

Wanged by Rae-Ellen
Nov & Dec. '85

Rae-Ellen: please do this title page
for me after the final page of
manuscript on this disc.

Dancing at the Rascal Fair

by Ivan Doig

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

--a ^{traditional} Nethermuir air

SCOTLAND AND HELENA

Harbour Mishap at Greenock. Yesterday morning, while a horse and cart were conveying 6 creels of sugar on the quay at Albert Harbour, one of the wheels of the cart caught a mooring stanchion, which caused horse and cart to fall over into the water. The poor animal made desperate efforts to free itself, and was successful in casting off all the harness except the collar, which, being attached to the laden cart, held its head under water until it was drowned. The dead animal and the cart were raised during the forenoon by the Greenock harbour diver.

October 23
--Glasgow Caledonian, ~~September 2~~, 1889

1 ~~small
gaw~~

To say the truth, it was not how I expected--stepping off toward America past a drowned horse.

You would remember too well, Rob, that I already was of more than one mind about the Atlantic Ocean. And here we were, not even within eyeshot of the big water, not even out onto the slow-flowing River Clyde yet, and here this heap of creature that would make, what, four times the sum total of Rob Barclay and Angus McCaskill, here on the Greenock dock it lay gawping up at us with a wild dead

~~gawp~~

eye. Strider of the earth not an hour ago, wet rack of carcass
 now. ^{*an affidavit*} A deposition such as that says a lot to a man who cannot
 swim. Or at least who never has.

But depend on you, Rob. In those times you could make light of
^{*whatever*} ~~any cloud~~. There was that red shine on you, your cheeks and jawline
 always as ruddy and smooth as if you'd just put down the shaving
 razor, and on this largest day of our lives you were aglow like a
 hot coal. You cocked your head in that way of yours and ~~out came:~~
^{*came right out with:*}

"See now, Angus. So long as we don't let them hitch a cart to
 us we'll be safe as saints."

"A good enough theory," I had to agree, "as far as it goes."

Then came commotion, the grieved sugar carter bursting out "Oh
 Ginger dear, why did ye have to tumble?" and dockmen shouting around
 him and a blinkered team of horses being driven up at full clatter
 to drag their dead ilk away. Hastily some whiskered geezer from the
 Cumbræ Steamship Line was waving the rest of us along: "You're for
 the ~~Stewart~~ James Watt? Straight on, the queue there, New York at its other
 end, step to it please, thank you." Less calamitous prospect than
 poor old horsemeat Ginger's watery example, at least, and so we
 stepped onto line with our fellow steerage ticket-holders beside the
 bulk of the steamship. Our fellow Scotland-leavers, half a thousand
 at once, each and every of us now staring sidelong at this black
 iron island that was to carry us to America. Over our heads
 deckhands were going through the motions of some groaning chore I
 couldn't begin to figure.

*Instruction
 Information
 Evidence*

whatever

*your swimming
 or not doesn't
 doesn't matter
 swim or no
 for all doesn't count
 too much?*

[Large scribbled signature]

"Now if this was fresh water, like," sang out one above the dirge of their task, "I'd wager ye a guinea this harbor'd right now taste sweet as treacle."

"But it's not, ye bleedin' daftie. The bleedin' Clyde is tide salt from the Tail of the Bank the full way up to bleedin' Glasgow, now en't it? And what to hell kind of concoction are ye going to get when ye mix sugar and salt?"

"Ask our bedamned cook," put in a third. "All the time he must be doing it, else why's our mess taste like what the China dog walked away from?" As emphasis he spat a throat gob over the side into the harbor water, and my stomach joined my heart in ^{trepidation} ~~doubt~~ about this worldcrossing journey of ours. A week and a half of the Atlantic and dubious food besides?

That steerage queue seemed eternal. Seagulls mocked the line of us with sharp cries. What was I, or my generation/that I should get such exaltation? A mist verging on rain dimmed out the Renfrewshire hills beyond Greenock's uncountable roofs. Even you ~~the~~ at least little bit appeared ill at ease with this wait, Rob, squinting now and again at the steamship as if calculating how it was that so much metal was able to float. I started to say aloud that if Noah had taken this much time to load the ark only the giraffes would have lasted through the deluge, but that was remindful again of the waiting water and Ginger's ^{final} experience with it.

Awful, what a person lets himself do to himself. There I stood on that Greenock dock, wanting more than anything else in this world

not to put foot aboard that iron ship; and wanting just as desperately to do so and do it that instant. Oh, I knew what was wrestling in me. We had a book--Crofutt's Trans-Atlantic Emigrants' Guide--and my malady was right there in it, ^{page one, was performed} ~~Crofutt served as~~ our tutor that a shilling was worth 24 American cents, and how much postal stamps cost there in the big country, and that when it came midnight in old Scotland the clocks of Montana were striking just five of the afternoon. Crofutt told this, too, I can recite it yet today: Do not emigrate in a fever, but consider the question in each and every aspect. The mother country must be left behind, the family ties, all old associations, broken. Be sure that you look at the dark side of the picture: the broad Atlantic, the dusty ride to the great West, ^{of America} the scorching sun, the cold winter--coldest ever you experienced!--and the hard work of the homestead. But if you finally, with your eyes open, decide to emigrate, do it nobly. Do it with no divided heart.

Right advice, to keep your heart in one pure piece. But easier seen than followed. ~~[At least in my case.]~~

I knew I oughtn't, but I turned and looked up the river, east up the great broad trough of the Clyde. East into yesterday, may as well say. For it ^{had been} ~~was~~ only the day before ^{when} ~~that~~ the pair of us ^{were} ~~had~~ ^{been} hurled almost all the way across Scotland by train from ^{clamorsome} Nethermuir into Glasgow. A further train across the Clyde bridge and westward alongside mile upon brown mile of the river's tideflats and their smell. Then here came Greenock to us, ~~James~~ Watt's city

of steam, all its shipyards and docks, the chimney stalks of its sugar refineries, its sharp church spires and high, high above all its municipal tower of crisp new stone the color of pie crust. A more going town than our old Nethermuir could be in ten centuries, it took just that first look to tell us of Greenock. For night we bedded where the emigration agent had advised, the Model Lodging Huse, which may have been a model of something but lodging wasn't it; then ~~this morning~~ Greenock true to reputation awoke into rain, but the majority of Scotsmen have seen rain before and so off we set to ask our way to the Cumbrae Line's moorage, to the James Watt, and to be told in a Clydeside gabble it took the both of us to understand:

"The Jemmy, lads? Ye wan' tae gi doon tae Pa'rick ~~Street~~ ^{Straight}."

And there at the foot of Patrick Street was the Albert Harbor, there was the green-funneled steam swimmer to America, there were the two of us.

For I can't but think of you then, Rob. The Rob you were. In all that we said to each other, before and thereafter, this step from our old land to our new was flat fact with you. The Atlantic Ocean and the continent America all the way across to Montana ~~were~~ ^{stood as} but the width of a cottage threshold, so far as you ever let on. No second guessing, never a might-have-done-instead out of you. A silence too total, I realize at last. You had family and a trade to scan back at and I had none of either, yet I was the one giving puppy looks up the Clyde to yesterday. Man, man, what I would give

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Robert Burns Barclay, single ^{man} ~~man~~ apprentice wheelwright, of Nethermuir, Forfarshire. That was Rob on the passenger list of the James Watt, 23rd ~~1st~~ ^{October} ~~of September~~ of the year 1889. Angus Alexander McCaskill, single ^{man} ~~man~~ wheelworks clerk, of Nethermuir, Forfarshire,

myself. Both of us nineteen and green as the cheese of the moon and trying our double dammedest not to show it.

Not that we were alone in tint. Our steerage compartment within the Jemmy proved to be the forward one for single men--immediately the report went around that the single women were quartered farthest aft, and between them and ^{stood} us the married couples and a terrific populace of children--and while not everyone was young our shipmates were all as new as we to voyaging. Berths loomed in unfamiliar tiers with a passageway not a yard wide between them, and the twenty of us bumped and backed and swirled like a herd of colts trying to establish ourselves.

I am tall, and the inside of the ship was not. Twice in those first minutes of steerage life I cracked myself.

"You'll be hammered down to my size by the time we reach the other shore," Rob came out with, and those around us hoohawed. I grinned the matter away but I did not much like it, either the prospect of a hunched journey to America or the public comment about my altitude. But that was Rob for you.

Less did I like the location of Steerage Number One. So far below the open deck, down steep stair after stair into the iron gut of the ship. When you thought about it, and I did, this was like being a kitten in the bottom of a rainbarrel.

"Here I am, ^{mates} ~~lads~~," recited a fresh voice, that of the steward. "Your shepherd while at sea. First business is three shillings from you each. That's for mattress to keep you company and tin to eat

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

showed any
sign of
being

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

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

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

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

"I heard."

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

"You'd have toddled off there when you were the age of Adair, would you?" Adair was Rob's small sister, his favorite in the family but just a child yet, so much younger than the rest of the Barclay brood that they fondly teased her for being an afterthought.

"Now there's another thing to wish: I still think at least she ought've come with us. Just look around you, this ship is thick with children no older than Adair. She'd positively be thriving here."

He had a point there. Something about the Barclays was that they all behaved as if whatever was on their minds ^{made} ~~was~~ the agenda for the world, and I could just see Adair promptly governing these other children into a deck game of hopscotch. She was a little replica of Rob or at least close enough; tease her as I did by greeting her in gruff hard-man style Hello you, Dair Barclay and she always gave me right back, snappy as beans, Hello yourself, Angus McCaskill. But still. ^{Rob,}

(no 4) "As your mother pointed out, ^{Rob,} the pair of us would be strange parents for a twelve-year-old girl."

"All parents are a strange commodity, haven't you ever noticed--Angus, forgive that. My tongue got ahead of itself."

"It went right past my ears. What about a walk ^{around} ~~of~~ deck, shall we?"

At high tide on the Clyde, when the steam tug arrived to tow this behemoth ship of ours to deep water at the Tail of the Bank, Rob turned to me and lifted his cap in mock congratulation.

"We're halfway there," he assured me.

"Only the wet part left, you're telling me."

He gave my shoulder a push. "Angus, about this old water. You'll grow used to it, man. Half of Scotland has made this voyage by now."

I started to retort that I seemed to belong to the half without webfeet, but I was touched by this, Rob's concern for me, even though I'd hoped I was keeping my Atlantic apprehensions within me. The way they resounded around in there--Are we both for it? Both--I suppose it was a wonder the entire ship wasn't hearing them like the thump of a drum.

We watched Greenock vanish behind the turn of the Firth. "Poor old River Carrou," from Rob now. "This Clyde makes it look like a piddle, doesn't it?"

Littler than that, actually. We from an eastern town such as

with its sea-seeking stream Carrou Nethermuir were born thinking that the fishing ports of our counties of Fife and Forfar and Kincardine and Aberdeen were the rightful entrances to the ocean, so Rob and I came with the natural attitude that these emigration steamships of Greenock and Glasgow pittered out the back door of Scotland. The Firth of Clyde was showing us Everywhere around us the water was wider than wide, otherwise. ~~The water was wide everywhere around us,~~ arms of it delving abundant reached constantly between the hills of the shore, islands were stood here and there on the great grey breadth as casually as past the last of the beetle-busy packet boats, haycocks. Out and out the Jemmy steamed, and still the Clyde carved went kept on carving hilly shores. Ayr. Argyll. Arran. This west of Scotland perhaps all sounded like gargle, but it was as handsome ^a coast as could be fashioned. Heath and cliff and one entire ragged horizon of the Highlands mountains for emphasis, shore-tucked villages and the green exactness of fields for trim.

And each last inch of it everlastingly owned by those higher than Angus McCaskill and Rob Barclay, I reminded myself. Those whose names began with Lord. Those who had the banks and mills. Those white-handed men of money. Those who watched from their fat fields as the emigrant ships steamed past with us.

Daylight lingered along with the shore. Rain came and went at edges of the Firth. You saw a far summit, its rock brows, and then didn't.

"Just damp underfoot, try to think of the old ocean as," Rob put in on me.

"I am trying, man. And I'd still just as soon walk to America."

"Or we could ride on each other's shoulders, what if?" Rob

Wider than wide
insert to
"Everywhere..."
reaching

past packet boats

steady packet
faster

swept on. "No, Angus, this steam yacht is the way to travel." Like the duke of dukes, he patted the rail of the Jemmy and proclaimed: "See now, this is proper style for going to America and Montana."

America. Montana. Those words with their ends open. Those words that were ever in the four corners of my mind, and I am sure Rob's too, all the minutes since we had left Nethermuir. I can hear that set of words yet, through all the time since, the pronouncement Rob gave them that day. America and Montana echoed and echoed in us, right through my mistrust of journeying on water, past Rob's breeze of manner, into the tunnels of our bones. For with the Jemmy underway out the Firth of Clyde we now were threading our lives into the open beckon of those words. Like Lucas Barclay before us, we were on our way to be Americans. To be--what did they call themselves in that far place Montana? Montanese? Montanians? Montaniards? Whatever that denomination was, the two of us were going to be its next members, with full feathers on.

My first night in steerage I learned that I was not born to sleep on water. The berth was both too short and too narrow for me, so that I had to kink myself radically; curl up and wedge in at the same time. Try that if you ever want to be cruel to yourself.

~~same time.~~ Too, steerage air was thick and unpleasant, like breathing through dirty flannel. Meanwhile Rob, who could snooze the thunders of through Judgment Day, was composing a nose song below me. But discomfort and bad air and snores were the least of my wakefulness, for in that first grief of a night--oh yes, and the Jemmy letting forth an iron groan whenever its bow met the waves some certain

~~Scotland~~
leaving

Try that
sometime
if you
can

when
you
are
cruel
to
yourself
thunders
of
day

way—my mind rang with everything I did not want to think of.

Casting myself from Nethermuir. The drowned horse Ginger. Walls of this moaning ship, so close. The coffin confines of my bedamned ~~ocean on all sides including abovehead.~~ ^{ocean on all sides including abovehead.} berth. The ocean, the ~~moaning ocean.~~ ^{Dark Neptune's labyrinthine lanes/} 'Neath these savage liquid plains.

~~berth.~~ I rose in heart-rattling startlement once when I accidentally touched one hand against the other and felt moisture there. My own sweat.

I still maintain that if the Atlantic hadn't been made of water, I could have gone to America at a steady trot. But it seems to be the case that fear can sniff the bothering places in us. Mine had been in ~~the~~ McCaskills for ~~more than~~ ^{some} eighty years now. The bones of the story are this.

^{no 41} With me on this voyage, into this unquiet night, ~~had~~ ^{came} the fact that I was the first McCaskill since my father's grandfather to go upon the sea. His voyage was only eleven miles, but the most famous eleven miles in Great Britain of the time and he voyaged them over and over and over again. He was one of the stone masons of Arbroath who worked with the great engineer Robert Stevenson to build the Bell Rock lighthouse. On the clearest of days I have seen that lighthouse from the Arbroath harbor and have heard the story of the years of workships and cranes and winches and giant blocks of granite and sandstone, and to this moment I don't know how they could do what was done out there, build a hundred-foot tower of stone on a reef that vanished deep beneath every high tide. But there it winks at the world even today, impossible Bell Rock, standing in the North Sea announcing the Firth of Forth and Edinburgh beyond, and my great-grandfather's toolmarks are on its

P12A follows

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12 A

we who are not a sea people, ^
stones. The generations of us dangle from ~~my great-grandfather and~~ ^
~~his achievement, all McCaskills deriving since from~~ that one bold ^
man who went to perform stonework in the worst of the ocean around
Scotland. ~~Like seeing a hoisted load hanging for eighty years from~~ ^

~~a single stout rope, when you looked at it that way.~~ Ever since
 him, Alexander has been the first or second name of a McCaskill in
 each of ^{those} ~~our~~ generations. Ever since him, we have possessed a saga
 to measure ourselves against. I lay there in the sea-plowing Jemmy
 trying to think myself back into that other manhood, to leave
 myself, damp sackful of apprehension that I was, and to feel from
 the skin inward what it would have been like to be Alexander
 McCaskill of Bell Rock ^{those} ~~eighty~~ years ago. My family's one scrap of
 our historic man was his ticket of freedom from the press gangs
 which otherwise would have swept him into the navy to fight
 Napoleon, and I had it with me here now, carefully pasted inside the
 back cover of Croft: Alexander Angus McCaskill, seaman in the
 service of the Honourable Commissioners of Northern Lighthouses,
 aged 26 years, 6 feet high, red of hair, light complexion, marked
 with the smallpox. (signed) Robert Stevenson, Engineer for Northern
 Lights, 7 August 1807. That height and hair and complexion I have,
 although thankfully not the pocked face. The same set of names, ^{too,}
 just swapped about. But employ my imagination to its utmost, I
 could not see myself doing what Alexander Angus McCaskill did in his
 Bell Rock years, live shipboard for months at a time, travel ^{an extent of untrustable water} each
 day to set Arbroath stone onto reef stone. Feed me first to the
 flaming hounds of Hell. The one family story my father would ever
 tell, and it took brooding and drink to unloose even that one,
 was of when Alexander McCaskill and the other stonemen had just
 begun to excavate the foundation for the lighthouse. As the tide
 began to seep in, they concluded work, gathered their tools and

small caps

sauntered across the reef to meet their boats. Stevenson, superintending from the reef's highest ledge, stood peering across the hazed water. I knew there was wrong as soon as I saw Mr. Stevenson, my great-grandfather's words. He was pale as the cat's milk. One of the boats from the attending ship had been for some reason delayed, was nowhere in sight. On Bell Rock just then were and that would be highly dangerous crowding at best. thirty-two men; boats enough to crowd aboard only twenty-four. The coming flood tide would bury Bell Rock beneath twelve feet of water. Stevenson the great engineer of the Northern Lights was going to need to calculate something miraculous. Meantime, other calculation was occurring. The pickmen--they were a rough lot anyway--flocked right around one of the boats, their implements casually and dangerously at hand. The forgersmen silently counted their own number, the stonemen theirs. Nothing was said, but every man on Bell Rock steadfastly watched Stevenson prowl on his lookout ledge. The wind freshened, helping the tide to rise. The stone mason Alexander McCaskill saw Robert Stevenson turn to speak to the men. This I'll swear to, his mouth moved just as if he was saying, but no words came out. Stevenson dropped to a rockpool, cupped his hands to bring moisture to his fear-dried mouth. As he lapped, there was a shout. A boat! There, a boat! Out of the haze emerged a pilot boat bringing the week's mail, and rescue. We almost ran out onto the water to hail that boat, you can believe.

You ask was I afraid, Alexander the Second? My father's voice became a strange sad thunder when he told of his grandfather's reply to him. Every hour of

P. 14 A follows →

✓
14A

those three years, and most of the minutes. I saw Jimmy Scott drown, when
the boat next to ours went over. He was eighteen years old. I was afraid
enough. ^{yes.} But the job was there at Bell Rock. It was to be done.

The past. The past past, so to speak, back there beyond
myself. What can we ever truly know of it, how can we account for

what it passes to us, what it withholds? For all I knew, my
 great-grandfather was ^{also} afraid of the dark or whimpered at the sight
 of a spider, but any such perturbances were whited out by time.
 Only his ^{brave Bell Rock} ~~fearless~~ accomplishment was left to sight. And here I lay,
 sweating steerage sweat, with a ^{dread} ~~fear~~ of water that had no ^{immediate} ~~logic~~, no
 personal ~~sensible~~ beginning, and evidently no end. It simply was in me, like
 a ^{underground river of} life's blood. How does it happen that we can come to this earth
 with unchosen hazards already in us? The medaled soldier cried,
here's battle's truth! / Fear ached in me like a rotten tooth. Ahead
 there, I hoped far ahead, when I myself became the past--would the
 weak places in me ^{become} ~~be~~ hidden too? There was a ^{universe} ~~world~~ of things I
 wanted to do before any marriage.

if indeed there ever was any marriage for me, for there was also in my
 McCaskill past a surplus of reasons against that.

^{no 91} But say I did become husband,
 father, all else, of Montana McCaskills. What were they going to
 comprehend of me as their firstcomer? Not this sweated night, not
 my mental staggers. Eventually all that could be know^m of Angus
 Alexander McCaskill was that I did manage to cross the Atlantic
 Ocean, ^{if} I managed to cross it.

This was not much solace in my midnight cage of steerage, but
 some. Any helped.

Through the night and most of the next day the Jemmy steamed
 its way along the coast of Ireland to Queenstown, where our Irish
 would come aboard.

^{no 9} To say the truth, I was monumentally aware of Queenstown as the final chance

^{outmost} where I could still
 for me to be not aboard; the ~~limb-end side for me to~~ say to Rob, no, I
am sorry, I have tried but water and I do not work together. But so
 far I had managed not to let my tongue say that. It bolstered me that
 Rob and I had been up from ^{Number One} ~~steerage~~ for hours,

~~Naturally, Rob and I were~~ on deck to see
 whatever there was, blinking ^{now} against the sun and its sparkle on the
 blue Queenstown harbor. And so we saw the boats come. A fleet of
 small ones, each catching the wind with a gray old lugsail. They
 were steering direct to us and as the fleet neared we could make

out that there was one man in each boat. No. One woman in each boat.

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

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

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

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

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

I suppose from the time we could walk Rob and I had never missed a rascal fair together--that day of fest when Nethermuir farmers and ~~workers~~ ^{bargain out} farm servants met to ~~negotiate~~ each season's wages and terms and have a drink or so in the process.

Peddlers, traveling musicians,

the Highland dancer known as Fergus the Dervish whose cry of hi yuhh! could be heard a mile, onlooking townfolk, hubbub, and

The two of us like minnows in that sea of faircomers, aswim in the sounds of the ritual of hard-bargaining versus hard-to-bargain. I see you wear the green sprig in your hat. --Are you looking for the right work, laddie? --Aye, I am. --And would you like to come to me? I've a place not a mile from here, as fine a field as ^{ever} you'll to harvest see. --Maybe so, maybe no. I'll be paid for home-going day, will

I? And now Rob had it as right as ~~the~~ ^a dexterous widow. With these knots of dicking and spontaneous commotion and general air of mischief-about-to-be, this shipboard bazaar did seem more than anything like that mix of holiday and sharp practice we'd rambled through in old Nethermuir. Remembered joy is twice sweet.

Rob's face definitely said so, for he had that bright unbeatable look on him. In a mood like this he'd have called out "Fire!" in a gunshop just to see what might happen.

^{Now the} ~~the~~ ^{the deck} two of us surged along with everybody else of the Jemmy, soaking in as much of the surprise jubilee as we could.

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

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

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

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

"Madam, you're asking twice the price of apples ashore!" expostulated a father with his wife and eager-eyed children in a covey around him.

"But more cheap, mister man, than the ocean's price of them."

"I tell ye," a deck hand adjudged to another, "I still fancy the lass there with the big cheeses"--

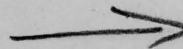
The other deck hand guffawed. "Cheese, do ye call those?"

--"and ye know I en't one that fancies just any old body."

"No, just anybody born of woman."

"Muuht'n, muuht'n," bleated the sheep leg seller as we jostled past. # "Green of the sod of Ireland!" the shamrock merchant advertised to us. ^

So this was what the world was like. I'd had no idea. ^



Then we were by a woman who was calling out nothing. She simply stood silent, both hands in front of her, a green ball displayed in each.

Rob passed on with the others of our throng, I suppose assuming as I first did that she was offering the balls as playthings. But ~~children were~~ there were plentiful children among this deck crowd and neither they nor their parents were stopping by the silent woman either.

Curiosity is never out of season with me. I turned and went back for a close look. Her green offerings were not balls, they were limes.

Even with me there in front of her, the woman said nothing. I had to ask. "Your produce doesn't need words, missus?"

"I'm not to name the ill they're for, young mister, else I can't come onto your fine ship."

Any schoolboy knew the old tale of why Royal Navy sailors came to be called limies, and so I ~~smiled~~ ^{grinned}, but I had to let Madam Irish know I was not so easily gulled. "It takes somewhat longer than a voyage of nine days to come down with scurvy, missus."

"Tisn't the scurvy."

"What, then?"

"Your mouth can ask your stomach when the two of them meet, out there on the herring pond."

Seasickness. Among my Atlantic thoughts was whether the crossing would turn me as green as the rind of these limes. "How can this fruit of yours ward off that, then?"

"Not ward it off, no. There's no warding to that. You only get it, like death. These fruit are for after. They clean your mouth, young mister. Scour the sick away."

"Truth?"

She nodded. But then, what marketeer wouldn't.

It must have been the Irish sun. I fished for my coins. "How much for a pocketful?"

Doubtful transaction done, I made my way along the deck to where Rob was. He and the majority of the other single men from our compartment had ended up here around the two youngest Irishwomen, plainly sisters, who were selling ribbons and small mirrors. The flirting seemed to be for free.

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

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

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

"Confess," I urged him. "You'd give your ears for a smile from

either of these maidens. I'm only here to see how romance is done."

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

After Queenstown and with only ocean ahead for a week and a day, my second seagoing night had even less sleep in it than my first. Resolutely telling myself there ^{was} ~~is~~ no back door to ^{this} ~~a~~ ^{now} ship, I lay crammed into that stifling berth trying to put my mind anywhere--multiplication, ~~geography~~, poetry--other than Steerage Number One. But it was water that was solidly on my mind, under my mind, all around, the water ^{named} ~~called~~ Atlantic. And what night journey of thoughts could ever cope with that?

~~What came back to me again~~

I found I could spend longest thoughts on, between periodic groans from the Jemmy that required me to worry whether its iron was holding,

was Nethermuir. Old grayrock town Nethermuir, with its High Street wandering down the hill the way a drowsy cow would, to come to the River Carrou. Be what it may, a fence, a house, a street, the accusing spire of a church, we Scots fashioned it of stone, and from below along River Street Nethermuir as a town looked as though it had been chiseled out complete rather than erected. Each of the thousand mornings that I did my route to open the wheelwright shop, Nethermuir was as asleep as its stones. In the dark---out went the streetlights at midnight; a Scottish town sees no need to illumine its empty hours--in the dark before each

dawn I walked up River Street past the clock tower of the linen mill and the silent frontages of the dye works and the paper mill and other ~~places~~ ^{shrines} of work. Was that the same me back there, trudging on stone past stone beneath stone until my hand at last found the oaken door of the 'wright shop? Climbing the stair to the office in the nail loft and coaxing a fire in the small stove and opening the ledger, pen between my teeth to have both hands free, to begin on say their daystarting greetings the accounts? Hearing the workmen arrive, those with farthest to come arriving first for wasn't that always the way? Was that truly

me, identical with this steerage creature listening to a steamship groan out greetings to disaster?

no 41 The same set of bones called Angus McCaskill, anyway. And not coincidentally the McCaskill second set.

the Barclays and their wheelwright shop had harbored.

To see you here is to lay eyes on your father again, Angus, Rob's father John Barclay told me at least once a week. A natural pleasantry, but John Barclay and I equally knew it was nowhere near true.

When you saw my father ^{there} over his forge in an earlier time, that 'wright shop you were viewing the keenest of wheelsmiths; the master in that part of Scotland at

making ninety pounds of tire-iron snugly ~~but~~ band itself onto

~~making ninety pounds of tire-iron deftly circumscribe~~ being a wagon

wheel. Skill will ask its price, though. The years of anvil din took nearly all of my father's hearing, and to attract his attention as he stood there working a piece of iron you would have had to toss a wood chip against his shirt.)

Do that and up he would glance from his iron, little less distant when

he was aware of you than when he wasn't. I never made that toss of contact with him, when sent by my mother on errand to the 'wright shop, without wondering what it would take to mend his life. For my father had gone deaf deeper than his ears.

I ~~came~~^{am} from a house of storm. My parents, Alex and Kate McCaskill, by the middle of their marriage were baffled and wounded combatants. I was their child who lived. Of four. Christie, Jack, and Frank who

was already apprenticing with my father at the Barclay 'wright shop--in a single week the three of them died of cholera. I ^{only} barely remember them, for I was several years the youngest--like Rob's favorite ⁹ sister Adair in the Barclay family an "afterthought" child; I have ^{contemplated} wondered since whether

parents in those times instinctively would have a late last child as a kind of insurance--but I recall in all clarity my mother taking me to the farm cottage of a widow friend of hers when the killing illness began to find Nethermuir. When my mother came for me six weeks later she had aged twice that many years, and our family had become ^a ~~the~~ husk ^{the epidemic} ~~death~~ left behind. From then on

And at home my father lived--how best to say this?--he lived alongside my mother and me rather than with us.

Sealed into himself, like someone of another country who happened to be traveling beside us. Sealed into his notion ^{as I grew,} that I ought to follow into his smithy trade. Oh, there was war in the house about that. My father could not see why I ^{ought to} ~~should~~ do anything but as my brother Frank had; ^{equally} apprentice myself into hammer work as he had, my mother was just as set that I should do anything but. His deafness made their arguments over me a roaring time. The teacups rattled when they

went at it. The school-leaving age was thirteen, so I don't know how things would have gone had not my father died when I was twelve. My mother ^{at once} took work as a spinner in the linen mill and enrolled me with the 'venture schoolteacher Adam Willox. Then when I was sixteen, my mother followed my father into death. She was surprised by it, going the same way he had; a stroke that toppled her in the evening and took her in the early morning.

With both of them gone, work was all the family I had. Rob's father John Barclay put me on as clerk ^{in the 'wright shop} in the mornings, Adam Willox made me his pupil-teacher in the afternoons. Two occupations, two slim wages, and I was glad enough to have them, anything. Then came America fever, Rob and I catching it from each other.

when every tomorrow of our Nethermuir lives began to look the same to us. The power of ^{that} the notion of homesteading in America, of land, lives, that We never had known anything like it in our young selves. ^{black} would be all our own. America. Montana. This ship to them. This iron groaner of a ship that--

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

I held myself dead-still to be sure.

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

I heard Rob wake with a sleepy "What?" just before full tumult
set in. The Jemmy stumbled ^{now} against every wave, conked its iron beak
onto the ocean, rose to tumble again. Barrels, trunks, tins,

✓
 whatever was movable flew from side to side, and we poor human things clung in our berths to keep from flying too. What was out there? My blood sped as I tried to imagine the boiling oceanic weather which could turn a steamship into an iron cask. Cloudcaps darker than night itself. High lumpy waves, foaming as they came. Wind straining to lift the sea into the air with it, and rain a downward flood determined to drown the wind. *to give a 1st 1st*

mod In an awful way, the storm tranced a person. At least thirty times in three minutes I retraced in my mind every stairstep from deck down into Steerage Number One; which was to say down into the basement of the titanic Atlantic, down into the country where humans are hash for fish. *< insert "what if" >*

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

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

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

P 22B belows →

into his berth. ⁹ Now the ship ^{was} ~~grunted~~ ^{ing} and ~~creaked~~ ^{ing} constantly--you
 could positively feel the Jemmy ^{exerting} ~~trying~~ to flee this maelstrom--and
 these grindstone sounds of its ^{effort} ~~exertions~~ drew screams from women and
 children in the midship compartments, and yes, from more than a few
 men as well, whenever the vessel rolled far over. Someone among the
 officers had a voice the size of a cannon shot and even all the way
 down where we were could be heard his blasts of "BOS'N!" and "ALL
 HANDS!" Those did not improve a nonswimmer's frame of mind, either.

But nothing to do but hold onto the side of the berth, hold myself as level as possible on a crooked ocean. ⁴Nothing, that is, until somebody made the first retching sound.

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

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

I heaved up, Rob heaved up, every steerage soul heaved up. Our poor storm-bounced guts strained, strained, strained some more. The stench of it all and the foulness of my mouth kept making me sicker yet. ⁴ managed to Until I remembered the limes.

I fumbled them out and took a desperate suck ⁵ of one. Another I thrust down to the bunk below. "Rob, here. Try this."

His hand found mine and the round rind in it.

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

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

Bless you, Madam Irish. Maybe it was that the limes put their

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

~~#~~ I suppose that ocean gale ~~was~~ ^{amounted to} simply the Atlantic out for an evening trot. But it was more than enough storm,

~~more than enough~~ ^{Toward} for us in steerage. By dawn the Atlantic had got the commotion out of its system and the Jemmy ploughed calmly along. Even I conceded that we ~~probably~~ ^{possibly} were going to live, now.

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

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

By now the weather was clement, so that ~~matter~~ ^{the} was no longer ~~matter~~ ^{drybrain} foremost in me. And I knew, the way you know a map fact, that the night's steaming progress must have carried us out of sight of land

on all sides. But the ocean. There my senses stood themselves on end. The ocean I was not prepared for nor ever could be.

Anywhere my eyes went, water bent away over the curve of the world. Yet at the same time the Jemmy and I were in a vast washbasin, the rims of the Atlantic perfectly evident out there over us. Slow calm waves wherever I faced, only an occasional far one bothering to flash into foam like a white swimmer appearing and disappearing. No savage liquid plains these. This was the lyric sea, absently humming the round ocean and the living air, the blue sky and the mind of man in the assured sameness of the gray and green play of its waves, in its profound pattern of water always wrinkling, moving, yet other water instantly filling the place. All this, and a week of water extending yet ahead.

Up on the deck of the Jemmy that morning with the world turned into purely satin-like water and open sky, I felt like a child who had only been around things small, suddenly seeing there is such a thing as big.)

^ Suddenly feeling the crawling fear I had known the past two nights in my berth ^{change itself into} ~~become~~ a standing fact: if the Jemmy wrecked I would sink like a statue but nobody could outswim the old Atlantic anyway, so why nettle myself over it? Suddenly ^{knowing} ~~know~~ that for this, the spectacle of the water planet around me,

^ Suddenly I knew that for this, I could put up with sleepless nights and all else; when you are nineteen and going to America, I ^{learned from in that moment} ~~told~~ myself, you can plunder yourself as much as is ^{needed} ~~necessary~~. Maybe I was going to see the Atlantic each dawn through ^{scared} ~~by the holy,~~ red eyes. But see it I would. ^

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walked that deck and

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

#

Print out to here

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

"Definitely enough for ^{pension}~~retirement~~."

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

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

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

"At least, ^{man}at least."

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

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

"What's that, now."

"You're walking us to America."

"Listen to old Grofutt here, will you. We find, from our experience, that the midpoint of the journey is its lowest mark, mentally speaking. If doubt should afflict you thereabout, remonstrate with yourself that of the halves of your great voyage, the emigration part has been passed through, the immigration portion has now begun. Somewhere there on the Atlantic rests a line,

invisible but valid, like Greenwich's meridian or the Equator. East
of there, you were a leaver of a place, on your way FROM a life.
West across that division, older by maybe a minute, know yourself to
be heading TO a life. What about that, do you see our line anywhere
 out there yet?"

"Not unless it's the color of water."

"Suppose we're Papists yet?" Sunday, and the priest's words
 were carrying to us from the Irish congregation thick as bees on the
 deck's promenade.

"I maybe am. There's no hope whatsoever for you."

"This Continental Divide that old Crofutt goes on about,
 Angus. What is that exactly?"

"It's like, say, the roof peak of America. The rivers on this
 side of it flow here to the Atlantic, on the other they go to the
 Pacific."

"Are you telling me we're already on water from Montana, out
 here?"

"So to say."

"Angus, Angus. Learning teaches a man some impossible things,
 is what I say."

"Too bad they're not bumboats. I could eat up one side of a
 leg of mutton and down the other about now." Autumn it may have
 been back in Scotland, but there off Newfoundland the wind was

hinting winter, and Rob and I put on most of the clothes we possessed to stay up and watch the fishing fleets of the Newfoundland coastal banks.

"And an Irish smile, Rob, what about. Those sisters you were eyeing at Queenstown, they'd be one apiece for us if my arithmetic is near right."

"Angus, I don't know what I'm going to do with you. I only hope for your sake that they have women in America, too."

"There's a chance, do you think?"

"Shore can't be all so far, now."

"No, but you'll see a change in the color of the ocean, first."



New

York harbor will be ~~full of cider~~, you know, and it'll start to show up out here."

"And in America ^{all} the geese are swans, are they?"

"And American hens sing opera."

"And the streets ~~will~~ blaze with diamonds as big as chestnuts, ^{do} will they?"

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

Then came the day.

"Mates," the steward pronounced, "we're about to pass old Sandy Hook. New York will come right out and meet us now. I know you've grown attached to them, but the time is come to part with your mattresses. If you'll kindly all make a chain here, like, and pass them along one to the next to the stairway..." Up to deck and overboard our straw beds proceeded, to float off behind us like a flotilla of rafts. A person would think that mine ought to have ^{stood out} looked freshest among them, so little of the sleep in it had been used, ~~but that wasn't the case.~~

New York was the portal to confusion and Castle Garden was its keyhole. The entire world of us seemed to be trying to squeeze into America through there. Volleys of questions were asked of us, our health and morals were appraised, our pounds and shillings slid through the money exchange wicket and came back out as dollars and cents. Then the railroad and the westward journey, oceanic again in its own way, with islands of towns and farms across the American

~~geese are swans~~

more?

archipelago

prairie. Colors on a map in no way convey the distances of this earth. What would the place Montana be like? Alp after alp after alp, as the Alberta adherent aboard ship assured us? The Territory of Montana, Crofutt defined, stands as a tremendous land as yet virtually untapped. Already planetarily famous for its wealth of ores, Montana proffers further potentialities as a savannah for graziers and their herds, and where the hoofed kingdom does not obtain, the land may well become the last great grain garden of the world. Elbow room for all aspirants will never be a problem, for Montana is fully five times the size of all of Scotland. How was it going to be to live within such distances? To be pioneers in filling such emptiness? At least we can be our own men there, Rob and I had told each other repeatedly. And now we would find out what kind of men that meant. # America seemed to go on and on outside the train windows, and our keenness for Montana and Lucas Barclay gained with every mile.

"He'll see himself in you," I said out of nowhere to Rob. I meant his uncle; and I meant what I was saying, too. For I was remembering that Lucas Barclay had that same burnish that glowed on Rob. The face and force to go with it too, for that matter. These Barclays were a family ensemble, they all had a memorable glimmer. Years and years back, some afterschool hour Rob and I were playing foxchase in the woodyard of the wheelwright shop, and in search of him I popped around a stack of planks into my father and Lucas and Rob's father John, eyeing out oak for spokes. I startled myself

"Wonder away, until sometime tomorrow. Then you can see the man himself and know."

In truth, we knew little more than the least about Lucas Barclay in these Montana years of his. Rob said there had been only a brief letter from Lucas to Nethermuir the first few Christmases after he emigrated, telling that he had made his way to the city of Helena and of his mining endeavor there; and not incidentally enclosing as his token of the holiday a fine fresh green American banknote of one hundred dollars. You can be as sure as Rob's family was that more than a greeting was being said there, that Lucas was showing the stay-at-homes the fruit of his adventure; Lucas's decision against the wheelwright shop and for America had been the early version of Rob's, too many Barclays and not enough wagon wheels any more. Even after his letters quit--nobody who knew Lucas expected him to spend time over paper and pen--that hundred dollars arrived alone in an envelope, Christmas after Christmas. The Montana money, Rob's family took to calling it. Lucas is still Lucas, they said with affection and rue for this strayed one of the clan; as freehanded a man as God ever set loose.

I won't bother to deny that in making our minds up for America Rob and I found it persuasive that money was sent as Christmas cards from there. But the true trove over across in Montana, we considered, was Lucas himself. Can I make you know what it meant to us to have this uncle of his as our forerunner? As our American edition of Croft, waiting and willing to instruct? Put yourself

where we were, young and stepping off to a new world, and now tell me whether or not you want to have a Lucas Barclay ahead, with a generous side that made us know we could walk in on him and be instantly welcome; a Lucas who would know where the best land for homesteading beckoned, what a fair price was for anything, whether they did so-and-so in Montana just as we were accustomed to in Scotland, whether they ever did thus-and-such at all. Bold is one thing and reckless is another, yes? I thought at the time and I'll defend it yet, just as surely as I had ~~pasted~~ ^{freed him for} my great-grandfather's affidavit ~~of~~ ^{held} Bell Rock work inside the back cover of Crofutt we, Rob and I, ~~had~~ ^{held} our own ticket of freedom in Lucas Barclay.

#

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 A
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24 Helena. Helena had three times the people of Nethermuir in
 forty times the area. Helena looked as if it had been ^{plopped} put into
 place last week and might be moved around again next week. A

Helena was not Hellenic. #A

newcomer had to stand and goggle. ~~The~~ ^{new mansions}
 castellated edge of the city, ~~great high houses~~ with sharp-towered
^{processioned} roofs, ~~went~~ right up onto the start of the mountains around. ~~Then~~

^{no 4} Earth-old grit side by side with fresh posh. Then
^{grew down} came a shambles of every kind of structure, ^{daft blurts of shack and manor,}
 between which evidently would be filled when new fashions of
 habitation had been thought up. Lastly, ^{a great raw gash of gulch,}
 down the middle of it all was slashed a raw earthquakelike gash of gulch,
 in which sat block after block of aspiring red brick storefronts.

Say for Helena, gangly capital city of the Territory of Montana
 and peculiar presbytery of our future with Lucas, it started us off with luck.

~~Helena started us off,~~
~~We began with luck there.~~ After the Model Lodging House ~~in~~
 Greenock we knew well not to take the first roost we saw, and weary
 as we were Rob and I trudged the hilly streets of ~~Helena~~ until we
 found a comparatively clean room at Mrs. Billington's, a few blocks
 away from Last Chance Gulch. Mrs. Billington observed to us at
 once, "You'll be wanting to wash the travel off, won't you," which
 was more than true. Those tubbings in glorious hot water were the
 first time since Nethermuir that we had a chance to shed our clothes.

But in the greater matter of presenting ourselves to Lucas
~~we now began to have the other side of luck.~~
 Barclay, ~~the next day, we had no success at all.~~

Nor the day after that nor the following several. We could not
 find that man.

change -
 was other
 side of luck

And promptly enough

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

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

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

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

That point had suggested itself to me too, but I decided to chide it away ^{on its way} from us. "Rob, how to hell could they all remember each other? Miners in Montana are like hair on a dog."

"Still," he persisted, "if Lucas these days is anything like the Lucas he was back in Nethermuir, somebody is bound to remember him. Am I right?"

"Right enough. We just need to find that somebody."

"Or Lucas. Whichever happens first."

"Whichever. Tomorrow we scour this Helena and make Lucas happen, one way or the other."

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That tomorrow, though, Helena had distinctly other plans for us.

I have not been through enough such times to know: do historic days customarily begin crisp and cool, thawing significantly as they go? Rob and I met our first Montana frost that ^{bright November} morning when we set out, and saw our breath all the way to the post office where we asked without luck about Lucas. We had just stepped from there, into sunshine now, to go and try at the assay office when I saw the fellow and his flag on a rooftop across the street. Stay-something, he shouted down into the street to us, stay-something, stay-something, and ran the American flag with 41 stars on it up a tall pole.

Cheers whooped from others in the street gaping up with us, and that in turn brought people to windows and out ^{from} ~~of~~ stores. Abruptly civilization seemed to be tearing loose in Helena as the crowd flocked in a tizzy to the flag-flying edifice, the Herald newspaper building.

"What is this, war with somebody?" Rob asked, ~~startled~~ as startled as I.

"Statehood!" called out a bearded man scurrying past. "Montana's a state at last! Follow me, I'm buying!"

And so that eight^h day of November arose off the calendar and grabbed Rob and me and every other ^{Helena} Montanian by the elbow, the one that can lever liquid up to the lips. Innocents us, statehood was a mysterious notion. However, we took it to mean that Montana had advanced out of being governed from afar, as Scotland was by the parliament in London, into running its own affairs. Look around Helena and you could wonder if this ~~was~~ ^{constituted} indeed an improvement. But the principle was there, and Rob and I had to drink to it along with everyone else, repeatedly.

"Angus, we must 've seen half the faces in Helena today," Rob estimated after we made our woozy way back to the lodging house. "And Lucas's wasn't among them."

"Then we know just where he is," I found to say. "The other half."

H —

The day after that and the next several, we did try,

~~We tried the post office. The land office. The assay office.~~

The register of voters. The offices of the newspapers. The

~~The jail.~~

Caledonian Club. The Association of Pioneers. Stores. Hotels.

Saloons, endless saloons. The Grand Central or the Arcade or
~~the IXL or the Exchange or the Atlantic, ran~~
~~the Iroquois or the Cricket, it all went the same:~~

"Do you know a man Lucas Barclay? He owned the Gre--a mine."

"Sometimes names change, son. What does he look like?"

"More than a bit like me. He's my uncle."

"Is he now. Didn't know miners had relatives." Wipe, wipe,
 wipe of the bartender's towel on the bar while he thought. "You do
 look kind of familiar. But huh-uh. If I ever did see your face on
 somebody else it was a time ago. Sorry."

Boarding houses.

"Good day, missus. We're trying to find the uncle of my friend
 here. Lucas Barclay is his name. Do you happen to know of him?"

"Barkler? No, never heard of him."

"Barclay, missus. B-A-R-C-L-A-Y."

"Never heard of him either."

Finally, the Greenwood cemetery.

"You boys are good and sure, are you?" asked the caretaker from beside the year-old gravestone he had led us to.

We stood facing the stark chiseled name. "We're sure," said Rob.

The caretaker eyed us regretfully.

"Well then," he ^{declared} ~~said~~, abandoning hope for this stone that read LOUIS BERKELEY passed from life 1888, "that's about as close as I can come to it for you. Sorry."

"It would need to be a this year's burial, ~~wasn't~~ there's every indication,

~~"We're certain sure he was alive at last Christmas,"~~ Rob specified to the caretaker. He meant by this that the Montana money from Lucas had arrived as always to Nethermuir.

"B-A-R-C-L-A-Y, eh?" the caretaker spelled for the sixth time, "You're sure that's the way of it?" Rob assured him for the sixth time he was.

~~"Barclay, eh?"~~
The caretaker shook his head. "Nobody by that name among the fresh ones. Unless he ^{'d} ~~could~~ be there." He nodded to the low edge of the graveyard, down near ^{where} ~~the~~ railroad right-of-way. ^{crossed the Fort Benton road} The grave mounds there had no markers.

Realization arrived to Rob and me at the same ^{instant} ~~time~~. The paupers' field.

P. 34A follows →

34A

Past a section of lofty monuments where chiseled folds of drape
and tassels were in style, we followed the caretaker ^{down} ~~there~~ to the
poorfield. ^

"Who are these, then?" asked Rob.

"Some are loners, drifters, hoboes. Others we just don't know
who the hell they are. Find them dead of booze some cold morning up
there in the Gulch. Or a mine timber falls on them and nobody knows
any name for them except Dutchy or Frenchy or Scotty." I saw Rob
swallow at that. The caretaker studied among a dozen bare graves.

"Say, last month I buried a teamster who'd got crushed when his
wagon went over on him. His partner said ^{Brown} ~~the name was Johnson~~, but

the gent called himself Brown, but a lot of folks color themselves
different when they come west. → ^

he didn't look like much of a Swede. ^{Maybe} ~~Would~~ ^{'d} he be yours?"

It did not seem likely to either Rob or me that Lucas would spurn a life of wagons in Nethermuir and adopt one here. Indeed, the more we thought, the less ^{possible} ~~likely~~ it seemed that Lucas could be down among the nameless dead. People always noticed a Barclay.

— Discouragement. Perplexity. Worry. All those we found abundantly that first week in Helena but no Lucas.

~~no off~~ in his head. ^{least} Not one little bit did ^{Rob} ~~he~~ let go of the notion of finding ~~Lucas~~ ^{him, though.} By week's end he was ^{this} ~~one~~ minute angry at the pair of us for not being bright enough to think where Lucas might be, the next at Lucas for not being anywhere. Then along came consternation—"Tell me truth, Angus: do you think he can be alive?"—and then around again to bafflement and irk—"Why to hell ^{that man} ~~is he~~ so hard to find?"

"We'll find him," I said steadily to all this. "I can be stubborn, and you're greatly worse than that. If the man exists in this Montana, we'll find him."

^{still} Yet we ~~did~~ not.

^{to tell} We had ~~told~~ ourselves that we'd worn out all investigation for a Helena version of Lucas, so we had better think instead of ^{other possible} ~~his~~ whereabouts. The start of our second week of search, we went by train to try Butte. That mining city seemed to be a factory for turning the planet inside out. Slag was making new mountains, while the mountains around stood with dying timber on their slopes. The

very air was raw with smelter fumes and smoke. ^{Further} No Butte, thank you, for either Rob or me, and we came away somehow convinced it was not the place Lucas Barclay would choose either.

We questioned stagecoach drivers, asking if they had heard of Lucas at their destination towns, White Sulphur Springs and Boulder ^{and Elkhorn} and Diamond City. No and no ^{and no} and no. Meanwhile, we were hearing almost daily of some new ^{silver} El Dorado where a miner might have been drawn to. ^{Glendale. Granite.} Castle. Philipsburg. Neihart. We began to see that tracking Lucas to a Montana mine, if indeed he was still in that business of Great Maybes, would be like trying to find out where a gypsy had taken up residence.

That ~~second~~ week of search ended as empty as our first.

Sunday morning, our second sabbath as dwellers of Helena, I woke before the day did, and my getting out of bed roused Rob. "Where're you off to?" he asked as I dressed.

"A walk. Up to see how the day looks."

He yawned mightily. "Angus, the wheelwright shop is all the way back in Scotland and you're still getting out of bed to open it." More yawn. "Wait. I'll come along. Just let me figure which end my shoes fit on."

We walked up by the firebell tower above Last Chance Gulch. Except for a few barn swallows dodging back and forth in the air, we were up before the birds. Mountains stretched high everywhere around, up in the morning light which had not yet found Helena.

The business streets below were in sleeping gray. Over us and to the rim of the eastern horizon stretched long, long feathers of cloud, half a skyfull streaked ^{extravagantly} ~~gloriously~~ with colors between gold and pink, and with purple dabs of heavier cloud down on the tops of the Big Belt Mountains.

"So this is the way they bring morning into Montana," observed Rob. "They know their business."

"Now that I've got you up, you may as well be thoroughly up, what about." I indicated the firebell tower, a small ^{open observation} ~~cabin thing~~ like the top of a lighthouse but perched atop an open spraddle of supports.

Rob paused as we climbed past the big firebell and ^{declared} ~~said~~, "I'd like to ring the old thing and bring them all out into the streets. Maybe we would find Lucas then."

Atop the tower, we met more of dawn. The land was drawing color out of the sky. Shadows of trees came out ^{hp} ~~near~~ the summit of Mt. Helena, and in another minute there were shawls of shadow off the backs of knolls. Below us the raw sides of Last Chance Gulch now stood forth, as if shoveled out during the night for the next batch of Helena's downtown to be ^{sown} ~~dropped~~ in.

Rob pondered into the hundred streets below, out to the wide grassy valley beyond. A breeze lazed down the gulch and up the backs of our necks. "Where to hell can he be, Angus? A man can't vanish like smoke, can he?"

Not unless he wants to, I thought to myself. But aloud: "Rob,

we've looked all we can. There's no knowing until Christmas if Lucas is even alive. If your family gets the Montana money from him again, there'll be proof. But if that doesn't happen, we have to figure he's--" Rob knew the rest of that.

Neither of us had been able to banish that Lewis Berkeley tombstone entirely from mind. → I went on to what I had

been mulling. "It's not all that far to Christmas now. But until then we'd better get on with ourselves a bit. Keep asking after Lucas, yes. But get on with ourselves at the same time."

Rob stirred.

He had that cocked look of his from when we stepped past the drowned horse on the Greenock dock, the look that said out to the world surely you're fooling? But face it, this lack of trace of Lucas had us fooled and then some.

Crofutt."

"And who better?" I swept an arm out over the tower railing to take in Helena and the rest of Montana. As full sunrise neared, the low clouds on the Big Belts were turning into gold coals. By the holy, this was a country to be up and around in. "Look at you here, five thousand miles from Scotland and your feet are dry, your color is bright, you have no divided heart. Crofutt and McCaskill, we've seen you through and will again, lad. But the time has arrived to think of income instead of outgo. Are we both for that?"

He had to ^{smile} grin. "All right, all right, both. But tell me this, early riser. Where is it you'd see us to next, if you had your way?"

We talked there on the bell hill until past breakfast and received the scolding of our lives from Mrs. Billington. Which was far short of fair, for she gained profit for some time to come from that fire tower discussion of ours. What Rob and I chose that early morning, in large part because we did not see what else to decide, was to stay on in Helena until ~~after~~ sent its verdict from Nethermuir. 1
~~post~~ Christmas

#

Two
to
further

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

"Can ye handle ^{sums} ~~numbers~~?"

"Aye." I could, too.

I am sure as anything that old Cariston then and there hired me on as ~~a clerk~~ ^{and bookkeeper} just so he could have a decent Scots burr to hear.

There are worse qualifications.

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

So there is the sum we were, Rob, as our Scotland-leaving year of 1889 drew to a cold close in new Montana. Emigrants changed by the penstrokes of the Cumbrae Steamship Line and Castle Garden into immigrants. Survivors of the Atlantic's rites of water, pilgrims to Helena. Persons we had been all our lives and persons becoming new to ourselves. How are past and present able to live in the same instant, and together pass into the future?

You were the one who hatched the fortunate notion of commemorating ourselves by having our likenesses taken on that Hogmanay, New Year's Eve as they ^{famely say} ~~said~~ ^{here} it in America. "Angus, man,

it'll be a Hogmanay gift such as they've never had in Nethermuir," you proclaimed, which was certainly so. "Let them in old Scotland see what Montanians are." We had to hustle to Ball's Studio before it ~~could~~⁹ close. ¹

That picture is here on my wall, I have never taken it down. Lord of Mercy, Rob. Whatever made us believe our new muttonchop side ^Pwhiskers became us? Particularly when I think how red mine were then, and the way yours bristled. We sit there in the photograph looking like the stuffing is coming out of our heads. Once past those sidewhiskers, the faces on us were not that bad, I will say. Maybe an opera house couldn't be filled on the basis of them, but still. Your wide smile to match the wide Barclay chin, your confident eyes. Your hair black as it was and more than bountiful, the part in it going far back on the right side, almost back even with your ear. It always gave you that look of being unveiled before a crowd, a curtain tugged aside and the pronouncement: Here, people, is Robert Burns Barclay. As for my own front of the head, there beside you I show more expanse of upper lip than I wish I did, but there is not much to be done about that except what I later did, the mustache. The jaw pushes forward a little, as if I was inspecting into the camera's lens tunnel. My eyes—my eyes in ~~the~~^{our} photograph are watching, not proclaiming as ¹ yours are. Even then, that far ago, watching to see what will become of us.

GROS VENTRE

We dislike to speak ill of any civic neighbor, yet it must be said that the community of Gros Ventre is gaining a reputation as Hell with a roof on it. Their notion of endeavor up there is to dream of the day when whiskey will flow in the plumbing. It is unsurprising that every cardsharp and hardcase in northern Montana looks fondly upon Gros Ventre as a second home. We urge the town fathers, if indeed the parentage of that singular municipality can be ascertained, to invite Gros Ventre's rough element to take up residence elsewhere.

--Choteau Quill, April 30, 1890.

Word from Scotland reached us ~~in late January~~ by early February, and it was yes and then some. As regular as Christmas itself, the Montana money from Lucas had again come to Nethermuir; and together with it this, which Rob's sister Adair enclosed to us with a flurry of questions about coyotes and cayuses and how Hogmanay was celebrated in Montana:

Gros Ventre, Mont., 23 Dec. 1889

My dear brother John and family,

You may wonder at not hearing from me this long while. Some day it will be explained. I am in health and have purchased a

business. This place Gros Ventre is a coming town. I remain your
loving brother,

Lucas Barclay →

"The man himself, Angus! ^{now} See, here at the bottom! Written by
our Lucas himself, and he's--"

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

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

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

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

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

Grows Vaunt," enunciated
"Grows Vaunt," ~~said~~ Rob as if trying it for taste. He already was putting on his coat and cap and I mine. To see our haste, you'd have thought we had only to rush across the snowy street to be in Gros Ventre.

Lucas's
"Grove On," the postal clerk pronounced the town, which was instructive. So, in its way, was what he told us quite a ways ~~said~~ next. "It's toward Canada, up in that Two Medicine country. Not a whole hell of a lot up there but Indians and coyotes. Here, see for yourselves."

What we saw on the map of post routes of Montana was that our first leg of travel needed to be by train north along the Missouri River to Craig, easy as pie. Then from Craig to Augusta by nothing daunting the map dot stagecoach, ~~none too hard~~ either. But from Augusta to Gros Ventre, no indication of railroad or stage route. No postal road. No anything.

The clerk did not wait for us to ask how the blank space was to be found across. "You'll need to hitch a ride on a spine pounder." ~~"Freight wagon, whenever spring comes. If it~~

~~comes."~~
Rob and I were blanker than the map gap.

"A freight wagon," the clerk elaborated. "They start freighting into that country whenever spring comes."

And so we waited for spring to have its say. In Montana, that is most likely to be a stutter. By the time snow and mud departed and then abruptly came ~~again~~ ^{back}, went off a second time and decided to recur again, I thought I might have to bridle Rob. He maybe thought the same about me. But the day at last did happen when we stepped off the train at Craig and presented ourselves at the stagecoach station. There we were looked over with substantial curiosity by the agent. Rob and I ~~had~~ ^{were topped off with} Stetson hats now, but I suppose their newness--and ours--could be seen from a mile off.

At five minutes before scheduled departure and no sign of anyone but us and the spectating agent, Rob asked restlessly: "How late will the stage be?"

"Who said anything about late?" the agent responded. "Here's ^{fellow} the ~~man~~ now who handles the ribbons." In strode a ^{young} ~~rangy man~~ ^{tall as myself,} who nodded briskly to the agent and reached behind the counter to hoist out a mail sack. Likely the newcomer wasn't much older than Rob or I, but he seemed to have been through a lot more of life.

"Yessir, Ben," the agent greeted him. "Some distinguished passengers for you today, all both of them."

The stage driver gave us his brisk nod. "Let's get your warbags on board." We followed him outside to the stagecoach. "Step a little wide of those wheelers," he gestured toward the rear team of the four stagecoach horses. "They're a green pair. I'm running them in there to take the rough spots off of them."

Rob and I looked at each other. And how did you journey from

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

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

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

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

The Montana of plain arising to foothills ascending to mountains, the
 continent going through its ~~change~~^{restless} of mood right exactly here.)

Montana of grass and grass and grass and grass. Not the new grass

of spring yet--only the south slopes of coulees showed a green hint--but I swear I looked out on that tawny land and could feel the growth ready to burst up through the earth. The Montana that fledged itself new with the seasons.

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

Rae-Ellen:
make
"wheelvoyaging"
one word

The stagecoach ride was a continuing session of rattle and bounce, but we had no runaway and no breakdown and pulled into Augusta punctual to the minute, and so Rob and I climbed down chipper as larks. Even putting up for the night at what Augusta called a hotel didn't dim us, cheered as we were by word that a freight wagon was expected the next day. The freighter had passed with supplies for a sheep ranch west of town and would need to come back through to resume the trail northward. "Better keep your eyes skinned for him," our stage driver advised. "Might be a ~~couple~~ ⁵ week before another one comes through."

Toward noon of the next day, not only were our eyes still skinned but our nerves were starting to peel.

"He must've gone through in the night," Rob ~~said~~ ^{declared}, not for the first time. "Else where to hell is he?"

"If he's driving a wagon through this country at night, we don't want to be with him anyway," I suggested. "The roads are thin enough in daylight."

"Angus, you're certain sure it was light enough to see when you first stepped out here?"

"Rob. A wagon as long as a house, and ^{eight}~~six~~ horses, and a man driving them, and you're asking if they got past me? Now, maybe they tunneled, but--"

"All right, all right, you don't have to jump on me with tackety boots. I'm only saying, where to hell--"

What sounded like a gunshot interrupted him. Both of us jumped like crickets. Then we caught the distant wagon rumble which defined the first noise as a whipcrack.

Rob clapped me on the shoulder and we stepped out into the road to await our freight wagon.

The freighter ^{proved to be}~~was~~ a burly figure with a big low jaw which his neck sloped up into, in a way that reminded me of a pelican. He rubbed that jaw assiduously while hearing Rob, then granted in a croaky voice that he could maybe stand some company, not to mention the commerce. We introduced ourselves to him and he in turn provided: "Name's Herbert."

Rob gave him the patented Rob smile. "Would that be a first name, now? Or a last?"

The freighter eyed him up and down as if about to disinvite us. Then rasped: "Either way, Herbert's plenty. ^{Hop}~~Climb~~ on if

you're coming."

We ~~hopped~~. But ~~While stowing~~ our bags and bedrolls I took the chance to inventory the wagon freight, you don't work in a store like Cariston's ~~Murdoch's~~ without hearing tales of wagonloads of blasting powder that went to unintended destinations.

Boxes of axle grease, sacks of beans, bacon, flour, coffee. Some ~~stacks~~ ^{bundles} of sheep pelts, fresh enough that they must have come from the ranch where the freighter had just been. Last, a trio of barrels with no marking on them. Herbert saw me perusing these.

"Lightning syrup," he explained.

"Which?"

"Whiskey. Maybe they've heard of it even where you men come from?"

The first hours of that journey, Rob and I said very little. Partly that was because we weren't sure whether Herbert the freighter tolerated conversation except with his horses. Partly it was because nothing really needed speaking, now that we were on our last lap to Lucas's town, Rob all but glittered with satisfaction. But also, we were simply absorbed in the sights of the land. A geography of motion, of endless ridges and knob hills and swales the wagontrack threaded through. And instead of mountains equally all ^{tiers of them} around as in Helena, here ~~they~~ were stacked colossally on a single horizon, the western. Palisades of rock, constant canyons. Peaks with winter still on them. As far ahead ^{north} as we could see, the crags

and cliffs formed that tumbled wall.

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

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

On and on the country of swales and small ridges rolled. Here was land that never looked just the same, yet always looked much alike. I knew Rob and I would be as lost out here as if we had been put on a scrap of board in the middle of the Atlantic and I was thanking our stars that we were in the guidance of someone as veteran to this trail as Herbert Whomever or Whomever Herbert. Just to put some words into the air to celebrate our good fortune, I leaned around Rob and inquired of our shepherd: "How many times have you traveled this trail by now?"

"This'll be once."

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

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

"What, ah, what if it snows?"

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

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

Finally he ~~gazed~~ ^{peered} across the fire, first at Rob, then at me.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

^{She's} "It's kind of slow, men. But so is the ~~river~~ ^{creek} to heaven."

When each of our cups was about two inches moist and the barrel hole plugged with a match stick and the hoop tapped back into place to hide it, Herbert was of new manufacture. As we sat at the campfire and sipped, even his voice sounded better when he asked intently: "How's the calico situation in Helena these days?"

I had a moment of wondering ~~why he was so interested in one~~ ^{what} ^{vital to him about that}

12 63

specific item of dry goods, then it dawned on me ^{what} he meant women.
And
From there it took no acrobatics of logic to figure out what sort of women.

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

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

From Herbert the rest of that evening, we heard of the calico situation at the Canadian forts he freighted to. (Bad.) The calico situation in New Orleans where he'd been posted as a soldier in the Union army. (Astounding.) The calico situation at Butte as compared with anywhere else in Montana. (A thousand times better.) The calico situation among the Mormons, the Chinese, the Blackfeet, the Nez Perce, and the Sioux.

what he meant.
women.
and him.

you could say
may

might
be
interesting?

Herbert

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

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

I came out of my bedroll scared and stayed that way despite the freighter's assessment that "this is just a April skift, I think." After Helena's elongated winter of snow flinging down from the Continental Divide, how was a person supposed to look at so much as a white flake without thinking the word blizzard? Nor was there any checking on the intentions of the Divide mountains now, they

The mountains were totally gone from the west, ~~the sky there~~ ^{that direction} a curtain of whitish mist. Ridges and coulees still could be ~~picked~~ ^{freshfall} picked out, the tan grass tufting up from the thin blanket of ~~snow~~. But our wagon trail, those thin twin wheeltracks--as far as could be told from the blank and silent expanse all around us, Herbert and Rob and I and the freight wagon and six horses had dropped here out of the sky along with the night's storm.

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

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

scuffing aside the snow to find the trail ruts while the other rode the seat beside Herbert and tried to wish the weather into improvement.

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

— "Maybe ^{by} ~~about~~ the ^{end} ~~middle~~ of summer," I muttered back.

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

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

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

— "She'd need to negotiate ^{past} ~~with~~ Herbert first."

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

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

— Still later: "Herbert says ^{this} ~~he~~ could have been worse, there could have been a wind with this snow."

"Herbert is a fund of happy news."

It was ^{is end before} ~~late morning when~~ Herbert informed us, "Men, I'm beginning to think we're going to get the better of this."

14A follows →

14A 67 ✓

He ~~had~~ no more than said so when the mist along the west began
to wash away and mountains ^{shouldered} ~~came~~ back into place here and there along
that horizon.)

The light of ^{this} ~~that~~ ghostly day became like no other I had ever seen,
a silver clarity that made the stone spines of ridges and an occasional
few cottonwood trees stand out like engravings in book pages. Any ^{outline} ~~thing~~
that showed itself looked strangely singular, as if it existed ^{only} ~~right~~
then, never before. At last

^{burned}
Before long, the sun ~~came~~ through, the snow was
melting fast, the wheeltracks emerged ahead of us like new dark
paint. Our baptism by Montana spring apparently over, Rob and I sat
in grateful ^{tired} ~~silence~~ on the freight wagon.

We were wagoneers for the rest of that day and the next,
crossing the two forks of the Teton River and observing some landmark
buttes which Herbert said were near a settlement called Choteau.

^{no 9} then
at supper on the third night Herbert ^{reported} ~~said~~, "Tomorrow ought to about



67
15-68

get us there." In celebration, we evaporated the final whiskey barrel to the level of the two previous nights¹⁹, congratulating ourselves on careful workmanship, and Herbert told us a number of chapters about the calico situation when he was freighting into Deadwood, South Dakota, during its gold rush. ^

Not an hour after we were underway the next morning, the trail dropped us into a maze of benchlands with steep sides. Here even the tallest mountains hid under the horizon, there was no evidence the world knew such a thing as a tree, and Herbert pointed out to us alkali bogs which he said would sink the wagon faster than we could think about it. A wind so steady it seemed solid made us hang onto our hats. Even the path of wagon tracks ~~seemed to lose~~^{lost} patience here. The bench hills were too abrupt to be climbed straight up, and rather than circle around among the congregation of geography, the twin cuts of track attacked up the slopes in long sidling patterns. 1

Herbert halted the wagon at the base of the first ruts angling up and around a bench^{land}. "I don't think this outfit'll roll herself over, up there. But I thought wrong a time or two before. Men, it's up to you whether you want to ride her out or give your feet some work." 1

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

We let the wagon have some distance ahead of us, to be out of

68
16
69

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

"Any ideas, if?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Kind of slaunchwise country, ain't ~~it~~^{she}?" remarked Herbert when we paused for noon. Rob and I didn't dare ~~look at~~^{study} each other. If Gros Ventre was amid this boxed-in skewed landscape; if this windblown bleakness was where we had ~~come~~^{plucked ourselves up} across the world to find ~~Luas~~^{Luas} Barclay...

17 69/70

, though,
Mid-afternoon brought a long gradual slope which the wagon could travel straight up in no peril, and we were able to be steady passengers again. By now Rob and I were weary, and wary as well, expecting the top of each new ridgeline to deliver us back into the prairie infantry. But another gradual slope and widened benchland appeared ahead, and a next after that. And then the trail took the wagon up to a shallow pass between two ^{long} broad flat ridges.

Herbert whoaed the horses there in the gap,

What had halted him, and us, was a change of earth as abrupt as waking into the snow had been.

Ahead was where the planet greatened. To the west now, the entire horizon was freestanding mountains, peaks, cliff faces; a jagged blue-gray wall with snow summits, like white fur hung atop.

^{stately}
The hem to the mountains was timbered foothills, and down from them broad than any we had met yet ^{plateaus} began prairie broadness, vast flat benches of tan grassland, north and east as far as we could see. About a mile in front of us, along the foot of the nearest of these low plateaus, the line of ^{cottonwood} trees along a creek made a graceful bottom seam across the tremendous land.

"Oh yeah, I see where we are now," contributed Herbert.

"There's old Chief." As our wagon began to jostle down toward the creek's biggest stand of cottonwood trees, he pointed out to us Chief Mountain, farthest north on the horizon and a step separate from the rest of the crags. ^{She's} "It's Canada after that."

^{comes}
Between her and here, though, ^{where we are} there's the Two Medicine River. Can't see that from ~~here~~, but this whole jography we're looking at is called the Two Medicine country."

Then Herbert

found the Sweetgrass Hills, five bumps on the plains northeast of us. "Men, unless I'm more wrong than usual, those're about

seventy-five miles from where we're at." Montana distances would
make your head swim. I tried to imagine going up onto one of the
hills above the Greenock dock and being able to see to Edinburgh.

"Then this kind of a tit over here, Heart Butte." A dark cone that
stood near the mountains like a watchtower. Much nearer, west along
the line of creek trees, rose a smaller promontory like the long aft sail of a windship,
with a tree-dark top. "Don't know what that butte is, she's a new one on me,"

Herbert confessed. In this landscape of expanse the local butte did
not stand particularly high, it was not monumentally shaped, yet it
managed to speak prominence, separateness, managed somehow to preside.

Rob and I interrupted our gaping to trade mighty grins. All we
needed now was Lucas Barclay and his coming metropolis
gallon of

Herbert cleared his throat and gestured toward the cottonwood
grove ahead. When we didn't comprehend, he said:

"Here she is, I guess."

Gros Ventre took some guessing, right enough.

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

From the wagon seat

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

✓
71 19 72

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

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

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

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

Our wagon rolled to a halt in front of what I took to be a log barn and which proved to be the livery stable. Rob and I climbed down and were handed our luggage by Herbert. As we shook hands with him he croaked out companionably, "Might see you around town. Kind of hard to miss anybody in a burg this size."

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

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

Our eyes followed the direction the hostler ~~had~~ jerked his

7

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

MEDICINE

LODGE

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

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

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

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

Like vikings into Egypt ~~Islam~~, we stepped in. And found it to be a saloon. Along the bar were a half dozen partakers, three or four others occupied chairs around a greentop table where they were playing cards.)

"Aces chase faces, Deaf Smith," said one of the cardsters as he spread down his hand. "Damn you and your luck, Perry," responded his opponent mildly and gathered the cards to shuffle.

no 4 Of course Rob and I had seen cowboys before, in Helena. Or what we thought were. But these of Gros Ventre were a used variety, in soiled crimped hats and thick clothing and worn-down boots.

20A 73

The first of the Medicine Lodge clientele to be aware of us was a stocky tan-faced man, evidently part Indian. He said something too soft for us to hear to the person beside him, who revolved slowly to examine us over a brownish longhorn mustache. I wish I



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21 74

~~the mustached one~~
could say that ~~Mr. Mustache~~ showed any sign we were worth turning around to look at.

~~If~~ someone had been counting our blinks--the Indian-looking witness maybe was--they'd have determined that Rob and I were simultaneous in spying the saloonkeeper. He stood alone near one end of the bar, intently leaning down, busy with some chore beneath ~~intoned deep~~ there. When he glanced up and ~~called~~, "Step right over, lads, this bunch isn't a fraction as bad as they look," there was the ~~Barclay~~ remembered brightness of his ~~cheeks~~, there was the brand of voice we had not heard since leaving Nethermuir.

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

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

Did I see it happen? Hear it? Or sheerly feel it? Whichever the sense, I abruptly knew that now the attention of everyone in the saloon ~~was~~ ~~weighed~~ on Rob and me. Every head had ~~turned~~ ~~pivoted~~ to us, every eye

gauged us. The half-breed or whatever he was seemed to be memorizing us in case there was a bounty on fools.

The saloonkeeper himself ~~looked~~ ^{stared} up at us thundrous. If faces could kill, Rob and I would have been never born. The two of us stared stunned as he glowered at Rob. At me. At Rob again. Now the saloonkeeper's back straightened as if an iron rod had been put in his spine, but he kept his forearms deliberately out of sight below the bar. My mind flashed full of Helena tales of bartenders pulling out shotguns to moderate their unruly customers. ^{By the holy, though,} ~~But~~ could anyone with eyes think Rob and I were anything like unruly right then?

Finally the saloonkeeper emitted low and fierce to Rob ~~who~~ ^{raging out} what his face was already ~~saying~~: "Are you demented? Who to hell are you anyway, to come saying that?"

"Rob!" from Rob the bewildered.

^{moq} ~~Rob.~~ "Lucas, man, I know you like myself in the mirror! I'm Rob, your nephew."

The saloonkeeper still stared at him, but in a new way. Then: "By Jesus, you are. Chapter and verse. ^{By Jesus,} You're John's lad Robbie, grown some." The fury was gone from Lucas Barclay's face, but what ~~passed into~~ ^{happened in} its place was no less unsettling. All emotion became unknown there now; right then that face of Lucas Barclay could have taught stoniness to a rock.

Still as ~~bewildered~~ ^{baffled} as I was, Rob blurted next: "Lucas, what is the matter here? Aren't we welcome?"

At last Lucas let out a breath. As if that had started him living again, he said as calm as cream to Rob: "Of course you're

75/76

welcome. You've come late, though, to do any handshaking with me." Lucas raised his forearms from beneath the bar and laid on the dark polished wood the two stumps of amputation where his hands had been.

I tell you true, I did not know whether to stare or look away, to stay or turn tail, to weep or to wail. There was no known rightness of behavior, just as there was no rightness about what had happened to Lucas. Like the clubs of bone and flesh he was exhibiting to us, any justice in life seemed lopped off. Ripped,

~~away. A thing this terrible had no business to happen. Yet happen it had.~~ To this day, the account of Lucas Barclay's mining accident causes my own hands to open and close, clench their fingernails hard against their palms, thankful they are whole. It ~~came afterward~~ ^{happened}

~~from the Great Maybe and Helena,~~ when Lucas had moved on to a silver claim called the Fanalulu in the ~~the~~ outcropping country between Wolf Creek and Augusta. My partner on that was an old Colorado miner, Johnny Dorgan. This day we were going to blast a lead. I was doing the tamping in, Johnny was behind me ready with the fuse.

What made this worse was that I had miner's religion, I always made sure to use a wooden tamp on the powder so there'd be no chance of spark. But this once, the blasting powder somehow did go off.

Dorgan had turned to reach for his chewing tobacco in the coat behind him and was knocked sprawling, with quartz splinters up and down his back. He scrambled ^{on all fours} to where Lucas had been flung, a burned and bloody mass. The worst was what was left--what was gone--at the

ends of Lucas's arms. Dorgan tied a tourniquet on each, then took Lucas, a wagonload of pain, to the Army post hospital at Fort Shaw. Johnny thought he was delivering a corpse, I suppose. He very near was. The surgeon there saved what he could of Lucas, starting at the wrists. By Jesus, Did I want to die, at first? I wanted worse than that. I wanted the world dead. I hated everything above snake-high. Lucas was tended by the Fort Shaw surgeon for months. I was his pastime, his pet. He made me learn to handle a fork and a glass with these stubs. He said if a man can do that, he can make himself a life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lucas turned from us to the line of glasses along the backbar shelf, grasped one between his stumps, set it in place in front of me, turned and did the same with one for Rob, a third time with a glass for himself. Next he clasped the whiskey bottle the same way and poured an exactly even amount in each glass. It was all done as neatly as you or I could.

"Sedge, Toussaint, you others," Lucas addressed the rest of the clientele, "line your glasses up here. You're not to get the wild idea I'm going to make a habit of free drinks. But it's not just any ^{old} day when a Barclay arrives to Gros Ventre." Lucas poured around, lifted a glass of his own as you would if you had to do it only with your wrists, and gave the toast: "Rest our dust."

— Our drink to health became two, then Lucas informed Rob and me he was taking us to home and supper and that he may as well show us the town while we were out and about. The half-breed, Toussaint, assured us, "This Gros Ventre, there never was one like it," and chuckled. The mustached man, called Sedge, stepped behind the bar to preside there and Lucas led Rob and ^{me} ~~X~~ out on tour.

I have been drunk and I have been sober, and the experience of being guided around that raw patch of a town by a handless man held the worst parts of each.

18

Gros Ventre could be taken in with two quick glimpses, one in each direction along the street, yet it registered on me in a slow woozy way, like a dream of being shown somewhere at the far end of the world. Or maybe a dream of myself dreaming this, reality a phase or two away from where I was. At any rate, my mind was stuck ~~on a thing that terrible had no business to happen yet happen it had~~ on Lucas and his maiming and he was energetically intent only on showing us Montana's Athens-to-be. Rob and I did much nodding and tried to mm-hmm properly as Lucas tramped us past such sights as Fain's blacksmith shop, encircled by odds and ends of scrap iron. Kuuvus's mercantile, a long low log building which sagged tiredly in the middle of its roofbeam. A sizable boarding house with a sign proclaiming that it was operated by C.E. Sedgwick--which was to say, the mustachioed Sedge--and his wife Lila. Near the creek in a grove of cottonwoods, a tiny Catholic church with the bell on an iron stanchion out front. (A circuit-riding priest circulated through "every month or so," Lucas noted favorably.) Dantley's livery stable where Herbert the freighter had disembarked us. Next to it Gros Ventre's second saloon, ^{Wingo}~~Rango~~'s: a twin to the Medicine Lodge except it was fronted with slabs instead of boards. (To our surprise--we now knew why Herbert hadn't materialized at the Medicine Lodge--we were informed in ^{an undervoice}~~a low voice~~ by Lucas that the town did have a calico supply ^{reported}~~and it was here~~ in Rango's. "Two of them," Lucas ~~said~~ with a disapproving shake of his head. "Rango calls them his nieces.")

79

We also became enlightened about the tents and picketed

Rae-Allen:
globally
replace
Rango
with
Wingo

79 horses.

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

"Borrow?" echoed Rob.

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

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

Be fair, though, ~~Angus~~⁹. The fledgling town was not without graces. It proffered two. ~~The~~⁷ first and finest was its trees, the cottonwoods like a towering lattice ^{above} ~~about~~¹ the little collection of roofs. When their buds became leaf, Gros Ventre would wear a green crown, true enough. And the other distinction stood beside the Sedgwick boarding house: a tall slender flagpole, far and away the most soaring construction in Gros Ventre, with the American flag energetically flapping at the top. When Rob or I managed to remark on this public-spirited display, Lucas glanced upward and said there was a story to that, all right, but he marched us across to what he plainly considered the centerpiece of Gros Ventre, the building skeleton at the end of the street.

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

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

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

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

Evidently we did not manage to ^{appear} ~~seem~~ convinced. Lucas started anew.

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

81 they'll need everything a town can furnish them," concluded the lord of the Medicine Lodge.

82 There was a brief silence, reverent on Lucas's part, dazed on ours. Then:

"I'll tell you another thing while I'm at it." Rob and I were certain he would, too. "My belief is we'll see a railroad of our own here," he confided. "After all, they talk of building one to that piddle spot beside the road, called Choteau. A squeak of a place like Choteau gets a railroad, we ^{ought to} ~~ll~~ ^{a dozen} ~~more than likely~~ get ~~two~~."

Lucas gazed out the solitary street to the straight-topped benchland south of us, then past the flagpole to the jagged tumble of mountains along the west. Up came an armstub and thoughtfully smoothed the black-and-gray beard as he contemplated. "This is rare country," he murmured. "Just give our Gros Ventre a little time and it'll be a grand town."

"Whom never a town surpasses," issued from me, "for honest men and bonnie lasses." I suppose I was thinking out loud. For the long moment Lucas contemplated me, I much wished I'd kept the words in me.

"Is that old Burns," he asked at last, "as in the middle of our Robbie's ~~Rob's~~ name?"

"The same," I admitted.

"Angus is a lad of parts," Rob roused himself to put in, "he can recite the rhyming stuff by the yard. See now, he was pupil teacher for Adam Willox."

83 "I knew Adam," recalled Lucas. "He had a head on his shoulders." Lucas eyed me again, as if hoping to see the start of one growing on me, then declared the next of Gros Ventre's matchless attractions was supper.

Past the rear of his saloon and across a wide weedy yard he led us toward a two-storey frame house. The house needed paint--this entire town needed that--but it sat comfortably between two fat gray cottonwood trees, like a hearth clock between pewter candlesticks. Lucas related to us that the house had come with the Medicine Lodge, he'd bought both from the founder of Gros Ventre, named DeSalis. It seemed DeSalis had decided the begetting of Gros Ventre was not a sufficient source of support in life and gone back to Missouri. But we had the luck, Lucas pointed out, that DeSalis first sired five children here and so provided ample guest space for us.

As we reached the front porch, Lucas stopped as if he had ~~butted~~ suddenly ~~come~~ up against a new fact.

"Now you'll meet Nancy," he said.

"Nancy?" I could see that Rob was buoyed by the sight of the considerable house, and now this news that Lucas at least had been fortunate enough to attain a mate in life. "The Mrs.!" And doesn't that make her my aunt, now I ask you? Lucas, man, why didn't you tell--"

underwent
Lucas's face ~~went through~~ underwent another change to stone. "Did you hear me say one goddamned thing about being married? Nancy is my--housekeeper."

Rob reddened until he looked like he might ignite. "Lead on, Lucas," ^{inserted} ~~I said~~ in a hurry. "We're anxious to meet Nancy." 1

84 He manipulated the doorknob with his stubs and led us into the front parlor. "Nancy! We have people here."

From the kitchen doorway at the far end of the parlor stepped a young woman. Her dress was ordinary, but that ^{made} ~~was~~ the only thing. Hair black as a crow's back. ^{squarish} ~~A roundish~~ face, the nose ^{and cheekbones} ~~a~~ bit broad; not pretty in ^{any} ~~the~~ usual way but not escaping a second notice, either, and then a third. Dark, dark eyes, perhaps black too. And her skin was brown as a chestnut, several shades darker than that of the half-Indian or whatever he was in the Medicine Lodge, Toussaint. 1 1 1

Rob was trying not to be frog-eyed, and failing. I suppose I was similar. Lucas now seemed to be enjoying himself.

Deciding the situation could stand some gallantry, I stepped toward the woman and began, "How do you do, Miss--"

Lucas snorted a laugh, then called to me: "Buffalo Calf Speaks."

"Excuse me?"

"Buffalo Calf Speaks," Lucas repeated, more entertained than ever. "She's Blackfeet. Her Indian name is Buffalo Calf Speaks. So if you're going to call her Miss, that's what Miss she is."

"Yes, well." Strange sensation it is, to want to strangle a grinning handless man. I put myself around to the woman again and tried anew: "Nancy, hello. My name is Angus McCaskill." I forced a grin of my own. "I'm from a tribe called Scotchmen."

"Yes," she answered, but her eyes rapidly left me to look at

Rob, his resemblance to Lucas. Lucas told her, "This is my brother's son. His name is Rob."

"Rob?" Her intonation asked how that word could be a name.

"Like Bob Rango," Lucas instructed, "except Scotchmen say it Rob. They never do anything the way ordinary people do, right, lads?"

"Rob," Nancy repeated. "From Scot Land."

"That's him, Nancy. Rob and Angus are going to be with us for a while. Now we need supper." The woman's dark eyes regarded us a moment more, then Lucas, and she went back ^h through the kitchen doorway. A

So that was Nancy. Or at least the start of her.

"Don't stand there like the awkward squad," Lucas chafed us. "Come sit down and tell me news of Nethermuir. If the old place has managed to have any, that is."

That supper, and that evening, were like no other.

Rob and I learned that a person without hands needed to have his meat cut for him--Nancy sat beside Lucas and did the knifework before ever touching her own plate--but he could manipulate a fork the way a clever bear might take it between its paws, and he could spoon sugar into his coffee without a spill and stir it efficiently. We learned that Lucas could dress himself except for the buttoning. That he could wind his pocket watch by holding it against his thigh with one stub and rolling the stem with the

other. That he had taught himself to write again by sitting down night after night, a pen between his stubs, and copying out of ^{an old} a book titled Wrinkles and Notions for Every Household, at first one sentence a night and then a paragraph and at last a page at a time. "Not only did I learn Hints for Health, lads--Never lean the back against anything that is cold. Never begin a journey till breakfast has been eaten.--

Stone Stories: Collected English Epitaphs. "It fit my mood. I made myself work at a line a night, until I could do it first try. Then two lines a night, and four, on up to a page of them at a time. Not only did I learn writing again, lads, the epitaphs were instructive. Here ~~there~~ lies John Jones, man of worth, repaying in full his borrowed earth. Angus, what would your man Burns think of ^{one} that, ay? Or the favorite of mine. Alone man must pass among the cold lunar beams/alone the sun arises, and alone/spring the great streams. That's entirely what I was, alone, after the accident to my hands. At least"--he indicated Nancy, buttering bread for him--"I'm over that now."

mod We learned by Lucas's ironic telling that he had earned good money from the Fanalulu mine before the accident.

"the great secret to silver mining, lads, is to quit in time; otherwise, the saying is that you need a gold mine to keep your silver mine going"--

and we inferred

from this house and its costly furnishings that those were not the last dollars to find their way to Lucas.

p. 33A follows →

80 We learned as much as he could bring himself to tell us about

us in Helena

~~I made myself do that letter that found its way to~~
 you. ^{write it} Why did I, after these years?" Lucas lifted his coffee cup

between his stubs and drank strong. "Matters pile up in a person.

They can surprise you, how they want out. I must have wanted to say

to old nose-in-the-air Nethermuir that I'm still living a life of my own."

Even so, I couldn't bring myself yet to tell about the accident, about my--condition. And now that you lads are here, I know it'll get told without me. That's a relief. Why I don't know, but somehow that's a relief."

41 We learned--at least I

did, and from his uncharacteristic demeanor it looked as if Rob was too--the effort of trying to keep a face under control when a meat platter arrived between those bony stubs at the ends of Lucas's sleeves.

Back in the saloon, when Lucas went to close up for the night and decided we needed one more drink to health and that led to another, we learned about Nancy.

"She came with, when I bought the Medicine Lodge and the house," Lucas imparted. "You're trying not to look shocked, but

that's the fact of it. Nancy was living with the DeSalises--this all goes back a few years, understand--when I bought out old Tom. You met Toussaint Rennie, the halfbreed or whatever arithmetic he is, in here when you came. Toussaint is married to Nancy's sister and that's all the family she has. The others died, up on the Reservation in the winter of '83. The Starvation Winter, these Blackfeet call that, and by Jesus they did starve, poor bastards them, by the hundreds. Nancy was just a girl then, ten or eleven, and Toussaint and his wife took her to raise. Then the winter of '86 came, a heavier winter than '83 ever thought of being, and Toussaint didn't know whether he was going to keep his own family alive up there on the Two Medicine River, let alone an extra. So he brought Nancy in here to the DeSalises. There's that shocked look again, lads." Himself, Lucas somehow appeared to be both grim and amused. "They say when Toussaint rode into town with her, the two of them wrapped in buffalo robes, they had so much snow on them they looked like white bears. When I came up here and bought the saloon and the house and DeSalis pulled out with his family for Missouri, Nancy--stayed on with me. I need some things done, like these damn buttons and shaving and all little nuisances like that. She needs some place to be. So you see, it's an arrangement that fits us both." Lucas shrugged into his coat, thrust his arm ends into its pockets and instantly looked like a town builder again. "This isn't old Scotland, lads. Life goes differently here."

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

Rob looked as if he'd received double of whatever I had.

"Christ of mercy, Angus. What've we gotten ourselves into here?"

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

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

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

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

"Lucas told. Tamping the blasting power and someway--"

"Not that, Angus. What I mean, how could it happen to him?"

To a Barclay, he really meant.

My own weary guess was that fate being what it is, it keeps a special eye for lives the size of Lucas's. A pin doesn't draw down lightning. But how say so to Rob this ^{unearthly} ~~unworldly~~ night and make any sense. He

(no 4) Rob was rattling at top speed now:

"Lucas always was so good with his--his hands. He was Crack Jack at anything he tried and now look at him. I tell you, Angus, I just-- and Nancy Buffalo-whatever. There's a situation, now. Housekeeper, he calls her. She must even have to help him take a pee."

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

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

Well, I told myself, here is interesting. A Barclay not

knowing what to make of another Barclay. The history of the world is not done yet.

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

Rob flopped onto his side of the bed but his eyes stayed wide open. He said only, "Maybe so, maybe ^mso."

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

Early as the hour was, the flag already was tossing atop the Sedgwick flagpole. Beyond, the mountains were washed a lovely ^{clean} blue and gray in the first sunlight. The peaks and their snow stood so clear I felt I could reach out and run a finger along that chill rough edge. At the cow camp across the creek the cook was at his fire and a few of the cowboys--riders, as Lucas referred to

them--were taking down the tents. I heard one of the picketed horses whinny, then the rush of the creek where it bumped busily across a bed of rocks.

"Angus, you are early," came a voice behind me. "Are you seeing if the sun knows how to find Gros Ventre?"

I turned around, to Toussaint Rennie. Lucas had said Toussaint was doing carpenter work for Sedge on the famous hotel. Toussaint does a little of everything and not too much of anything. He's not Blackfeet himself--it is not just entirely clear what he is--but he has a finger in whatever happens in this country. Has had for years, and it's not even clear how many years. A bit like a coyote, our Toussaint. Here and there but always in on a good chance. He comes down from the Two Medicine, works at something for a while, goes home long enough to father another child, comes down to work at whatever interests him next. And came once in a blizzard to deposit his wife's sister to the house I had just stepped from.

~~Was this person everywhere, everytime?~~
~~I want to think I would do better with the moment if I had it over again, but all I managed to respond to Toussaint was,~~ "The day goes downhill after dawn, they say," ~~he vouched.~~

"I think that, too," ~~replied Toussaint.~~ ^{he vouched.} "You ought to have been here then." ~~He~~ ^{Toussaint} nodded toward the flagpole and its flapping banner.

"Then?"

"The statehood. Sedge put up the flagpole in honor. Lila had the idea, fly the flag the first of anyone. We did, do you know."

The first flag in Montana the state, it was ours. Here in Gros Ventre."

I thought of the flag unfurling atop the Herald building in Helena that November morning, of the other flags breaking out all over the city, of the roaring celebration Rob and I had enlisted in. "How are you so sure this one was the first?"

"We got up early enough," ~~vouched~~ ^{testified} Toussaint. "Way before dawn. Sedge woke up me, I woke up Dantley, we woke up everybody. Rango and his nieces, the Kuuvuses, the Fains, Luke and"--Toussaint glanced around to be sure we were alone--"that Blackfeet of his. Out to the flagpole, everybody. It was still dark as cats, but Dantley had a lantern. Lila said, 'This is the day of statehood. This is Montana's new day.' Sedge put up the flag, there it was. Every morning since, he puts it up." Toussaint chuckled. "The wind has a good time with it. Sedge will need a lot of flags, if he keeps on."

The morning was young yet when Fain of the blacksmith shop came to ask if Rob might help him with a few days of wheelwork. Rob backed and filled a bit but then said he supposed he could, and I was glad, knowing he was privately pleased to be sought out and knowing too that a chance to use his skill would help his mood. The two of us had decided we'd give our situation a few days and conclude then whether to go or stay. I say decided; the fact that we had to wait anyway for another freight wagon or some other

conveyance out of Gros Ventre was the major voice in the vote.

When Rob went off with Fain, I offered to Lucas to lend a hand--just in time I caught myself from putting it that way--in the saloon.

The notion amused Lucas. "Adam Willox taught you how to swamp, did he?"

I said I didn't know about that, but people had been known to learn a thing if they tried.

"I've heard of that myself," Lucas answered drily. "You at least don't lack attitude. Come along if you want, we'll show you what it's like to operate a thirst parlor."

Swamping was sloshing buckets of water across the floor and then sweeping the flood out the door, I learned promptly, and when the saloon had been broomed out, there were glasses to wash and dry, empty bottles to haul out and dump, beer kegs to be wrestled, poker tables and chairs to be straightened, spittoons to be contended with. Lucas meanwhile polished the bar from end to end, first one foreshortened arm and then the other moving a towel in caressing circles on the wood.

I am not happy to have to say this, but as happened the evening before when he was showing off Gros Ventre to us, the person that Lucas was to me depended on whether his stubs were in the open or out of sight as they now were in the towel. Part of the time I could forget entirely that Lucas was maimed as he was. Part of the time there was nothing I was more aware of.

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Eventually he called a pause in our mutual tasks. "Do you ^{feel} have any thirst?" he asked. I did. "We can't have like the wise cow of Ecclefechan people thinking we sit around in here and drink," he said, "so we'll take a standing one."

I watched astounded as Lucas wrestled forth a small crock and poured us each a beerglass of buttermilk.

"Buttermilk until well into the afternoon, Angus," he preached. "The saloonman doesn't live who can toss liquor into himself all day long and still operate the place." ^

As we sipped the cow stuff and Lucas told me another installment of Gros Ventre's imminent eminence, my gaze kept slipping to his stubs. I needed to know, and since there was no good time to ask this it may as well be now as any.

"Lucas, would you mind much if I ask you a thing?"

He regarded me in the presiding way of Rob aboard the steamship. "About my hands, you mean. The ones I haven't got. Everyone asks something eventually. How do I tie my shoes. How do I get my dohickey out to take a piddle. Well? Bang away, Angus lad."

I swallowed, not just on the taste of buttermilk. "Do they--does it ever still hurt, there?"

Lucas looked at me a long moment, and then around the Medicine Lodge as if to be sure there were no listening ghosts in its corners.

"Angus, it does. Sometimes it hurts like two toothaches at once."

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44

#

really, to become Frank, his first-born and

I watched as Lucas wrestled with a small crowd and poured
us each a beer, less of butter milk.

As we slipped the coat, and Lucas told me another story.
Gros Ventre's turbulent existence, my gaze kept slipping to his story.
I needed to know, and since there was no good time to ask this way
as well be now as any.

"Lucas, would you mind much if I ask you a thing?"
He reported me in the presence of Rob, toward the stamper.
"About my hands, you mean. The ones I haven't got. Everyone takes
something eventually. How do I tie my shoes. How do I and my brother
out to take a phable. Well, hang away, Angus lad."
I swallowed, not just on the taste of butter milk. "Do have--"

it's over still, isn't it?

Those are the times when it feels like I still have the hands but they're on fire. But I don't have them, do I, so where does that pain come from?" The asking of that was not to me, however, and Lucas went on: "There, ~~is~~ then. That's one. Next question?"

"That one was all, Lucas."

After Lucas began to see that I could do saloon tasks ~~at least~~ ^{almost} half as well with two hands as he could with none, he made strong

use of me. Indeed, by the second day I ~~had heard~~ ^{was hearing} from him: "Angus, I've some matters at the house. You can preside here till I get back," ^{ay?} ~~And~~ ^{there} ~~that~~ ^{promotion} was my ~~elevation~~ into being in charge of the ¹ Medicine Lodge during the buttermilk hours of the day. #

95

"How do, Red." The taller of the pair who were bowlegging ~~back~~ their way to the bar gave me the greeting, while the short wiry one beside him chirped, "Pour us somethin' that'll cheer us up." In that order of presentation, Perry Fox and Deaf Smith Mitchell these were. Riders for one of the Noon Creek cattle ranches up near the Blackfeet Reservation. Progeny of Texas who, to hear them

~~tell it, had strayed north from that paradisiacal prairie to cowboy in Montana~~ and hadn't yet found their way back. The one called Deaf Smith was no more hard of hearing than you or I, but simply came from a Texas locality of that name. Not easy to grasp logically, ~~he~~ was Texas.

In not much more time than it would have taken Lucas to serve an entire saloonful, I managed to produce a bottle and pour my pair of customers a drink.

~~They~~ lifted a glass to each other and did honor to the contents, ~~They clinked glasses, did a healthy swallow apiece,~~ then Perry

faced me squarely. "Red, we got somethin' to ask you."

96

This put me a bit wary, but I said: "I'm here listening."

"It's kind of like this. Luke's been tellin' us there's these of yours Scotch soldiers that put a dress on when they go off to war. Is he pullin' our leg, or is that the God's truth?"

"Well, the Highlanders, yes, they have a history of wearing kilts into battle. But Lucas and Rob and I ^{come} ~~are~~ from the Lowlands, we're not--"

"Pay me," Perry drawled to Deaf Smith. "Told you I could spot when Luke is funnin' and when he ain't."

Deaf Smith grudgingly slid a silver dollar along the bar to Perry. To me, he aimed: "Just tell us another thing now, how the hell do you guys make that work, fightin' in dresses? What's the other side do, die of laughin'?"

The dilemma of the Lowlander. To venture or not into the Highlands thicket of kilts, bagpipes, the Clearances, clan quarrels and all else, the while making plain that I myself didn't number among those who feuded for forty generations over a patch of heather. The voice of my schoolmaster Adam Willox despairing over the history of the Highlands clans ^{swam} ~~came~~ to mind:

If it wasn't for the Irish, the Highlands Scotch would be the most pixied people on earth. But Lucas's voice ^{floated} ~~was~~ there in my head, too: Conversation is the whetstone of thirst, Angus. These Montanians ^{in their big country} aren't just dry for the whiskey, they're dry for talk.

97 "Gents, let's look at this from another way." Before going on, I nodded inquiringly toward the bottle. Perry and Deaf Smith automatically nodded

(made change from Perry's fresh dollar and
 in turn. Pouring them another and myself a buttermilk, I began: "As I
 hear of it, this geezer Custer was more fully dressed than the Indians
 at the Little Big Horn. Am I right so far?"

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

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

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

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

"Man, that's not just a frame of mind, there are other ~~bits~~ ^{departments}
 involved too."

"You can spare me that inventory," he retorted with a bit of an edge,
 and in we went to eat. But I was impressed from then on with Rob's change
 of attitude about Nancy and her benefit to Lucas. Indeed, at supper he
 began the kind of shiny talk to her that for the first time since we
 landed in Gros Ventre sounded to me like the characteristic Rob.

—

98

40 D

The rumor is being bruited that a hotel, possibly of more than one storey, is under construcion in Gros Ventre. The notion of anyone actually desiring to stay overnight in that singular community: this, dear ^{readers} ~~people~~, is the definition of optimism ⓧ

Some such ~~sally~~ ^{was} ~~vo~~ was in each of the past issues of the Choteau newspaper I ~~reading~~ ^{was} through to pass time in the Medicine Lodge. But I thought little of them until the slow afternoon I came across the one:

Gros Ventre recently had another instance of the remarkably high mortality rate in that locale. Heart failure was the diagnosis. Lead will do that to a heart.

I blinked and read again. The saloon was empty, and in the street outside nothing was moving except Sedge's and Toussaint's sporadically hammers banging the hotel toward creation. Gros ventre this day seemed so peaceful you would have to work for hours to 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--"

"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,"

"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"--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--"

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

A major gulp of buttermilk went down him.

"That one, now." "That one, I do have to say was ill luck. He was shot in an argument over cards."

"What, here?"

"No, in Rango's." Lucas looked at me with extreme reproach, but I held gaze with him. After a bit he glanced away. "Well,

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well as
him

you have a point. It would have happened in here if it hadn't been the gambler's week there instead. But after that, Rango and I talked it over and we've given gamblers the bye. Pleasant games A coming town like this has its good name to think of, you know. among local folk, now.

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 for excitement the very next day let pass the chance to go Ventre's fresh reputation that the two of us then decided to stay a on a freight wagon retracing our route toward Augusta and Helena? few more weeks? Or in hope of it?

Either case, my growing notion that I ought to The notion that I go ahead and try some land-looking between intervals of helping Lucas in the saloon, just to be sure we weren't undisclosed met no objection from missing something here in Gros Ventre's neighborhood, was Rob's. He and other repair stayed in demand with Fain for as much wheelwork as a pair of hands could do and next with Sedge for the making of the hotel's windowsills and doorframes, 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, I'll keep Gros Ventre in tune while you're out and around." And this is how I got my introduction to the country around Gros Ventre.

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 Rob. Tell you what, I'll even make a contribution to your exploring. Follow me." I tracked after him to the

101 42A
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 Texas saddle. The pony's gaily splotched colors made me feel as if I was riding



into the country around Gros Ventre ^{was} the actuality is that
forth in warpaint, but I suppose I sallied out looking as purely
green at ~~horsemanship~~ 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 that he could take care of what he termed "business at the house.") Now the question was the homestead-seeker's eternal one, where best to seek?

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

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

43A

103

#

Three mornings in a row I rode different tracts eastward of Gros Ventre, following along the creek and its ^{fringe} ~~hedge~~ of willow and cottonwood until

~~South I did not bother with, for when Rob and I were trekking through there in the wake of Herbert's freight wagon we agreed that to dwell amid those treeless benchlands would be like living on a table top. East, along the creek and its hedge of willow and cottonwood, was more interesting.~~ The land opened into leveler ^{an even} prairie, flattening and fanning into ^{the big} horizon which Lucas's maps showed were incised by ^{the big} rivers, the Marias, the Milk, and eventually the Missouri. Noble enough country--Toussaint told me it had been thick with buffalo when he first came--but so broad, so open, so exposed, that I felt like a ~~fieldmouse~~ ^{fieldmouse} under the eye of ~~that~~ hawk. Next was north, and red cattle on buff hills.

#

North took only a single morning. North was red cattle on buff hills, north was ranch after ~~Ranches were~~ already built along a twisty stream called Noon Creek, Walter Williamson's huge Double W, Thad Wainwright's Rocking T, three or four smaller enterprises upstream toward the mountains. Where the road ran along the benchland between Gros Ventre and Noon Creek, I ~~sat on the pinto~~ for a while and gazed down at the fort-like cluster of Double W ranch buildings, ^{and} ~~wondering~~ ^{red} whether Rob and I would ever possess a fraction as much roof over us.

#

104 43B

—
"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} ~~close~~ under the mountains.

Lucas had not remarked much on my land-looking, maybe on the ^{figured} basis that he ~~thought~~ I ought to see plenty before making my mind ^{ratified} up, but now he ~~remarked~~:

"That'll be worth doing."

Plan to spend the full day at it, there ~~are~~ are a lot of miles in that country up there." To my surprised look, Lucas cleared his throat and allowed: "Business at the house can rest for an afternoon."

"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~~ you. While you're about it tomorrow,

Pay a visit to Ninian Duff ^{while} ~~just~~ ^{just} you're about it. His is the first place up the North Fork, there after ~~where~~ the creek divides."

105
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} ~~looks~~ and instructed, "You'll remember, 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

44A

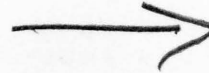
know something more about that, Lucas."

"Angus, you're one who'd want to know which way the rain falls
from. I've nothing ^{major} 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.

#

~~(The description of Nain Duff to come)~~



106 44B

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} ~~made~~ ^{to} me 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
~~was comfortable~~ on my back. Who knew, maybe this was simply how a Two
Medicine day whistled.

The road ~~for Patch and me~~ ^{today} wasn't honestly one, just twin prints of
wheelmarks such as those Herbert's freight wagon had tracked to Gros
Ventre. Yet this was ^{peopled} ~~people~~ land along this ^{main} ~~mean~~ creek, homesteads
inserted into each of the best four or five meadows of wild hay.

Here was handsome, with the steady ^{line of grassed} ~~backing~~ benchland ~~above~~ the creek and the
convenient hedge of willows and trees giving shelter all along the
water. The long-sloped promontory butte with its timber top poked ^{companionably}

~~above~~ just into sight over the far end of this valley of homesteaders,
^{but} ~~and~~ ^{that butte} ~~and beyond it~~ where the tiers of ^{and forest} mountains began to show, it looked

like tangled country. Any one of these established homesteads down here,
I would gladly own. Were Rob and I already latecomers?

4) The mare ^{of course} Patch 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 one myself before she waded in. Today, though, the streambed was thoroughly ~~pebbles~~ ^{gravel}, several-colored ^{and bright} under the swift ^{clean flow} water as a spill of marbles, ~~and~~ ^{so} Patch ~~created no~~ ^{didn't} roil the drinking site. I rode her on across before getting down and drinking the fresh brisk water 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.

107 To me the natural thing was to point Patch ^{toward} ~~to~~ 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 new country would bring anticipation, curiosity. And there you'd be as wrong as I was. For what I ^{began to feel} ~~felt~~ was a growing sense of ^{familiarity.} ~~familiarity.~~ ^{something making itself} Of the known, ~~the~~ recognized. I ~~hadn't~~ ^{tried to place} the cause ^{though, I kept trying to place but couldn't.} of the feeling, The wind, yes, that. Smell of new grass, which I had been among for my several days of riding by now. Cold whiff from where

a snowbank lay hidden in some north-facing coulee. All those but something more.

At the knob ~~top~~, I saw. The earth's restless alterations of itself here. The quickening swells of plains into foothills and then the ~~great~~ ^{abrupt}

upward spill of the mountains.

The climb of the continent to its divide, higher, greater, more sudden like a running leap of the land,

than seemed possible; I had been feeling this all happen in the same way that I watched it delineate itself while Rob and I were aboard the stagecoach between Craig and Augusta. The interior of America ~~went~~ ^{soared} through its change of mood ^{as well} here. And here, just below me, one single calm green wrinkle

amid the surrounding rumpus of tall timbered ridges and surging buttes and stonecliff skyline, lay the valley of the North Fork.

Once seen never forgotten, that new mood of land. I sat transfixed in the saddle and slowly tutored myself about the join of this western

attic to the rest of the Two Medicine country. No human sign was

anywhere around, ^{except for tiny} ~~other than~~ the pair of homesteads just above the

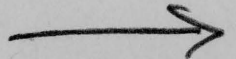
mouth of the North Fork, one of them undoubtedly that of the ^{old} Bible-banger, Whoojamadinger

~~howler 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

, what, seventy-five miles distant,
 matter, I could see all the way to the Sweetgrass Hills that Herbert
 had pointed out to Rob and me. ^{By the holy,} ~~Lord of Mercy,~~ this was as if stepping
 up onto the hill above the Greenock dock and being able to ^{look} ~~see~~ across
 Scotland to Edinburgh. North, the benchland and the landmark butte that
 met it were ^{road} my boundaries of study. South, ^{ward} a throng of big ridges
 shouldering between this creek branch and the South Fork.

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



Someway, in the midst of all my gawking I began to feel ~~I was~~
~~being~~ ^{myself} watched. Maybe by someone at either of the homesteads along
 the creek, but no one was in view.

Who knew, probably these ~~seven-league~~ mountains were capable of gazing back at me.

Nonetheless

I cast a glance behind me. On a ~~lean~~ ^{blood bay} horse not much farther
 away than a strong spit, sat a colossally bearded ~~man~~ ^{figure}.

He was loose-made--tall, thin, mostly legs and elbows. And
 that beard; a dark-brown feedbag of whiskers halfway down his
 chest. He also had one of those foreheads you sometimes seen 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.

All of this ~~he~~ was regarding me in a blinkless way. I gaped back at the
 whiskers and forehead, only gradually noticing that ~~the horseman's~~
 either side of his saddle horn, holding ~~another~~ a lengthy stick of some sort
 and pointing it mostly towards me. ~~that~~ across there. Then I realized ~~the~~ 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. "I'm looking for land to take up."

"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 nodded my
 head to the North Fork and the butte--"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 ~~all the~~ ^{any}

gazing the length of the valley to where the far shoulder of the
butte angled down to the North Fork. Abruptly:

"You ^{are} ~~be~~ not afraid of work?"

"None that I've met yet."

The whiskers of Ninian Duff twitched a bit at that.

"Homesteading has ^{some} ~~some~~ brands of it the rest of the world never
heard of. But that is something you ^{will} ~~be~~ need to learn ~~that~~ for
yourself. If I were you now"—a hypothesis I wasn't ^{particularly} ~~at all~~

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further in
way to my direction., "You ^{are} new to here?" he now inquired.

"As the dew," I admitted, and told him in general ^{but quick} about Rob and myself and our homesteading intention ^{while I was t}

, and that if we needed any vouching it could be obtained ⁱⁿ at the Medicine

^{saloon}
Lodge from none other than Lucas Barc--

By the time I caught up with what my tongue was saying, His Whiskerness

made up his mind about me. "Lucas Barclay has had a misfortunate life,"

he announced. "He can answer to God for it. Or knowing Lucas, more likely ^{argue with} question Him about it. But so far as I can see,

^{are}
you ~~is~~ not Lucas." He slid the rifle into its scabbard.

^{no} "My name is Duff."

^{geener} So. I could well believe that this ^{came keen} ~~man~~ and Lucas ~~would strike~~ against ^{as} iron sharpens iron sparks off each other, ~~hard against hard.~~

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

^{are}
"You ~~is~~ from?"

"Nethermuir, in Forfar."

^{Ay,}

"I know of your town. Flora and I are East Neuk of Fife folk."

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

As if he had run through his supply of words, Ninian Duff was

111
 comfortable with--"I'd have a look there ^{under Breed Butte,} along the top of the
 creek. ^{Ay,} You can dinner with us and we ^{will} talk then." Ninian Duff
 started his horse down off the knob. "We eat at noon," he declared
 over his shoulder in a way that told me he did not mean the first
 minute beyond 12 o'clock. scene ~~at~~ 11/1

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

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

Stopping by the house to tell Nancy this calendar, I swung off
the pinto horse like a boy who has been to the top of the world.
The kitchen door was closest for my moment's errand. With my mind
full of the ~~day's discovery~~ ~~North Fork and the future~~, 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. Too alike in the caught look each cast me. All this
~~That~~ ~~mistakable~~
might have been ~~accident~~. 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 ~~mirror~~ door of glass.

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

113 "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. It's up the North Fork, good grass and water with fish 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 ^{with a smile} the kitchen 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 ^{most 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."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—

On our way back from Rango'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} ~~let~~ its slight light into the Montana darkness. I quoted dreamily, "It is the moon, I know her horn."

"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. ~~Just then~~ 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.)

no 4 "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. "The Caledonian Railway"--the line of our journey from Nethermuir to Greenock--"will run through the middle of this town Gros Ventre. I can hear it now. Whoot-toot-toot! Whoot-toot-toot!"

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"The train will stop exactly here"--I made a somewhat crooked X in the dirt with my foot--"and Queen Victoria and the Pope of Rome will climb off and step into the Medicine Lodge for a drink with us all."

one way
"And I'll own all the land that way"--Rob pointed dramatically north--"and you'll own all the other"--now pointing south--"and we'll have rivers of red cattle we'll ship to Chicago on our train."

"And we'll have ^{Texas} ~~Mexican~~ cowboys," I threw in. "Thirteen dozen of them."

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.

As clear as today, I remember how the 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 onto Breed Butte to see straight down into the valley, I thought the North Fork looked even more resplendent than I had seen it the day before.

A curlew made deft evasive flight across the slope below us. We sat unspeaking for a while, in that supreme silence that makes the ears ring. 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."

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

"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--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 ~~plenty~~ for two in his shop⁸ 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 world at least as well as either of us. He has--" 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} ~~tumbled~~ off my horse just thinking how much more there was to this than I'd noticed about ~~it~~: Rob and Nancy, and maybe 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?}"

118 I answered only, "I'll need to think on it, all right." Then I touched the pinto into motion, down off the butte toward the North Fork and Gros Ventre, and Rob came after.

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 again and again and again in my mind I looked from one to

the other to the third, as you would scan at the corners of a room you were afraid in.

119 Nancy seeing Rob as a younger Lucas. A Lucas fresh and two-handed. Nancy whose life had been to accept what came. in his infatuation with townbuilding Lucas not seeing at all that under his roof, trouble was about to ^{grow} ~~receive~~ a new meaning. own

Rob—Rob unseeing too, not letting himself see. Simply putting himself where it all could not help but happen.

(no 91) That helmeted mood of his, that trance into triumph.

(no 91) Of his 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.

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,

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→ it couldn't have been dreamed of by me in thousands of nights. Rob coveting--not a 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.

Who among us is not sin-stained? Every Scot is born knowing

that, too. But knowing it and standing in the exact middle while it
~~floods up~~
~~cuts loose~~ around you are two different things. ~~No one could ever~~
~~win in the pitting of a Barclay against a Barclay. This I wanted~~
~~none of. This I could see nothing to do but leave from.~~

I had seen
story on
pamphlet
about
Barclay
y.

V20

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~~ ~~Angus~~, tear each other apart; in the pitting of a Barclay against a
~~no~~ ~~unripped~~
Barclay ~~one~~ ~~one~~ could ever win ~~unscathed.~~ This conflict I wanted none of.

Even the North Fork, grandeur though it was, wasn't worth witnessing this.
Search myself and the situation in every way,
This I could see nothing to do but leave from.

Nothing was.

#

I said as much--just the leaving; I didn't want to be the one
to utter more than that--to Lucas as soon as he came into the saloon
that second afternoon.

near the end of

"Up to the North Fork already? Aren't you getting ahead of
yourself? You and Rob ~~lie~~ will need to file homestead claims at the
land office in 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
Two Medicine
this country, you don't mean."

Away.
"Lucas, I do mean that."

"Away where?" he erupted. "Angus, are you demented?
III 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."

p. 54A follows

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"Lucas, it's just that I've had--second thoughts."

121
"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, I don't know what can have gotten into you and Rob. ^{lie} 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--" ^

→

intends to
"It's only me leaving. Rob ~~says he'll~~ stay on with Fain for
awhile."

"Rob ^{lie} says that, after coming all the way from Nethermuir to get
away from the wheel shop?" Lucas polished even more ^{furiously} energetically.

"Put a hammer in a Barclay's--" he stopped, ^{managed to go} then ~~went~~ on--"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
Tell me this, now.
me: "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--"

"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} said: "Well, at least you can stay on for a bit, can't you?"

My turn to shake a head.

^{as peevish as one person could be.}
"What's your damned headlong hurry?" Lucas demanded
^{Weary} peevishly. "Tired of my hospitality, are you?"

"Lucas--" I sought how to say enough without saying too
^{ought not} much--"a welcome ~~shouldn't~~ be worn out, is all."

122
Lucas stopped wiping the bar and gazed at me. ^{Abruptly} His face had the
same look of thunder as when Rob first stepped up to him asking for
a handshake. What a thorough fool I was. Why had I said words with
my real meaning behind them?

Lucas moved not at all, staring at me. Then with great care to

say it soft, he said:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

123 ^{the better life} "Here's to ~~sane living~~," he snapped out, and we drank needfully. Still abrupt, he ^{queried} ~~asked~~, "Have you told our Rob ^{his} 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

123
empty Medicine Lodge as if daring it to tell him why not. "I'll have Sedge take the saloon for a while and the three of us at least can have a final supper together. We may as well ^{hold} ~~have~~ peace in the family until then, do you think?"

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

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

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

124
Dismay and concern and suspicion had flashed across Rob's face rapidly as a shuffle of cards and now he was back to usual 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. Here, I can do the carving," and he reached over to cut Lucas's cold beef for him.

124 Lucas fed himself some bites in his bearlike way. Then he began out of nowhere: "I've been thinking what you two might do."

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

But Lucas sailed on: "When you lads take up your land, I mean." I gave him an idiot's ^{stare} look. ~~Hadn't~~ ^{forgotten every} he ~~heard~~ the words I said in the Medicine Lodge this afternoon? "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} ~~nice~~ 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} ~~said~~ nothing.

125 "So the ticket up there will have 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 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. ^{yearling} With ~~young~~ ewes you'd have the wool money this summer, and both

lambs and wool next year. Two revenues are better than one," he declared, as if this was news to the world. "It's more than interesting, Angus, Ninian Duff saying to you that he'll sell 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."

126 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 ~~said~~^{spelled out} impatiently. "I'll partner you in getting sheep. A small band apiece, 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. (; don't get the wild idea I'm made of money.
 Not endlessly, mind you, ^{dive} But to help you
 get underway. You're going to need to ~~get~~ right to work, Montana
I'd say tomorrow isn't too soon for starting.
 winters come before you know it. 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. ^{again} This was the Rob I had come from
 Nethermuir and Helena with.

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

"Who wouldn't be? A chance like that?" Somewhere in his mind
 Rob had to adjust about Nancy, that there'd need to be some delay in
 that matter now; but with her absent to Toussaint's household, there
 already was a delay and in the meantime Lucas's offer lay like money
 to be picked up. You could all but hear Rob click with adjustment.

^{piece}
 I knew Lucas had one more ~~sentence~~ to put into place, and it
 came, it came.

"There's still one country here to be heard from," he said benignly
 around his pipe. ^{to me.}

^{Can I count on you both?}
 "And what do you say to the idea, Angus?"

^{no} My mind buzzed like a hive with all this. I tried to sort what
 this offer of Lucas's meant, what it didn't, what it could or might
 or may. Lucas Barclay, rascal that you knew how to be even without
 hands. This was your way of easing us from your house, of shunting
 Rob from Nancy's vicinity, was it not? Answer, a sure yes. You
 knew too that the homestead work would so take us up that there was
 every chance Nancy would pass from Rob's mind, that out of her sight

other possibilities would present themselves. Again, yes in high letters. And would you ever have made your offer if I had not fumbled out the hint to you about your nephew and your woman? Answer, maybe so and maybe no. This isn't old Scotland, lads. Life goes differently here.

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,

But 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
that answer, Lucas, was
What you and I both knew I now could not avoid saying, did we not?

And say it I did.

Both
"Yes."

amen.
Both.