

start a dogfight. Even so, as soon as Lucas came in I pressed him about the Quill item.

"People die everywhere, Angus."

"As far as I know, that's so. But the Quill seems to say they have help here in Gros Ventre."

"You know how newspapers are."

"The question still seems to be how Gros Ventre is."

"Angus, you are your father's son, no mistake. Stubborn as strap iron and twice as hard to argue with. All right, then. A man or two died before his time here, the past year or so. But ^I_M"

"A man or two?"

"Three, if you must count. But what I'm saying if you'll listen, two of those would have gone to their reward wherever they were. Cattle thieves. Not a race known for living to old age, lad."

"What happened with them?"

Lucas stroked his beard with a forearm. "That is not just entirely clear. Williamson out at the Double W might know, or Thad Wainwright" ^T_M "owners of big cattle ranches north of town, I had heard. "Or maybe even Ninian Duff." Evidently another lord of cattle, though this one I hadn't heard of before.

"And man three?"

"What would you say to a glass of buttermilk?" Lucas busily began to pour himself one. "It's good for all known ailments, and ^I_M"

"Lucas, I'm swimming in the stuff. The particular ailment we're talking about is man number three's."

"That one, now." A major gulp of buttermilk went down him.

"That one, I do have to say was ~~pure~~ ill luck."

When nothing further seemed forthcoming from Lucas except continued attention to his buttermilk, I persisted: "Dying generally is ill luck, we can agree on that. But I still haven't heard the man's ailment."

"He was shot in an argument over cards."

"What, in here?"

"Don't be pure ridiculous, lad. In Wingo's, of course." Lucas looked at me with extreme reproach, but I held gaze with him. After a bit he glanced away. "Well, you may have a point. It would have happened in here if it hadn't been the gambler's week there instead. But after that, Wingo and I talked it over and we've given gamblers the bye. Pleasant games among local folk, now. A coming town like this has its good name to think of, you know."

~~Rob was as startled as I by the news that we were in a sulphurous town. "Angus, this place isn't a penny whistle compared to what went on in Helena."~~

~~I have wondered more than once. Was it in spite of Gros Ventre's fresh reputation for excitement that the two of us the very next day let pass the chance to go on a freight wagon retracing our route toward Augusta and Helena? Or in hope of it?~~

~~Either case, the notion grew on me now that maybe I might as~~

agree -
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well go ahead and try a bit of land-looking between intervals of helping Lucas in the saloon, just to be sure we weren't missing some undisclosed reason for hope here in Gros Ventre's neighborhood.

This supposition met no objection from Rob. He was staying in demand with Fain for as much wheelwork and other repair as any pair of hands could do, so there was sound sense in him earning while I scouted about. "It could be you'll find a Great Maybe for us," he said, though not within Lucas's hearing. "Have at it, McAngus, why not. I'll keep Gros Ventre in tune while you're out and around."



Lucas of course was several thousand percent in favor of my intention. "By Jesus, Angus, now you're talking. The best part of the world is right out there waiting for you and Robbie. Tell you what, I'll even make a contribution to your exploring. Follow me." I tracked after him to the shed room behind the saloon.

"There now," he plucked the peg from the door hasp with his stubs and grandly pushed the door open, "choose your choice."

Saddles were piled on other saddles, and the walls were hung with bridles as if it was raining leather. Seeing my puzzlement, Lucas spelled the matter out:

"Collateral. These cattle outfits seem to specialize in hiring men who are thirstier than they have money for. I'm not running the Medicine Lodge as a charity, and so my borrowers put up these, ay? Go ahead, have your pick."

Several of the saddles were larger than the others, large enough that they looked as if they would house a horse from his withers to his hips. "What're these big ones?"

"Lad, do you even need to ask? Those are Texas saddles."

Since Nethermuir, the progression had been train, steamship, stagecoach, freight wagon, and shoe leather, and to it I now added the plump little pinto mare named Patch, rented to me by the half-day by Dantley and saddled maximally with my new Texican saddle. The pony's gaily splotched colors made me feel as if I was riding forth into the country around Gros Ventre in warpaint, but I suppose the actuality is that I sallied out looking as purely green as I was.

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 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 unforgettable 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 ^{dark} 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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Three mornings in a row I rode different tracts eastward of Gros Ventre, following along the creek and its fringe of willow and cottonwood until the land opened into leveler prairie, flattening and fanning into an even horizon which Lucas's maps showed were incised by the big rivers, the Marias, the Milk, and ^{ultimately} ~~eventually~~ the Missouri. This prairie before the rivers, though, had no habitation nor showed much sign it wanted any. In that trio of mornings I met only one other human being, a rider named Andy Cratt who was another of the Seven Block ranch's Texans or Texicans or whatever they called themselves. He was suspiciously interested in the origin of my saddle until I invoked Lucas. When Cratt and I parted, it took the next half hour for his moving horseback figure to entirely dwindle from my over-the-shoulder looks. Noble enough country, this eastward prairie—^mToussaint told me it had been thick with buffalo when he first came—^mbut so broad, so open, so exposed, that I felt like a fieldmouse under the eye of the hawk out there.

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Everything was in place. The continent's fringe of mountain
range along the west. The far ^{back} butte called Hawk and the center
along one like an old wall. The grass plateau beyond Gros
Ventre and the cottonwood creek. The soft triangle of plains toward
the Sweetgrass Hills and where the sun came from. Enough country
that a century of hope and anguish would never fill it. As I sat
while on Hatch, 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. Thus I retained
Hatch east, the hawk's direction.

Three mornings in a row I rode different tracks eastward of

No - Meriwether Lewis named it
"Marias," circa 1805.
Was the Marias called the
~~last~~ Bear back then?
See ^{inside cover} ~~map~~ map from
James Welch's Foots Craw, which
I'm sure you have since you
rendered ^{it} ~~it~~ ^{back into its} ~~it~~ ^{Flap} ~~Flap~~ ^{quite} ~~quite~~ ^{for it.}
105 (Indian name, Cover)

only one other human being, a rider named Andy Gatt who was another
of the Seven Black ranch's Texans or Mexicans or whatever they
called themselves. He was suspiciously interested in the origin of
my saddle until I invoked Lucas. When Gatt and I parted, it took
the next half hour for his moving horseback figure to entirely
disappear from my over-the-shoulder look. Noble enough country, this
eastward prairie--possessor told me it had been thick with buffalo
when he first came--but so broad, so open, so exposed, that I felt
like a fieldhouse under the eye of the hawk out there.

North needed only a single morning. North was red cattle on buff hills, north was ranch after ranch already built along a twisty stream called Noon Creek. Thad Wainwright's large Rocking T, ~~Not~~ Pat Egan's sizable Circle Dot, three or four smaller enterprises upstream toward the mountains, and most of all, Warren Williamson's huge Double W which held fully half of that Noon Creek Country. General opinion I had overheard in the Medicine Lodge was that you could rake Hell from corner to corner and not find a nastier item than Warren Williamson. Or, as was supposedly replied to a traveler who innocently wondered what the cattle brand WW stood for, Wampuscat Williamson. I'd only glimpsed Williamson when he stepped into the Medicine Lodge to summon a couple of his riders, a thickset impatient man several shades paler than his weatherbrowned cowboys. Evidently those whitehanded men of money were here as in Scotland, those whose gilt family crests properly translated would read something like Formerly robbers, now thieves. I'd hoped it wouldn't be that way in America. Maybe it wasn't entirely, yet. But there where the road ran along the benchland between Gros Ventre and Noon Creek, I gazed down at the fort-like cluster of Double W ranch buildings and wondered whether Rob and I would ever possess a fraction as much roof over us.

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on
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"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.

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, since I began ~~it~~, maybe on the basis that he figured I ought to see plenty before making my mind up. But now he ^{said:} ~~ratified:~~

"That'll be worth doing. That North Fork is pure handsome prospect. Plan to spend the full day at it, there are a lot of miles in that country up there ~~where you'll be going.~~" To my surprised look, Lucas cleared his throat and allowed: "Business at the house can rest for an afternoon."

"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. His is the first place up the North Fork, just there after the creek divides."

Here was a name Lucas had mentioned in connection with the vanishment of cattle rustlers. When I reminded him so, Lucas gave me one of his long perusals and instructed, "You'll remember, lad,

I only said maybe. But you might do well to stay away from the man's cows."

Lucas paused, then added: "Don't particularly tell Ninian you're working here in the saloon with me. He and I are not each other's favorite, in that regard."

I thought that over. "If I'm to meet the man, I could stand to know something more about that, Lucas."

"Angus, you're one who'd want to know which way the rain falls from. I've nothing against Ninian Duff. It's just that he and his are more churchly folk."

Orthodox, orthodox/ who believe in John Knox./ Their sighing canting grace-proud faces/ their three-mile prayers and half-mile graces. I knew the breed. Maybe I would pay a visit to some old holy howler and maybe I wouldn't, too.

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~~No?~~

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Wind was my guide west, early the next morning. It met me facefirst as soon as I rode around the creek bend where the big cottonwoods sheltered Gros Ventre. The stiff breeze required me to clamp my hat down tight and crinkle my eyes, but no cloud showed itself anywhere there in the Rockies where the wind was flowing from, and the first sunshine made a promise of comfort on my back. Who knew, maybe this was simply how a Two Medicine day whistled.

The road today wasn't honestly one, just twin prints of wheel[#]marks such as those Herbert's freight wagon had tracked to Gros Ventre. Yet this was peopled land along the main creek, homesteads inserted into each of the best four or five meadows of wild hay. Here was handsome, with the steady line of grassed benchland backing the creek and the convenient hedge of willows and sturdy trees giving shelter all along the water. The long-sloped promontory butte with its timber top poked companionably just into sight over the far end of this valley of homesteaders, but beyond that butte where the tiers of mountains and forest began to show, it looked like tangled country. *This was the best land I'd yet seen;* Any one of these established homesteads down here, I would gladly own. Were Rob and I already latecomers?

The mare Patch of course decided to drink when we came to a crossing of the creek, and as usual in those first days of my horsemanship I of course forgot to climb off and have myself one before she waded in, *and muddied the water.* Today, though, the streambed was thoroughly gravel, several-colored and bright under the swift clean flow as a spill of marbles, so Patch didn't roil the drinking site. I rode her on across before getting down and drinking the fresh brisk water

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from my hands. [#] Now that I was on that side of the crossing I could see past the willows to another creekline, coiling its way as if climbing leisurely, between the benchland I had followed all the distance from town and a knobby little pine ridge directly in front of me. Here I was, wherever I was: by Lucas's description that other water had to be the North Fork, this the South. 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.

You 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. A glimpse of a few grazing cattle below near that north creek branch, like stray red specks from the Double W's cow hundreds. 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. While Rob and I were aboard the stagecoach between Craig and Augusta we had watched this, the entire interior of America soaring through its change of mood. That same radical mood of terrain I was feeling here [^]_m the climb of

the continent to its divide, higher, greater, more sudden than seemed possible; like a running leap of the land.

Here was magnificent. And here, just below me, one single calm green wrinkle amid the surrounding rumpus of surging buttes and tall timbered ridges and stone[#]cliff skyline, lay the valley of the North Fork.

To say the truth, it was the water winding its way through that still valley^m—its heartstream, so to speak^m—that captured me then and there. When the summitline up along these mountains, the Continental Divide, halved the moisture of America's sky, the share beyond went west to the Pacific Ocean while that of this slope was destined to the Atlantic. Are you telling me, Rob shipboard, we're already on water from Montana, out here? Aye, yes and yea, Rob.

This supple little creek below me, this North Fork, was the start of that water^{which} that eventually touched into the Atlantic. This was the first flowing root of that ~~profound~~ pattern of waves I watched and watched from the deck of the emigrant ship. But greatly more than that⁵ too, this quiet creek. Here at last was water in its proper dose for me. Plentiful fluid fuel for grass and hay, according to the browsing cows and the green pockets of meadow between the creek's twists. Shelter from the wind and whatever rode it in winter stood in thick evidence, creekbank growth of big willows and frequent groves of quaking ash. The occasional ponds behind beaver dams meant trout, a gospel according to Lucas. And by its thin glitter down there and the glassy shallowness of the main creek back where the mare and I crossed, not any of this North Fork ran deep enough to drown more of me than my knees.

I sat transfixed in the saddle and slowly tutored myself about the join of this tremendous western attic to the rest of the Two Medicine Country. No 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, more than eighty 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 magically able to ~~look~~^{gaze} across all of Scotland to Edinburgh. My eyes reluctant to leave one direction for the next, nonetheless I twisted to scan each of them over and over: north, the broad patient benchland and the landmark butte that lifted itself to meet it; southward, the throng of big drygrass ridges shouldering between this creek branch and the South Fork....

West. West, the mountains as steady as a sea wall. The most eminent of them in fact was one of the grayrock palisades that lay like reefs in the surge of the Rockies, a straight up-and-down cliff perhaps the majority of a mile high and, what, three or more miles long. A stone partition between ground and sky, even-rimmed as though it had been built by hand, countless weathers ago. That rimming mountain stood nearest over the valley of the North Fork. A loftier darkly timbered peak loomed behind the northernmost end of the cliff rim, and between the pair a smaller mountain topped with

an odd cockscomb rock formation fitted itself in. Close as I was now to these promontories, which was still far, for the first time since Rob and I came to Gros Ventre these seemed to me local mountains. They were my guide now, ^{from} even the wind fell from mind in ^{from} 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. By the cows then? No, they seemed all to have their noses down in their daydream fashion of eating. Nothing else, nobody, anywhere that I could find. # As much as I tried to dismiss the feeling, though, the touch of eyes would not leave me. Who knew, probably these seven-league mountains were capable of gazing back at me. Nonetheless I cast a glance behind me for surety's sake.

On a blood bay horse not much farther away than a strong spit, sat a colossally bearded figure.

He was loose-made ^m-tall, thin, mostly legs and elbows, a stick man. And that beard, ^{was} a dark-brown feedbag of whiskers halfway down his chest. He also had one of those alarming foreheads you sometimes see on the most Scottish of Scots, a kind of sheer stark cliff from the eyes up. As if the skull was making itself known under there.

~~Sketch~~
Sketch

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All of this was regarding me in a blinkless way. I gaped back at the whiskers and forehead, only gradually noticing that the horseman's hands were either side of his saddle horn, holding another lengthy stick of some sort across there and pointing it mostly towards me. Then I realized that stick was a rifle.

"You have business here, do you?" this apparition asked.

"I hope to," I answered, more carefully than I had ever said anything before. From the looks of him, the lightest wrong word and I was a gone geezer. "I'm, I'm looking for homestead land to take up."

Ay,
~~"~~Every man who can walk, crawl or ride is looking for that. But not many of them find here."

"That's their loss, I would say. This country"--^I_MI nodded my head cautiously to the North Fork and the butte--^I_M"is the picture of what I'd hoped for."

"Pictures are hard to eat," he gave me for that. Maybe I was hoping too much, but I thought his stare had softened a bit as he heard more of my voice. At least the rifle hadn't turned any farther in my direction. Any mercy there was to this situation, I would devoutly accept. He levied his next words: "You are new to here?"

"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 full at the Medicine Lodge saloon from none other than Lucas Barc^I_M--

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 until the cows come home to Canaan. 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 personage 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 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~~^{Jen} 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 for this hour, Ninian Duff was now gazing the length of the valley to where the far shoulder of the butte angled down to the North Fork. I kept a sideway eye on him as much as I dared. Ninian Biblical Rifleman Duff, scarecrow on a glorious horse. Was there no one in this Two Medicine country as normal as me? He sat silently studying the calm swale of green beneath us as if making certain every blade of grass was in place, as if tallying the logs in the two lonely homestead houses. Abruptly:

"You are not afraid of work?"

"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 thing you will need to learn for yourself. Were I you"^ma hypothesis I wasn't particularly comfortable with^m"I'd have a look at the patch of land there aneath Breed Butte, along the top of the creek. ~~Ay~~[≡] then you can dinner with us and we will talk." Ninian Duff started his powerful red-brown 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.

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When I rode back into Gros Ventre it was nearly supertime. I was vastly saddle-tired^m--cowboys must have a spare pair of legs they put on for riding, I was learning^m--but could feel the North Fork, the future, like music under my skin. Could bring back into my eyes that 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 all of what Ninian told me at dinner: I have found that cattle do well enough, but the better animal hereabout may be sheep. A person can graze five or six of them on the same ground it takes for one cow. Ay, these ridges and foothills, the mountains themselves, there is room up here for thousands and thousands of sheep. The Lord was the shepherd of us, so we have His example of extreme patience to go by, too. But

nothing born with wool on its back can be as troublesome as we who weave it before wearing, I believe you will agree....Don't come thinking a homestead is free land. Its price is serious sweat, and year after year of it....But were I you, 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 the holy, 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. It is no long jump to the nearest conclusion, ever. 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. "McAngus, is there a fire?" he called out swift and smooth. "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, if you please." Her dark eyes gave away nothing. "Yes," she acknowledged.

I turned to Rob again. "Get your eyes ready for tomorrow, so I can show you heaven."

"The homesteads? You've found a place?"

"I have, if you like the land there an inch as much as I do. Lord of Mercy, Rob, I just wish you'd been with me today to see it all. It's up the North Fork, good grass and water with trout in it and timber to build with and the mountains standing over it and—"

"I'll hope it doesn't blind me, all that glory," Rob broke in. "So tomorrow I need to hoist myself onto a horse, do I?"

"You do. Rob, you'll fall head over heels for this land as quick as you see it."

"I'd bet that I will." He came across the kitchen with a smile and clapped me on the shoulder. "Angus, you've done a rare job of work, finding us land already."

My riding muscles did not feel like already, but I let that pass. "Right now I'd better find Lucas for supper. Come along, can't you? I'll even serve you the first drink and keep the majority of my thumb out of it."

"This North Fork must be a place, it's sending you that giddy," Rob said back, still smiling in his radiating way. "But I'll stay on here to keep Lucas company for supper. You'll owe me that drink later."

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

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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 moved us down to the quiet end of the bar he called the weaning corner, set a bottle in front of us and went to tend some parched Double W riders who had just stormed in. After a bit, I proposed:

"Let's go see about the calico situation, why don't we. Those calico nieces of Wingo's down the street."

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

"Man, 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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On our way back from Wingo's belles, I was feeling exceptionally clever about having invented this mind-clearing evening for Rob, and we were both feeling improved for the other reason, so we halted ourselves in front of the hotel framework for nocturnal contemplation and a further drink or so. Not that we could hold many more without tamping them in.

A quarter moon lent its slight light into the Montana darkness. I ^{commemorated} ~~quoted~~ dreamily, "It is the moon, I know her horn."

(Rom)

"This Montana even has its own moon," declared Rob in wonder, lurching against me as he peered upward. "You don't find a place like this Montana just any old where."

I chortled at how wise Rob was. Right then I couldn't see how life could be any better.

Rob tugged at my sleeve and directed my attention down the lonely single street of Gros Ventre. "See now, Angus. This is what a coming town looks like by night."

"Dark," I observed.

"But its day will dawn, am I right?" He made his voice so much like Lucas's it startled me. Now Rob straightened himself with extreme care and peered like a prophet along the dim street.

"You'll see the day soon, lad, when the Caledonian Railway" ^{the} ~~the~~ line of our journey from Nethermuir to Greenock ^{the} ~~the~~ "will run through the middle of this town Gros Ventre. By Jesus, I think I can hear it now! Whoot-toot-toot! Whoot-toot-toot!"

"The train will stop exactly here" ^{the} ~~the~~ I made a somewhat crooked X in the dirt with my foot ^{the} ~~the~~ "and Queen Victoria and the Pope of Rome

will climb off and step into the Medicine Lodge for a drink with us."

"And I'll own all the land that way"^T~~M~~ Rob pointed dramatically north^T~~M~~--"and you'll own all the other"^T~~M~~ now pointing south^T~~M~~--"and we'll have rivers of red cattle we'll ship to Chicago on our train."

"And we'll have Texas cowboys," I threw in. "Thirteen dozen of them a piece."

Rob was laughing so hard I thought he would topple both of us into the dirt of the street. "Angus, Angus, Angus. I tell you, man, it'll be a life."

"It will," I seconded. And we lurched home to the house of Lucas and Nancy.

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As clear as today, I remember how that next morning went. The weather was finer than ever and even had the wind tethered somewhere, the mountains stood great and near, and as Rob and I rode past my knob of yesterday onto Breed Butte to see straight down into the heart of the valley, I thought the North Fork looked even more resplendent than I had seen it the day before. We sat unspeaking for a while, in that supreme silence that makes the ears ring. Where the bevels of the valley met, the creek ran in ripples and rested in beaver ponds. A curlew made deft evasive flight across the slope below us as if revealing curlicues in the air. Everything fit everything else this day.

Rob too said how picture-pretty a patch of the earth this truly was. Then he started in with it.

"I don't just know, though. Maybe we ought to wait, Angus."

"Wait? Isn't that the thing that breaks wagons?" I tossed off, although I was stung. Wait for what, Eden to reopen? "Man, I've seen this country from here to there, these past days, and there's none better than this valley. It decides itself, as far as I'm concerned. This North Fork is head and shoulders over anything else we could choose. But if you want to ride with me around to where I've been and see for yourself, tomorrow we can^h—"

"Angus, I mean wait with this whole idea of homesteading."

I thought my ears were wrong. Then I hoped they were. But the careful look on Rob told me I'd heard what I'd heard.

"Rob, what's this about? We came half across the world to find this land."

"Homesteading would be a hard go," he maintained. "We'd better do some thinking on it before we rush in. See now, we're too late in the year to buy cattle and have calves to sell this fall. As to sheep, we'd need to bring sheep from Christ knows where and we don't have the money for that. Two houses to build, fences, everything to be done from the ground up^h—it'd be main sweat, all the way." As if our lives so far have been made of silk, do you mean, Rob? But I was so dumbstruck that the words didn't find their way out of me. Rob gazed down at the North Fork and shook his head once as if telling it, sorry, but no.

And then he had a matter to tell me. "Angus, I'm thinking strong of going in with Fain. There's plenty of work for two in his shop. Everything in Montana with a wheel on it can stand repair. Fain's offered to me already, and it'd be a steady earn. And a chance to stay on in Gros Ventre, for a time at least." He glanced

off at the North Fork again, this time not even bothering to dismiss it with a headshake. "I'd be nearer to Lucas that way."

"Lucas? Man, Lucas is managing in this life at least as well as either of us. He has^m ~~---~~[#]" It hit me before her name fell off my tongue. "Nancy." The mood I broke when I walked in on the two of them the evening before. The way Rob outshined himself at every meal. The change from his first night's distaste for Lucas's domestic arrangement. I almost somersaulted off my horse just thinking of how much more there was to this than I'd noticed. This was no routine rise of the male wand, this was a genuine case of Rob and Nancy, and maybe what would be greatly worse, of Nancy and Rob. Whoever the saint of sanity is, where are you when we need you?

"Angus, think it over," Rob was going on. "There's always a job for a schooled man like yourself in a growing town. When we see how things stand after we get some true money together there in Gros Ventre, well, then can be the time to decide about homesteading. Am I right?"

I answered only, "I'll need to think, you're right that far." Then I touched the pinto into motion, down off the butte toward the North Fork and Gros Ventre, and Rob came after.

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I thought of nothing else but Rob and Lucas and Nancy the rest of that day and most of the next. I hadn't been so low in mood since those first Atlantic nights in the pit of the Jemmy's stomach. Within my mind I looked again and again and again from one of these alarming people to the other to the third, as you would scan at the corners of a room you were afraid in.

Nancy seeing Rob as a younger Lucas. A Lucas fresh and two-handed. Nancy whose life had been to accept what came.

Lucas in his infatuation with town^{ing}building not seeing at all that under his own roof, trouble was about to grow a new meaning.

Rob^m—Rob unseeing too, not letting himself see the catastrophe he was tipping himself and Lucas and Nancy toward. Rob who could make himself believe water wasn't wet. Of his sudden catalogue of excuses against the North Fork, not a one came anywhere close to the deep reason of why he wanted to stay in Gros Ventre. But if I knew that, I also knew better than to try to bend Robert Burns Barclay from something he had newly talked himself into. Take and shake Rob until his teeth rattled and they'd still be castanets of his same tune.

Here the next of life was, then. A situation not only unforeseen from the stone streets of Nethermuir or the steerage berth in the Jemmy or the fire tower hill of Helena or the freight wagon seat from which Rob and I first saw Gros Ventre, it couldn't have been dreamed of by me in thousands of nights. Rob coveting^J—not another's wife in this case, but close enough. There was an entire Commandment on that and you didn't have to be John Knox to figure out why. Particularly if the one coveted from was not mere neighbor but of one's own blood.

Dampness in my eyes, the conclusion to the floodtide of all this. Normally I am not one to bathe in tears. But it ought to make the sea weep itself dry, what people can do to people. I had undergone family storm in Nethermuir and that was enough. I had

not come to Montana to watch the next persons closest to me, Rob and Lucas, tear each other apart; in the pitting of a Barclay against a Barclay no one could ever win unripped. Even the North Fork, grandeur though it was, wasn't worth taking sides in this. Nothing was. Search myself and the situation in every way, this I could see nothing to do but leave from.

⊕

I said as much^T_m—just the leaving; I didn't want to be the one to utter more than that^T_m—to Lucas as soon as he strode humming into the saloon near the end of that second afternoon.

"Up to the North Fork already? Aren't you getting ahead of yourself? You and Robbie will need to file ^{your} homestead claims at the land office in ^{Lewistown} ~~Fort Benton~~ first, you know."

"No, leaving is what I mean. Away from here."

Lucas broke a frown and studied me, puzzled. "Not away from this Two Medicine country, you don't mean."

"Lucas, I do mean that. Away."

"Away where?" he erupted. "Angus, are you demented? You know there's no better country in all of Montana. And that's damn close to meaning all of the world. So where does leaving come in, sudden as this? Here, let's have some buttermilk and talk this over."

"Lucas, it's just that I've had^T_m—second thoughts."

"Your first ones were damn far better." Lucas had plunked down a glass of buttermilk apiece for us, instantly forgot them and now

was violently polishing the bar I had just polished. "Leaving! By Jesus, lad, I don't know what can have gotten into you and Robbie. I have heard strange in my time, but you two take the prize. Now if the pair of you can just get enough of a brain together to think this through, you'll^I--"_m

"It's only me leaving. Rob intends to stay on with Fain."

"Robbie says that, after coming all the way from Nethermuir to get away from the wheel shop?" Lucas polished even more furiously. "Put a hammer in a Barclay's^I--"_m he stopped, then managed to go on^I--"_m a Barclay's hand and he doesn't know when to put it down, ay?"

I let silence answer that, and Lucas was immediately back at me: "Tell me this, now. If you're so set on leaving, what wonderful damn place is it you're going to?"

"I'll maybe go have another look at that Teton River country we came through on the freight wagon. Or around Choteau^I--"_m

"The Teton? Choteau?" I might as well have said the Styx and Hades to this man. "Angus, are you entirely sober?"

I assured him I was never more so. Lucas shook his head and tried: "Well, at least you can stay on for a bit, can't you?"

My turn to shake a head.

"Lad, what's your headlong hurry?" Lucas demanded, as peeved as one person could be. "Weary of my hospitality, are you?"

"Lucas"--^I_mI sought how to say enough without saying too much^I--"_m a welcome ought not be worn out, is all."

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^D~~---~~_M it might."

At last Lucas unlocked his gaze from me. "I ought to have seen. I ought to have, ay."⁹ He stared down at his stubs on the bar towel, grimacing to the roots of his teeth as he did, and I knew I ~~was seeing~~^{watching} as much pain as I ever ~~wanted to~~^{would}. Hell itself would try to douse such agony. I reached across the bar and gripped Lucas halfway up each forearm, holding him solid while he strained against the invisible fire inside his sleeves.

Gradually Lucas's breath expelled in a slow half-grunt. At last he swallowed deep and managed: "Any sense I ever had must've gone with my hands."

I let go my grasp of the stubbed arms. "Lucas, listen to me. There's nothing happened yet, I swear it. I^T~~---~~_M"

He shook his head, swallowed trouble one more time, and began randomly swiping the bar with the relentless towel again even though each motion made him wince. "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.

"Here's to a better time than this," he snapped out, and we drank needfully. ~~It~~ 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 get Sedge to 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, don't you think?"

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

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When Lucas and Rob and I went around 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 Toussaint, up to the Reservation to visit her aunt. So tonight, lads, it's a cold bite but plenty of it." He sat down regally, 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, ay, Angus?"

Dismay and concern and suspicion had flashed across Rob's face rapidly as a shuffle of cards and now he was back to customary confidence again. I could see him wanting to ask how long an absence "a bit" amounted to, but he held that in and said instead, "Angus and I can be bachelors with the best of them. We've been practicing at it all our lives. Here, I can do the carving," and he reached over to cut Lucas's cold beef for him.

My meal might as well have been still on the cow, I had so little enthusiasm for it. Rob jabbed and chewed with remarkable concentration. Lucas fed himself some bites in his bearlike way. Then he began out of nowhere:

"I've been thinking how to keep you two out of mischief."

My heart climbed up my throat, for I thought he meant what the two on my mind, Rob and Nancy, were heading headlong into. This would teach me to keep my long tongue at home.

But Lucas sailed on: "When you lads take up your land, I mean." ~~It~~ gave him an idiot's stare. Had he forgotten every word I said in the Medicine Lodge this afternoon? ~~It~~ "It can be a hard go at first, homesteading," Lucas imparted as if from God's mountaintop. I caught a didn't-I-say-so glance from Rob, but we both stayed quiet, to find out whatever this was on Lucas's mind. "Hard,"

repeated Lucas as if teaching us the notion. "Nobody ever has enough money to start with, and there's work to be done in all directions at once, and then there's the deciding of what to raise. The North Fork there, that's sinfully fine country but it'd be too high to grow much of anything but hay, do you think?"

I recited yes, that was what I thought. Rob offered nothing.

"So the ticket up there will need to be livestock, ay?" Ay and amen, Lucas. "Cattle, though, you're late to start with this year, with calving already done. You'd be paying for both the cows and their calves and that's a pure dear price. And horses, this country is swimming in horses, the Indians have them and Dantley deals in them and there's this new man Reese with them on Noon Creek. No sense in horses. But I'll tell you lads what may be the thing, and that's sheep. This Two Medicine country maybe was made for sheep. As sure as the pair of you are sitting here with your faces hanging out, sheep are worth some thinking about. Say you had some yearling ewes right now. You'd have the wool money this summer, and both lambs and wool next year. Two revenues are better than one," he ^{informed us} ~~declared, as if this was news to the world.~~ "It's more than interesting, Angus, Ninian Duff saying to you that he's thinking of selling his cattle for sheep. Ninian is a man with an eye for a dollar." Tell us too, Lucas, does a fish swim and will a rock sink and can a bird fly? Why be trotting out this parade of homestead wisdom, when Rob wants none and I've already told you I'm leaving?

Sermon done, we finished eating, or in my case gave up on the task. Lucas swung his head to me and requested: "Angus, would you

mind? My chimney."

I fetched his clay pipe, tobaccoed it and held it to him as he took it with his mouth. After I lit it and he puffed sufficiently, he used a forearm to push it to the accustomed corner of his mouth, then quizzed: "What do you lads think of the sheep notion?"

Rob looked at me but I determinedly kept my mouth clamped. He was the one bending the future to awkward angles, let him be the one to describe its design to Lucas.

Instead, Rob bought himself another minute by jesting, "Sheep sound like the exact thing to have. Now if we only had sheep."

Lucas deployed a pipe cloud at us, and with it said:

"I'll go with you on them."

Neither Rob nor I took his meaning.

"The sheep!" Lucas spelled out impatiently. "I'll partner the two of you in getting sheep. A band of yearling ewes, to start you off with."

Rob sat straight up. Probably I rose some myself. Lucas puffed some more and went right on: "I can back you a bit on the homestead expenses, too. Not endlessly, mind you; don't get the wild idea I'm made of money. But to help you get underway. You pair are going to need to dive right to work, Montana winters come before you know it. I'd say tomorrow isn't too soon for starting. But spend the rest of spring and the summer up there at it, and the North Fork will have to make room for you two."

"Lucas, man," Rob burst out, "that's beyond generous."

Hesitation was gone from him. This again was the Rob I had come

from Nethermuir and Helena with.

"You're for it, Robbie, are you?" Lucas made sure.

"Who wouldn't be? A chance like ^{this} ~~that~~?" Somewhere in his mind Rob had to adjust about Nancy. But with her absent to Toussaint's household and Lucas's offer laying like money to be picked up, you could all but hear Rob click with adjustment.

I knew Lucas had one more piece to put into place, and it came, it came.

"There's still one ^{constituency} ~~country~~ here to be heard from," he dispatched benignly around his pipe to me. "What do you say to the idea, Angus? Can I count on you both?"

Lucas Barclay, rascal that you knew how to be even without hands. Your bearded face and Rob's bare bright one waited across that supper table. Waited while my mind buzzed like a hive. This isn't old Scotland, lads. Waited for the one answer yet to come, the last answer of that evening and of the time that has ensued from it. Life goes differently here. The answer, Lucas, that you and I knew I could not now avoid saying, didn't we?

And say it I did.

"Both."

1 (699) 10 (m)

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4326-62

(A) SCOTCH HEAVEN (m) (2)

extract

Prophetic indeed was the man who uttered, "You can fight
armies or disease or trespass, but the settler never."
Word comes of yet another settlement of homesteaders in
this burgeoning province of ours. Who can ever doubt,
with the influx which is peopling a childless land and
planting schools by the side of sheep sheds and cattle
corrals, that Choteau County is destined to be the most
populous in Montana? Of this latest colony, situated into
the foothills a dozen or so miles west of Gros Ventre, it
is said so many of the arrivees originated in the land of
the kilt and the bagpipe that Gros Ventrians call the
elevated new neighborhood Scotch Heaven. ep

SC, No BP

Choteau Quill, July 3, 1890 (m) (M)

(m) "Hotter'n not, said the Hottentot." ep (1)

"And what else do you expect, man. Montana is up so high it's next door to the sun."

"Speaking of high, your lifting muscles are ready, are they?"

"As ready as they'll ever be." We each grasped an end of the next log.

"Then here it comes, house. Up she goes. Tenderly, now. Up a bit with your end. Up up up, that's the direction. A hair more. Almost there. There. Ready to drop?"

"Let's do."

With a sound like a big box lid closing, the log fell into

Quarry?

SCOTCH HEAVEN

permission needed for
this quote? NO -
credited in
acknowledgment -
short enough to be
"fair use."

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Choteau Gull, July 3, 1890

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"Speaking of high, your lifting muscles are ready, are they?"
"As ready as they'll ever be." / We each grasped an end of the next log.
"Then here it comes, house. Up she goes. Fasten up, now. Up a
bit with your end. Up up up, that's the direction. A hair more.
Almost there. There. Ready to drop?"
"Let's do."
With a sound like a pig box lid closing, the log fell into

place, its notched ends clasping into those of the cabin's side walls.

"Well?" demanded Rob the log hewer. "Does your end fit?"

I squinted dramatically at the wink of space between the log we had just placed and the one below. "Snug enough. You'll barely be able to toss your cat through the crack."

That brought him in a rush. He eyed along the crevice^I which would vanish easily enough when chinked^I and lamented, "A tolerant tolerance, my father and Lucas would have called that in the wheelshop. See now, these Montana trees have more knots in them than a sailor's fingers."

"Lucky thing we're just practicing on this house of yours," I philosophized for him. "By the time we build mine, now^I"

"Lucky thing for you I'm so much a saint I didn't hear that."

⊕

God proctored poor dim old Job about how the measures of the earth were laid. Had Job but been a homesteader, he could have readily answered that the government of the United States of America did it.

The vast public domain westward of the Mississippi River, as Crofutt put the matter for us when Rob and I were somewhere back there on his oceanic border from emigration to immigration, where the stalwart homesteader may obtain legal title to his land-claim by ^{five} ~~three~~ years of living upon it and improving it with his building and husbandry labors, has been summed in an idea as simple as it is powerful: the land has been made into arithmetic. This is to say,

Ⓟ

surveyors have established governing lineations across the earth,
the ones extending north and south known as principal meridians and
those east-to-west as base lines. Having thus cast the main lines
of the net of numeration across half a continent, so to speak, they
further divided the area into an ever smaller mesh, first of Ranges
measured westward from the meridians and then of townships measured
from the base lines. Each township is six miles square, thus
totaling thirty-six square miles, and attend closely for just a few
moments more-it is these townships, wherein the individual
homesteader takes up his landholding, that the American penchant for
systemization fully flowers. Each square mile, called a section, is
numbered, in identical fashion throughout all townships, thusly:

Slug Art on
Galley T-1

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

(Art)

As can be seen, the continuousness of the numeration is reminiscent
of the boustrophedonic pattern a farmer makes as he plows back and
forth the furrows of his field-or, indeed, of the alternate
directions in which ^{earliest} ~~ancient~~ Greek is written! Thus does the
originality of the American experiment, the ready granting of land

to those industrious enough to seek it, emulate old efficacious patterns!

Rob's remark at the time was that Crofutt himself verged to Greek here. But upon the land itself, there on the great earthen table of the American experiment, the survey system's lines of logic wrote themselves out so clearly they took your breath away. Why wasn't the rest of humankind's ledger this orderly? Filing our homestead claims of 160 acres apiece, the allowable amount one person could choose out of a square-mile section of 640 acres, amounted merely to finding section-line markers—^TNinian Duff could stride blindfolded to every one of them in the North Fork valley—^Tand making the journey to the land office at ^{Lewistown} ~~Fort Benton~~ and putting a finger on the registrar's ~~map~~ ^{map} of ~~Montana~~ and saying, this quarter-section is the ^{patch} ~~square~~ of earth that will be mine. The land has been made into arithmetic indeed. On the Declaration of Applicant there in front of me my land's numbers were registered as SW 1/4 Sec. 31, Tp. 28 N, Rge. 8 W, on Rob's they were NE 1/4 Sec. 32, Tp. 28 N, Rge. 8 W, and with our grins at each other we agreed that ink had never said anything better.

Here then is land. Just that, land, naked earthskin. And now the due sum: from this minute on, the next ^{five} ~~three~~ years of your life, please, invested entirely into this chosen square of earth of yours.

Put upon it house, outbuildings, fences, garden, a well, livestock, haystacks, performing every bit of this at once and

it's not necessary;
this just quoted
p134
OK

to those instructions enough to ask it, emulate old efficacious

particular

OK
OK no itals? "himself" refers
to the man, not the book,
∴ no itals. Also on p.
134 at (v).

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Here then is land. Just that, land, asked entirely. And now

the due sum: from this minute on, the next five years of your life,

please, invested entirely into this chosen square of earth of

Yours.

But upon it house, outbuildings, fences, garden, a well,

livestock, hayrack, performing every bit of this at once and

irrespective of weather and wallet and whether you have ever laid hand to any of these tasks before. Build before you can plan, build in your sleep and through your mealtimes, but build, pilgrim, build, claimant of the earth, build, build, build. You are permitted to begin in the kind delusion that your utensils of homestead-making at least are the straight forward ones—^maxe, hammer, adze, pick, shovel, pitchfork. But your true tools are other. The nearest names that can be put to them are hope, muscle, and time.

#

"Ay, Robert, you will eat your fill of wind up here," Ninian Duff brought along as a verdict one forenoon when he rode up to inspect our house progress.

Rob's choice of land was lofty. His homestead claim lay high as it could across the south slope of Breed Butte itself, like a saddle blanket down a horse's side. Those early summer days when we were building his house—^mwe bet the matter of whose to build first on which of a pair of magpies would leave their snag perch sooner, and would you not know, Rob's flew at once—^mthose summer-starting days, all of the valley of the North Fork sat sunlit below Rob's site; and if you strolled a few hundred yards to the brow of the butte each dawn, as I did, you ^{even} saw the sun emerge out of the eastward expanse of plains all the way beyond the distant dunelike Sweetgrass Hills.

Rob found Ninian's decree worth a laugh. "Is there somewhere in this country that a man wouldn't have wind in his teeth?"

Even while we three stood gazing, the tall grass of the valley

bottom was being ruffled. A dance of green down there, and the might of the mountains above, and the aprons of timber and grazing land between; this would always be a view to climb to, you had to give Rob that. Even Ninian looked softened by it all, his prophetic beard gently breeze-blown against his chest. I was struck enough to announce impromptu: "You did some real choosing when you found us the North Fork, Ninian."

The beard moved back and forth across the chest. "None of us has bragging rights to this country yet."

After Ninian had ridden away and Rob and I climbed up to resume with rafting, there still was some peeve in Rob. He aimed his chin down at the Duff and Erskine homesteads, one-two there beside the creek at the mouth of the valley. "By damn, I didn't come all the miles from one River Street to live down there on another."

"You can see almost into tomorrow from up here, I will say that," saying it against my own inclination in the matter. For, unlike me as it was to be in the same pulpit with Ninian, to my way of thinking too this scenery of Rob's had high cost. By choosing so far up onto the butte he was forfeiting the meadow of wild hay that meandered beside the North Fork the full length of the valley, hay that seemed to leap from the ground and play racing games with the wind as we went back to hammering together Rob's roof. And more serious than that, to my mind, he was spurning the creek itself, source for watering livestock. True, at the corner of his land nearest to mine a spring lay under a small brow of butte, like a weeping eye, and Rob gave me to know that I would see the day when

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Meant, in the sense of a
 street near a river,
 therefore lowercase?
 No, it's a street name

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 nearest to mine a spring lay under a small brow of butte, like a
 weeping eye, and Rob gave me to know that I would see the day when

he built a reservoir there. But we live in the meantime rather than the sometime and to me a nearness to the creek was the way to begin the world at the right end, in a land as dry as this Montana. Which was why my own homestead selection, southwest from Rob's and just out of view behind the dropping shoulder of Breed Butte, was down into the last of the North Fork valley before ~~the~~ foothills and mountains took command of the geography. There at my homestead meadows of wild hay stood fat and green along both sides of the creek, and the bottomland was flat enough beside the clear little stream to work on my house-to-be and its outbuildings in level comfort; for all the open glory of Rob's site, you always were trudging up or down slope here.

But try tell ^{ing} any of this, as I had, to Rob, who assured me in that Barclay future-owning style: "In the eventual, a dab of hay or water more or less won't make the difference. What counts, see now, is that no one can build to the west of me here," ^{and} the timbered crest and long rocky shoulder of Breed Butte indeed ^{made} making that an unlikelihood. "Angus, this butte will be the high road into all the pasture there ever was and I'll be right here on it, am I right?"

There he had me. Crofutt [✓] to the contrary notwithstanding, anyone with an eye in his head could see that the key to Scotch Heaven was not our homestead acreage, because no piece of land a ^{half} quarter ~~of a~~ mile long and wide is nearly enough to pasture a band of a thousand sheep on. They'll eat their way across that while you're getting your socks on in the morning. No, it was the miles and miles of free range to ^{the} ~~our~~ west, the infinity of grass in the

he built a reservoir there. But we live in the meadows rather than
 the meadows and to me a meadow to the creek was the way to begin
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OK? OK Use "to the contrary"
 or "notwithstanding."
 initials of Croft? OK

foothills and on up into the mountains, that was going to be the larder for ~~the~~ ^{our} flocks of fortune. Ninian Duff had seen so, and Rob and I, not to mention our treasurer Lucas, could at least puff ourselves that we glimpsed Ninian's vision.

"Our woolly darlings," Rob broke these thoughts now, "can you spot them up there?"

"Just barely. They're grazing up over the shoulder of the butte. One of us is going to have to, again. You know I'd gladly tell you it's my turn, except that it isn't."

Rob swore ⁷sheep will cause that in a man, too ^Tand went down the ladder, the fourth time that morning one or the other of us had to leave off roofwork to ride around [#]our ^{zestful} new band of yearling ewes and bring them back within safe view.

[#]"Angus, I wish we had oakum to do the chinking with. Make nice dark seams against the logs instead of this clay."

"Toussaint told you how to darken it."

"Considering the cure, I'll accept the ill, thank you just the same." The Toussaint Rennie formula for darkening the chinking clay was: You take horse manure. Mix it in nice with that clay.

[#]A buckboard was coming. Coming at speed along the road beside the North Fork, past Duffs' without slowing, past Erskines' just short of flying. It looked like a runaway, but at the ^{trail} ~~track~~ which led up the butte to us, the light wagon turned as precisely as if running on a railroad track. Then Rob and I saw one of the two

figures wave an arm. Arm only, no hand to be seen. Lucas. And Nancy was driving.

The rig, one of Dantley's hires, clattered to a stop just short of running over us and the house. The horses were sweat-wet and ~~appeared~~ ~~looked~~ astounded at what was happening to them. Behind their reins Nancy seemed as impervious as she did in the kitchen. Lucas was as merry as thick jam on thin bread.

"By Jesus, there's nothing like a buggy ride to stir the blood," he announced as the buckboard's fume of dust caught up with the contingent. "Air into the body, that's the ticket. Angus, lad, you're working yourself thin as a willow. Come to town for some buttermilk one of these evenings." Both arms cocked winglike for balance, Lucas bounded down from the wagon. "So this is your castle, Robbie. I've seen worse, somewhere, sometime."

"You're a fund of compliments," Rob said back, but lightly. "This will do me well enough until I have a house with long stairs."

"And a wife and seven sons and a red dog, ay? That reminds me, lads, Gros Ventre has progress to report," announced Lucas. His stubs were in his coat pockets now, he was wearing his proprietor[^]-of-Montana demeanor. "A stagecoach line! Direct from up there where they're building the Great Northern railroad₃ to us. What do you say to that? I tell you, our town is coming up in the world so fast it'll knock you over."

There was more than a little I didn't know about stagecoaches, but I had a fair estimate of the population of Gros Ventre and its surroundings. Helena had more people on some of its street

corners. "What, they're running a stage line just to Gros Ventre? Where's their profit in that?"

"Oh, the stage goes on to Choteau too," Lucas admitted, "but we'll soon have that place out of the picture."

"Up here we have news of our own," Rob confided happily in turn. "Ninian has had word of three families from the East Neuk of ~~that're~~ Fife ~~who are~~ on their way to here."

"Grand, grand," exulted Lucas. "The Scotch are wonderful at living anywhere but ⁱⁿ Scotland. I suppose they'll all be Bible-[^]swallowers like Ninian, but nobody's perfect." Lucas rotated himself until he stood gazing south, down the slope of Breed Butte to the North Fork and its clumps of willows. Beyond [^]against the sky [^] stood the long rimrock wall we now knew was named Roman Reef, and then a more blunt contorted cliff called Grizzly Reef, and beyond Grizzly other mountains stood in rugged file into the Teton River region. "By Jesus, this is the country. Lads, we'll see the day when all this is ranches and farms. And Robbie, you're up in the place to watch it all." A whiff of breeze snatched at Lucas's hat and he clamped an arm stub onto the crown of it. "You'll eat some wind here, though."

While we toured our visitors through the attractions of the homestead and Lucas dispensed Gros Ventre gossip [^]Sedge and Lila were very nearly ready to open the hotel but couldn't agree what sign to paint on it; Wingo had another new [^]"niece" [^]--I tried to watch Rob without showing that I was. He was an education, this first time he had been around Nancy since Lucas's bargain made

homesteaders of us. So far as Rob showed, Nancy now did not exist. His eyes went past her as if she was not there, his every remark was exclusive to Lucas or to me or to the human race with the exception of one. It was like watching the invention of quarantine.

Nancy's reaction to this new Rob, so far as I could see, was perfectly none. She seemed the exact same Nancy she had been at the first moment Rob and I laid eyes on her in the doorway of Lucas's kitchen, distinct but unreadable. That always unexpected flash of front teeth as she turned toward you, and then the steady dark gaze.

Meanwhile Lucas was as bold as the sun, asking questions, commenting. "Lads, you're a whole hell of a lot further along with all this than I expected you'd be. Do you even put your shadows to work?" Nearly so. Never have I seen a man achieve more labor than Rob did in those first homestead months of ours, and my elbow moved in tandem with his.

Rob gave a pleased smile and said only: "You're just seeing us start."

"I know this homesteading is an uphill effort. ^{At least Montana} ~~But think of it~~ ^{is the prettiest place in the world to work yourself to death, ay? "} as a bit of a wager, lads. The government is betting you the land, ^{ay? "} against your ~~three~~ ^{long low} years of work, ay?" Lucas paused at a rear corner of the house, to study the way Rob's ^{ax}work made the logs notch together as snug as lovers holding hands. While Lucas examined, I remembered him in the woodyard in Nethermuir, choosing beech worthy for an axle, ash for shafts, heart of oak for the wagon frame. I could not help but wonder what lasts at the boundaries of such loss. At his empty arm ends, did Lucas yet have memory of the feel of each wood? Were the routes of his fingers still there, known paths held in the air like the flyways of birds?

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"And the woollies," Lucas inquired as he and Nancy returned to the wagon. "How are the woollies?"

That was the pregnant question, right enough. The saying is that it takes three generations to make a herdsman, but in the considerable meantime between now and the adept grandson of one or the other of us, Rob and I were having to learn that trying to control a thousand sheep on new range was like trying to herd water. How were the woollies? Innocently thriving when last seen an hour ago, but who knew what they might have managed to do to themselves since.

Rob looked at me and I at him.

"There's nothing like sheep," I at last stated to Lucas.

Lucas and Nancy climbed into the buckboard, ready for the reversal of the whirlwind that brought them from Gros Ventre. ¶ "Well, what's the verdict?" Rob asked in a joking way but meaning it. "Are we worth the investment?"

Lucas looked down at him from the wagon seat.

"So far," he answered, "it seems to be paying off. Pound them on the tail, Nancy, and let's go home."



That first Montana summer of ours was determined to show us what heat was, and by an hour after breakfast each day Rob and I were wearing our salt rings of sweat, crusted into our shirts in three-quarter circles where our laboring arms met our laboring shoulders. Ours was not the only sweat dripping into the North Fork earth. In a single day the arrival of the contingent from Fife

almost doubled our valley's population--^Tthe Findlater family of five, the ^{young}widower George Frew and his small daughter, and George's bachelor cousin Allan. Two weeks later, a quiet lone man named Tom Mortensen took up a claim over the ridge south from my place, and a week after that, a tumbleweed family of Missourians, the Speddersons, alit along the creek directly below Rob. As sudden as that, the valley of the North Fork went from almost empty to homesteaded.

"Who do you suppose invented this bramble?" Barbed wire, that ^{was what Rob} was meant. Neither of us liked the stuff, nor for that matter the idea of corseting our homesteads in it. But the gospel according to Ninian Duff rang persuasive: If you don't fence, you will one morning wake up and find yourself looking into the faces of five hundred Double W cows.

"Never mind that, why didn't they invent ready-made postholes to go with it?"

Rob and I were at my homestead. We had bedded the sheep on the ridge and come on down to wrestle a few more postholes into my eternal west fenceline before dark. There were occasional consequences from nature for decreeing lines on the earth as if by giant's yardstick, and one of them was that the west boundary of my homestead claim went straight through a patch of rock that was next to impossible to dig in. Small enough price, I will still tell you all these grunted postholes later, to have the measures of the earth plainly laid for you; but at the time--ⁱ

was what Rob
 OK?
 NO-
 here
 their dialogue
 is deliberately
 not attributed -
 it's meant to
 be inter-
 changeable, to
 show the
 closeness of
 Rob & Angus
 as chums,
 partners etc.

"Now, you know the answer to that. A homestead is only 160 acres and that's nowhere nearly enough room to pile up all the postholes it needs."

"Dig. Just dig."

Can a person be happy while he's weary in every inch of himself? Right then, I was. I entirely liked my homestead site. Maybe you could see around the world and back again from Rob's place on Breed Butte, but mine was no blinkered location. Ridges, coulees, Roman Reef in the notch at the west end of the valley, the peak called Phantom Woman, the upmost trees on Breed Butte, ^T~~X~~ all could be seen from my yard-to-be. The tops of things have always held interest for me. Rob's house was just out of view behind the shoulder of the ridge. Indeed, no other homesteads could be seen from mine, and for some reason I liked that, too.

"Digging holes into the night this way--^Tback in Nethermuir they'd think we're a pair of prime fools."

"We're the right number for it, you have to admit."

Dusk slowly came, into this country so appropriate for dusk--^T the tan and gray of grass and ridge looking exactly right, the soft tones a day should end with. This time of evening the gullies ~~blanked~~ ^{blanked} themselves into shadow, the ridgelines fired themselves red with the last sunset embers. But we were here to make homesteads, not watch sunsets. And by the holy, we were getting them made. Just as soon as Rob's house was done we began on our sheep shed, at the lower end of my homestead for handiness to the creek. The shed work we interrupted with the shearing crew for our sheep. We

can you improve transition?
Seems serviceable enough to me.

"Now, you know the answer to that. A homestead is only 160

acres and that's nowhere nearly enough room to pile up all the

postholes it needs."

"Dig. Just dig."

Can a person be happy while he's weary in every inch of

himself? Right then, I was. I certainly liked my homestead site.

Maybe you could see around the world and back again from Bob's place

on Broad Butte, but mine was no blistered location. Kidger,

couldn't, Roman Reel in the notch at the west end of the valley, the

peak called Phantom Woman, the highest trees on Broad Butte, all

could be seen from my yard-to-be. The tops of things have always

held interest for me. Bob's house was just out of view behind the

shoulder of the ridge. Indeed, no other homestead could be seen

from mine, and for some reason I liked that, too.

"Digging holes into the night this way--back in Nebraska

they'd think we're a pair of prime fools."

"We're the right number for it, you have

Just slowly came, into this country he

the tan and gray of grass and ridge looking

long a day should end with. This line of

casted themselves into shadow, the ridges

with the last sunset ebbers. But we were here

not watch sunsets. And by the holy, we were getting them made.

Just as soon as Bob's house was done we began on our sheep shed, at

the lower end of my homestead for happiness to the creek. The shed

work we interrupted with the shearing crew for our sheep. We

Don't get this.

? 2 persons = 1 pair.
Leave it as is.

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finished the wool work just in time to join with Ninian and Donald in putting up hay for the winter. Any moment free from haying, we were devoting to building fencelines. And someway amid it all we were hewing and laying the logs of my house, to abide by the spirit of the homestead law, even though I was going to share the first winter under Rob's roof; we were reasonably sure President Harrison wouldn't come riding over the ridge to check on my residency.

Full dark was not far from being on us but we wanted to finish my fenceline. Between bouts with shovel and crowbar and barbed wire, we began to hear horses' hooves, more than one set.

"Traffic this time of day?" Rob remarked as we listened.

"Angus, what are you running here, an owl farm?"

We recognized the beanpole figure of Ninian Duff first among the four who rode out of the deep dusk, long before he called out: "Robert and Angus, good evening there. You're a pair who chases work into the night."

"It's always waiting to be chased," Rob said back. I ran a finger around the inside leather of my hat, wiping the sweat out. Besides Ninian the squadron proved to be Donald Erskine and the new man Archie Findlater and a settler from the South Fork, Willy Hahn. Every kind of calamity that could put men on saddle leather at the start of night was crossing my thoughts. Say for Ninian, you did not have to stand on one foot and then the other to learn what was on his mind.

"Angus, we've come to elect you."

I blinked at that for a bit, and saw Rob was doing the same.

^{haff #} What was I, or my generation, / that I should get such exaltation?

"Elected, is it," I managed at last. "Do I get to know to what?"

"The school board, of course," Ninian stated. "There are enough families herearound that we need a proper school now, and we're going to build one."

"But, ^T_m but I'm not a family man."

"Ay, but you were a teacher once, over across, and that will do. We want you for the third member of our school board."

"Together with ^T_m?"

"Myself," Ninian pronounced unabashedly, "and Willy here."

Willy Hahn nodded and confirmed, "You are chust the man, Anguss."

"The old lad of parts!" Rob exclaimed, and gave my shoulder a congratulatory shove. "He'll see to it that your youngsters recite the rhyming stuff before breakfast, this one."

"The fact of the matter is," Ninian announced further, "what we need done first, Angus, is to advertise for a teacher. Can you do us a letter of that? Do it, say, tomorrow?"

I said I could, yes, and in the gathering dark there at my west fenceline the school was talked into shape. Because of their few years' headstart in settlement, the South Fork families had a margin more children of schoolable age than did Scotch Heaven, and so it was agreed to build the schoolhouse on their branch of the creek.

"You here in Scotch Heafen will haff to try hard to catch up with uss," Willy Hahn joked.

"Some of us already are," came back Ninian Duff, aiming that at the bachelorhood of Rob and me.

"The rest of us are just saving up for when our turn comes," Rob contributed. That drew a long look from Ninian, before he and the other three rode away into the night.

It was morning of the third week of August, still a month of



summer ahead on the calendar, when I came in from the outhouse with my shoes and the bottoms of my pantlegs damp.

Yawning, Rob asked: "What, did you miss your aim?"

I almost wished I had, instead of the fact to be reported: "Frost on the grass."

#

That forehint of North Fork winter concentrated our minds mightily. In the next weeks we labored even harder on Rob's outbuildings and fences, and when not on those, on the schoolhouse or on my house; and when not any of those, we were with the sheep, keeping a weather eye on the cloudmaking horizon of the mountains. Soon enough^D--too soon^T--came the morning when the peaks showed new snow like white fur hung atop.

On the day when Donald Erskine's big wagon was to be borrowed for getting our winter's provisions in Gros Ventre, we bet magpies to see which of us would go. Mine flew first from the gate. "Man, you're sneaking out here and training them," Rob accused. But off he went to the sheep and I pointed my grin toward Gros Ventre.

The Medicine Lodge was empty but for Lucas. "Young Lochinvar is come out of the west," he greeted me, and produced an instant glass between his stubs and then a bottle.

"What's doing?" I inquired.

"Not all that much. People are pure scarce this time of year, busy with themselves. We'll soon have snowflakes on our head, do you know, Angus."

"We will and I do," I answered, and drank.

"You and Robbie are ready for old winter, are you?"

"Ready as we'll ever be, we think."

"Winter can be thoroughly wicked in this country. I've seen it snow so that you couldn't make out Sedge's flagpole across there. And my winters here haven't been the worst ones by far. Stories they tell of the '85 winter would curl your dohickey."

"I'll try not hear them, then."

"You and ~~Rob~~^{Robbie} have worked wonders on those homesteads of yours, I have to say. Of course I could tell from the moment the pair of you walked in here that you were going to be a credit to the community."

"Credit. Do you know, Lucas, there's the word I was going to bring up with you."

"Angus, Angus, rascal you." Shaking his head gravely, Lucas poured a drink for himself and another for me. His toast, odd, was the old one of Scottish sailors: "Wives and sweethearts." After our tipple, Lucas resumed: "What do you and ~~Rob~~^{Robbie} do, sit up midnights creating ways to spend my money? What's the tariff this time?"

"Pennies for porridge. We need groceries enough to get us through the winter, is all."

"All, you say. You forget I've seen you two eat."

"Well, we just thought if you maybe were to ^{mortgage} sell the Medicine Lodge and your second shirt--"

"All right, all right, tell Kuuvus to put your groceries on my account. By Jesus, you and ~~Rob~~^{Robbie} would have to line up with the coyote pups for supper on the hind tit if I didn't watch over you."

"We might yet, if half of what you and Ninian keep saying about winter comes true."

"Put me in the same camp with Ninian, do you. There's a first time. How is old Jehovah Duff? Still preaching and breeding?"

"In point of fact, Flora does have a loaf in the oven. As does Jen Erskine. As does ^{Grace} Mary Findlater. If our neighbors are any example to the sheep, we're going to have a famous lamb crop come spring."

"Lambs and lasses and lads," Lucas recited with enthusiasm. "By Jesus, we'll build this country into something before it knows it." I raised an eyebrow at his paternal "we" there. Lucas raised it a good deal higher for me by declaring next: "Angus, I believe you need to think of a woman."

"I do, do I." Truth known, on my mind right then was the visit I was going to make to Wingo's niecery as soon as I was finished with other provisioning. "Along any particular lines, do you recommend?"

"I'm talking now about a wife. All right, all right, you can give me that look saying I'm hardly the one to talk. But the situation of Nancy and myself is—^Iwell, not usual." That was certainly so. "You're young and hale and not as ugly as you could be," he swept on, "and so what's against finding a wife for yourself ^Iay? I tell you, if I were you now—^I"

"Just half a moment, before you get to being me too strenuously. What brings this on?" It wasn't like Lucas to suddenly speak up for womanhood at large. "Is this what you're prescribing today for all your customers?"

"Just the redheaded ones." ^{My} ~~X~~ eyebrow found a new direction to

Change here to Grace Findlater
 as you requested we ^{yes,}
 change on p. 155? ^{good}
 IF NO, pls note charge needed ^{catch.}
 on style sheet under
 (151) Findlater,

"But we in the same camp with Nihilism, do
 time. How is it Jehovah built? Will preach
 "in point of fact, there does have a look
 Jen Eskine. As does Mary Findlater. If our
 example to the sheep, we're going to have a
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 prescribing today for all your customers?"
 "Just the rebedded ones." I eyebrow found a new direction to

cock itself. Why was I the subject of this sermon instead of Rob? He was the one Lucas had needed to negotiate away from Nancy. ~~#~~ "Oh, I know what you're thinking," and as usual, he did. "But that's another case entirely, our Robbie. The first bright mare who decides to twitch her tail at Robbie, she'll have him. He's my own nephew, but that lad is sufficiently in love with himself that it won't much matter who ^{he} marries. Whoever she is, she'll never replace him in his own affections. You though, Angus. You're not so much a world unto yourself. You ~~I think~~ ^{, I'd say,} need the right partner in this old life."

I hoped the Lucas Barclay Matrimonial Bureau was about to close for the day. "I'm already in partnership with a pair of Barclays," I pointed out, "which seems to keep me occupied twenty-five hours a day eight days a week."

"Mend your tongue," Lucas answered lightly, but with a glance that seemed to wonder whether I'd heard any word he'd been saying. "Robbie and I'll have you so prosperous you can take your pick of womanhood. But who's that going to be, ay? It wouldn't hurt you a bit to start thinking in that direction."

"And was Lucas in fettle?" asked Rob as we unloaded the wagon of groceries. *delete "fine"*

"Lucas was Lucas," I attested, "and then some."

—————

(#)

Was it a long winter Rob and I put in together, that first homestead one? Yes, ungodly so. And no, nothing of the sort. How time can be a commodity that lets both of those be equally true, I have never understood.

November and December only snowed often enough to get our attention, but by ~~Thanksgiving~~ the North Fork had ice as thick as a fist and we were chopping a waterhole for the sheep and our workhorses each morning. Of course that was the time of the year the bucks were put with the ewes to breed ~~April and May~~ ^{spring} lambs, and so there at least was warm behavior in the pastures, so to speak.

"See now, McAngus, don't you just wish it was spring? To ~~see~~ ^{watch} those lambs come ~~man~~ ^m, it'll be like picking up money along the road."

"That's what it had better be like, or we're going to be in debt to Lucas down to our shoe soles."

You might not think it, but with winter we saw more of the other homesteaders than ever. People neighbored back and forth by horse and sled to escape cabin fever, and no more than a few weeks ever passed without Scotch Heaven having a dance ~~which~~ ^{that} brought out everyone, for even the Duffs and Erskines were not so skintight they could resist waving a foot to a tune. I thought many a time that to watch Ninian on the dance floor was like hearing a giggle out of God. ¶ Not, let me say, that Ninian got all that much of my watching that winter, nor Rob's nor George Frew's nor Allan Frew's nor old Tom Mortensen's either. We of the bachelor brigade were too busy

any mention beyond this? ~~at one~~

aw

appreciating that Scotch Heaven's balance sheet of men and women was less uneven than it had been, with the teacher Mavis Milgrim and Archie Findlater's sister Judith, newly come from Scotland, now on hand. Miss Milgrim always had a starch to her that she thought a schoolma'am had to have, and Judith Findlater had a startling neck that was not so much swanlike as gooselike, but they helped the situation of the sexes, they helped. Most especially Judith. She was a sweet, quiet woman, of the kind in the old saying she's better than she's bonny, and there were moments at those dances when I had to wonder whether she was that prescription of Lucas's for me. Along those lines, the single time I found a decent chance to get Judith aside and coax a kiss out of her, she delivered one that I could feel all the way to my ears.

Something to put away for spring, although whenever I looked in a mirror I still was not seeing anything that resembled marriage.

When the last day of the calendar came ~~no~~^m Hogmanay commemorative portrait of Rob and myself this year, except the one that memory draws ~~we~~^m were invited down to see out the eve at ^{the} Duff's, together with the five Erskines and the six Findlaters, as many people as could breathe in one house that size. The right way to bridge years, in company with those we had come to know best in our homestead effort. Donald Erskine was a fretful man, who changed his mind so often he went around half-dizzy. Yet Donald would leap a mile to your aid, letting his own work stand while he pitched in on yours. Ninian Duff on the other hand would think three times before offering to lend you the sleeves of his vest, but there was no one

Stat
The repetition here is deliberate amiable exaggeration.

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more sound in advice than God's solemn brother Ninian. Their wives, ~~Jen and Flora,~~ ~~Flora and Jenny,~~ were equally broad women, grown wide as wagons in child-bearing, and each ^{as} capable ^a as ^a mother lions. Archie Findlater was a plump man, like a grouse—I admit, his roundness caused me to wonder what Judith's future shape would be—but sharp in his head, a calculator. ^{Gracey} Mary Findlater did the talking of their household, but as she was the one person in Scotch Heaven who could quote more verse than I could, I figured she had every right.

As midnight neared, there was acclamation from all these—led by Judith with a bit more enthusiasm than I was comfortable with—that I of course had to be one to first-foot the new year in for Ninian and Flora.

"Can't I wait for a year when the weather is better out there?" I protested. But at a minute before 1891, out I went into the cold blustery middle of the night.

I stood alone there in the mountainous dark where weather comes from, where years come from. Then turned myself around to the homestead house.

"Now there's a year's worth of good luck if I ever saw him," announced Rob after I stepped back in across the Duff threshold without a word, strode to the stove and poked the fire into brisker flame. Not that any of us at all believed the superstition about a tall unspeaking man who straightway tended the hearth fire being the year's most propitious first foot, but still.

"He will do," granted Ninian while Flora handed us steaming cups of coffee with just a tip of whiskey therein. "Warm

yourselves, you may need it riding home."

"What do you make of this weather, Ninian?" I wondered. By the sound of it the wind was whooping harder every minute. "A squall, is this?"

"It may be. Or it may be the start of winter."

For the next eight days, all the wind in the world tore at Scotch Heaven. We had wind that took the hay as we struggled to feed the sheep, wind that coated us and the workhorses with snow, wind every breath of the day and wind in our sleep.

And then came cold. Probably Rob and I were lucky not to know until later that from the tenth of January until the twenty-second, Donald Erskine's thermometer never rose above fifteen below zero.

"Angus, you're my favorite man, but there are times when I wish your name was Agnes."

This was ribald from Rob. I gave him back: "What times are those, I wonder? January can't be one, surely. A month of snow-white purity^l--"

"You say snow one more time and you'll be out in it."

Winter engines, us now. The pale smoke of Rob's breath as he chopped ice from the ~~sheeps~~ waterhole, I could see from the top of the haystack two hundred yards away. As our workhorses Sadie and Brandy pulled the haysled in a great slow circle in the snow while we fed the hay off, they produced regular dragonsnort. Our exertions were not the only ones there in the air; ^{there was} the whacking sound of Tom Mortensen at his woodpile over the ridge from my place, and the spaced clouts of George Frew next down the creek breaking out

No, let's keep. See your point, but I want the short quick rayark here, and I think the phrase is quickly understandable with "pale smoke" immediately following.

OK?
OK

the waterhole for his livestock. It was a new way to live, bundled and laborious and slow, oddly calm, and you had to wonder how Eskimos put up with it all the time.

A Saturday of February. The day had been blue and still. Rob's whistling was the liveliest element around. We had not been to Gros Ventre since Christmas, and we were preparing to remedy that. Haircuts had been traded, baths had been taken, books blacked with stove lid soot. Mustaches were our winter project, which meant meticulous trimming. We were putting on our clean shirts when a white flurry flung past the south windows, as if someone had begun plucking geese.

"Don't be that way," Rob told the weather.

"Probably it's only a flurry."

"It had better be."

It was not. The snow drove and drove, sifting out of the silent sky as if to bury the planet. In minutes the west window to the mountains was caked white.

"That's that, then," Rob admitted at last. "Goodbye, Gros Ventre."

"We'll go twice next time." That was brighter than I felt, for I was as keen as Rob for a meal cooked by Lila Sedge, for a drink poured by Lucas, for talk in the air of the Medicine Lodge, for what waited at Wingo's.

"Next time is the story of homesteading, I'm beginning to think," Rob gloomed. ^{said gloomily}

"You're coming down with winter fever. Elk stew is the only

← OK?
No-
stet

known antidote." Or at least the only supper we had now that Lila Sedge's cuisine was out of the picture.

"Lord of mercy, man. No town, and now Ninian's elk that bends forks?"

"The same famous one." The bull elk shot by Ninian was so elderly he had a set of antlers that would have scaffolded Canterbury Cathedral. "Old Elky, grandfather of beasts."

"And enemy of teeth. Tell me again the price of mutton."

I raised my thumb to him. "One, the cost of a sheep herself." Then extended my first finger. "Two, the cost of the hay she's eaten so far this winter." Next finger. "Three, the loss of her lamb next spring." Next finger. "Four, the loss of her fleece next summer." Final finger. "Five, explaining to Lucas that we've been sitting out here eating an animal he put up good money for."

Rob studied my display. "McAngus, if you had more fingers on that hand, you'd have more reasons too. All right, all right, the sheep are safe again. Elk stew by popular demand."

To cheer him up while I heated the familiar stew, I resorted to: "Surely you've never heard the story about Methusaleh^{ea} and his cook?"

"This weather has me to the point where I'll listen to anything. Tell away."

"Well, Methusaleh^{ea}'s cook got tired of cooking for that houseful[?]. All those begattings, more and more mouths at every meal^m—a couple of hundred years of that and you can see how it would start to get tiresome. So she went to Methusaleh^{ea} and said, 'What

about some time off, like?' 'No, no, no,' he tells her, 'we can't possibly spare you, you're too good a cook. In all these years have I ever complained once about your food?' She had to admit he hadn't. 'No, nor will I,' he says. 'If you ever hear me complain, I'll do the cooking myself, for the rest of my life.'

"The cook went away thinking about that. Methusaleh^{ea} was only around four hundred years old at the time, still doing all that begatting, and he looked as if he maybe had another five hundred years or so in him. The cook kept thinking, five hundred years off from all that cooking if she could just get Methusaleh^{ea} to complain. So the next morning for breakfast, the first thing she does is put a handful of salt in Methusaleh^{ea}'s coffee and send it out to the table. Methusaleh^{ea} takes a big swallow and spews it right back out. The cook starts to take her apron off. 'By Jehovah!' he says, and she can hear him coughing and sputtering, 'the coffee is full of salt!' She's just ready to step out of that kitchen forever when she hears him say: 'Just the way I like it!'"

After laughter, Rob went quiet during the meal. I was hoping that after the last bite of elk he might put down his fork and proclaim Just the way I like it, but no, the evening was not going to be that easy. He pushed back his chair and said instead: "Angus, do you know what I think?"

"When it starts out that way, probably not."

"I think we need more sheep."

"What, so we can eat some? Rob, it won't be elk forever. As soon as we can get to town^T"

"I'm serious here," Rob attested. "More sheep would be just the ticket we need, is what I think."

"If I understand right what those bucks were doing to those ewes, we're pretty soon going to have more."

"Not just the lambs, man. We ought to be thinking about buying more ewes. Another five hundred, maybe another thousand. ~~It's not~~ ^{can't be} that much more trouble to run two thousand sheep than it is a thousand."

"It's twice the hay, though." ~~My~~ ^{My} meadows were just enough to get us through ~~this~~ ^a winter, ~~if we were lucky.~~ ^{such as this} "Where's that going to come from?"

"We can buy it. Jesse Spedderson would a lot rather sell us his hay standing in the field than exert himself to put it up, I'll bet you this kitchen table on that."

"Say he does, then. What do we use to buy these famous further sheep with?" Although I thought I knew.

"We'll get Lucas to back us."

"Rob, we're already in debt to Lucas a mile deep."

"Angus, look at it this way: if we're going to be in debt, Lucas is our best choice anywhere around. Naturally there's a bit of risk, taking on more sheep. But if you're going to homestead, you have to take risk, am I right?"

I peered over at him, to be sure this was the same Rob who had been ready to spurn the North Fork for going in with Fain in the blacksmith shop.

"These sheep we have now can be just the start of us, man," he

galloped right on. "That's why it was worth coming from Scotland. Worth even finding Lucas^m--the way he is. His hands maybe are gone but none of his head went with them. No, Lucas has the fact of it. This Two Medicine country will grow. It's bound to. And we're in on the ground floor."

I directed his attention to the white outside the window. "Actually we may be down in the cold^k-cellar."

"Angus, Angus. By damn, I wish it was spring. You'd be in a brighter mood and you'd see in a minute what I'm talking about here."

If my ears were to be trusted, he was talking about the theory of sheep, which is the world's best. In theory a band of sheep is a garden on legs. Every spring a crop of lambs, every summer a crop of wool. Feed us and clothe us, too^{ite}—not even potatoes yield so beneficially. But the fleecies are a garden that wanders around looking for its own extinction, and in the Two Medicine country were many sources there ~~was much that was~~ willing to oblige their mortal urge. ~~cliff, blizzards.~~ Coyotes, bear, ~~death~~camas, lupine. Not least, themselves. I can tell you to this moment the anguish when, the second day after we had trailed our yearlings home to the North Fork from their former owner in the Choteau contry^u, Rob and I found our first dead sheep. A fine fat ewe on her back, four legs in the air like hooved branches. In her clumsy cocoon of wool she had rolled helplessly onto her back when she lay down to scratch a tick itch. ~~and couldn't right herself again.~~ Rob was shocked, ^{and} I admit I was a bit unsettled myself. And as any sheep owner must, we began thinking the terrifying arithmetic: what if we lose another ewe two days from now... Lord of mercy, what if we lose

one again tomorrow. . . . A little of that and in your mind you soon not only have no sheep left, you possess even fewer than that ~~—~~ cavities of potential loss of however many sheep you could ever possibly buy to replace the ones that right now are out there searching for ways to die. Thus you draw breath and try to think instead of the benefits of sheep. Watch them thrive on grass a cow wouldn't even put its head down for. Watch the beautiful fleeces, rich and oily to the touch, ~~come~~ ^{unfold} off them as they are sheared. Dream ahead to when you can watch your first crop of lambs enlarge themselves week by week. As Rob was doing now in his winter rhapsody about more sheep. But I didn't want that tune, expensive as it promised to be, to get out of hand, and so I responded:

"Rob, I see that we don't even know yet if we're going to get through this winter with these sheep alive, let alone twice that many that we don't have."

he retorted a bit quick and sharp,

"With an attitude like that, ~~you~~ ^{we} you're not looking ahead beyond the end of your nose, you know."

And you're looking right past all the precipices there are, I thought but managed not to say. This was new. Usually when Rob and I disagreed it was about some speck of a matter that was gone by the next day. Even during our months here in the white cave of Montana winter, our most spirited argument had been over whose turn it was to bring in the firewood. But I knew too well that if Rob Barclay decided to believe in a thing as if it ~~was~~ ^{were} fairy gold, words weren't an antidote. I shook my head now, both at Rob and at the silliness of us filling the kitchen with debate about phantom sheep. "You're

working hard on the wrong source here," I pointed out to him. "It's Lucas's wallet you're going to have to persuade."

"I can see winter isn't the season to reason with you," he gave me back. "Let's talk this over in the spring, what do you say?"

"I say, knowing you we're sure to talk it over, all right."

That at last drew a smile and a short laugh from him, and he got up and went to the south window. The snow no longer was flailing past, but clouds covered the mountains, ^{and} more storm was only minutes away.

"McAngus, ~~who~~ who of your old poets called clouds the sacks of heaven?"

hair # "Undo the silver sacks of heaven, / seed the sky with stars. / See every gleam grow to seven, / something something Mars." "I can't think now, which."

"He ought to be shot," Rob stated.

⊕

Then in March, this.

"There. Hear that?" We were feeding the sheep their hay beside the North Fork, on a morning as icy as any of the winter had been.

"Hear what? The sound of me pitching hay and you standing there with your ears hanging out?"

"There, that rushing sound up in the mountains. That's new."

"Just the wind."

"What wind? There isn't a breath of one."

"Running water, then?"

"That creek is frozen stiffer than I am."

"Creature, maybe?"

"Making a noise that size? We'd better hope not."

The sheep began to raise their heads from the hay, nosing the air.

"They hear it, too."

~~"Why wouldn't they? Their ears are even bigger than yours."~~

Isn't it getting louder??
"Listen. It's louder."

~~"Louder doesn't say it. That's a positive roar."~~

Off came our flap caps, not just for keener listening but because the air strangely no longer seemed chilly. In minutes the great flowing sound was dispensing itself down from the peaks and crags as a sudden stiff breeze, but a breeze warm all through. A day that had been firmly fifteen degrees below zero began to feel tropical. As we finished the pitchfork work we had to shed our scarves, then our coats. Not until Rob and I talked with Ninian a few days later, the snow already gone from every south slope and elsewhere retreating down into its deep coulee drifts, did we learn the word of that miracle wind, which was chinook. But driving the haysled home from the sheep on that chinook day, our gloves next off, the two of us kept flexing our pale winter hands, one and then the other as if shedding old skin, in that astonishing blowing air of springtime.



In the after years, Rob always made the jest that the winter with me was what caused him to marry Judith Findlater.

"Your cooking, of course I mean to say, Angus. Every recipe you knew was elk, do you remember. Judith brought one of her mince pies to a dance and I was a gone gosling."

I laughed ritually each time, but what Lucas had forecast about Rob's route into marriage always tinged the moment. For I did see it come, Judith's quiet sorting of us during her husband-looking winter ^I~~me~~ too wary and waitful, George Frew so gawkishly silent, Allan Frew too irresponsible, Tom Mortensen too old and bachelorly, but Rob bright and winnable, Rob always pleased to find himself reflected back in someone's attention. When Archie Findlater came that March to ask Rob for a few days ^{skilled} help in building lambing pens ^I~~work~~ which anybody who could fit fingers around a hammer could do ^I~~and~~ mentioned "Take your meals with us too, why not, and save yourself the ride back and forth," he may as well have brought Judith and the marriage license with him.

The wedding, in almost-warm-enough weather you could step into blindfolded and know it was May in Montana, ⁴ was in Rob's front yard. All of Scotch Heaven assembled there under the crest of Breed Butte for the valley's first matrimony, and as best man I had the closest look of anyone except the minister ~~and the two of them~~, at how Rob and Judith gleamed for each other. He was newly dismystached and his smile seemed all the fresher. Judith already looked wifely, quietly natural beside Rob. He'd teased her beforehand that when the major question came he was going to respond, "Can I toss a coin to decide that?" But when the moment arrived, Rob spoke out "I do" as if telling it to generations before

rom. instead of Ital

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 that March to ask Rob for a few days' help in building landing
 gear - work which anybody who could fit fingers around a hammer could

← wordy. Shorter? No - the description of the season is important.
 deletion OK?
 OK
 165

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 The wedding, in almost-warm-weather
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 respond, "I'm a coin to decide that" but when the moment
 arrived, Rob spoke out "I do" as if telling it to generations before

and aft.

Afterward we ate and danced and talked and danced and drank and danced. As evening came on, before heading home I got Rob and Judith aside to congratulate them one last time.

"For people who just got married beyond redemption, you both look happy enough about it," I assessed for their benefit.

"You're the best best man there could be," Judith nicely assured me and rose on tiptoes to kiss my cheek while Rob warned merrily, "Not too much of that, now."

Riding toward home with the bunch from the wedding, I took full notice that the May dusk was telling us the lengthened days of summer were truly on their way, but otherwise I heard with only half an ear the jokes and chat that were ^being passed around. Until silent George Frew and I swung off together on the trail to our homesteads. Then George, who was sloshing a bit with the amount of wedding drink in him, jerked his head back toward Breed Butte and blurted: "They're at it now."

No doubt Rob and Judith were. I'd have been, in Rob's place, ^{and} ^{But} and I have money that says you would have been too. Yet George's whiskied words set off something in me. I rode home thinking over whether I ought to have made the ~~move~~ ^{maneuvers} maybe I flattered myself, but I believed it would not have taken any too many ^m that would have put me in Rob's place. And decided again, no. The same voice in me that said all winter about Judith, not yet, not this one, was saying even stronger now, wait, let time tell. Oh, I knew that all you can count on in life is your fingers and toes, but I was determined to

who is
"you"?
often it's
Rob,
sometimes
the
reader.
OK that
way?
Yup!

do marriage as right as I could when I did it at all. Did I have an enlarged sense of carefulness, where weddings were concerned? Maybe, but I felt it had grown naturally in me. My parents' case, a marriage locked in ice whenever it wasn't shaking with thunder, was not anything I intended to repeat. No, there had to be better than that. And the matrimonial exchange I had just witnessed on Breed Butte: Judith bagging a husband, Rob pocketing a wife. I hated even to think it of two people I so prized, but there had to be better than that, too. A high idea, maybe, but the North Fork valley around me and the strong mountains over me seemed the place for such a thought. If better could not be done here, on new land on a new continent, myself a new version of a McCaskill^T_m--the American version^T_m--where could it ever be done?

Why Stone?

⊕

Say you are a stone that blinks once a year, when the sun of spring draws the last of winter from you. In the wink that is 1891, you see nine houses in the valley of the North Fork where there had been but those two of the Duff and Erskine homesteads^e_A. You note the retreat of timber on Wolf Butte where Rob and myself and Archie Findlater and Jesse Spedderson and old Tom Mortensen and the Frew cousins George and Allan sawed lodgepole pines to build those houses. You notice lines of new fence encasing each of Scotch Heaven's homesteads, straight and taut as mesh. You see Vinia Spedderson's laundry flying from a hayrack, to the disgust of the other wives. You see the Erskine boy, Davie, riding his pony along the creek as if in a race with the breeze-blown hay. Your next

⊕ OK-A

do marriage as right as I could when I did it at all. But I have an
 enlarged sense of catholicity, where weddings were concerned?
 Maybe, but I felt it had grown naturally in me. My parents' case, a
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 version—where could it ever be done?

Keep "stone"
 See margin query. why
 Stone? (Also on next
 page at ①) Because
 stone is the one thing that'd
 be enduring enough to
 "see" the procession of life,
 year after year. Poetic usage.

Say you are a stone that thinks once a year
 spring draws the last of winter from you. In
 you see nine houses in the valley of the North
 feet but those two of the Duff and Esklin have
 retreat of timber on Wolf Butte where Bob and
 Fletcher and Jess Spederson and old Tom Mortensen and the five
 cousin George and Allan sawed log-pole pine to build those
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 Spederson's laundry flying from a hayrack, to the disgust of the
 other wives. You see the Franklin boy, Davie, riding his pony along
 the creek as if in a race with the breeze-blown hay.

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①

glimpse, 1892, shows you newborn Ellen, the first of Rob and Judith's girls. You see slow-grazing scatters of gray which are the sheep of one or another of us, maybe mine and Rob's working the grassy foothills west of my homestead, maybe the new band belonging to Rob and Lucas there on the slope of Breed Butte. (Were not stones famously deaf, you would have heard Rob try to the end to persuade me to come in with him and Lucas on that second thousand of sheep, Angus, you're thinking small instead of tall, I'm disappointed in you, man; and from me, to whom deeper debt did not look like the kind of prosperity I wanted, Rob, if this is the first time or the last I disappoint you, you're lucky indeed.) You see rain booming on the roofs in the rare two-day May downpour that brought the North Fork twice the crop of hay any of us had expected or imagined. You behold Ninian Duff coming home from town with a bucket of calcimine, and you watch as every Scotch Heaven household, mine included, quickly whitens a wall here or there. # And now in your third blink, 1893, you notice an occasional frown as we lords of sheep hear how the prices are beginning to drop in the distant wool and lamb markets. You see my life as it was for the rest of that year, achieveful yet hectic as all homestead years seemed to be, tasks hurrying at each other's heels: turn out the last bunch of ewes and their fresh lambs onto new pasture and the garden needs to be put in; do that, and fence needs mending; mend that, and it is shearing time; shear the beloved woollies, and it is haying time. You see me look up, somewhere amid it all, to a buckboard arriving, drawn by Ninian Duff's team of matched bay horses.

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 Judith's girls. You see slow-growing scatters of grey which are the
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 grassy foothills west of my homestead, maybe the new herd belonging
 to Rob and Lucas there on the slope of Broad Butte. (Were not
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 persuade me to come in with him and Lucas on that second thousand of
 sheep, Angus, you're thinking well instead of tail, I'm
 disappointed in you, man, and from me, to whom despair had not
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 time or the last I disappoint you, you're lucky indeed.) You see
 rain pouring on the roofs in the rare two-day May downpour that
 brought the North Fork twice the crop of hay any of us had expected
 or imagined. You behold Minnie Bull coming home from town with a
 bucket of caliche, and you watch as every sheep licks her
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 shearing time, shear the beloved woolies, and it is haying time.
 You see me look up, somewhere and it all, to a buckboard arriving,
 drawn by Minnie Bull's team of matched bay horses.

Not a word in my dictionary,
 and Angus's language is usually
 more graceful. Perhaps
 "productive" or something?
 Keep as is - it's
 (168) sufficiently self-explanatory.

On the seat beside Ninian perched Willy Hahn. School board business, this could only be.

Ninian pulled his bays to a halt and announced down to me: "News, Angus. We've lost our teacher. George Frew is marrying her." With the school year so close on us, Ninian was saying what was in our three minds in the last of his pronouncement: "Maybe she can teach him to speak up sooner."

"So we've a fast advertisement to write, have we?" I responded. "Come down and come in, I'll ^L_M"

Ninian interrupted, "In point of fact, Willy and I already have located a replacement teacher. Haven't we now, Willy?" Willy dipped his head yes. "More than that even," Ninian swept on, "we've voted to hire." Willy dipped again.

I was peeved to hear this. By damn, I was more than that. These two old puffed-up whiskerheads. "Well, then. Since the pair of you are running the school board so aptly without me, we haven't anything more to talk about, now have we. Don't let me keep you here, busy persons like yourselves."

Ninian winked solemnly to Willy. "The man doesn't see it."

"What's to see?" I blazed. "You two parade in here and ^L_M"

"Anguss," Willy put in mildly. "It iss you we voted to hire."

#

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⊕



Ordain me here and now as the Lord High Kafoozalum and I would be no more surprised than I was to be made the South Fork schoolteacher. Not that there was ever any supposition I was the pedagogical genius the world had been seeking since Jesus went upstairs; after all, back there in Nethemuir I had only ever been the pupil-teacher assisting Adam Willox, never the actual master of a schoolroom. What designated me now, as Willy and Ninian cheerfully made plain, was that time was short and I was nearest.

"Temporary, just for the year," Ninian assured me as if schoolteaching could be done with my little finger.

"Can't Flora fill the situation as well as I can?" I astutely retorted to him, citing the only other person in the vicinity who had experience at standing at the front of a classroom. Willy tittered, cast a glance toward Ninian on the wagonseat beside him, then looked down at me severely. Which caused me to remember that Flora Duff was currently a prominent six months in the family way.

"There is of course the matter of the teacher's wage," Ninian at last found around to, and there he met me coming, I do have to admit. That year of 1893 was the sour kind that we hadn't known was in the calendar of America. Prices of wool and lambs both were falling through the floor while I still was trying to climb out of Lucas's wallet. And be it said if it needs to, no homesteader was ever his own best paymaster. Besides, I had come across the bend of the world looking for ^{a different life} new, had I? The one thing certain about a year as the South Fork teacher would be ^{was that it} ~~its newness~~ ^{different} every day. Alexander Angus McCaskill of ^{the} Bell Rock, were you watching this wade

insert from following page

I had explanatory material of this in an earlier draft, cut it for thrift-- but I think you're right it's needed, so I've restored it.

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may train
 following
 page

With all the work of lambing,
 raising sheep watching,
 haying, shearing, etc.,
 I'm quite surprised that
 Angus would agree to a teaching
 job without first making an
 agreement for someone to
 help with his farmwork. →

I had explanatory material of
 an earlier draft, but it for
 but I think you're right it's needed,
 so I've restored it.

170A

INSERT ON P. 170

Ninian and Willy proceeded to argue qualm after qualm out of me. Yes, they would see to it that I had help with my homestead tasks as needed. Yes yes, they would put in a word with Rob about the necessity of adjusting our sheep arrangement if I took the school. Yes yes yes, they would find someone more suitable for the position next year.

of mine into new water?

"All right then," I acquiesced to my electors. "If you haven't come to your senses in the last minute, I'm your schoolkeeper for this year."

"Anguss, you are chust the man," Willy ratified, and I swear Ninian very nearly smiled at me.

That first South Fork morning, The Hahn brothers were the earliest to trudge down the road toward the waitful school and waitful me, dragging with them the invisible Gibraltar of burden of having a father on the school board. The children from the other families of that branch of the creek as well, the Petersons and Roziers and Van Bebbers, all lived near enough to walk to school and soon they were ricocheting around outside in those double-quick games that erupt before the class day takes everyone captive. I turned from the window for one last inventory of my schoolroom. Desk rows across the room. Blackboard and a roll-down map of the world fastened above. Framed portraits of Washington and Lincoln staring stoically at each other on the far wall. I hammered days of nails when this schoolhouse was built, I came here many a time with Ninian and Willy to tend to our teacher, I had danced on this schoolroom's floor, mended its roof. Yet I tell you, it was a place foreign to my eyes as I waited for the minute when it would fill with pupils. My pupils.

For the dozenth time I looked at the alarm clock ticking on my solitary desk at the front of the schoolroom. This time it told me

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"All right, then," I acquiesced to my electors. "If you haven't
come to your senses in the last minute, I'm your schoolkeeper for
this year."
"Angus, you are chum the man," Willy rallied, and I swear
Minton very nearly smiled at me.

NO - stat
ok to make a complete
sentence? Angus doesn't
usually talk in incomplete
phrases. The few times he does,
as here and on p. 345, it emphasizes
what a fraught moment it is for him.

171

That first South Fork morning, the rain
existed to bridge down the road toward the water
waiting me, dragging with them the inevitable
having a father on the school board. The child
facilities of that branch of the creek as well.
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Minton and Willy to tend to our teacher. I had danced on this
schoolroom's floor, washed its roof. Yet I tell you, it was a place
foreign to my eyes as I waited for the minute when it would fill
with pupils. My pupils.
For the dormitory time I looked at the alarm clock ticking on my
solitary desk at the front of the schoolroom. This time it told me

I had to ring the bell to begin school, even though a significant half of my pupil population hadn't yet appeared.

Ring I did.

In trooped the South Fork boys and girls.

I hemmed and hawed and had them take temporary seats until the others arrived.

But still no others.

Accident? Boycott? Jest of the gods? Possibilities trotted around in me until I needed to do what I had been resisting, retreat out onto the porch and peer up the North Fork road. With me went the echo of Lucas's reaction to my new and quite possibly stillborn career: By Jesus, Angus, you're the first swamper the Medicine Lodge ever had that's turned out to be a schoolmarm. Maybe I was in over my head, trying to be schoolkeeper as well as homesteader as well as sheep partner with Rob. Maybe...

Here they came, the child cavalry of Scotch Heaven. The three Findlaters on a fat white horse named Snowy. Susan Duff regal on one of Ninian's blood bay geldings. Jimmy Spedderson on a beautiful blazeface black worth more than the rest of the Speddersons' homestead combined. George Frew's daughter Betsy on an elderly sorrel. Davie Erskine on his fast-stepping roan with small sister Rachel clinging behind him.

I let out a breath of thanks. But to show them I did not intend for tardiness to become habit, I stood conspicuously waiting while they put their horses on picket ropes. Already there on a length of grazing tether was the Dantley mare Patch that I still

rode, and with all our horses picketed around the schoolhouse, the scene suddenly hit me as one of life's instants I had been through before—Rob and I gawking at the Floweree outfit's cow camp the day we arrived green as peas into Gros Ventre. I reminded myself how greatly more veteran in life I was by now, and tried to believe it in the face of what advanced on me here, Susan Duff.

She poised below me as if bearing a message from Caesar. "We cut through our lower field and couldn't get the gate open and the top loop was too tight and barbwire besides," she reported in funeral tones. "My father will need to fix that gate." Unaccountably my spirits rose as I thought of Ninian having to deal with this daughter. "Meg Findlater's nose is running and she doesn't have a hanky, and Davie Erskine forgot to bring his and Rachel's lunch." This seemed to conclude Susan's docket, and up the porch steps and into the schoolhouse she marched with the other Scotch Heaven children in a straggle behind her.

I kick myself yet for not anticipating the next snag of that morning, although I am not sure what I could have done about it. My gender. In Scotland schoolmasters were thick on the ground. But here, having a man teacher proved to be an unexpected thought to pupils accustomed to Miss Milgrim. The larger boys were plainly restless about me, and I was afraid little Meg Findlater's eyes would pop from her head every time I leaned far down to bring my handkerchief to the rescue of her nose.

My predecessor still governessed that schoolroom in another way, too. After I had everyone sorted and seated and the littlest

ones were more or less occupied with the new things called desks and books, I started on my upper grades in what I thought was peerless emulation of Socrates, "Tell me, anyone please, the Presidents from Washington to Lincoln."

I drew back stares.

There I stood wondering what had taken their tongues, until Susan Duff informed me that it was the practice of Miss Milgrim to tell the pupils such matters as the Presidents to Lincoln, while they listened.

"That's as may be, Susan. But I look very little like Miss Milgrim, don't I, and so I need to do things my own way. Now who'll tell the Presidents, Washington to Lincoln?"

A silence deep as a corner of eternity. As the silence yawned on, my only immediate hope was Susan again. But a look at her told me she had lent me all the instruction she currently intended to.

This tiny box of school, on the universe's ocean. How could we in here ever hope to know enough to get by on, let alone improve the race at all? I despaired and was starting to reach for the chalk and begin listing Presidents, anything to stir this congealed schoolroom, when I heard:

"Hickory Jackson."

I turned, blinking. Davie Erskine was regarding me with a helpfulness that managed to be vague and earnest at the same time. I'd made mental note to share my lunch with him and his little sister Rachel; this opening effort of Davie's resolved me to give them it all. Taking my surprise for encouragement, the boy visibly

searched around in his head some more. After a while:

"Quincy Adams."

Yet another Davie spell of thoughtⁱ--Shakespeare could have written a couple of acts during this one^m--and:

"Some other Adams."

I was desperately debating within myself whether to shut off this random trickle of Presidents, try to suggest some order into it, or what, when Davie's thoughtⁱseeking gaze lit on the wall portraits.

"Abe Lincoln," he announced to us. "Georgeⁱ--"

It was too much for Susan Duff. Up shot her hand.

"Washingtonjohnadams jefferson," she launched,

"Madisonmonroejohnquincyadamsⁱ--"
^m

My pupils, my minnow school of new Montana. It was like having tailor's samples, swatches, of Scotch Heaven's families all around you daylong. Susan Duff had bones longer than they knew what to do with themselves, in the manner of Ninian, so that her elbows stuck over the aisle the way his poked wide when he cut his meat. The Findlaters all were marvels at arithmetic. The Hahn boys had cherubic lispy voices like Willy's, you would never suspect that one or more likely both of them had just been in a blazing fistfight during recess. Yet I always needed to watch out not to peg a child according to his parents or older brothers and sisters. Along came small Karen, of the cog-at-a-time Petersons, and she had a mind like a magic needle. It penetrated every book I managed to find for her,

and of my bunch in that schoolroom Karen was the one spellbound, as I had been at her age, by those word rainbows called poems.

And so there I stood before these sons and daughters of the homesteads, their newly minted teacher of such topics as the history of the United States of America ^{the} with my Scottish schooling which had instructed me thoroughly in the principal events from Robert the Bruce to the Union of the Crowns. My daily margin of American history over my various grades' was the pages I'd scurried through the night before. Fortunately, not all the subjects were as lion-sized as history. Even in America lessons in handwriting were lessons in handwriting, and reading was reading. And spelling was spelling except when harbour arrive^d to this side of the ocean as harbor, tyre as tire, theatre as theater, and sundry other joggled vowels. But geography. The grief of American geography. When it came to geography, my pupils and I had to be strange pickles together. In that schoolroom of mine were children born in Bavaria and Scotland and Norway and Alsace-Lorraine, and others who never had been farther in the world than ten miles down the creek to Gros Ventre. Our sole veteran traveler of the continent we were on was Jimmy Spedderson, seven years of age, who had lived in Missouri, Kansas, North Dakota, Manitoba, and now Montana--a life like a skipping stone. Whatever the roll-down map of the whole world proclaimed, every one of us there came from a different earth and knew only the haziest about anyone else's. For me, terra incognita was the 99% of Montana where I had never been. I could instruct my pupils perfectly well that Thomas Carlyle--he of I don't pretend to

not
until
the 1920s
OK out
it is

understand the universe; it's a great deal bigger than I

amⁱ_m-originated at Ecclefechan, pronounced Eckle-FECK'n, county of Dumfries in southmost Scotland, near to Carlisle and the Solway Firth. But I had to learn along with them the sixteen counties of Montana and the mysterious town names of Ekalaka, ^{Ubet}Wibaux, Saco, Missoula, Shawmut, Rimini, Ravalli, Ovando...

One geographic inspiration I did have. The piece of the planet that stayed with me as no other, the Atlantic. Vivid as this minute, that time of Rob and myself on the Jemmy, down in Steerage Number One, deep there in the hole in the water. The Hahn boys and the three Findlaters and Daniel Rozier and Susan Duff and Davie ~~and~~

~~Rachel~~ Erskine also all remembered crossing the ocean to America. I strived to have them make the other pupils understand that feat of crossing, and to hold it in their own minds ever and ever. And got more than I bargained for when Jenny Findlater hesitantly raised her hand and asked if when I was on the ocean, was I scared any?

"Jenny, I was," I said to Daniel's smirk and the careful gazes of all the others. "An ocean is dangerous enough to be afraid of. As are the rear hooves of our horses out there, and blizzards, and just a number of things in life. But we try to use our judgment and be afraid only when it's worth it, don't we, and then only as much as we have to be. Is that how it was with you, Jenny, when you were on the ocean?" Jenny's vigorous nod carried me from that trouble.

Thank heaven arithmetic is a neutral country. At least I could put addition and subtraction and multiplication and division into my pupils like nails into a shingle roof, pound pound pound pound.

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 am--originated at Kuchelochan, pronounced Kuchelochan, county of
 Dunbarton in southwest Scotland, near to Carlisle and the Solway
 firth. But I had to learn along with them the sixteen counties of
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 the chine Finlaysons and Daniel Koster and Susan Dull and Davis and
 Robert Eskline also all remembered crossing the ocean to America. I
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 of all the others. "An ocean is dangerous enough to be afraid of.
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 be afraid only when it's worth it, don't we, and then only as much
 as we have to be. Is that how it was with you, Jenny, when you were
 on the ocean?" Jenny's vigorous nod carried

necessary? Yes, to make his point

Here was once when old Scotland came back to help me out, for when I had been pupil-teacher under Adam Willox in Nethermuir he made arithmetic my particular topic. They can become literate from me, Angus, and learn to be numerate from you.

So maybe it was numbers alone that kept me, that school year, from ever riding into the Duff homestead and saying Ninian, start advertising for someone else, this is beyond me. Instead, day upon day I ransacked my brain for how Adam Willox had done things. Then amended nearly all of that, for Adam never had the situation of the Hahns' dog Blitzen following them to school and howling by the hour; of keeping track of whose turn it was among the big boys to go to the creek and fill the water bucket; of Einar Peterson's perpetual tendency toward nosebleed and Jenny Findlater's toward hiccups; of having to watch for ticks on everyone, including myself.

roman instead of italics

stet Hahns'
The family name is Hahn - plural Hahns, possessive Hahns', yes?

Of having to deal with Daniel Rozier about the issue of the girls' outhouse.

A country school such as South Fork was not an individual receptacle of knowledge, it was an educational trinity. You saw all three as you came to where the streambed of the North Fork met that of the South Fork and made the main creek, just upstream within a willow-thick bend, the white schoolhouse and behind it the white twin toilets, girls' to the left, boys' to the right. Each waiting to do its duty, they sat there like an attentive hen and two pullets. My problem, or more accurately the girls' problem, was Daniel Rozier's fascination with the possibilities of that left-hand outhouse.

It all began with garter snakes. Most ^{of} the girls were not normally afraid of them, but go seat yourself appropriately and glance down to find restless green reptiles beside you, and see what you think.

I heard out the girls' lamentations, and made my threats about what would happen to whomever I caught at snakework. But the Rozier homestead was just down the creek from the school, near enough for Daniel to sneak back before or after the rest of us, and try as I did I never could convict Daniel.

Susan Duff, rather than I, ended the snake episode the recess time when she stormed out of the girls' toilet grasping a writhing foot-long serpent by the tail, carried it around to the side of the schoolhouse where Daniel Rozier was in a game of ante-I-over, and whapped him across the bridge of the nose with the thing.

Even if she was the avenging figure of justice, Daniel was livid about being hit by a girl.

"Susan-Duff-you're-worse-than-snot!" he screeched.

"The next snake I find in there I'll hit you with twice," she vowed in return.

And so only two of the trinity were standing when I rode into sight of the South Fork the morning after that. The casualty naturally was the girls' outhouse, flat on its back as a dead beetle. The bad fact now was that even Daniel Rozier at his most indignant wasn't strong enough to tip over a two-hole outhouse. he'd had help from the other boys. It took Daniel and Davie Erskine and the Hahn brothers, conscript labor all, and me to lift the structure

upright.

Two mornings later, the girls' outhouse was horizontal again.

By then I knew Daniel Rozier was the sort you could punish until he was jelly and he'd still behave the same. Instead, I opened school that day with the observation: "A freak of nature seems to have struck the girls' outhouse." Smirk from Daniel to Susan Duff, glower from her to him. "Until it comes along again and puts the toilet back up, chivalry will have to be in force. Who'll tell me the spelling of chivalry? Daniel, crack at it, please."

The smirk went and confusion came. "Unngg, ah, is it ~~S-H-O-V-E-L-R-Y?~~"

"Closer than you might think," I granted. "Susan, enlighten Daniel as to chivalry, please." Which she did as fast as the letters could prance out her mouth.

"Thank you, Susan. Now the definition, at least in this case. The boys will yield their toilet to the girls."

Little Freddie Findlater, a lad with a nervous kidney, had his hand up in an instant. "Where will the boys go, then?"

I directed attention to the willow thicket along the creek. "Like Zeus on Mount Olympus, Freddie, all of outdoors is your throne." Looks were cast toward Daniel Rozier, but the boys sat firm, so to speak, on their outhouse position.

Montana weather being Montana weather, I didn't have to wait long for the day I needed. Squalls were getting up speed in the mountains as I reached into my cupboard that morning, and by noon hard wind and blasts of sleet shot against the schoolhouse windows.

"My eyes must have been big this morning, I brought more than I can eat," I confessed during lunchtime. "Daniel, pass those around please," handing him the big bag of prunes. In groped his paw for the first haul, then the fruit began its fist-diving circle among the other boys.

When the prunes had time for full effect, and boy after boy trooped back in from the bushes as if dragging icicles behind, I decided here was my moment. "I've been meaning to ask, how many of you can stay after and put the outhouse back up?"

Where it then held.

"A coyote can too run faster than a dog, Fritz Hahn." Jimmy Spedderson's contention wafted in through an open window as I was at my desk cramming that afternoon's American history.

"Can't either. Our dog Blitzen runs after coyotes all the time, see."

"Your dog can't catch coyotes! That's a fat lie. Liar, liar, pants on fire!"

"Didn't say he catches them."

"See, then."

"He'd have to run faster to catch them. What he does is he keeps up with them. So a dog and coyote run the same, see."

"They don't either. After recess we'll ask McAsker."

"All right then. McAsker will know."

McAsker, was I now. It could have been worse.

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"My eyes must have been big this morning, I brought more than I
can eat," I confessed during luncheon. "Daniel, pass those around
please," handing up the big bag of prunes. In groped the jaw for
the first head, then the fruit began its flat-diving circle among
the other boys.

NO
Say more straightforwardly? This
is a rather cryptic way
of saying ~~and~~ they fixed it
& it never again fell down.

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When the prunes had time for full effect,
trooped back in from the bushes as if dragged
decided here was my room. "I've been mean
you can stay after and use the outdoor back
where it then held.

"A coyote can't run faster than a dog, Fritz Heim,
Speotator's contention waited in through an open window as I was at
my desk crumpling that afternoon's American history.

"Can't either. Our dog Hittzen runs after coyotes all the
time, see."

"Your dog can't catch coyotes! That's a fat lie. I can, I can,
pants on fire!"

"Didn't say he catches them."
"See, then."

"He'd have to run faster to catch them. What he does is he
keeps up with them. So a dog and coyote run the same, see."

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For all the daily tussle of schooling, there were distinct times when I wished the rest of the world ^{were} was made of children as well. I had wondered what some of the community thought of having me as teacher, and I found out when the first dance of the year was held in the schoolhouse. Just after I had done a schottische with Rob's Judith, Allan Frew called out to me in a high girly voice: "Angus, aren't you afraid your petticoat will show when you kick up your heels like that?"

I stepped over within arm's reach of Allan, which made him blink and think.

"Ask me that outside," I urged him, "and I'll answer you by hand."

That ended that.

Then there was the matter that fists have never been able to settle. ^f ~~O~~ course it had to be Ninian to bring me word of this, and I give him full due, he looked nowhere near happy to be performing it.

"Angus, this business about the universe being too big to understand and so on. I'm hearing from a few folks that they would like a bit more orthodox view of things told to their children."

Of anything to be scanned and poked and sniffed in the making of education, this. So far as I could see I was doing the job of teaching as well as I knew how. Probably better. To have it all snag on a sentence from Carlyle, himself a God-wrestler right in there with the most ardent—^fit put my blood up.

"Ninian, I can't get into that. You can say all day long you

just want a bit of orthodoxy, but there's my-doxy, your-doxy, this-doxy, that-doxy. They're all somebody's orthodoxy. I don't notice Willy being here with you. Has he been saying I don't trot Martin Luther into the classroom often enough? Then there are the Roziers. I can invite the Pope to visit from Rome to please them, too, of course?"

"Angus, I am troubled myself with this. The matter was simpler when we were over across in Scotland."

"Oh, was it? Then you don't hold with the fellow who said the history of Scotland is one long riot of righteous against righteous."

"Now Angus, don't start."

"Ninian, you and the others can fill your children with funnels religion of ~~at~~ at home, as far as I'm concerned. But I won't do it for you here at school. If you want a kirk school, then you'd better sack me and find yourself a preacher."

Ninian by now looked more bleak than I'd ever seen him, which is saying a lot.

"Ay, well. That's your last word, then?"

"It's even the one after that."

"Angus, we will leave this where it was. I have to go and tell them I told you." The long beard moved on Ninian's chest as he shook his head at me. "They don't need to know how hard of hearing you can be."



And then there was Rob.

"You know you're demented to be spending yourself there in the

school. 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^I--"

"--^mYou'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's a solid mind at the school, what with all the Barclays that seem to be on their way to the place," ^{I said} Judith being notably along then toward their second child. 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 woollies 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."

"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. "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 ^{o = ^}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 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 anymore. 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
He can be the horse of us both, why not.
I put up half the price of him. 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. 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 ~~eight and~~ hearsay."

Isaac Reese, long-mustached and soft-eyed, had been issued the

right face for a horse trader, for he showed no twitch of anticipation when I stepped off the Dantley nag as if I was a plump hen seeking a chopping block. When I told him 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 arm out at a height considerably more lofty than the back of old Patch. about him high," holding his ~~hand at the height of my neck.~~ (aw)

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 ^hthis Isaac Reese was a Dane who alit in America as a penniless teamster ^h—likely about the time of Rob and me ourselves, for he looked to be only a few years older than us ^{soon}—and ^{now} had horse crews of his own at work on 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 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 shoulder the animal stood neck-high to me as prescribed by Isaac,~~ ^h a tall young gelding of a ^gstriking strong brown color odd in a horse, remindful of dark gingerbread. Maybe Rob and I were no great equinists, but at the wheel shop in Nethermuir we had seen enough horses pass through to fill a corner of Asia, and

designer: for this cattle brand, we need a small script with a long tail, so that at a glance it looks like the "scorpion" the cowboys nicknamed it--a creeping little profile of legs and tail.

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with a quick look at each other we agreed that here was ~~something~~ ^{a strikingly} ~~animal.~~ ^{animal.} handsome. Both of us stepped closer to admire the steed and began companionably rubbing his velvet neck while I asked 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 instant.

Both of us stepping with great promptness back to where we had begun, I gulped 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. Rob and I looked: yes, a large long-tailed script ~~m~~ ^m. Isaac's explication of the brand sounded to me as if the horse originated on a ranch which belonged to the Mikado. Later Lucas clarified that the ~~m~~ ^m 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, McAngus." But I knew from the way his head was cocked that he would be pleased to own half of this lofty creature.

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 horse?"

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Art
also on 666A

Tom--If you're dead+sure Angus's homestead/teaching life looks hectic, "divided," enough without this, I agree we can cut. (I took it out in an earlier draft, then reinstated it, but I think that was before the buying of Scorpion got fitted in here).

So, without meaning to--there was no Greenock dock at the mouth of the North Fork valley, no green-funneled emigrant ship hawsered in the clear ripples of the South Fork--I had become a divided citizen again. Between the homesteader families and their children. Between sheep enterprise with the pair of Barclays and my own homestead. Between my homestead and school. Sew a flounce of several more hours onto each day and maybe then I'd have had almost enough time for all those. As it was, I knew I was skimping everything else for the sake of the school, for my effort to be all the teacher I could, but I saw no other way.

Say it better, wanted no other way. A year is not forever, I told my other consciences; a year was little enough to give to a cause as infinite as a schoolroom. Zephyrs from the latitudes of learning must begin in aspiration, I quoted righteously back at old Carlyle's universe, and came down the wind each morning to the South Fork.

#1
(2) Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes, 4p
Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song in thy praise;
SONG My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream--
Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream. epim (1)

Some zephyrs took more of my coaxing breath than others.

4) Songtime in the schoolroom each week hinged on whatever Burns was in my mind just then and wherever Susan Duff's fine clear lilt led us. Neither premise was much my choice. But a thousand hymns had built Susan a voice, even I had to admit, and I'd found it was like pulling teeth to draw

Tom - If you're headstrong Angus's headstrong teaching life looks hectic, "divided",
enough without this, I agree we can cut. (I took it out in an earlier draft, then
reinstated it, but I think that was before the buying of Gordon got fitted in
here).

So without wanting to there was no greenback book at the bottom
of the North Fork valley, no green-funnelled exit and ship powered
in the clear riparian of the South Fork - I had become a divided
citizen again. Between the householder families and their
children. Between sheep enterprises with the pair of Barclays and my
own household. Between my household and school. Saw a flourish of
several more hours onto each day and maybe that I'd have had almost
enough time for all those. As it was, I knew I was extending
everything else for the sake of the school, for my effort to be all
the teacher I could, but I saw no other way.
Say it better, wanted no other way. A year is not forever, I
told my other conscience; a year was little enough to give to a
cause as infinite as a schoolroom. Repays from the families of
learning must begin in application. I quoted righteously back at old
Barclay's universe, and came down the wind each morning to the South

permission needed? No -
it's a Robt Burns tune.

1887

Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy
Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song
My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream
Flow gently, sweet Afton, display thy
Some repairs took more of my course than
Song that each week hurled on whatever Burns was in my mind just then
and wherever Susan Bull's fine clear lilt led us. Her lilt promise
was much my choice. For a thousand hymns had built Susan a voice,
even I had to admit, and I'd found it was like falling teeth to draw

(15)

song suggestions from my other pupils, even though the schoolyard often rang with one chant or another. Children are their own nation and they hold their anthems to themselves. Ritually, though, I tried to pry music out of them:

"You're like a school for the mute today. Now who'll tell, please, what we can sing next?"

"I know one, Mr. McCaskill," piped Davie Erskine, standing and swallowing a number of times. Here was surprise.

"Do you, Davie? Can we hear it now?"

Another salvo of swallows. Then out quavered:

(21) "I came down from Cimarron, alooking for a job ep
riding for the outfit they call the Jinglebob.
The boss told me ↘ Stranger, let's have ourselves some fun.
Come and throw your saddle on our horse called Zebra Dun. ↘
 (em) Oh, that old zebra dun,
that bucking son of a gun,
a-pitching his walleyed fit,
while upon him I did sit.
The punchers came and gathered, laughing up their sleeves
counting on their zebra bronc to do just what he pleased.
And when I hit the saddle, old Dunny quit this earth
went right up to try the sky, for all that he was worth. ep (m) 1

sing
set line
for line

Susan Duff was wrinkling her nose at Davy's minstrelsy. But as soon as I gave her a severe look, she joined in the chorus with Davie and me, and the rest of the children followed her. Onward

song suggestions from my other pupils, even though the schoolyard
often rang with one chant or another. Children are their own nation
and they hold their anthems to themselves. Actually, though, I

OK
OK to remove quotation mark? Above
at end or on next page, and
many of the other songs in book
could be considered "dialogue."
Best to keep style, no quotes
around songs, I think. See also
p. 295

Need permission for this
song? (continues on
p. 190) I wrote most of
it - the rest is an
old cowboy song.

tried to pry music out of them:
"You're like a school for the mice today,
please, what we can sing next?"
"I know one, Mr. McAskill," piped Davie
swallowing a number of times. "Here was a song
"Do you Davie? Can we hear it now?"
another salvo of swallows. Then our guest
I came down from Cleverton, standing
riding for the outfit they call the
The boss told me "stranger, let's
Come and throw your saddle on our
"Oh, that old rope dunn,
that bucking son of a gun,
a-pitching his walloped fit,
while you sit I did sit."
The punchers came and gathered, laughing up their sleeves
counting on their knees prone to do just what he pleased.
And when I hit the saddle, old Denny quit this earth
went right up to try the sky, for all that he was worth.
Susan Duff was writhing her nose at Davy's minstrelsy. But as
soon as I gave her a severe look, she joined in the chorus with
Davy and me, and the rest of the children followed her. (ward

(12)

(12)

Davie warbled with his verses:

Old Dunny pawed the moon and passed right by the sun
He chased some clouds a while then came down like a ton.
You could see the tops of mountains under our every jump
But I stayed tight upon his back just like the camel's
hump.

We bucked across the prairie, scattered gophers as we went
kicked the cook and stewpot right through the boss's tent.
But when the fray was over and Zebra done all he did
No doubt was left in this world: that outlaw I had rid.

The boss whooped hurrah! and threw the hat high off his
head.

He shook my hand until it ached and here is what he said:
If you can toss the lasso like you rode old Zebra Dun
You're the man I have looked for since the year of one.

"Davie Erskine, that was ¹/_{in} remarkable." It was more than that. There were days when Davie was so drifty he could scarcely remember how many fingers he had. "And where did you learn that tune?"

"From Mr. Fox and Mr. Mitchell." I had to expend a long moment to translate Mr. Fox and Mr. Mitchell: the riders Perry and Deaf Smith. "They took supper with us, when they were riding for strays. They said it's a song from Texas," Davie reported as if the place was blue heaven. "Texas is where I'm going when I grow up."

Song

set line
for-line

"That may be, Davie. But for now you're going to arithmetic. Davie and Susan and Daniel and Einar, your book is page 132. Karen, show the others where they're to read, please."

At the close of school that day, I stepped out as always to watch the children start for home, the walkers up the South Fork, the riders up the North Fork. The white horseload of little Findlaters, Susan Duff aboard her blood bay and Jimmy Spedderson on his black pony with the blaze face and Betsy Frew atop her old sorrel, Davie Erskine urging his roan with Rachel tight behind him. It was Davie I was seeing most of all. Seeing older Davies, although their names were Rob and Angus, hearing their own tunes of a far place.

#

A late afternoon near the end of the school year, Ninian Duff appeared in the schoolroom as I was readying to go home.

"Angus, I've been by to see Archie and Willy and we have made our decision on next year's school teacher."

"Have you now?" I'd been more and more aware that my time at the South Fork was drawing to a close, but it made me swallow to hear the fact. "I hope you've found a right one."

"Ay, we do too," he delivered right back. "It is you again. Temporary, of course, just for another year."

#

—

Three times more in the next three years, Ninian made that same ay-it-is-you-again call on me at the schoolhouse. ("Ninian," I at last inquired of him, "did you ever happen to have a look at the word temporary in a dictionary?") But ~~you~~^{the} know as well as I ~~do~~^{did} that the teaching job pleased me, and I was more than glad too to have its wage, because in that set of years spawned by the economic crash of 1893 the rewards of raising sheep were more aptly counted in small coins than in major currency. Even our prophet of profit Lucas looked perturbed, as if the sun had begun coming up in the wrong end of the sky. I don't know who among us in Scotch Heaven said in 1894 or 1895 or 1896 that despite the calendar, it still seemed to be 1893. But ever after, we spoke of this ^{hard} time as the years of '93. The years of '93 had their own bittersweet anthem, the joke about the sheepman who shipped some of his lambs to Chicago to test the market, received a telegram from the stockyard buyer which read SALE OF YOUR LAMBS YESTERDAY ONLY PAID HALF YOUR SHIPPING COSTS, I HAD TO PAY OTHER HALF FOR YOU, and telegraphed back to the buyer DO NOT WORRY, AM REIMBURSING YOU BY SENDING TWICE AS MANY LAMBS TODAY.

In truth, though, the years of '93 were most harsh not in their lamb and wool prices—money is only money—but in abrupt occurrences among our people of the North Fork. Events that might have happened anyway took on darker shadow from the weight of the times. We had an unforgettable lesson when Archie Findlater lost half his band of sheep to a May blizzard, ewes and lambs smothered and frozen by the hundred out on the distant foothills where he had put them a week

5th this has
caps. ext

too soon. We had a heartsickening ^{departure} ~~parting~~ when the Spedderson family simply vanished, abandoning their ramshackle homestead and leaving in the night without a word to any of us. My next several days I taugh with a lump in my throat, thinking of small Jimmy in that family that slunk from one piece of earth to the next.

And we had our first deaths. Gram Erskine, Donald's mother who had come with the Erskines and the Duffs on the ship to America when she was nearly eighty, died on a first fine green spring day. Odd, how the old so often last through the winter and then let go. Not a week after Ninian said the words over Gram Erskine, Rob and I had to be the ones to find Tom Mortensen. We were moving a bunch of ewes and week-old lambs over onto a slope of new grass just south of my place, and from there we noticed that, chilly day though it was, no smoke was rising ^{from} ~~fom~~ the chimney of the Mortensen cabin. When the two of us went down to see, a magpie was strutting along the ridgepole of the cabin, watching us cagily. Tom we found sprawled beside his chopping block, on his side, curled up as if napping. I knelt beside him, had a look, and threw up. Rob saw over my shoulder and did the same.

"Lord of ~~Mercy~~, if there is one," Rob choked out after we both retched ourselves dry and I managed to go to the house for a blanket to put over Tom. Rob grabbed up a stone and flung it clattering along the cabin roof toward the black and white bird, causing the magpie to swim away silently through the air. "I'll see what I can find here to make a coffin," he said. I said, "And I'll fetch Ninian."

At Ninian's I told him it looked as if Tom's heart had given out. He started to the house for his Bible, saying "I'll come in the wagon with Flora, she can help lay out the body."

"No. Don't bring Flora."

"Ay? Whyever not? Flora has seen a man dead before."

"Not like this one. Ninian, the magpies have been at his eyes."



Death had been to Nethermuir, too. I remember bringing out the letter, small taut handwriting on it I did not recognize, when I came back from a grocery trip into Gros Ventre, and Rob at the wagon ripping it open as quick as he saw that writing. The news was on his face, although he read all the letter before passing it to me with the words, "My father's dead." Vare Barclay in the woodyard of the wheelshop, my father and Lucas beside him; Vare who had given me work as his clerk--the letter was from Rob's sister Adair, telling that her mother could not bring herself to write yet, that the Barclay house on River Street had been sold for what little they could get, that she and her mother would live now with Rob's oldest brother, who was closing down the wheelwrighting but would try to stay in business by making wheelbarrows and suchlike small stuff. As much sadness as paper can absorb was in that letter.

Rob set his jaw to go into the house to tell Judith and then make the ride into town to tell Lucas. But first he put a hand on my shoulder. "We were right to come, Angus. Hard as times ever can get here, we're better off than them over across in Scotland." I thought of Rob's mother and young Adair, being ~~seen to in a~~

seen to in a household not their own. Being seen to. Not much of a prospect in life, not much at all. I had sheep waiting and school preparation waiting, but I stood and watched the erect American back of Rob as he took the news of his father's death into the house on Breed Butte. And watched again not half a year later, when word came that his mother too had passed away, dwindled away really. The strangest news there is, death across a distance; the person as alive as ever in your mind the intervening time until you hear, and then the other and final death, the one a funeral is only preliminary to, confusedly begins.

#

"By Jesus, the woollies do make a lovely sight," intoned Lucas. "If we could just sell them as scenery, ay?"

The time was September of 1896, a week before shipping the lambs, and Lucas and Rob and I were holding a Saturday war council on the west ridgeline of Breed Butte where we could meanwhile keep an eye on our grazing bands. By now Rob and Lucas's sheep had accumulated into two oversize bands, nearly twenty-five hundred altogether, as Rob kept back the ewe lambs each year since '93 rather than send them to market at pitiful prices. The band he and I owned in partnership I always insisted keeping at a regular thousand, as many as my hay would carry through a winter. So here they were in splendid gray scatter below us, six years of striving and effort, three and a half thousand prime ewes and a fat lamb beside each of them, and currently worth about as much as that many weeds.

"Next year is going to be a bit tight," Rob affirmed, which was getting to be an annual echo out of him.

"These tight years are starting to pinch harder than I'm comfortable with," he was informed by Lucas. Lucas's Jerusalem, Gros Ventre, was not prospering these days. Nowhere was prospering these days. I noticed how much older Lucas was looking, his beard gray now with patches of black. The years of '93 had put extra age on a lot of people in Montana. "So, Robbie lad, we have sheep galore. Now what in the pure holy hell are we going to do with them?"

"Prices can't stay down in the well forever," Rob maintained. "People still have to wear clothes, they still have to eat meat."

Lucas squinted at the neutral September sun. "But how soon can we count on them getting cold and hungry enough?"

"All right, all right, you've said the big question. But Lucas, we've got to hang onto as many sheep as we can until prices turn around. If we don't, we're throwing away these bands we've built up."

"Robbie," said Lucas levelly, "this year we've got to sell the ewe lambs along with the wether lambs. Even if we have to all but give the little buggers away with red bows on them, we've just got to ~~to~~"

"I'll meet you halfway on that, how about," Rob put in with a smile.

"Halfway to what, bankruptcy?" retorted Lucas in as sharp a tone as I had ever heard from him.

I saw Rob swallow, the only sign of how tense a moment this was for him. Then he brought it out: "Halfway on selling the lambs, Lucas. I'm all for selling the ewe lambs, just as you say. But this year let's keep the wether lambs."

"Keep the wethers?" Lucas stared astounded at Rob. "What in the name of Christ for? Are you going to make history by teaching the wethers"^L~~h~~—which was to say, the castrated male sheep whose sole role was mutton^A~~m~~—"how to sprout tits and have lambs?"

"We'd keep them for their wool," Rob uttered as rapidly as he could say it. "Their wool crop next summer. Lucas, man, if we keep the wethers until they're yearlings they'll shear almost ten pounds of wool apiece. And if wool prices come back up to what they were^L~~h~~"

Lucas shook his head to halt Rob and brought up a stub to run vigorously along his beard. "I never listen to a proposition beyond ~~the~~^{the} ~~its~~ second if."

"Lucas, it's worth a try. It's got to be." If conviction counted, Rob right then would have^{had}~~X~~ the three of us in bullion up to our elbows. "See now, the man McKinley is sure to be President, and that'll be like money in the bank for the sheep business." True, there was talk that McKinley could bring with him a tariff on Australian wool. If he did, prices for our fleeces then could climb right up. Pigs could fly if they had wings, too.

"Angus, what do you say to this new passion of Robbie's for wethers?"

"Maybe it's not entirely far^f~~f~~-fetched," I conceded, earning myself a mingled look from Rob.

Lucas still looked skeptical. "Here's the next thing you can enlighten me about, Robbie--how in holy hell do you handle that many sheep next summer? Tell me that, ay?" I knew it already was costing dear on them to hire herders for their two bands while Rob and I shared the herding of our one, and for them to add a third herder--

He was ready, our Rob. "I'll herd the wether band myself. Judith will have kittens about my doing it." And well she might, because with Rob herding in the mountains all summer she would need to manage everything else of the homestead, ~~not to mention three daughters.~~ "But she'll just have to have them, she married Breed Butte when she married me."

I regarded Rob for a waitful moment, Lucas glancing uncomfortably back and forth between us. Finally I said what was on my mind and Lucas's, even if it didn't seem to be within a hundred miles of Rob's:

"That leaves just one band of sheep unaccounted for."

"Yours and mine, of course," Rob spoke up brightly. "And there's where I have a proposition for you, Angus. If you'll take our band by yourself next summer, I'll give you half of my half."

I made sure: "On the wool and the lambs both?"

"Both."

Translated, half of Rob's half meant that I would receive three-fourths of any profit--wool and lambs both, the man had said it--on our band of sheep next year. And if wool went up as Rob was betting on...if lamb prices followed...Never listen to a proposition beyond the second if, ay, Lucas?

"Done," I snapped up Rob's offer which would make me money while he made money for himself and Lucas on the wethers. "That is, if Lucas agrees to your end of it."

Lucas studied the two of us, and then the three-about-to-be⁴ four bands of sheep below.

"There are so goddamn many ways to be a fool a man can't expect to avoid them all," he at last said, as much to the sheep as to us. "All right, all right, Robbie, keep the wethers. We'll see now if '97 is the year of years, ay?"

Let me give the very day of this. The twentieth of April, 1897. Here in the fourth springtime that I had watched arrive outside the windows of the South Fork school, I perched myself on the waterbucket stand at the rear of the classroom while Karen Peterson, small but great with the occasion, sat at my big desk reading to us from the book of stories.

"One more sun," sighed the king at evening, "and now another darkness. This has to stop. The days fly past us as if they were racing pigeons. We may as well be pebbles, for all the notice life takes of us or we of it. No one holds in mind the blind harper when he is gone. No one commemorates the girl who grains the geese. None of the deeds of our people leave the least tiny mark upon time. Where's the sense in running a kingdom if it all just piffles off into air? Tell me that, whoever can."

"If you will recall, sire--"

In the trance of Karen's reading, even Daniel Rozier squirmed

"Bony" I snapped up Rob's offer which would make no money while he made money for himself and Lucas on the waters. That is, if Lucas agrees to your end of it."

Lucas watched the two of us, and then the three-about-to-be-four bands of sheep below.

"There are no goddam many ways to be a fool a man can't expect to avoid them all," he at last said, as much to the sheep as to us.

"All right, all right, Robbie, keep the waters. We'll see how it '97 is the year of years, ay?"

Let me give the very day of this. The twentieth of April, 1897. Here in the fourth springtime that I had watched arrive outside the window of the South Fork school, I perched myself on the waterbucket stand at the rear of the classroom while Karen Peterson, small but great with the occasion, sat at my desk reading to us from the book of stories.

permission needed for this story, as well as confirmation on 199A + 199B? Nope, it's my very own.

199

"One more sun," alighted the king at evening darkness. This has to stop. The days fly past racing pigeons. We say as well as pebbles, takes of us or we of it. No one holds in mind he is gone. No one commemorates the girl who some of the beads of our people leave the least trace. Where's the sense in running a kingdom if it all just flies off into air? Tell me that, whoever can."

"If you will recall, sir—"

In the trance of Karen's reading, even Daniel Foster squinted

← p. 199A follows

199A

only ritually, and I took quiet pleasure in seeing those still rows of oh so familiar heads in front of me. I swear to heaven Susan Duff could have ruled France with the crown of her head. How such chestnut lustre and precise flow of tress had derived from old dustmop Ninian was far beyond me. But Davie Erskine's crownhair flopped in various directions and no definite one, and that seemed distinctly Erskinian. But then there was the bold round crown of Eddie Van Bebber, so that you'd have thought half the brains of the human race were packed under there, and Eddie Van Bebber was only barely bright enough to sneeze.

"Why is it that the moon keeps better track of itself than we manage to? And the seasons put us to shame, they always know which they are, who's been, whose turn now, who comes next, all that sort of thing. Why can't we have memories as nimble as those? Tell me that, whoever can."

"Sire, you will recall—"

Each of those South Fork and Scotch Heaven heads in front of me, a mind that I as teacher was to make literate and numerate. The impossibly mysterious process of patterning minds, though. How do we come to be the specimens we are? Tell me that, whoever can.

p. 199B follows 

199B

"Oblivion has been the rule too long. What this kingdom needs in the time to come is some, umm, some blivion. There, that's it, we need to become a more blivious people. Enough of this forgettery. But how to do it, it will take some doing. What's to be done? Tell me that, whoever can."

"If you will recall, sire, this morning you named a remembrancer."

"Eh? I did? I mean, I did. And what a good idea it was, too. For a change things are going to be fixed into mind around here. Send me this remembering fellow."

"Bring forth the king's remembrancer!"

In time to come, when Susan Duff had grown and herself become a teacher in Helena^I_M—I've always been sure that Helena is the better for it^I_M—I could wonder if I truly affected that in any meaningful way.

In time to come, during what the fable king would call blivion, I always remembered Daniel Rozier more vividly than Karen Peterson, and in no way under heaven was that fair.

In time to come, when Davie Erskine^I_M—

But that was waiting some hundreds of days to come, Davie's time. Memory still had everything to make between here and there.

#

#

p. 200 follows

"Oblivion has been the rule too long. What this kingdom needs
 in the time to come is some, um, some division. There, that's it,
 we need to become a more divided people. Enough of this
 forgettery. But how to do it, it will take some doing. What's to
 be done? Tell me that, whoever can."
 "If you will recall, sire, this morning you named a
 remembrance."

OK - good point.
 OK to transpose these paragraphs.
 When Karen Peterson has finished
 reading, it's more natural that
 Angus's next thought should be
 of Karen, not Susan Duff.
 The comment on Duff struck
 me as out of place.

1998

← p. 200 follows

— #

This was a full-fledged spring day in the Two Medicine country, breezy along with sunny, melt and mud along with greening grass and first flowers. The afternoon was better than my afterschool chore, which was to call on the replacement teacher newly arrived at Noon Creek. Old Miss Threlkeld, who held forth there since Cain and Abel, toward the end of winter had suffered palpitation of the heart, and about this sudden successor of hers I more than half knew what to expect and fully dreaded it.

"Ramsay is her name," Ninian Duff reported, "they are a new family to here, down from Canada. Man and wife and daughter. The Mrs. seems to be something of an old battle-axe, I do have to say." Coming from Ninian, that was credential for her indeed. "They bought the relinquishment up there to the west of Isaac Reese," he went on, "with a bit of help from Isaac's pocket from what I hear."

Given the basis that Isaac Reese headed the Noon Creek board as Ninian did ours, I couldn't let pass the opportunity to declare: "Now there's the way for a school board to operate."

Ninian broadly ignored that and stated, "When you find a spare moment, Angus, you would do well to stop by the schoolhouse over across there and offer hello. Our schools are neighbors and it would not hurt us to be."

"Maybe not severely," I had to agree, and now Scorpion and I were descending from the divide between our valleys to Noon Creek, a prairie stream twice as twisty as the North Fork ever thought of being. Scorpion was pointed to the country where I bought him^T_m the

Av-
 Delete "full-pledged?" Was
 in your list of corrections
 without it, so I'm not sure
 if you wanted it in or not.
 my error

200

This was a full-pledged spring day in the
 breeze along with sunny, mild and not along
 first flowers. The afternoon was better than
 which was to call on the replacement teacher
 Greek. Old Miss Threlkeld, who held forth
 April, toward the end of winter had suffered precipitation of the
 heart, and about this sudden successor of hers I was than half knew
 what to expect and fully dreaded it.
 "Kammy is her name," Miss Bell reported, "they are a new
 family to here, down from Canada. Her and wife and daughter. The
 Mrs. seems to be something of an old battle-axe, I do have to say."
 Coming from Miss Bell, that was credential for her indeed. "They
 bought the replacement up there to the west of Isaac Reese," he
 went on, "with a bit of help from Isaac's pocket from what I hear."
 Given the facts that Isaac Reese headed the Moon Creek board as
 Miss Bell said ours, I couldn't let pass the opportunity to declare:
 "Now there's the way for a school board to operate."
 Miss Bell broadly ignored that and stated, "When you find a spare
 moment, Angus, you would do well to stop by the schoolhouse over
 across there and offer help. Our schools are neighbors and it
 would not hurt us to be."
 "Maybe not severely," I had to agree, and now Scorpion and I
 were descending from the divide between our valleys to Moon Creek, a
 prairie stream twice as twisty as the North Fork ever thought of
 being. Scorpion was pointed to the country where I bought his—