

An impromptu, midnight auto race through the foreboding depths of the Lundeby Swamp in the summer of 1949. The race starts off badly, and deteriorates to a tragic end, having a profound impact on the lives of the surviving participants.

Arvid Township

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ARVID TOWNSHIP



By Charlie Warnes

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PART ONE

CHAPTER 1 - Thompson: The Uffdahls.

October 1949

I guess you can just call me Thompson. My parents, they give me a regular name when I was born, of course. But if I told you what it was, you would understand why I don't use it now. Let's just leave it at that. If you just say the name "Thompson" around here, they'll know who you are talking about.

I'm not writing this about me anyway. You see, we got some pretty queer characters living up here. I figure if I don't write about them, nobody will get around to it until it's just too late.

I know that there guy down in Sauk Center, he got himself into all kinds of trouble when he wrote about his home. But I don't have no axe to grind like he seemed to. I'm just going to stick to the plain truth. If there's something I don't know about, I'm not going to try to pull your leg or nothing.

Old Ivar Uffdahl, he finally died last week. They went and gave him a pretty strange funeral, at least for up here in this neck of the woods. You see, he was one of them old timers who swore never to set foot in the Trondheim Lutheran Church in there at Quisling. So we agreed it probably wouldn't be too decent of us to carry him in there in a box neither.

Instead of having it in the church in there at town, they had it in the Arvid Town Hall out here. They got one of them Pentacostal holy roller preachers to do the service. I guess you'd have to say things, they worked out pretty good in spite of everything.

Some of us, we thought they might try to bring Marvin up for it, but I guess they didn't figure he was quite ready to get out yet. They asked me to be one of the pall bearers, but I had to turn them down because I'm still getting over this here hernia operation.

Sig Anderson, the editor of the *Quisling Journal*, he isn't the greatest newspaper man in the world by a long shot. But he doesn't do

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too bad when it comes to writing obituaries. I think this one he done on old Ivar might be just as good a place as any to start this here story.

**IVAR UFFDAHL,
ARVID TOWNSHIP PIONEER,
LAID TO REST**

The community was saddened to learn of the passing of Ivar Uffdahl on Tuesday, October 25, after bravely suffering over two months from injuries in a farm equipment accident.

Ivar Karle Uffdahl was born near Trondheim, Norway on March 23, 1871. He was baptised and confirmed in the Lutheran faith, and grew to manhood before immigrating to America in 1893.

He was one of the original settlers in this area when he homesteaded on Section 22 of Arvid Township. He was united in marriage to Ingeborg Kjelle at the Vaerness Lutheran Church at Norse Corner on June 15, 1897. Mrs. Uffdahl passed away in 1928. To this union were born five children: Albert, who gave his life serving in France during WWI; Ella, Mrs. John Bratrud of Quisling; Blanda, Mrs. Edwin Molde of Varnegeiga; Leona, Mrs. Harry Walker of Marmarth, North Dakota; and Charles, who died in infancy. He is also survived by one brother, Johann Karlsson of Uffdahl, Norway; eight grand-children, and one great grandson.

He and Coya Trollson were married in 1936, and they have one son, Marvin, of Fergus Falls.

Mr. Uffdahl was one of the pioneer settlers of this region, and he played a key role in

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molding the wilderness into the progressive community that it is today. He was a charter member of the Vaerness Lutheran Church, served for years on the Arvid Township board, and had once been chairman of the Norse Corner school board.

Funeral services were held on Friday, October 28, at the Arvid Town Hall, with Pastor Stanley Johnson conducting the service. Pall bearers were his many long time friends and neighbors: Hans Gunvick, Swen Olson, Gust Trollson, Einar and Ole Swanson, and Emil Norgaard. Internment was made in the Vaerness Cemetery at Norse Corner.

The whole community extends to the sorrowing family its most sincere sympathy.

It all started on that Saturday, back in July. It was one of them hot, muggy days we get around that time of the year, when nothing seems to go right. Some people, they call them the Dog Days.

I was over to Hans Gunvik's place, fixing the axle bearing in his F-12 Farmall for him. I don't usually do this. I rather they bring their machinery over to my shop here at Norse Corner where I got all my equipment. But since she froze up on him right then and there, that's where I had to fix her. Still, I was going to have to charge him a couple of bucks extra for all the added bother.

It so happened she broke down in Hans' south hay meadow, right over by the Uffdahl's place. So I guess you could say I had a front row seat.

Little Jimmy, he's Hans' boy, he was sort of helping me. I guess I should tell you there's something wrong with him, but nothing anybody put their finger on. He looks and acts pretty normal, but he don't talk none. He only makes these here strange noises that don't make no rhyme or reason, and he don't understand what you say to him neither.

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But I know he isn't deaf because he can hear when you bang something or yell at him.

They sent him to school for a couple of years but that didn't work out. They also talked about putting him away at the asylum down there at Fergus Falls, but Hans' missus wouldn't let them. She can be kind of funny that way. I don't mind having him around, though. He has a knack for machinery in spite of his problem, so he's even kind of helpful sometimes.

Marvin, that twenty year old boy of Ivar's, he was cultivating potatoes in the field next to us with Ivar's 'B' John Deere. I could tell that things wasn't going too good for them that day. Of course, from the way Ivar had been running things these last few years, even a good day for him is bad enough to make any other farmer call it quits. It's too bad too, because I can remember back when he was one of the better farmers we had around here.

Marvin, he was trying to show off for us by turning in off the end-row and dropping the cultivator without stopping. It's a pretty fancy maneuver if you can do it, but he wasn't doing so good. In fact, more often than not, he had to stop and raise up the cultivator and back up and start again. Most of the time he ended up digging up a bunch of potato plants to boot.

He would of been better off if he would of just gone slower and stopped each time to begin with. But that takes common horse sense, and most young guys come up on the short end of the stick in that department, this day and age. Sometimes it makes me wonder what this world is coming to.

Marvin, he kept up with that monkey business for most of the morning while old Ivar, he was over fixing something on their hay stacker. He was close enough to us that I could tell he was getting madder by the minute. I can't say I can blame him neither. I would have stopped and give that fool kid of his a talking to long before this. It wasn't until Marvin hit a rock and broke a cultivator shank that he finally did.

A little breeze was blowing our way, so I could hear quite a bit of what they was saying, even over the racket of that John Deere sitting

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there idling and wasting fuel. What I couldn't hear, me and Jimmy could pretty well tell from just seeing how they was acting.

Now old Ivar, you see, he never did learn to talk English too good. So it can be pretty entertaining to listen to him. And Ivar, he got rheumatism in his hips, so it took him a while to get over to where Marvin was. At least it took him longer than his patience was. He was still a several yards away from Marvin when they started their hollering and cussing at each other.

Old Ivar, he starts out the hollering in that raspy voice of his. "Gull dammit, Marvin! Vat da helll did you doo now? I tolt you to vatch out fer dem dere rock!"

Now I could hear old Ivar just fine, but Marvin, he was up front there by the motor, pawing around for something in the tool box, so he probably didn't hear nothing. Old Ivar, if you really want to get under his skin, you just try ignoring him when he got something to say to you.

Marvin, he nearly jumps out of his skin when Ivar gets to just a few feet away and bellers "GULL DAMMIT, MARVIN, I VAS TALKINK TO YOO!" Marvin, he had just laid his hands on the monkey wrench he was looking for, and he looks up at old Ivar all of a sudden with that dumb look that he usually has. He just stands there until his hands remind him that there monkey wrench he's holding is pretty hot. All of a sudden, he starts jumping around juggling that there monkey wrench like a hot potato, while he was trying to get that slow mind of his in gear, to work up some answer for that old man of his.

"But Pa!" I could hear him holler back in that whining voice of his, "I WAS being careful! But lookit! You can't even hardly SEE dat damn rock here!"

"Marvin, gull dammit! Yoo shoult know by now dere's rock all over dis here field. Helll, yoo yust don't vatch what yer doing, dat's all! How many times do I got to tell yoo to slow dis damn t'ing down? Notting can get done when dis here machinery is all broke down, yoo know!"

"T'ell you say. Reason dis here machinery always breaks down, is because its damn near wore out in da first place!"

"Hunh!" Ivar snorted and spat a stream of Rite-Cut tobacco juice down there at Marvin's feet. "My stuff was okay until YOO started tearing da hell out uff it." Marvin, he didn't seem to have anything to

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say to that. He just squatted down and started fiddling with something on the cultivator. "Vhat da hell do yoo t'ink yer doing now?" Ivar demanded.

"I got to get this here broke shank off, doncha tink?" More than that, I think he was trying to find some way to avoid another one of them dumb arguments that him and his old man have had running for so many years now.

Well, they was right up next to that tractor now, so I couldn't hear too good what they was saying. We could tell, just from seeing the way they was acting, that it was a start of another one of them Uffdahl's machinery-breakdown routines that I seen so often around here.

First, they take the part off - if they can find a wrench handy. Then they go and kill a good half hour looking for another part around that scrap heap they got next to the machine shed. Finally, the both of them, they get in the car and go to town to buy one.

Of course we never got to see what they done in town. But knowing old Ivar, how stingy he was, he'd piss away the rest of the morning running around from one implement dealer to another to save himself a measely dime.

Yep, I guessed right. It was nearly noon before they got back. That meant it would be sometime in the middle of the afternoon before they got things running again. That would be if things went good. But things wasn't going good that day, so it had to be pretty near four o'clock before Marvin got rolling again.

That froze-up bearing went and messed up the race in there too, and she was a real bugger to get out. I wasn't paying too much attention to them for a while until I hear Marvin head off back to their yard. I pulled out my watch and, sure enough, it was five-thirty on the dot. Yep, chore time at the Uffdahl's, come rain or come shine.

Now any farmers who milk cows is more or less tied to the chore-time routine. Most of them have enough sense to have their cows freshen in the fall, so they are dry in the late summer. It makes a lot of sense, you know. Especially right around threshing season, when there's better things to do than screw around milking a bunch of cows.

But not them Uffdahls. Old Ivar, he'd be damned if he'd dry up any of his cows as long as there was a few more quarts he could wring out

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of them. To make matters worse, he went and bought this bred heifer last spring, and she went and freshened on him right after the Fourth of July. So he was pretty well stuck with doing chores all year.

Here we got a good three hours of daylight yet, and they didn't have no more chores than half a man could do. But here the both of them, they quit their field work anyway, just to cater to them worthless cows of theirs. Kind of a waste of time if you ask me. No wonder they don't get nothing done around that place.

But as things turned out, the both of them they had their hands full, and then some, on that day.

I guess you might of figured it out by now that cows aren't exactly my favorite creatures in this here world. I can't really tell you why, I guess maybe I just milked a few too many of them out in a freezing barn when I was growing up.

Them milk cows, you know, they lead a pretty dreary existance. All they get to eat is just grass and hay. They gobble that down so fast they got to spend the rest of the day puking it up, chewing it again, and then swallowing the mess down a second time.

Their love lives, they aren't much better. They're in the 'family way' most of their lives from getting 'it' only once a year. That's usually from some total stranger that they might never even see again to boot.

Yah, sure, they got a lot of freedom to roam around out in the pasture. But up here, that's only about half of the year. The rest of the year they spend chained in stalls where they got the choice to just stand there all day or else lay down in a pile of their own crap.

When you get right down to it, farmers keep them around for only two reasons. The first is so a pair of rough, cold hands can wring enough milk out of their tits to pay the bills. The second is to produce at least one calf a year. If she don't cut the mustard in either job, she ends up facing a death sentence.

I got to admit, though, when you compare them with other farm animals, they do have some intelligence. They understand what fences are for, and each cow, she has a stall that she considers her very own. You never seen fury until you seen an old cow's eyes if she finds one of her sisters standing in her stall. Also, a herd has their own organization

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of a sort, with their own leaders you can pretty easily see if you pay much attention to them.

What I'm leading up to here, is what I call the annual Bovine Rebellion. I should know, I've seen enough of them over the years to be glad I don't no longer own any of them animals.

Thank goodness, it usually only happens about once a year. But when it does, it usually hits the poor farmer as a total surprise. I think that's because by the time its all over and done with, the farmer, he's so outraged and tuckered out, he kind of gets a case of amuneshia from it. You know, a lot like how a woman forgets what the pain of child birth is enough to just go ahead and have another one.

But I'm not a farmer, so I get to see it all in a different light. For example, I seen over the years that the instigator is usually the boss cow. It's usually when she's pretty far along with the pregnancy business, so maybe a frisky calf inside of her has something to do with it too.

Uffdahl's boss cow is this here scrawny old roan who's got to be eight or ten years old by now, pretty old for a milk cow. Her eyes is set real wide apart so she looks like a frog when you look at her, and her hips stick out like a couple of fence posts. Her udder, it just hangs down there like a dirty gunny sack.

She's been a 'three-titter' ever since she crashed her way through a barb wire fence when she led a flanking maneuver during the rebellion of '47. Now a problem like that would of sent your average cow straight to the slaughter house. But no, not her. You see, even with just three, she still out-milks most of their others, not that that says a lot.

Quite a while after I heard old Ivar's cattle call, I looked up and seen Marvin hoofing it in that clumsy trot of his out to their far pasture. Even from where I was at, I could see from the way them cows was standing around that they was up to something.

Before I get any further into this, I should probably tell you why it was Marvin who was the one hoofing it out to get them. Up to this spring that used to be old Shep's job. Shep, you see, he was a twelve-year-old mongrel that was old Ivar's pride and joy. Over the years he had took on a lot of Ivar's personality, so I guess you can figure out

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from that that he was anything but a pet. If anybody who had children was visiting at the Uffdahl's, they knew better than to let them play outside.

Now, old Shep, he was half blind and had rheumatism a lot like old Ivar, but he was still a working dog too. I think about the only time the two of them could forget their misery was when Ivar would holler "Shep, go and get da gull damned cows!" That old mutt, he would limp half a mile or more just to show them cows who was boss.

Old Shep, he liked to chase cars too, even after he couldn't no longer see or move too good. Then one Saturday night this May, Marvin, he come home from town. It was pretty late, and maybe wasn't driving too straight neither.

Marvin, he was telling me later, he said he didn't even feel nothing, so he didn't even know nothing happened. But I guess old Shep sure did, because he was still lying there kicking when Ivar found him the next morning. The surprising thing about it was, Ivar never even yelled at Marvin about it or nothing. But ever since then, Marvin went hoofing it without no questions or nothing whenever old Ivar says "Marvin, go and get da gull damned cows!"

I could see from where me and Jimmy was at, that Marvin had almost gotten out to where the cows was, when only he would be dumb enough to pick up a rock and throw it at them. That was what set the whole thing off.

That old roan, she took off at a stiff-legged gallop with the whole herd in tow, but at a right angle from where they was supposed to be going. Then we could see them all stop way over at a far corner of the pasture where they all turned and give Marvin a defiant glare.

Marvin, he took off trotting in pursuit. He got to about fifty yards of them when they bolted again. This time they galloped along the fence line to another corner of the pasture, even further from the barnyard.

Marvin, he started jogging over toward that corner now. I could hear him cussing way over to where we was. Then I heard some roaring sounds from their farmyard. Sure enough, it was that '42 Chevy of theirs with old Ivar, somewheres behind the wheel, heading towards the gate. His missus, she was making a mad dash towards the gate, trying to get it opened before he plowed right through it.

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Old Ivar, you see, he was over forty before he learned to drive. That was with Model 'T' Fords. But Model 'T's with their planetary transmissions, were getting scarce in recent years. So Ivar had to finally trade up to a car with a regular stick shift. It took him three transmissions before he finally accepted what a clutch was for.

But now these modern cars with their colyum shifts, they threw him another curve. That job of pulling the gearshift back, and then down into low, was just too much for him to handle. So he only used second and high now, and blamed Marvin for the the burned-out clutches.

His missus, she got the gate open just in time for him to go tearing on through. A cloud of white smoke was already billowing out from underneath that old Chevy. From the looks and smell of it, I knew I was going to have another clutch job on my hands next week. Its front end was bouncing like crazy as he flew over the ruts, rocks, and gopher mounds over to where Marvin was. I could hear him yelling to Marvin "Yoo get over to da sout' fence over dere! and I vill stop dem up ahead!"

Then the enemy, they split ranks on them. The roan cow, she took a squad off to the right. One of her lieutenants, a spotted four year old, led a charge of her squad that managed to slip between that one-man infantry and the four-wheeled calvary.

Ivar, he bent a front wheel on the Chevy when he glanced off a big rock, and took out two fence posts during a 'U'-turn to get over to where they was regrouping, out there by that big rockpile in the middle of the pasture.

It was another twenty minutes at least, and a whole mess of maneuvers, countermaneuvers, and encounters before the herd got confused and made an ill-fated retreat into the barnyard. Ivar's missus, she got the gate shut on them before they could regroup.

But you could tell they wasn't beat yet. It took Marvin and Ivar quite a while to hoof it back there. Enough time to give them cows a chance to rest up and plan their next tactics. By the way, Ivar and Marvin was walking because the Chevy, she ended up stranded out there. I could see smoke coming out from where her clutch had been.

Well now, if the fences could hold up, the open field action was over. But they still had to deal with the enemy at close quarters -

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pitchfork to horn combat - to drive them critters back into the barn. Now with this here hernia, I couldn't get around too fast, but I figured I better get over there and see what I could do to help anyways.

By the time I got over there, I could see that Ivar's missus had got the barn doors open. Them three Uffdahls, they had the rebels pretty well cornered between the barn wall and the north fence.

Then that fresh heifer, she got pushed to a few feet of the open barn door where she could see inside. She mustn't of liked what she seen in there because he give old Ivar an evil glare, and bolted straight toward him. He give an equally defiant battle cry and jabbed of the pitchfork at her. She ignored both and run right by him. It took the rest of the herd less than a second to see the opportunity, and they all escaped out into the open.

Old Ivar, he had a look of fury blazing in his eyes, and he seen I was there too now. I think by now, he figured out that the roan was the leader of this here whole mess, so he had us all work on getting her cornered. I guess it wasn't a bad plan, except the corner we ended up getting her into was over by the hog pen, fifty yards away from the barn. So now we had to get her steered along the north fence back to the barn, and that was when she decided to get pig-headed. She just wouldn't budge. We tried all kinds of yelling, slapping, and tail twisting. But nothing doing.

That was when Ivar, he decided to give her a jab in the hinder with his pitchfork. That got her moving, all right. Marvin, he found himself standing in front of her and he probably didn't even know how he was holding that three-tine pitchfork of his. Before he knew it he was jousting. I'll bet he didn't even know what jousting was until then.

You see, two of them pitchfork tines, they got sunk into her shoulder just deep enough, so the pitchfork suddenly became the cow's weapon instead of his. When she bolted, she ended up ramming the handle of that there pitchfork right back at Marvin. It sent him sprawling flat on his back in the mud. If you know what kind of mud there is in a barnyard, you know that isn't none too pleasant. Then, with that fork still stuck in her shoulder, she veered right and managed to give old Ivar a good swat with it just before she went straight through

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them four strands of barb wire. Three others followed her through to freedom.

You would of thought Marvin would get right back up out of that crap. But that old cow, she must of hit him just right because he just laid there for a minute or two, trying to get some wind back. Old Ivar, I don't think he even cared if Marvin would of stayed there all night, he was so disgusted by then.

The rest of the battle must of took another half of an hour or more, tore out at least a hundred feet of fence, and destroyed two more pitchfork handles. I figure it also poured out about six quarts of blood, sweat, and tears – or about the same amount as they got in milk that night. At least they had enough sense to just leave them cows in the barn that night. No point in repeating this same silliness again the next morning.

I still had my mind made up I was going to get that bearing back together on on Hans' F-12 before the day was over. All that monkey business over there at Uffdahl's, it put me behind some, so I was still working out there when Uffdahls got through with chores. I was just finishing up when I seen Marvin take a bucket out beside their house and strip down bare naked to give himself a bath. It didn't surprise me none after what he fell into earlier.

What did surprise me, though, was to see him come out later with his good clothes on. I seen him start to fiddle around, cleaning some of the junk out from their Clunk, like he was getting ready to go somewheres. I figured that after a day like he had, he'd of gone straight to bed if he had any real sense. But then I guess I told you before, he's a little short in that department.

This here Clunk, which was a good a name as any for her, was an old car the Uffdahl's used for hauling stuff out to their fields. Ivar got her in the spring of '45 when he traded Swen Olson two yearling heifers for her, and I gave her a ring job last November in trade for a butcher hog. The only good thing about her is, her clutch seems to be indestructable.

She started out as a 1935 Chevy Master coupe, and the Uffdahls, they are her fourth owners, now. It was 1942 when Swen had me tear

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her trunk out and bolt a pickup box into her back end. Old Ivar, he removed her driver's door himself.

You could say that '35 might of been a landmark year for Chevrolet when they took a stab at streamlining their cars. If you ask me it didn't turn out none too good. Just to make matters worse, they went ahead and ignored Ford's mistake of 1933, and put them backwards opening 'suicide' doors on them.

The Clunk, I guess she lost her door like many of her sisters did. You see, old Ivar, he was driving home along the Ditch Road, and it was pretty late in the day. He probably wasn't paying too much attention to things, like that chuckhole he hit square with both left wheels. It jarred that worn-out latch the rest of the way. It must of give the old man some real excitement then, when that big door flew back and hit the rear fender. The fender already had a pretty bad crack in it, and that bent it in to where it carved right through the tire, which wasn't too good in the first place. I hear he swallowed a whole cud of Rite-Cut while he fought to keep her out of the ditch. They say his missus made him wash out his own underwear that night.

Well, anyway, it looked like Marvin had his heart set on going out that night, in spite of everything. I didn't pay too much attention to him after that because it was getting pretty late. I knew if I didn't get home pretty soon I'd end up with supper out of a sardine can again. My missus, she don't like if I get home too late too often.

CHAPTER 2 - Thompson: Norse Corner

This house we got is right next to my shop here at Norse Corner, so it's pretty convenient sometimes. Then it can also be a real nuisance too, especially when some people think they can pester me with their problems any time of the day or night.

The missus, I think she kind of likes having me around, but she's not bashful about letting me know about it when too much stuff gets piled up around the shop. I keep telling her it's our bread and butter, so to speak. But then, you probably know what it's like to reason with them women sometimes.

I don't know what got into her that night. I know I got home late. But it was for a good reason, because of all the trouble I been having with Hans' F-12, and then having to stop and help Uffdahls. Anyway, I was just pulling in and I seen her walking out to the car with her going-to-town dress on, and that walk she gets whenever she's on the warpath. I was going to ask her what was eating her, except she was heading off down the road before I was even out of my truck. Well, since it had been a bad day for a lot of folks around here, I figured maybe she hadn't had a very good day neither.

As I expected, she didn't leave me much for supper. I ate what there was, and then decided to take a walk over to see what was going on at Olaf's before I called it a day.

Norse Corner here, it got started by the three Bratrud brothers when they come over from the Old Country in 1887, and built a store here in this old grove of popple and willows. It wasn't too long before a few houses and a school got built, and the Vaerness Lutheran Church got chartered in 1894. Yah, that's right, because it was the year after my father started up his blacksmith shop here, which was in '93.

Anyway, like a lot of little communities back then, there was a lot of hope of making it into a town. That didn't pan out, though, because the Soo Line railroad ended up getting built four miles east of here.

Norse Corner managed to survive quite a few years in spite of it all. Then the Model 'T' Fords come along, and more and more people started running in to Quisling to do their shopping every chance they got. Even Gunvald and Einar Bratrud, they moved in to Quisling a few

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years before the First World War and opened up a store. So before you knew it, the only two business left here was Olaf Bratrud's store and this here blacksmith shop.

I wasn't around here when Prohibition come in, but I guess it's got to be true what they say about Olaf and my father, about them building a little still back in the woods there. Yah, I know what they was doing probably wasn't right, but it did help them get by when things was pretty tight.

The church, it burned down on Christmas Eve, back in 1932. I was there that night when it happened. You see, we must of had over a hundred candles on the tree. It was right at the end of the service when they was getting ready to sing "Silent Night" when one of them got away from them. Before they could get any water on it, the whole thing was going up. We called the fire department out here from Quisling, but it was just too late by the time they got out here.

That happened a couple years after the church teamed up with the Trondheim Lutheran in at Quisling, and they just couldn't get up enough votes to rebuild her. Some of the older folks say the whole thing was a conspiracy, and they ended up getting pretty bitter over it. Some of them, like old Ivar, I don't think they set foot in a church ever since. Maybe they got a point, or maybe they haven't, I don't know. I try to keep out of them things.

I don't know if the church had anything to do with it or not, but Olaf, he turned the store into a tavern that next spring. That was the same year my father was fixing a muffler on Emil Norgaard's Dodge, and she slipped off of the jack. I don't think he even knew what hit him. The missus and me, we talked it over some, and decided to move back up from Fargo and wrap some things up with the shop. The missus, she ended up getting a teaching job, and somehow we been here ever since.

They went and consolidated the schools into Quisling three years ago, so that meant we lost our school out here too. But I guess there was only about a dozen or so kids going here at the end anyway. The schoolhouse, it still sits over there across the road, only now it's the Arvid Town Hall. It's used mainly for voting. The 4-H Club, they sometimes have their Christmas parties in it.

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Me and the missus, we try to keep our place up pretty good. I wish I could say the same for Olaf. He don't seem to give a damn about much since his wife moved into town to live with her sister a few years ago. I wish he did, though. Because the way it is now, he don't attract the best customers from around here. In fact, I think if it wasn't for his low prices and his not being too fussy about checking ages, he probably wouldn't get much business at all.

That tavern of his, what used to be the store, is kind of hid way back among them willows. The willows have gotten out of hand in recent years, so you can hardly even see the tavern until you're almost to it. I guess it wasn't the prettiest building even when it was new, but it's getting pretty ramshackle now. On second thought, maybe them willows is doing it a favor by camouflaging it.

After dark, about the only way you can tell where it's at is from the dim light of the two ceiling bulbs that manages to get out through them dirty front windows. Me and Olaf, we put them lights up ourselves, about five years ago. You see, he bought a generator at an auction sale, and we set it up to run off of my Fairbanks-Morse stationary engine. We call it our 'power co-op' since him and me, we own it together. I use it some during the day to run my shop equipment, and he uses it after dark. The REA is supposed to be running electric power out here next year, but we haven't decided if we're going to sign up for it yet.

It wasn't too dark yet, so I could recognise most of the cars and other clunkers that was parked over by Olaf's. It was pretty muddy around there. Because of the mud, most of them was parked where their owners could find their way back out to them without getting too messed up. They also had to be careful where the other cars was, because some people, they don't drive none too good by the time they end up leaving here.

That queer looking '36 Cord that Emil Norgaard's boy brought up here from The Cities, it was sitting right along the north side of the building. I figured he must of got here pretty early to park there. Why he ever went and bought that piece of junk is more than I'll ever be able to figure out. I hear he paid way too much for it in the first place. They say he had so many breakdowns, it took him three whole days to get it

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up here from The Cities. Them Cords, they never was any good in the first place, and you never could find parts for them. He had the nerve to come and want me to do some work on it after he got it up here, and I told him point blank what I thought of it.

Then there was what was left of this here '32 Ford Victoria, sitting so close to the front steps you nearly had to crawl over it. I knew that car good. I also knew the car's owner good enough to know why nobody said nothing about where he parked it.

It had to be the worst looking car around this neck of the woods. To start with, Palmer rolled her back in June. Half the windows was busted out, and the windshield was so messed up he had to drive with his head out the window to see where he was going. It had three different sizes of wheels on it. The biggest one was on the right rear, so it looked like a big mangy dog that was getting ready to take a leak on Olaf's front step.

Now I've been into Olaf's more times that I can think of, but it still feels like you swatted me across the face with a rancid bar rag each time I step in the door. Sure, he's got screen windows on the place, but with all them trees round there, the air just sits around and collects everything that gets put into it.

Them farmers who come around there, they got a lot to put into it. This here layer of smoke always hung about eye level. The smell of that was always mixed in with the sixteen years worth of spilled beer, tobacco juice, sweat, puke, and cowshit that was soaked into the woodwork. Even the mosquitoes got enough sense to stay out of there.

But there was something more to the place than just the aroma. It was the music. Now I never would of called it music until after I was away for a few years, but now music is the best word I can think of for it. It wasn't from no jukebox or band or nothing like that. It was from the voices in there. You see, they was outside, North country voices, that had got that way from people doing a lot of hard work outside. From hollering at each other over the cold winds we got up here. These here were hearty voices, spoke straight from deep in the lungs, with a rhythm that I guess you would call a Scandinavian accent.

It wasn't none of them 'hoo-de-hoo-de-hoo's you hear them trying to do in them cheap movies you see these days neither. No. You see, there

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is probably as many dialects in Norway alone as there is in this whole country here. So what you hear is a mixture of a whole bunch of accents from the Old Country. Of course, these here farmers aren't too fussy about the words they use neither, so that adds some color to things too.

Of course I knew just about everyone around here anyway, so I didn't really need for my eyes to adjust to see who was there. When they got adjusted, I seen Harry Norgaard sitting there in the second booth. He still looked like he did two years ago. With them big eyes and front teeth of his, he looks a lot like that there rabbit you see in the movie cartoons these days.

Now I told you already about Marvin Uffdahl, and how he seems to have a screw loose half the time. But Marvin, he's a damn genius when you compare him with this here screwball cousin of his. Harry, he's Emil's boy, and I don't know what I'd do if I was poor Emil. You see, the old Norgaard family, they was pretty well-to-do even back in the Old Country. When they came over here, they was either smart enough or lucky enough to settle on some pretty good land out west of here. They was always pretty good farmers, so they done well. I guess you could say they know it too, but they don't try to rub it in or nothing.

But this Harry, I don't know. For one thing, I think his folks, they ended up spoiling him pretty bad. They give him damn near anything he could want. He must have been nearly twelve or thirteen before they tried to get any real work out of him, and that don't do nobody no good. I think things really went haywire when they bought him that there Model 'A' roadster when he turned fifteen. Then he wasn't never home. They still talk about the hell raising he done that summer, until they found him in that ditch out south of here, all bunged up, and with a broken leg. Emil, he had me haul the wreck over here where I was supposed to fix up again. But Emil and me, we sort of agreed that I wouldn't never find the time to get around to it.

Things was pretty normal with him for the next two or three years. Then he went and fell in love like you'd think it never happened to nobody before. It was with John Bratrud's daughter, Harriet. They was going to get married that summer right after they got out of high

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school. Emil and his missus, they was all for it. They even started fixing up that old Olson place they bought for them out here.

Then Harriet, she decided to go down to The Cities with some of her friends to earn a little nest egg for them to get started on. It was only going to be a few weeks, but I could tell from the way everybody was acting that something wasn't going right. Then one night, Harry, he steals twenty five bucks right out of Emil's pocket book, sneaks into town, and catches the Soo Line Flyer down to The Cities. That's the last anybody heard of him for the next two years or so. Yah, as a matter of fact, it was almost two years exactly before he suddenly showed up again with that worthless car of his.

They say he got down there and found her being courted by this here banker she ended up marrying. I understand Harry and her, they had it out pretty good. When she give him the engagement ring back, he went on a two day binge, and found himself sobering up on a train to Fort Leonard Wood. I hear the Army, they had him stationed overseas most of the time since then.

Like everyone else, I was glad to see him back here at first. I figured the Army might of kicked a little sense into him. But it didn't take long for me to see he was just as big a screwball now as he was two years ago.

But I almost swallowed my false teeth when I seen who was sitting there with him. It was Palmer Trollson of all people!

Now don't get me wrong, there wasn't really nothing wrong with it or nothing. It sure was unusual, though. Now I already told you about the Norgaards. I guess you'd have to say the Trollsons, they are on the other end of the social ladder we got around here, even if it is a kind of short one.

Palmer, he's the eleventh of Gust Trollson's brood of fourteen. Gust, he raised them all in that shack he got on forty acres of scrub pasture, out there next to the Lundeby Swamp east of here.

Palmer, he quit school when he was fifteen or so, and I don't think he ever did learn to read or write. Maybe he still could of made something of himself, but then before you know it, he went and married his cousin Erma. Now I kind of like Palmer, but I seemed to be the only one around here who thought he shouldn't of got married like that.

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Then I didn't know the baby was so far along neither. In a way, I guess you'd have to say his getting married was a step up for him, because most of his relations they don't even bother to make nothing official, if you know what I mean.

Palmer, him and Erma and their kids, they lived in quite a few places during these last few years. They had just moved over to that old Olson place, so it started going to rack and ruin too. Broken windows, piles of trash, and a half dozen derelict cars is standard trademarks of a Trollson place.

I got to wonder sometimes what they lived on. Palmer, he's a pretty good worker so he gets jobs from some farmers around here in the summer. He works with potatoes during the fall and winter, of course. He's a pretty fair mechanic too, so he helps me out too sometimes. But I watch him pretty close.

Palmer, he's a big brute who's always kind of hunched over. He just sort of squints at you through them little eyes he got right next to his nose. To look at him, well, I think even William Jennings Bryan might admit this here Darwin guy had a point afterall.

I could tell from where he was parked out in front that he must of got a pretty early start on the evening too. That meant somebody must of paid him today. Palmer, you see, he never drinks if he's broke, and he never goes home if he's got any money.

I got my usual bottle of Grain Belt and went over to where the Swanson boys was sitting in the third booth. I knew they was wanting to talk with me about threshing. Them Swanson boys, neither of them don't say too much, so I probably overheard more of what was going on in the next booth than I should of.

I could already tell that Palmer and Harry they was pretty well plastered from the way they was talking. Harry, he was blabbing away in that high pitched voice of his, so I could hear him pretty good. He was telling Palmer, "Yep, they just don't make 'em like that in Detroit! So this here Cord guy decides to show 'em how to do it right. Boy-oh-boy! I tell ya, I never knew what a real car was like 'til I got this here one. Come up here from The Cities, eighty miles an hour the whole way! An' with that front wheel drive, why I hardly had to slow down

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for a curve th' whole way up here! Just wait 'til I get some new tires on it! Why, they say you can cruise along all day at ninety or a hunnert!"

"Awwh, horseshit!" I could hear Palmer say back to him. That voice of his, it always sounds like it's gurgling its way through a bubble of phlegm. "Thompson, he vas tellin' me about it. He say dey wasn't nuttin' but a buncha damn lemons. Hell!" he snorted, "dey don't even make dem no more!"

"Yeah, sure. They don't make 'em anymore. An' ya know why? Cause they made 'em too bloody good, that's why!" That was Harry talking, of course. They say he ended up stationed over in England somewheres, and every now and then he tries to show off by using some of them strange expressions. He don't impress nobody around here with that, though.

"Yeah!" I could hear Harry say, "They went an' put all their money into ENGINEERING an' QUALITY. Din't have NOTHIN' left over for profit! THAT'S why they stopped makin' 'em. They made 'em just to BLOODY GOOD!"

Palmer, he says "Hell, nuttin is as good as a Ford. Only a Merc'ry. I should know, I got bote sitting right ouside here!" Now Palmer, he don't have a lot to be proud of, so I guess it's OK for him to have something to brag about sometimes.

I also figured Harry, he would pick right up on that. "Mercury? I didn't see any Mercury out there. Just that '32 you been drivin' around lately."

"It's unner da hood!"

"Whaddya mean?"

"Dat dere turdy-two out dere, it didn't have no motor in it when I got it. Den I gone and put dis here '40 Merc'ry motor in it. I done it myself. It can beat da pants off of any damn t'ing ..."

"Hey! Wait a minute! You said '40 Merc'ry! Where'dja get it from?"

"From dis here car Clarence had last winter. Den he went and rolled it and...."

"No, wait! Tell me, what'd this car of his look like?"

"Aw, it was a four door. Sorta blue. Used to be, anyways."

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"Hey! I bet that used to be my dad's old car! The one he traded in last fall. Well I'll be! Hey, ya know that thing ran like a SONOFABITCH!"

"Damn right dat ting run like a son uff a bitch." said Palmer, "It still does too! Only it goes a hell of a lot faster now in dis here little turdy-two. Why, de udder night me an' Clarence, we was out west of here. We was going along at a purty good clip when we sees dese here lights coming and ..."

That little Victoria of Palmer's, she showed up around here in that freak blizzard we had the spring before last. Somebody run her into the ditch just west of here and must of abandoned her. She had North Dakota license plates on her, and just sat there for almost a week before the sheriff, he asked if I'd haul her away. Any fool could tell she had a cracked block, so that's probably why they just went off and left her there.

Anyway, she sat around my shop for that summer where she was pretty handy to get parts off of. So there wasn't much left of her when fall rolled around. Me and the missus, we was trying to raise a few rabbits for eating then, and we used her for a rabbit hutch that next winter. Then the missus, she got up one day and decided she had become an eyesore, since we was having company over for Easter. That didn't leave me much choice but to get rid of her. The Victoria, I mean.

Palmer, he was helping me out around then. I offered her to him, and he snapped her right up. Now I told you earlier how the sign of a Trollson home is at least a half dozen junk cars laying around the yard. So it didn't surprise none of us that he scraped enough parts together so he could tow her out of here the next day.

Now you're probably wondering how Emil Norgaard fits into all this. Well, you see Emil, he had a pretty good crop these last few years. He had drove this here '40 Mercury all during the war, and she had way over a hundred thousand miles on her. He had been on the list for a new car ever since 1947. He could of got one last spring a year ago, but decided to wait until the fall, when them new body styles come out. I can't say I blame him since these new body styles, they look pretty good in my opinion.

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Anyway, Emil traded his '40 in last fall and Clarence, he's Palmer's older brother, he bought her from the Ford dealer for \$165. He only paid \$50 down. For some dumb reason, the bank, they went and lent him the rest. As you would expect, they only saw about twenty bucks of that before they decided they better do something about it.

They tried to collect from him, and Clarence, he just said "T'ell witja. Come and get it!" The bank, they paid me four bucks to go out and get it with my wrecker. I probably shouldn't of even taken their money because I come back empty. You see, all that was left of her was the stripped shell and that wasn't even worth hooking a chain to. I guess you know where the motor ended up at.

It was about then that Marvin comes stomping into the place. I already knew the sort of a day he had, so I didn't figure he was in a very good mood. He had a look on his face like somebody rammed a bunch of sow thistle up his hinder. He stomped them big shoes of his straight over to the bar and demanded two bottles of Schmidt's from Olaf. He swilled the first one straight down before he even looked around to see who was in there. Old Olaf, he gave Marvin a strange look that sort of asks "What the hell's bothering you, you dumb cluck?", but he don't say nothing to him. Now that I think about it, old Olaf, he gives everybody a look like that.

Then he spies Harry over here with Palmer. Harry, he yells out "Hey! Look what th' cat jist dragged in! I was jist 'bout ready t' give up on ya! Where ya bin?"

Marvin, he comes over and sits down with them, and grunts something about "dem gull damned cows."

"Well dammit, ol' sport, y' better get a coupla more beers in ya quick, 'cause we gotta get goin'!" Harry says. "Them Polack gals're gonna all be taken if we don't get this here show on th' road!"

"Awh shuttup, dammit. If you is in such a gull damn hurry, you can yust go on widdout me den." Marvin snarled. "Wit da day I had, I ain't going to be no fun over dere anyways."

"Yea, sure ya will! Here, go up an' get us a coupla more beers, willya! I gotta finish 'splainin' something t' Palmer here anyways. But we ain't got all night, y'know!"

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"Yoo can git me a Hamm's, Marvin," I heard Palmer say. "While yer up, go take a leak for me, villya?" The last words sort of come gurgling out of his throat while he started to laugh at his own joke. "No, dammit. I giss I'll haff to go and do dat myself." I felt the whole booth behind me shift as he pulled his bulk up from it and lumbered toward the front door.

Now Norse Corner's 'facilities' aren't nothing too fancy. In fact, it's nothing more than a single three-holer sitting out in them trees about thirty yards back there. I don't know what a woman would do here, but then none ever showed up. At least none never stayed around long enough to need anything like that, so I guess it wasn't no problem. Most of the guys never bothered to go back that far anyways. The trees and shadows, they gave plenty of privacy for them who felt they needed it, and a lot of them didn't even worry about that. A lot of the time, you'd see somebody coming back inside with muddy shoes, even in dry weather.

Palmer, he wasn't gone too long. So pretty soon, they was back to bragging about all the great things they dreamed them junkers they had parked outside there could do. After a while that subject started to peter out. Then Harry, he starts some tall story about what he was doing when he was stationed over there in England. Now knowing him, he probably dreamed that up too, but I guess I should repeat a little bit of it anyways because it sort of ties in.

"Sounds a lot like that last trial I ran at Shelsley Walsh! Y'know, jist 'fore I got shipped back here." From the way he was slurring, I could tell that he was getting to be in pretty bad shape. "Heck, t'was nothin' but rocks 'n mud! I darn near had it WON, 'til that one stump tore th' oil pan slick and clear off!"

"Hey, Norgaard," Palmer growled, "I t'ought you said you was in da Army over dere. How da hell did you get to do all dat udder crap?"

"I WAS in th' Army, but it wasn't ALL the time! REST of th' time I was RACIN'! But not on tracks like you got at th' fairgrounds here. This was cross country stuff, what takes a heck of a lot more skill!"

"Waddaya mean by dat?" Palmer growled. I could tell from the sound of his growl that Harry was starting to get under his skin. One thing you don't want to do is get under Palmer's skin when he's been

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drinking. "Hell, I drive t'rough stuff alla da time dat you couldn't ride a gull damned horse t'rough!"

Marvin, he seemed to get stuck with buying most of the beer. I seen him come back to the booth there with three more beers what seemed to help settle things down a little. Things stayed pretty quiet for a few minutes before I heard Palmer say "Hell, dat t'urty-two of mine, it can beat da pants off of anyt'ing anybody got. Dat includes dat dere funny looking piece of crap you got sitting out here, Norgaard!"

Now anybody with common sense would just smile and agree with Palmer at that point. But like I said earlier, Harry was pretty short in that department. So he goes and opens that big mouth of his and says "Now jist a bloody minute there! Yeah, I know that thing might be fast an' ever' thing, pervidin' y' got a straight road! 'cept ever' road in th' world ain't jist a straight line, y' know. Now powerful engines is jist fine, but there's a heck of a lot more to a good car 'n jist power! T'ain't worth a damn if y' can't keep it on th' bloody road, y' know!"

"Look, smart guy! I says I can beat anyt'ing anywhere's! Time youse put yer mout' where yer money is! ... I mean ... No, gulldammit! Let's go out now! You and dat piece of crap can try to shase me all over da gulldammed county!"

"Hey, no! Wait chist a minute, there! Sure, I'll race ya! But if we chist go out there like this, we're only gonna burn up a lotta gas, an' probly get inna lotta trouble. I gotta better idea!"

Things was quiet for a while again - that kind of quiet like we get just before a tornado. Then I hear Palmer say "Whaddaya mean, Norgaard?"

"What I mean is, let's set up some rules so we c'n have some fun, so we c'n acshully see who's winnin'!" Harry replied. "Hey Uffdahl! Y' know that ol' road through th' Lundeby Swamp? That ol' road still out there?"

"Yah, I guess you could say its dere, but its purty wet this year. We was cutting hay with the Swanson boys out dere last month, over by da old Torgerson place. It was so damn muddy we had to use the horses to get it outa dere. But yah, da road is still dere, if dat's what you mean. But it ain't much of a road no more. More like a old wagon pat' now. And in some of da low spots, it ain't even dat."

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"Sounds purfec'! Tellya wat, Palmer. I'll schallench ya to a genuine road trial! Something that'll show us what yer car c'n REALLY do! We'll start out over there by th' ol' Torgerson place. Firs' one over to th' Ditch Road's th' winner!"

"Vell, I dunno, dat's ..."

"What, Palmer? Y' schickenin' out? I was 'fraid y' would! C'mon! We'll make it worthwhile! Firs' one to th' Ditch Road gets a case of Hamm's!"

"Vell, uh, okay. T'ink Olaf will go along vit it?" Palmer asked.

"What's Olaf got to do with it?"

"Da beer! Ain't he gonna buy it?"

"Hell no! Th' loser buys!"

"Yah, but I ain't got no more ..."

"Ahh! Don't worry 'bout it!" Harry said. "Yer gonna be th' winner anyways, 'member? C'mon! Let's git goin'!"

"Hey, Harry," I could hear Marvin protest, "what about dat dere dance we was going to?"

"Ahh, there's still PLENTY a time! Them Polacks, they drink an' dance all night! Heck, this'll take a few minutes, anyways. We'll have PLENTY a time to schase them little cuties. Yer comin' along, aren'cha."

"Naw, I t'ink I'll yust stay here and wait fer you. Why da hell should I go out dere and fight mosquitoes, yust to see a couple of damn fools go get demselves lost in some gulldammed swamp?"

"Cause we need you fer a starter, thash why!"

"Huh?"

"Never mind, I'll 'splain it when we get out there. C'mon! It's gettin' late!"

"But what am I goin to do while you guys is racing? If you t'ink I'm goin to ride along wit one of you damn fools, you got a ..."

"Well, why 'n't you come along with th' Clunk, then. That way, ya c'n meet us back here when we're through!"

"Well, oh alright."

"Great! An' while yer at it, why don't we take a coupla six packs with us too! Y'know, jist in case we get tied up, or Olaf's closed before we get back. I'll pay ya back next week!"

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I seen by my watch it was eleven-thirty already, so I better be getting on home. That night sure flew by in a hurry. When I stepped outside I could see the light was on over at the house, which meant the missus, she was still up. That probably also meant I was in the dog house again.

I was sitting there on the back porch, taking my shoes off, when I seen them three clunkers start up and head out of here. It looked like they were running a sort of a snake dance. I knew it wasn't the smartest damn thing in the world for them guys to be driving when they was like that. At least there wasn't a whole lot for them to run into between here, and where they was going.

I knew the Lundeby Swamp good enough to know that the first thing they was going to do when they got out there, was get themselves good and stuck. And that would be the end of that foolishness.

An impromptu, midnight auto race through the foreboding depths of the Lundeby Swamp in the summer of 1949. The race starts off badly, and deteriorates to a tragic end, having a profound impact on the lives of the surviving participants.

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