the spotter now, had learned it from Brock, then gone far beyond any skill his brother had ever
had at it. It kept Brock away from the toluene, but the
trichlorethylene in the extractors was almost as bad. It
was habit forming, but not as toxic as the carbon tet.
Both the brothers could spot a carbon tet man a mile away.
They always had sallow complexions, were thin, and
nauseated. Nine times out of ten, they got cirrhosis of
the liver.

Dall knew stains, spots, singe marks, burns. He knew
lipstick smears and rouge streaks, make-up rings on the
ladies' collars. There were peroxide bleach burns, blood
stains, grease marks, fountain pen leaks. He knew them
all and everything on the board that would take them out.
It was the only reason the two of them could find work.
They were a team. Dall the Spotter, Brock the Presser.
They were fast and good, a team. They'd changed their
last name to Matheson just to be on the safe side. It was
Scottish for "son of a bear", but it sounded like it could
have been British or maybe even Swedish. No one needed to
know, no one cared. Dall was simply "Bottles" to the boys
from the mine, while Brock became "Steamer." But Dall had
wanted so much more. Mr. MacKenzie it would have been.
Now it was Bottles Matheson. And his poor old
grandmother. She was getting old, worn-out. Her ancient,
glittering eyes had seen too many tragedies. A tribe reduced and imprisoned, a husband disappeared, a son crushed to death. And Dall thought, she knows. Goddammit, I know she knows. They'd covered too many miles in the last few years, dragging her along in the old "T" pick-up they'd managed to finagle. Every place in Montana had been so depressed and full of drought that the people themselves looked withered and windblown, like stalks of wheat beaten to the ground by hail and heat. The men were starting fires in the forests just for the work of putting them out and the high quality of food they got to eat while on the line. The National Guard had been called in, closing the access roads, guarding the trees against the people who were supposed to own them. Government, Dall thought, the same one who got us into this damned depression, the same one that's probably trailing us like some bloodhound with his ribs all poked out. So the new Matheson's came across the state line fifteen miles and tried out Aurora.

It was almost dark. Dall thought for a moment of suicide. What would it feel like to fly off the outcrop, to fall through the clear air? They'd find his body
eventually. Brock would know about where his brother was prospecting. What if he didn't die though, but just broke his neck and lay there while the wolves came and gnawed on his unfeeling limbs? What if he just knocked himself blind? A light came on in the valley below, then another. It really was late. Nothing would be solved. He needed to fix things before he could die. It was only right.

Supper was done when Dall got back, but they had saved a bowl of the thin soup for him. He looked at Brock, who sat rocking in an old chair that creaked with every motion.

"Any luck?"

Brock smirked. "Nah. You?"

"Nothin'. Saw some good color, so I went to the top. Just iron stains in the rock. Good view from up there though. The river looked clean from where I was."

"Must've been pretty damn far up."

Dall grunted and turned to his soup, thinking of a big T-bone, and listening with one ear to the radio in the corner. He'd missed Amos and Andy, hours earlier, but he could just hear the opening of The Shadow: "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?" The Shadow knows,
thought Dall as it was said, full of static into the dark room, and my grandmother maybe, and my brother who killed a man for me. He knows too.
Silver Nitrate stains are most commonly associated with medicines and photography, and are most often found on the garments of x-ray technicians. By first applying iodine to the stain, it is possible to change the insoluble silver nitrate into a soluble silver iodide. The next step is to merely follow the removal procedures for iodine. Begin by dusting Sodium bisulfite crystals onto the stain (safe on most dyes except some cotton colors), then shake on some dilute acetic. The action is chemical, and the iodine seems to simply disappear! Very thoroughly rinse. Penicillin stains may also be removed in this manner. -- from Doctor Drycleaner: Make Those Medicine Stains Disappear.

Brock opened the extractor and pulled the wet garments out and into a clean basket, then loaded the tumbler with them. He was laughing at another one of Dall's New Deal jokes when the tumbler exploded into his chest. The door
flew open, smashing into him, pushing him into the air as quickly and brutally as if the front bumper of their pick-up had done it. From the corner of his eye Brock saw the glass in the front window explode outward into a thousand shards, there was a sickening thud of flesh against metal, and the sudden, unmistakable odor of burning hair came to him. Then the pain. *Jesus H. Christ, the pain, the pain.* Brock had seen a miner miss with an eight-pound sledge once, catching his partner square in the kidneys. That was it. That must have been the kind of pain in his lower back. The thud he'd heard had been him. There was no air in his lungs, only heat, and Brock began clawing at his throat, slumped on the floor. Flames were all around him, and the smoke was getting too thick to see. Brock could feel no heat on his skin, only inside, like an oven. A woman's blouse lay next to him smoldering, crackling as little patches of blue and yellow flame danced along the sleeve. Where had all the air gone? *Help me, Dall,* he tried to whisper. But nothing came out. He tried to will the words to his brother, *C'mon, I got no air here. Jesus, Dall where are you? Bring me some air! You owe me you little shit. He woulda killed you that night. I don't care if you got the lunch to Dad or not, but ya*
gotta bring me some air. A whistle blew somewhere close by, and then the store got smaller and smaller, shrinking in upon him, trapping him in a place with no light, and only Dall's voice drifting in, coughing, "Brock? You okay? What in hell...?" Then he was floating, waiting for another joke from Dall, something to make him laugh in all the darkness and heat.

Brock felt great. No doubt about it. He drifted in a sea of white, a sea of numbness, and at the same time, every nerve ending in his entire body felt excited, stimulated. The radio drifted in, low and sweet, the notes somehow making him feel even better. It was as if he were a note himself drifting up and down with the others, all part of a greater whole, the song itself. "Oh, I got plenty o' nuttin'," the clear voice sang. "And nuttin's plenty fo' me." He tried to hum with it, but for some reason no sound came out. Ah, what did it matter anyhow? "I got no car, got no mule, I got no misery..." Real nice. Good radio, too. Brock liked a good voice, and words in a song that struck him as true. Right now, he had no misery. "...got my gal, got my song, got Hebben the whole day long..." It was that new tune from some
show called *Porgy and Bess*. He stretched lazily, or tried to, for when he tried to move his arms above his head, they wouldn't. His eyes popped open, suddenly alert.

"What in the livin' shit?"

An angel stood over him, dressed in white, humming, and in Brock's head, the words kept coming, *Never worry, long as I'm well/ Never one to strive to be good, to be bad, What the Hell? I is alive.*

*Am I?* He thought. Am I alive? Brock tried to speak, to move his arms again, but the angel put a finger to her lips, still humming and pulled a glass syringe from her uniform pocket, pushing slightly on the plunger and tapping the sides with her red fingernails until the air came out of the hypodermic. Brock's eyes widened even further, and finally, a strangled, dry, *No rasped out. No needles. "Shhh,"* he heard her say, "Sleep, Mr. Matheson, go to the arms of Morpheus and sleep." He tried to jerk away from the needle, but he couldn't. His arms were strapped down and rubber tubes snaked up to a glass bottle somewhere above him. The metal sliver slid into his skin and the cool liquid entered him.

In his mind, he saw this woman, this tall angel with
blonde hair and the syringe with the long, long needle. Then there was Dall saying "You'll be okay, Brocko. You'll see." Then: "Wanna get some coffee, Helen?"

"Sure. He'll sleep for hours, now."

Brock fell then, down through a skull, with very alive eyes, fell through the center of a blue iris and kept falling in the darkness. He yelled, screamed, until blood frothed on his lips, but no one could ever, would ever hear, and as he tumbled head over heels, end over end, something kept pounding in the back of his head, then came through it and landed on his chest. It was Dall, he saw, squatting on him, shaking his head. No, wait, it wasn't Dall. But it was Dall's face, only wrinkled and old, and he had a cane in each hand. The geezer was beating on Brock's chest, his head, saying, Don't worry young feller. I seen worser ... worser...worser.

When Brock woke again, there was no angel, and his back hurt like hell. No, Hell was supposed to be just flames and whips, standing on your head on broken bottles, and such. This was beyond Hell. This was being tied up to a ceiling by your arms, and spinning slowly while strips of your skin are peeled away by a paring knife. When you
flinch, they heat the blade and jab it into the small of your back. When you exhale, they twist it. Hell. He wasn't hungry, only nauseous from the pit of his stomach straight up to the base of his throat. But around his stomach and in the front of his head there was something. A need? A desire? To feel what? Nothing? There was thirst. He opened his eyes. Bad idea. The light from the outside window arced through like a carbide lamp, blue-white and painful. A hospital. That's where he was, a goddamned hospital. Tubes still ran from his arms. Yeah, he remembered that from...when? Yesterday? An hour ago? Hell, it could be last week for all he knew. Somebody was kicking him in the small of the back again with steel-toed boots. There'd been an explosion, flames, Dall. Where was his brother? Was he here too? Dead? No, not unless something hit him. He'd been clear up front at the spotting board. Telling jokes. Yeah, now he remembered, New Deal jokes. What about their crazy old grandmother? Brock figured at least she'd be here. Didn't anyone care?

"Good morning, Mr. Matheson. How are you feeling today? Here, before you try to answer, drink this. It's orange juice. It'll help to lubricate your throat." It
was the angel from his dreams. But maybe not everything had been a dream.

Brock tried to speak and managed more of a croak. "What day is it? How long have I been here?"

She smiled. "It's Thursday. You've been in here, let's see, since Monday of this week. Yes, that's right."

She paused and looked up from the clipboard hanging on the end of his bed. She wore all white, a long skirt and a big cap pinned back in her light blonde hair. Her eyes were so green that they captured Brock's attention immediately, held his gaze like a cat. He was just thinking that maybe her nose was a bit too pointy, when the steel-toed boot connected with his kidneys again. He gritted his teeth, but when he winced she saw, and leaned over.

"Try not to move, Mr. Matheson. I'm afraid the doctor says you've bruised your back rather badly. Everytime you move, it's going to hurt."

She stuffed her hands in her front smock pockets.

Brock suddenly remembered the shot. Needles, Jesus Christ on a crutch, how he hated needles. But what was inside the syringe...the feeling of need came over him, like it did occasionally in the dry-cleaning plant, for
toluene or even triclor, sometimes. Whatever they'd given him had been great stuff. No pain of body, no pain of mind. Hmmm...too good, he thought, too damn good. But hey, doctor's orders, right? He couldn't go against them could he? Brock's hands shook as he finished the orange juice and handed the glass back. "What about my brother? Is he okay? Was he hurt when the plant blew up?"

"Dall is just fine. A few cuts, a couple of bruises. Nothing major. A big goose egg on his noggin where he fell. Knocked him for a loop, they say."

Dall? he thought. Not Mr. Matheson? "Where is Dally? A guy'd think his brother'd be here to see him when he came back from the dead, wouldn't you?"

"Actually, Mr. Matheson, your brother and your grandmother have been here almost the entire time, but we didn't know how long it would be until we could lower the dosage on your pain medication enough for you to wake up, so we told them to go on home. We'll ring them up, if you'd like." She was smiling again. Perfect teeth as far as Brock could tell, straight and white as the day is long.

"Number one:" Brock winced again as he tried to sit up. "Number one: My name is Brock. B-r-o-c-k. Not Mr.
Matheson. Brock. Mr. Matheson was my father, and by god, I'm not that old yet." Brock tried to smile, to somehow make her at least a little interested in him for reasons other than syringes and thermometers. "Number two: you can't ring 'em up, because we don't have a telephone, and I sure as...heck...wouldn't advise a surprise visit to the house." He reached for the orange juice glass back from her, tilted it up and got the last few drops from the bottom. As he gave the glass back to her again, he went rigid with pain. "And that, that was number three. I think I need more of that pain killer."

Brock began to shake, and the blood drained from his face. "What's your name, anyway?"

"Miss Hickok, or just 'nurse' if you please." She set the empty glass down and reached back into her pocket. "I think you're right, Mr. Brock Matheson. You do need more morphine. Here now, let me swab your arm."

"Now hold on here, a minute, nursie. You ain't related to Ol' Wild Bill are you? Cuz I'm not so sure I want any dang sharpshooter for a nurse." Brock stared at the needle.

"Better that I hit what I'm aiming for isn't it? And yes, Wild Bill was a relation of mine, distant, but blood
nonetheless. Now hold still."
Brock's eyes widened. He felt like a cotote in that fatal moment when his paw has hit the pedal of a steel trap but the jaws of it haven't started to move just yet. In that instant he already knew the only way out was to chew his own leg off, tearing through muscles and tendons that would cripple him for life. "Christ, nurse -- excuse my French -- isn't there any other way to put that stuff inside me? And morphine for godssakes, isn't that dangerous? Doesn't it make a man go crazy, or somethin'? And what is this 'nurse', Miss Hickok crap. You know my first name. Howsabout if I get yours?"

"It's Helena. H-e-l-e-n-a. Helena. Like the capital of Montana. Now sit still so I don't have to give this to you in your tush."

"You wouldn't dare."

"Sometimes I have to. I swear. All you big strong men. Look at you, blonde hair, gray eyes, all-American strappin' young man, afraid of a tiny needle." She laughed softly, and as the liquid slid into his veins again, Brock relaxed into love.
Chapter 7

Iodine

If you get a little iodine on some of your clothing, don't panic! It's actually rather simple to remove, but you may have to try several methods. If the article is washable, try soaking it in cool water overnight. If the stain persists, rub it with soap and wash it in warm suds. Still not gone? Sprinkle sodium thiosulfate crystals on the dampened stain or soak in a mixture of 1 tbsp of crystals to 1 pt. of warm water. Rinse well when stain is no longer visible. For non-washables, try moistening the stain with water and holding it in the steam from a boiling tea kettle, or, if alcohol is safe for the dye, cover the stain with a pad of cotton soaked in it. Dilute with two parts of water for acetates. -- from Stain Removal for the Homemaker: A Guide to Happier Clothes.

When Irma MacKenzie began to shake, she was looking at the only picture she had ever had of her husband. The shakes
began as trembles at first, high frequency vibrations, like the big electrical generators she'd felt at the mines, humming, pulsing, full of potential and energy, but she knew what was next. She thought of the picture on the table and tried to move it away, but it was too late, the heaves had begun and the weak tea suddenly sloshed out of the cup, scalding her leg. Oh no, not again. Who is it this time? Who is dying? Who is hurt? She knew the answer before she finished forming the question. You, out there, the god nailed to a tree. How 'bout you do something for old Crazy Ermine, eh? I swallowed you every Sunday, didn't I? I took a bath with you. Hear me! She fell from the chair she was sitting in, hitting the rough-sawn boards of the floor hard, too hard, and lay still, rasping for breath through the red and black mist in the front of her mind. The pain was coming, building like a big finish in one of the white man's concerts on the radio. It grew louder in her mind, trumpets, trombones, kettle drums pounding until the back of her neck seemed to explode, and something white hot like molten silver raced down her back and lay pooled near her kidneys. Brock! It was his face she saw, blonde hair, gray eyes, smoke, fire. Dall? No. Nothing there; just a twinge. Did all of the
men in her life have to die, every last one of them? Was what she had done so wrong? It was forty years ago, over a hundred and fifty seasons, a thousand moons, in the past, and still she was being punished.

When the spasms stopped arching her back off the floor in violent angles, the old woman lay on her side in a puddle of her own sweat and urine. She tasted the salty copper of blood in her mouth and realized she had bitten her tongue in the agony. She opened her old eyes and saw that the picture had fallen off the table and lay beside her. It was old, yellow more than black and white, and smelled of the dust of her youth, of campfires, dogs, buffalo hides, a thousand different smells, half forgotten, hidden in the steamer trunk where the old memories were kept. The picture had lost some of its focus, its clarity, or was it maybe her eyes, now? She could still see the rugged face and square jaw of the man she had fallen in love with. Those blue, blue eyes, she thought, the same ones she had done everything in her power to possess. Ian, her son, had inherited those eyes. Now they were blank, sightless in the dark of the Pahasapa. Brock had part of his father's eyes, part of
hers, and nothing from his mother except that hair. Now, who knew about Brock? She didn't think he was dead. It hadn't been as bad as it had with Ian, but still... she had to get up, to pull herself down to either the hospital or the undertaker's, but the photograph seemed to hold her down. Lean like Dall. Curly black hair. Now she remembered why she had done what she had, why she had used the love medicine on the man whose image lay beside her. Those eyes still pulled out to her after all those years.

A knock on the door roused her, and her first thought was of spirits, or of children laughing, Crazy Ermine, Crazy old bat, sticks pins in the ground that belong in a hat. To hell with them, she thought. I will not answer. But the knock came again. A man's voice. Probably someone from the dry-cleaners. Would he be wearing a black armband? She pushed against the wood of the floor, and short splinters pierced her palms and fingertips. She had wet the front of her pants, and they clung cold to her legs. It didn't matter. The door. She had to answer the door. She tried to cry out, Come in, or even Dammit open the door, lift the latch, walk in. Anything at all, but nothing would come out, just a gurgle of blood in her
throat. She used the table to pull herself up, then staggered to the door, and opened it. No one there. Laughter in her mind. Children jumping rope, sweet little girls in all the towns they'd lived in and would live in. Crazy Ermine can't talk at all, bit off her tongue when she took a fall. Irma wiped the blood off her chin and turned slowly to look at the wet spot where she'd fallen. It was true. Her tongue lay there like a piece of venison or a thumb, thick and mute. It was true.

Crazy Ermine, jump, can't talk at all, jump...
Bit off her tongue, jump, when she took a fall, jump
Chapter 8

$\text{H}_2\text{O}_2$

Hair Dye -- Hair dye colors can prove very difficult to remove -- especially on silk and wool. Hair is also a protein fiber, and it readily absorbs the same dyes. (Dyes containing metallic salts are also used on hair!) As with fountain pen inks, this calls for rust remover for the first step. Some hair dye stains, particularly black, are very difficult to remove successfully.

-- from Successful Spotting Requires Good Judgment

Helena laughed again. Ye gods, she thought, I haven't had this much fun in years. The man she knew as Dall Matheson sat across from her in the Cafe Moderne in what amounted to downtown Aurora. It was one of the few cafes still able to keep its doors open, and the people who wandered in with a few cents in their pockets wore faces
dark with the summer sun and worn thin as the naugahyde upholstery on the booths. The customers and fixtures alike seemed to have tarnished over the years, their smiles rusting like the chrome chair legs and counter rails. She couldn't blame the owners for not keeping the old place up, she figured, since nearly everyone in here was having only a cup of coffee or maybe a homemade donut. Coffee and donuts didn't put paint on the walls or new fabric over the springs in the seats, and it sure as hell wouldn't buy new chrome fixtures. People smiled in here occasionally, she noticed, but never the wide, toothy grins she remembered from childhood, big generous miner's grins. They all just drank their coffees and tried to keep the emptiness of their pockets from spreading to their faces. They smiled to lighten the dark circles under their squinting eyes and to offer some excuse for the grooves worn into their faces from falling silver prices, blowing dust, and bread lines. The cafe was one of the few places left where a person could still take a load off and try to forget. There are always the bars, of course, Helena thought, a drink or two like my old man, that'd make me forget all right. You betcha. Sure worked for him. Helena still loved her father at times,
remembering the old days when he had smiled and taken her fishing up in the Sawtooths, just the two of them, double-packing on the big Bay gelding. They had thrown a gob of worms in over a cutbank in the splashing creek and waited for the fat trout to swallow them. And they did. Every time the two of them came to that place, the fish were biting, and she took a nice Cutthroat longer than her young arm with every cast. They were meaty, heavy fish she remembered, powerful in the way of thunder and quick as lightning flashing out of your hand. Lookit their small heads, her father had said. Means lotsa feed in the water, punkin, an' looky here. See these red slashes 'neath their chins? 'S why they're called Cutthroats. Gonna be a feast in the old house tonight.

Those had been good times in Aurora, silver booming, her father the richest man in town. But the veins petered out. Stocks fell. The family had to move out of their rambling house on the hill and into a small one in town. Helena remembered her mother taking in laundry she recognized all too well. Many of the shirts had been Helena's father's, donated or given away in the past years of wealth. Now her mother ironed them once again, remarking to her daughter about the difference in men's
sweating. "See here, Helena? Your father used to sweat here in circles, but now, look at this. It's more like streaks or a pie shape. Different people sweat in different ways, daughter of mine." Daughter of mine, Helena thought. Funny. Not 'my daughter', but a daughter of the mine? I wonder if she meant it that way? Even those times seemed better now, with her father spending the last of their money, borrowing, begging a drink at every bar in town. She'd seen it too many times not to have a clear picture in her mind, him stumbling up steps or pushing awkwardly through a door, leaning, then pushing so hard that the door slammed against its stop. Sudden silence. Every head turned at the commotion, cigarettes and drinks momentarily forgotten. Heads shaking, a little laughter, a long, slow, thoughtful drag on a cigarette, then regular as clockwork, her father would cough into his soiled handkerchief, then bellow out, "Ain't a man amongst ya what I haven't put to work at one time or t'other. What say ya miners? A drink for an old buzzy-drill man?" And dammit, it always worked. Helena would watch through the bar door, peering in as her father downed his free drinks and told the same painful stories time and again, men on either side nodding mechanically when he paused,
but still carrying on their own conversations with the living. Eventually, she'd walk away and go on home. Yes, there had been good times long ago. Maybe a whiskey would bring them back. It would make her feel warm inside, alive, happy-go-lucky. No. No, no, double damn no. She wouldn't do it. Whiskey tasted too good. She'd worked too dang hard to become a nurse, to pull herself out of the muck pit, to get out of the house, away from the touchings, the slappings, the things whispered in her sleeping ears by lips smelling of vomit. She wouldn't slide back down now. No way, no how. After all, why throw it away? People always got sick, even her father. She knew that now. It was the ultimate in job security, wasn't it? Especially around mines, where the men could be killed or hurt in a thousand different ways by the mountain they worked under, or by themselves, in bars and back alleys, with broken bottles, brass knuckles, knives, sometimes lead exploding into their guts. And now silver had dropped again. That meant more miners out of work, ticked off, on slow boil, just waiting for someone to blame. There would be more hungry kids weakened and dirty hanging around downtown, coughing on each other, measles, mumps, polio, more alcohol, more fights, and more work for
her at the hospital. It didn't mean more pay, of course, just more work. "Can't get blood out of a turnip" her mama used to say, and she was right. And boy, were most of her patients turnips! She smiled. You could squeeze and squeeze, but nothing was going to come out, and besides, how could she give up a job where she could feel the blood heat in her veins and her heart race every time she picked up a syringe? There wasn't anything she could think of that she liked better than watching men squirm when she pulled out a long needle, then slowly swabbed their arms or buttocks with alcohol. She could feel their tenseness, their eyes straining to see every flickering of light off the needle, their nostrils flaring like a wild animal as the antiseptic smells of the office flooded into their brains. Their eyes would always widen in surprise as she slowly slid the needle in. They felt nothing, not really even a pinch, just something cool coming into their bodies. Then they would relax, as if they had accepted defeat. They had asked for this, with their mouths, their lifestyle, their profession, and now they would take their medicine like good little boys. Helena looked up at Dall, horrified inside that she might have been staring off into space for what? An hour?
Could he read minds? There were stories about his grandmother. It felt like he might know what she was thinking. Helena blushed, but Dall just smiled at her. Helena smiled back, looked down at her coffee, then back up.

It had been almost a month since the accident at the dry cleaners. Brock was still in the hospital, but Crazy Ermine was back at home with only a stub of a tongue left. The doctors had tried to sew it back on twice, but it was too late, the flesh had turned now to nothing more than rotted meat. She felt sorry for this man, and intrigued. There always seemed to be something he was holding back, a secret he might never share, and yet, what man could ever keep a secret from a woman who wanted to know? She could wait. Dall seemed worth it, a person in Aurora -- finally -- that she could get to know. He seemed pretty intelligent, she thought, a nice smile, cute curly hair, and holy cow, there wasn't a chance one that she'd ever own any clothing with spots or stains on them with this guy around. And she'd never have to iron clothes like her mama. The miners called Dall "Bottles Matheson" because of all the different chemicals he used at the dry-cleaners. Correction. Had used now that the cleaners was
nothing more than ashes. And what of this brother of his? He was definitely a looker in her book. Rugged face, blonde hair, and those eyes -- even clouded by pain, Brock's eyes had made her feel...how? Like she was undressed in front of him? No, it was much more than that. It was like he could see into her, like he knew what her lungs looked like, her liver, her heart, like he could watch them all working. She shuddered. It had been the oddest feeling, and yet -- it was a sensation she'd never felt with anyone else. But here was Dall, who seemed decent and good, funny, and courageous all at the same time. They'd really just met, yet she felt she could say anything to him, tell any of her own deepest secrets, and this young man would hold them inside, secure until the end of time. Well, she thought, Maybe not that long. But long enough for all I need. That was it. You could trust this man. Brock...Now that was a different matter. The woman who hooks up with him would have to watch him like a hawk. Jeezo. It's only been a little over a month. What am I doing? I just met these two. It's like there's some power over me or something. Helena looked up. Dall was smiling as he sipped his coffee and his eyes were bright over the rim of the cup. Well, mama did marry
after only two weeks. She said something about power, too, like a spell had come over her. Was that it? Was this a spell? If it was, what the heck, it felt pretty darn good. Helena shook her shoulder length bottle blonde hair and laughed aloud.

"What are you laughin' about, Blondie?"

"Nothing, really. I was just thinking about how my mother and father got married in less time than I've known you two brothers."