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22

World, it has happened at last! With this inaugural issue Gros Ventre and the Two Medicine country gain their journalistic voice. The Gros Ventre Weekly Gleaner! The name flows easily from the tongue and the news of our prospering community will flow as fluently. Scarce a day goes by without newcomers arriving to enrich this locale with their endeavors, and the Gleaner is more proud than can be put into words, to now join their ranks. Let the future come!--that is our chorus here in God's favored country.

--Gros Ventre Weekly Gleaner, April 5, 1894

more to ch. 6,

more

7 after Raisin's reading - same afternoon

#

Let me give
~~I can tell you~~ the very day of this. The twenty ^{iet} ~~first~~ of April, 1894. A Montana spring day, which was to say breezy along with sunny, melt and mud along with greening grass and first flowers.

The afternoon was better than my ^{afterschool} chore, which was to call on the replacement teacher newly arrived at Noon Creek. Old Miss Threlkeld, who ~~had~~ held forth there since Cain and Abel, toward the end of winter had suffered palpitation of the heart, and ^{about} this sudden successor of hers I more than half knew what to expect and fully dreaded ~~it~~ it.

no 9

"Ramsay is her name," Ninian Duff ~~had~~ reported, "they're a new family to here, down from Canada. Man and wife and daughter. The Mrs. seems to be something of an old battle-axe, I do have to

say." Coming from Ninian, that was credential for her indeed.

"They bought the relinquishment up there to the west of Isaac Reese," he went on, "with a bit of help from Isaac's pocket from what I hear."

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

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

"Maybe not severely," I had to agree, and now Scorpion and I ^{were} ~~ing from the divide between our valleys descended from the benchland to Noon Creek, a prairie stream twice as twisty as the North Fork ever thought of being. North Fork and Noon Creek, straight from the schoolhouse.~~ Scorpion was pointed to the country where I bought him--the Noon Creek schoolhouse ~~that~~ was within ~~sight of~~ easy eyeshot of ~~my destination was nearby Isaac Reese's place~~ horse ranch and I wondered if he held horse memories of it. "Skorp Yun, lad, what about that?" I declaimed. "Is it the case with you today that It's home and it's home, home where I would be /Oh home, home, home to my own country?" Scorpion's ears twitched up and I suppose that was my answer, as much as the horse clan was willing to tell a man.

cut
policy?

A quick how-do here and home was my own destination. This

The schoolhouse
was much like mine--for that matter, so was its attendant pair of
outhouses--except for standing all but naked to the wind, Noon Creek
providing only a thin sieve of willows instead of the South Fork's
broadback clumps of cottonwoods. Ask any dozen people ^{passing} and thirteen
of them would tell you my schoolsite was the obvious superior of the
two.

~~passing~~

Pleased with that and armored with the thought that however howlingly formidable Mrs. Battle-Axe Ramsay might try to be I ~~still~~ was the senior teacher hereabout, I tied Scorpion beside the Noon Creek teacher's horse and strode to the schoolhouse.

"Hello, anyone," I called in, and followed my words through the doorway.

A woman did look up from the teacher's desk.

A woman whose shoulders drew back nobly and whose breasts came out nobler yet.

A woman my age or less. A woman ^{and} with perfect round cheeks and an exactly proportionate chin and a small neat nose, ~~and~~ with the blackest of black hair done into a firm glossy braid, and with direct blue eyes.)

A glory of a woman.

She ~~gave~~ ^{granted} me an inquiring half-smile, the rest of her expression as frank as a clock.)

(no 9) "Hello," she enunciated, although what was being said was And What Is Your Business Here, If Any?

I told her me. And made about as much impression as a mosquito alighting on a stone fence.

"I am called Anna Ramsay," she stated in return,

and I was going to need to ask Ninian what he thought a battle-axe talked like.

Hers was a liltful voice which may have paused in Canada but only after fully flowering in Scotland.

"I'm the teacher at the South Fork school, over across, Mrs. Ramsay," I hurried to clarify.

"I am the teacher here," said she, "and it is Miss Ramsay."

3A

Rob, Lucas, my unhearing father, my sorrowful mother, all who have ever
known me and generations yet to come: did you feel ^{any of} this long breath of instant
together with me, this abrupt catch in the throat that said here ^{was} the end to all
my waiting, this

catch/breath

light message

I am sure there was ~~an audible~~ ^{surprise} swale of time while I traced
step by step back to the brain of Ninian the Calvinian? Ninian Duff
had told me Mrs. Ramsay was an old battle-axe. He had told me the

any



new Noon Creek teacher could stand a cordial look-in. He had never bothered to tell me those two formulations did not add up to the same person.

"Yes, well. Miss Ramsay, now. ^{ah,} I ~~seem~~ to have been misinformed," I understated. "In any case, I came by to say hello"--her look told me that had been more than amply done by and not in ribbonwinning fashion now--"and to see if there's any help I can offer."

"That's kind," she decided. "But I know of none."

In that case, Miss-not-Mrs. Ramsay, help me and my ^{dazed} tongue.

What do you think the price of rice in China will reach? And are absolute you the lovely thing you appear to be under the crust?

"I'm trying to place your voice," I ~~said~~ ^{managed to say, find,} true enough in its way: trying to coax the sound of it into my ears for as long as possible. "Your town ⁱⁿ Scotland is--?"

"My town was Brechin." ~~Not all that far from my own Nethermuir.~~ She noticeably did not ask me mine.

Brechin! Not all that far from my own Nethermuir, in the same county of Forfar; we must have grown up sharing the same days of sun, the same storms from the sea.

I at once told her of my Nethermuir nativity, which did not noticeably set her afire with interest. "This Montana is different from old Scotland, isn't it?" I imparted.

She ^{regarded} looked at me steadily as ever. "Yes."

"Although," I began, and had no idea where to head from there.

"Mr. McCaskill, ~~what do you say~~ you have just reminded me,

~~Mr. McCaskill,~~ there is one matter you ^{may} might be able to help me with."

Anything, anything; wheelbarrowing a mountain from here to there, putting socks on snakes. ^{I find I am}

^{now} ~~in~~ in short supply of ^{Montana} new geography books. This school has a ~~total~~ total of one, to be exact. Mr. Reese promised me ^{more} some, but he's

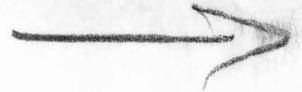
away buying horses."

more

^

"I have ^{loads} ~~extra~~," I offered as fast as I could say it. Later
would be soon enough to calculate whether or not I actually had
any. "You're more than welcome to them."

Anna Ramsay shook that matchless head of hers, but in general
perturbance at men who would see to horses before geography, rather
than at my offer. "I've had to put the pupils to making their own."



I was as flummoxed now as a duck in thunder. "You've--?"

"Yes, they're a bit makeshift but better than nothing," she said and gestured to the stack of them at the corner of her desk. They were pamphlets ^{of as many colors as a rainbow,} bound with yarn, with My Montana Book and the pupil's name bold on the cover. More than just that, the pamphlets were scissored into ^{unmistakable} the shape of the state of Montana--twice as wide as high and the entire left side that curious profile of a face looking down its bent nose at Idaho. I opened the pamphlet proclaiming Dill Egan, grade four, to be its author. Intently--not only was I curious but I was not going to forfeit this opportunity to hover in the near vicinity of Miss Anna Ramsay--as I say, ^{as I could manage with so much distraction so close,} intently I started through the pamphlet pages. Products of Montana, and Dill Egan's confident map of where gold, copper, cattle, sheep and sundry grains each predominated. Area and Population of Montana, 147,138 square miles and 132,159 persons respectively, and his enstarred map showing Helena, Butte, Bozeman, Missoula, Great Falls, Billings, Miles City and the now twenty-four county seats. Mountains of Montana and another map showing the western throng of ranges, Bitterroot and Cabinet and Garnet and Mission and Tendoy and Tobacco Root and on and on until the Bearpaws and Little Rockies and Big Snowys outposted the eastern majority of the state. Drainages of Montana and yet another map of all the rivers and what must have been every respectable creek as well, with the guiding message The Continental Divide separates the Atlantic and the Pacific slopes of America. Railroads of Montana. Minerals of Montana. -- →

I had a sudden image of this brisk beautiful woman beside me as the goddess of geography, fixing the boundaries of this careless world as unerringly as Job's prosecutor or even the ^{U.S.} General Land Office.

I swallowed hard. Anna Ramsay's ten-year-olds all too evidently ^{already} knew more about Montana than I did. Every one of them a Crofutt in the bud. I took a look around me. High on the ^{behind us} blackboard was chalked the majestically handwritten single word:

chilblain

Other than it, the blackboard was ^{not only} freshly cleaned, ^{it shone black.} The best I could scrape together to remark was: "Your chalk keeps talking after school, does it?"

"Yes, that's tomorrow's ^{in the air} ~~wander~~ word," she explained. "I write a different ^{up} one ^{go} there for each day. That way, when the pupils' eyes ^{ing off into air,} wander ~~around the room,~~ they at least are looking at how ^a ~~one~~ word of the language is spelled."

"A sound principle," I ^{vouched sagely} ~~managed to concur~~, wishing I'd thought of it the first day I stepped into my South Fork classroom.

Contemplate the miracle of chilblain spelling itself, even approximately, into the mind of Daniel Rozier. My eyes moved on from the blackboard. Her schoolroom ^{gleamed} ~~shined~~ like the Queen's kitchen. ^{seemed to be} This Miss Ramsay was a stickler about everything. ~~Adam Willox, could you have come into our two classrooms,~~ I have no doubt whom you would have instantly seen to be the better schoolkeeper.

, ah, you , were you
"You were a teacher in Scotland?" I somewhat unnecessarily asked.

, back in Brechin
"In a dame school." It seemed to me a magnificent beneficence when she ~~came somewhere close to smiling as she~~

creaky?
~~Just black~~

~~stuttered~~
~~seemed~~
~~cut~~

Yes, at...
very good

tilted her head ever so slightly and
decided to add: ^{as you say,} "This is different."

I wanted to sing out to her, so are you, so are you. I wanted
to hang Ninian Duff from a high tree by his beard. I wanted to go
back out that schoolhouse door, turn myself around three times, and
start this anew. I wanted--instead I managed to draw in enough
breath to clear my head and free up my tongue: "I'll fetch the
geography ^{des} books to you. Tomorrow, I even could. ^{and} If there's
anything ^{whatsoever} else you need--"

"Mr. Reese will be back from his beloved horses any day. It is
his job to see that I have what the school needs."

Again that first half-smile ^{of hers} and the ^{simultaneous} clocklike frankness, in which I
desperately tried to discern a momentworth more of warmth than when
I arrived.

→ "Mr. McCaskill, I
do appreciate that you came."

"It's been my pleasure, Miss Ramsay."

Riding home, I was the next thing beyond giddy. Scorpion must
have compassed his own route around the west shoulder of Breed Butte
and down to my homestead, or he and I would be circling there yet.

41 Astonishment. That was my word in the air. The coming of dusk was an
astonishment, the last of this ^{April} day coloring a blue into the gray of the mountains
as if sky had entered rock. My homestead was an astonishment, in expectant
welcome there beside the North Fork like the front porch to the future. The
the dabbed yellow of buttercups, smooth
greening grass, the creek rattling mildly over stones, the rhythm of Scorpion's

hooves against the earth, the ever-restless air of the Two Medicine country traveling over my skin,

obviously

~~hooves against the earth,~~ astonishments all. For that matter, I was an astonishment to myself--how fertile for love I was. Just when you have lived long enough to think you know yourself, behavior such as this crops out.

4 this life? - just

But the braided marvel that touched alive all these others: Anna Ramsay.

Where, really, did I stand with her, after an acquaintance that would have even barely boiled an egg? I didn't know. I didn't know how to know.

could

Thunder tumbling out of an absolute clear sky, was the way this had fallen on me.

The one certainty I held was that the women I had met in my life so far were no training for this one.

Oh, I tried to tell myself whoa and slow. And by the time I'd

in my whoa & slow

cooked supper

twice--my first try burned conclusively--

I had myself half-believing I was near to sane again. brainless.

Angus, Steady, don't rush in. For that matter, Miss Anna Ramsay did not tolerated rushing. look anything like a person who could be rushed. Nor had I made a ribbonwinning job of introducing myself to her.

but I did go to bed with the thought that tomorrow, nothing known on earth could keep me from delivering those geography books to her.

Pig Pom Wang
I was a astronomer
c myself.

#

"This was kind of you"--she, even more glorious on second inspection. "To make the ride over here so soon again."

"Not at all"--myself, earnest without even trying. "If one schoolkeeper can't lend a hand to another schoolkeeper, the world is a poor place."

Just over Anna's head as she stood behind her desk was her blackboard word for today, accommodate, which for the first time in my life I noticed contains more than one m.

"Before you go"--I had no thought of that--"I do have something further I wonder if you might advise me about, Mr. McCaskill."

"Miss Ramsay, if I can I will. What?"

"How do you keep the big boys from playing pranks that have to do with"--she never blinked--"the girls' outhouse?"

With teacup delicacy I outlined to her the curative effects of the boys having to go in the brush. Throughout, she regarded me steadily. Then she swung to the schoolroom window and studied the willow supply along the creek. I stored away forever the fact that her braid swung almost all the way down her back. ⁴ Evidently she judged the Noon Creek willows ample to their duty, sufficient thatch of them to screen a boy but not enough to thwart the chilly seeking nose of the wind, for she turned around to me and nodded. "Yes, that should do it. ^m Thank you for that advice, Mr. McCaskill. Well. I have grading--"

conclusively

"As do I, " I put in, as accommodating as can be imagined.
 "But now there's a question I ~~have~~ ^{need to put to} for you. I've ~~been~~ ^{visited} your school,
 and I'd ^a ~~like~~ ^{much} like you to ~~see~~ ^{visit} mine. We're holding a dance, Saturday next
 week. Could I see you there?"

She grew as intent as if I'd thrown her a major problem in multiplication. "It's early to say." Seeing my hope plummet, she provided me a half-smile to grapple it back up. "But possibly--"

"I could come for you."

"That won't be necessary."

"Oh, no trouble."

"But it would be." She was looking at me a bit askance, as if wondering how a grown man could not see that an extra stint on horseback equaled an inconvenience for ~~him~~ ^{self}. Anna Ramsay plainly could out-teach me in spelling and geography, but there was at least one variety of arithmetic she didn't yet ^u understand.

"I'm sure others from Noon Creek will be attending," she elucidated for me, "and I can come with them."

Come in a congregation, come by your lovely lone self, come dogback or come in a purple carriage with wheels of gold, but just come. Aloud, I granted: "A sensible solution. I'll see you ^{at South Fork} then, on the night."

I went to the lambing shed to relieve Rob that evening,
 When ~~Rob next came over~~, he greeted me with: "And how is life
 among ^{all} you schoolkeepers?" ~~4~~ Already. The way news flew in a
 country with so few tongues to relay it, I never would comprehend.

Stiff as a poker, I said to Rob: "

~~"What can I tell you, you seem to know at least as much about my doings as I do."~~

Angus, Angus.

"Just because there's a fresh path worn this deep"--he indicated to his knee--"between the South Fork schoolhouse and the Noon Creek schoolhouse, I thought I might inquire."

"Well, you ~~have~~ ^{did it}." But I couldn't stay miffed where Anna was concerned. "She needed ~~some~~ ^{a bit of} help on a geography matter."

"Geography," Rob mused. "Now that's ~~a new word~~ ^{the} for it, ~~these days,~~ ^{these days,} is it."

"Rob, aren't you on your way home to supper?"

"You're sure you know what you're getting into with all this geography business? From what I hear, Miss Noon Creek is a bit of a snooty one."

I was outraged. "Speaking of snoots, ~~snoots~~ you can just keep your own damn one out of--"

"All right, all right. If you're not in a mood to hear wisdom, you're ~~just~~ not." The words were light enough, although behind them Rob still seemed peeved. But a day in a lambing shed will do that to a man, and he sounded thoroughly himself when he went on: "Probably this is nothing you'll find near so interesting as geography, but Lucas brought out word today

change "What can..."

That's what it call these days.

that wool is up to $12\frac{1}{2}$ cents and lambs are climbing fine, too. This
 is the year we've been looking for, man." Rob had it right, the world and
 its price of wool and lambs was not what I wanted to think about, only Anna.

(no #) However far gone ^{he} ~~was~~ thought I was down romance's knee-deep
 road, he didn't know half of it. I was Anna dizzy, in an Anna tizzy.

These days there seemed to be fresh blood in my veins, brewed by the maker
 of harem potions. But the relentless fact of Anna always in my mind ^{also} ~~continually~~
 startled me constantly, if it can be said that way, and I will tell

you it was a bit scaring, too. ^{Anything and} ^{any more} Everything I did ~~was~~ through a haze of Anna,
 sometimes a sweet blue mist that made any task light, other times a forgetful
 fog. At the end ^{here} of what I thought was ~~our~~ perfectly normal ^{lambling} ~~conversation~~ ^{now},

10B

Rob cocked his head and asked: "Are you off your feed this ~~spring~~ spring? You'd better come by and let Judith tuck a few ~~decent~~ ^{solid} suppers into you."

I said I would, soon, whenever that was, and Rob gave ~~up~~ ^{askance} me ~~with~~ ^{askance} glance one last ~~shake~~ ^{departed} of the head and ~~went~~.

~~INSERT: Angus's mood, hopes~~

———
You could have counted the next ten days on my face. I went from remorse at how long it would be until I laid eyes on Anna again, to fevers that I wouldn't be prepared when I did. One morning I was gravely giving arithmetic when Susan Duff pointed out that I already had done so, not an hour before. And I suppose all ^{my} the South Fork pupils were startled by the onslaught of ^{Montana} geography that ~~hit~~ ^{struck} them.

One thing I did know for dead-certain, and this was that my schoolhouse was going to be ^{grandly} ready to dance. At the close of class that Friday I prevailed on Davie Erskine to stay after and

help me, and we moved the rows of desks along the walls and pushed my desk into a corner. Davie took out the stove ashes while I filled lanterns and trimmed wicks. There never has been a boy enthusiastic about a broom, so I next swept the floor myself in solid Medicine Lodge swamping style and put Davie to wiping the windows with old copies of the Choteau Quill.

"But Mr. McCaskill, it'll be dark out, why do the windows need to be clean?"

"On account of the moonbeams, Davie. You've got to let the moonbeams in on a dance, or people's feet will stick to the floor. Did you not know moonbeams are slick as soap, Davie?"

Davie gaped at me as if I already was askate on moonbeams, but he did the windows fine. Next I had him wash the blackboard, then fill our bucket with fresh drinking water from the creek. I swept and hummed, dusted and hummed, I even straightened the pictures of George and Abraham and gave them each a hum of joy, they always looked like they needed cheer.

"Do you know this old tune, Davie?" I asked, for it seemed to me an impossibly this wonderful thing, a dim prospect that anyone should go through life knowing only songs of Texans and horses. "You don't? That's odd, for it seems to be addressed to you."

"Me?"

"Surely. Listen to it.

Let's
no more
no more
no more
no more
no more

Dance, dance, Davie lad
and whistle, Willie Young!
There's sheep's head in our pot
and you'll get the tongue!

Davie whipped through the last of his tasks as if afraid my lunacy might be catching. "Is there anything more, Mr. McCaskill?"

"You've more than earned supper, Davie. And thank you the world, for your help here." I fished in my pocket and handed him a coin. From the size of Davie's eyes it was more of a coin than I'd intended, but no matter.

There was a thing more I wanted done, but I needed to be the doer. I went to the freshly washed blackboard and in my best hand, which was an urchin's scrawl compared to Anna Ramsay's, wrote large:

Dancing at the rascal fair,
try it only if you dare,
hoof and shoe, stag and mare,
dancing at the rascal fair.

By last light of Saturday, the sun behind a peak called Phantom Woman and dusk graying the valley, people came. Rob and Judith. The Duffs and Erskines. I scattered oatmeal on the floor to help the moonbeams with our gliding. George Frew as ever was our fiddler, and the night began with the high beautiful tune of Green Glens of Strathspay. I took a diplomatic first turn with George's Mavis

toward convincing her that while I might never run a school the way she did, my dancing made up for it. Archie and Grace Findlater came. The Shepherd's Schottische. The Hahns and Petersons and Van Bebbers came. The Herring Lasses' Reel. The Roziers from down the main creek, the Kuuvuses and Sedgwicks from town, they came and came.

The first time we stopped to blow, Rob glanced over his shoulder to be sure Mavis ~~Milgrim~~ ^{nee Milgrim} Frew was nowhere in hearing and declared, "This place ^{definitely} dances better since you're the schoolkeeper. ^{Angus} What, have you put bed springs under the floor?"

I was gazing around fondly, awaiting what--who--I knew would come. Must come. "Owe it to George, not me. He fiddles better as a married man."

Judith put in, "There's a lesson there for you, Angus."

"You mean if I married, I'd be able to play the fiddle?"

Judith, that's surprising. What would I need to do to be able to play the piano?"

Rob ~~laughed~~ ^{chortled} and batted my shoulder while Judith mocked a huff and declared: "Angus, you are just impossible." Ah, Judith, but I no longer was. I was purely possible. I was possibility with its wings ready, these days. "You have me right," I mollified Judith though, "yet would you dance with me anyhow? Rob, there's paper and pen in my desk there, if you'd care to jot down for yourself how Judith and I do this."

"I'm lending her to you with two sound feet, so bring her back unbroken, hear?"

P. 14
 on closing
 To my delight
 Lucas
 of
 Nancy
 missing
 + saint
 handwriting

"Unbroken, nothing. She'll be downright improved." And Judith and I swung away together, Rob's two closest people in this world, who once had kissed hotly at one of these gatherings and could grin a little rue at each other that we never would again.

On and on the music flowed and the sweat rolled. Thank heaven George Frew's fiddling ^{left} arm was as oaken as the rest of him. Sedge taught us a square dance called Bunch to the Middle and we danced it until the floor would remember every step of it.

By the holy, I loved these people. This night I loved all of Scotch Heaven, the Two Medicine country, Montana, America, the sky over and the earth under. Who could not?

What I loved strongest of all ^{entered now} ~~came through the door~~ ^{my schoolroom doorway} in a dark blue skirt and white shirtwaist and an ivory brooch at her throat. --surprisingly unprepossessing, for a pair who had given mankind such a gift-- Anna. And her mother and father ^{and others from Noon Creek, the}

Wainwrights and Egans and Isaac Reese, all come in one wagon, and now entering our tuneful school eager for the reward of that ride.

"Welcome across the waters," ^{to Scotch Heaven} Rob called out to this delegation and drew a laugh from all. The South Fork and North Fork and Noon Creek taken together, you could still skim your hat across.

^{Brung} ~~Brought~~ the Ramsays along to translate for us," gruffed the rancher Thad Wainwright. ^{damn well might've} "I ~~might've~~ known, the only heaven I'd get into I ^{need} have to learn to talk Scotch to do it."

"God works in mysterious ways, Thad, yet we're pretty sure he does wear a kilt," Rob assured him.

That was more than the Duffs and a few others could listen to,

*change
classif*

improve

damn well

so onto the dance floor they stepped. They were right, too, for why stand talking when you can be dancing?

Hoping for battle-axe avoidance tonight, I waited until Anna's mother and father took their first dance together, and seized my ~~chance~~

~~I bided my time for a small eternity—it must have been fully the next two tunes' worth—until I saw a chance to go over and greet Anna alone. "I see your chalk keeps talking after school, too," she said of my rascal fair verse in white on the blackboard.~~

Which I took as approval, on the grounds that it didn't seem to be disapproval.

"That chalk

~~it~~ must have caught the habit somewhere. Do you know, ~~that~~ chalk took me by the hand as I was walking past and made me write that?"

"I suppose you objected strenuously all the while?"

"Objecting is a thing I try not to believe in, particularly the strenuous kind. Just for example, Miss Ramsay, I'm hoping you won't object to a turn around the floor with me right now? Sir Patrick MacWhirr wasn't meant to be stood to."

A flicker went through her steady eyes, but if that was hesitation I'll never mind a dose so small. Here came something else I'd hoped, her half-sidelong smile. Then, up came her hand between us as if onto her Norm Creek ~~schoolroom~~ blackboard.

I waited, yes, astonished, while whatever it was got elaborately spelled

into the atmosphere of my schoolroom. When done,

amused she pronounced for me with vast deliberation: "unobjectionable." And onto the dance floor I pranced with her.

15A

To Noroway, To Noroway,

to Noroway over the foam;

the King's fair bride from Noroway --

oh, Sir Pat, Sir Pat, Sir Pat, Sir Pat!--

'Tis thee must ^{sail and} bring her home!

I'll need to see whether

~~I hope~~ there's a floor left for my pupils, after tonight."

"If there's not, you will have to teach outside ^{as did} like the ancient Greeks."

"Outside, were they. Small wonder all they ever knew how to talk was Greek. Tink the tongues they'd speak if they'd gone to school to the pair of us." She had to ^{smile fully at that,} laugh, and so did my heart. Anna was alive with loveliness, she was ^{in my arms} mine for as long as I could make the moment. "And what would they think of this at the Brechin Dame School?"

I saw the new moon, late yester e'en,

with the old moon in her arm;

and if we go to sea, ^{oh} my dear queen--

oh, dear queen, dear queen, dear queen, dear queen!--

I fear we must come to harm!

"They would think this Scotch Heaven of yours is a shameless place." ^{My heart keeled sideways.} "Cavorting in a place of learning. See up there, even your Presidents think so." The jounce of the dancing had tilted Washington and Lincoln toward each other, and they did look like two old streetcorner solemms, confiding the world's latest waywardness to each other.

~~My heart keeled sideways.~~

"I hope that's not what you think," I hoped desperately. ^{she postulated,}

"If a schoolhouse is the only place big enough for a dance,"

"then the schoolhouse should be used."

^{My own thought, exactly.}

"And so we'll be dancing next at Noon Creek, will we?"

I particularly meant the two of us. She only granted, "The

school board has the say of any dance. But I'll not object." wavy
P-19
^ well

The sails were hoist on Mononday morn,
the wind came up on Wenensday;
it blew and blew and blew so forlorn--
oh, Sir Pat and Queen, Sir Pat and Queen!--
blew Sir Pat and Queen from Noroway!

I bided my time for a small eternity--it must have been fully the next two tunes' worth--before dancing with her again. But the wait was worth it, for during this circuit of the floor she sanctioned my suggestion that Miss Ramsay and Mister McCaskill might just as well be discarded to give Anna and Angus some ^{wear} ~~use~~.

no 4 My aim ~~that~~ ^{is} night was to dance with Anna enough times to ^{begin to} ratify us as a couple, yet not so many as to alarm her. So I didn't mind--much--when Allan Frew took a turn with her. From his doggish look toward me I knew that Allan knew I would pound him back to milkteeth if he tried seriously to get in my way with Anna. She even went a few rounds with Isaac Reese and made him and his drooping mustache look almost presentable. Then Rob danced with Anna to Brig of Dee while I did with Judith, and I saw Judith's eyebrow inch up at Rob's nonstop chat there, but I knew that was just him being him. I thanked my stars that Rob was not in the running with me for Anna. Indeed, peer along the lovelit road ahead as far as I could, I saw no one else who was. Which was won^drous and sobering and exhilarating and bewildering and intimidating and sublime all in the same pot together. ^ That was a rouser.

So spirited was Brig of Dee that it made Thad Wainwright announce,
"You Scotchmen sure do know how to make feet move. Only one thing missing
from tonight, so far's I can tell. How come no bagpipes?"

~~"What, no bagpipes?"~~ Thad Wainwright wondered. ~~A~~ No drums, no
bules, no tinsel tunes of war. Lord of Mercy, when was the rest of
mankind going to quit thinking of us as wild Highlanders?

Bar
^
I caught
Rob's
eye nod
ch
ly
Lucas

"We thought there's enough wind in this country without making more," I told Thad.

"It's kind of disappointing though, you know? With all you Scotchmen here under one roof, ^{the rest of us figured} ~~Mary and I~~ thought we were going to see some real flinging." The Noon Creek rancher chuckled a regret and moved on.

Try it only if you dare, hoof and shoe, stag and mare.

^{noah} My verse on the blackboard spoke to me over Thad's retreating shoulder. It made me remember aloud to Rob: "Fergus the Dervish."

Rob roared a laugh. "Fergus and his Highland whoops! He'd ^{old} show Thad some steps."

"Why don't we? The two of us saw Fergus enough times at the rascal fair."

"You think we can?"

"Man, is there something we can't do?"

"We haven't found it yet. You're right, you're right, it will take Barclay and McCaskill to show these Noon Creek geezers what dancing is."

"McCaskill and Barclay," I corrected him, "but you're correct enough other than that. See if our many George can plan ^{by} Tam Lin, why not, while I tend to something else."

Apprehensively, Judith began: "Now, you two--"

"No, love, it's we three, you're into this too. And whoever Angus can inveigle into risking her--"

I was across the room before my feet knew they were moving. I hadn't a wisp of a clue as to how this person Anna would react to a

called out

old

M

dancing exhibition. Here was the time of times to find out.

"It's all for the cause of education, of course," I prattled to her while those direct blue eyes worked on me. "Instruction for the world at large, think of it as."

The smile I wanted began to sidle onto her face. "I'll believe you," granted Miss Anna Ramsay and lightly grasped the arm I proffered, "but thousands would not."

Oh, you must beware, maidens all,
who wear gold in your hair
don't come or go by Linfield Hall
for young Tam Lin is there.

Dark and deep lay the wood of night
and eerie was the way
as fair Janet with hair so bright
toward Linfield Hall did stray.

^{acknowledge}
 I ~~grant~~ that other nationalities are known to dance, but it is my hypothesis that they must have learned how from the Scots. You can't but admit that a land of both John Knox and Robert Burns is nimble, and we like to think that quality comes out on us at both ends, head and feet. Earlier that night I danced a reel with Flora Duff, who was wide as any other two women there, and she moved like a rumor. And now Rob and Judith and Anna and I were the four-hearted dancer of all dancers, gliding to and from, following the weave of the tune, saluting the night and life with our every

change grant?

motion and capping them all with the time-stopping instant when Rob and I faced one another, each with a hand on a hipnd and the other bent high abovehead, and our two throats as one ^gflung the exultant Highland cry, hiiyuhh!

Her skirt was of the grass-green silk
her cloak of velvet fine
about her neck so white as milk
her fox-red furs entwine.

About the dead hour of the night
she heard Tam's bridles ring
and Janet was as glad of that
as any earthly thing.

Put away geography and numeration and the Presidents from yon to hither, pupils of mine and of my partner in whirl Anna, and write for us books of that dance. Scissor her lovely profile down the left of your pages and in eternal ink say how forthright she is even when set to music. Miss Ramsay seems to look into the face of the tune in the air and say, yes, you are what music should be. Make an exact report, for I will want to know from this moment on, the way she and I blend into a single dancing figure and then ⁿsift swiftly into two again and next meld with Rob and Judith. You will please find a line somewhere there, too, for the Scotch Heaven serenade this schoolroom has never heard before tonight: hiiyuhhh!

1
1

improve meter

1

ready

She heard the horseman's silv'ry call,

'Come braid your golden hair

in the fine manse of Linfield Hall

for I, Tam Lin, am there.'

She went within that hall of Lin

fair Janet on her ride

and now you maidens know wherein

dwelt Tam Lin and his bride.

HiiiiYUHHHH! ⁷ Our final whoop, Rob and I agreed, could have been heard by old Fergus the Dervish himself wherever he was cavorting, in Scotland just then.

9
more dialogue etc

The crowd too gave us whoops and hoots and claps of commendation as we two pairs of flingers vacated the floor to merely mortal dancers. Escorting Anna off--I could have made a career of just that--I asked, "Don't you suppose that changed their minds any, over across in Brechin?"

Where she held my arm I felt a lightest affirming squeeze. "If anything was her voice's version. could," ~~she said~~

When I went back to Rob and Judith, she was catching her breath between chat with Lucas and Nancy while Rob had a strange distant smile on him. As I came up, he gripped my shoulder. "I have to hand it to you, Angus, you do get an ^{now and} idea again."

I must have grinned like a moonchild, for Rob's head went from ~~his~~ side to side and he elucidated, "No, no, I don't mean her. Any man with ~~eyes~~ could get that idea. What I mean is our Fergus fling. Angus, it made me think back to Nethermuir and our last rascal fair."

~~At that from him, I was genuinely surprised.~~ "What, are you ~~getting~~ sentimental about Nethermuir in your old age?"

He gave me the caught smile of a ^{mildly} guilty boy. "The surprises of ^{this thing} life. A person just never does know, does he."

~~"Not nearly all of ~~it~~. Just one bit. You'd recognize it." Whatever this was about, it put that joyous shine on him of the day we stood on the Greenock dock. George Frew's fiddle began The Soldier Lad's Love's Lament.~~

"And now that I've danced with you, McAngus, do you mind overmuch if I take a turn with my wife?"

I got myself beside Anna ^{one last time} as the goodbying was going on, and ~~begin~~ ^{begin} said: "You know, of course, tonight was a mark the Noon Creek dance will have to match."

"We will strive," she answered.

"It'll not be easy. Much of the music of the world got used up here tonight."

"We ~~will~~ ^{will} dust off ~~what's~~ ^{any that's} left, you needn't worry. By now I know ~~you're~~ ^{are} not a man for standing."

213

"There, you see? A mere few hours in my schoolroom and you've already learned a thing." Her parents were waiting at the door, I was drawing heavy looks from her mother.

"Well. Goodnight, Anna," I finally had to say.

"Yes." A bit slow from her too, I noted with hope.



"Goodnight, Angus."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You were schooled where?" she asked.

"At a 'venture school in Nethermuir."

"Anna and I both matriculated from the Dame School in Brechin."

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

"And what of your family?"

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

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

My father the ironhand, encased in his deafness; my mother the mill worker...Try sometime to put that into parlor speech. Anna was interested and encouraging--Anna could do me no wrong--but it was uphill all the way, trying to tell of the wheelshop years.

The Ramsay place all but touched the mountains. Until humans learned to hang to the side of a crag with one hand and tend livestock with the other, here was as far as settlement could go. I hoped these Ramsays knew what they were in for when winter's winter, which is to say January and February, came howling down off the Rockies onto them. I could see the rock face of Jericho Reef through the curtain, the window where the fly was 00ing. "You've seen Bell Rock, off from Arbroath?"

"I passed it on a schooner once," spoke Peter Ramsay, his full contribution to that day's conversation. "Surprising."

1 ✓ see.

Wang
P. 26

~~scribble~~

west in
Two
Aed
entry

rumbling
BR
lighthouse

With
donation?

Rae-Ellen: please begin here,
p. 12 on Heaven disc.

14

✓

That summer was determined to show us what heat was, and by an hour after breakfast each day Rob and I were wearing our salt rings, crusted into our shirts ~~in~~ three-quarter circles where our laboring arms met our laboring shoulders. Just as soon as Rob's house was done, we began on our sheep shed. The shed work we interrupted to join with Ninian and Donald in putting up hay. Any moment free from haying, we devoted to building fencelines. And somehow amid it all we were putting the walls and roof of my house, to abide by the spirit of the homestead law even though I was going to ~~winter with Rob~~ share Rob's house ~~this~~ ^{first} winter; we were reasonably sure President OO wouldn't come riding over the ridge to inspect.

Ours was not the only sweat dripping into the North Fork earth. In a single day the arrival of the contingent from Fife ^{almost} doubled our valley's population--the Findlater family of five, the widower George Frew and his small daughter, and George's bachelor cousin Allan. Two weeks later, a quiet lone man named Tom Mortensen took up a claim over the ridge south from my place, and a week after that, a ^{tumbleweed} family of Missouriians, the Speddersons, alit along the creek directly below Rob.

When we wouldn't
facing
of

Accuracy
laying
logs

homesteading

improve?

#

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

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

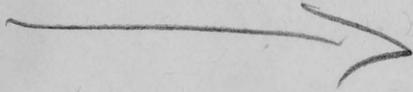
Rob and I were at my homestead. We had bedded the sheep on the ridge and come on down to wrestle a few more postholes into my ~~eternal~~ west fenceline before full dark.

There were occasional consequences from nature for decreeing lines on the earth as if by giant's yardstick and one of them was that the west boundary of my homestead claim went straight through a patch of rock that was next to impossible to dig in. Small enough price, I will still tell you all these postholes later, to have the measures of the earth plainly laid for you; but at the time--

☿ "Now, you know the answer to that. There isn't a homestead in this world with enough room on it to pile up all the postholes it needs."

"Dig. Just dig."

15A



Between bouts with shovel

and crowbar, we began to hear horses' hooves, more than one set.

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

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

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

"It's always waiting to be chased," Rob said back. I ran a finger around the inside leather of my hat, wiping the sweat out.

Those with Ninian proved to be Donald Erskine and the new man Archie

Findlater and a settler from the South Fork, Willy Hahn. Every kind of calamity that could put men on saddle leather at the start of night was crossing my thoughts. Say for Ninian, you did not have to stand on one foot and then the other to learn what was on his mind.

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

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

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

"The school board, of course. There are enough families here-around that we need a proper school now, and we're going to build one. We want you for the third member of our school board."

"Together with--?"



"Myself," Ninian pronounced unabashedly, "and Willy here."
Willy Hahn nodded and confirmed, "You are chust the man, Anguss."

"The old lad of parts!" Rob exclaimed and gave my shoulder a congratulatory shove. "He'll ^{see to it that} ~~have~~ your youngsters reciting ~~the~~ Burns before breakfast, this one."

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

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

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

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

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

—

It was morning of the third week of August, still a month of summer ahead on the calendar, when I came in from the outhouse with my shoes and the bottoms of my pantlegs damp.

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

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

That forehint of North Fork winter concentrated our minds mightily. In the next weeks we labored even harder on Rob's outbuildings and fences, and when not on those, on the schoolhouse or when not on ^{any of those} ~~either~~, we were with the sheep, keeping a weather eye on the cloudmaking horizon of the mountains.

school house

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

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

^

"What's doing?" I inquired.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Angus, Angus, rascal you." Shaking his head gravely, Lucas poured a drink for himself and another for me. "What do you and Rob do, sit up midnights creating ways to spend my money? What's the tariff this time?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Lambs and lasses and lads," Lucas recited as if ~~it were~~ Scripture.

"By Jesus, we'll build this country into something before it knows it."

I raised an eyebrow at his paternal "we" there. Lucas raised it ^{a good deal} higher straight out of nowhere: for me by declaring,

"Angus, I believe you need to think of a woman."

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

"I'm talking now about a wife. All right, all right, you can give me that look saying I'm hardly the one to talk. But the situation of Nancy and myself is--well, not usual." That was certainly so.

"You're young and hale and not as ugly as you could be," he swept on,

"and so what's against ^{finding} ~~having~~ a wife for yourself. I tell you, if I were you now--"

"Just a moment, before you get to being me. ^{Too strenuously} What brings this on?"

If I were you
never...
Is this what...
you
could...

It wasn't like Lucas to suddenly speak up for womanhood at large.

"Is this what you're prescribing today for all your customers?"

"Just the redheaded ones." My eyebrow found a new direction to cock itself. Why was I the subject of this sermon instead of Rob?

He was the one Lucas had needed to negotiate away from Nancy.

no 4

"Oh, I know what you're thinking," and as usual, he did. "But

that's another case entirely, our Robbie.)

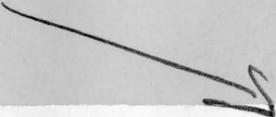
~~That's another country, our Rob.~~ The first bright mare who decides to twitch her tail at ^{Robbie} ~~Rob~~, she'll have him. He's my own nephew, but that lad is sufficiently in love with himself that it won't much matter who ^{he} marries. Whoever she is, she'll never replace him in his own affections. You though, Angus. You're not so much a world unto yourself. You I think need the right partner in this old life."

Robbie

he

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

"Mend your ^Btongue," Lucas answered lightly but with a glance that seemed to wonder whether I'd heard any word he'd been saying. "Robbie



~~"Mend your tongue. Rob and I'll have you so prosperous you can~~
take your pick of womanhood. But who's that going to be^{ay?} It
wouldn't hurt you a bit to start thinking ~~in that direction~~
~~along those lines."~~

———

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

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

———

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

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

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

"That's what it had better be like, or we're going to ~~be in debt~~^{have to get} down on all fours and eat grass ourselves,"
to Lucas down to our shoe soles."

You might not think it, but in winter we saw more of our neighbors than ever. People visited ^{back and forth} to escape cabin fever, and no more than ~~two~~^{a few} weeks ever passed without Scotch Heaven having a dance ~~xxx~~ which brought out everyone, for even the Duffs and Erskines were not so skintight they could resist waving a foot to a tune. I thought many a time that to watch Ninian on the dance floor was like hearing a

giggle out of God. Not, let me say, that Ninian got all that much of my watching that winter, nor Rob's nor George Frew's nor Allan Frew's nor Tom Mortensen's either. We of the bachelor brigade were too busy appreciating that Scotch Heaven's balance sheet of men and women stood less uneven than it had been, with the coming of the teacher Mavis Milgrim and then the arrival from Fife of Archie Findlater's unmarried sister Judith. Miss Milgrim had a starch to her that she thought a schoolma'am needed to have, and Judith, comely enough otherwise, had a startling neck that was not so much swanlike as gooselike; but the two of them helped our situation of the sexes, they helped. ^{Along those} ~~For that~~ lines, ~~matter,~~ the single time I found a decent chance after a dance to get Judith aside and coax a kiss out of her, she delivered one that I could feel all the way to my ears.

Something to put away for spring, the matter of Judith, although I still was not seeing anything that resembled marriage when I looked in a mirror.



commemorative

When the last day of the calendar came--no Hogmanay portrait of Rob and myself this year, except the one that memory draws--we were invited ^{down} to see out the eve at Duffs, together with the five Erskines and the six Findlaters, as many people as could breathe in one house that size. As midnight neared, there was acclamation--led by Judith with a bit more enthusiasm than I was comfortable with--that I had to be the one to first-foot the new ~~year~~ year in for Ninian and Flora. "Can't I wait for a year when the weather is better out there?" I protested, but at a minute before, out I went into the cold blustery dark.

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

while Flora
 "He will do," granted Ninian ~~and~~ handed us steaming cups of coffee with just a tip of whiskey therein. "Warm yourselves, you ^{riding home} may need it ~~in this wind~~."

weather sleep

By the sound of it

"What do you make of this weather, Ninian?" I asked. The wind ^{blew away} ~~seemed to be~~ whooping harder every minute. "A squall is this?"
~~was~~ ^{against the house} ~~to say goodbye~~ to the old year,

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

For the next eight days, all the wind in the world tore at

Scotch Heaven. We had wind that took the hay as we struggled to feed

the sheep, wind that coated us and the workhorses with snow, wind

every ^{breath} ~~minute~~ of the day and wind in our sleep.

dialogue
or more
descript'n

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

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

"What times are those, I wonder? January can't be one, surely. A month of snow-white purity--"

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

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

oddly calm?

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

A Saturday of February. The day had been blue and still. Rob's whistling was the liveliest element around. We had not been to Gros

Ventre ^{since Christmas} ~~in more than six weeks~~ and we were preparing to remedy that.

Haircuts had been traded,

Baths had been taken, boots blacked with stove lid soot. We were

putting on our clean shirts when a white flurry flung past the window, as if someone had begun plucking geese.

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

"Probably it's only a flurry."

"It had better be."

It was not. The snow drove and drove, sifting out of the silent sky as if to bury the ^{planet} world. In minutes the ^{west window} ~~ground~~ ^{ceded} was white.

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

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

for what waited at Wingo's.

"Next time is the story of homesteading, I'm beginning to think," Rob gloomed.

"You're coming down with winter fever. Elk stew is the only known antidote." Or at least the only supper we had now that Lila Sedge's cuisine was out of the picture.

"Is this still the one Ninian told us to be careful about sticking our spoons into its gravy, we might bend them?"

"The same famous one."

The bull elk shot by Ninian had a set of antlers that would have scaffolded

Canterbury Cathedral. "Old Elky, grandfather of beasts."

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

I raised my thumb to him. "One, the cost of a sheep herself."

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

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

To cheer him up while I heated the familiar stew, I asked: "Did you ever hear the story about Methusaleh and his cook?" *Do you mean*

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

"Well, Methusaleh's cook got tired of cooking for that housefull. All those begattings, more and more mouths at every meal--a couple of hundred years of that and you can see how it would start to get tiresome. So she went to Methusaleh and said, 'What about some time off, like?' 'No, no, no,' he tells her, 'we can't possibly spare you, you're too good a cook. In all these years have I ever complained once about your food?' She had to admit he

hadn't. 'No, nor will I, ' he says. 'If you ever hear me complain, I'll do the cooking myself, for the rest of my life.'

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

After laughing^{ten}, Rob went quiet during the meal.

I was hoping that after the last bite of elk he ^{might} would put down his fork and proclaim Just the way I like it, but no, the evening was not going to be that easy. He pushed back his chair and said: "Angus, do you know what I think?"

"~~When~~ When it comes out that way, probably not."

"I think we need more sheep."

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

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

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

"We can buy it. ^{Jesse} ~~the~~ Spedderson would a lot rather sell us his ^{hay standing in the field} than exert himself to put it up, I'll just bet you."

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

"We'll get Lucas to back us."

"Rob, we're already in debt to Lucas down to our shoe soles."

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

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

"These sheep we have now can be just the start of us, man," he ~~was~~ galloped right on. "That's why it was worth coming from Scotland. ~~Why it was even~~ Worth even finding Lucas--the way he is. His hands maybe are gone but none of his head went with them. No, Lucas has ^{the fact of} it, right."

~~"Lucas has it right."~~ This Two Medicine country will grow. It's bound to. And we're in on the ground floor."

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

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

If my ears were to be trusted, he was talking about the theory of sheep, which is the world's best. In theory

working right

~~In its way,~~ a band of sheep is ~~like~~ a garden on legs. Every spring a crop of lambs, every summer a crop of wool. Feed us and clothe us too--not even potatoes yield so beneficially. But the fleecies are a garden that wanders around looking for its own extinction, and in the Two Medicine country there was much that was

willing to oblige their mortal urge. Coyotes, bear, deathcamas,
 lupine. Not least, themselves. I can tell you to this moment the
 anguish when, a week after we had trailed our yearlings home to the
 North Fork from their former owner in the Choteau country, Rob and I
 found our first dead sheep. A fine fat ewe on her back, four legs
 in the air like hooved branches. In her clumsy cocoon of wool she
 had rolled helplessly onto her back when she lay down to scratch a
 tick itch. Rob was shocked, I admit I was a bit unsettled myself.
 And as any sheep owner does, we began thinking the ^{terrible} ~~awful~~ arithmetic:
 what if we lose another ewe next week...Lord of Mercy, what if we
 lose one again tomorrow...A little of that and in your mind you soon

~~tomorrow~~

6

not only have no sheep left, you possess ^{fewer} ~~less~~ than that--cavities of
 potential loss of however many sheep you could ever possibly buy to
 replace the ones that right now are out there searching for ways to
 die.

no 41

Thus you draw breath and try to think instead of the benefits
 of sheep. Watch them thrive on grass a cow wouldn't even put its
 head down for. Watch the beautiful fleeces, rich and oily to the
 touch, come off them as they are sheared with the Duff and Erskine
 bands. Dream ~~anyone~~ ahead to when you can watch your first crop of
 lambs enlarge themselves week by week.

(not)

As Rob was ^{doing now} ~~was~~ in his winter rhapsody about more sheep. But I didn't
~~, expensive as it promised to be,~~
 want that tune to get out of hand, and so I responded:

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

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

And you're looking right past all the precipices ^{there are,} ~~in the world,~~ I thought
 but managed not to say. Instead: "You're working ^{hard} on the wrong source here,"

~~you know.~~ "It's Lucas's wallet you're going to have to persuade."

"~~But~~ I can see winter isn't the season to reason with you. Let's
 talk ~~about~~ ^{over} this in the spring, what do you say."

"I say, knowing you we're ~~certainly~~ sure to talk ~~about~~ ^{over} it, all right."

That at last drew a laugh from him, and he got up and

~~Rob~~ went to the ^{south} window. The snow no longer was flailing past, but clouds covered the mountains, more storm was only minutes away.

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

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

"He ought to be shot," Rob stated.

#

Then in March, this.

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

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

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

"Just the wind."

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

"Running water, then?"

"That creek is frozen stiffer than I am."

"Creature, maybe?"

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

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

"They hear it too."

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

"Listen. It's louder."

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

Off came our flap caps, not just for keener listening but because the air strangely no longer seemed chilly. In minutes the great flowing sound was dispensing itself down from the peaks and crags as a sudden stiff breeze, but a breeze warm all through. A day that had been firmly fifteen degrees below zero began to feel tropical. As we finished the pitchfork work we had to shed our scarves, then our coats. Not until Rob and I talked with Ninian a

few days later, the snow already gone from every south slope and elsewhere retreating down into its deep coulee drifts, did we learn the word of that miracle wind, which was chinook. But ~~riding~~ ^{driving the haysled} home from the sheep on that chinook day, our gloves next off, the two of us kept flexing our pale winter hands, one and then the other as if shedding old skin, in that astonishing blowing air of springtime.

#

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

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

of course
gone
pies

I laughed ritually each time, but what Lucas had forecast about Rob's route into marriage always tinged the moment. For I did see it

happen in the course of that winter, Judith's sorting of us as if we were pattern patches for the quilt she had in mind--myself too wary, George Frew too gawkily silent, Allan Frew too irresponsible, Tom Mortensen too old and bachelorly, but Rob bright and winnable, Rob always pleased to find himself reflected back in someone's attention.



When Archie Findlater came to ask Rob for a few day's help in building lambing pens--work which anybody who could fit fingers around a hammer could do--and mentioned "~~You may as well~~ take your meals with us, ^{why not, and} save yourself the ride back and forth," he may as well have brought Judith and the marriage license with him.

The wedding, in almost-warm-enough weather you could step into blindfolded and know it was May in Montana, was ~~there~~ in Rob's front yard. All of ^{Scotch} ~~Scotch~~ Heaven assembled there under the crest of Breed Butte for the valley's first matrimony, and as best man I had the closest look of anyone except the minister and the two of them, at how Rob and Judith ~~sparkled~~ ^{glowed} for each other. He'd teased her beforehand that when the major question came he was going to respond, Can I ~~throw~~ ^{toss} a coin to decide that? but when the moment came he said "I do" as if telling it to the mountains. ⁴ Afterward we ate and danced and talked and danced and drank and danced. As evening came on, before heading home I got Rob and Judith aside to congratulate them one last time.

"For people who are married beyond redemption, you both look happy

Go behind their story of marriage...

enough about it," I assessed for their benefit.

"You're the best best man we've ever had," Judith assured me and rose on tiptoes to kiss my cheek while Rob warned, "Not too much of that, now."

As I turned to go, Judith ^{called out after me} ~~said~~ the ritual "Don't be a stranger, Angus," but I believe meant it, for she ^{well knew} ~~recognized~~ the bond, long as our lives, between Rob and ~~me~~ me.

"Come by whenever, man," Rob added his urging. "You're welcome at all times, you know that if you know anything."

in the world

—

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

No doubt Rob and Judith were. I'd have been, in Rob's place, and I have money that says you would have been too. Yet George's whiskied words set off something in me. I rode home thinking over whether I ought to have made the moves--maybe I flattered myself, but I believed it would not have taken ^{any too} many--that would have put me in Rob's place. And decided again, no. I was determined to do the thing right when I did it at all, to be ~~sure~~ certain of the shape of the married life before I entered it with anyone; and while Judith was someone I could imagine waking up beside, sureness beyond that was not there, in her case.

improve

a block. I like to have the rock already shaped, or headed in the right direction, to suggest a form to pursue. To let the rock lead me, rather than me leading the rock. To let the rock take me away with it."

"My hands can give me a quick reading as to whether there's a flaw just by the kind of feeling that comes up out of the stone when I strike it."

"If I want to do a configuration or a flow of feathers over the back, sloping down, I may look at it, but I'll also spend some time feeling it. And sometimes the feeling will say, hey, this isn't quite right."

Say you are a stone that blinks once a year, when the sun of spring draws the last of winter from you. In the wink that ~~was~~ ^{is} 1891, you see nine houses in the valley of the North Fork where there had been but those two of the Duff and Erskine homesteads. You note the retreat of timber on Wolf Butte where Rob and myself and Archie Findlater and Jesse Spedderson and old Tom Mortensen and the Frew cousins George and Allan sawed lodgepole pines to build those houses. You notice lines of new fence encasing each of Scotch Heaven's homesteads, straight and taut as mesh. You see the Erskine boy, Davie, riding along the creek as if in a race with the breeze-blown hay. You see ~~Clara~~ ^{Vinia} Spedderson's laundry flying from a hayrack, to the disgust of the other wives. Your next glimpse, 1892, shows you newborn Ellen, the first of Rob and Judith's girls. You see ~~the gray scatter of the~~ ^{slow-grazing scatters of gray} which are the sheep of one or another of us, maybe mine and Rob's working the grassy foothills west of my homestead, maybe the new band belonging to Rob and Lucas there on the slope of Breed Butte. (Were not stones famously deaf, you would have heard Rob try to the end

to persuade me to come in with him and Lucas on that second thousand of sheep, Angus, I'm disappointed in you, man; and from me, to whom deeper debt did not look like the kind of prosperity I wanted, Rob, if this is the first time or the last I disappoint you, you're lucky

indeed.) You see rain booming on the roofs in the ^{rare} two-day ^{downpour} storm

that brought us ^{twice the crop of} ~~the magnificent~~ hay any of us had expected or

imagined. You behold Ninian Duff coming home from town with a

bucket of calcimine, and you watch as every Scotch Heaven household,

mine included, quickly whitens a wall here or there. ^{And now} ~~Then~~ your

third blink, 1893, shows the General Land Office certificates coming

in their ^{majestic} ~~royal~~ envelopes, one for Rob ~~and his wife~~, one for me, ^{homesteaded} 160 acres

^{conveyed} ~~to~~ free and clear ~~to~~ each of us. You see my life as it was that

achievable year, tasks hurrying at each other's heels: turn out the

last bunch of ewes and their fresh lambs onto new pasture and the

garden need^s to be put in; do^g that, and fence need^s mending; mend

that, and it ^{is} ~~was~~ shearing time; shear the beloved woollies, and it ^{is} ~~was~~

haying time. You notice an occasional frown as we lords of sheep hear ^{beginning to do} what the prices are ~~doing~~ in the distant markets.

no 91

You see me look up, somewhere amid it all, to a buckboard

arriving, drawn by Ninian Duff's team of matched bay horses.

