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.
>
> --Glasgow Caledonian, September 2, 1889

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

eye. Strider of the earth not an hour ago, wet rack of carcass now. A chalk lesson like that asks a lot of a man who cannot swim. Or at least who never has.

But depend on you, Rob. In those times you could make light of the worst. You cocked your head in that way of yours and out came:

"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 various dockmen shouting around him and a blinkered team of horses being driven up at full clatter to drag their dead ilk away. Hastily a whiskered geezer from the Cumbrae Steamship LIne was waving the rest of us along: "you're for the James Watt? Straight on, the queue there, New York at its other end, step to it, please, thank you." More heartening prospect than poor old Ginger's watery example, and so we went onto line with our fellow steerage ticket-holders beside the bulk of the steamship. Our fellow Scotland-leavers, 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.

"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 that 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 doubt about this 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 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 of the drowned horse again.

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 ailment was right there in it. Crofutt was our tutor that a shilling was worth 24 American cents, and what postal stamps cost there in the big country, and that when it was 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, 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 was only the day before that the pair of us had been hurled almost all the way across Scotland by train from 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, hight above all its municipal tower of crisp new stone the color of pie crust. It

took just that first look to know Greenock was a more going town than our old Nethermuir could be in ten centuries. For night, we bedded where the emigration agent had advised, the Model Lodging House. Which may have been a model of something but lodging wasn't it. Then this morning, Greenock true to reputation waking into rain, but every Scotsman has 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 Stree'."

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 American continent all the way across to Montana were but the width of a cottage threshhold, 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 were grinning, that Barclay mix of amusement and estimation. We had reached the head of the queue, another whiskery geezer in Cumbraie uniform was directing us to find Steerage Number One, go forward toward the bow, descend those stairs the full way down, watch our footing and our heads...

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

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

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. That was Rob on the passenger list of the James Watt, 1st of September of the year 1889. Angus Alexander McCaskill, myself. Both of us nineteen and green as the cheese of the moon and trying our double damnedest 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--we learned in the first minute that the single women were farthest aft, and between them and us were quartered the married couples and a

populace of children--and while not everyone was young our shipmates were all as new as we to voyaging. Berths were in upper and lower 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 ~~laughed~~ chortled. 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.

As to our compartment mates, a bit of listening told that some were of a fifty going to settle in Manitoba, others of a fifty ~~that~~ was choosing 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 told them as if it was Eden's best neighborhood. "I've an Uncle there."

"What does the man do there," sang out an Alberta adherent, "besides boast of you as a nephew? Montana is all mountains, like the name of it."

"he's a mine owner," Rob reported, and this drew us new looks from the compartment citizenry. Rob, though, could not quit while 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 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.

"Here I am gents," announced a new voice, that of the steward. "Your shepherd while at sea. First business is three shillings from you each. That's for mattress and tin to eat with and the fined saltwater soap you've ever scraped yourself with." Along with everyone else Rob and I had to buy ~~soap~~ ocean and straw mattress, but we'd brought our own tinware, on Crofutt's advice.

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

At high tide on the Clyde, when the steam tug arrived to two this 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."

"Just damp underfoot, try to think of it as."

"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 kept on gaily. "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 pair 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 fondness for flippance, 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.

As Rob and I watched Greenock vanish behind the turn of the Firth, 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 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. With your eyes open. With no divided heart--I suppose it was a wonder the entire ship wasn't hearing them like the thump of a drum.

"I seem to belong to the half without fins," I rejoined. "Not all of us spent our free time splashing in the Arrou."

"Poor old River Carrou. This Clyde makes it look like a piddle, doesn't it?"

Littler than that, actually. We from an eastern twon such a 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 otherwise. The water was wide everywhere around us, arms of it reached constantly between the hills of the shore, islands were stood here and there on the great grey breadth as casually as haycocks. Out and out the Jemmy steamed, and still the Clyde carved hilly shores. Ayr. Argyll. Arran. This west of Scotland perhaps all sounded like gargle, but it was handsome coast. 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 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.

As if hearing my thoughts, Rob made the declaration: "We can be our own men there."

He meant America and Montana, I knew.

Through the night and most of the next day the Jemmy steamed its way along the coast of Ireland to Queenstown, where our Irish came aboard. Naturally, we were on deck to see whatever there was, blinking 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 a man in each boat. No. A woman in each boat.

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

"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.

Pickledmeat.

Pinafores.

Butter.

Pots of shamrock.

Small mirrors.

Legs of mutton.

Then began tthe 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.

"Do you see what this is like, Angus?" Rob broke out in delight. "The rascal fair!"

Indeed, in its knots of dickering and spontaneous commotion and general air of mischief-about-to-be, this did seem more than a bit like that day of fest when Nethermuir farmers and farm servants met to negotiate each season's wages and terms. I suppose from the time we could walk Rob and I had never missed a rascal fair together. 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. --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 you'll see. --Maybe so, maybe no. I'll be paid for home-going day, will I? There was a tune of that Nethermuir mix of holiday and sharp practice, which Rob began to hum now:

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

The 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 in 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."

Next 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 either.

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 there were plentiful children among this deck crowd and neither they nor their parents were stopping by the one silent woman either.

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

I asked, "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 ~~story~~ old tale of why Royal Navy sailors came to be called limies, and so I smiled, 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. "How can your limes 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.

I fished for my coins. "Give me a pocketful."

Our transaction over, I made my way forward to where Rob was. He and most 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 sight of the sisters elevated my mood some more too, and I stepped close behind Rob and hummed 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.

"Where've you been, man? he chided. "You're missing the best of the fair."

"I thought you might be memorizing it for me," I said, just as 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.

Where the storm was hiding during that day of Irish sun, I do not know. But sometime past midnight, after we had left the last of Ireland's coastline far behind, that weather came and found us.

I was awake for it, of course. My first night in steerage, on our way to Queenstown, had already shown that I was not one born to sleep on water. The berth was both too short and too narrow for me, so that I had to kink myself radically. Meanwhile Rob, who could snooze through Judgment Day, was composing a nose song below me. But discomfort and snores had been 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 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 berth. I rose in startlement once when I touched one hand against the other and felt moisture there. My own sweat. Rob, I wanted to call down to him time and again that first seagoing night, Rob, I can't do this. I can't. Can not. Now after Queenstown and with ocean the only choice, I was determined that while this second night might rob me of sleep again, it would not see me cringe. I lay there saying any lines of poetry I knew; over and over performed the several verses of the rascal fair tune; did multiplication and geography. I want to think that the chorus in me now had become I can do this. Barely, but I can.

Awake with all this, then, I began to notice the Jemmy was groaning more often. My berth was starting to sway and dive.

I suppose it was not much of an ocean gale as those events go. The Atlantic out for a summer evening trot. But before long at all,

the storm was more than enough for us in steerage. I heard Rob wake with a sleepy "What?" just before the real tumult set in. 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. Now the ship grunted and creaked constantly, and drew yells from women and children in the midship compartments, and yes, from some men as well, whenever it 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. Nothing, that is, until somebody made the first retching sound, the signal to all our gullets.

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

Steerage Number One's vomiting was extraordinary. Meals from a month ago were trying to come out of us. I heaved up, Robe heaved up, every steerage soul heaved up. The stench of it and the foulness of my mouth were making me sicker yet. Until I remembered the limes.

I fumbled them out and took a suck 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 shite 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 it was that they puckered our mouths as if with drawstrings. Maybe it was 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, but we were not heaving up.

By dawn the Atlantic had got the commotion out of its system. Even I conceded that we probably were going to live, now. The steward put in an appearance and chivvied us into slucing and scrubbing the compartment. For breakfast Rob and I put shakey cups of tea into ourselves. Then he returned to his berth, claiming there was lost sleep to be found there, and I headed up for deck.

I knew I was still giddy from the night of storm. But as I began to walk my first lap of the deck, the sene that come into my eyes made me all the more woolheaded. By now the weather was clement, so that was not matter to me. And I nkew, the way you know

a map fact, that the night's progress must have carried us out of sight of land on all sides. But the ocean. The ocean, I was not prepared for. The ocean was a hundred times greater than I had been able to imagine.

Up on the deck of the Jemmy that morning when 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. Wherever I faced, the same gray and green play of the waves, the water always wrinkling, moving, yet other water intantly in its place.

Hour by hour I watched and watched for the secret of how this could endlessly go on, but only discerned more wrinkling, fresh motion.

A

Somewhere on the Atlantic lies a line, invisible but valid, like the equator or Greenwich's meridian. East of there, Robert Burns Barclay and Angus Alexander McCaskill were leavers of Scotland; young men on the way from a life. Across that division, older by maybe only a minute, we knew ourselves to be heading to a life. Call it actuality catching up with us, call it my righting myself from fear of the Atlantic and Rob making himself settle from restlessness, call it whatever. But that line through our lives did exist.

like a belt around our middle

Strangely, it was the morning directly after the gale taht I began to feel at ease on the ocean. You can say it was nothing profound, for me to come up on deck that morning feeling that the absence of seasickness was the peak of health. More than my stomach had mended, though. The fact that I would sink like a statue if the Jemmy wreckeed became simply that, a standing fact, instead of the crawling fear I had known the first night in my berth. Nobody would outswim the old Atlantic anyway and so why nettle yourself over it? Too, I suppose by then I had time o become interested in myself as an ocean traveler; sought to live up to the size of this journey across the world's water. FFor I was the first McCaskill since my father's grandfather to go upon the sea.

And his voyage was but 11 miles. The most famous 11 miles in Great Britain of the time, though, for he was one of the stone masons of Arbroath working under the great Robert Stevens on 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 ships and 00 and 00 involved and to this moment I don't know how they could do it, build a tower of rock on a reef that vanished beneath every high tide. But there it winks even today, Bell Rock, announcing the Firth of Forth and Edinburgh beyond, and my great-grandfather was one of its builders. Inside the back cover of Crofutt I had pasted the ticket of freedom from the press gangs which otherwise would have swept him into the navy to fight Napoleon:

Alexander 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.

Robert Stevenson

Engineer for Northern Lights

(date)

His height and hair and complexion I have, although thankfully not his pocked face. And ever since him Alexander has been the first or second name of a McCaskill in each of our generations.

Resemblance and the ticket of leave saying so and his name in the middle of my own were all I had of that old storied man. Those and the capacity to withstand ocean if we had to.

I tried to think myself back into that other manhood, to feel from the skin inward what it would have been like to be Alexander McCaskill of eighty years ago.

Old gray town Nethermuir, with your High Street wandering down the hill the way a drowsy cow would, to come to the River Carrou. I thought at the time that you looked down your stone nose at those of us of River Street; and I still think so. Weave my linen for me, you said to us...But River Street was beginning to say things back, wasn't it. The linen workers were learning the word union; trying to get 8 shillings a week. Rob and I spoke with our feet: America. Sad, that a handsome town and a striving fold could not say better to each other.

Nethermuir was as asleep as its stones. In the dark---out went the streetlights at midnight; a Scotch town sees no need to illumine its empty hours--in the dark I walked up River Street past the 00 mill and the 00 and found my way to the 00 door of the 'wright shop. Was that me, trudging...? The same set of bones called Angus McCaskill, anyway.

Rock, the manna of Scotland. Be what it may, a fence, a house, a town, we Scotch fashioned it out of stone. In the gray before day, Nethermuir looked like it had been chiseled out instead of erected.

I was the child who lived. Of their three, the only one left to my parents after the 00 had done with Nethermuir. If a friend of my mother, a widow whose children were grown and gone, had not taken me to her cottage away from River Street, I too would have become a patch of earth there with 00 and 00.

I

My father was the smith for John Barclay's wheelwright shop. A keen workman, him; the best in that part of Scotland at OOing a wagon wheel. But the years of anvil din had taken nearly all of his hearing, and to attract his attention as he stood there working a pice of iron, you had to toss a wood chip against his shirt. At home he lived--how best to say this?--he lived along side my mother and me rather than with us. Sealed into himself, like someone of another country who happened to be traveling beside us.

Oh, there was war about that. My father could not see why I should do anything but follow into his smithy trade. 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.

correct ? Thirteen now ...

Then when I was sixteen, my mother follwed 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.

There is an odd thing about the wood of the ash tree. When the sawyers were working on an ash timber, in would come a smell almost like burning. A 'wright shop is always thick with shavings, so to be certain against fire John Barclay would say to me, "See to its hear, Angus." Out to the saw pit I go, to see if the ash proved to be black-hearted: had a streak like an ink stain along its core (Sturt Skilled excrpt,324) What that odor was none of us knew, but...

M

Where my habit of speaking to people in my mind comes from, I don't know. My father lived within himself, but of course that was due to deafness. From my mother, you heard promptly enough whatever she was thinking.

"He'll see himself in you," I said out of nowhere. I meant Lucas, his uncle; and I meant what I was syaing, too. There was almost a red shine to Rob. His cheeks and jawline always were as ruddy and smooth as if he'd jhust shaved, and on this largest day of our young lives he was aglow like a hot coal. Lucas Barclay had that same burnish. I was remembering years and years back to some afternoon when my mother sent me on an errand to my father at the wheelwright shop, and Lucas and Rob's father John and mine were in the woodyard, eyeing out oak for spokes: remembering how I startled myself and them by popping around a stack of planks into the midst of their deliveration; the pair of bright Barclay faces and my father's pale one. Was that the final time I'd seen Lucas before his leaving Scotland, that instant of rosy grin at a flummoxed boy? Most probably. It was the lasting one, at least.

"I hope he doesn't inspect too close, then," Rob tossed off. "Else we may get the door of the Great Maybe slammed in our faces."

"Man," I decided to tease, "who could ever slam a door to you? Shut with firmness and barricade it to keep you from their maidens, maybe, but--"

Rob gave my shoulder a push. "I can't wait to see the surprise on Lucas," he said laughting. "Seven years. I can't wait." That Lucas did not know we were on our way would have perturbed me if I had not spent all my life around Barclays and known how they were. Shipwreck a Barclay on Crusoe's island, then shipwreck another Barclay there ten years later, and the first would say to the second:

"What kept you away this long while?" There had been a first letter or two from Lucas to Rob's father, telling that he had made his way to the Montana city of Helena and of his mining endeavor there, but nobody who knew Lucas expected him to spend time over paper and pen. After his letters quit, a more characteristic Lucas message continued to arrive, each Christmas since, to the Barclays in Nethermuir. A hundred-dollar bill, alone in its envelope. The Montana money, Rob's family called it. Lucas is still Lucas, they said with affection and rue; the most freehanded man God ever set loose.

Can I make you know what it meant to Rob and me to have this uncle of his as our forerunner? As our American edition of Crofutt, waiting and willing to instruct? Oh, I won't deny that we found it sufficiently impressive that money was sent as Christmas cards in America. But the true trove over there, we considered, was Lucas himself. 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, knowing where the best land beckons, what a fair price is for anything, whether they do so-and-so in Montana just as we are used to in Scotland, whethery they ever do thus-and-such at all. Bold is one thing and reckless is another, yes?

The Jemmy drove on. Three days from New York, a Mrs. 00 from Brechin gave birth to a boy. The ocean child was a matter of cheer to us all; the pride we took, you'd have thought us all its fathers and mothers. About then, too, we began to see fishing boats of the Newfoundland bank. Summer it may have been back in Scotland, but there off Newfoundland the wind said March, and Rob and I put on most of the clothes we had to stay up and watch the fishing fleet.

We passed 00, and it came time to dispose of our mattresses.

Up to deck and overboard they went, floating behind us like...

New York was Edinburgh and Glasgow and then some. Castle Garden I remember as a portal to confusion. The world seemed to be coming into American through there. Questions were asked of us, our pounds and shillings became dollars and cents at the money exchange, our baggage we guarded like itself...

We began with luck. After the Model Lodging House in Greenock we knew 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, some blocks away from Last Chance Gulch. Mrs. Billington said 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 Barclay, we had no success at all. We could not find that man.

Our first Helena week we spent asking and asking. We did find the owner of the Great Maybe mine. But he was not Lucas, nor were any of the three previous disgusted owners we managed to track down. Lucas's name was six back in the record of ownership and there had been that many before 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.

Next we tried the post office. The offices of the newspapers. The register of voters. The court records. Stores.

Saloons.

"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 his 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 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 cemetery.

"We know he was alive at last Christmas," Rob specified to the caretaker. He meant by that that the Montanan money from Lucas had arrived as always to Nethermuir.

The caretaker shook his head. "Nobody by that name among the fresh ones. Unless he could be there." He nodded to a low bare slope at the edge of the graveyard. The graves there had no markers.

Realization arrived to Rob and me at the same time. The paupers' field.

We followed the caretaker there. "Who are these, then," asked Rob.

"Some are Chinamen. Others we just don't know who the hell they are. Find them dead of booze some cold morning over there in

the Gulch. Or a mine caves in on them." 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 the name was Johnson, but he didn't look like much of a Swede. Would 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 likely it seemed that Lucas could be down among the nameless dead. People always noticed a Barclay.

By week's end Rob was beside himself, one minute angry at the pair of us for not being able to find Lucas, the next at Lucas for not being findable; then would come consternation--"Tell me thrugh, Angus: do you think he can be alive?"--and then back to bafflement--"Why to hell is he so hard to find?"

"We'll find him," I said to all this. "I'm stubborrn, and you're worse than that. If the man exists in this Montana, we'll find him."

Yet we did not. Our second week of search was equally empty. The middle of that week, 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. No Butte, thank you, for either Rob or me, and we came away somehow convinced it was not te place Lucas Barclay would choose either.

We began to quetion stagecoach drivers, asking if they had heard of Lucas at their destination towns, White Sulphur Springs and 00 and 00. No and no and no. Meanwhile, we were hearing almost daily of some new El Dorado where a miner might have been drawn to. Castle. 00. 00. We began to see that tracking Lucas to a mine, if he was still in that business of Great Maybes, would be like trying to find out where a gypsy had taken up residence.

Sunday morning, our second sabbath as swellers 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 sheelwright shop is back in Scotland and you're still getting up 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. The mountains stood high all around, up in the morning light which had not yet found Helena.

We looked down into the dark gulched streets, out to the wide grassy valley beyond. "Where to hell can he be, Angus? A man cna't vanish like smoe, 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 aloive. If your family gets the Montana money from him again, well and good. But if that doesn't come, we have to figure he's--" Rob knew the rest of that. I went on to what I been mulling. "It's not that far to Christmas now. 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. "Get on with ourselves, is it. You sound like Crofutt."

"And who better? 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."

He had to grin. "All right, schoolman. But where is it you'd see us to next, if you had your way?"

We talked there on the hill untill 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 discussion of ours. What Rob and I chose that early morning, mostly because we did not see what else to decide was to stay on in Helena until past Christmas.

Of course, we needed to earn while we tried to learn Montana. I took myself down to Murdoch's Mercantile. an Aberdeen man and a bit of a conniver, High Murdoch; he later became a banker and a state senator. He fixed a hard look on me and in that Aberdonian drone asked:

"Can ye handle numbers?"

"Aye." I could, too.

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

And Rob found a ready job at the stagecoach company.

Statehood was a new notion to us, and we took it to mean that Montana had advvanced 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 indeed an improvement. But the principle was there, and Rob and I drank to it along with everyone else, repeately, on that 00th of November.

So there we were, Rob, our Scotland-leaving year of 1889 drawing to a cold close in the new capital of new Montana. It was your notion to commemorate ourselves by having our likenesses taken. "Let them in Nethermuir see what Montanians are," you proclaimed. We hurried to 00's studio before it could close for New Year's Eve.

Lord of Mercy, Rob; whatever made us think that muttonchop side whiskers 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.

The faces on us were not that bad, I will say. Your hair black and so think on top you looked as if you were wearing a cap even when you weren't, but below that you...
(for Angus, some of McC description from Eng Crk)

Though Rob had a more than bountiful head of hair, the part in it went far back on the right side, almost back even with his ear. It gave this face the look of being unveiled beffore a crowd, a curtain tugged aside and the promouncement: Here, people, is Robert Burns Barclay.

As for the front of my head, 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.

GROS VENTRE

indent 3 more

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 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 fresh 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! 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 having broken out in penmanship--I managed to reach the magical letter from Rob for another look.

"When he finaly puts his mind to it," I remarked, "Lucas writes a bold hand." Bold and then some, in fact. The written 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.

"So he does," agreed Rob. "That would be like him." He was more intent on the letter's contents. "This place Graws 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," said Rob as if trying it for taste. He already was puttin gon his coat and cap and I mine. To see our haste, you'd have thought we had only to rush across the street to be in Gros Ventre. For the first time since Nethermuir, neither of us fet we had to ask the other if we were both for it.

"Grove On," the postal clerk pronounced the town, which was instructive. So, in its way, was what he said next: "It's toward Canada up in the Two Medicine country. Nothing much 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 stagecoach, not so bad 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. "Freight wagon, whenever spring comes. If it comes."

And so we waited for Montana spring to have its say. By the time February went, and March, and enough of April that it seemed Montana might become something other than snow and mud again, I thought I might have to bridle Rob. He maybe thought the same about me. But the day did come when we stepped off the train at Craig and presented ourselves at the stagecoach office. The agent looked us over with substantial curiosity. Rob and I had Stetson hats now, but I suppose their newness--and ours--could be seen from a mile off.

In strode a tall rangy man with some papers he handed to the agent. 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 nodded briskly to us. "Let's get your warbags on board." We followed him outside to the stagecoach. "Step wide of that wheel team," he gestured toward the rear pair 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," Rob told him, "Gros Ventre." Meanwhile he was scrutinizing the wheels of the stagecoach and I has devoutly hoping they looked hale.

The driver nodded decisively again. "There're worse places. Or so I hear." He conferred with his pocket watch once more, put it away. "It's time to travel. 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 American, now Rob and I were departing one Montana for another. The Montana of steel rails and mineshafts and politics for the Montana of--what? Expanse, definitely. There was enough untouched land between Craig and Augusta to empty Edinburgh into and spread it thin indeed. Flatten the country out and you could butter Glasgow onto it as well. So, the widebrimmed Montana, this was. And the Montana of grass and grass and grass and grass. Not the new grass of spring yet--only the south slopes of coulees showed a green hint--but I swear I looked out on that tawny land and could feel the growth ready to burst up through the earth. The Montana that fledged itself new with the seasons.

The Montana, too, of the world's Rob Barclays and Angust 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 was the Montana that shouted all this and then said, come have it. If you dare, come have it.

The stagecoach ride was a continuing session of rattle and bounce, but we had no runaway and no breakdown and so Rob and I climbed down at Augusta 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. Our stage driver advised us to keep our eyes skinned for the freight wagon in the morning, as it might be a week before another went 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, 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 six horses, and a man driving the, 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 humped 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 the freight wagon.

The freighter 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 while hearing Rob, then granted 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 game 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 said: "Herbert's enough. Climb on if you're coming."

I inventoried the wagon freight while stowing our bags and bedrolls. Boxes of axle grease, sacks of beans, bacon, flour, coffee. Some stacks of sheep pelts, fresh enough that they must have come from the ranch where the greighter had just been. 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. But also, we were absorbed in the sights of the land. Instead of mountains all around as in Helena, here they were stacked on the western horizon. Every mountain in America seemed to be there. Palisades of rock, constant canyons. As far 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 asked the freighter: "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 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 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 seemed restless. Maybe it was only his body trying itself out after the day of sitting on the wagon seat like a stone, but I didn't think so.

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

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

"We think we're honest enough," vouched Rob. 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 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 anyway, no reason not to borrow ouselves 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 the barrel hoop an inch or so above its normal 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 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?"

The straw was my assignment, and from the fistful I'd been busily puffing until I found a sturdy one that could be blown through nicely. Rob drew the awl from the hole and delicately injected the straw in its place. Herbert had his cup waiting beneath when the first drops of whiskey began dripping out. "It's kind of slow, men. But so is the river 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 a new make. As we sat at the cmpfire and sipped, 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 specific item of dry goods, then it dawned on me he meant women. 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, 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 hill to 00 Street, Rob fidgeted, then blurted: "I'll go along." 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. Put it this way. Rob and I knew about life--somewhat--but didn't feel we had to go around annoucing it, even to each other.

"Worst thing about being a freighter," Herbert was announcing after my tepid report on Helena, "is how far 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 long ago been posted as a solider in the Union army. (Incredible.) The calico situation at Butte as compared with anywhere else in Montana. (A thousand times better.) The calico situation among the Mormons, the Chinese, the Blackfeet, the Nez Perce, and the Sioux.

When we had to tell him that no, we hadn't been to London to find out the English calico situation, Herbert 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." The mountains were totally gone from teh west, the sky there a curtain of whitish mist. Ridges and coulees still could be ~~picked~~

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 only hope I saw anywhere around. But was the sky empty by now? Or was more snow teetering up there where this came from?

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

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

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

"Sometime after this day of April," I muttered back.

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

"If you're going to imaging, try get some heat into the notion."

Still later:

"Herbert says it could have been worse, there could have been a wind with this snow."

"herbert is a fund of happy news."

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

He had no more than said so when the mist along the west began to wish away and mountains were in place here and there along that horizon. Before long, teh sun came thrugh, the snow was melting fast, the wheeltracks emerged ahead of us like new dark paint. Our baptism by Montana April apparently over, Rob and I sat in grateful silence on the freight wagon.

We were wagoneers for the rest of that day and the next, then at supper on the third night Herbert said, "Tomorrow ought to get us there." In celebration, we evaporated the final whiskey barrel to the level of the two previous nights;, congratulating ourselves on careful workmanship, and Herbert told us a number of chapters about the calico situation when he was freighting into Deadwood, South Dakota, during the gold rush of 00.

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 patience here; then 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 fled up the slopes in long sidling patterns.

Herbert halted the wagon at the base of the first ruts angling up and around a bench. "I don't think this outfit'll roll itself 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."

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 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 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 top the wagon over and kill himself, too. Let's see how right he is about that, first."

As the snow had done the benchlands set us a routine: 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?" remarked Herbert when we paused for noon. Rob and I didn't dare look at each other. If Gros Ventre was amid this boxed-in slanted landscape; if this windblown bleakness was where we had come across the world to find Luas Barclay...

Mid-afternoon brought a long gradual slope which the wagon could travel straight up, and we were able to be steady passengers again. 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 was ahead, and a next after that. And when the trail took the wagon up to a shallow pass between two broad flat ridges.

Herbert halted the horses there. What had halted him, and us, was a change of earth as sudden as awaking into the snow had been.

Ahead was where the planet greatened. To the west now, the entire horizon was mountains, peaks, cliff faces; a jagged blue-gray wall with snow summits, like white fur tossed atop. The hem to the mountains was timbered foothills, and down from them 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 trees along a creek made a graceful bottom seam across the tremendous land.

"Oh yeah, I see where we are now," Herbert contributed. "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. "It's Canada after that." Then Herbert found teh Sweetgrass Hills, five bumps on the plains northeast of us. "Men, unless I'm wrong, those're about seventy-five miles from where we're at." I tried to imagine going up onto one of the hills above the Greenock dock and being able to see to Edinburgh. "Then this over here, Heart Butte." A dark cone that stood near the mountains like a watchtower. Nearer, west along the line of creek trees, rose a smaller promontory with a tree-dark top. "Don't know what that one is. Another butte of some sort."

Rob and I interrupted our gaping to trade huge grins. All we needed now was Lucas Barclay and his town.

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

"here she is, I gues."

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 countrysides. None of the buildings qualified as much more than an eyesore, and beyond them on the far bank of the creek were 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.

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

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

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 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 said, "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 head. At the far end of the dirt street, near the bright skeleton of whatever was being built, stood a building with words painted in sky blue across the top third of its square front, 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 tents and picketed horses, "do they have gypsies in this country?"

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

We stepped in and found it to be a saloon. A half dozen partakers were along the bar, three or four others were at a table playing cards. Rob and I had seen cowboys before, in Helena. Or what we thought were. These of Gros Ventre were a used variety, in soiled crimped hats and thick clothing and worn-down boots.

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

If someone had been counting our blinks--the Indian-looking witness maybe was--they'd have determined that Rob and I were simultaneous in seeing the saloonkeeper. He was alone near one end of the bar, intently leaning down, busy with some chore there beneath the bar. When he glanced up and called, "Step right over, lads, this bunch isn't as bad as they look," there was the Barclay brightness of this cheeks, there was the kind of voice we had not heard since leaving Nethermuir. Lucas had a black beard now with gray in it like streaks of ash. The beard followed his jaw and chin, with his face carefully shaved above that. And above the face, Lucas had gone bald but the dearth of hair only emphasized the power that was below in that frame of coaly whiskers: blue eyes under heavy dark eyebrows, substantial nose, set mouth, that stropped ruddiness of a Barclay.

Rob let out a breath of relief. 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 on Rob and me. Every head had turned to us, every eye gauged us. The half-breed or whatever he was eemed to be memorizing us in case there was a bounty on fools.

The saloonkeeper himself looked thundrous. That face ofmight glowered at Rob. At me. At Rob again. The saloonkeeper's back straightened as if an iron rod had been put in his spine, but he kept his forearms out of sight below the bar. Helena tales of bartenders pulling out shotguns to moderate their unruly customers flashed to my mind. But could anyone with eyes think Rob and I were anything like unruly right then?

Finally the saloonkeeper said low and fierce to Rob: "Who to hell are you, to come saying that?"

"Rob. Lucas, man, I'm Rob. Your nephew."

The saloonkeeper stared at him in a new way. Then: "By Jesus, you are. John's lad Robbie, grown some." The fury was gone from Lucas Barclay's face, but what had happened in its place was no less unsettling. Emotion was unknown there now; right then that face could have taught stoniness to a rock.

At last Lucas let out a breath. As if that had started him living again, he said calmly to Rob: "You've come late, though, to do any handshaking with me." Now Lucas raised his forearms from beneath the bar and laid on the polished wood the two stumps of amputation whre his hands had been.

I did not know whether to stare or look away, stay or turn tail. There was no known rightness of behavior, just as there was no rightness to whatever had happened to Lucas. Like the clubs of bone and flesh he was exhibiting to us, any justice in life seemed looped off. Ripped away. A thing this terrible could not have happend. Yet it had. To this day, the account of Lucas Barclay's mining accident causes my own hands to open and close, open and close, thankful they are whole. It happened to him after the Great Maybe and Helena, when Lucas had moved on to a silver claim called the Fanalulu, east from 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 in his back. He scrambled 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 by wagon to the Army surgeon at Fort Shaw. "Johnny thought he was delivering a corpse, I suppose. He very near was." 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 live."

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 bourght his hand back to his side and stammered. "Lucas...I...we didn't--"

"Put it past, Rob," his uncle said. "have alook 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--"

"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 msall wince of regret. "I'm sorry to hear so. Down here among the living, we'd better drink to health."

Lucase 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 a glass for Rob, a third time with a glass for himself. Next he clasped a whiskey bottle the same way and poured an 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. Don't get the idea I'm going to make a habit of free drinks. But it's not just any day when a barclay arrives to Gros Ventre."

Our drink to health became two, then Lucas informed Rob and me he was taking us to home and supper and that he might 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, who was called Sedge, stepped behind the bar to preside there and Lucas led us 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. 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 odd. Or maybe a dream of myself dreaming this. At any rate, my mind was stuck on Lucas and his maiming while he was energetically intent 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 Tribble's mercantile, a long low log building. Fain's blacksmith shop A sizable boarding house 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 came through once a month, Lucas noted favorably.) Dantley's livery stable where Herbert the freighter has disembarked up. Next to it the other saloon, Rango's a twin to the Medicine Lodge except it was fronted with slabs instead of boards. (To our surprise--we hoped Herbert had received the news--we were

informed in a low voice by Lucas that the town did have a calico supply and it was here in Rango's. "Two of them," Lucas said with a disapproving shake of his head. "Rango calls them his nieces.")

We also became enlightened about the tents and picketed horses. "That's the floweree outfit, from down on the Sun River," Lucas told us. "They're trailing some steers north. A lot of cattle outfits come through on their way up to borrow grass."

"Borrow?" echoed Rob.

"From the Blackfeet. The Reservation is out 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. The town was not without graces. It proffered two. The first and finest was its trees, the cottonwoods like a towering lattice about 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 flapping at the top. When Rob or I managed to remark on this public-spirited display, Lucas glanced upward and said there as a story to that, all right, but he marched us across to what he plainly considered the

the centerpiece of Gros Ventre, the building skeleton at the end of the street.

"Sedge's hotel," Lucas identified this assembly 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 blanker 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."

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, Angus. I know Gros Ventre looks like a gypsy camp to you lads. But by Jesus, you ought've seen what a skimpy place it was when I came three years ago. The Sedgwicks and Rango, the Tibbles and the Fains, they've all settled here since then. If you used your eyes at all on your way here, you saw that there's land and more land, just for the taking. And people will take it. They'll flock in, one day, and that day not long from now. The railroad is being built, up north of the Two Medicine River. My belief is we'll see a railroad there, too." Lucas gaxed laong the street to the benchland south of us, then past the flagpole to the mountains along the west. "This is rare country," he said. "Just give our Gros Ventre a little tme and it'll be a grand town."

"Whom never a town surpasses," came 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, "as in the middle of our 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. He was pupil teacher for Adam Willox."

"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 attractions was supper.

He led us past the rear of the saloon and across a wide weedy yard 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 told us the house had come with the saloon, 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 and gone back to Missouri. But we had the luck, Lucas pointed out, that DeSalis also sired five children here and so provided guest space for us.

Lucas stopped at the front porch as if he had 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--"

Lucas's face went through another change. "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," I said in a hurry. "We're anxious to meet Nancy."

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 was the only thing. Hair black as a crow's back. A roundish face, the nose a bit broad; not pretty in 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.

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. Nancy, hellow. My name is Angus McCaskill." I forced a grin. "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 broghter'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 trough the kitchen doorway.

"Don't stand there like the awkward squad," Lucas told us. "Come sit down and tell me news of Nethermuir. If it's 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 for him before ever touching her own plate--but he could manipulate a fork the way a 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 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.--I made myself do that letter that found its way to you. Why did I, after these years? To say to Nethermuir that I'm still living a life of my own, I suppose." We learned that he had earned good money from the Fanalulu mine before the accident, and we knew by this house and its costly furnishings that those were not the last dollars to find their way to Lucas. We learned--at least I did, and it looked like 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, after Lucas closed up for the night and decided we needed one more drink to health, we learned about Nancy.

"She came with, when I bought the Medicine Lodge and the house," Lucas stated. "You're trying not to looked shocked, but that's the fact of it. Nancy was living with the DeSalises--this all goes back a few years--when I bought out old Tom. You met Toussaint Rennie, the halfbreed or whatever arithmetic he is, in here when you came. He's 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. They say when he 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. She needs some place to be. So you see, it's an arrangement that fits us both. 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 town. 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?"

"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 a thing that bad happen?"

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

"not that, Angus. What I mean, how could it happen to <u>him</u>? Lucas always was 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. Housekeeper, he calls her. She must even have to help him take a pee."

"That's as maybe, but look at all he 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 now 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 hwere we are. Maybe Gros Ventre will look fancier after a nights sleep."

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

And do you know, it did, 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 cottonwoods seemed to stand even taller over Gros Ventre. Grave old nurses for a foundling town. Or at least there in the daybreak, a person had hope that nurture was happening. Early as it was, the falg alread was tossing atop the Sedgwick flagpole. Beyond, the mountains were washed 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 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. 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 something else. And came once in a blizzard to deliver his wife's sister to the house I had just stepped from.

I want to think I would do better with the moment if I had it oer again, but all I managed to respond to Toussaint was "The day goes downhill after dawn, they say."

"I think that, too," replied Toussaint. "You ought to have been here then." He 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 that morning. We did, do you know. The first flag in Montana the state, it was ours. Here in Gros Ventre."

I thought of the roaring celebration Rob and I had enlisted in in Helena. "How are you so sure this one was the first?"

"We got up early enought. Way before dawn. Sedge woke up me, I woke up Dantley, we woke up everybody. Rango, the Tibbles, 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 day or so of wheelwork. Rob backed and filled a bit but then said he supposed so, and I was glad, knowing a chance to use his skill would help his mood. He and I 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 peopole had been known to learn a thing if they tried.

"I've heard of that myself," Lucas answered drily. "Come along, we'll show you what it's like to operate a thirst parlor."

Swamping was sweeping, I learned promptly, and when the Medicine Lodge had been broomed out there were glasses to wash, empty bottles to be hauled away, beer kegs to be wrestled. After Lucas began to see that I could do saloon tasks at least 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 from him: "Angus, I've some matters at the house. You can preside here till I get back." And that was my elevation into being in charge of the saloon during the quiet hours.

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

Some such sally was in each of the past issues of the Choteau newspaper I was reading through to pass time in the Medicine Lodge, but I thought little of them until 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 hammers banging the hotel twoard 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, two of those would have gone to their reward wherever they were. Cattle thieves. No, a race known for living to old age."

"What happened with them."

"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 heard. "Or maybe even Ninian Duff." Evidently another lord of cattle, though I hadn't hear of him yet.

"And man three?"

"That one, now, 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 reproachfully, but I held gaze with him. After a bit he glanced away. "Well, you're right.

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 among local folks, 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 Ventre's reputation that the two of us then decided to stay a few more weeks? Or in hope of it?

The proposal that I try some land-looking was Rob's. He was in demand with Fain for more wheelwork and with Sedge for the making of the hotel's windowsills and doorframes, so there was sound sense in him earning while I scouted about. "Mkaybe you'll find a Great Maybe for us," he said, though not within Lucas's hearing. And this is how I got my horseback introduction to the country around Gros Ventre.

Dantley provided me a pinto horse, which made me feel I was riding forth in warpaint, and out I went, for half a day at a time at first. South I did not bother with, for when Rob and I trekked 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 prairie, flattening and fanning into horizon which Lucas's maps showed were incised by rivers, the Marias, the Milk, and eventually the Missouri.

Next was north, and red cattle on buff hills. Ranches were already built along a twisty stream called Noon Creek, Walter Williamson's 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 gaxed down at the Double W ranch buildings, wondering whether Rob and I would ever have a fraction as much roof over us.

(More description to come, of the country east and north of Gros Ventre as Angus looks at it.)

That evening in the Medicine Lodge I mentioned to Lucas tthat I thought I would ride west the next day, follow the creek from town toward the area under the mountains. Lucas had not said much about my land-looking, maybe on the basis that he thought I ought to see

plenty of land before I chose, but now he remarked: "That'll be worth doing. Pay a visit to Ninian Duff while you're about it. His is the first place up the North Fork, there where the creek divides."

Here was a name Lucas had mentioned in connection with the vanishment of cattle rustlers. when I reminded him so, Lucas gave me one of his long 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~~ and you needn't particularly tell ~~him~~ Ninian you're working here in the saloon with me. ~~Ninian~~ He and I are not each other's favorite."

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

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

Someway, in the midst of all my gawking I began to feel I was being watched. Maybe by someone at either of the homesteads along the creek, but no one was in view. I glanced behind me. On a roan horse not fifty feet from my own sat a bearded man. He was

loose-made--tall, thin, mostly legs and elbows. And that beard; a dark-brown feedbag of whiskers down to his chest. He also had one of those foreheads you sometimes seen on the most Scottish of Scots, a kind of sheer cliff from the eyes up. As if the skull was making itself known under there.

He was regarding me in a blinkless way. I gaped back at the whiskers and forehead, only gradually noticing that his hands were either side of his saddle horn, holding a long stick of some sort 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 looing 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 way to my direction., "You're new to here?" he now inquired.

"As the dew," I admitted, and told him in general about Rob and myself and our homesteading intention. Mister Whiskers made up his mind about me while I was telling this, for when I was done he slid the rifle into its scabbard and annouced: "My name is Duff."

So. I could well believe that this man and Lucas would strike sparks off each other, hard against hard.

I introduced myself and we had a handshake, more or less. Ninian Duff immediately asked:

"You're from?"

"Nethermuir, in Forfar."

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

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

"You're not afraid of work?"

"None that I've met yet."

The whiskers of Ninian Duff twitched a bit at that. "Homesteading has some brads of it the rest of the world never heard of. But that is something you'll need to learn that for yourself. If I were you now"--a hypothesis I wasn't at all comfortable with--"I'd have a look there along the top of the creek. You can dinner with us and we'll 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 a minute beyond 12 o'clock.

When I rode into Gros Ventre it was nearly suppertime. I felt saddle-tired--cowboys must have a spare pair of legs they put on for riding, I was learning--but too thrilled yet to settle into a chair. I decided instead I'd relieve Lucas in the saloon, let him have a long supper in preparation for a Medicine Lodge Saturday night. Then Rob and I could go together for our own meal and talk of our homesteads. By damn, the two of us would be owners of Montana yet. Stopping by the house to tell Nancy this calendar, I swung off the pinto horse like a boy who has been to the tope of the world. The kitchen door was closest for my moment's errand. With my mind full of the 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. And they were too still. that 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.

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

"The prospect of supper will do that to me." I almost added <u>You're in here amply early yourself</u>, 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 gain. "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 ans 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 tthe 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, byt I let that go. "Right now I'd better find Lucas for supper. come along, can't you? I'll even serve you the first drink and keep my thumb out of it."

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

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

That evening in the Medicine Lodge, I managed to put a few extra drinks into myself ad Rob followed without really noticing. As matters went on, Lucas gave 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 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 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 clever about having invented this mind-clearing evening for Rob, and we were both feeling improved for the other reason, so we stopped in front of the hotel framework for contemplation and a further drink or so.

"See now, Angus. This is what a coming town looks like by night."

"Dark," I observed.

"But its day will dawn, 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 throug the middle of this town Gros Ventre. I can hear it now. Whoot-toot-toot. Whoot-toot-toot."

"The train will stop right 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."

"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 Texican 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 finder than ever, the mountains stood great and near, and as Rob and I rode onto Breed Butte to see the valley, I thought the North Fork looked even more resplendent than I had seen it the day before. Rob too said how picture-pretty a patch of the earth

this truly was. Then he began:

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

"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. But if you want to ride around with me, see for yourself--"

"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, "on no more money than we have to start with. We're too late in the year to get 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 slik, 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.

"Angus, I'm thinking strong of going in with Fain. There's work aplenty for two in his shop --everything in Montana with a hweel on it can stand repair. He's offered to me, and it'd be a steady earn. And a chance to stay on in Gros Ventre, for a time

at least. I'd be nearer to Lucas that way."

"Lucas? Lucas is managing in this world at least as well as either of us. He has--" It hit me before her name came off my tongue. "Nancy." The mood I broke when I walked in on the two of them the evening before. The way Rob shined at every meal. The change from his first night's distaste for Lucas's domestic arrangement. 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, well, then can be the time to decide about homesteading."

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. 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.

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

Lucas not seeing at all that under his roof, trouble was about

to receive a new meaning.

Rob--Rob unseeing too, not letting himself see; simply putting himself were it all could not help but happen. Of his catalogue of excuses against the North Fork, no5 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, it culdn'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 cuts loose around you are two different things. No one could ever win in the pittin gof a Barclay against a Barclay. This I wanted none of. This I could see nothing to do but leave from.

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.

"Up to the North Fork already" You and Rob 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."

"Away where? Angus, 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, so sudden?"

"I've had--second thoughts."

"Your first ones were better." Lucas was polishing the bar I had just polished. "By Jesus, I don't know what can have gotten into you and Rob."

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

"Rob says that, after coming all the way from Nethermuir to get away from the wheel shop? Lucas polished even more energetically. "Put a hammer in a Barclay's--" he stopped, 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 me: "If you're so set on leaving, what wonderful placce is it you're going to?"

"I'll maybe go have another look at that Teton River country the freight wagon came through. 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 said: "Well, at least you can stay on for a bit, can't you?"

My turn to shake a head.

"What's your damned hurry?" Lucas demanded peevishly. "Tired of my hospitality, are you?"

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

Lucas stopped wiping the bar and gazed at me. 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, nothing of the sort. I just think I'd better be on my way before--it might."

At least he dropped his gaze. "Christ, I should've seen." He stared down at his stubs on the bar towel. "Any sense I ever had must've gone with my hands."

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

He as wiping the bar again. "I can believe you, 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 needed to be gone from Gros Ventre. I wished I already was.

"Have you told Rob you're leaving?" asked Lucas.

"Not yet, but I'm about ot, when he come off work."

"hold back until tonight, if you would. I'll have Sedge take the saloon for a while and the three of us can have a final supper together. We may as well have peace in the family until then, do you think?" I thought, peace is not 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 Burns, eh, Angus?"

I could see Rob wanting to ask how long an absence "a bit" would be. But he held that in, and cut Lucas's cold beef for him. Lucas fed himself some bites in his bearlike way. Then he began:

"I've been thinking waht you two might do."

My heart climbed into my throat, for I thought he meant what Rob and Nancy were heading toward. This would teach me to keep my long tongue at home. But then Lucas went on: "When you lads take up your land, I mean. It can be a hard go at first, homesteading." I caught a didn't-I-say-so look from Rob, but we both stayed quiet, to find out what was on Lucas's mind. "Nobody ever has enough money to start with, and then there's the deciding of what to raise. The North Fork there, that would be too high to grow much of anything but hay, do you think?"

I said yess, that was what I thought, Rob said nothing.

"So it would have to be livestock there. Cattle, though, you're late to start with this year, with calving already done. Sheep may be the thing. With sheep 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?

We finished eating, or in my case gave up on the job and Lucas swung his head to me and asked: "Angus, would you mind? My pipe."

I fetched the pipe and put it in his mouth. After I lit it and he puffed sufficiently, he used a forearm to push it to the corner

of his mouth, then said: " I'll go with you on them."

Neither Rob nor I took his meaning.

"The sheep," Lucas said 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 on: "I can back you a bit on the homestead expenses, too. You'd need to get right to work, Montana 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."

"Lucas, man," Rob burst out, "That's beyond generous." Glum was gone from him. This was the Rob I had come from Nethermuir and Helena with.

"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 dealy and in the meantime Lucas's offer lay like money to be picked up.

I knew Lucas had one more sentence to upt into place, and it came. "And what do you say to the idea, Angus?"

My mind buzzed like a hive with all this. I tried to sort what this offer meant, what it didn't, what it could or might or may. Lucas, rascal that you knew how to be: this was your way of easing us from your house, of removingg RRob from Nancy's vicinity, was it

not? Answer, a sure yes. You knew too that the homestead work would absorb us that Nancy would pass from Rob's mind. 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 and maybe not. Life goes differently, lads. But the one answer yet to come, the 1st answer of that evening and of the time that has ensured from it--that answer, Lucas, was what you and I both knew I could not avoid saying, did we not?

And say it I did.

"Yes."