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THE 'STEADERS

The Great Herdsman Above must have thrown up his hands over the territory of bald plains between here and North Dakota and ordained it to be eternally stampede country. First of all, He turned loose the buffalo there; next the cattle herds in the days of open range; and now the homesteaders are flocking in by the thousand. Nearest us, a Paris of the prairie called Valier already exists on the maps the irrigation company is providing to hopeful immigrants, and there can even be found in the townsite vicinity occasional buildings which, if rounded up and bedded down into some sort of order, might constitute a town eventually.

--Gros Ventre Weekly Gleaner, May 13, 1909

I mean this better than it will sound. Adair was the biggest change my life had known since sheep came into it.

———
"Dair? You don't snore."

She stopped the work of her fork, that breakfast time in the early weeks of our marriage, and looked across at me curiously. "Such high praise so early in the day."

"All I meant was--it's a nice surprise." Surprise and cause for wonder, this small woman silent in the dark as if she wasn't there in the bed beside me. My years of alone life had made me think that adding

a second person to a household would be like bringing in a crowd.

Whenever you looked up, there would be a presence ~~there~~ ^{who} hadn't been,

now at the stove, now at the window, now in the chair across from you,

now in the blanket warmth next to you. But not so, with Adair. ~~she~~

She was not what could be called a throng of wives. No, ~~she was~~ instead

she was proving to be a second solitude on the homestead, a new aloneness

daily

Y crisscrossing my own. That was the parallel I meant

with the sheep. Which is to say, as much as words ever can, that in

the way I had needed to aim my mind as fast as possible--faster, really--

in at least the same general direction as those pathless clouds of fleece

when Rob and I became men of sheep, I now had to try to fathom this

sudden young gray-eyed woman with my name joined onto hers. This ^{quietly - here} newcomer

from the past. This afterthought bride in the lane of time where I

^{only} foresaw Anna. The saying is that to be successful with sheep, even

when you're not thinking about them you had better think about them a

little. Now that I was coupled into life with Adair, even when I was

trying ~~to~~ ^{not} to wonder I had to wonder whether I was up to this.

~~And now that~~ I was letting this ^{be seen} ~~show~~ ^{bald} by remarking to the presence

wasn't I. Figuring across the breakfast eggs from me about her snorelessness, ~~I figured~~

*Adair
up not
wibly*

*more
Adair
clear*

*she
she no
seemed
writing in
not inhabiting*

*Adair
odd*

*more
Adair
clear*



^{had} I'd better get out of the topic before damage was done, ^{deployed} I asked: "You're sure you're related to Rob Barclay, the Scotch Banshee?"

"Would you like me to ask Rob ^{for} lessons in sawing with my nose?" she said back, lightly enough.

"No, no, no. I can step out and listen to the coyotes whenever I feel too deprived."

My wife lifted her chin at me and declared, ^{softly} "Adair has the same news for you, old Angus McCaskill. You aren't a snorer either."

"Now where do you get the evidence for that?" For if she was asleep as she seemed while I lay there searching the night--

"I wake up early, well before you do. And you're there, quiet as a gatepost."

^{Adair and I} So we were opposite wakefulnesses, were we, at either end of the night. The dark quiet between, we shared.

#

^{"See now,"} "I always knew marriage would agree with you," Rob ^{accorded} assured me.

"You don't have that bachelor look on you, any more." He sucked his cheeks in ~~and~~ to hollows and meanwhile crossed his eyes, just in case I didn't happen to ~~to let me know~~ what abject bachelorhood looked like.

Rob assured me
accorded
Adair
know

#

Adair had barely come across the threshold when Rob and I had to trail his wethers and my lambs to the railhead at Conrad for shipping. Quick after that, school began again and I was making the ride from homestead In weekends and other spare minutes, to day of teaching and then back. ~~Dawns, dunks and weekends,~~ winter had to be readied for. It sometimes seemed I ~~was~~ saw more of Scorpion than I did of ~~Adair~~ my new wife.

She said nothing of my here-and-gone pace, just as I said nothing of her beginning attempts at running a household. Accustomed to tea, ^{Adair} ~~she~~ applied the principle of boiling to coffee and produced a decoction nearly as stiff as the cup. Her meals were able enough, but absentminded, so to speak; the same menu might show up at dinner and at supper, then again at the same meals the next day, as if the food had forgotten its way home. Courage, I told my stomach and myself, we'd eventually sort such matters out, but not just yet. There already was a problem far at the head of the line of all others. Adair's lack of liking for the homestead and, when you come all the way down to it, for Montana.

Again, words were not what said so. I simply could see it, feel it, in ^{her} ~~Adair~~ whenever she went across the yard to fling out a dishpan of

Adair had barely come across the threshold when Rob and I had to trail his

had to be reached for. If sometimes seemed I saw more of Scorpion

Montana winter having no known remedy, she applied the principle

nearly as stiff as the cup. Her meals were soft enough, but

had forgotten its way home. Courage, I told my stomach and myself,

we'd eventually

water and ~~came~~ ^{strode} back, all without ever ~~looking up~~ ^{elevating her eyes} from her footsteps.

The mountains and their weather, she seemed only to notice when they were at their most threatening. I counted ahead the not many weeks to winter and the white cage it would bring for someone such as Adair, and tried to swallow that chilly future away.

Before winter found its chance to happen, though, there was ~~the~~ a Friday end-of-afternoon when a session of convincing Ninian on the need for new arithmetic books -- ay, are you telling me there are new numbers

be learned these days, Angus?--didn't get me ~~back~~ ^{home} from the schoolhouse until suppertime. During my ride, I had watched the promise of storm being formed, the mountains showing only as shoals in the clouds by the time I stepped down from Scorpion.

"Sorry, Dair," I ~~said~~ ^{provided} to her with a kiss and headed ~~out~~ ^{sharp} for the wash basin while she put the waiting food on the table. "It's just lucky I didn't end up arguing with Ninian by moonlight."

"The old dark comes so early these days," she said and took the glass chimney off to light the lamp wick.

"We get a little spell of this weather every year about now," I mollified her as I craned around to peer out the window at the clouds atop the mountains, hoping they would look lessened, ^{but} "and then it clears away bright as a new penny ^{for awhile.} We'll be basking in Indian summer before you know what's hap-" The sound of shatter, the cascade of glass, spun me to Adair.

add Angus, interior, a comma, wait, clauses?

of a facial, dreaded, swallow, hand, tried, to swallow that future away.

sharp

She was staring dumbstruck at the table strewn with shrapnel of the lamp chimney, shards in our waiting plates and in the potatoes and ~~the~~ ^{and the milk and the sugar and all} the gravy and other food dishes as if a shotgun loaded with glass had gone off. In her hand she still held a glinting jagged ring of glass, the very top of the chimney. ~~I~~ [#] I went and grasped her, wildly scanning her hands, arms, up the aproned front of her, up all the fearful way to her eyes. No blood. ~~Mercy I asked, mercy I found.~~ ^{sought, got gazed} Adair ~~looked~~ back at me intact.

~~Adair~~
~~Mercy I asked~~
~~mercy I found~~

She did not look ^{the least} afraid, she did not look as if she even knew what the fusillade of glass could have inflicted on her.

Tunnels of puzzle, those eyes above the twin freckle marks. ~~She~~ ^{She}

~~Adair~~ murmured, "It just--flew into pieces. When I put it back on the lamp."

Not afraid
 of you

"That happens ^{the rare time} ~~sometimes~~, the heat cracks it to smithereens. But ~~you're sure~~ ^{sure you're} what matters, none of it cut you? Anywhere? You're ~~all~~ right, are you, Dair?"

you're
 sure

"Yes, of course. It surprised me, is all. And look at poor supper."

~~Adair~~ ^{Adair} sounded so affronted about the surprise and the stabbing of supper that it could have been comical. But my heart went on thundering as I stepped to the shelf where I kept a spare lamp chimney.

#

In the morning I said what had lain in my mind through the night.

"Dair, you need to learn to ride a horse."

She thought it was one of my odder jokes. "I do, do I. What, do I look like a fox-hunting ~~type~~ ^{flopsie} to you? Lady Gorse on her horse?"

"No, I mean it. As far back in here as we are, no one else ~~close~~ ^{near} around, it'd be well for you to know how to handle a horse. Just in case, is all." "In case lamp chimneys detonate in innocent moments, in case any of the accidents and ailments of homestead life strike when I am not here with you, I was attempting to say without the scaring words, ~~case something ever happens when I'm not here.~~ "I'm living proof that riding a horse isn't all that hard. Come along out, Scorpion ~~and I~~ and I'll have you galloping in no time." I got up from my chair and stood waiting.

"Now?"

"Now. Out to the barn." I put my arm in hers, ready escort.

"Scorpion awaits."

Her gaze said all right, I will humor you, show me what a horse if you must. ~~At the barn I took her through the routine of saddling, then unsaddled Scorpion and~~ demonstrated to her said: "Your turn."

"Angus. This is--"

"No, no, you don't do it with words. Hands and arms are unfortunately required. They're there at the ends of your shoulders if I'm not wrong."

No smile from her. Well, I couldn't help that. "Just lift the saddle onto him and reach slowly under for the cinch."

Beside the big gingerbread-colored horse, Adair was a small pillar of reluctance.

"Now then, Dair," I encouraged. "Saddle him and get it over with."

She cast me a ~~sharp~~ glance full of why?

"Please," I said.



~~"Please."~~

~~As a
force~~

have

The saddle seemed as big as she was, but she managed to ~~put~~ it onto Scorpion. Then in three tries she struggled the cinch tight enough that I granted it would probably hold. # "There," she panted. "Are you satisfied?"

interjection
in sun
on
sunday

"Starting to begin to be. Now ^{for} your riding lesson." ~~What you do~~

Over Pegasus I'll fling my leg/and never a shoe will I need to beg."

Verse didn't seem to loft her any more than the rest of my words. ~~that~~

"What you do is put your left foot in the stirrup," I demonstrated with myself, "take hold of the saddle horn, and swing yourself up ^{this} way."

From atop

Scorpion I ~~looked down at an Adair~~ sent my most encouraging look down to Adair, then swung

off the horse. "Your turn. Left foot into stirrup."

"No." She sounded decisive about it.

~~you've got to.~~

"Ah, but you ~~have to~~. This isn't Nethermuir. Montana miles are too many for walking, and there ~~may~~ are going to come times when I'm not here to

mph
Stacy

hitch up the team and ^{wagon} ~~buggy~~ for you. So unless you're going to sprout

there are
going
to
come

wings or fins, ^{Dair} that leaves horseback."

8A

"No, Angus. Not today. I have this dress on. When I can ^{make myself} get a riding skirt--"

"There's nobody to see you but me. And I've glimpsed the territory before, have I not?" I hugged her and urged her, ^{wishing} ~~thinking~~ to myself that ~~I would~~ I knew how to ^{snip} ~~cut~~ up Barclay stubbornness ^{into five-foot chunks to} and sell ~~it~~ as

^{crowbars} ~~nails~~. "You can do this. My schoolgirls ride like Comanches."

~~uniforms~~
~~Dusty~~ ~~horses~~



"I'm not one of your wild Montana schoolgirls. I'm your wife,
and I--"

"I realize that makes your case harder, love, but we'll try to work
around that handicap." She didn't give me the surrendering smile I'd

hoped that would bring. By now I realized she wasn't being ~~coy~~ stubborn,

she wasn't being ~~stubborn~~ coy, she was simply being Adair. At her own

time and choosing, riding skirt newly on, she might ~~consent to~~ announce her

Fine, well, and good, readiness. But this couldn't wait. "I'm sorry, Dair, but there's no halfway
to this. Come on now," I directed. "Up."

"No."

I suppose this next did come out livelier than I intended.

"Dair, lass, you came across the goddamned Atlantic Ocean!

Getting up into a saddle is no distance, compared. Now will you put
your foot ~~in~~ here in the stirrup--"

with all your fuss

"No! Angus, I won't! You're being silly about this."

no Adair herself wasn't quite stamping that a foot yet, but her voice was.

She sounded as adamant as if I'd wakened her in the middle of the night
and told her to go outside and tie herself upside down in the nearest tree.

~~Fine, well, and good,~~

~~consent to~~

~~fuss~~

~~next~~

*Adair
alright*

Adair

del

A The only thing I could think of to do, I did. I stepped to ~~her~~ and

lifted her so that she was cradled in my arms. *A* Surprised pleasure came

over her face, then she ~~was laughing~~ ^{smiled} and put ~~her~~ arms rewardfully around

*laughing
9/15/51*

my neck. *A* ~~The laughing~~ ^{smiling} quit as I abruptly took us over beside Scorpion.



"Angus, what--"

"Upsy-daisy, lazy Maisie," I said. "Whoa now, Scorpion," and with a grunt I lifted Adair, feet high to clear the saddle horn and I hoped aiming her bottom into the saddle.

A "Angus!
AnGUS! Angus, quit! What're you--"

"Dair, let yourself ^{down} into the saddle. Whoa, Scorpion, steady there, whoa now. Don't, Dair, you'll scare the horse. Just get on, you're all but there. Whoa now, whoa--"

Her fists were rapping my back and chest, and not love taps either. But with no place else but mid-air to go, at last she was in the saddle, my arms ~~clashed~~ clasped around her hips to keep her there. Scorpion gave us a ^{perturbed glance} ~~perplexed look~~ and flicked his nearest ear. "Dair, listen to me. Sit still, you have to sit still. Scorpion isn't going to stand for much more commotion. Just sit a minute. You have to get used to the horse and ~~let~~ let him get used to you."

Handwritten note:
Adair
sit
let

She was gulping now, but only for breath after our struggle; her tears were quiet ones. "Angus, why are you doing this?"

"Because you have to know how to handle a horse, Dair. You just absolutely do, in this country." I buried my face in her dress at

her hip while the sentences wrenched themselves out of me.)

~~her hip.~~ "Dair, ~~love,~~ I'm afraid for you. I could never stand it if something happened to you on account of marrying me. An accident, you here alone, this place off by itself this way..."

The ache of my fear known to both of us now. I had lost one woman.

If I lost another, lost her because of the homestead--"But this place is all

I've got. We've got. So you have to learn ~~to~~ how to live here. You just have to." ~~She was pale and the tear tracks were still fresh, but she~~ A silent time, then I raised my head to her. ~~Hello~~

She was ^{was} pale but the tear tracks were drying. "Hello

you, Dair Barclay. Are ~~we~~ ^{you} all right ~~fill up there?~~"

"Y-yes. Angus, I didn't know--how much it meant to you. I thought you were just being--"

I cleared enough of the anxiety out of my throat to say: "Thinking will lead to trouble time after time, won't it. Now then, all you need ~~to~~ ^{to} do is take these reins. Hold them in your right hand, not too slack but not tight either, there's the way. Don't worry, I'll be hanging tight onto Scorpion's bridle and first we'll circle the yard. *Ready?*" mou?

and what meant circle the yard.

"I wonder if I am becoming feral," Sue Hubbell speculates equably

amid her pages of coyotes, opossums, skitters, black rat snakes and other creatures she neighbors with in her adopted rural life. "Wild things and wild places pull me more strongly than they did a few years ago, and domesticity, dusting and cookery interest me not at all."

If I lose another, I lose her because of the homestead--"But this place is all

The scene of my first known to do to of us now. I had lost one woman.

fiftyish, smallish, an ex-librarian, the survivor of a discombobulating divorce ("I was out to lunch for three years") and either owns or is owned by eighteen million honeybees in the Missouri Ozarks. By the evidence of her every sentence, she is also a beautifully blossoming writer. How about: "There is a magnificent dappled brown and gold house spider changing her skin today in a

the lady beekeeper

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the Alps." But nothing doing. Adair quietly smiled us away, brother
as well as husband. "Adair can see ^{the}~~the~~ winter from where she is," she
assured us.

She
took
me
to
Robt
McSkill's

She
crossed
through
had

For a while my hope was that she was simply content to be on the inside of winter looking out, the way she paused at any window she passed to gaze out into ~~the~~ Scotch Heaven's new whiteness.

That hope lasted until ~~the~~ ^a choretime dusk soon after the start of ~~winter~~ ^{the snow season}

when George Frew, quiet ox in a sheepskin coat and a flap cap, trooped behind me into the house. "Anything you'd like from town besides the mail, Dair?" I asked heartily. "George is riding in tomorrow."

"Yes," she responded, although you couldn't really say it was to George or myself. Times such as this, conversing with her was like speaking to a person the real Adair had sent out to deal with you. Wherever the actual ^{motel} Adair was otherwise occupied at the moment, the one in front of us ^{stated} ~~said~~ now: "Adair would like a deck of cards."

George positively echoed with significant silence as he took those words in. Flora Duff might want darning thread, Jen Erskine might want dried peaches for pie, but what did Adair McCaskill want but a--

"You heard the lady, George," I ^{produced} ~~said~~ with desperate jolliness. "We're in for some fierce whist in this household, these white nights. Kuuvus's best deck of cards, if you please--I'll ride down and pick it up from you tomorrow ^{night}."

Thereafter, Adair would indeed play me games of whist or gin rummy when I took the care ^{to put my reading aside and} ~~to~~ suggest it in an evening. But her true

game was what I had known she intended, ^{solitaire} ~~solitaire~~. After the deck of cards arrived, I began to



at first
to put
reading
aside

seven marching
notice the columns of solitaire laid out on the sideboard during the day.

Aces, faces, and on down, the queues of cards awaiting their next in number.

Adair amid her housework would stop and deal from the waiting deck to herself,

play any eligible card where it belonged, and then go on about whatever she

had been doing, only to stop again her next time past and repeat the

ritual.

*David's
mother*

—

But I soon was repeating my own silent ritual that winter,
wasn't I. My own solitary preoccupation. Against every intention in
myself, I was soon doing that.

The schoolhouse dances brought it on. At the first dance in my
schoolroom, fresh silver of snowfall softening the night, I was in
mid-tune with Adair when I caught sight of Anna and Isaac Reese entering.
The sensation instantly made itself known within me, unerringly as
the first time I ever saw Anna. Toussaint Rennie once told me of a
Blackfeet who carried in his ribcage an arrowhead from a fight with
the Crow tribe. That was the way the feeling for Anna was lodged in
me: just there, its lumped outline under the skin same and strong as ever.

Adair

X

The sensation fell on me from full height, unerringly as the first time

I ever saw Anna. ^{no 91} Dair, here in my arms, what am I going to do with

myself? Marrying you was supposed to cure me of Anna. Why hasn't it?

Until that moment of Anna entering from the snow-softened dark, not

having laid eyes on her since the day Adair and I were married I was

able to hope it was my body alone, the teasing appetite of the loins,

that made me see Anna so often as I waited for sleep. I am not inviting

any of this, ^{Dair,} I never invited it. Her in the midst of this same music,

that first night of glorious dancing with her here in my schoolroom.

Her in the Noon Creek school, turning to me under a word in the air,

her braid swinging decisively over her shoulder to the top of her breast.

Dair, I wish you could know, could understand, could not be hurt by it.

^{Anna}
~~Her~~ beneath me, watching ^{so}

intently as we made the dawn come, arousing each other as the sun kindled

the start of morning. Double daybreak such as I had just once shared

with a woman, not the woman ~~was~~ I had wed. Night upon night I had been opening

my eyes to explode those scenes, driving sleep even farther away. Beside

me, Adair who slept as if she was part of the night; there in the dark

was the one place she seemed to fit the life I had married her into.

But this other inhabitant of my nights--I knew

now, again, that whether she was Anna Ramsay or Anna Reese or Anna

Might-Have-Been-McCaskill, every bit of me was in love with the woman

as drastically as ever. But can't a person somehow, sometime, say to

life: Wait now, there's been a misreckoning, you've put the wrong man

p. 18 follows →

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~~But I was repeating my own silent ritual that winter, wasn't I.
My own solitary preoccupation. Against every intention in me, I was
soon doing that.~~

here in love with the wrong woman, I only want to go along the years
making life right for the woman I wed?

How many times that winter, to how many tunes, was I going to tread
the floor of my South Fork schoolroom or her Noon Creek one, glimpsing
Anna while Adair flew in my arms? Can't a person, somehow, sometime?
I am going to need to try like almighty, aren't I. I couldn't not come
to the dances, even if Adair would have heard of that--which she definitely
would not have. To her, the dances were the one time that Montana
winter wasn't Montana winter.

"She's another person, out there in the music." This from Rob.
He meant it to extoll, but that he said anything at all about an oddness
of Adair was a surprise.

"She is that," I couldn't but agree. Dancing with Adair you were
partnered with some gliding being she had become, music in a frock,
a ringleted
silken motion wearing ~~an~~ Adair mask. It was what I had seen when she
danced with Allan Frew after the shearing, a tranced person who seemed
to take the tunes into herself. Where this came from, who knew. At home
she didn't even hum. But here from first note to last she was on the
floor with Rob or me or occasional other partners, and it was becoming

more than noticeable that she never pitched in with the other wives when they put midnight supper together. To Adair, eating wasn't in the same universe with dancing.

"Angus, you look peaked," Adair remarked at the end of that first schoolhouse dance. "Are you all right?"

"A bit under the weather. It'll pass."

#

But then the Monday of school, after that dance. A squally day, quick curtains of snow back and forth across the winter sun, the schoolroom alight one minute and dimmed the next. By afternoon the pupils were leaning closer and closer over their books and I knew I needed to light the overhead lanterns. Yet I waited, watching, puzzled with myself but held by the mock dusk that seemed to find the back of the schoolroom and settle there. Davie Erskine in the last desk gradually felt my stare over his head toward that end of the room.

He turned, ^{peered}~~looked~~, then at me. "Is something there, Mr. McCaskill?"

"Not now there isn't, Davie." Of all the tricks of light, that particular one. Slivers of cloud-thinned sunshine, so like the moonsilver when Anna and I lay with each other on the floor there. You've got

to let the moonbeams in on a dance, Davie. The silvered glim had

come and gone in the past half-minute, a moment's tone that I had seen in this schoolroom any number of times without really noticing, that now I would always notice.

"Davie!" I called out so sharply his head snapped up, "help me light the lanterns, would you please."

#

That winter, then. Adair and I so new to each other, and the snow-heavy valley of the North Fork so new to her. I at least believed I could take hope from the calendar. Even as the year-ending days slowed with cold and I fully realized that Adair's glances out into the winter were a prisoner's automatic eye-escapes toward any window, even then I still could tell myself that with any luck at all she would not have to go through a second Scotch Heaven winter



with only cards for company, ~~with~~ any luck at all, this would be our only
 childless winter. Children, soon and several, we both wanted. Adair
 seemed to have an indefinite but major number in mind--it came with
 being a Barclay, I supposed--while I lived always with the haunt of
 that fact that my parents had needed to have four to have one who
 survived. It would be heartening to think the world is growing less
 harsh, but the evidence doesn't often say so, does it. In any case,
 the next McCaskill, the first American one, was our invisible visitor
 from the winters to come.

more-
 of +
 was to
 make
 a life
 without
 Anna...

to
 make

—
It was a morning in mid-March when Rob and I declared spring. Or rather when the sheep did, and he and I, fresh from the lambing shed, came into the kitchen bearing those declarations, a chilled newborn lamb apiece.

~~She~~ "Company for you, Adair," sang out Rob.

She gave a look of concern at our floppy infants, who in their first hours of life are a majority of legs, long and askew as the drone pipes of a limp bagpipe. "But whatever's wrong with them?"

"A bit cold, is all," I told her. "Bring us that apple box, would you ~~please~~ please."

"Poor things." She went and fetched the box. "What are you going to do with them?"

"Put them in the oven, of course."

"The oven?"

"A cold lamb's best friend," vouched Rob.

"In--this oven? The oven of my cookstove?"

"It's the only oven there is," I replied reasonably.

"But--"

"They'll be fine," I provided instruction to her as I dropped the oven door and Rob arranged his little geezer in the box next to mine, "all you need do is set the box behind the stove when they come to."

"In you go, tykes." With their amplitude of legs out from sight under them, the lamb babes in the open oven now looked like a pair of legs of plucked rabbits close to expiration, their eyes all but shut ^{in surrender} and the tips of their tongues protruding feebly. "They're not as bad off as they look," I encouraged Adair. "They'll be up and around before you know it."

"But, but what if they ^{climb} ~~get~~ out of the box?"

"In a situation like that," Rob postulated, "I'd put them back in. Unless you want designs on your floor."

"How long are they going to be in here?"

Rob gawked around studiously. "Do you have an almanac? I can never remember whether it's the Fourth of July or Thanksgiving ~~that~~ that

tykes
in a situation like that (Rob) never design on yr floor

McAngus,

~~whether it's July or August when we take the lambs out of the kitchen. Angus,~~

can you?"

"You know better than to listen to him," I counseled her. "He'll be up to get these lambs when they thaw out in an hour or so. Dair, the lambs as a lot of them are always going to be, are our living. We've got to save every one we can, and when they're chilled, this is the only way to do it."

"How long did you say lambing goes on?"

"Only about six weeks."

—————

May

So ~~spring~~^{May} was a double event for Adair, an end to lambs in the oven

and the beginning of weather that ^{truly} wasn't winter. Her spirits rose day by day, taking mine with them. By the holy, if you can't believe in possibilities in the greening Montana of May, when can you? Compared with how we had wintered, Adair and I were next things to larks the

~~Adair~~
describe Adair

you
in Adair's
spurs, when?

afternoon when we were to go to Gros Ventre for provisions. ¶ "You're ready for town, are you?" I called in through the doorway to her. "Or can you stand to be away from the company of lambs for that long?"

¶ "Adair is more than ready for town," she informed me.

"If she's that eager she can practice her driving, can't she.

I'll go see whether ~~Prince~~^{Jupiter} and ~~Blaze~~^{Beastie} are agreeable to you handling their reins."

~~Adair~~
Beastie

"Tell them they'd better be ~~if~~ if they know what's good for them."

The day was raw, despite the new green of the grass and the fact that the spring sun was trying its best. We were a bit late starting because I'd had to take a look at the last bunch of ewes and fresh lambs that had been put out to graze. Even so, how fine ~~if~~ felt to have a change from the muck of the lambing shed. ¶ "This must be what they mean by the civilized life," I said with my arm around Adair as she handled the reins.

"A carriage and a driver and the kind of day that makes poets spout.

Have you heard this one: My life your lane, my love your cart/come ~~my~~ take
my rein, come take my heart?" cut?

"I've heard it now, haven't I. Depend on you and your old verses."

We were almost at the sideroad up Breed Butte. "Had we better see if
Rob and Judi th^{want} ~~we~~ anything from town?"

"Rob was in just yesterday, there'll be no need. Let's make up
~~a bit of~~^{the} time instead. Poke the team along a little, what about ~~it~~^{them} I'll take
a turn driving after we cross the creek."

~~Jupiter and Beastie~~
~~Prince and Blaze~~ stepped along friskily as we passed meadow after

meadow of half-grown hay beside the North Fork. I never tired of
reviewing Scotch Heaven, the knob ahead where I first looked down into
this valley, ~~the~~ Breed Butte and the south ridges on either side of us
and the plains opening ahead through the benchland gap made by the creek.

~~halfpenny~~
"A ~~quarter penny~~ for them," spoke up Adair eventually. "Or are
you ~~so~~^{too} lost in admiration for my driving to have any thoughts." more?

"Actually, I've been watching that horse." Considerably distant
yet, the ~~the~~^{stray} animal was moving along the fenceline between the Findlater
place and Erskines' lower pasture. It acted skittish. Going and stopping,
going again. in the season Shying sideways. Too early for locoweed. Odd.

"Dair, stop the team. I need to see over there."

With the buckboard halted, I stood up and peered. The distant horse shied once more, and the inside of me rolled over in sick realization. That stray horse had a saddle on.

"Angus, what--" ~~Dair~~ Adair ^{let out} ~~exclaimed~~ as I grabbed the reins and slapped the team into a startled run.

"Something's happened over there, we've got to go see what. Hang on, Dair." She did, for dear life. ^{left the road behind and} ~~We~~ ^{Findlater} went across the pasture at a rattling pace.

The wire gate into the Erskine field was closed: it would be. I saw the scene in my mind as Adair held the team and I flung the gate aside, the rider starting to remount

after having come through the gate and closed it, his ^{just into} foot ~~in~~ the stirrup, the horse shying at the sudden flight of a bird, ^{or} a dried weed blowing, then ^{in alarm} at the ^{struggling} strange ^{hanging down} thing ~~dragging~~ from its stirrup...

I swerved our team from the worst rocks and dips in the ground but we could not miss them all and keep any speed, so we jolted, ^{banged, bounced,} Adair clinging part to me and part ~~to~~ ^{ahead} the wagon seat, closer and closer ~~to~~ the antsy saddlehorse and the figure dragging below its flanks.



stopped they

By the time I got ~~them stopped~~ our own horses, were agitated from their run. # "Dair, you've got to get down and hold them by their heads. Don't let go, whatever happens. Talk to them, croon to them, anything, but hold onto those halters. We can't have a runaway of our own."

Beastie Jupiter
"Good ~~Blaze~~, good ~~Prince~~, yes, you're good horses, you're good

old dears..." Her words came with me as I slowly approached the restless saddlehorse, my hands cupped as if offering oats.

I was halfway ~~to the animal~~ when there was a *sharp* jangle of harness and a *fearfully* clatter behind me; I looked *around* to where our team had jerked Adair off her feet for a moment, but she still clung to their heads, still recited "Beastie...Jupiter...be good horses now," she still bravely had a ton and a half of animals held in her small hands. # "Are you all right there, Dair?" I called with urgent softness, not to startle the saddlehorse off into another dragging of its victim. # "Yes," she said, and resumed her *chant* ~~talk~~ to ~~them~~ Jupiter and Beastie. # "Easy now," my voice added to Adair's horse chorus as I turned back to the saddlehorse, "easy now, fellow, easy, easy, easy..."

The false offer of oats got me to within a few steps before the saddlehorse snorted and began to turn away. I lunged and caught a rein, then had both hands clinging to his bridle. "Whoa ~~Easy~~, you son of a bitch, ~~easy~~, you ~~diminished~~ ^{demented} bastard, ~~easy~~..." ^{Whoa} # The worst wasn't done yet, ^{either.} Somehow I had to hold his head rock-firm and at the same time sidle along his side until I could reach the stirrup and the ankle and foot trapped in ~~the~~ ^{the long bones of my body} it. For once I was glad of ~~my body's length~~ as I stretched ~~and~~ in opposite directions ~~to~~ to try this rescue.

When I managed to free the ankle and foot I had time to look down ~~at~~ at the dragged and kicked rider. ^{Whoa} # The battering he had ~~undergone~~ undergone, it took a long moment to recognize him.

*300 ft
 100 ft
 before*

"Dair," I called. "It's Davie Erskine. He's alive, but just. You'll have to lead the team and wagon over here. Slow and easy, that's the way."

Adair caught her breath when she saw how ~~badly~~ hooves and earth had done their work on Davie. "Angus. Is he going to live?"

"I don't know that," I answered and tried to swallow my coppery taste of fear for Davie. He was a bloodied sight it made the eyes ~~squint~~ ^{pool} pinch together in pain just to look at.

*Adair's
saw
the
tail*

"I don't know." He looks as if he's hurt every way he can be. The best we can do is get him home to Donald and Jen." Now our ride to the Erskine homestead had to be the reversal of the careening dash we had just done--as careful as possible, ~~Adair~~ ^{in the back of the wagon} our coats under Davie while Adair held his head steady, the saddlehorse docilely tied to the tailgate.

By the time the doctor had been fetched to the Erskine place and delivered his verdict of Davie to white-faced Donald and Jen, his news was only what Adair and I expected. Oh, it is hindsight, there is no way she and I could have known as we conveyed him home in the creeping but still jolting wagon, that the places of shatter in Davie could never entirely true themselves, that he would lead the limping half-tilt life he had to afterward. But I still feel, we both somehow did know.

—

Six days after that, Adair had the miscarriage.

—

"Angus, you dasn't blame yourself."

Seeing me silent and long-faced, ^{Adair} ~~she~~ herself brought the matter into words. "We had to help Davie. That 's just the way it happened. You heard the doctor say it's not even certain the wagon ride caused it. Maybe so, maybe no. Isn't that the way everything is?"

I had heard. And as best I could divine, Adair entirely meant it when she said there was no blame on me. As well blame the rocks for jarring the wagon wheels, or the wheels for finding the rocks. If bone strike stone, a hurt for bone. If stone strike bone, no hurt for stone.

No, I knew where Adair put the blame. On Scotch Heaven itself, on Montana, on a land so big that people stretched dangerously to meet its distances and seasonlong moods. Not that she came out and said so. Another case of dasn't; she did not dare lay open blame on our homestead life, for she and I had no other footing of existence together. You would have to say, then, Adair took the loss of our child-to-be as well as ^{a person} ~~you~~ can take a thing such as that. Not so, me. To me, a double death was in that loss. The child itself, the packet of life, we had withheld from

changed
"you"

us; and the miscarriage also had cost us a possible Adair, Adair as she could be, Adair with the son or daughter she needed to turn her mind from the homestead, the isolation. I had lost my own best self when Anna spurned our life together. How many possibles are in us? And of those, how many can we ever afford to lose?

how many
can afford to lose?

can afford

"Angus." Adair by me now, touching me, her voice bravely ~~bright~~ bright.

As if the ill person had climbed from bed to dance and cheer up the mourning visitor, she was doing her best to bolster me. "We'll have other children," she assured me. "You're definitely a man for trying."

#

That December, Adair miscarried again. This time, four months into her term.

second
winter
of mine

I see ^{second of our marriage} that winter as a single long night. A night in the shape of the four walls of a bedroom. The man Angus with thoughts hammering at him from the dark. How has it turned out this way? I saw where my life ought to go, to Anna. Why then this other existence, if that is what it is, of Adair and me not able to attain the single thing we both want? The woman Adair this time the one ~~was~~ staying grievous, silent as the frost ~~on the window~~ on the window and as unknowable. A pair patternless as the night, us.

I turn onto my side, to contemplate again the sleeping stranger who ~~is~~ my wife. And am startled to meet her awake, her head turned toward me.

"Angus. Angus, what--what if we can't have any children." [#]Silence of darkness, our silence added into it. "If I can't have any children."

"You don't seem like a stone field to me." I move my hand to her.

"Or feel like one either."

"I need to know. ~~Will it~~ Do you still want me for a wife, if?"

How to answer that, in the face of if?

"Dair, remember what the doctor keeps saying. 'There's not that much wrong; as young ^dand strong as you are, there's every chance...'"

"Every chance. But none has come yet, has it." She didn't add but it ^{is}~~was~~ there anyway: will it ever?

Suddenly I was angry with life. Not in the spit-against-the-wind way of exasperation, but vexed all the way up from my core, from whatever heartpit of existence I have. For life to be against this marriage of ours was one matter--Adair and I could answer for that, we were answering for it--but why begrudge us our child, life? A child would be the next link of time, the human knot ^{woven}~~made~~ from all McCaskills and Barclays there

ever had been, the new splice of Scotland and America and Montana and what was and what needs to be. But here where our child ought to fit-- by your own goddamn logic of us, life--the only strands of time in sight to us were the old harsh ones of winter and night. Well, you haven't done us in yet, I vowed silently to the winter thorns of frost on the windows and the ~~empty black~~^{faceless} of night, we will stave you off a while yet.

Adair did her utmost to bolster me after the wagon ride cost us our first child. My turn now.

"Dair, listen to me."

I touch~~ed~~ to her, stroking the gentle horizon of her body.

(no #)

"Dair," I say with the ~~is~~ kind of declaration

that can be said only in bed, "we'll get you a baby."

We I rise over her and kiss her lips will next kiss, for the point of her chin get now down to her throat for the next kiss and the tender un~~buttoning~~ you this kiss on her breastbone a kissing back and forth on her breasts now baby as she lifts to me with her quickening breath.

reverse
Haley
type
both
ways

—

3
It was one of those May mornings which could have just as well
~~Adair was washing clothes~~
saved itself the trouble of posing as spring and simply admitted it was
leftover February.

A washday, too, and Adair was hard at it when I pecked her cheek and
went out into the day.

In the gray chilliness of the barn I had untied
my sheepskin coat from behind Scorpion's saddle and gratefully put it on,
and was ready to swing onto the horse when I heard Adair, calling from
the house: "Angus! Come look!"

I wrapped Scorpion's reins and hurried out of the barn. ~~May~~

Uhu
cloud tufts
snow had begun to fall, ^a fat and feathery ^{May squall,} so that I saw Adair as if through
cloud tufts. I strode across the yard to her calling, "What's happened?"

"Just look around you! It's snowing!"

I peered at her, then had to laugh. "Either that or it's ^{awful} early
for dandelions to fly."

Laugh was the least thing this wife of mine was in a mood to hear.
She was the closest I had ever seen her to open anger when she fastened
her ^{gaze} look on me and demanded:

mod "But how can it snow? This is May! Almost summer!"

"Dairy" ^{any time it takes a sweet}
"In Montana it snows whenever it takes a notion to."

scrutinized
She ~~gazed at~~ me as if I'd told her the sun was due to go cold.

^{of wet laundry.}
Then she was reminded of her basket, "My poor wash, though. What'll
I do about--"

^{as usual.}
"Hang it. If nothing else it'll freeze dry."

"Angus, you really don't care that it's snowing in May?"

any time
it takes
sweet notion
to

more

If I couldn't say truth about the weather, then what could I. "Worse than that, Dair. I'm glad to see it."

"Glad?" as if I'd said treason.

"But what will this do to the grass? And the lambs?"

"I was on my way to shed up the ewes and ~~the~~ ^{newest} lambs. ^{They'll be fine, under roof.} And a spring ^{exactly} snow is just what the grass wants. After an open winter, ^{such as we had,} the country needs the moisture."

Adair blinked steadily against the snowflakes as we stood looking at each other. "A strange way to get it," she told ~~me~~ the country and me.

#

The next did not surprise me. I had only wondered when it would come.

Two days after the snow, when slush and mud were everywhere and spring was starting over, Adair asked:

"Angus, do you ever have any feeling at all to see Scotland again?"

"No, Dair. It never occurs to me." We might as well have the next into the open. "But it ^{does} ~~mean~~ to you, doesn't it."

"I don't mean going back for good. But for a visit."

"If it's what you want, we can get the money ahead someway for ~~it~~ you to go."

"But you won't come?"

"No."

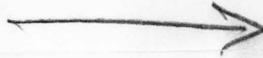
"Is it the ocean? Adair doesn't really like the old Atlantic either."

"No, it's not the ocean, at least not just. Dair, everything I have is here now. Scotland is an old calendar to me." To hear that from me who once stood pining up the Clyde to yesterday. Angus, are we both for it? And to have the sister of Rob the America prophet turning back like a compass needle toward Nethermuir and all its defeats. Straight paths simply are not in people.

Adair at least deserved to have the terms between us made clear, here. "If you feel you want to, you can go--for however long you like."

She did the next clarifying. "Do you want me to, Angus?"

"No." The full answer was greatly more complicated than that, but that was the uppermost edge of how I felt. I wanted not to be alone in life, and whatever else marriage with Adair ~~wasn't~~ wasn't, it was not utter aloneness.



wasn't

*what
do
you
want
- fantasy
company*

My way of saying ^{so} ~~it~~ came out ^{now} ~~as~~: "What would I do without you?"

She answered as simply as those gray eyes gave their knowledge of me: "You would still have a life to look ahead to."

Time to be honest, said the thief in the noose. Since the moment of my wedding vow to this inexplicable woman,

mod I had spent four-thirds of my time ~~was~~ imagining how I might ever be found out, and here when it happened, it was nothing at all like the rehearsed versions. Time and again in those, out of somewhere it would come, Adair's question Angus, after all this while, haven't you been able to forget Anna? There we would be at last. On the terrible ground of truth that I had hoped we could avoid. Adair would be ^{staring} ~~looking~~ at me in appeal. Convince me otherwise, ^{her} ~~he~~ look ready myself to would be saying. And I would ~~begin~~ begin at it. Dair, you are imagining.

There is nothing between Anna and me any more, there has not been for--
for years. You are my wife, you are the one woman I hold love for.

The disclaiming would marshal ~~itself~~ ^{that way} all of itself in my head, ready to troop along my tongue. And instead I would look at Adair and in eight words give up all I had. Dair, you're too right. I still love

Anna.

But now it had happened, and not that way at all. Whether Adair saw it in the ~~way~~ ^{manner} I tried not to watch Anna at the dances, or whether it simply stuck out all over me as I tried to be a husband, she knew my love for Anna was not changing. More than that. In her distance-from-all-this way of doing so, Adair had just told me she knew that Anna ~~maybe~~ ^{And more than that again.} maybe was possible for me yet, in time. By invoking Scotland, Adair was saying that our marriage need not be a lasting barrier ~~between~~ keeping me from Anna.

Straight paths are not in people: amidst all my relief that Adair knew, and granted, my helplessness about Anna, I was sad that the knowing had to cost her. She was carefully not showing so, she was ^{staying} at that slight mocking distance from herself as she ^{calmly} answered my gaze with her gray one. But cost surely was there, in her and in our marriage from here on.

Our marriage, if that was what it was going to continue to be.

no 41

Wedding vows are one thing; the terms of existing together are

another language altogether. "Dair, where are we coming out at here?"

Are you going back to Scotland?"

My wife shook her head, not meaning no she wouldn't like to go,

just that she wasn't deciding now. "I'll see." We both would. ~~both~~

—

"Adair seems a bit drifty lately," Rob ^{remarked} ~~said~~ when he rode by, the next day.

"Does she," I acknowledged without really answering.

His head went to one side as he studied me. "Angus, ^{you know} I only ask this because Adair is my sister and you're all but my ~~father~~ brother. Is life all right between you two, these days?"

"Right as ever," I provided him, and managed to put a plain face over my ^{quick} moment of irk ~~at him~~ before I added: "But you didn't come ~~by~~ all the way by to take the temperature of Adair and me, I know."

"You're right, you're right, there's other news. I've been up looking at the grass"--he gave a head toss toward Roman Reef where we grazed our sheep each summer--"and there's no reason we can't trail the sheep up in a week or so." A good early start toward fat lambs in the fall, and I nodded in satisfaction with his news. Or rather, with that much of it.

"We've got a new neighbor up there," Rob went on. "The Double W."

My turn to cock a look at him. "With how many cows?"

"No more than a couple of hundred head, is all I met up with. I gave them a dose of dog and pushed them north off where we've been pasturing."

But that damn Williamson," Rob said in what almost might have been

"The man has admiration. ~~He's~~ already got cattle on every spear of grass he owns on Noon Creek, he 'borrows' on the Reservation, and now he's putting ~~them~~ them up in the mountains. Old Wampus Cat must have invented the saying, 'all I want is all I can get,' ay?"

"We'd better hope he doesn't make a major habit of putting ~~them~~ ^{cattle} up there."

Rob shook his head. "They're big mountains. No, Angus, I don't like having Double W cows within mouth distance of our summer grass any better than you do. But Williamson will have to put enough cows up there to tip over the world, before he makes any real difference to us.

That's what brought us to Montana, wasn't it--elbow room when we need it?"

True enough, Rob. But as you gave me a ~~hand~~ lifted hand of goodbye and rode away that day, Montana even then did not seem to me the expanse it had been.

—

At first I thought it was bad pork. Just an evening or two after our inconclusive circle of Scotland, Adair took her opening bite of supper and then swiftly fled outside, where I could hear her retching as if her toenails were trying to come up.

I pushed my plate back. Even our meals could not go right.

When a marriage ^{begins to come apart,} ~~breaks~~, the stain spreads into wherever it can find.

The thunder between my father and mother within the stone walls of River Street. The worse silences between whatever Adair ^{sought} ~~wanted~~ of life and the unattainable, the Anna shadow, that I wanted. Those mindblind days before Adair and I said the vow there on Breed Butte, why had I ever, why had she ever--

The screendoor slapped again. Adair leaned against the doorway, ^{cupped onto} one hand ~~on~~ her stomach. She still ^{appeared} looked a bit weatherish, but ^{strangely} ~~queerly~~ bright-eyed too. Fever next? # "Dair, are you all right?"

Her heart of a face had on the damndest expression, a smile-try that wasn't anything like a Barclay smile; a nominated look that seemed a little afraid to come out. Adair gazed at me with it. Then she moved her cupped hand in a small arc out and down over the front of her stomach, as if smoothing a velvet bulge there.

appeared
Tommy?
As she looked up at me I nodded, more,
impress
"gazed"

I can only hope my face didn't show the arithmetic racing through me before I stood and went to my wife-with-child. May-June-July-August-September-October-November?-December? That calendar of pregnancy could not have been worse. If we lost this child as we had the other two, it would be with Scotch Heaven winter staring Adair in the face.

#

"McAngus, the third time is the charm," Rob proffered with a hearty smile but worried eyes.

"Something grand to look forward to, Angus, pure grand," from Lucas, his eyes not matching his words either.

#

men?

again?

We count by years, but we live by days. Rightfully, we should do both by seasons. Even now, looking back, it makes greater sense to me to recall how that springtime, when the baby was yet invisible in her, nurtured Adair's hope along cautiously, as a sun-welcoming tree unobtrusively adds a ring of growth within itself. That summer, when the creekside meadows became mounded with haystacks, Adair began to round out prominently. Then as autumn came and remorselessly wore on toward worse weather, a gray strain ^{began to} showed on Adair as well. But so far so good, we said to each other in our every glance. Each season in the procession had handed her along without jolt, without fatal jostle to the life she was carrying.

Drawing ever nearer to the birthtime, I cosseted her every way I could think of. The oldest ^{Findlater Jenny} ~~girl~~, ^{on hand as hired girl to do} ~~for~~ ^{daughter} for months now had been ~~hired for~~ our cooking and washing. Adair was the first to declare of herself, "Adair has the life of a maharanee these days." I knew it was put somewhat differently by others in Scotch Heaven. "Adair is still feeling delicate, is she?" I was queried by Flora Duff, who ~~was~~ marched babies out of herself as if they were cadets. Elbows of the neighbors

But?

I didn't care about; Adair and her ^{inching} ~~impenetrable~~ struggle to bring us a child were all that counted. She had become a kind of season herself, a time between other times. I noticed ~~now~~ that once in a while now she would lay a game of solitaire, but only seldom. Almost all of her existence now was waiting. Waiting.

Hadn't
- last
of her
complaint

One single day of that time stands out to be told. The day of Isaac.

first
snowfall

It came courtesy of Ninian. "I'm here to borrow a favor," he said straight off. "We have a wagon of coal coming for the school." Ninian stopped to glance sternly at the sky. This was late October now; first snowfall could come any hour. "But Reese's man can only deliver Sunday or never. Ay, he's busy as the wind these days. Everyone in Gros Ventre has caught the notion they can't live without coal now. Sunday, though.

~~can't live without coal now. Sunday, though.~~ You see my dilemma,

Angus." [#]I did. Any hard breathing on Sunday that wasn't asthma was

frowned upon by the Duffs and Frews. [#]"Angus, I will trade you whatever

help you need around your place when Adair's time comes, if you'll handle

this." ⁹I agreed to be the welcomer of sabbath coal, and on the day, the big wagon and its team of eight were no sooner in sight on the road from Gros Ventre than I knew. ^{Reese} Isaac himself was the teamster today.

"An-gus," he greeted when he had halted the wagon. "You vish for coal?"

"Isaac," I reciprocated, my throat tight. "I'll see if your shovel fits me."

Not much more was said as we began unloading the coal. I suppose we were saying without words, letting our muscles talk. Coal flew from our two shovels. I wondered if he had ^{least} any idea of my love for his wife.

Of those words of hers to me, If I ever see that Isaac and I have become wrong together, I'll know where to turn for rightness, Angus. Those were words with only the eventual in them, though. The ones with the actual in them had been the ones that counted: Angus, you know how you and I were, ~~this is the right way to do it~~ there in your schoolhouse together. Isaac and I have been that way, all this summer.

I sent a glimpse at him as we labored. Since when did Denmark manufacture Casanovas? Isaac Skorp Yun Reese. Scarecrow of sinew and mustache and unreadable face. If you had tried to tell me, the day I bought Scorpion from him, how this man was going to figure in my life, I would have laughed you over the hill. ^{Yet} But ~~then~~ maybe Isaac

more -
revised

39A

--in the eventual--

in turn was living in silken ignorance of me and what I might someday

do to his life with Anna. Wasn't that more than possible? With an

ordinary human, yes, but with a horse dealer... I would have given

a strip of skin an inch wide to know what Anna's mate

in life knew. ~~But~~ in that mustached face ^{though,} there was no sign I ever would.

Through everything, I ^{had} never managed to hate Isaac Reese. Not for lack

of trying; how many thousand times easier it would have been had I been

able to despise the man who was Anna's husband. With him as a target

my despair would have had a place to aim. But Isaac was not a man who

could be despised. Calm, solid, entirely himself in the way a mountain

is itself; that, and nothing else, ^{so far as could be seen,} I had might as well despise the

black nuggets we were shoveling, equal good it would do. No, all I



ever felt when I was around Isaac was a kind of abrupt illness, an ache that I was myself instead of him.

Exertion greatly warmed the ^{chilly} ~~November~~ day, and as soon as Isaac stopped to peel off his coat, I did too. As we stood and blew, he asked: "How are your missus?"

I told him Adair was fine, hoping as ever that ~~the moment wasn't~~ ^{our history of misfortune} wasn't making a liar of me at that precise moment. Then I was privileged to ask: "And your better half. How is she, these days?" ^{How is she?"}

Isaac Reese gave me a probably ^e smile under that mustache and ~~g~~ gabbled out:

"Ve got a stork on de ving."

I held my face together not to laugh, and cast a ^{into the air} glance ^{around} for the hawk or crane that Isaac was trying to name. Then his meaning came.

"So, congratulations," I got out, trying not to swallow too obviously. Anna now with child, now of all times? Now as I watched Adair grow with our own creation, Anna with this man's--~~was~~ "When does the baby arrive?"

"Sometime of spring." He gave me a twinkling look, unquestionably ~~grinning~~ grinning under his handlebars now. "Foalz, calfs, lamps," he recited, as if the busyness of the animal kingdom then was contagious. I stooped to more shoveling, more pondering. But Isaac's hand came down onto the haft of my shovel. When I looked at him I found he had something more he wanted to say. It came ~~out~~ out: "Ve will be feathers of our country, An-gus."

I had to hope Isaac was right even if his ^{corkscrew} ~~sharp~~ tongue wasn't.

I had to hope he and I indeed would be fathers of children whose dangerous voyages into life somehow would do no harm to the women we were each wed to.

#



Adair's

On the eleventh of November, 1899, ~~the~~ baby came--

weeks early but alive, whole, healthy, squalling for all he was worth.

"It's a wonder a son of yours didn't come out spouting verse,"

Flora Duff tendered to me when she had done the midwifing.

In our bed with the tiny red storm of noise bundled beside her,

Adair was wan except in her eyes. I leaned over her and said low and

fervent, "He's the finest there ever was. And so is his mother." She

smiled up while I smiled down. Our son found higher pitch. We didn't

care. He could yell for a year, if that was the fanfare it took to

bring us a child. Softly Adair asked, "Whatever time of day is it?"

"Early. Flora is fixing breakfast and right after I'll need to

feed the sheep. And you're going to have a feeding of your own to do,

with a prettier implement than a pitchfork." When I went out into that

day and its start-of-winter chores I felt as exultant as any being ever

has, I felt that this was the morning the world was all possibilities.

Adair and I and in the ~~dim~~ ^{frosty} November daybreak this miracle of a baby,

our son of the sun.

*They were
deep now
Crestfallen*

To balance this ~~son~~^{boy} of ours, Adair and I gave him a name from each side of the family. Varick because it was her father's, and then the traditional McCaskill Alexander for a middle, in spite of it being my father's.

#

44

I measure the next span of years by you, Varick. You who were born into one century, one era of Scotch Heaven and the Two Medicine country, and by the time you were approaching eight years of age, different ^{epoch} ~~time~~ and place had been brought around you. Or so it very much seemed to me, as sentinel called father.

You weren't ^{not} ~~at~~ past your first birthday before your mother and I knew ^{by doctor's verdict that}

you were the only child there was going to be for us. You weren't past

your second before our hearts ticked on the fact that keeping you in

life was never going to be simple. Every winter from then on you worried

grippe
~~There were points when, as~~ and bouts of grippe, as influenza was called then, us, coming down with alarming coughs and fevers, for which spring seemed

to be the only cure. Strange, the invalid ghost of yourself that you

became as soon as cold weather cooped you in the house.

As if ^{your vitality} ~~something in~~ you dwindled when the length of daylight did.

But in your hale seasons you more than made up for that, sprouted long

and knobbly, like me, and rapidly you were out and roaming into every

corner of the homestead. The first major talking-to I ever had to give

you was about wanderlust, the ^{spring} ~~afternoon~~ I found you in the barn: down

at their oat trough,
~~under~~ ~~amid~~ the workhorses ~~scrapes~~, crooning happily amid the fetlocks and

scrapes?
~~pasterns~~ and those hooves that with a casual swipe could have smashed you

as if you were ~~you~~ like a pullet egg. Had your mother seen you there innocent among

the feet of death, she would have forfeited years of her life ~~to the~~

I measure the next span of years by your Vastok. You who were

different time and place had been brought around you. Or so it very much

seemed to me, as sentinel called father.

Of course I had my own everlasting fret about you

But in your life seasons you more than made up for that, sprouted long



no 9



fright. ~~To say the truth,~~ my own heart pounded several months' worth
 before I managed to sidle among ~~the~~ ^{big} horses and snatch you. Snatch only
 begins to say it, for I also gave you a shake that rattled your eyeballs,
 and the appropriate gospel: "If I ever again catch you anywhere, anywhere,
 around the hoof of a horse, I'll lather you black and blue! Do you
 understand me? Varick? Do you?" You looked downright shocked--at
 me rather than realization of your peril. But you ~~said~~ ^{peeped} apologetically,
 "I unnerstand," and lived up to it.

You went on, in the next year or so, to your lasso period of trying
 to rope the chopping block, the dog, the cat, the chickens--and fortunately
 got over that.)

But horses, you did not ever get over. By the time you were ~~five~~ five you
 could ride as well as I could, and by six you were twice the person I
 was on the back of a horse. The more horseman you became, the more
 worrisome it was for your mother; that hauntful day of our finding
 Davie Erskine bloody as a ~~half~~ ^{haunch} of beef never wasn't there in her eyes
 when she watched you rollicking across a meadow aboard Scorpion or some
 other mount. But she braced herself, as a person will when there seems

nothing else to be done, and like a person who has simply decided to suffer--there is no less way to say it--she watched you out of sight the school morning when you proudly set off toward the South Fork on the back of your own pony now, Brownie.

To say the truth, I had my own ^{overwhelming} ~~great~~ fret about you. The dread deep as the bloodstream in me. What I feared for you, from the time you began to toddle, was what I had until then always prized--the water of the North Fork and its easy nearness to the house. I who would never swim was determined for you to become complete

tadpole; water and the McCaskills were ^{already} several generations late in coming to terms with each other.

~~tadpole.~~ And so the ~~in~~ minute you were old enough I got Rob to teach you the water, your small strokes dutifully imitating his there in the North Fork's beaver ponds beneath Breed Butte, until he was saying, and meant it: See now, McVarick, they couldn't drown you in a gunnysack.

water of
McC

had
to come
to
terms
each
other

Did it lead on from there, the alliance between you and Rob?

"Unk" as you called him from the time you were first persuaded to try

your tongue on "uncle." No, even without the swimming you and he would

have doted on one another, ^{I have to believe.} The two of you made a kind of inevitable

league against your girl cousins, Rob's daughters who for all that he

treasured them like wealth were unmistakably four versions of Judith.

Your tenet of those years, girls are bossy, fit snugly with his customary

joke about unexpectedly running a convent on Breed Butte, and it was

your Unk more often than not who enlisted you into riding the gutwagon

with him during lambing time or a buckrake during haying, you little

more than a tyke but the reins taut in your small hands as Rob taught

you to tug the workhorses into their necessary routes.

You just don't know how lucky you are, Angus, I heard from your

Unk ^{regularly} ~~frequently~~ in that time, having a Varick.

I maybe have some idea of it, Rob.

^{South Fork}
 # I did not take the school that first year of yours, on the doctrine

that you ought to be spared the awkward load of having your own parent

everlastingly up there at the teacher's desk. But when that first year

produced as little in you as it did, I tossed away doctrine and became
~~the South Fork~~ schoolmaster as quick as the annual offer came again
 from Ninian. And found out for myself that as a pupil, you were
 reminiscent of the fellow who declared that his education simply hadn't
 happened to include reading, writing and 'rithmetic. Oh, you could do
 well enough to ^{scrape} ~~get~~ by in the schoolroom, and did, with prods from me;
 but the main parts of you were always outside the walls rather than in.
 Riding beside you to and from the schoolhouse, I ~~was~~ saw day by day
 what made you absent-minded above a book. Absent to the mountain canyons
 like ~~xxx~~ crevices in the wall of the world, absent to the warm velvet back
 of Brownie, absent to the riffles and trout holes of the North Fork--you
 already were a fishing fiend--absent to anywhere your volition could be
 your own, rather than an arithmetic book's or a teacher father's.

~~There~~ ^{Those} were points ^{at which} ~~when~~, as maybe all parents

ever have, your mother and I wondered where we got you. Except in the
 lines of your body, there was much about you that did not ^{necessarily} seem to be
 my son. Except in your ^{annual} war with winter and a certain habit of drifting
 quietly into yourself, there was ^{considerable} ~~much~~ about you that did not seem to be
 your mother's son. You seemed to be the Two Medicine country's son.

48A

Your chosen curriculum, even then, was with Rob and me in the year's rhythm with our band of sheep, lambing-shearing-summering-shipping-wintering.

With us as either Rob or I rode up atop Roman Reef once each summer week to tend the camp of our shepherd, Davie Erskine, whom I had hired as soon as he grew from twisted boy into twisted man.

With us as we more and more discussed--cussed and discussed, as Rob put it--the jumping total of Double W cattle on the mountains' summer grass ~~with us~~ after the Blackfeet Reservation was fenced against the Williamsons of the world in 1904. With us, jackknife in your earnest small hand, skinning the pelts off our ^{terrible} heavy loss ~~in~~ in the winter of 1906, when ^{a quarter of} almost ~~half~~ our sheep piled up and smothered during a three-day blizzard.

With us to every extent a boy could be in his greenling years.

A last thing that needs saying of those earliest years of yours, Varick; in all that was to come, I hope it was not lost to you that some supreme truces were ^{those years} made of ~~them~~. Your mother's with the homestead. Mine with the everpresence of the shadow between your mother and me, the shadow named Anna; Anna now with children of her own, Lisabeth born half a year after you and Peter a few years after that, children who might

48B

have been mine, instead of you. Truce, yes: your mother's and mine
with each other, for I believe--I hope with all that is in me--that
you grew through these years without yet having to know that a truce
is not full peace.

In the spring of the year that Toussaint Rennie ever after spoke of as that 19-and-7, you at rambunctious seven-going-on-eight. A

Saturday morning amid

lambing time, you were helping me at the sheepshed, watering the jugged ewes with as much as you could carry in a bucket while I suckled a freshborn lamb onto its reluctant mother. As you were making one of your lopsided trips from the creek, outside the shed door I heard a voice with Missouri in it say to you:

"Hullo, mister. Funny how water turns heavy when you put a bucket around it, ain't it."

"Uh, yeah, sure is, I guess." I could hear too the startlement in your question back to the Missouri voice: "Who is it you're looking for--my dad?"

"If he's the sheep boss of your outfit here, yeah, I'd kind of like to talk to him about something."

You plummeted into the shed as nearly running as a person can with a bucket of water tilting him sideways. ^{Daddy} "Dad!" your face still

lit from having been mistered for the first time in your life, ~~Dad!~~ ^{Daddy,} "Dad!"

^{Some} There's a man--"

"I hear, son. As soon as little Fiddlesticks here gets his breakfast, I'll be ~~there~~ there. Tell our visitor so, will you please?"

In the spring of the year that Toussaint L'Ouverture ever after spoke

of as that 19- and -1, you at rambrunctous seven-foote-on-eight. A

your lap-sided trips from the creek, outside the shed door I heard a

bread buttered. Ours, though, said grace only once every, and
sixty-five days, and that one a joke--my father's New Year's Day invocation
in that Scotch-preacher burr he could put on: Hogmanay that's born today,
gi' us a year o' white bread and nane o' your gray--and other than that,
a McCaskill meal started at random, the only tradition to help yourself
to what was closest and pass the food on clockwise.

lit from having been mistered for the first time in your life, said "Dad!

There's a man--"

"I hear, son. As soon as little Riddlesicks here gets his breakfast,

I'll be there there. Tell our visitor so, will you please?"

has a badge
just

But you lurched on toward me with your water bucket until near
^{in scared thrill} Daddy
enough to whisper: "Dad, he's wearing a badge!"

~~Added~~ An added fact such as that does take the slack out of a
person's behavior. I finished with the lamb quicker than I'd have thought
possible and stepped out of the shed, you shadowclose to my heels, Varick.

And both of us very nearly tromped on the nose of a chestnut-colored
saddlehorse, so much white on his head he was the sort called an apron
face, ^{chewing} ~~grazing~~ the tall new grass beside the shed.

"Hullo," the figure atop ^{big} the horse greeted. "Sorry to pull you
off of your work this way." ^{The man} ~~He~~ wore a campaign hat and a soft brown
leather vest,

leg
across
the

and was lazing on the horse with one knee hooked over the saddle horn in
an easy way I knew I would never learn. His face had good clean lines
but only a minimum of them: a sparse, almost pared look to this Meixell.
And while the badge on his vest seemed

min
of them

to say he was a lawman, ~~but~~ he was more casual about it than any I'd
^{He was asking me now,}
ever seen. "You the gent of this enterprise?"

W.C.?

"I am."

Handley

"Myself, I carry the name Meixell. Stanley Meixell." He put down a hand and I responded with mine and my own name. The restlessness behind me was close enough to feel, and I added: "This bundle of fidgets is my son Varick."

"Him and me has met just now, though we didn't get quite as far as names. Pleased to know you, Varick," and the rider put down his hand again. While your small one was going into his large work-brown one, I snatched the chance to look hard at the man Meixell's badge. Not a law star; not anything I had ever seen: ~~It was not a star, but~~ a shield with a pine tree embossed in its middle.

Stanley Meixell moved his head to take in the ridgeline, ^{above the creek valley,} the summit ^{above that.} of Breed Butte. "This's a pretty valley in here. Kind of up toward the top of the world, though. Get some snow in the winter, do you?"

"A bit," I submitted. "Then a few feet ^{more for sauce on} ~~on top of~~ that."

"Winter," he repeated, as if it were an affliction of the race. ^{at ~~through~~ the high grass,} Meanwhile the chestnut saddle horse chewed on the only one of ~~the~~ us getting anything accomplished.

*mope?
chestnut
horse
chewed
on it
only
1 of
4 of us
getting
anything
done*

Whatever this Meixell's business was he seemed to have forever to do it in, but I had ~~waiting ewes and lambs~~ ^{a maternity ward of sheep} waiting.

"Your badge isn't one ~~meixell~~ I'm familiar with. What, have the trees elected you sheriff?"

"Not exactly the trees. A ~~gent~~ ^{character} named Theodore Roosevelt. I'm what's called a forest ranger." ^{in his same slow voice,} he went on, "The country up west of you here is gonna be made a national forest." ^{Meixell} ~~he~~ shrugged in what seemed a mildly regretful way. "They sent me to make it."

"Mr. Meixell, I have to ask you to trot that past me again. A which forest?"

"A national one." He began giving me an explanation of the new United States Forest Service, and then I remembered ^{that} what were called forest reserves existed a number of places in Montana, mostly west of the Divide where trees ^{grew} ~~were~~ big enough to be made into lumber.

"Mr. Meixell, I'm afraid ^{you've got} ~~you have~~ your work cut out for you if you're looking for timber ^{to reserve} ~~nowhere else~~ anywhere around here. It reserves itself on this dry side of the mountains. No self-respecting logger would bother with these little pines of ours for anything but kindling, now would he?"

Meixell's gaze had been all around our valley and up the pinnacle of Breed Butte and back and forth across the mountains we were ~~was~~ talking of, and now it casually found me, and stayed. # "No, I don't guess he would, Angus--if I can go ahead and call you that?" # I had to nod; civility said so. # "But actually it ain't just the trees I'm supposed to be the nursemaid of," Meixell went on, "it's the ^{whole} ~~entire~~ forest. The soil and water too, a person'd have to say." # He contemplated me and added in a slower voice yet: # "Yeah, and the grass."

I felt as if a tight rope suddenly was around my insides. It was ^{blunted} then I ~~said~~ to you, Varick, "Son, you'd better get on with your watering, before those ewes come looking for you."

"Aw." But you went as promptly as a reluctant boy ever can. And I have regretted since that I sent you, for if you had stayed and heard, the time ahead might have come clearer to you. You who were born in the Two Medicine country with its rhythms and seasons in you had a right I did not manage to see just then, ~~the Two Medicine country had a right I did not manage to see just then,~~ there in the welter of apprehensions instantaneously brought on me by Stanley Meixell's words, a right to witness what was beginning here. We both know it was not the worst you could ever hold against me, but if I had that exact moment back... Instead, as soon as you were out of

meixell

earshot I spun around to the man Meixell. "But we summer our sheep up there. Everybody here, on both forks of the creek. That's free range and always has been."

"Always is something I don't know that much about, Angus. But I just imagine maybe the Blackfeet who used to have free run of this country had their own notion of always, don't you suppose? And if there was anybody here before them, they probably knew how to say always, too." Meixell shook his head as if sorry to be the herald of inescapable news. "As I get it--and I'm the first to admit that the Yew Ess Forest Service ain't the easiest thing in the world to ~~run~~ savvy-- the notion is we can't go on eating up the land forever. As the lady said to the midget, there's a limit to everything."

I could feel the homestead, seventeen years of labor, hours incalculable spent on the sheep, all slip beneath my feet as if I were on a 160-acre pond of ice. *With surprising quickness* ~~Quickly~~ now, the forest ranger spoke to my wordless dismay:

"Don't take on too hard about the national forest, though. More'n likely you're still gonna be able to summer your sheep up there, or

at least most of them. There's gonna be grazing ^{allotments and I'll be doling out,} permits and prior use is something I'm supposed to take into account." Up there on his chestnut horse he began outlining to me how the permit system was to work, every inch of it sounding reasonable in his laconic tone, but I was still unready to ^{let myself} skid back to hope. I broke in on him:

"But then, if we can still use the range, why bother to--Mr. Meixell, just what in holy hell is it you and President Teddy have in mind for us?"

"The idea ain't to keep the range from being used," Meixell said as if it was a catechism. "It's to keep it from being used to death."

Now the summer mountains filled my mind, the rising tide of Double W cattle we sheep graziers were encountering ~~now~~ in each grass season up there, Wampus Cat Williamson's offhand imperial complaint You people would sheep this country to death. The awful echo of that in what this--what Prior use. But whose prior use of that mountain range? was the word for him, ranger?--had just said. Suddenly cold with suspicion,

I studied the hardworn lean face above the badge, beneath the campaign hat: had he come as agent of the Wampus Cat Williamsons of the world, those who had the banks and mills and fortunes in their white hands? I clipped

my next words with icy care: ⁴¹ "I hope while you're so concerned against grass being sheeped out, you'll manage to have an eye for any that 's being cattle ~~d~~ out, too."

From his saddle perch Meixell gave me a look so straight it all but twanged in the air. "Yeah," he spoke slowly, "I figure on doing that."

Did he? Who knew. Ruin's wheel drove over us/in gold-spoked quietness.

I had thought it wouldn't be like that in America. Maybe it wasn't yet.

Maybe so, maybe no. I kept my gaze locked with his, as if we were

memorizing each other. Say for this Meixell, he did not look like anyone's

person but his own. Yet even if he was coming here neutral, that eternal

seep of Double W cattle to wherever Williamson's eye alit... "You may

as well know now as later," I heard myself informing the man in the saddle,

~~may as well know now as later,~~ there'll be some who have their own

ideas about your government grass."

"Oh, they won't have no real trouble telling the difference between

the forest grass and their own," Meixell ^{offered} ~~said~~ absently. "There's

gonna be a bobwire fence for the boundary. And I'll pretty much be

on hand myself, if the fence ain't enough." Still absently, he tacked

on: "And if I ain't enough, ~~the~~ then Assistant Ranger Windchester likely'll

be." The butt of his Winchester rifle stuck out of ~~his~~ its scabbard

as casually ready as this forest ranger himself.

you can make a good look at what it is all out

twanged in the air. "Yeah," he spoke slowly, "I figure on doing that."

Did he? Who knew. Ruth's wheel drove over us in gold-spoked quietness.

I had thought it wouldn't be like that in America. Maybe it wasn't yet.

Maybe so, maybe no. I kept my gaze locked with his, as if we were

Oh, you must beware, maidens all,
that wear gold on your hair
to come or go by Charterhall
for young Tam Lin is there.

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

the magic of Tam Lin. the mane she wells with thin
fair Janet waxed dwells therein



"Fellow there in the saloon in town," Meixell resumed as I was striving to blink all that in, "he told me you're the straw boss of the school up here. I wonder if I could maybe borrow your schoolhouse for a meeting, just in case anybody's got any ~~last~~ questions left over about the national forest." Meixell paused and scanned the long stone colonnade of Roman Reef atop the western horizon. "The Yew Ess Forest Service is great on explaining. Anyway, next Saturday wouldn't be any too soon for me about your schoolhouse, if it wouldn't for you."

I answered, "I'll need to talk to our school board," which meant ^{I can tell you} Ninian. "But the likelihood is, people here are going to have questions for you, yes."

Meixell nodded as if that was the fairest proposition he'd heard in years. "Well," he concluded,

"I better get to getting. Figured I might as well start here at the top of the valley with my good news and work on down. Noticed a place on that butte"--he inclined his head an inch toward the summit of Breed

~~the~~ Butte. "I suppose you maybe know the fellow's name up there?"

Only as well as I knew my own. And although this forest ranger

was a stranger to me, and maybe a dire one, I felt impelled to tell him at least the basic of Rob Barclay. "He had ^{his} a mind of his own, especially where his sheep are concerned."

Meixell cast me ^{another} a look from under his hat, a glance that might have had a tint of thanks in it. "There's some others of us that way. Be seeing you, Angus." Before he swung the chestnut saddlehorse away, he called into the shed to you: "Been my day's pleasure to meet you, Varick."

While the man Stanley Meixell rode away, I stood staring for a while at the mountains. National forest. They did not look like a national anything, they still looked ^{just} like mountains. A barbed wire fence around them. It did not seem real that a fence could be put around mountains; ^{but} ~~But~~ I would not bet against this Meixell when he

said he was going to do a thing. A fence around the mountains not to control them but us. Did we need that? Most, no. But some, yes.

The Double W cattle that were more and more. It bothered me to think it in the same mental breath with Wampus ^Cat Williamson, but even Rob's penchant for more ~~and more~~ sheep was a formula the land eventually would

not be able to stand. And without the land healthy, what would those of us on it be? The man Meixell's argument stood solid as those mountains. But whether he himself did ~~not~~ ^{not} proven.

I heard you come out of the shed with your ~~knicker~~ bucket and ~~start~~ start your ^{delightful} next journey to the creek. When I ^{glanced} ~~looked~~ around at you, I found ~~you~~ that you had taken a sudden ~~new~~ new interest in your hat. You were wearing it low to your eyes as the forest ranger did. I registered then, Varick, that from the ^{instant} ~~moment~~ he reached down to shake your hand, ~~you~~ you looked at Stanley Meixell as if the sun rose and set in him. And I already was telling myself that you had better be right about that.

—

"What in goddamn hell"--Rob, full steam up--"are we going to do about this national forest ~~thing?~~ ^{nonsense?"}

"You're of the opinion there's something to be done, are you."

"Angus, you know as well as I do that's been our summer grass ^{up there}

ever since we set foot into this country. We can't just let some geezer in a pinchy hat ^{prance} ~~come~~ in here and tell us how many sheep we can put on this slope, how many on that one. What kind of a tightfart way is that to operate, now I ask you?"

I had to say.

"There's maybe another piece to the picture, you know," "Those grazing allotments could mean Williamson can't pour every ^{cow} on earth up there any more, too."

~~"There is another piece to the picture, you know. It'll mean Williamson can't pour every cow on earth up there, too."~~

"Williamson has never managed to crowd us off those mountains yet."

"Yet."

"Angus, are you standing there telling me you're just going to swallow the guff this man Meixell is ^{trying to hand} giving us? Just because he wears a ^{goddamn} tin badge of some kind?"

"I'd say it's not the worst reason to pay the man some (Rob,

~~"There are worse reasons to pay attention. And no, I'm not~~

swallowing anything, just yet. I do think we ~~should~~ all need to do some chewing on the matter, though."

Rob shook his head slowly, deliberately, as if erasing Meixell and the heresy he called a national forest.

mod

"I'll tell you this: I can't stand still and accept that any sheep I own has to have a permit to eat grass that doesn't belong to a goddamn soul."

"Rob, there's a fair number of sheep you own one end of and I own the other."

That drew me a sharp look. I had not seen Rob so het up since

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our ancient debates over how many sheep we ought to take on. ~~But~~ Yet why wouldn't he be; this matter of the national forest grass was the same old dogfight, simply new dogs.

Rob must have realized we were fast getting in deep, for he now backed to: "All right, all right, I might've known you're going to be as independent as a red mule. If it'll keep peace in the family, you can go around ~~thinking believing~~ ^{daydreaming that} we can run sheep with reins on every one of them." He cocked his head and made his declaration then and there:

~~every one of them.~~ "But if that forest ranger of yours thinks he's going to boss me, and a lot of others around here, he has his work cut out for him."

del
of
Rob

—

When I made a quick ride down to Duffs' after supper, Ninian was bleak, even for Ninian. "Ay, we can open the schoolhouse next Saturday and give a listen to the man Meixell," he granted. "But if what he has to say isn't against our interests as sheepmen, I'll be much and pleasantly surprised."

—

That night at bedtime, I told Adair: "I think we'd better make a trip to town, after school Monday."

She glanced over at me in surprise. Any town trip other than a periodic Saturday was rare ^{for us,} and during lambing time it was unheard of.

"Davie can handle the lambing shed until we get back," I elaborated.

"That way, we can take our time a bit, have supper with Lucas and Nancy."

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thinking...~~

She still ~~looked~~ ^{gazed} at me. She knew as well as I did that my elaboration was mere fancywork, not revelation.

"Dair, I need to talk to Lucas about this national forest."

"Rob has made his opinion clear."

"Rob isn't Lucas."

At least that turned off her ~~look~~ ^{gaze}. "No," she said. "No one is anyone else."

—

Gros Ventre these days was a growing stripling of a town, all elbows and ~~shanks~~ shanks. The main street was beginning to fill in-- fresh buildings for the Gleaner newspaper, for a new saloon that called itself the Pastime, for the stagecoach office next to Dantley's stable, for an eating place that had opened beside the Medicine Lodge; pure convenient, ~~pleasure,~~ as Lucas put it, whenever the notion of a mean happens to strike one of my customers--but still had plenty of room to go.

in every conceivable though, way, I was assured by Lucas in the next breath after I stepped into the Medicine Lodge, the town was advancing grandly. A barber, a lawyer, even a tailor, kept themselves honed in Gros Ventre these days. "And we're about to get ourselves a bank, Angus. It's bad business to let such places as Choteau and Conrad have our money in their pockets."

All this he ~~was~~ ^{ed} tendering to me as I ^{was} ~~noticed~~ ^{ing} that now that a bridge of bright new lumber hurdled the creek ford, by weathered comparison the Northern Hotel looked as if it had been in business since Lewis and Clark spent ^{the} a night there.)

And Rob and I preceded the Northern, and Lucas preceded us...

I took a sip from the glass Lucas had furnished me and speculated, "Then if we were to put the royal mint next to the bank, with a chute between for the money to flow through, and spigots on the front of the bank..."

Lucas had to laugh. But he came right out of it with: "Angus, you'll see the day this town of ours is the county seat, and of our own county, too. Gros Ventre is a coming place."

~~is a coming place.~~ # I could agree with that; it had been coming for nearly twenty years that I knew of personally. Before I could say anything to that effect, Lucas produced a glass for himself, ^{between his stubs, then} ~~sipped~~ the whiskey bottle, freshening my drink after he had poured his own. "But enough progress for one day. Lad"--for a change that was not me but Varick, who had wanted to tag along with me rather than endure while his mother and Nancy were fixing supper--"what would you say to a fine big glass of buttermilk?"

"Uh, no thanks," uttered Varick with that eloquent dismayed swallow only a boy can perform.

~~"Uh, no thanks," said Varick with all the swallow a boy can perform.~~ ^{the dismayed swallow only a}

Lucas peered over the bar at him. "It's a known fact that buttermilk will grow a mustache on you practically overnight. How do you think this father of yours got his? I'm telling you, this is ~~fast~~ yourself your chance to get a cookie duster." Varick grinned up at him and gave out a skeptical "aw."

Lucas shook his head ^{as if} dubiously. "If you're going to pass up perfectly good buttermilk, I'm afraid the only choice left is root beer."

That resolved, while Varick happily started ^{into} on his rich brown glassful,

Lucas remarked all too casually in my direction: "It's not usual to see Mc Castills ~~you~~ in town on a school night, Angus."

"I thought we ought to talk, Lucas. You just maybe can guess what about."

"Angus, Angus." Lucas's great face behind the bar, his bald dome and ~~dark~~ his still-dark beard, and those gray Barclay eyes, ^{regarding me;} how many times had I known this moment? "Life was a lot simpler before this man Meixell, wasn't it," Lucas was saying.

"You've met up with him, ^{I understand."} ~~have you?~~"

I believe this ^{exact}
"The day he hit town. ~~This~~ was the next place he found after the Northern."

"And?"

"And once I'd picked my jaw up off the floor after hearing the words national forest and what they meant, I stood him a few ~~extra~~ drinks

while I tried to figure him out. That, I have to say, didn't even come

close to working." It was an admission chipped in stone, the chilly way Lucas said that, then this: "Our Meixell definitely is a man with a hollow leg, and by the time he strolled out of here I was the one wobbling."

Lucas stopped and cocked a look Varick's direction. Then, soul of discretion, said: "That was Meixell's first half hour in town, Angus, and his second was a visit to Uncle Dolph," which was to say Spenger and his "nieces." A fellow who attended ~~to~~^{to} priorities ~~in~~ promptly, this Meixell, ay, Lucas?

All of this Varick was taking in avidly. The first Montana McCaskill, trying to hear beyond his years. Even to myself I couldn't have specified why, but I now wanted my son to know as many sides as there were to this thing called the Two Medicine National Forest, this matter of the land and us on it, and the sudden forest ranger on whom our future pivoted. I asked Lucas straight: "Other than Meixell's ^{social} ~~various~~ capacities, what've you concluded about him?"

To my surprise, Lucas Barclay hedged off to:

no 91

"The talk I hear, this national forest notion is about as popular around here as a whore in church."

"I've heard similar, just recently. But unless our conversation walked out the door while I wasn't looking, Lucas, we're talking now about Meixell himself and what we can expect from him."

"Angus, Robbie is not wrong about what this national forest can do to us and the way ~~we~~ we're used to ~~doing~~ ^{going about} things. ^{Now} I know as well as you do that Robbie can be the quickest in the world to get a wild hair up his"--Lucas's eye caught the attentive face of Varick below--"nose."

But this notion of divvying the grass as if it was the oatmeal and we

^{--by Jesus,} were the orphans ~~I~~ I don't know why that should have to be, Angus, I

~~just~~ ^{just} ~~don't~~ don't. What I do know is that we've always run whatever sheep we could manage to, up on that grass, and we've built ourselves and Scotch Heaven and Gros Ventre and the entire Two country by doing it, ^{ay?}"

"That's been the case, yes," I had to agree. "But how long can any piece of ground, even one the size of those mountains, keep taking whatever sheep get poured onto it?" I studied Lucas to see how he would ingest this next: "Or cattle either, for that matter."

Lucas rubbed a stub across his beard as if reminded of ~~a spill~~ ^{an untidiness}

^{Our dear friend Wampus Cat.} there. "You mean Williamson. I don't have the answer there either,

Angus, any more than I do to this geezer ^{Meixell}. I'm as ^{fuddled about this} ~~baffled~~ as

the old lady of Ecclefechan when she was told that astronomers had found

planets named Mars and such up there among the stars. ~~There~~ 'I've nae

doubt they can see those things with their long glasses and all,' she

find out?

said, 'but how did they ^{find out} ~~ask them~~ their names?'"

And that proved to be Lucas's say on planetary matters this night. Even after the lilt of that joke, though, I was certain of this much: certain that I saw come back into Lucas the same bleakness I had found in Ninian Duff two evenings ago. Ay, the one of them beginning dourly about Meixell, and the other concluding dourly, ay? Not pleasant to be squeezed between, Ninian and Lucas. If these two old stags of the country set their minds and horns against Meixell; if they led the many others who would listen to them into rank behind Rob's anger...a ~~fine~~ fence could be built around a forest, but a fence could be cut, too; grass could be allotted, but sheep could forever stray onto the unallotted, too; a forest ranger could be sent to us, but that forest ranger could ^{rate} ~~bring~~ early replacement if everything he touched turned to turmoil.

I looked down at my son and had the sudden wish for him to be twice or three times his not-quite-eight years, to be old enough, grown enough, to help me think through what I ought to do. To bring his ^{native} attunement to the land into my schoolmasterly mind.

Lucas too now put his attention on the inquisitively watching boy. Leaning across the bar, he announced:

"Varick, ~~she~~, I happen to know for a fact that Nancy has ginger ^{in oversupply} cookies ~~on hand~~ at the house. Go tell her I said to give you ^{the biggest} one, ay?"

Varick couldn't help blurting his astonishment at such ^{unheard-of} good fortune:

"This close to supper?"

"I know just ^{who} ~~what~~ you mean by that, ^{lad, "sympathized"} ~~announced~~ Lucas. "But tell

twitch

that mother of yours that I've known here since she was just an idle notion up ~~for~~ my brother's leg"--I'd wanted Varick to have full education ^{tonight,}

had I--"and I don't want to hear ^{whippersnap} any arguments out of her about when a

cookie can be eaten. Tell her that for me if she needs it, ay?" ~~Will you tell her that for me?"~~

Varick scooted out of the saloon for the house and I sat wondering if the Barclays maybe constituted an entire separate human race. It would explain a lot. Lucas now turned his magnanimity my way and proclaimed: "We've just time to top off these drinks before supper." He poured and ~~toasted~~ ^{toasted}, "Rest our dust." As we put our glasses down, Lucas asked: "And how ^s if life treating its schoolkeepers?"

Schoolkeepers. That s whispering more than just yourself and you know who I mean by more, Angus.

I studied my glass while all the other whispers of Anna ^{whispered} ~~wished~~ in me, years of accumulated echoes of not having her, a chorus of whispers adding and adding to themselves until they were like the roar of a chinook wind.

~~added and added onto themselves.~~ Angus, I've told Isaac yes....Angus,

Angus, take it slow now, both on this whiskey and yourself....Angus,

man, this is the best news in the world!...Angus, I'll try with whatever's

in me to be a good wife....An-gus, ve got a stork on de ving. And ever

around to first words again: I am called Anna Ramsay. And it is Miss

Ramsay.

^{swarm} ^{all} The ~~whirl~~ of it ~~was~~ too much; if I ever once began letting it ^{free} ~~out~~...

Even here now to Lucas, I could stand only to say the ^{of my Anna situation} ~~minimum~~:

^{utter} "We get by, Lucas. That seems to be the story of schoolkeepers."

"And that's enough, is it?"

"I try to make it be."

George and Abraham traded their eternal stoic stares ^{along} ~~across~~ the

schoolroom wall, and the bunch ranged below seemed to have caught ^{their} ~~its~~

mood ~~from them~~. If faces could ^{somewhat} ~~ever~~ be said to be sitting there with

crossed arms, these of Scotch Heaven's sheepmen on Saturday morning were.

improve
"whirl"

Stanley Meixell half-sat half-leaned on the corner of my big desk in front of us. ~~the number was~~ By years, he was the youngest ~~person~~ person in this gathering, but with his hat off, the start of a widow's ^{suggested itself} peak ^{at the corners of his eyes} was there in his crow-black hair, and the lines webbed in by wind and sun and maybe personal weather as well made his face seem twice as old as the rest of him. # Having just ^{given} ~~told~~ us the full particulars of the land he was boundarying to create this ~~thing~~ the Two Medicine National Forest, ^{of his} Stanley paused to let it all sink in, and it definitely sunk.

"Why don't you just arrange your goddamn boundaries to the North Pole and the Atlantic Ocean while you're at it?" spoken lividly by Rob.

To say the truth, the empire of geography the forest ranger had delineated to us was stunning. Grizzly Reef. Roman Reef. Rooster Mountain. Phantom Woman Mountain. Guthrie Peak. Jericho Reef. Anywhere in the high stone skyline to our west, name a rimrock bow of mountain or a sharp flange of peak, and it sat now within the Two Medicine National Forest. And its foothills below it, and its neighbor crags behind it, all the way up to the Continental Divide. All the way up to the moon, may as well say. And Stanley hadn't only ^{tugged} ~~taken~~ his indelible boundary west to the Divide and north to the Two Medicine River: to the startlement

of us all, he already had put a Forest Service crew to building his ranger station here on the east edge of Scotch Heaven, at the juncture where the North Fork and the South Fork met to form the main creek. ^{True,} The narrow panhandle of national forest boundary he had drawn from the mountains down here to the station site took in only a hogback ridges of rocks and stunted pine that could never be of use to anyone, but still. Everyone of Scotch Heaven and the South Fork both would need to pass by the ranger station, and the bold flag atop its pole, whenever they traveled to or from town. Like having an unexpected lodger living on the front porch of our valleys, although I knew from Stanley's own lips why he had done it: You ask me if I absolutely have to bring the national forest all the way down to the ^{forks of the} creek, Angus, and yeah, I figure I do.

"Yeah, Angus, I figure I do. If I hide the ranger station way to hell and gone out of sight somewheres, that's not going to do either side of the situation any good. This station and the forest are gonna be facts of life from now on. They're a part of this Two country and people just might as well get used to them as quick as they can." My answer,

nope

"Some aren't going to like your station out ^{there} here so prominent."

I didn't much myself. Me and the forest got plenty of time, said Stanley,

for them to change their minds.

Changing of minds wasn't the fad yet, if this schoolroom audience was any evidence. In the seat next to me Rob was tight-jawed, fired up as a January stove. On the other side of him, Lucas was the definition of skeptical. Around us, a ^{maximum} Ninian frown and variations of it on Donald Erskine, Archie Findlater, the two Frews...the only unperturbed one in the room was Stanley.

He wasn't going to stay that way if Rob had anything to do with it.
~~Rob now set out to unperturb him~~

"Christ on a raft, man! You're taking every goddamn bit ^{ob} of the country we use for summer range!"

"I ain't taking it anywhere," Stanley responded quietly, "it's still gonna be there."

"What makes you think," Rob spoke up again, "you can parade in here from nowhere and get us, ~~you just~~ to swallow this idea of a national forest and like it?"

"I wouldn't necessarily say you got to like it, Bob," answered Stanley. ^{"But man"} "If you just got used to it, that'd be plenty to suit me."

"But man, what you're asking of us"--pure passionate Rob, this--"is to get used to limiting our sheep on that mountain grass. That's the same as limiting our livelihoods. Our lives too, may as well say."

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"I'm not here to fool you," Stanley responded. "You're probably not gonna be able to put any more sheep onto ^{I those} ~~that~~ mountain ^S ~~grass~~ than you've already had up there, and maybe some fewer." "Glower from Rob, that. "You ~~summit~~ there and on that. His look changed to bafflement as he realized ~~Stanley~~ the ranger didn't intend to expand that response. Rob burst out:

"You mean you're ^{flat-out} telling us there isn't anything we can do about you and your goddamn grazing ^{allotments} ~~permits~~?"

"Me personally," Stanley said to Rob, "I guess you could get rid of ~~someway~~. Or at least you could try." The schoolhouse filled with consideration of that. "But about the grazing allotment system, no, I don't really see nothing for you to do."

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the

Before Rob's fury found a next tangent, the forest ranger went along us from face to face with his eyes. "But none of what we been saying so far here today goes through the alphabet all the way from A to Why, does it. I've told you what the national forest is gonna be, you've told me what you think about it. Seems to me we both better take a look at ~~that~~ just why I got sent here to make the Two Medicine National Forest."

I shifted drastically in my chair, not just for the exercise. Was this going to work? Was I several kinds of a fool for abetting Meixell as I had? The night after my visit to Lucas in town, another visit.

this one in the lambing shed after supper: Stanley Meixell appearing again where Varick and I first laid eyes on him. Found your note under my door ~~this morning~~, Angus. I almost hadn't gone to the Northern and ^{got up from Lucas and Nancy's table to go} left that message, when I announcedly ~~was going out to~~ harness the team for our drive home to Scotch ^Haven. Yet I did, yet I had to make the effort to give Stanley the words, the thoughts, for fitting with as little woe as possible to all concerned. this national forest onto the Two ^Medicine country. My words to him ^{there} in the lantern light of the shed, that the national forest ~~is~~ ^{actually} was the the weave of land and utilities pattern of homesteading ~~writes~~ large: lines of logic laid upon the earth, ^{pattern} toward the ~~making~~ of America. A quiltpiece of mountains and grass and water to join onto our work-won squares of homestead. The next necessary sum in trying to keep humankind's ledger orderly. Those words of mine, Stanley's tune of them now to listening Scotch ^Haven: "I guess you're all familiar with the term public domain. It's the exact same ~~land~~ bunch of land you ~~were~~ all able to homestead on..." Land, naked earthskin. America. Montana. We can be our own men there, the Rob of then to the me of then. Maybe so, maybe no. What can you have in life, of what you think you want? Who gets to do the portioning? Stanley's voice going on, low, genuine: 

with as little woe to everybody as possible.

designated

utility