

school," Rob informed me when I first went to Breed Butte to give him word of my year's livelihood. He said it smiling, but I could tell he more than half meant it. "Of course," he swept on, "that goes without saying, about anyone as redheaded as you are. But--"

--You'll be glad to say it for me even so," I finished for him. "And here I thought you'd be relieved to know there'll be a solid mind at the school for all the Barclays that seem to be on the way," Judith being notably along then toward their second daughter. You had to wonder, with the wives of Scotch Heaven as fruitful as they were, was there a permanent pregnancy that simply circled around among them?

"Solid is one word for it. Thick is another. Angus, man, you're missing a golden chance by not coming in with Lucas and me on more sheep. With prices down where they are, we can buy enough woolies to cover this country from here to there."

We. Lucas and thee and his money make three, I thought to myself. But said: "If you and Lucas want to be up to your necks in sheep, that's your matter. I have all I can handle and still take the school. And there's where I have a proposition for you, if your ears are ready."

~~My offer was to herd our shared sheep, a next summer's task that I could manage to do after the end of school, if Rob would lamb them this coming spring with his and Lucas's bands. He looked the proposal over from every angle--he was getting surprisingly like Ninian in that--and at last said he guessed he could go along with~~

such an arrangement.

"You're a contrary man, McAngus, is what you are. Give you bread and roses and I swear you'd eat the petals and go around with the loaf in your buttonhole." Rob shook his head as if clearing it of vapors caught from me.

"But you're missing ^{serious} opportunity," he reiterated, "passing up Lucas's pocket this way when he has it open. Don't say I never told you."

"Rob, I never would."

"I can only hope you're saving up your brains to contend with this horse dealer," Rob switched to with a laugh, and quick as that, the how-many-sheep-are-enough? debate was behind us one more time and he was the other Rob, the sunbright one. A Saturday, this, and the pair of us were pointing our horses across the divide of Breed Butte and down, north, to Noon Creek. Our mission was a new horse for me, poor old mare Patch no longer having enough step in her for my ~~daily~~ miles back and forth to the school and out and around our band of sheep when I took them from Rob each weekend--I seemed to use the saddle for a chair any more. Patch's plodding pace here beside Rob's strong roan reinforced my conviction that buying another horse from Dantley's stable in Gros Ventre would be like throwing the money in the stove, so we were resorting to elsewhere. I say we; Rob was avidly insistent, when I mentioned to him my rehorsing intention, that Patch's successor be a partnership horse--Angus, man, you'll be using him on the band of sheep we own together, so it's only logical I put up half the price of him.

insert
new
horse
at
impress?

In fine, going in with me on the purchase of the horse was Rob's roundabout way of helping me to juggle the school along with the homestead and the sheep, without having to say out loud that it was something worth juggling. And I was taking considerable care not to divulge that I knew so. Maybe the right silences are what keep a friendship green?

Isaac Reese's horse ranch was as far up Noon Creek as mine was along the North Fork, comfortably near the mountains without having them squat on you.)

As we approached the place Rob^{now} asked, "Do you know this geezer Reese at all?"

"Only by sight and hearsay."



long-mustached and soft-eyed,

And Isaac Reese had been issued the right face anticipation for a horse trader, for he showed no twitch of expression when I stepped off the Dantley nag as if I was a plump hen seeking a chopping block. When I told ^{him} Isaac my purpose, he only asked in some accent my ears were not prepared for: "How much horse?"

I took that to mean how much was I willing to pay for a horse, and began the sad hymn of my finances. But Isaac Reese meant what he said. He studied me, eyeing my long legs, and judged: "You vant about him high," holding his hand at the height of my ^{neck} nose.

Plainly this was a man who knew horses. What else he knew was as unclear to me then as his version of English, which had Rob covering a smile as he witnessed our conversational free-for-all. By common report this Isaac Reese was a Dane who alit in America as a penniless teamster and now had horse crews of his own at work on

way across America with the railroad that was being built north of the Two Medicine River. My bet is that he learned his English, to call it that, from someone else who didn't speak it as an original language. It was Isaac who ^{made} would make famous a Noon Creek winter day when the temperature rose from twenty below to zero by observing, "Der t'ermometer fall up dis morning."

What Isaac Reese led out for me was a high horse, no question about that. At ^{the} his shoulder he stood ^{the animal} nose-high to me as prescribed by Isaac; a tall ^{young} gelding of a striking strong brown color odd in a horse, remindful of dark gingerbread. Maybe ^{Rob and I were} I was no great equinist, but at the wheel shop in Nethermuir ^{we} I had seen enough with a quick look at each other we agreed that horses pass through to fill a corner of Asia, and ^{Both of us} I thought here was something handsome. ^{ing} I stepped closer to admire the steed and ^{I asked} companionably rubbed his velvet neck while ^{asked} asking Isaac: "What's his name?"

"Skorp Yun," Isaac informed me. That had a pensive homely Scandinavian ring to it, and I was on the verge of asking what it translated to. When it came clear to me, ~~and Rob at the same time~~ instant.

"His name is Scorpion?" I verified, stepping promptly back to where I had begun.

Both of us stepping with great promptness back to where we had begun, I ~~was~~ ^{gulfed for} verification: "His name is Scorpion?"

There ensued from Isaac a scrambled-egg explanation that the horse was titled not for his personality but for the brand on his right hip, a

Rob and I looked: yes, a large long-tailed

script M-- ^{MM}. Isaac's ^{explication} ~~explanation~~ of the brand sounded to me as if the horse originated on a ranch which belonged to the Mikado. Later Lucas clarified that ~~it~~ ^{the MM} was the brand of the Mankato Cattle Company in North Dakota, and "No, Angus, I wouldn't know either what a Mankato horse is doing six hundred miles from home, nor would I ask into the matter as long as I had a firm bill of sale from Isaac."

There in the Reese corral I cast a glance at Rob. Studying the big brown horse gravely, he told me: "It's your funeral." But I knew from the way his head was cocked that he would be pleased to own half of this ^{lofty creature} ~~fine animal~~.

While I was making up my mind about Scorpion, Isaac Reese was eyeing my colossal saddle on the Dantley nag. He inquired dubiously, "Do you came from Texas?"

"No, not quite that bad." How much do you want for this ^{fanciful} ~~allegorical~~ horse?"

#

"Goodnight, Angus."

But before she could turn, I blurted: "Anna, I'd like to call on you."

That direct look of hers. "Then why don't you?"

A fly buzzed uselessly against the window of the Ramsay parlor, herald of my audience thus far with Anna's parents.

"So, Mr. McCaskill, you too are of Forfar," speaks the main dragon. "That surprises me." ^M Margaret Ramsay, mother of Anna, any day of the week. looked as if she could out-general Wellington. A drawn, bony sort of ^Ywoman with none of Anna's adventurous curves, she seemed to have room in herself only for skepticism toward the male race. Beside her sat probably her prime reason for that. Peter Ramsay was a plump placid man who sat with his hands resting on his belly, the first finger of his right hand gripped his left, in the manner a cow's teat would be grasped. Ready to milk one hand with his other and evidently content to spend a lifetime at it. It stretched my imagination several ways beyond usual, as to how these two beings could have made Anna.

I was trying to be ^{extra} careful with my tongue, but: "I'd be interested to know, Mrs. Ramsay, in what aspect I look so different from other Forfar folks. My face, is it? I should have put on my other one."

If vinegar can smile, Margaret Ramsay smiled. "Of course I meant surprised to find someone else from Forfar so near at hand here in Montana."

change
"look"

horse man

"You were schooled where?" she asked.

"At a 'venture school in Nethermuir."

"I see. Anna and I both matriculated from the dame school in Brechin."

"So I understand." I am a famous scholar, see./Graddy-ated and trickle-ated, me./I've been to Rome in Germany/and seen the snows of Araby. I swallowed that safely away and put forth: "Education is the garment that never wears, they say."

"And what of your family?"

I looked squarely at her. "Dead," I said.

Margaret Ramsay regarded me. "I mean, of course, what of them in life."

My father the ironhand, encased in his deafness; my mother the mill worker;

myself the tall alone boy trodding the lightless streets of old stone town Nethermuir...Try sometime to put ^{those} ~~that~~ into parlor speech. Anna was interested and encouraging--Anna could do me no wrong--but it was uphill all the way, trying to tell of the wheelshop years.

Sun lightened the room a half-minute, cloud darkened it, the day's weather coming and going up there on the Divide of the continent. This

~~The~~ Ramsay place all but touched the mountains. Until humans learned to hang to the side of a crag with one hand and tend livestock with the other, here was as far as settlement could go. I hoped these Ramsays knew what they were in for when winter's winter, which is to say January and February, came howling down off the

myself tall boy

clouds

restless

can't

descended

retail to granite

From where I sat look right up into the granite
Rockies onto them. I could see the rock face of Jericho Reef
through the curtain, the window where the fly was haplessly
zizzing. # "You've seen the lighthouse," I thought of abruptly,
"off from Arbroath?"

"I passed it ^{close} on a schooner once," spoke Peter Ramsay, his ^{most extensive} full
contribution to that day's conversation. "Surprising."

Well, he didn't know the half of it yet. I began telling of Alexander
McCaskill of ^{the} Bell Rock. Of his day-by-day fear of his ocean workplace, of
his daily conquer of the fact that a boat is a hole in the water. Of he
and the other Arbroath stonemen encircling the ~~granite~~ engineer Stevenson
as the first foundation block of the lighthouse was laid and its dedication
recited, May the Great Architect of the Universe complete and bless this
building. Of the fog-pale day the boat did not come and did not come, the
floodtide rising to take ^{the} Bell Rock, dry-mouthed Stevenson drinking poolwater
like a dog to try say bravery to his men, the random pilot boat at last.
Of the three-year rising of the ~~granite tower~~ round rock tower there beside
the verge of Scotland, ~~at last~~ a single bold sliver of brightwork in the ocean.

up
thought of
abruptly
light house

I told of Alexander McCaskill at Bell Rock, and if the impression was left that my great-grandfather had been the right hand of the colossal Stevenson throughout that ~~construction~~, I didn't mind.

"Interesting," granted Margaret Ramsay. "Interesting indeed."

"I'll walk out with you," Anna said when it came my time to go.

Air was never more welcome to me. Whoof. ~~Mons~~ ^{Picklish} Meg Ramsay was going to be something to put up with, but Anna was worth all.

As soon as we were out of sight around a corner of the house, I put her hand on the back of mine and urged, "Quick, give me a pinch."

She lightly did and inquired, "And what was that for?"

"I needed to be sure my skin is still on me."

Anna had to smile. "You did well. Even Mother thought so, I could tell."

"Well enough to be rewarded by my favorite teacher?"

Anna let me kiss her. Then she gave my arm a squeeze, and went back to the house.

As Scorpion and I rounded Breed Butte, the places on my body counted themselves up. That joking pinch, the considered meeting of our lips, the OO squeeze of my arm. Not as great a total as I was capable of imagining, but a promising sum.

more to come
matt

Hand Meg

1

23

middle

An evening of ~~early~~ June, ~~Angus~~ Rob poked his head in on me. "Angus,

sharpen your ears. I've a proposition for you."

"It'd be news if you didn't."

"Now don't be that way. I'm ~~offering you a free excursion~~ ^{here to offer (an} ~~and~~ ^{, free gratis for nothing,} and all you have to provide is your ~~own~~ ^{own} ~~matchless self~~ ^{for company!}. What this is, I've to go up to the railroad--Judith's new cream separator came in by train. Ride along with me in the wagon, why not."

"It's our last change for an outing before we ~~become~~ ^{turn into} shearers and shearers."

Rob was expansive these days. ~~While I was low,~~ ^{because} commerce ~~had~~ ^{suddenly was.} ~~decided to climb.~~ Prices of wool and lambs had sprung back to what they were before all the buckets fell in the well of 1893. With their ~~abundance of wethers to be shorn~~ ^{we were looking at} Rob and Lucas ~~had~~ a real payday ahead, just as ~~and my lamb crop would get me back to comfort;~~ ^{raise me} to where ~~I'd intended~~ ^{I wanted to be} for Anna and ~~I~~ ^{me} to begin our married life. ~~I shook off that last~~

~~There and back was a journey of two days, maybe three.~~ "Why don't you have the next freight wagon bring it?"

"That'd be weeks yet, and I want this ~~to be~~ to be a surprise for Judith. I'm telling her you and I are going up to talk sheep with the Agency people."

Come along, man. You've been keeping yourself scarce everywhere but at Noon Creek. See some more of the world for a change. This'll be the ride of your life." Rob smiled that blame-me-if-you're-heartless-enough-to smile of his.

MM
ch

I said my
1st thought
which was

That'd
be
weeks

Now - m
17 you -



^{maybe}
"Well, ~~not~~ quite. Men," He pulled his chin into his neck ~~and~~ ^{for} ~~did~~
the croaking tone of the freighter Herbert ^{six years} ~~our first night out from~~
^{before} ~~before~~, "there's no hotel like a wagon. Warm nights your room is on
the wagon--"



"--Stormy nights it's under it," I completed the chorus. Our first prairie night out from Helena was beginning to seem another life ago. I still wasn't ready to relent to Rob.

Jaunting for jaunt's sake was not something I was in the mood for, having better moods to tend to, ~~the moods~~ and to the railroad and back was a journey ~~that would~~ was a journey of three days.

Shearing was not far off

"So your clinching

argument is the opportunity to sleep out with the coyotes, is it?"

"Angus, Angus. Trust me to ^{carry} ~~have~~ more than one motive ^{at a time} ~~here~~. I thought we could spend the going-up night ^{there on the Two Medicine,} at Toussaint Rennie's place. You ^{won't} ~~can't~~ pass up the chance for a dose of Toussaint, now ^{will} ~~can~~ you? The two of you can gab history until you're over ~~your~~ ears in it."

As Rob knew it would, this cast a light of interest. Visiting Toussaint on his home ground would be like seeing where they put the music into fiddles. ~~And if I was trying to provide Anna some time to think matters over, going with Rob would do that too.~~ Besides, Rob was indubitably right that after shearing next week there would be a long summer in the mountains, stretched all the longer by Anna being away. And maybe too, just maybe the Reese plowing crew would be somewhere on the section of railroad where Rob was headed. ^{bonus} A chance to see Anna, however slight--

"You'll come, certain sure?" Rob specified. When I agreed so, he assured me: "Herbert would be proud of you."

#

"What's this, a mounted escort for us on our way to the poorhouse?"

Rob met us with at the haystack. Degraded as that way^S, it seemed to be the top of his mood this day. I told him shortly that Scorpion was on his way out to pasture, which drew only Rob's scornful study of the elderly horse. At least he didn't start a recapitulation of how mawkish I was in keeping Scorpion among the living. But then as soon as I suggested that we needed to move the sheep from the muddy feedground in my meadow, the Rob response to that was hundred-proof sarcasm.

"So that hay can be grown to be fed to sheep that are worth less than the hay, do you mean? That definitely sounds like the McCaskill high road to wealth, I can be the first to vouch."

"Rob, there's no sense in being owly about a little thing like this. We always put the sheep onto a fresh feedground after a chinook. You know that as well as I do." Or you would if you'd let your Barclay mind rule your Barclay mouth, for a change. "They can at least get a little grass into them if we move them onto the butte there," I went on, indicating with a nod the slope beside his reservoir,

where broad ~~patches~~^{swathes} of ground showed themselves amid the melting patches of snow. The ~~hazy~~ earthwork of the reservoir itself was already ~~almost~~ clear of snow, a chocolate pocket on the mottled slope of Breed Butte.

"Put the bastards up the backside of the moon, for all I care,"

Rob grumped next. "Let's get this feeding done."

Adair's gaze seemed to silence him after that, at least during our effort of loading the hay onto the sled rack. When we were done and standing there puffing, ~~Adair~~ she announced she would drive the team for us now rather than ride Scorpion up the slope--"Adair needs the practice," she stated. Scorpion could follow, his reins tied to the back of the hayrack as they were; no problem ~~there~~ to that. The problem anywhere in the vicinity went by the name of Rob, and I knew as well as Adair that the true need for her to be on the sled was to stay between her brother and me when he was this sulphurous.

The sheep were curious about the sled going up the slope instead of toward the meadow and them. Prrrrr prrrrr, I purled as loudly as I could, and the first few ewes began to get the idea and started toward the slope.

"Where to, gentlemen?" Adair called back to us from her position at the team's reins.

I asked Rob, "What do you think, maybe here?"

He said acidly, "It's the same muck everywhere, so this is as good as any."

He was going to be thoroughly that way today, was he. Then the thing to do was to get this hay flung off the sled and the sheep up here onto their new venue and be done with ~~Rob~~ ^{the man} and his red mood. That curative ~~for today--tomorrow would have to contrive another one--~~ ^{its own Rob remedy as needed--} could begin just as soon as Scorpion was turned loose out of the ~~way~~ ^{flight} of the hay as we pitched it off, and so I climbed swiftly down to take his saddle and bridle off. I was untying Scorpion's reins from the back of the hayrack when Rob's voice slashed above me.

"Angus." [#] The first time in years he had used my name. And now it snapped out quick and bitter, as if he wanted to be rid of it.

I swung around to see what this fusillade was going to be.

"Don't turn that geezer of a horse loose yet," Rob directed. "I just saw something I need to do with him."

"What's that, now?" I said up to him in surprise.

"My reservoir. This is a chance to tamp it." There atop the hay, he was gazing in a stony way along the slope to the long narrow mound of the dam and the ice-skinned impoundment behind it. Rob aiming his chin down at the valley and its creek, now and that first time I had watched him do it: By damn, I didn't come all the miles from one River Street to live down there on another. "The sheep have got to come up here anyway," he was saying, "the bastards might as well tromp across the dam and do me some good while they're at it. I'm going to ride old horsemeat here down and start shoving them ~~xxxxxx~~ to the reservoir."

"Why don't you wait with that until the next time we move the ~~band~~ band," I tried. "The ground will be drier by then and the tamping will ~~work~~ ^{go} better."

"Rob, yes," Adair interceded, "Angus is right about waiting for another day."

That brother of hers just shook his head, his gaze still fixed across at the reservoir and its watery gray disc of ice. So far as I could see, winter and spring were knotted together there, ice and slush

in the swale behind the dam versus mud on its sides and top; whatever moment of opportunity Rob Barclay thought he was viewing there made no sense whatsoever to me. But then we had made our separate decisions about water, about Breed Butte and the North Fork, a full thirty years ago, so when had we ever seen with the same eyes?

One thing I was determined to enforce: "Scorpion isn't the best horse for this, after all winter in the barn. You'd be as well off on foot. I'll walk down with you, what about, and the two of us can--"

Rob came down off the hay sled. But I saw he hadn't come anywhere toward my line of thinking. His tone was ^{its} most scornful yet, as he unloaded the words onto me:

"Pushing the sheep across that dam is a minute's work, is all. This goddamn horse has been gobbling up hay and doing not one thing to earn it all winter long. And you'd let it be that way. Your heart is as soft as your head."

Through it all, he still scanned with determination the reservoir, the sheep, the saddle horse. He would not look at me. Heart, mind, tongue, and now eyes, the last of Rob that was left to turn from me.

"Rob, Angus," Adair spoke ~~silently~~ up from the front of the hay sled where she had been waiting for this to abate. "You know how you're supposed to settle these things."

I was reluctant to toss Scorpion to chance one more time, but if that's what it took...

"All right," I said with resignation, "we'll cut the cards for it, then," and reached into my coat pocket for the well-worn deck. "If I draw the low, Scorpion gets turned loose here and now. If you draw it--"

"No."

Before I knew it he had Scorpion's reins out of my hand, snatched into his. "This horse has been living beyond his time ever since you won that other card cut." The face in front of me was cocked to one side, atilt with anger and the ~~need to declare it.~~ abrupt spill of declaring it. "He can do this one bit of work, and he's by Christ going to." With that, Rob shoved his overshod foot into the stirrup and swung heavily onto Scorpion, the horse grunting in surprise at the force of the rider clamping onto him.

I managed to get hold of Scorpion's bridle and kept Rob from

reining the brown head around as he was trying to do. # "Rob, I'm telling you, once," I delivered my own cold anger to this situation. "Behave yourself with this horse or I'll talk to you by hand."

There was a startled whinny from Scorpion as Rob jammed his heels into him and spun the horse out of my grasp, down the slope toward the approaching straggle of sheep. # "Go operate a pitchfork," Rob flung back at me without looking. "It's what you're good for."

So this had begun, had it. Rob storming off, breaking all the terms I knew for ~~me~~ reasoning with him. Winter coming out of him as a white rage.

I saw Scorpion make his stumble, then his hindquarters slip off the edge of the embankment as he tried to find his footing. Rob did not even attempt to vault off him to safety; instead he yanked the reins and stood back hard into the stirrups, seeming to want to stiffen the horse back into steadiness with the iron line of his own body. But Scorpion still was not able to scramble back securely onto the muddy rim of the dam. He tottered. Then he began to flounder backwards down the bank, sliding, skidding. It took an instant for the sound to travel to me--a crisp clatter, thin iceskin breaking as horse and man tumbled through it. The sheep ran, heads up in alarm, never looking back.

"DAIR!" My shout startled her around to me. "Turn the team! Get us to the reservoir!"

She jerked the team and sled in a quick half-loop as I plunged through the hay to the front of the rack. There beside her I grabbed the rack frame with one arm and held Adair upright with my other as she whipped the team with the loose ends of the reins and the hay sled began to trundle and jolt. The sled seemed monumentally awkward, slow,