

These are pp. revised in 1st week of Jan. '86,
before 1st 2 chs. of ms went to NY.

next not

my?

to know. Under the stream of words with which we talked each other into our long step to America, what were your deep reasons?

I am late about asking, yes. Years and years and years late. But when was such asking ever not? And by the time I learned there was so much within you that I did not know and you were learning the same of me, we had greater questions for each other.

A soft push on my shoulder. When I turned to your touch you were smiling hard, that Barclay special mix of entertainment and estimation. We had reached the head of the queue, another whiskery geezer in Gumbrae green uniform was trumpeting at us to find Steerage Number One, go forward toward the bow, descend those stairs the full way down, mind our footing and our heads...

You stayed where you stood, though, facing me instead of the steamship. You still had the smile on, but your voice was as serious as I ever had heard it.

"Truth now, Angus. Are we both for it?"

With your eyes open. With no divided heart. I filled myself with breath, the last I intended to draw of the air of the pinched old earth called Scotland.

"Both," I made myself say. And up the Jemmy's gangplank we started.

Robert Burns Barclay, single man, apprentice wheelwright, of Nethermuir, Forfarshire. That was Rob on the passenger list of the James Watt, ^{22nd}~~23rd~~ of October of the year 1889. Angus Alexander McCaskill, single man, wheelworks clerk, of Nethermuir, Forfarshire,

readone

and tin to eat with and the finest saltwater soap you've ever scraped yourself with." Along with everyone else Rob and I had to buy ocean soap and straw ~~mattress~~^{bed}, but we'd brought our own trustworthy tinware, on Grofutt's advice. "Meals are served at midship next deck up, toilets you'll find in the deckhouses, and that's the circle of life at sea, mates," the steward rattled to us and was gone.

insert

As to our compartment companions, a bit of listening told that some were of a fifty embarking to settle in Manitoba, others of a fifty espousing Alberta for a future. The two heavenly climes were argued back and forth by their factions, with recitations of rainfall and crop yields and salubrious health effects and imminence of railroads, but no minds were changed, these being Scottish minds.

Eventually someone deigned to ask we neutral pair what our destination might be.

"Montana," Rob enlightened them as if it was Eden's best neighborhood. "I've an uncle there these seven years."

"What does the man do there," sang out an Alberta adherent, "besides boast of you as a nephew? Montana is nothing but mountains, like the name of it."

"He's a mine owner," Rob reported with casual grandness, and this drew us new looks from the compartment citizenry. Rob, though, was not one to quit just because he was ahead. "A silver mine, called the Great Maybe."

at Habana?

All of steerage except the two of us thought that deserved the biggest laugh there was, and for the next days we were known as the

redone

Maybe Miners. Well, they could laugh like parrots at a bagpiper. It was worth that and more, to have Lucas Barclay there in Montana ahead of us.

"Up?" offered Rob to me now, with a sympathetic toss of his head. Back to deck we climbed, to see how the Jemmy's departure was done.

As I look on it from now, I suppose the others aboard cannot but have wondered about the larky companion beside me at the deck rail, dispensing his presiding smile around the ship as if he had invented oceangoing. You could be fooled in a hurry about Rob, though. It maybe can be said my mind lacks clench. Rob had a fist there in his head. The smile gave way to it here when he saw a full family, tykes to grandfolks, among us America-goers.

"They all ought've come, Angus. By damn, but they ought've. Am I right?" He meant the rest of the Barclays, his father and mother and three older brothers and younger sister, and even his two married sisters; and he meant it with passion. Rob had argued for America until the air of the Barclay household was blue with it, but there are times when not even a Barclay can budge Barclays. "They ought've let the 'wright shop go, let old Nethermuir doze itself to death. They can never say I didn't tell them. You heard."

*all rest of his family**more?*

"I heard."

"Lucas is the only one of the bunch who's ever looked ahead beyond his nose. See now, Angus, I almost wish we'd been in America as long as Lucas. Think of all he must've seen and done, these years."

redone

You ask was I afraid, Alexander the Second? My father's voice became a strange sad thunder when he told of his grandfather's reply to him. Every hour of those three years, and most of the minutes. I saw Jimmy Scott drown, when the boat next to ours went over. He was eighteen years old. I was afraid enough, yes. But the job was there at Bell Rock. It was to be done.

*afraid
or
no afraid*

The past. The past past, so to speak, back there beyond myself. What can we ever truly know of it, how can we account for what it passes to us, what it withholds? For all I knew, my great-grandfather was also afraid of the dark or whimpered at the sight of a spider, but any such perturbances were whited out by time. Only his brave Bell Rock accomplishment was left to sight. And here I lay, sweating steerage sweat, with a dread of water that had no immediate logic, no personal beginning, and evidently no end. It simply was in me, like life's underground river of blood. How does it happen that we can come to this earth with unchosen hazards already in us? The medaled soldier cried, here's battle's truth/Fear ached in me like a rotten tooth. Ahead there, I hoped far ahead, when I myself became the past--would the weak places in me become hidden too? There was a universe of things I wanted to do before any marriage; if indeed there ever was any marriage for me, for there was also in my McCaskill past a surplus of reasons against that. But say I did become husband, father, all else, of Montana McCaskills. What were they going to comprehend of me as their firstcomer? Not this sweated night here in my midnight cage of

redone

steerage, not my mental staggers. No, for what solace it was, eventually all that could be known of Angus Alexander McCaskill was that I did manage to cross the Atlantic Ocean.

If I managed to cross it.

Through the night and most of the next day the Jemmy steamed its way along the coast of Ireland to Queenstown, where our Irish would come aboard. To say the truth, I was monumentally aware of Queenstown as the final chance for me to be not aboard; the outmost limb-end where I could still say to Rob, no, I am sorry, I have tried but water and I do not work together. But so far I had managed not to let my toungue say that. It bolstered me that Rob and I had been up from Steerage Number One for hours, on deck to see whatever there was, blinking ^{now} against the sun and its sparkle on the blue Queenstown harbor. And so we saw the boats come. A fleet of small ones, each catching the wind with a gray old lugsail. They were steering direct to us and as the fleet neared we could make out that there was one man in each boat. No. One woman in each boat.

"Who are these, then?" I called to a deckhand sashaying past.

"Bumboats," he flung over his shoulder. "The Irish navy. ^{ye} You'll learn some words now."

A dozen of the boats nudged against the steamship like piglets against a sow, and the deckhand and others began tossing down

redone

ropes. The women came climbing up like sailors--when you think of it, that is what they were--and with them arrived baskets, boxes, creels, buckets, shawls. In three winks the invaders had the shawls spread and their wares displayed on them. Tobacco, apples, soap. Pickled meat. Pinafores. Butter, hardbread, cheese. Pots of shamrock. Small mirrors. Legs of mutton. Then began the chants of these Irishwomen singing their wares, the slander back and forth between our deckhands and the women hawkers, the eruptions of haggling as passengers swarmed around the deck market. The great deck of the steamship all but bubbled over with people.

As we gaped at the stir of business Rob broke out in delight, "Do you see what this is like, Angus?" ^{and} He answered himself by whistling the tune of it. I laughed along with every note, for the old verse came as clear to me as an anthem.

hang

Dancing at the rascal fair,
devils and angels all were there,
heel and toe, pair by pair,
dancing at the rascal fair.

the

From the time we could walk Rob and I had never missed a rascal fair together--that day of fest when Nethermuir farmers and farm workers met to bargain out each season's wages and terms and have a drink or so in the process. Peddlers, traveling musicians, the Highland dancer known as Fergus the Dervish whose cry of hiyuhh! could be heard a mile, onlooking townfolk, hubbub and gossip and banter, and

put themselves around

the two of us like minnows in that sea of faircomers, aswim in the
 sounds of the ritual of hard-bargaining versus hard-to-bargain. --I
see you wear the green sprig in your hat. Are you looking for the
right work, laddie? --Aye, I am. --And would you like to come to
me? I've a place not a mile from here, as fine a field as ever
you'll see to harvest. --Maybe so, maybe no. I'll be paid for
home-going day, will I? And Rob now had it as right as a dexterous
 widow; with these knots of dickering and spontaneous commotion and
 general air of mischief-about-to-be, this shipboard bazaar did seem
 more than anything like that mix of holiday and sharp practice we'd
 rambled through in old Nethermuir. ^A Remembered joy is twice sweet.
 Rob's face definitely said so, for he had that bright unbeatable
 look on him. In a mood like this he'd have called out "Fire!" in a
 gunshop just to see what might happen. The two of us surged along
 the deck with everybody else of the Jemmy, soaking in as much of the
 surprise jubilee as we could.

"Have your coins grown to your pockets, there in Scotland?"
 demanded the stout woman selling pinafores and drew laughing hoots
 from us all.

"But mother," Rob gave her back, "would any of those fit me?"

"I'd mother you, my milktooth boy. I'd mother you, you'd not
 forget it."

"Apples and more apples and more apples than that!" boasted
 the next vendor.

redam

*rascal
fairday*

the

redone

The sight of the saucy sisters elevated my mood some more too, and so I stepped close behind Rob and caroled appropriately in his ear:

"Dancing at the rascal fair,
show an ankle, show a pair,
show what'll make the lasses stare,
dancing at the rascal fair."

"Shush, you'll be heard," he chided and glanced around to see whether I had been. Rob had that proper side. As will happen with a person who possesses the gab knack, he was uneasy to hear anything twinkle out of somebody else and I felt it my duty every so often to tweak him on this.

*cut?
or more?
SAVE
it*

"Confess," I urged him. "You'd give your ears for a smile from either of these maidens. I'm only here to see how romance is done."

Before he could answer me on that, the boatswain's whistle shrilled. The deck market dissolved, over the side the women went like cats. In a minute their lugsails were fanned against the sparkling water of Queenstown harbor, and the Jemmy was underway once more.

After Queenstown and with only ocean ahead for a week and a day, my second seagoing night had even less sleep in it than my first. Resolutely telling myself there was no back door to this ship now, I lay crammed into that stifling berth trying to put my

two days?

Nethermuir

verse

mind anywhere—multiplication, ~~poetry~~^{verse}—other than Steerage Number One. But it was water that was solidly on my mind, under my mind, all around, the water named Atlantic. And what night journey of thoughts could ever cope with that?

What I found I could spend longest thoughts on, between periodic groans from the Jemmy that required me to worry whether its iron was holding, was Nethermuir. Old grayrock town Nethermuir, with its High Street wandering down the hill the way a drowsy cow would, to come to the River Carrou. Be what it may, a fence, a house, a street, the accusing spire of a church, we Scots fashioned it of stone, and from below along River Street Nethermuir as a town looked as though it had been chiseled out complete rather than erected. Each of the thousand mornings that I did my route to open the wheelwright shop, Nethermuir was as asleep as its stones. In the dark---out went the streetlights at midnight; a Scottish town sees no need to illumine its empty hours--in the dark before each dawn I walked up River Street past the clock tower of the linen mill and the silent frontages of the dye works and the paper mill and other shrines of ~~work~~^{toil}. Was that the same me back there, trudging on stone past stone beneath stone until my hand at last found the oaken door of the 'wright shop? Climbing the stair to the office in the nail loft and coaxing a fire in the small stove and opening the ledger, pen between my teeth to have both hands free, to begin on the accounts? Hearing the workmen say their daystarting greetings,

redone

those with farthest to come arriving first for wasn't that always the way? Was that truly me, identical with this steerage creature listening to a steamship groan out greetings to disaster? The same set of bones called Angus McCaskill, anyway. And not coincidentally the second McCaskill set the Barclays and their wheelwright shop had harbored. To see you here is to lay eyes on your father again, Angus, Rob's father John Barclay told me at least once a week. A natural pleasantry, but John Barclay and I equally knew it was nowhere near true. When you saw my father there over his forge in an earlier time, you were viewing the keenest of wheelsmiths; the master in that part of Scotland at making ninety pounds of tire-iron snugly band itself onto a wagon wheel. Skill will ask its price, though. The years of anvil din took nearly all of my father's hearing, and to attract his attention as he stood there working a piece of iron you would have had to toss a wood chip against his shirt. Do that and up he would glance from his iron, little less distant when he was aware of you than when he wasn't. I never made that toss of contact with him, when sent by my mother on errand to the 'wright shop, without wondering what it would take to mend his life. For my father had gone deaf deeper than his ears.

Never did I make

I am from a house of storm. My parents, Alex and Kate McCaskill, by the middle of their marriage were baffled and wounded combatants. I was their child who lived. Of four. Christie, Jack, and Frank who was already apprenticing with my father at the Barclay 'wright shop--in a single week the three of them died of cholera. I

Nethermuir

only barely remember them, for I was several years the youngest--like Rob's sister Adair in the Barclay family an "afterthought" child; I have contemplated since whether parents in those times instinctively would have a late last child as a kind of insurance--but I recall in all clarity my mother taking me to the farm cottage of a widow friend of hers when the killing illness began to find Nethermuir. When my mother came for me six weeks later she had aged twice that many years, and our family had become a husk the epidemic left ^hbeind. From then on my father lived--how best to say this?--he lived alongside my mother and me rather than with us. Sealed into himself, like someone of another country who happened to be traveling beside us. Sealed into his notion, as I grew, that the one thing for me was to follow into his smithy trade. Oh, there was war in the house about that. My father could not see why I ought to do anything but apprentice myself into hammer work as he had, as my brother Frank had; my mother was equally as set that I should do anything but. His deafness made their arguments over me a roaring time. The teacups rattled when they went at it. The school-leaving age was thirteen, so I don't know how things would have gone had not my father died when I was twelve. My mother at once took work as a spinner in the linen mill and enrolled me with the 'venture schoolteacher Adam Willox. Then when I was sixteen, my mother followed my father into death. She was surprised by it, going the same way he had; a stroke that toppled her in the evening and took her in the early morning. With

redone

both of them gone, work was all the family I had. Rob's father John Barclay put me on as clerk in the 'wright shop in the mornings, Adam Willox made me his pupil-teacher in the afternoons. Two occupations, two slim wages, and I was glad enough to have them, anything. Then came America fever, Rob and I catching it from each other when every tomorrow of our Nethermuir lives began to look the same to us. The power of that notion of homesteading in America, of land, lives, that would be all our own. We never had known anything like it in our young selves. America. Montana. This ship to them. This black iron groaner of a ship that--

I was noticing something I devoutly did not want to. The Jemmy seemed to be groaning more often.

I held myself dead-still to be sure.

Yes, oh sweet Christ and every dimpled disciple, yes: my berth was starting to sway and dive.

I heard Rob wake with a sleepy "What?" just before full tumult set in. The Jemmy stumbled now against every wave, conked its iron beak onto the ocean, rose to tumble again. Barrels, trunks, tins, whatever was movable flew from side to side, and we poor human things clung in our berths to keep from flying too. What was out there? My blood sped as I tried to imagine the boiling oceanic weather which could turn a steamship into an iron cask. Cloudcaps darker than night itself. High lumpy waves, foaming as they came. Wind straining to lift the sea into the air with it, and rain a downward flood determined to drown the wind. In an awful way, the

*a minute or so
of time was
+ more than
kept going
on it*

reclams

storm tranced a person. At least thirty times in three minutes I retraced in my mind every stairstep from deck down into Steerage Number One; which was to say down into the basement of the titanic Atlantic, down into the country where humans are hash for fish.

What if old Bell Rock had drowned me? my father remembered being asked in boyhood by old Alexander Mc Gaskill at the end of the Bell Rock tale. Where would you be then, Alexander the Second? What if, still the question.

Even yet this is a shame on me to have to say, but fear brought a more immediate question too, insistent in the gut of me and below. I had to lay there concentrating desperately not to soil myself.

Now the Jemmy dropped into a pause where we did not teeter-totter so violently. We were havened between crags of the sea. Rob's face swung up into view and he began, "See now, Angus, that all could have been worse. A ship's like a wagon, as long as it creaks it holds, and--" The steamship shuddered sideways and tipped ponderously at the same time, and Rob's face snapped back into his berth.

Now the ship was grunting and creaking constantly--you could positively feel the Jemmy exerting to flee this maelstrom--and these grindstone sounds of its effort drew screams from women and children in the midship compartments, and yes, from more than a few men as well, whenever the vessel rolled far over. Someone among the officers had a voice the size of a cannon shot and even all the way

Melony

down where we were could be heard his blasts of "BOS 'N!" and "ALL HANDS!" Those did not improve a nonswimmer's frame of mind, either.

But nothing to do but hold onto the side of the berth, hold myself as level as possible on a crooked ocean.

Nothing, that is, until somebody made the first retching sound.

That alarm instantly reached all our gullets. I knew what Crofutt advised. Any internal discomfort whilst aboard ship is best ameliorated by the fresh air of deck. Face the world of air; you will be new again. If I'd had the strength I'd have hurled Crofutt up onto that crashing deck. As it was, I lay as still as possible and strove not think of what was en route from my stomach to my mouth.

Steerage Number One's vomiting was phenomenal. Meals from a month ago were trying to come out of us.

I heaved up, Rob heaved up, every steerage soul heaved up. Our poor storm-bounced guts strained, strained, strained some more. The stench of it all and the foulness of my mouth kept making me sicker yet. Until I managed to remember the limes.

I fumbled them out and took desperate sucks of one. Another I thrust down to the bunk below. "Rob, here. Try this."

His hand found mine and the round rind in it.

"Eat at a time like now? Angus, you're--"

"Suck it. For the taste." I could see white faces in the two bunks across from us and tossed a lime apiece over there as well. The Jemmy rose and fell, rose and fell, and stomachs began to be heard from again in all precincts of the compartment except ours.

redone

Bless you, Madam Irish. Maybe it was that the limes put their stern taste in place of the putrid. Maybe that they puckered our mouths as if with drawstrings. Maybe only that any remedy seemed better than none. Whatever effect it may have been, Rob and I and the other limejuiced pair managed to abstain from the rest of the general retching and spewing. We could never be mistaken for hale beings, but we were not heaving our socks up.

I suppose that ocean gale amounted to simply the Atlantic out gallop for an evening ~~stet.~~ But it was more than enough storm for us in steerage. Toward dawn the Atlantic got the commotion out of its system and the Jemmy ploughed calmly along. Even I conceded that we possibly were going to live, now.

*cut
more
conspicuous
last
of*

"Mates, what's all this muss?" The steward put in his appearance and chivvied us into sluicing and scrubbing the compartment and sprinkling chloride of lime against the smell, not that the air of Steerage Number One could ever be remedied much. For breakfast Rob and I put shaky cups of tea into ourselves and I had another lime, just for luck. Then Rob returned to his berth, claiming there was lost sleep to be found there, and I headed up for deck, anywhere not to be in that ship bottom.

I knew I still was giddy from the night of storm. But as I began to walk my first lap of the deck, the scene that gathered into my eyes made me all the more woolheaded.

By now the weather was clement, so that was no longer the foremost matter in me. And I knew, the drybrain way you know a map

redone

moment, you can plunder yourself as much as is needed. Maybe I was going to see the Atlantic each dawn through scared red eyes. But by the holy, see it I would.

I made my start that very morning. Hour by hour I walked that deck and watched and watched for the secret of how this ocean called Atlantic could endlessly go on. Always more wrinkling water, fresh motion, were all that made themselves discernible to me, but I kept walking and kept watching.

—————
"How many voyages do you suppose this tea has made?"

"Definitely enough for pension."

*you're
meat
wrong* —————
"Mahogany horse at dinner, Aberdeen cutlet at supper." Which was to say, dried beef and dried haddock. "You wouldn't get such food just any old where. The potatoes aren't so bad, though."

"Man, potatoes are never so bad. That's the principle of potatoes."

"These ocean nights are dark as the inside of a cow, aren't they."

"At least, at least."

"We can navigate by the sparks." The Jemmy's funnel threw constant specks of fire against the night. "A few more times around will do us good. Are we both for it?"

"All right, all right, both. Angus, you're getting your wish, back there on the Clyde."

"What's that, now."

"You're walking us to America."
—————

retraced

"Twenty-four hours a day, because America is a country so big it takes the sun all night to go down."

Then came the day.

"Mates," the steward pronounced, "we're about to pass old Sandy Hook. New York will ^{step} come right out and meet us now. I know you've grown attached to them, but the time is come to part with your mattresses. If you'll kindly all make a chain here, like, and pass them along one to the next to the stairway..." Up to deck and overboard our straw beds proceeded, to float off behind us like a flotilla of rafts. A person would think that mine ought to have stood out freshest among them, so little of the sleep in it had been used.

New York was the portal to confusion and Castle Garden was its keyhole. The entire world of us seemed to be trying to squeeze into America through there. Volleys of questions were asked of us, our health and morals were appraised, our pounds and shillings slid through the money exchange wicket and came back out as dollars and cents.

returned

Then the railroad and the westward journey, oceanic again in its own way, with islands of towns and farms across the American prairie. Colors on a map in no way convey the distances of this earth. What would the place Montana be like? Alp after alp after

read one

the travel off, won't you," which was more than true. Those tubbings in glorious hot water were the first time since Nethermuir that we had a chance to shed our clothes.

But in the greater matter of presenting ourselves to Lucas Barclay, we now began to have the other side of luck.

We asked and asked. And promptly enough did find the Barclay everybody knew of, a railway clerk who was nothing at all like Lucas. We found as well the owner of the Great Maybe mine, but he was not Lucas either. Nor were any of the three previous disgusted owners we managed to track down. In fact, Lucas's name was six back in the record of ownership the Second Deputy Clerk and Recorder of Lewis and Clark County grudgingly dug out for us and there had been that many before Lucas. It grew clear to Rob and me that had the Great Maybe been a silver coin instead of a silver mine, by now it would be worn smooth from being passed around.

By that first night, Rob was thoughtful. "What do you suppose, Lucas made as much money from the Great Maybe as he thought was there and moved on to another mine? Or didn't make money and just gave the mine up?"

"Either way, he did move on," I pointed out.

"Funny, though," Rob deliberated, "that none of these other miners can bring Lucas to mind."

redone

We talked there on the bell hill until past breakfast and received the scolding of our lives from Mrs. Billington. Which was far short of fair, for she gained profit for some time to come from that fire tower discussion of ours. What Rob and I chose that early morning, in large part because we did not see what else to decide, was to stay on in Helena until Christmas sent its verdict from Nethermuir.

Of course, we needed to earn while we tried to learn Montana and if we didn't have the guidance of Lucas Barclay, we at least had an honest pair of hands apiece. I took myself down to a storefront noticed during our trekking around town, Cariston's Mercantile. An Aberdeen man and thus a bit of a conniver, Hugh Cariston; he later became a banker and a state senator. He fixed a hard look on me and in that Aberdonian drone demanded:

"Can ye handle sums?"

"Aye." I could, too.

I am sure as anything that old Cariston then and there hired me on as a clerk and bookkeeper just so he could have a decent Scots burr to hear. There are worse qualifications.

In just as ready a fashion, Rob found work at Weisenhorn's wagon shop. "Thin stuff," he shook his head about American wheels but at least they made a job.

—

readers
- #

"Rob, man, did I ever give up on a Barclay? It takes you people some time to find the ink, but--"

We whooped and crowed in this fashion until Mrs. Billington announced in through our door that she would put us out into the winter streets if we didn't sober up. That quelled our eruption, but our spirits went right on playing trumpets and tambourines. Weeks of wondering and hesitation were waved away by the sheet of paper flying in Rob's hand: Lucas Barclay definitely alive, unmistakably here in Montana, irrevocably broken out in penmanship--I managed to reach the magical letter from Rob for another look.

When he finally put his mind to it, Lucas wrote a bold hand. Bold and then some, in fact. ^{Each of every word was a} The words ^{commanded} were fat coils of loops and flourishes, so outsize that the few sentences covered the entire face of the paper. I thought I had seen among Adam Willox's pupils of the 'venture school all possible performances of pen, but here ^{stood} was script that looked meant to post on a palace wall.

I said as much to Rob, but he only averred, "That would be like him," and proceeded to read us the letter's contents aloud for the third time. "This place Graws Ventree--ever hear of it, did you?"

Neither of us had word one of French, but I said I thought ^{the location} ~~it~~ might be more like Grow Vaunt, and no, the ^{town} name had never passed my ears before. "We can ask them at the post office where it is. A letter got from the place all the way to Scotland, after all."

running them in there to take the rough spots off of them."

Rob and I looked at each other. —And how did you journey from Craig to Augusta, Mr. McCaskill and Mr. Barclay?—Oh, we were dragged along behind wild horses. There was nothing else for it, so we thrust our bedrolls and bags up top to the driver. When he had lashed them down, he pulled out a watch and peered at it. "Augusta where you gents are aiming for?"

"No," I enlightened him, "we're going on to Gros Ventre." Meanwhile Rob was scrutinizing the wheels of the stagecoach and I was devoutly hoping they looked hale.

The driver nodded decisively again. "You'll see some country, up there." He conferred with his pocket watch once more, put it away. "It's time to let the wheels chase the horses. All aboard, gents."

No two conveyances can be more different, but that stagecoach day was our voyage on the Jemmy out the Firth of Clyde over again. It has taken me this long to see so, among all else that I have needed to think through and through. But my meaning here is that just as the Clyde was our exit from cramped Scotland to the Atlantic and America, now Rob and I were departing one Montana for another. The Montana of steel rails and mineshafts and politics for the Montana of—what? Expanse, definitely. There was enough untouched land between Craig and Augusta to empty Edinburgh into and spread it thin indeed. Flatten the country out and you could butter Glasgow onto it as well. So, the widebrimmed Montana, this was. The

Montana of plain arising to foothills ascending to mountains, the continent going through its restless change of mood right exactly here. And the Montana of grass and grass and grass and grass. Not the new grass of spring yet--only the south slopes of coulees showed a green hint--but I swear I looked out on that tawny land and could feel the growth ready to burst up through the earth. The Montana that fledged itself new with the seasons.

The Montana, most of all to us that wheelvoyaging day of the world's Rob Barclays and Angus Mc Caskills. We had come for ^{homestead} land, had we? For elbow room our ambitions could poke about in? For a 160-acre berth in the future? Here began the Montana that shouted all this and then let the echoes say, come have it. If you dare, come have it.

The stagecoach ride was a continuing session of rattle and bounce, but we had no runaway and no breakdown and pulled into Augusta punctual to the minute, and so Rob and I climbed down chipper as larks. Even putting up for the night at what Augusta called a hotel didn't dim us, cheered as we were by word that a freight wagon was expected the next day. The freighter had passed with supplies for a sheep ranch west of town and would need to come back through to resume the trail northward. "Better keep your eyes skinned for him," our stage driver advised. "Might be a couple weeks before another one comes through."

2 redone

wagontrack threaded through. And instead of mountains equally all around as in Helena, here tiers of them were stacked colossally on a single horizon, the western. Palisades of rock, constant canyons. Peaks with winter still on them. As far ahead north as we could see, the crags and cliffs formed that tumbled wall.

I at last had to ask. "How far do these mountains go on like this?"

"Damn if I know," responded Herbert. "They're in Canada this same way, and that's a hunderd fifty miles or so."

On and on the country of swales and small ridges rolled. Here was land that never looked just the same, yet always looked much alike. I knew Rob and I would be as lost out here as if we had been put on a scrap of board in the middle of the Atlantic and I was thanking our stars that we were in the guidance of someone as veteran to this trail as Herbert Whomever or Whoever Herbert.

Just to put some words into the air to celebrate our good fortune, I leaned around Rob and inquired of our shepherd: "How many times have you traveled this trail by now?"

"This'll ^{make} be once."

The ^{glance} look that shot between Rob and me must have had some left over for the freighter, because eventually he went on: "Oh, I've drove this general country a lot. The Whoop-up Trail runs along to the east of here, from Fort Benton on up there into Canada. I've done that more times than you can count on a stick. This trail meets up with that one, somewhere after this Gros Ventre place. All we got to do, men, is follow these ^{here} tracks."

^

redone

Rob and I peered at the wheelmarks ahead like two threads on the prairie. This time Rob did the asking.

"What, ah, what if it snows?"

"That," Herbert conceded, "might make them a little harder to follow."

After we stopped for the night and put supper in us, Herbert grew restless. He got up from beside the campfire and prowled to the freight wagon and back ^{twice} ~~two or three~~ times. Maybe this was only his body trying itself out after the day of sitting lumplike on the wagon seat, but somehow I didn't think so.

fridgey

Finally he peered across the fire, first at Rob, then at me.

"Men, you look like kind of a trustable pair."

"We like to think we're honest enough," vouched Rob. I thought I had better tack on, "What brings the matter up?"

Herbert cleared his throat, which was a lot to clear. "That whiskey in the wagon there," he confessed. "If you two're interested as I am, we might could evaporate a little of her for ourselves."

I was puzzling on "evaporate" and I don't know what Rob was studying, when Herbert elaborated: "It ain't no difference to the trader getting those barrels, if that's what you're stuck on. He'll just water them back up. ^{water} ~~So if there's gonna be more in those barrels than I started out with, anyhow, no reason not to borrow ourselves a sip apiece, now is there? That's if you men think about this the way I do."~~ ^{water than they would, anyhow, and up being just as much} ~~no matter what~~

*you can see the bottom dollar
He's gonna**water
bejus**stuff*

redone

If Rob and I had formed a philosophy since stepping foot into Montana, it was to try to do as Montanians did, within reason. This seemed within.

Herbert grabbed the lantern and led as we clambered into the freight wagon. Rummaging beneath the seat, he came up with a set of harness awls and a hammer. Carefully, almost tenderly, he began tapping upward on the top hoop of the nearest whiskey barrel. When the barrel hoop unseated itself to an inch or so above its normal latitude, Herbert placed the point of an awl there in a seam between staves and began zestfully to drill.

"That's a thing I can do," Rob offered as soon as the freighter stopped to rest his hand. He moved in and quicker than quick completed the drilling.

This impressed even Herbert. "This ain't your profession, is it?"

"Not yet. Angus, have you found the one with the tune?"

A straw to siphon with was my mission, and from a fistful off the floor of the wagon I'd been busily puffing until I found a sturdy one that blew through nicely. "Here's one you could pipe the Missouri River through." Rob drew his awl from the hole and delicately injected my straw in its place. Herbert had his cup waiting beneath when the first drops of whiskey began dripping out. "She's kind of slow, men. But so is the creek to heaven."

When each of our cups was about two inches moist and the barrel hole plugged with a match stick and the hoop tapped back into place

*she's straight
from
angel's tip
when she
comes.*

to hide it, Herbert was of new manufacture. As we sat at the campfire and sipped, even his voice sounded better when he asked intently: "How's the calico situation in Helena these days?"

I had a moment of wondering what was so vital to him about that specific item of dry goods, then it dawned on me what he meant. Women. And from there it took no acrobatics of logic to figure out what sort of women.

Rob raised his cup in a mock toast and left the question to me. Well, there was rough justice in that, you could say. I had been the first to investigate the scarlet district of Helena, after I'd begun earning wages at the mercantile. The next time I said I was setting off up the gulch, Rob fidgeted, then blurted: "You can stand company, can't you?" Those brothel excursions were not particularly a topic between us, any more than the allure of the Nethermuir mill girls with the boldest tongues had been, but I knew it was an area of life where Rob was not as proficient as he was in most other ways. Put it this way. Rob and I both knew about that side of life --somewhat; you never know enough-- but I was a bit more inspired about its ramifications than he was.

"Worst thing about being a freighter," Herbert was proclaiming after my tepid report on Helena, "is how far she is between calico. Makes the need rise in a man. Some of these mornings, I swear to gosh I wake up and my blanket looks like a tepee."

From Herbert the rest of that evening, we heard of the calico situation at the Canadian forts he freighted to. (Bad.) The calico

situation in New Orleans where he'd been posted as a soldier in the Union army. (Astounding.) The calico situation at Butte as compared with anywhere else in Montana. (A thousand times better.) The calico situation among the Mormons, the Chinese, the Blackfeet, the Nez Perce, and the Sioux.

When we had to tell him no, we hadn't been to London to find out the English calico situation, he looked regretful, tipped the last of his cup of whiskey into himself, and ^{announced} ~~said~~ he was turning in for the night. "Men, there's no hotel like a wagon. Warm nights your room is on the wagon, stormy nights it's under it." Herbert sniffed the air and peered upward into the dark. "I believe tonight mine's going to be under."

Herbert's nose knew its business. In the morning, the world was white.

I came out of my bedroll scared and stayed that way despite the freighter's assessment that "this is just a April skift, ~~I think.~~" After Helena's elongated winter of snow flinging down from the Continental Divide, how was a person supposed to look at so much as a white flake without thinking the word blizzard? Nor was there any checking on the intentions of the Divide mountains now, they were totally gone from the west, that direction a curtain of whitish mist. Ridges and coulees still could be picked out, the ⁱⁿ tan grass tufting up from the thin blanket of freshfall. But our wagon trail, those thin twin wheeltracks--as far as could be told from the blank

redone

maybe
I believe

weather making

nearby
to see

redone

and silent expanse all around us, Herbert and Rob and I and the freight wagon and eight horses had dropped here out of the sky along with the night's storm.

The snow had stopped falling, which was the sole hope I saw anywhere around. But was the sky empty by now? Or was more snow teetering up there where this came from?

"She sure beats everything, Montana weather," Herbert acknowledged. "Men, I got to ask you to do a thing."

Rob and I took turns at it, one walking ahead of the wagon and scuffing aside the snow to find the trail ruts while the other rode the seat beside Herbert and tried to wish the weather into improvement.

"When do you suppose spring comes to this country?" Rob muttered as he passed me during one of our walking-riding swaps.

"Maybe by the end of summer," I muttered back.

Later: "You remember what the old spinster of Ecclefechan said, when somebody asked her why she'd never wed?"

"Tell me, I'm panting to know."

"'I wouldn't have the walkers, and the riders went by.' Out here, she'd have her choice of us."

"She'd need to negotiate past Herbert first."

*# e ?**#*

Later again: "Am I imagining or is Montana snow colder than snow ever was in Scotland?"

"If you're going to imagine, try for some sunshine."

Still later: "Herbert says this could have been worse, there could have been a wind with this snow."

"Herbert is a fund of happy news."

It was morning's end before Herbert informed us, "Men, I'm beginning to think we're going to get the better of this."

He no more than said so when the mist along the west began to wash away and mountains shouldered back into place here and there along that horizon. The light of this ghostly day became like no other I had ever seen, a silver clarity that made the stone spines of ridges and an occasional few cottonwood trees stand out like engravings in book pages. Any outline that showed itself looked strangely singular, as if it existed only right then, never before. At last the sun burned through, the snow was melting fast, the wheeltracks emerged ahead of us like new dark paint. Our baptism by Montana spring apparently over, Rob and I sat in grateful tired silence on the freight wagon.

redone

mist?

—

nealans

We were wagoners for the rest of that day and the next, crossing the two forks of the Teton River and observing some landmark buttes which Herbert said were near a settlement called Choteau. Then at supper on the third night Herbert reported, "Tomorrow ought to about get us there." In celebration, we evaporated the final whiskey barrel to the level of the two previous nights', congratulating ourselves on careful workmanship, and Herbert told us a number of chapters about the calico situation when he was freighting into Deadwood, ~~South Dakota~~, ⁹ during ~~its~~ ^{the Dakota} gold rush. 1

Not an hour after we were underway the next morning, the trail dropped us into a maze of benchlands with steep sides. Here even the tallest mountains hid under the horizon, there was no evidence the world knew such a thing as a tree, and Herbert pointed out to us alkali bogs which he said would sink the wagon faster than we could think about it. A wind so steady it seemed solid made us hang onto our hats. Even the path of wagon tracks lost patience here. The bench hills were too abrupt to be climbed straight up, and rather than circle around among the congregation of geography, the twin cuts of track attacked up the slopes in long sidling patterns.

Herbert halted the wagon at the base of the first ruts angling up and around a benchland. "I don't think this outfit'll roll herself over, up there. But I thought wrong a time or two before. Men, it's up to you whether you want to ride her out or give your feet some work."

redone

If Herbert regarded these slopes as more treacherous than the cockeyed inclines he had been letting us stay aboard for... down I climbed, Rob prompt behind me.

We let the wagon have some distance ahead of us, to be out of ^{its} the way in case of tumbling calamity, then began our own slog up the twin tracks.—And how did you journey from Augusta to Gros Ventre, Mr. McCaskill and Mr. Barclay?— We went by freight wagon, which is to say we walked. The tilted wagon crept along the slope while we watched, Herbert standing precariously in the uphill corner of the wagon box, ready to jump.

"Any ideas, if?"

"We're trudging now, I suppose we'd keep on. Our town can't be that far."

"This is Montana, remember. You could put all of Scotland in the watch pocket of this place."

"Still, Gros Ventre has to be somewhere near by now. Even Herbert thinks so."

"Herbert thinks he won't tip the wagon over and kill himself, too. Let's see how right he is about that, first."

The benchlands set us a routine much as the snow had done: trudge up each slope with the wind in our teeth, hop onto the freight wagon to ride across and down the far side, off to trudge some more. The first hour or so, we told ourselves it was good for the muscles. The rest of the hours, we saved our breath.

redone

Ahead of us under the trees waited a thin scatter of buildings, the way there can be when the edge of town dwindles to countryside. None of the buildings qualified as much more than an eyesore, and beyond them on the far bank of the creek were arrayed several picketed horses and a cook wagon and three or four tents of ancient gray canvas, as if wooden walls and roofs hadn't quite been figured out over there yet.

From the wagon seat Rob and I scanned around for more town, but no. This raggletaggle fringe of structures was the community entire.

Rather, this was Gros Ventre thus far in history. Across the far end of the street, near the creek and the loftiest of the cottonwoods, stood a wide two-storey framework. Just that, framework, empty and forlorn. Yellow lumber saying, more like pleading, that it had the aspiration of sizable enterprise and lacked only hundreds of boards and thousands of nails to be so.

Trying to brighten the picture for Rob, I observed: "They, ah, at least they have big plans."

Rob made no answer. But then, what could he have?

"Wonder where it is they keep the calico^{at}," issued from Herbert. He pondered Gros Ventre a moment further. "Wonder if they got any calico."

Our wagon rolled to a halt in front of what I took to be a log barn and which proved to be the livery stable. Rob and I climbed down and were handed our luggage by Herbert. As we shook hands with

redone

him he croaked out companionably, "Might see you around town. Kind of hard to miss anybody in a burg this size."

Rob drew in a major breath and looked at me. I tried to give him a grin of encouragement, which doubtless fell short of either. He turned and went over to the hostler who had stepped out to welcome this upsurge of traffic. "Good afternoon. We're looking for a man Lucas Barclay."

"Who? Luke? Ain't he over there in the Medicine Lodge? He always is."

Our eyes followed the direction the hostler jerked his head. At the far end of the dirt street near the bright skeleton of whatever was being built, stood a building with words painted across the top third of its square front in sky blue, startling as a tattoo on a forehead:

MEDICINE

LODGE

??

I saw Rob open his mouth to ask definition of a medicine lodge, think better of it, and instead bid the hostler a civil "Thank you much."

The utmost

Gathering ourselves, bedrolls and bags, off we set along the main and only street of this place Gros Ventre.

"Angus," Rob asked low, as we drew nearer to the skelter of tents and picketed horses across the creek, "do they have gypsies in this country?"

what,

redone

"I wish I knew just what it is they have here." The door into the Medicine Lodge whatever-it-was waited before us. "Now we find out."

Like vikings into Egypt, we stepped in.

And found it to be a saloon. Along the bar were a half dozen partakers, three or four others occupied chairs around a greentop table where they were playing cards. "Aces chase faces, Deaf Smith," said one of the cardsters as he spread down his hand. "Goddamn you and the horse you rode in on, Perry," responded his opponent mildly and gathered the cards to shuffle. Of course Rob and I had seen cowboys before, in Helena. Or what we thought were. But these of Gros Ventre were a used variety, in soiled crimped hats and thick clothing and worn-down boots.

The first of the Medicine Lodge clientele to be aware of us was a stocky tan-faced man, evidently part Indian. He said something too soft for us to hear to the person beside him, who revolved slowly to examine us over a brownish longhorn mustache. I wish I could say that the mustached one showed any sign we were worth turning around to look at.

Had someone been counting our blinks--the Indian-looking witness maybe was--they'd have determined that Rob and I were simultaneous in spying the saloonkeeper. ^A He stood alone near one end of the bar, intently leaning down, busy with some chore beneath there. When he glanced up and intoned deep, "Step right over, lads, this bunch isn't a fraction as bad as they look," there was the

redaw

remembered brightness of his Barclay cheeks, there was the brand of voice we had not heard since leaving Nethermuir.

Lucas possessed a black beard now with gray in it like streaks of ash. The beard thickly followed his jaw and chin, with his face carefully shaved above that. And above the face Lucas had gone babe-bald, but the dearth of hair only emphasized the features of power dispersed below in that frame of coaly whiskers: sharp blue eyes under heavy dark eyebrows, substantial nose, wide mouth to match the chin, and that stropped ruddiness identical to Rob's.

Rob let out a breath of relief that must have been heard all the way to Helena. Then he smiled a mile and strode to the bar with his hand extended: "Mister Lucas Barclay, I've come an awful distance to shake your hand."

*out as if
far as it
could go*

Did I see it happen? Hear it? Or sheerly feel it? Whichever the sense, I abruptly knew that now the attention of everyone in the saloon weighed on Rob and me. Every head had pivoted to us, every eye gauged us. The half-breed or whatever he was seemed to be memorizing us in case there was a bounty on fools.

The saloonkeeper himself stared up at us thundrous. If faces could kill, Rob and I would have been never born. The two of us stared stunned as he glowered at Rob. At me. At Rob again. Now the saloonkeeper's back straightened as if an iron rod had been put in his spine, but he kept his forearms deliberately out of sight below the bar. My mind flashed full of Helena tales of bartenders

redone

glass with these stubs. He said if a man can do that, he can make himself a life.

There in the Medicine Lodge, Lucas's maiming on show in front of him, Rob's case of stupefaction was even worse than mine. He brought his hand back to his side as if burned and stammered, "Lucas...I...we never--"

"Put it past, Rob," ^{his} his uncle directed. "Have a look at these to get used to them. Christ knows, I've had to." Lucas's powerful face turned toward me. "And who's this ^{long} one?"

while (Rob's) eyes were still out like organ at you

Would you believe, I stupidly started to put my hand out for a shake, just as Rob had. Catching myself, I swallowed and got out: "Lucas, I'm Angus McCaskill. You knew my father, back--"

"You're old Alex's lad? By Jesus, they must have watered you. You've grown and then some." His gaze was locked with mine. "Is your father still the best wheelsmith in the east of Scotland?"

"No. He's, he's dead."

Lucas's head moved in a small wince of regret. "I'm sorry to hear so. The good die as thoroughly ^e as the bad." His armstumps vanished briefly beneath the bar again and came up delivering a whiskey bottle clutched between. "Down here among the living, we'd better drink to health."

*as**to you on side*

Lucas turned from us to the line of glasses along the backbar shelf, grasped one between his stumps, set it in place in front of me, turned and did the same with one for Rob, a third time with a

showing us Montana's Athens-to-be. Rob and I did much nodding and tried to mmhmm properly as Lucas tramped us past such sights as Fain's blacksmith shop, encircled by odds and ends of scrap iron. Kuvvus's mercantile, a long low log building which sagged tiredly in the middle of its roofbeam. A sizable boarding house with a sign *above* ~~over~~ *its door* proclaiming that it was operated by C.E. Sedgwick—which was to say, the mustachioed Sedge—and his wife Lila. Near the creek in a grove of cottonwoods, a tiny Catholic church with the bell on an iron stanchion out front. (A circuit-riding priest circulated through "every month or so," Lucas noted favorably.) Dantley's livery stable where Herbert the freighter had disembarked us. Next to it Gros Ventre's second saloon, Wingo's: a twin to the Medicine Lodge except it was fronted with slabs instead of boards. (To our surprise—we now knew why Herbert hadn't materialized at the Medicine Lodge—we were informed in an undervoice by Lucas that the town did have a calico supply, ensconced here in Wingo's. "Two of them," Lucas reported with a disapproving shake of his head. "Wingo calls them his nieces.")

We also became enlightened about the tents and picketed horses.

"That's the Floweree outfit, from down on the Sun River," Lucas told us. "Trailing a herd of steers north. These cattle outfits ^{all} come right through on their way up to borrow grass. I tell you, lads, this town is situated--"

"Borrow?" echoed Rob.

~~Accepted~~
redon

"From the Indians. Blackfeet. Their Reservation is north there"--Lucas gestured beyond the creek with one of his stubs; would I ever get used to the sight of them?--"^{fifteen}ten miles or so, and it goes all the way to Canada. Cattle everywhere on it, every summer."

— And how did the municipality of Gros Ventre strike you, Mr. McCaskill and Mr. Barclay?—We found the main enterprise to be theft of grass, and our host had no hands.

Be fair, though. The fledgling town was not without graces. It proffered two. First and finest was its trees, cottonwoods like a towering lattice above the little collection of roofs. When their buds became leaf, Gros Ventre would wear a green crown, true enough. And the other distinction stood beside the Sedgwick boarding house: a tall slender flagpole, far and away the most soaring construction in Gros Ventre, with the American flag energetically flapping at the top. When Rob or I managed to remark on this public-spirited display, Lucas glanced upward and said there was a story to that, all right, but he marched us across to what he plainly considered the centerpiece of Gros Ventre, the building skeleton at the end of the street.

"Sedge's hotel," Lucas identified this assemblage of lumber and air for us. "I've put a bit of money into it too, to help him along. The Northern, he's going to call it."

Rob and I must have looked less comprehending than we already were, for Lucas impatiently pointed out that the hotel site was at the north end of town. "You'll see the difference this hotel will make," he asserted. "Sedge and Lila will have room for dozens here."

redone

Thinking of what it had taken for us to reach this speck on the map, I did wonder how dozens at once were going to coincide here. Lucas faced the pair of us as if he'd heard that. He thrust his stubs into his coat pockets and looked whole and hale again, a bearded prophet of civic tomorrows.

"Robbie, Angus. I know Gros Ventre must look like a gypsy camp to you lads. But by Jesus, you ought've seen what a skimpy place it was when I came three years ago. You had to look twice to see whether anybody lived here but jackrabbits. The Sedgwicks and Wingo, Kuuvus and his wife and Fain and his, they've all come in since then. And they're just the start, this'll be a true town before you know it."

Evidently we did not manage to appear convinced. Lucas started anew.

"Lads, you have eyes in your heads. If you used them at all on your way here, you saw that there's land and more land and then more of more, just for the taking here in Montana. And by Jesus, people will take it. They'll flock in, one day, and that day not long from now. The railroad is being built, do you know, up north of the Two Medicine River. That's what'll bring them, lads. And when they come, they'll need everything a town can furnish them," concluded the lord of the Medicine Lodge.

*That's history of
noce
right
there.
in no
many
words*



Netherm

other. That he had taught himself to write again by sitting down night after night, a pen between his stubs, and copying out of an old book titled Stone Stories: Collected English Epitaphs. "It fit my mood. I made myself work at a line a night, until I could do it first try. Then two lines a night, and four, on up to a page of them at a time. Not only did I learn writing again, lads, the epitaphs were instructive. Here lies John Jones, man of worth, /repaying in full his borrowed earth. Angus, what would your man Burns think of that one, ay? Or the favorite of mine. Alone man must ^{find his way} ~~pass~~ among / the cold lunar beams / ~~alone~~ the sun arises, and alone /spring the great streams. That's entirely what I was, alone, after the accident to my hands. At least"--he indicated Nancy, buttering bread for him--"I'm over that now." We learned by Lucas's ironic telling that he had earned good money from the Fanalulu mine before the accident--"the great secret to silver mining, lads, is to quit in time; otherwise, the saying is that you need a gold mine to keep your silver mine going"-- and we inferred from this house and its costly furnishings that those were not the last dollars to find their way to Lucas. We learned as much as he could bring himself to tell us about that letter that found its way to us in Helena. "Why did I write it; after these years?" Lucas lifted his coffee cup between his stubs and drank strong. "Matters pile up in a person. They can surprise you, how they want out. I must have wanted to say to old nose-in-the-air Nethermuir that I'm still living a life of my own. Even so, I couldn't bring myself yet to tell about the

redans

and Toussaint and his wife took her to raise. Then the winter of '86 came, a heavier winter than '83 ever thought of being, and Toussaint didn't know whether he was going to keep his own family alive up there on the Two Medicine River, let alone an extra. So he brought Nancy in here to the DeSalises. There's that shocked look again, lads." Himself, Lucas somehow appeared to be both grim and amused. "They say when Toussaint rode into town with her, the two of them wrapped in buffalo robes, they had so much snow on them they looked like white bears. When I came up here and bought the saloon and the house and DeSalis pulled out with his family for Missouri, Nancy--stayed on with me. I need some things done, like these damn buttons and shaving and all little nuisances like that. She needs some place to be. So you see, it's an arrangement that fits us both." Lucas shrugged into his coat, thrust his arm ends into its pockets and instantly looked like a town builder again. "This isn't old Scotland, lads. Life goes differently here."

a bit simpler

Differently, said the man. In the bedroom that night, I felt as if the day had turned me upside down and shaken me out. Lucas without hands. This end-of-nowhere place Gros Ventre. The saga of Nancy.

Rob looked as if he'd received double of whatever I had. "Christ of mercy, Angus. What've we gotten ourselves into here?"

*redone
reworked*

It helped nothing to have the wind out of Rob's sails, too. I tried to put a little back in by pointing out: "We did find Lucas, you have to say that for us."

"Not anything like the one I expected. Not a--" He didn't finish that.

"The man didn't lose those hands on purpose, Rob."

"I never meant that. It's a shock to see, is all. How could something like that happen?"

"Lucas told. Tamping the blasting ^{powder} ~~power~~ and someway--"

"Not that, Angus. What I mean, how could it happen to him?" To a Barclay, he really meant. My own weary guess was that fate being what it is, it keeps a special eye for lives the size of Lucas's. A pin doesn't draw down lightning. But how say so to Rob this unearthly night and make any sense. He was rattling at top speed now: "Lucas always was so good with his--his hands. He was Crack Jack at anything he tried and now look at him. I tell you, Angus, I just-- and Nancy Buffalo-whatever. There's a situation, now. Housekeeper, he calls her. She must even have to help him take a pee."

"That's as maybe, but look at all Angus does manage to do."

"Yes, if it hadn't been for that damned letter he managed to write--" Rob shook his head and didn't finish that either.

Well, I told myself, here is interesting. A Barclay not knowing what to make of another Barclay. The history of the world is not done yet.

peddle

redo

From our bedroom window I could see the rear of the Medicine Lodge and the patch of dirt street between the saloon and the forlorn hotel framework. Another whisper from Burns came to mind: Your poor narrow footpath of a street/ where two wheelbarrows tremble when they meet. Those lines I had the sense to keep to myself and said instead: "Anyway, here is where we are. Maybe Gros Ventre will look fancier after a night's sleep."

Rob flopped onto his side of the bed but his eyes stayed wide open. He said only, "Maybe so, maybe no."

And do you know, Gros Ventre did improve itself overnight, at least in the way that any place has more to it than a first ~~look~~^{glimpse} can gather. I went out and around at dawn, and in that opening hour of the day the high cottonwoods seemed to stand even taller over the street and the little scatter of buildings. Grave old nurses for a foundling town. Or at least there in the daybreak, a person had hope that nurture was what was happening.

to: first
weather
of dawn -

Early as the hour was, the flag already was tossing atop the Sedgwick flagpole. Beyond, the mountains were washed a lovely clean blue and gray in the first sunlight. The peaks and their snow stood so clear I felt I could reach out and run a finger along that chill rough edge. At the cow camp across the creek the cook was at his fire and a few of the cowboys--riders, as Lucas referred to them--were taking down the tents. I heard one of the picketed horses whinny, then the rush of the creek where it bumped busily across a bed of rocks.

redone

"Gents, let's look at this from another way." Before going on, I nodded inquiringly toward the bottle. Perry and Deaf Smith automatically nodded in turn. Pouring them another and myself a buttermilk, I made change from Perry's fresh dollar and began: "As I hear it, this geezer Custer was more fully dressed than the Indians at the Little Big Horn. Am I right so far?"

"How do you suppose Lucas spends his afternoons?" Rob asked near the end of our arrival week in Gros Ventre, no freight wagon having reappeared nor news of any. We were waiting for Lucas to show himself and take over bar duty from me, so that we could go around to the house for our turn at supper.

"With Nancy on hand, how would you spend yours?" I asked back reasonably.

Rob looked at me with reproach and was about to say further when Lucas materialized, striding through the Medicine Lodge doorway as if entering his favorite castle. "Lads, sorry I'm late. Affairs of business take scrupulous tending, you know how it is. Carry yourselves over to the house now, Nancy has your feast waiting."

"She does put him in a good frame of mind," Rob mused as we went to the house.

"Man, that's not just a frame of mind, there are other departments involved too."

"You can spare me that inventory," he retorted with a bit of an edge, and in we went to eat. But I was impressed from then on with

compartment

reXerox

The earth was mine to joggle over aboard Patch, at least until each midday. (Lucas was strict that he wanted me to continue my saloonkeeping afternoons, so that he could take care of what he termed "business at the house.") Now the question was the homestead-seeker's eternal one, where best to seek?

Whatever compass is in me said south first. Not south as a general direction of hope, for as Rob and I tramped through those steep treeless benchlands in the wake of Herbert's freight wagon ten days before, we had plenty of time to agree that living there would be like dwelling on top of a table. But south a mile or so from Gros Ventre, to the pass where Herbert had halted the wagon to give us our first glimpse into the Two Medicine country, was where I felt I needed to start; up for a deeper look at it all.

Everything was in place. The continent's flange of mountain range along the west. The far butte called Heart and the nearer slow-sloping one like an aft sail. The grass plateaus beyond Gros Ventre and its cottonwood creek. The soft rumple of plains toward the Sweetgrass Hills and where the sun came from. Enough country that a century of Robs and Anguses would never fill it. As I sat a while on Patch, above to my right a hawk hung on the wind, correcting, correcting. I let myself wish that I had that higher view, that skill to soar to wherever I ought to be. Then I reined Patch east, the hawk's direction.

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redone

"You're becoming a regular jockey," Rob tossed cheerily as he came out from dinner and I rode up to grab a bite before spelling Lucas at the saloon.

"You're missing all the thrill of exploration," I imparted as I climbed off Patch and stiffly tottered toward the house.

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That evening in the Medicine Lodge I mentioned to Lucas that I thought I might ride west the next day, follow the creek up from town toward the area that lay nestled under the mountains.

Lucas had not remarked much on my land-looking, maybe on the basis that he figured I ought to see plenty before making my mind up. But now he ratified:

"That'll be worth doing. Plan to spend the full day at it, *why not?* there ^{is a surplus} are a lot of miles in that country up there." To my surprised look, Lucas cleared his throat and allowed: "Business at the house can rest for an afternoon."

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"That's more than generous of you," I said with what I hoped was a straight face.

"Angus, here's a pregnant thought for you. While you're about it tomorrow, pay a visit to Ninian Duff, ^{ah?} His is the first place up the North Fork, just there after the creek divides."

1

Here was a name Lucas had mentioned in connection with the vanishment of cattle rustlers. When I reminded him so, Lucas gave

To me the natural thing was to point Patch toward the top of the knob, for a scan around. Patch did not necessarily agree, but plodded us up the slope anyway. ⁴You would imagine, as I did, that this climb to see the new country would bring anticipation, curiosity. And there you'd be as wrong as I was. For what I began to feel was a growing sense of familiarity.

Of something known, making itself recognized. The cause of the feeling, though, I kept trying to place but couldn't. The wind, yes, that. Smell of new grass, which I had been among for several days of riding by now. Cold whiff from where a snowbank lay hidden in some north-facing coulee. All those but something more.

At the knob top, I saw. The earth's restless alteration of itself here. The quickening swells of plains into foothills and then the abrupt upward spill of the mountains. The climb of the continent to its divide, higher, greater, more sudden than seemed possible; like a running leap of the land. I had been feeling this all happen in the same way that I watched it delineate itself while Rob and I were aboard the stagecoach between Craig and Augusta. The interior of America soared through its change of mood here as well. And here, just below me, one single calm green wrinkle amid the surrounding rumpus of tall timbered ridges and surging buttes and stonecliff skyline, lay the valley of the North Fork.

Once seen never forgotten, that new mood of land. I sat transfixed in the saddle and slowly tutored myself about the join of this western attic to the rest of the Two Medicine Country. No

redone

human sign was anywhere around, except for the tiny pair of homesteads just above the mouth of the North Fork, one of them undoubtedly that of the old Bible-banger, Whoojamadinger whom Lucas mentioned to me. Other than those, wherever I looked was pure planet. There from the knob I could see eastward down the creek to where Gros Ventre was tucked away; for that matter, I could see all the way to the Sweetgrass Hills, what, seventy-five miles distant, that Herbert had pointed out to Rob and me. By the holy, this was as if stepping up onto the hill above the Greenock dock and being able to look across Scotland to Edinburgh. North, the benchland and the landmark butte that met it were my broad boundaries of study. Southward, a throng of big ridges shouldering between this creek branch and the South Fork.

West. West, the mountains as steady as a sea wall. They were my guide now, even the wind fell from mind in their favor. Seeing them carving their canyons of stone into the sky edge, scarps and peaks deep up into the blue, a person could have no doubt where he was. The poor old rest of the earth could hold to whatever habit of axis it wished, but this Two Medicine country answered to a West Pole, its own magnetic worldtop here along its wildest horizon.

Someway, in the midst of all my gawking I began to feel watched myself. Maybe by someone at either of the homesteads along the creek, but no one was in view. Who knew, probably these seven-league mountains were capable of gazing back at me.

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"As the dew," I admitted, and told him in general but quick about Rob and myself and our homesteading intention, and that if we needed any vouching it could be obtained in at the Medicine Lodge saloon from none other than Lucas Barc--

By the time I caught up with what my tongue was saying, His Whiskerness made up his mind about me. "Lucas Barclay has had a misfortunate life," he announced. "He can answer to God for it. Or knowing Lucas, more likely argue with Him about it. But so far as I can see, you are not Lucas." He slid the rifle into its scabbard. "My name is Duff."

So. I could well believe that this geezer and Lucas came keen against each other, as iron sharpens iron.

I introduced myself and we had a handshake, more or less. Ninian Duff immediately ^{turned to} made inquisition:

"You are from?"

"Nethermuir, in Forfar."

"Ay, I know of your town. Flora and I are East Neuk of Fife folk. As are Donald and Jennie Erskine, next along the creek here. We made the journey together, three years since." People were even leaving the fat farms of Fife, were they. Old Scotland was becoming a bare cupboard.

As if he had run through his supply of words, Ninian Duff was gazing the length of the valley to where the far shoulder of the butte angled down to the North Fork. Abruptly:

"You are not afraid of work?"

rodome

"None that I've met yet."

The whiskers of Ninian Duff twitched a bit at that.

"Homesteading has brands of it the rest of the world never heard of. But that is ^a something you will need to learn for yourself. If ^e I were you now"--a hypothesis I wasn't particularly comfortable with--"I'd have a look there ^{aneath} under Breed Butte, along the top of the creek. Ay, you can dinner with us and we will talk then." Ninian Duff started his horse down off the knob. "We eat at noon," he declared over his shoulder in a way that told me he did not mean the first minute beyond 12 o'clock.

When I rode back into Gros Ventre it was nearly supertime. I was vastly saddle-tired--cowboys must have a spare pair of legs they put on for riding, I was learning--but could feel the North Fork, the future, like music under my skin. Could bring back into my eyes again and again the valley I rode up after encountering Ninian Duff, the long green pocket of creekside meadow, the immense ridges that were timber where they weren't grass and grass where they weren't timber, the Montana earth's giant sawline of mountains against the sky beyond, the nearer gentler soar of the timber-topped prominence called Breed Butte. Could hear echo and echo all of what Ninian told me at dinner: I have found that cattle do well enough, but the better animal here may be sheep. These ridges and foothills, the mountains themselves, there is room up here for thousands and thousands of sheep....Don't come thinking a homestead is free land.

Its price is serious sweat, and year after year of it....But if I
were you now, the one place I'd want to homestead is here along the
North Fork while there is still the pick of the land....

Too thrilled yet to settle into a chair, I decided instead I'd relieve Lucas in the saloon, let him have a long supper in preparation for a Medicine Lodge Saturday night. Then Rob and I could go together for our own meal and talk of our homesteads. By damn, the two of us would be owners of Montana yet.

Stopping by the house to tell Nancy this calendar, I swung off the pinto horse like a boy who has been to the top of the world. The kitchen door was closest for my moment's errand. With my mind full of the day's discovery, in I sailed.

In on Rob and Nancy.

She was at the stove. He was half-perched, arms leisurely crossed, at the woodbox beside the stove. True, there was distance between them. But not quite enough. And they were too still. Too alike in the caught look each cast me. All this might have been mistakable. There was something more, though. The air in the room seemed to have been broken by me. I had crashed into the mood here as if it was a door of glass.

Rob recovered first. "Angus, is there a fire? You're traveling like there's one in your hip pocket."

"The prospect of supper will do that to me." I almost added You're in here amply early yourself, but held it. "Nancy, I just came to say I'll go to the saloon for Lucas, then eat after he does,

redone

Well, I thought as I crossed the space to the saloon, it's time to stir the blood around in our man Rob.

That evening in the Medicine Lodge I managed to put a few extra drinks into myself and Rob followed without really noticing. As matters progressed, Lucas sent us a couple of looks but evidently decided we deserved to celebrate my discovery of our homesteads-to-be. He set a bottle on the bar in front of us and went to tend some thirsty Double W riders who had just stormed in. After a bit, I proposed:

"Let's go see about the calico situation, Those calico nieces of Wingo's."

Rob looked surprised, and when he hesitated with an answer, I pressed:

"Haven't you noticed, the bedcovers on my side look like a tepee these mornings?"

He laughed loud and long over that. I was sober enough to notice, though, that he didn't make the logical joke in return about our bedding resembling a two-pole tent.

But he went with me, and the bottle came along too.

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Why don't we.

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realms

Lucas stopped wiping the bar and gazed at me. Abruptly his face had the same look of thunder as when Rob first stepped up to him asking for a handshake. What a thorough fool I was. Why had I said words with my real meaning behind them?

Lucas moved not at all, staring at me. Then with great care to say it soft, he said:

"I don't consider it's been worn out. Do you?"

"No, no, nothing of the sort. I just think I'd better be on my way before--it might."

At last Lucas unlocked his gaze from me. "I ought to have seen. I ought to have, ay." He stared down at his stubs on the bar towel, grimacing as he did, and I knew I was seeing as much pain as I ever wanted to. "Any sense I ever had must've gone with my hands."

"Lucas, listen to me. There's nothing happened yet, I swear it. I--"

He shook his head and began swiping the bar with the relentless towel again. "Not with you, no. You I can believe, Angus. You're in here telling me, and that's a truth in itself."

So I had said all, and he had heard all, without the names of Rob and Nancy ever being spoken. More than ever, now, I felt the need to be gone from Gros Ventre. I wished I already was, and far.

Lucas swabbed like a man possessed until he reached the two glasses of buttermilk, glowered at them and tossed their contents into the swill pail. In an instant he had replaced them with glasses of whisky and shunted mine along the bar to me with his forearm.

randomly

redone

"Here's to the better life," he snapped out, and we drank needfully. Still abrupt, he queried, "Have you told our Robbie you're leaving?"

"Not yet, but I'm about to, when he comes off work."

"Hold back until tonight, why not." Lucas gazed out across the empty Medicine Lodge as if daring it to tell him why not. "I'll have Sedge take the saloon for a while and the three of us at least can have a final supper together. We may as well hold peace in the family until then, do you think?"

I thought, peace is nowhere in the outlook I see among the Barclays, but aloud I agreed.

When Lucas and Rob and I went across to the house that evening, supper already waited on the table, covered with dish towels. Three places were set, with the plates turned down.

"We're on our own for a bit," Lucas announced. "Nancy has gone home with Tbussaint, up to the Reservation to visit her sister. So tonight it's a cold bite but plenty of it." He sat down, reached his right stub to the far edge of his plate and nudged the dish toward him until it lipped over the edge of the table; that lip he grasped with both stubs and flipped the plate over exactly in place. "Turn up your plates and let's begin/ Eat the meat and spit the skin," he recited tunefully. "Most likely not old Burns, eh, Angus?"