

76
"The national forest is a kind of pantry for tomorrow, for your

youngsters when they grow up and inherit all this you've got started..."

In the lambing shed as Stanley and I met, ^{our} one witness: ~~Frank~~ Varick. ~~he~~

Your mother doesn't need to know about this, son; one more item put

sorry to say.

into that category, ~~but~~. But Rob and Lucas already were more Barclays

than any sane man ought to have to contend against, without an Adair

salient too. I hated for Varick to see me sneak. But I wanted him

there that night, to absorb whatever he could of ^{the} ~~my~~ words of the land

as Stanley and I knew them.

"My life maybe don't count up as much in years as some of yours,

but I been quite a number of places in it." No one of us ^{in his audience} could doubt

that. ^{Stanley} ~~Meixell~~ was a number of years younger than myself or Rob, but he

definitely had the look of a man with a lot of before in his life.

"Every one of those places," ^{he} ~~Meixell~~ went on, "I seen some ~~pretty~~ pretty sad

behavior toward the country." I watched him twice as carefully as I had

been. There was none of me in these words, this was undiluted Stanley now.

"I used to ask people about that. What was

gonna happen when the land wore out. And they always said that when

they'd used the country up, they'd just move on. But I don't know ^{of}

anything you can just keep on using up and using up and using up, and

not run out of. And that's all the Forest Service is saying with this

Two Medicine National Forest. You can use it, but not use it up."

The schoolroom was quiet. Stanley was finished with that part of the task. But now the next. [#] I wanted ^{not} to be the one to ask it. Yet no one else was. I would have to, Stanley had to have the chance to answer. Before I got my mouth to agree, though, I heard my intended words coming out of Lucas:

"What about cattle? Do your grazing allotments take in the fact that cattle eat grass too?"

"I guess I know what you got on your mind, Mr. Barclay. Its initials are Double W, ain't they." Stanley paused to gather his best for this. "I went and did some riding around in the mountains, taking a look at the ground wherever the snow was off. Trying to figure out for myself just what the country up there can carry. How many sheep. And how many cattle." There's one thing you've utterly got to do, my last words to him in the shed those nights ago. Somehow ~~you~~ prove you're going to put a rein on Williamson as well as on the rest of us. If you're going to have people ^{of Scotch Heavens} accept the notion of this national forest, prove to them it's not just going to be another honeypot for the Williamsons of the world. Prove it to me, for ~~that~~ that matter. And Stanley ^{was in} ~~was~~ drifting ^{them out of} away from the lantern light, saying only Been a interesting evening.

the watching boy?

And to the watching boy not much higher than our waists:
 Good night, Angus, and ~~many~~ thanks. My pleasure one more time, Varick.

Now I waited with the rest, waited for proof.

"Arithmetic has never been my long suit," Stanley was saying unpromisingly. "But I do ^{savvy} ~~know~~ that old formula, which I guess all of you know better than I do, that you can run five sheep on the same ground it takes for one cow. Now, each of you in this room has got a band of a thousand sheep, by yourself or in partner with somebody"--here a Stanley glance along the line from me to Rob to Lucas--"or whatever.

So, the fairest thing I can think of to do is what I went ahead and did--tell Williamson I'm allotting him ^{a grazing permit} ~~the~~ equal of a band of sheep. Two hundred cows."

A massive thinking silence filled the schoolroom.

Stanley spoke again: "If it'll help your ^{own} ~~arithmetic~~ along any, I figure he's been running a couple of thousand cows up there the last summer or so. Fact is, I came across some bald places around springs and salt licks where it looks like he's been running a couple million." ~~Manure~~ ^{up}

^{such places} Came across ~~them~~, yes, with my ^{guidance} ~~help~~. It would take a man weeks to ride an inspection of those mountains, and Stanley ~~only~~ had only days; I'd cited him chapter and verse, ^{where} ~~places~~ to see for himself the overuse and erosion from Williamson cramming the land with Double W cattle. "Manure

up to your,

shins, and the grass worn away just as deep," as Stanley was saying it now.

"I asked our,

friend Williamson about behavior like that. He told me any overgrazing

up there was done by you sheep guys. I kind of hated to have to point

out to him I do know the difference between cowflops and sheepberries

when I see them on the ground."



Ninian now, ^{starkly} incredulous--it was worth being here today just for that. ^{day?} "Am I hearing you right, that you've already ^{instructed} ~~told~~ Williamson you're cutting him to just two hundred head of cattle in those mountains?"

"Yeah." Stanley ^{peered} ~~looked~~ out the window toward the mountains, as if for verification.

"And then--?" demanded Ninian.

"Some other stuff got said, is all. Mostly by him." Stanley still studied the mountains. "As long as I'm the ranger here, though, he ain't gonna get treated any different than the rest of you."

Now Stanley Meixell looked out among us.

"None of us needs any more trouble than we already got," the man at my desk with a face older than himself offered. "For my part, I can always be worked with,

if you just keep one thing in mind. It's something they"--the jerk of his head eastward, to the invisible church of the Forest Service ^{in Washington} ~~in~~

^{his way?} "claim President Roosevelt himself goes around saying. 'I hate a man who skins the land.'"

Deep silence again. Until ^{Stanley} ~~Meixell~~ cleared his throat and said:

"Just so we all know where we're coming out at here, can I get a show of hands on how many of you go along with the idea of grazing

allotments the way I intend to ^{do} ~~make~~ them?"

instigated

for verification.

"And then--?" demanded Nathan.

"Some other stuff got said, as all. Mostly by him." Stanley still

To be pioneers in filling such emptiness. At least we can be our own

men there, the Rob of then to the me of then.

The North Fork, there, that's sinfully fine country, the Lucas of then.

CAN ALWAYS BE WORKED WITH

of hands on how many of you go along with the idea of grazing

do
"I intended the way I intended to work them?"

I raised my hand.

No other went up.

Indecision was epidemic in the room. Stanley had said much sense.

But the habit of unrestricted summer grass, the gateless mountains, the way life had been for the twenty years most of these men had put into their homesteads, those said much too. Skepticism and anger and maybe worse weren't gone yet; I could feel Rob's stiff look against the side of my head. My hand stayed lonely in the air, and was getting more so.

Then, from the other side of Rob:

"Will a slightly used arm do?"

Lucas's right sleeve, the stub barely showing out its top, slowly rose into the air.

The next assent that went up was that of Ninian Duff. Then Donald climbed.

Erskine's hand vaguely ~~rose~~ Archie Findlater's followed, and George

Frew's, and Allan Frew's. Until at last Rob's was the only hand not up.

The expression on ^{Rob}him was the trapped one of a man being voted

into exile.

I felt some sorrow for him. The horizon called Montana was narrower
for Rob after today.

But you never wanted to be too quick to count Robert Burns

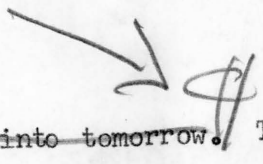
Barclay out. As if by volition of all the other assents there in the

air, Rob's hand at last gradually ^{began to rise} ~~rose~~ too. For better or for worse,

in trepidation and on something ^{a bit} ~~less~~ than faith, ^{all of} ~~Scotch~~ Heaven had

taken the Two Medicine National Forest for a neighbor.

#



~~Squint as hard as you will, you can't see into tomorrow.~~ There
wasn't ^{not} a one of us who stepped out of that South Fork schoolroom into
the spring air of Montana and put a glance to the mountains of the new
Two ^Medicine National Forest who didn't think he was looking at ~~the~~
a principal change. But

those of us that day weren't even seeing the first wink of what was
coming. In the next few years, change showed us what it could do when it learned the multiplication
table. Change arrived now not in Stanley Meixell's mountain realm west
of us but onto the prairies everywhere to our east, it arrived wearing
thousands of farm boots and farm dresses, and it arrived under the same
names ~~we~~ we ourselves had come with, homesteaders.

Full flood

Overnight, it seemed, the town Lucas had always said Gros Ventre
was going to be was also arriving. But it was arriving twenty miles
away, at a spot on the prairie which had been given the name Valier.
A town made from water, so to speak, by a company fueled by water.

(mod)

Irrigation was the word ^{wetting} ~~on~~ every lip now. The waterflows coursing
from the Rockies would be harnessed as if they were clearcolored mares,
and made to nurture grainfields. Dam to canal to ditch to head of wheat
was going to be the declension. And soon enough it began to be. Scotch

^{simply}
 Heaven ~~only~~ watched, because the valley of the North Fork was narrow
 and slanted to the extent that ~~only~~ a smidgen of hayfield irrigation
 could be done, or, ^{honestly} ~~really~~, needed doing. But a water project such as
 the one around the townsite called Valier, eighty thousand acres of
 irrigation being achieved and homesteaders pouring off every train,
 the world ^{quick becoming}
 was reason enough to rethink ~~Montana~~ and what it was ~~going to be~~.

Yet you have to wonder. If someone among ^{those} ~~the~~ prairie homesteaders,
 of 1908-9-10
 Illinoisan or Missourian or Belgian or German, if some far-eyed soul
 who had come to plaid himself or herself into this Montana land ^{could have} ~~had~~
 taken an occasional moment to watch Scotch Heaven, ^{even} would ~~we~~ up there
 have seemed as fixed in a rhythm of life as we assumed we were? Riffle
 into us in those years, and you find Scotch Heaven's first automobile--
 Rob's Model T Ford. "See now, McAngus, I haven't laid eyes on one
of these contraptions yet that has a wheel worth the name. But the
thing is an amazement, am I right? To ~~go without~~ be able to go ~~without~~ horses...
down the road without horses... →

9/1908-9-10

more?
quite
mean's

could be done, or, really, needed doing. But a water project such as
the one around the townsite called Valler, eighty thousand acres of
irrigation being achieved and homesteaders pouring off every train,
the world
Illinoisan or Missourian or Belgian or German, if some far-eyed soul
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Blearily my son managed to locate the manure-dipped figure of young

Withrow,

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You find Mavis Frew telling anyone who ^{would} ~~will~~ listen that the suffragettes will prevail, that women will attain ~~themselves~~ the right to vote.

You find in my schoolhouse a long-boned boy named Samuel Duff, son
inimitable — Samuel my first pupil
of ~~the~~ Ninian and brother of inimitable Susan, whose dreams and passions

are of airplanes and wireless messages that fly between ships at sea. more?

So, no, even spaces of time that seem becalmed must be riding a considerable tide.

—

I knew I was. Not that whatever carried me and my thoughts could be called a clear current of history, not that at all. I was no resemblance to a Gibbon, cawing the decline of naughty old Rome/tome upon tome upon tome upon tome. But season by season, those around me were altering. Varick was ever taller, like a young tree. His quiet beyond-the-schoolbook capabilities ^{grew} ~~added~~ and ^{grew} ~~added~~ in him; he had a capacity for being just what he was and not caring ^{an inch} ~~about~~ other directions of life. A capacity that I could notice most in one other figure, ~~and~~ when I did my wondering about it. Was it in any way ^{is} possible that Varick somehow saw ^{the} ~~that~~ knack ~~that~~ he wanted for his own, began to ^{practice} ~~practice~~ it in himself even then, that first time the two of us laid eyes on Stanley Meix

My son, then, was steadily becoming some self that only he had the chart of. And as he did, my wife just as surely began ^{glimpsing} ~~seeing~~ ahead to the time when Varick would leave us. Several years yet, yes, but Adair saw life the way the zoo creature must see the zoo; simply inexorably there, to be paced in the pattern required. The requirement beyond raising Varick through boyhood was losing him to manhood, was it? ~~Yes~~

That being life's case, she ~~would~~ ^{manner of pacing that} would go to the only other ~~place~~ she knew. She was preparing herself to be childless again. While I watched with apprehension. Not that Adair was in any way ending, yet, the companionable truce that was our marriage. We had our tiffs, we mended them. ^{till} We met each other in bed gladly enough. The polite passions of our life together were persevering.

But in the newly watchful gazes she sent to the mountains now, in how the deck of cards occasionally reappeared now and she would be absorbed into the silent game of solitaire, I could more than notice that this was beginning to be the Adair of our first winters of marriage again, the Adair of Angus, I don't want you disappointed in me. The Adair of A person just doesn't know...Or at least this one doesn't know.

My son, then, was steadily becoming some self that only he had the

chart of. And as he did, my wife just as surely began to read ahead

there, to be paced in the pattern required. The requirement beyond

relating Varick through boyhood was losing him to manhood, was it?

Again had better prepare herself to be childless again

the doubt. And now was too late. Doubt didn't count now.

The polite passions of our life together were persevering.

of A person just doesn't know...Or at least this one doesn't know.

84C

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There were shades of change, ~~there~~, anywhere I looked in these years--except within me. This person me, permanent in the one way I ~~should~~ ^{ought} not ^{to} have been: in silent love with a woman not my wife, not the mother of my son; seeing her at dances, thinking across the divide of the North Fork and Noon Creek to her. Angus the Hopeless.

more
Anna
constant

not

If I could have changed myself from that, would I? Yes, every time. For it was like having a second simultaneous ^{existence} ~~life~~, two sets of moments ticking away in me at once, one creating the Angus who was husband to Adair and father to Varick, and partner to Rob in sheep and schoolmaster to my pupils, and all other roles ~~to~~ to the

community, ^{route} the other the ~~Angus~~ who did nothing but love Anna Reese.

^{existence} One ~~life~~ too many, for the amount of me available. It was cause enough to wonder: was everyone more than the single face they showed the world? It ^{periodically did} ~~more than occasionally~~ seem so. The side of Adair I could not get to. Angles within Rob that could catch me by surprise even after twenty years. If so, if others too were no more their single face to the world than I was, then what were we all doing--going through life in the kind of

armistice that my South Fork pupils used as time-out in their games

at recess, thrusting up crossed fingers and calling out King's X? But

how long in this life can you keep fingers constantly crossed.

For all the surge of change it brought,
1908 did not answer that. Nor did 1909.

~~For all
the
change~~

—————

1910 was our year of fire.



(no 41)

~~Our year of fire was 1910.~~ A summer that would have ~~frightened~~ ^{made}

^{cough} the devil. We of Scotch Heaven had seen hot before, we had seen dry
^{persistent forest fire} before, we had even seen ~~smoke~~ before. But this. This was unearthly.

What seemed worse than the acrid haze itself was that the great source

of it lay far beyond the horizon to the west of us, ~~a big forest fire~~

^{fract of the} all the way over in the Bitterroot Mountains along the Idaho border, ^{(; halfway to Seattle.}

Every splinter of that distant ^{pine} forest must have caught aflame, for
~~its~~ the smoke seeped east to us day after day as if night was drawing over

from the wrong side of the world. Somebody else's smoke, reaching
 across great miles to smear the day and infect the air--it rakes the
 nerves in a way a person has never experienced before.

And next, as if our own mountains were catching the fire fever
 from the Bitterroot smoke, in mid-August a blaze broke out in the
 Two Medicine National Forest. From the shoulder of Breed Butte the
^{gray-black cloud} boil of ~~smoke~~ could be watched, rising and spreading from the timber
 gulches north of Jericho Reef. Stanley Meixell rounded up crews and
 fought that fire for weeks, but it burned and burned--We'd might as
well been up there spitting on ~~the sonuvabitch~~ the sonuvabitch, Angus, for
all the goddamn good we ended up doing, Stanley told me after.

add / for
 smoke?

halfway
 to
 Seattle

Wife
 Breed Butte
 came out
 of forest

more a
 smoke
 than
 burned

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With the Two Medicine smudge added into the Bitterroot smudge, the sky was saturated with smoke: the day the Northern Hotel caught fire and burned like a tar vat--by a miracle of no wind, not quite managing to ignite the rest of Gros Ventre along with itself--none of us in Scotch Heaven even noticed any smoke beyond usual in the murky direction of town.

On the homestead we went through the days red-eyed, throats and noses raw, nerves worse yet.

I felt a disquiet in myself even before the season of smoke honestly arrived; somehow I had smelled the smoke coming, a full day before the sky began to haze; an odor ^{of char,} old and remindful of something I could not quite bring back into mind. No other aroma so silky, acidic... It hung just there at the edge of being remembered, pestering, as each dusklike day dragged past.

^{ought to}
~~a gospel~~
Was that ~~something~~ you still believed, Rob? After you had returned
Did you still believe the black gospel of what you had just said, Rob?

from the Two Medicine and hotly ~~told~~ Varick
spilled your words to Varick, did you ~~not~~

want them back, want them unspoken? Want yourself not to ^{have been} ~~be~~ the tool of anger

that ripping ^{ed} ~~ing~~ between Varick and ~~me~~ me? Your face now ~~showed~~ ~~was~~ had as much anger

*but as
anger*
as it could ^{even} ~~hold~~ ~~but~~ belief in what you had done ^{your own}
~~the~~ belief in your sabotage wasn't total now, was it,

^{to hold}
try as you were. And now was too late. OO didn't count now.

I felt a disquiet in myself even before the season of smoke honestly arrived;

back into mind. No other aroma so silky, acidic... It hung just there

at the edge of being remembered, pastering, as each dusklike day

dragged past.

By turns, Varick was wide-eyed and fretful--

"It can't burn up all the trees, can it, Dad?"--and entranced by the fire season's undreamt-of events--"Dad, the chickens! They went back in to roost! They think this is night!" # Adair looked done in. These days of soot, of smokey heat seeming to make the air ache as ~~you look~~ the lungs took it in, how else could she look.

A suppertime in our second or third week of smoke, she said across the table to me: # "How long can this last?" # At first I thought ~~her~~ ~~was~~ words were ritual exasperation, as a person will wonder aloud without really be wondering, Isn't this day ever going to end? But then I saw she was genuinely asking.

"Dair, I'd rather take a beating than tell you this. But ^{a couple} ~~two~~ or three times since I've been in this ~~country~~ country, it didn't rain ~~at~~ enough ~~all~~ in August to disturb the dust. And it'll take a whopping rain to kill fires as big as these." I had delivered that much bad news, I might as well deliver worse. "They might go on burning until first snow in the mountains, Labor Day or so."

"Really?" This out of Varick, as he tucked away yet another unheard-of

"Beside" puts out of track, as he tucked away left shoulder upward-of
in the mountains, farol day of 203.

might as well deliver worse. "They might go on printing until that snow

kill trees as big as these." I had delivered that much bad news, I

off in August to disturb the quiet. And it'll take a whopping lot to

three times since I've been in this ~~country~~ country, it didn't let me

"Day, I'd rather take a beating than tell you this. But who of

was Remington saying.

REMEMBER THE, YOU A GIVE ME A BACK BOTHER TO AND I BUT WHEN I WAS 203

THE LAST I REMEMBERED, WAS A FEW DAYS AFTER THE DEATH OF THE BROTHERS

THE CORRAL WAS NOT THE SAME ANY MORE. IT WAS A MONTH LATER, MID-OCTOBER, THE CORRAL THIS TIME WAS

[It was] a month later, mid-October, the corral this time ^{was} the big

round one at the Egan ranch on Noon Creek.

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prospect. After he went outside to his nightly ~~chore~~ woodpile chore, his mother turned her face to me again. "And yet this is the one place you want to be."


"Times like this, I could stand to be somewhere else a minute or two."

"Angus. I don't want this to sound worse than I mean it. But Montana never seems to get any easier."

And anywhere else in life does, does it? Famous places of ease, Adair, such as Scotland and Nether--

Abruptly I knew the smell; the disquieting connection that had been teasing in my mind these weeks of the forest smoke. Angus, is your sniffer catching what mine is? That unvarying question ~~comes~~ from Vare Barclay, Adair and Rob's father, to me there in the Nethermuir wheelshop. It is, I reply. Better see to it, Angus, best to be sure than sorry. Out I go into the woodyard to inspect for fire, the wheelshop's worst dread; but as ever, the sawyers merely have halved an ash tree. It is the black heart of ~~the~~ ^{when it is split,} ash, an inky streak the length of the tree, that gives off the smell ^{so much} like burning; like ^{mocking} a residue of char.

And now in the



air of Scotch Heaven and much of the rest of Montana, that old odor from Nethermuir. I wondered if Adair, daughter of that wheelshop, somehow was recognizing ^{the} ~~that~~ ^{aroma} ~~odor~~ of the ash's heartwood, too, in ~~her~~ this latest dismay of hers against Montana. I was in no mood to ask.

Instead, levelly as I could:

"Dair, this isn't a summer you can judge by. I know the country is so full of smoke you can cut it with scissors, but this is far out of the ordinary. None of us has ^{even} ~~seen~~ a worse fire season and we're not likely to."

~~cut
air
smell~~

^{trying}
"I'm ~~not~~ ^{trying} not to blame the country for how awful these days are. I truly am."

I wonder if you are, ran in my mind. It'd be new of you. But that was smoked nerves squeaking. I made myself respond to her: "I know. It's just a hard time. They happen. You're perfectly entitled to throw your head back and have a conniption fit, if it'll help."

"Adair would do that," she went that mocking distance from herself,

from the moment, ^{she thought} "if ~~it~~ would help."

——— ^{either}
It helped matters none ~~that~~ a few days later I had traveling to do.

With school to begin in not much more than a week and the flood of pupils from the homestead influx that was upon us, the county superintendent was calling all country-school teachers to a meeting in new Valier.

"I'll be back the day after tomorrow," I told Adair. "Any stray rain I see, I'll bring home with me."

^{do our best}
"Varick and I will ~~not~~ turn into smoked kippers in the meantime,"
she ~~gave~~ gave me in return.

Riding into Gros Ventre just before nightfall--although it was hard to sort dusk from haze any more--I stayed over with Lucas and Nancy,

and in the small hours got up and resaddled Scorpion and rode eastward.

The face of the land as dawn began to find it took my breath away. The land I had ridden across so gingerly when Rob and I first came to Gros Ventre, the bald prairie where I had met only the one Seven Block rider in my three days of scouting, now was specked with homestead cabins. Built of lumber, not our Scotch Heaven logs. This was as if towns had been taken apart, somewhere distant, and their houses delivered at random to the empty earth.

The rainbow eyes of memory/that reflect the colors of time. My remembering of a hawk hanging on the wind, steering me with his wings to this prairie that was vacant of people then; these people now in these clapboard cabins, would they in twenty years be recalling when their plump farms were just rude homesteads? ^{And} The memories-to-come of of any of this change in the land the next McCaskill: what tints were waiting to happen in Varick's mind?

For that matter, if people continued to flock in, if the scheme of earth called Montana grew ever more complicated, where was there going to be room, land, for Varick to root his life and memories into?

With more and more light of the morning, which was tinted grey-green even this far from our smoke-catching mountains, I could see the upsloping canal banks of the irrigation project, and machinery of every kind, and then, not far from the Valier ^{townsite} ~~townsite~~, the whitish gray of several tents near a corral. As I passed that encampment the many colors of horses grew apparent, muted a bit by the hazy air but still wonderfully hued; big ^{workhorses} ~~workhorses~~ standing like dozens of gathered statues. Quickly I began to meet and greet men walking in from homesteads to their day's work of teamstering, another session of moving earth from here to there in the progress of canals. # I rode on trying not to dwell on those tents and the brand on the hips of those

workhorses, Isaac Reese's Long Cross.

At Valier, or what was going to be, a ~~plump~~ three-storey hotel of tan brick sat mightily above the main intersection of almost houseless streets, as though lines had been drawn from the corners of the world to mark where the next civilization was to be built. The other main enterprises so far were lumber yards and saloons. There was something unsettling about coming onto this raw abrupt town spring^U from the prairie, so soon after Gros Ventre nestling back there in its cottonwood grove. Valier did not possess a single tree--no, there, one: a whip~~le~~ being watered from a tub that a tan-faced woman had just carried out and dumped. I touched my hat brim, the washerwoman gave me a solemn Tous saint-like Morning, and we went our ways.

Say this for the)
fledgling town, ^{Valier} it was only half as ~~smoky~~ smoky as anywhere else I had been in recent history; the other half of its air was an enthusiastic wind. Squinting, I saw through the scatter of buildings to where the schoolhouse sat alone, and directed Scorpion that way.

wait
tree

11
workhorses, Isaac Reese's Long Cross.

At Valter, or what was going to be, a three-story hotel

of tan brick sat mightily above the main intersection of almost houseless

unsettling about coming onto this raw abrupt town spring from the prairie,

so soon after Gros Ventre nestling back there in its cottonwood grove.

Valter did not possess a single tree--no, there, one: a white being

watered from a tub a tan-faced woman had just carried out. I touched

Past noon, south gained the majority of my watching. Rob did not

and did not appear from the direction of Scotch Heaven as promised.

91A

The rural teachers from nearer were already there and of course
The rural teachers from nearer were already there and of course

the Valier ones, six in total, more than Gros Ventre's school had.

the Valier ones, six in total, more than Gros Ventre's school

~~rounds of hello~~

The ~~hello-saying~~ revealed that four of the Valier contingent were young
had.

single women, none so pretty as to make a man break down the door but

each unhomely enough that in all likelihood four marriage proposals

were around not very distant corners.

If the Valier maiden teachers wanted a lesson in loveliness, she

was the next to arrive after me. Anna.

had begun to whisper from Green to fan
whispered

left alone with his promising clasp of speech, the reservation class

left Davie with his browsing cloud of sheep, the Reservation grass
crispened
had begun to crispen from green to tan

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I knew she had been spending the summer here where Isaac's horsework was. For how many years now had I had ears on my ears and eyes on my eyes with the sole specialty of gathering any news of Anna, and the early-June item in the Gros Ventre Gleaner had shot out of the page of print at me: Anna Reese has joined Isaac at Valier. Isaac's crew will be the fortunate beneficiaries of her provender the duration of the summer, as they engage in canal construction ~~xxx~~ on the irrigation project and grading streets in the forthcoming metropolis. She was in the cook tent of that corralside assemblage I rode past, she was here in front of me now as the county superintendent solemnly joked, "Mrs. Reese, you and Mr. McCaskill may have made each other's acquaintance. ^{if not,} it is past time you did." For the benefit of the Valier teachers, he further identified us: "These two have been the ^{pillars} ~~bearers~~ of education at Noon Creek and the South Fork ever since the foundations of the earth were laid."

"Angus, how are you." Her half-smile, glorious even when she was being most careful with it.

"Hello, Anna." And you know how I am, ~~Anna~~. We both know that, Anna.

I but half-heard the morning's discussions of school wagons to bring children from the nearest homestead farms into Valier, of country schools to be built east and south of town for the more distant pupils, of the high school to be begun ^{here} next year. My mind was ahead, on noon.

4 When that hour came, picnic dinner was outside in the wind because every new Montana town tries to defy its weather. I got myself beside Anna as we went out the door into the first gust. 4 "Wouldn't you say we've eaten enough wind at our own schools," I suggested, ~~without~~ "without having to swallow this place's?" 4 The truth of that brought me a ^{glance} bright look from her, and then her words: "I could say that even without prompting 4 out of the wind any asking." 4 We stepped around the corner of the schoolhouse and seated ourselves on the fire-door steps there. Promptly a high-collared young man, more than likely a clerk at the hotel or a lumber yard, strolled by with the most comely of the Valier teachers. There went one.

What do you talk about when you can't talk about what you want.

As Anna and I began to eat, we resorted to conversation confined to our schools.

"Three of my pupils this year are children of some of my first pupils," she noted.

"I have that beginning to happen, too." And after them will it be these children's children in our schoolrooms, and the two of us still separate? By all evidence. I stood up abruptly. Seeing her look, I said, "Just a cramp in my leg."

I drew breath and hoped it had as much resolve in it as it did smoke and dust, and sat down beside her again. Even from our stairstep Valier and the irrigation future could be seen being built, a steam dragline shovel at continuous work in the near distance. It was like a squared-off ship, even to



hays

~~The steam dragline shovel was like a squared-off ship, even to~~
 the smoke funnel belching a black plume at its middle. Its tremendous
 prow, however, was a derrick held out into the air by cables, and from
 the end of the derrick a giant bucket was lifting dirt, swinging it,
 dropping it along a lengthening dike for the lake that would store
 irrigation water. Handfuls of earth as when a child makes a mud dam,
 except that the handfuls were the size of freight wagons.

"People come from miles just to watch it," Anna said. ^{work}

"It does dig like a banker who's lost a nickel down a gopher hole,"
 I had to grant. "Turning a prairie into Holland. You need to see it
 to believe."

"Yes. A town built from a pattern," she announced as if storing
 away the spelling of a fresh word. "They are planning for ten thousand
 people here."

"They've got a ways to go."

"And you don't think they'll get there?" Not disputing me, merely
 ; her instinctive interest in Not Proven.
 curious to hear so minority an opinion

"Who knows?" Things are famous for not turning out the way I think
 they will, aren't they. "Maybe all this time we've been living in the
 Two Medicine grainfield and never realized it."

I forced my attention back into my plate. It was as much as I could do not to turn to Anna, say Here's something ten thousand Valierians ought to be here to cheer for, ^{wrap} ~~take~~ her in my arms and kiss her until her buttons ^{burst} ~~melted~~.

"Isaac thinks you are right." I instantly ^{was looking} ~~at~~ her, into those direct eyes. "To have stayed with sheep as you and the others in Scotch Heaven have and not be tempted off into farming or cattle," she went on. "He tells our neighbors that if they want to go on being cowboys, they had better buy some sheep so they can afford their hats and boots."

"Isaac"--my throat couldn't help but tighten on the name--"has always been ~~manly~~ the canny one."

Now Anna's plate was drawing diligent attention. After a bit she gazed up again and offered, carefully casual: "With Isaac out and around in his work so, we don't see much of Scotch Heaven any more. Except at dances, and there's never any real chance to visit during those. I don't feel I even much know Adair and Varick." She paused, then: "How are they this fire summer?"

"They're as well as can be. Varick gets an inch taller every hour."

Her voice was fond of the thought. "^{and Peter}Lisabeth too. They're regular weeds at that age." But when she turned her face directly to me to ask this next, I saw she was starkly serious. "And you yourself. You really didn't answer when I asked this morning. How is Angus?"

"The same." We looked levelly into each other's eyes, at least we always were capable of honestly seeing each other. "Always the same, Anna."

She drew a breath, her breasts lifting gently. "How much better if we had never met." What would have been simpering apology in any other woman's mouth was rueful verdict from hers. "For you, I mean."

"Anna, tell me a thing. ~~It'll help if I really know.~~ Do you have the life you want?"

She barely hesitated. "Yes. Given that a person can have only one, I have what I most want. But you don't at all, do you."

I shook my head. "It's never as simply as ^edo and don't. The version I walk around in, there's nothing to point to and say, 'this is so far wrong, this can't be borne.' Adair and Varick, they're as good as people generally come. It's the life I don't lead that is the hard one."

"How is your family?"

"They're well. Varick gets an inch taller every hour."

variation I walk around in, there's nothing to point to and say, 'this

I shook my head. "It's never as simple as you don't. The

"Every change. But it seems to come along with."

other women's mouth was tightly closed from hers. "For you, I mean."

It was not never met. "What would have been something apology in any

she drew a breath, her breaths lifting gently. "How much better.

I turned to her, that face always as frank as it was glorious.

She had hesitated, before answering my question about her life. There was something there, something not even the remorseless honesty of Anna wanted to admit. I needed to know. Was I alone in the unled life of all these years? Or not alone, simply one separate half and Anna the other?

"I wonder when I'll get used to it," I suddenly was hearing Anna say. But this was not answer, I hadn't yet asked, ~~and~~ she had slipped her eyes away from my gaze, past my shoulder to a chugging noise down the street. "Every automobile still is a surprise," she continued. If this ^{coming} one was any standard, Valier was going to be a clamorsome town. With no patience I waited for the racketing machine to pass ^{by} the school.

It didn't pass. The automobile yanked to a stop and sat there clattering to itself while the driver flung himself out. And with a lift of his goggles became Rob.

tumbled his words out
 "Angus!" he ~~called~~ as he came, "there's been--you have to come.

There was an accident."

Anna and I were onto our feet without my having known we'd done so, side touching side and her hand now on my arm to help me stand against Rob's words. He stopped halfway to us, the realization of Anna and me together mingling with what he had to ^{report} ~~tell~~. Dumbly I stared all the questions to his tense bright face: Adair or Varick, Varick or Adair, how bad, ~~whether~~ alive or--

"It's Varick. He was chopping wood. We got him in to Doc Murdoch.
~~Robert Murdoch~~ You have to come." He jerked his head almost violently toward the chattering automobile.

"I'm coming." But to what. I pressed Anna's hand in gratitude for her touch, in gratitude for her. "Goodbye."

"One of Isaac's men will bring your horse home for you," Anna said before echoing my goodbye. I climbed into one side of the Ford while Rob banged shut the door of the other, and in a ~~whirling~~ roar we ~~were gone~~ hurled away.

#

On the rattling ride to Gros Ventre Rob ^{provided} ~~told~~ me the basic about Varick's accident, and then we both fell silent. In those miles of fire haze and dust from the Ford's tires, I seemed already to know the scene at the homestead that morning, before Adair's words told it to me. I was just ready to bake bread, before the day got too hot.

And I heard the sound. An auhhh, a low cry of surprise and pain.

Then the awful silence in her ears told her Varick's chopping ^{at the woodpile} had stopped. I ran out, the screen door flying open and ^{crashing shut} ~~closing~~ behind her like a thud of fear. She knew there would be blood somewhere, but she was not ready for the scarlet fact of it on our son's face, on the edge of the hand he was holding over his left eye as he stood hunched, frozen. Varick, let me see, I've got to see--Adair lifting his red wet hand far enough away for the eye to show. Hold still, ^{staring}

Perfectly still. The blood was streaming from the outer corner of the tight-shut eye, there was no telling whether the eyeball was whole.

The stick of wood, Varick was gasping. It flew up. I-- She held both his hands in hers. Sit. Sit right here on the chopping block ^{Varick} ~~and~~

don't touch your eye ^{at all} ~~while~~ I go-- With water and clean rags she tended the bloody mess, then half-led, half-carried the boy big as her into

the house. Listen to me now. You have to lie here on the bed until

I get back. Hold the rag there against the cut, but don't touch ~~the~~ your

no matter how it hurts,
eye. Varick, ~~whatsoever you may~~ don't touch your eye. Varick ice-still

as she left him on the bed holding back the red seep, as she went to

the barn silently crying and saddled Varick's mare Brownie and swung

herself up and still was silently crying when she halted the horse

on Breed Butte ~~and~~ in front of Rob. Then the Ford journey to ^{Grosvontes} ~~town~~

with Varick, past the fenceline where she and I had found Davie ~~and~~

Erskine being dragged by his horse, where she and I first learned of

the impossibly unfair way life ^{can} ~~could~~ turn against its young.

"We'll just have to wait," judged Doc ^{Murdoch} ~~to~~ to Adair and me, ^{that night.} "To see

whether those eye muscles are going to work. I do have to tell you,

there's about an even chance they won't." Precisely what we wanted

not to hear: flip of the coin, whether Varick would be left with one

powerless eye, a staring egg there in its socket. "But the eyeball

~~looks~~ ^{looks} intact," the doctor tried to relent, "and that's a piece of luck."

Luck. Was there any, and if so, where. Had the chunk of wood

flown a fraction farther away Varick would have only a ^{micked} ~~cut~~ cheek or

ear, one quick cry and healed in a few days. But a fraction inward and the eyeball would have been speared. The tiny territory between, the stick struck. That ~~must be~~ must be luck, the territory between.

~~Varick was to lie still for at least a week. Then the doctor would lift the bandage and gauge the eye.~~

in bed
@
Lucas

##

In the ^{big} guest bed at Lucas's house, the same bed where Rob and I had spent our ^{day} first night in Gros Ventre, Varick lay as still as an eleven-year-old boy ^{ever has} ~~could~~ for a week. Then the doctor lifted the bandage and gauged the left eye and its eyelid as Adair and I and Lucas and Nancy wordlessly clustered to watch.

"Blink for us now," the doctor directed. And Varick did. "Open wide. Close. Excellent. Look this way. Good. The other. Good again. Now bat your eyes, that's the boy." All those too, Varick performed.

"If that eye was any better, ^{my boy,} the doctor eventually stepped back and announced, "you'd be seeing through these walls." ~~Then as Varick~~

V more
even

4 as
12



Varick regarded him, and the others of us, with his two good eyes.

This can only be retrospect, but I swear I ~~thought~~ already was seeing

a Varick considerably ^{further in years than} ~~different~~ from the one I had left ^{when} ~~the morning day~~

I rode off to Valier; a boy who knew ^{the week before} ~~something~~ ^{of the worst} about life now,

and who ^{was} ~~had~~ ^{ing} inserted some distance, some gauging space, between it and

him. Because, when all at once Varick was grinning up at the doctor,

the smile maybe was as boyish as ever but that left eyelid independently

dropped down to half-shut.

As it ever did thereafter, when something pleased him, my son's wise

^{wounded} squint of amusement and luck.

—

"Varick is twice the son you deserve, McAngus," Rob acclaimed

when I went by,

Breed Butte to tell him and Judith of Varick's mend. More, he clapped

me on the shoulder and walked out with me to the gate where I'd tied

Scorpion. I stopped there, with Rob beside me, just to enjoy all around.

I didn't come all the miles from one River Street to live down there on

another; this day supported those ^{lofty} homestead-building words of Rob's.

The first freshfall of snow shining in the mountains had sopped the

forest fires, the air was cleansed and crisp with autumn now, and the

view from Breed Butte was never better nor would be. My own outlook

just as fresh as the moment. Varick's restored eye, another year

in my schoolroom about to begin, the Valier minutes spent with Anna

so recent in my mind--I felt as life,

had ~~shed~~ just shed a scruffy skin and was growing a clean new one.

Absorbed, I was about to swing up onto Scorpion when Rob stopped

me with:

~~Seamus~~ Angus, I think it's time you had a talking to."

I turned to him with the start of a grin, ^{expecting} ~~thinking~~ he had some usual scold to make about my taking the school again.

"About Anna Reese," he said, destroying my grin.

"Rob. She's not a topic for general discussion."

"But she's one ^{that's} ~~that~~ generally on your mind, isn't she. Angus, this is no way to be."

"Is that a fact?" It was and it wasn't. By choice I would not be the way I was toward Anna, carrying this love ~~love~~ through the ^(my recording angel?) years. But choice was not in this. "Rob, who the hell do you think you are, ^{Rob} ~~he~~ had the honesty to look uncomfortable. "I know you ^{maybe} ~~think~~ I'm poking my nose in--"

"You're right about that, anyway."

"--but Angus, listen, man. ^{Adair} ~~Dair~~ is my sister. I can't ^{just} stand by and see you do this to her."

"You're going to have to." ^{My} ~~his~~ eyes straight into ^{Rob's} ~~his~~ eyes ^{six} ~~few~~ feet away, ^{suddenly} a gap ~~the~~ the size of life. "Dair and I are managing to live with it, it shouldn't be a major problem ^{for} ~~with~~ you."

"Living with it, are you? That's what you call this, ~~this~~ infatuation you won't let go of?"

"See now, I think it's time you had a talking to."

I turned to him with the start of a grin, thinking he had some usual

school to make about my taking the school again.

"About Anna Reese," he said, destroying my grin.

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liberties with their food that I'd never dreamt of. Take hotcakes as an example: Ray and Mary Ellen poured some syrup on, then rolled each hotcake up, then syruped the outside and began eating. A kind of maple syrup tamale, I now know enough to realize. When I first began overnighthing with them they urged me to try mine that way, but the thought of my mother's response to something like that made me figure I might as well not get converted. At other meals too Ray and Mary Ellen squooged their food around in remarkable ways and ate only as much of it as they felt like. I tell you, it shocked me--people my own age leaving plates that looked more as if they'd been walked through than eaten from.) Ray's mother, Genevieve, kept that big two-story house dusted and doiled to a fare-you-well. Mary Ellen already had her mind set on being a nurse--she was a kind of starchy kid anyway, so it probably was a good enough idea--and you couldn't scratch a finger around there without her wanting to daub it with Mercurochrome and wrap you up like a mummy.

Then there was Ray's father, Ed. You could hang your hat on

Ed Heany's habits. Every evening he clicked the lock on the door of the lumber yard office as if it was the final stroke needed to complete six o'clock, and if he wasn't walking in the kitchen door

I wanted to shout in his face that there had been a time when he was ^{the} expert on infatuation, ^{enough} ~~and~~ right; that if Lucas had not outwitted him and sent Nancy out of reach and us here to the North Fork, Robert High-and-Mighty Barclay would have taken his own uncle's woman. ~~How~~

soon they forget/truth is a duet.

must be

What had been a quick infection in him had escaped every cure I could try on myself but it was the same ill. Why couldn't he of all people see so, why--

Rob was resuming, "I kick myself--"

"You needn't," I tossed in on him, "I'll be glad to help you at it."

--Angus, serious now. I kick myself that I didn't see this earlier, why you and Adair aren't more glad with each other. It wasn't until I saw you with Anna there in Valier that I put two and two together."

"Rob, you have a major tendency, when you put two and two together, to come out with twenty-two."

Rob surged on: "I've known you forever but I can't understand this Anna side of you. How it is that you're still smitten with her." Smitten? I was totally harpooned, and this man was not willing to make himself understand that. Rob stood planted, earnest, waiting. "All I'm asking is how you can let a thing like this go on and on." →

at five minutes after six, Genevieve started peering out the kitchen window to see what had happened to him. Another five minutes, Ed washing up and toweling down, and supper began. As soon as supper

was over Ed sat at the kitchen table going through the Falls Leader and visiting with Genevieve while she did the dishes. his deep voice came his son my age, Ray. I could see perfectly damn well what was intended here, and that's the way it did happen. Off up the South Fork our fathers rode to eyeball a stand of timber which interested Ed for fence posts he could sell at his lumber yard, and Ray and I were left to entertain one another.

Living out there at English Creek I always was stumped about what of my existence would interest any other boy in the world. There was the knoll with the view all the way to the Sweetgrass Hills.

Rob was resuming, "I kick myself--" "You needn't," I tossed in on him, "I'll be glad to help you

--Angus, serious now. I kick myself that I didn't see this

this Anna side of you. How it is that you're still smitten with her." Smitten? I was to tally harpooned, and this man was not willing to make himself understand that. Rob stood planted, earnest, waiting. "All I'm saying is how you can let a thing like this go on and on."

He meant for this conversation to work as a poultice, I knew. But

it wasn't going to.

^{Rob.} "Let me understand this, You're telling me I owe you more

^{about this}
~~explanation~~ than my own wife is content with?"

^{Adair}
"Adair is not content with this, how can she be? You moping like

a kicked pup, another man's wife always on your mind. What woman can accept that?"

What Barclay? was his real question, wasn't it. Now that I saw

where this storm had come from I was sad as well as angry. The old great gulf, life as it came to the McCaskills and as the Barclays expected it to come to them.

4 But Rob, you ~~of all people~~. You who indeed had known me forever.

You, now, who

~~that you~~ would not listen and then say, yes, I see, you have a friend

in me for always, if I can help I will and if not I'll stand clear.

You who

^{stood}

~~that you~~ instead ~~would stand~~ here in-lawing me relentlessly. I got

^{in a hurry}
rid of sad and stayed with angry. "Rob, I'm telling you. ⁴ This isn't yours to do. You can't

interfere into my life and Adair's this way. So don't even start

to try."

"Interfere? Angus, you're not taking this in the spirit ^{it's} I meant.

All I want is for you and Adair not to come apart over--over Anna. Can

you at least promise me that?"

"Booger eater," I promptly gave him back.

"Pus gut."

"Turd bird."

As I remember it, I held myself in admirable rein until Ray came

out with "turkey dink."

For some reason that one did it. I swung on Ray and caught him just in front of the left ear. Unluckily, not quite hard enough to knock him down.

He popped me back, alongside the neck. We each got in a few more

We each were strong enough, and outraged enough, to tip

You, now, who

in me for always, if I can help I will and if not I'll stand clear.

You who stood
that you instead would stand here in-lawing me relentlessly. I got
This isn't yours to do.
rid of sad and stayed with angry. "Rob, I'm telling you. You can't

interfere into my life and Abair's this way. So don't even start

to try."

"Interfere? Angus, you're not taking this in the spirit I meant.

All I want is for you and Abair not to come apart over--over Anna. Can

You at least promise me that?"

"Promise--? Where in all hell do you think you get ^a ~~that~~ right

like that--that I have to promise you anything about my own marriage?

Listen to yourself ^{here} a minute. ~~Rob~~ This is idiots out at play, the pair
is what this is."

of us yammering on and on at this, ~~4~~ I swung up onto Scorpion and looked
down at Rob. "If it'll close you on this topic, I'll tell you this much:

Adair and I aren't ^{not} coming apart over Anna Reese. All right?"

Rob as he studied up at me was a mixture of suppressed ire and obvious
discomfiture. I at least thought the decent side, discomfiture, won out
when he ~~spoke~~ ⁴ spoke: "All right, Angus. We'll leave ^{this} ~~at~~ at what you ~~just~~ just
said."

—
I let my breath out slowly over the next several days. But it
seemed to have passed, that notion of Rob's that he had a say in
how Adair and I were to manage our marriage. Rob being all he was
to me, I was able to forgive him the incident, although not ~~entirely~~
~~able to~~ forget it.

—

Rob's spat with me was not the only perturbation that lingered in the smoked memory of 1910. The other had begun to show up in the benchland country to the south of Scotch Heaven and Gros Ventre; the wind-blown and slope-skewed landscape where Herbert's freight wagon tilted its way through, twenty years earlier, while a pair of greenlings named Angus McCaskill and Rob Barclay trudged behind.

The dry and ^{bottom}empty edge of the

Two country, which now, ~~immediately~~ who would have ever thought it, was drawing in people ^{exactly}precisely because it was dry and empty.

They were a few families at first, and then several, and then more.

709/ The homesteaders who were alighting on dry-land claims instead of the irrigated acres of Valier and the other water projects.

It took Stanley Meixell to dub them so sadly right. After riding past one or another of their shanties optimistically sited up a wind-funneling coulee or atop a shelterless bench of thin soil and plentiful rock, Stanley bestowed: "Homestead, huh? Kind of looks to me like more stead than home." And that is what they became in Scotch Heaven's askance parlance of them: the 'steaders.

Settlers who were coming too late or too poor to obtain watered land and so were taking up arid acres and trusting to rain/all dry land instead.

Men and women and children who had heard of Montana's bonanza of space and were giving up their other lives to make themselves into farmers instead.

Investors of the next ~~three~~ years of their hopes, into a landscape that was likely to give them back indifference instead.

Watching the 'steaders come, the first few in 1910 and more in ~~1911~~ the next summer and the summer after that, I couldn't not ask, if only to myself:

no 9) Was this what ^{that dry} the land was meant for--^{plowed} grain rows like columns on a calendar, a house and chicken coop every quarter of a mile? In ^{indubitably} ^{definitely} homesteading terms, it was. But when can ^{Or no, not here?} the land say, enough? We of Scotch Heaven believed we were doing it ^{as, as could be} right--you can't live anywhere without some such belief--^{can you} but then we had the North Fork, water bright and clear on the land. At Valier and the other irrigation projects, those settlers too had water, ditch water. But ^{these} ~~the~~ ones out on the ^{thirsty} ~~treacherous~~ benchlands... ~~dry~~ I grant that Rob and I knew next to nothing ~~dry land...~~

There
was
this, too

Maybe
it was
my years

Watching the 'stealers come, the first few in 1910 and more in

from the next summer and the summer after that, I couldn't not ask,

it only to myself:

Finally, on November 10, 1913, the Department of the Interior authorized a school for Metlakahla. Within three weeks, Bureau of Education teacher Charles D. Jones had enrolled 120 students. Duncan, with some twenty students remaining in his own school, pointedly ignored Jones. Even more pointedly, Duncan turned off the pipeline to the public hydrant which was the central source of water for the village, then fenced off the wharf so that the Indians could not use it either.

These troubles brought school administrator Beattie to Metlakahla in February 1914. Beattie called Duncan's arguments "disconnected ranting" and urged his superiors to "bring authority to bear on Mr. Duncan and cause him to cease his tyrannical treatment of the natives." Secretary of

A controversy arose with the Department of the Interior that there was no other solution to the irreconcilable differences between Duncan and his once-loyal followers. Secretary of the Interior Lane reached back into the uncertainties of the original Annette Island land grant to strip away the missionary's legal basis for ownership. On June 26, 1915, Lane issued a decision that the government owned all structures on Annette Island. Superintendent Beattie, who had changed his mind about resigning when the Department of the Interior stiffened against Duncan, was ordered to take over the sawmill, cannery, warehouse, store, city hall, and several other public buildings.

The old missionary watched bitterly as government men strode the boardwalks of Metlakahla. "... We are being treated by the government of the United States much worse than we

typed

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If Rob and I did not know much about homesteading when we came to Montana to undertake it, ^{but} we were royal wizards compared to many of these freshcomers. Here were people straight from jobs in post offices and ribbon stores, arriving with hope and too little else onto the benchlands and into the June-green coulees. Entire families down to the baby at the breast, four-five-six people living in a shanty the size of a woodshed or in a tent while they tried to build a shanty. And meanwhile were struggling too to break the sod and plant a crop, dig a well, achieve a garden. Lads, think of it as a bet the government is making you that you can't last three years on the land. I suppose these 'steaders had to be as Rob and I were when we began in Scotch Heaven, not daring to notice yet that they were laboring colossal days and weeks for a wage of nothing or less. I suppose there is no other way to be a homesteader. Yet, bargaining yourself against the work and the weather is always going to turn out to be greatly more difficult than you can ever expect. Even in Scotch Heaven we had the absences around us, the Speddersons and Tom Mortensen, to remind how harsh and unsure a bet homesteading was. Yet and again, agog as I might be at the numbers of these incomers and aghast as I often was at how little they knew of what they needed to, I could not deny that the 'steaders on their raw dry quarter-section squares were only attempting the same as we had, trying to plaid new lives into this Montana land.

This was bright June. Winter waited four or five months away yet. Nonetheless I began saying a daily prayer to it: be gentle with these pilgrims.

and have
pilgrims
soddy

—

4 Not many days later,

The two waylaid me when I was in my lower meadow making a peaceful reconaissance of the hay prospect there. Angling a look into the ~~buggy~~ ^{Ford} couldn't help but as it halted briskly beside me, I put the query:

"What's this, now--a war council of Clan Barclay?"

Out they climbed, here they were.

(no 4) "Mark this day, McAngus," Rob proclaimed, Lucas equally sunny

beside him. "We're here with the

proposition of a lifetime for you."

"Wait. Before I hear it"--patting each appropriate neighborhood of my body I recited: "Testicles, spectacles, wallet, watch." There's proof I had all my items before the two of you start in on me, just remember."

"Angus, Angus," chided Lucas. "You're as suspicious as the deacon of Ecclefechan. Just hear what we've got in mind, ay?"

"That shouldn't take all day. Bring it out."

"There's hope for you yet, Angus," Rob averred with a great smile.

"Now here's the word that's as good as money in the bank: 'steaders."

He cocked his head and waited a moment for my appreciation before proceeding:

"You know as

well as we do that they're starting to come into this end of the Two country

by the hatful and they can barely recognize ground when they're standing on it."

"And?"

Rob's smile greatened more yet. "And we can be their land locators."

Lucas broke in: "Angus, it's something I ought to've listened to when I first came to Montana, when I was mining." Into his coat pockets



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How many times had I seen this, now. A Barclay locked into
had torn his
rightness. Lucas becoming a builder of the Montana that tore h

hands from him. Rob so outraged toward me about Anna that he pried
away from
my son from me. And now Adair bolting Rob and me into impossible
partnership.

went his stubs, as if he was whole again there at the start of Montana life. "Someone asked old Cariston there in Helena, the same geezer you worked for in his mercantile, Angus, what he did for a living. Do you know what he said? 'I mine the miners, ~~there's~~ where the real money is.' And it's ~~pune~~.true. Every word of it and then some. In a new country the one thing people need is supplies. And what's the supply every homesteader needs first of any? Land, Angus. You and ~~Rob~~^{Robbie} know all this land around here ~~this country~~ by the inch. You're just the ~~ones~~^{lads} to supply homestead sites."

all the
country
around here

in
the
country

I studied from Lucas to Rob, back to Lucas again. ~~Rob alone I~~
Usually Lucas was as measuring as a draper, but Rob plainly had him entirely talked into the gospel of land locating. Rob alone I would have given both barrels of argument ~~at once,~~ but for Lucas's sake I went gentler. "Just how does this rich-making scheme work?"

"Simple as a dimple," Rob attested. "I'll meet people right at the the depots, in Valier and Conrad and Browning--you know they're pouring in by the absolute trainload." They were that. Just recently an entire colony of Belgians came to the Valier land--men, women, children, grandparents, babes, likely cats and canaries too. The Great Northern simply ~~threw~~^{was throwing} open the doors of freight cars in St. Paul, and Montana-bound families ~~tossed~~^{were tossing} in their belongings and themselves.

"I'll ferry them out to here in the Lizzie," Rob strategized, "and here's where you come in, Angus--you're the man with the eye for the land. You'll locate the 'steaders ~~on~~ onto the claims, mark the claim for them, tell them how to file on it, all but give them ~~the~~ their homestead on a ^{china} plate." Lucas just said it, really. What we'll be is land suppliers, pure and simple."

The arguing point to all this couldn't be ignored any longer. "If we had the goods, I could see your supply idea," I told Rob. Then with a nod toward the ~~here~~ south benchlands: "But what land is left around here is thin stuff for homesteading." I paused and gave him a look along with this next: "Concentrate a bit

^{we thought of it ourselves,}
and you'll maybe remember what ~~a paradise it definitely wasn't~~, when you and I walked into this country behind Herbert."

"By our lights, maybe it is scanty land," Rob granted. ~~"But to these 'steaders,~~

~~"By our lights, maybe it is,"~~ Rob granted. ⁷ "But to these 'steaders

it's better than whatever to hell they've had in life so far, ^(now isn't it?) Man,

people are going to come, that's the plain fact of the matter--whether or not we lead them by the hand, they're going to file homestead claims all through this country. They might as well be steered as right as possible, by knowledgable local folk. Which is the same as saying, us.

how
frustrated
them

In that way of looking at it, McAngus, we'll be doing them a major favor, am I right?"

"And charging them ~~some~~ a whack for it," I couldn't help saying of Rob's version of favor.

"Are you so ^{prosperous} ~~rich~~ you can do it for free?" came back at me from him.

"Funny I don't notice the bulges in your pockets."

"Lads, now," Lucas interceded. "Angus, we're not asking for your put the idea on your pillow for a few nights, answer this very minute. Just ~~think on it~~, ay?"

Had they been asking my answer right then, it would have been No, The prosperous problem. with with livestock, in high letters. But. The perpetual problem of homesteads, ~~ships~~ or maybe just with McCaskills: working yourself gray, ~~year~~ year after year, and always seeing the debt years most of the profit years. To now, Adair had never said boo about the fact that where money was concerned we were always getting by, hardly ever getting ahead. So the dollar thoughts were delaying my No a bit, and I ~~really~~ decided to leave matters with the Barclays at: "I'll need to do a lot of that pillow work, and to talk it over with Dair."

111A

"You can save your breath there," Rob tossed off. "She's thoroughly for it."

I gave Rob a look he would have felt a mile away. "You know that already? From her?"

"I happened to mention it to Adair, yes. Angus, she is my sister. I do talk to her once in a blue moon. Not that I'd particularly have to in this case--she's bound to be for anything that'll fetch money the way this will. Who wouldn't be?"

—

"Angus, I know how you feel about this country and the 'steaders,"

Adair said that night. By then we had been thoroughly through it all.

Adair's point that here was a plateful of opportunity on Varick's behalf, as easy a chance as we would ever have at money for his future, his own start in life and land in the years not far ahead now. My lack of any way to refute that, yet my unease about the notion of making myself into a land-locator. "But change always has to happen," she was saying, "doesn't it?"

"The ^{big} question is whether it happens for the better or the worse."

"Either case, what can you really do about it? You and Rob came as settlers to Montana. So are all these others."

"~~But~~ ^{if} they were bringing their own water and trees and decent topsoil, I'd say let everybody and his brother come. But good Christ, this dry-land craziness--Dair, they say there are 'steaders on the flats out north of Conrad ^{now} who haul all their water a couple of miles, a barrel at a time on a stone boat. They strain that cloudy water through a gunny sack as they bucket it into the barrel. My god, what a way to try to live. And these have been wet summers and open winters. What are those people going to do when this country decides ~~to~~ to show them some real weather?"

"I suppose some will make it and some won't," she answered in all calmness. "It's their own decision to come here and try--it's not ours for them." The deep gray eyes were steady on me, asking me to reason as she was.

I could do that. What I wasn't able to manage was the waiting conclusion: that I ought to join in, bells, tambourines and all, with Rob and Lucas in putting people onto land that ought not have to bear any people.

"There's something more, Angus," my wife offered now. "We need "It's not just Varick we need to plan for. It's each other as well." Her silence, my waiting. Then from her: "Adair doesn't know if she can stay, after Varick is grown and gone."

So
Here it was, out.)

no 4 Adair and how long she would reconcile herself to Scotch Heaven, once it became a childless place to her again, had been in my mind with an entire Anna at Valier and so I could not call this a surprise. Stunning, yes, now that it was here, openly said. But all the years since Angus, do you ever have any feeling at all to see Scotland again?, since Do you still want me for a wife, if?, all those years led here, if you were Adair.

I reached her to me, but there was too much in me to speak straight to what she had just said. Adair herself, myself, Anna, past, future, now-- it all crowded me beyond any saying of it. No, only the one decision, the one I had to do ^{at once} rather than let the next years take care of, came to my tongue. If there were three McCaskill lives ^{ahead} that needed finance-- mine of Scotch Heaven, Varick's of the Two Medicine country, Adair's of Scotland or wherever--then I had to find money.

"All right, Dair," I whispered. "We're in business with a couple of Barclays."

#

Squint as hard as you will, you can't see to tomorrow. Had I been told in the wheelwright shop in Nethermuir, Angus, the day will arrive when you trace the hopes of homesteaders onto the American earth with a ^{wagon} ~~handkerchief~~ wrapped buggy wheel...when the turns of that wheel become the clock that starts dew-fresh families on three years of striving...when the wheeltracks across the grass single out another square of earth for the ripping plow...I would have gawped and gulped

out, You have the wrong Angus. Yet there I was, that summer and the next, on the wagon seat with a white handkerchief tied around a wheelspoke to count revolutions by, counting ~~and~~ the ordinations of wheelspin. Fifty. Seeing the craft of my unhearing father, the band of iron encircling the spokes, holding all together to write the future of 'steaders onto Montana. That's a hundred. Conveying, in a single day, lives from what they had abandoned to where they had dreamed of being. A hundred fifty. Here is your first corner of your claim, Mr. and Mrs. Belgium. Mr. Missouri bachelor. Miss Dakota nurse. Mrs. Wisconsin widow. Then to the next corner, and then next, and the next, and the square was drawn, here was your homestead utter and complete:

SE $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 17, Tp. 27 N, Rge. 8 W: the land has been made into arithmetic.)

A sort of weaving,

wasn't it, these ^{numerated} homestead squares, the lives threaded in and out. The weaving mill was America, Montana. But these bare dry-land patches amid the mesh of homesteading... It was said there were twice as many people in Montana now than five years ago. The growth, the 'steader-specked prairies and benchlands and coulees, the instant towns, they were what Lucas dreamed of and Rob calculated on, and I was earning from. →

legal
description

If I could dance ahead into time yet to come, what would I see in this procession of 'steaders that ought not have been let to happen, and what ought to have been encouraged instead? But we never do dance ahead into time, every minute is a tune-step of ours to the past. Say it better, the future is our blindfold dance, and a dance unseen is strangest dance of all, thousands of guesses at once. That was what my 'steaders amounted to, after all. Say that each of these people beside me on the wagon seat was a flip of the coin; half would turn up wrong. And so for two summers I watched ~~my~~ Montana's # 'steaders, Rob and Lucas's 'steaders--my 'steaders--and wondered just which of them were wrong tosses, which would meet only ~~the~~ distress and failure and maybe worse here on this free dry land which was not costless, not nearly.

—

It was a ~~Saturday~~ ^{Helmer} early the next May that there was the ~~Tebbel~~ occurrence.

The family of four was Rob's first delivery, ~~of the first delivery~~ ^{to me}, this new season of 'steadlers. As Rob and the Ford ~~hauled~~ receded back down the road to further depot duty, the newcomers and I sized each other up. The man was loose-jointed, shambly, with a small chin, a small mouth, a small nose, and then a startlingly high and wide forehead.

no 9 The woman was worn, maybe weary after their journey from wherever to Montana, maybe just weary. Two children thin as sticks, the boy a replica two-thirds the size of his father, the girl small yet. Both children and the man stared at me as openly as hawks. As to what they saw in all this eyework ^{on} ~~at~~ me, I do not really know, do I. in just less than a shout:

I introduced myself, and received from the man: "Our name's ^{Helmer} ~~Tebbet~~, but you got to call me Otto."

I invited them into the wagon, and after an odd blank little pause while the rest of the family looked at him and he fidgeted ^{an untrusting} ~~a~~ look at me, up they came.

The ride into the south benchlands was a few miles, and would be longer than that ~~inasmuch as~~ without conversation. I inaugurated:

"Where is it you're from?"

The man peered at me in dumb dismay. Hard of hearing, the poor pilgrim must be. Deaf and a 'steader too ought to ^{be} more hardship than the fidgeting any one soul rated. I ~~was~~ squared around to ~~Tebbet~~ ^{Helner} and repeated my question louder and slower. In a braying voice, he responded: ^{there}

Relief came over him. "Couldn't cut through your brogue, ^{feller} that first time. A ~~person~~ gets so used to hearing American he gets kind of spoiled, I ~~guess~~ ^{reckon} ^{Helner}." I gazed at ~~Tebbet~~ hoping that was what passed for a joke wherever to hell he had been spawned, but no. He rattled on:

"Anyhow, we come from Oblong, Illinois. Ever hear of it?"

"Illinois, yes."

only a couple days' travel from
"Oblong is ~~near to~~ Normal."

"Is it truly. I wouldn't have thought so."

Having had my fill of conviviality Otto ~~Tebbet~~ ^{Helner} style, I whapped the team some encouragement with the reins. Delivering this man and his wan family to their 160 acres of delusion couldn't come too soon for me.

Atop the rim of the benchland, I halted the wagon. Beside me ~~Tebbet~~ ^{Helner} ^{kept} ~~had~~ his head turned in a gawk toward the mountains and the North Fork for so long that I truly wondered if he and I both belonged in the human race. Now he gesticulated for his ~~wife's~~ ^{family's} benefit to the hay-green valley

of the North Fork, the newly-lambled bands of sheep on its ridges around, the graceful wooded line of the creek and its periodic tidy knots that were our houses and outbuildings.

"Hannah, honey, those're what I been telling~~x~~ you about," ~~Those're~~

he resounded to his wife. Noticing that the boy's stare was still ^{fixed} in

my direction rather than onto the Scotch Heaven homesteads, Hebner added

sharp to loud in telling him: "Garland, ⁼⁼ you listen up to what I'm saying~~x~~

here, you hear?" The boy's gaze slowly ^{drifted} moved from me to the North Fork.

~~where he said he would~~

His father by now had reached his proclamation point: "Those're what our homestead is going~~x~~ to be like before you know it."

Bring that moment around to me again and I would utter what I furiously kept myself from uttering at the time. ^{Hebner} ~~Tebbett~~, you major fool,

^{down there.} you're looking at twenty years of stark work~~x~~ Twenty years of building

and contriving and fixing and starting over again. Twenty lambing times,
twenty shearings,
twenty hayings. Twenty Montana winters, each of them so long they add far

beyond that. You're looking at the stubborn vision of Ninian Duff,

you're looking at the ^{tireless ambitions} ~~ventures~~ of Rob Barclay, you're looking at the durable

routes Scorpion and I have worn^{into the ground} back and forth between sheep and

schoolchildren, you're looking at ^{choreworn} ~~wives~~ who put up with more isolation

*was then worn
choreworn*

you're looking at the members of Rob Barclay. You're looking at the quarter
priceless emblems

belong that. You're looking at the superb vision of winter dull,

twenty paintings. Twenty mountain winters, each of them so long they add the
twenty paintings.

and continuing and fixing and starting over again. Twenty painting times,

you're looking at twenty years of stark work. Twenty years of painting

Yet I had to be concerned. It was not like Rob Barclay to not be
his father by now had reached his proclamation point: "Those, to
where he said he would.

here, you hear?" The boy's face slowly moved from me to the north fork.

again to long in telling him: "Barclay," you listen up to what I'm saying.

my direction rather than onto the Scotch heaven homesteads. Hermer added

he responded to his wife. Noticing that the boy's state was still in

of the north fork, the newly-lamped bands of sheep on its ridges slowly,

A kept
watch

and empty distance than anyone sane ought to have to. You cannot judge

this country by idle first glance. I am here to tell you, you cannot.

But no, I was there to guide the ^{Hebners} ~~Tebbets~~ of the world to available acres,

such as they were now. Try to dike this ^{'steader} ~~homestead~~ flood with myself

and all I would get was reputation for being all wet.

I drew a steadying breath. My own gaze ~~looked~~ down into Scotch

~~was helping now.~~

Heaven helped. On the shoulder of Breed Butte between Rob's homestead

~~had come into motion: now~~ and mine, a rider ~~was moving~~ Varick, on his way up to check ^{our} ~~the~~ sheep,

Hebnerian episode.

while I was in the midst of this ~~'steadering enterprise~~. Varick ~~looked~~ on a

horse now looked as big as a man. Already his first year of high school

was nearly behind him. His school year of boarding in town with Lucas

and Nancy and returning to Adair and me only on weekends was his first

footprint away from home, and this summer would

bring his next--he had asked Stanley Meixell for, and received, the

job of choreboy at the ranger station until school began again ~~next~~ in the

fall. ~~It would not be~~ ^{, not many at all, Angus,} many years now ^{yours} until this son of ~~mine~~ would

need to find his own foothold in this country, and so I swung back to

the task of delving with 'steaders.

"Those of us in Scotch Heaven do have a bit of a head start on you,

Helmer
Mr. ~~Tobbet~~, so there's--"

"Otto," he corrected me with a bray.

was setting out

"Otto, then. As I ~~beginning~~ to say, there's no real resemblance
between a settled creek valley and a dry-land homestead. So I don't

AP11
"I'm not accepting that you can ~~miss~~ sniff off after her"--he

jerked his head north toward Anna's route--"Whenever you get the least
can't see that when you're
how is that you the way you are about Anna,
chance. Angus, when you're OO about Anna you're only half married

And
to Adair. That's not enough."

"I'll have to be."

119 B

want to startle you, but here we are at the ~~in~~ available land for you

~~Hebner~~ ^{Hebner} hopped down and
to have a look at." ~~Tebbet~~ ^{Tebbet} gawked south now, across the flat table of
~~his son duplicating the staring inspection~~
gravelly earth sprigged with bunchgrass, while I took the ~~boy and~~ girl

down from his wife and then helped her out of the wagon. We stood in a
at the section marker stone,
covey, the wind steadily finding ways to get at us under and around the

~~Hebner~~ ^{Hebner} ~~hopped down and~~ strode off twenty or so paces toward
the yawning middle of the benchland as if that was the favored outlook.

After a long gander and kicking his heel into the soil, what there was
of it, a number of times, he marched back and took up a stance beside me.

Still scrutinizing the benchland, the shanties and chicken coops and pale

~~Thor~~ ^{Thor} ~~bjornsen~~ ^{bjornsen} ~~homesteads~~, he demanded: "You're
gray-brown furrows of the Keever and ~~Thor~~ ^{Thor} ~~bjornsen~~ homesteads, he demanded: "You're

~~here~~ ^{here} ~~new ground~~ ^{new ground}
dead-sure this ~~is~~ the best piece of ~~land~~?"

Anyone with an eye could see that the benchland was equally stark,

stony, unwelcoming, wherever a ~~look~~ ^{glance} was sent. "None of it is fair Canaan,

was all I could ~~Hebner~~ ^{Hebner} ~~answer~~ ^{answer} ~~Tebbet~~ ^{Tebbet}. "But if here in this ~~end~~ ^{dry-land} of the Two country

is where you ~~want~~ ^{truly} to homestead, right where we're standing is as good
as any."

^{a lot of}
Not ~~much~~ satisfaction for him to find in my words. He leaned away from me and turned a bit so his silent wife would see the shrewdness of what he asked next: "How deep is it to water?"

The question I had been dreading. "I can only tell you this much: ^{Keavers} the ~~Sopers~~ and the ^{Thorselsons} ~~Fayttes~~ dug about forty feet to get their wells."

"Forty! Back in Illinois we could dig down fifteen feet anywhere and get the nicest softest vein of ^{wellwater} ~~water~~ there is!"

^{"Then"} ~~"You~~ ought to have brought one of those ^{matchless} wells with you." I faced

around to his wife, on the chance she might not be so hopeless a case

as him. ^{Helmer} "Mrs. ~~Tebbet~~, you had better know too--the water ^{up} here is hard."

She made no reply. "Just so you know, come first washday," I tried to
 "and you won't cuss me too much."
 prompt, Still nothing from her except that abject gaze at her husband.

By the holy, if she could ~~sit~~^{stand} there wordless and let this ~~Tebbet~~^{Helner} commit

her to a homestead eternity of clothes washed out stiff as planks and of
 By the holy, if she could sit there wordless in the face of a homestead
 a sour grayness in every teaspoon of water she ever used, why then--

"Seems like you ain't overly ~~here ground~~^{Helner}
 "You don't sound all so enthusiastic about this ~~land~~^{land}," Tebbet
 in every teaspoon of water she ever used, and let this Tebbet commit
 now gave me with a suspicious frown.

her to ~~Helner~~^{Helner}
 "Mr. Tebbet, listen--"

"Otto," the man insisted ~~thunderously~~

"Otto, then. Listen a minute. None of this is going to be easy
 or certain, for you and your family. ~~Even~~^{Even} At its best, homesteading is a
 gamble, and it's twice that in these benchlands. A dry-land homestead
 is just what it says it is, dry."

"I didn't notice ~~that~~^{as how} you left us any room back down there along
 the creek," he retorted, making ~~a~~^{only} small attempt to smile around the resentment.

Roust yourself twenty years ago from ~~Longthorpe~~^{Lopside} ~~wherever~~
 it is that spawned you, and there was room along the North Fork, along
 the South Fork, room everywhere across the Two Medicine country. And
 in the same thinking of that I knew that I would not have welcomed Sam

^{Helner}
 Otto ~~Tebbet~~ even then; that anyone who did not come accepting that the homestead life was going to be hard, all of it hard, I did not want at the corner of my eye.

"Let's call this off," I said abruptly. "We're not doing each other any good here."

^{Helner}
 "Call it off!" ~~Tebbet~~ blinked at me, thunderstruck. "This's a funny doggone arrangement you're pullin' on us, seems like," he brayed. "Leadin' us out to this here ground and then givin' us the poormouth about it. This's ^{doggone} ~~dang~~ funny exchange for the money we paid, is what I say."

"I thought you might want to know what you're in for, trying to homestead country such as this. I was obviously wrong. I'll give you your money back and take you ^{in to Gros Ventre.} ~~to town.~~ If you're still set on finding a site, someone in town can do your locating for you."

^{Helner}
 "Nothing ~~doing~~!" ~~Tebbet~~ did not look toward his wife and children, did not look around at the land again; he fixed his gaze onto my face as if defying me to find any way to say him nay. "This ^{here's} ~~what~~ I'm goin' to claim, right where we're at."

"Even against my advice, you want me to mark off the claim?"

119F

"That's what we came all the way out here for."

I wrote ~~HEBNER~~ ^{HEBNER} ^{four} on the corner stakes, climbed into the buggy
and counted the ^{one hundred and fifty} ~~66~~ wheel revolutions north, east, south, and finally
west to the section stone again.

—

By the time that day was done, I knew my crew could not hold any
~~more Hobbits~~, ever. ^{all} ~~Any more~~ ^{from here on} 'steads were going to have to dry-land
 4 In bed that night,
 themselves to death without my help. ~~At supper~~, I said as much to Adair.

"We're back where we started, then," she said as the fact it was.

"Back to just

getting by, and putting nothing ahead ~~for Varick~~."

"There may be a way we can yet," I ^{offered} ~~said~~ to her in the dark. "Dair,
 if I'm going to get us and Varick anywhere in life, it's going to have
 to be some way where I savvy and believe in what I'm doing--something
 I know the tune of." I could feel her waiting.

"Sheep," I announced. "If we were to take on another band of
~~sheep~~, the profit from that we could set aside for Varick."

Silence between us. Until Adair spoke softly: "You've never
 wanted to take on more than the band you and Rob run."

"I'll need to try stretch my philosophy, won't I." Try, for Varick.
 For you, Dair. For myself?

"Do we have the money for another band of sheep?"

"No. ~~Half~~ Half enough, maybe."

"Lucas would have it," she contributed.

more?
4?

you've
never
wanted...

I'll
if I can
stretch
myself
- I can't for
Silence
return
me.

"Lucas took his turn in backing me with sheep, long since. Besides, he's in up to his neck in land dealings these days. No, I think I know who would ~~rather~~ be keener than Lucas for this." Although I didn't look forward to hearing it from him: I never thought I'd see the day, McAngus, when you'd start sounding like me--'More sheep, that's the ticket we need.'

"Dair, I thought I'd see if Rob will partner with us on another band."

^{spoke}
Adair ~~said~~ what I was counting on, from her, from her brother.

"He will."

—————

What I had not counted on was Rob's notion of where we ought to put a new band of sheep. "Angus, I won't go for putting any more sheep up there in Meixell's ^{hip} pocket, even if the damn man would let us."

If not on the national forest, then we'd have to rent grazing somewhere else, I pointed out to him--maybe in the Choteau country, ~~maybe~~ not that there was that much open range left there or any--[#] "Give me a couple of days," Rob said. "I just maybe know the place for those sheep, where Meixell or some ~~highwayman~~ ^{one} Choteau geezer either won't have a hoot in hell to say about them."

[#] — The couple of days later, Rob's announcement was pure jubilation.

"The Reservation! Angus, you remember that Two Medicine grass-- elephants could be grazed on it. The Blackfeet don't know anything to do with it but sit and look at it."

I stirred. "Rob, hold your water a minute here. Those days of You know as well as I do why the Agency fenced the cow outfits out. That old business of 'borrowing' Reservation grass--"

you know
as well
as I do
why

"'Borrow*', who said anything about 'borrow'?" We'll be paying good
lease money to the Blackfeet. ~~This is every-dot legal, Angus. The agent~~

--you can ask your pocket whether there's any 'borrowing' to this. No,

this is every-dot legal, Angus. The agent

will let us on ~~anywhere~~ that big ridge north of the Two Medicine River

with the sheep

the first of the month. Man, you can't beat this with a stick! A full

summer on that grass and we'll have lambs fat as butter."

I gave it hard thought, sheep on the ^{desired} Blackfeet grass. Sheep were
not plows that ripped the sod, sheep with a good herder were not cattle
casually flung Double W style.

~~I gave it hard thought, sheep on the Blackfeet grass.~~ Prairie
that had supported buffalo herds vast as stormclouds ought to be able
to withstand a careful load of sheep.)

no 4

If Rob saw this band as a ladle to get
at the cream of Reservation grass, so be it. With Davie Erskine as
herder, I could see to it the summer of ^{leased} grazing was kept civil and civic.

I wanted it begun right, too.

"Those are some miles, from here to the Two Medicine," I pointed out. Forty or more, in fact.

"Sheep have feet," retorted Rob. As I knew, though, the days ~~at~~ it would take to trail the sheep were not going to be his favorite pastime.

"I hate like the dickens to lose that many days of the locating business, but I suppose--"

Without ^{needing} ~~having~~ to think I said: "I'll take the sheep up." I
 felt ^{Rob} ~~Lucas~~ study me. Probably it was all too plain that I didn't
 want to see ^{his next} ~~the spring~~ crop of 'steaders. Then from him:

"Angus, you're made of gold and oak. ~~Want to make some right to you~~
 the Reservation band ^{I'll}
 If you can handle ~~the sheep~~ until shearing ~~and I'll~~ make it right to you
 when we settle up this fall."

—

They were a band of beauties, our new sheep: the top cut of ewes and their six-week lambs from the big Thorsen sheep outfit in the Choteau country. And confident grazers, definitely confident. The morning Varick and Davie and I bunched them to begin the journey from Scotch Heaven to the Reservation, making them leave the green slopes above the North Fork was sheer work. You could all but hear

their single creed and conviction in the blatting back and forth, why leave proven grass for not proven? That first ^{hour or so} ~~morning~~ it seemed that

every time I looked around a bunch breaker was taking off across the countryside at a jig trot, her lamb and twenty others in a scampering tail behind her. ^{Relentlessly} ~~Eventually~~ Varick and Davie and I dogged that

at last formed itself and ^{cloud} foolishness out of them, and the band ~~began~~ to move like a hoofed ~~army~~

^{toward} ~~across~~ the benchland between the North Fork and Noon creek, toward the road to the Two Medicine River.

Telling Varick and Davie I'd be with them shortly, I rode back down to the house.

Telling H & D
not to go
4 rode
not to go
also

"Varick and I ^{ought to} ~~should~~ be ~~now~~ more than a week, Dair. Four days to get the sheep there, a day or two to help Davie settle in, and then the ride home."

"I'll look for you when I see you coming," she said.

"We're going a famous route, you know. A wife of mine came into this country by way of it," I said from ~~high~~ high spirits. "My expectation is

that there'll be monuments to her every mile along the way." and surprised me with:

Adair smiled. "I hope there's not one at a certain coulee south of the Two Medicine River." Coachman, a so-young Adair to Rob at the reins, are there any conveniences at all along this route of yours? Myself ready to throttle Rob as she disappeared to piddle: Your idea was to get her over here and marry her off to me, wasn't it? The inimitable Rob: If it worked out that way... Rob's was the way it had worked out, although whether life after the wedding vow was working out for Adair and me seemed ever an open question.

"Dair?" ^{of this} The impulse ^{felt} deeper, truer, even as I began to ^{say} ~~say~~ it:

"Come along with us, why not. To the Two Medicine."

Now the surprise was hers. "To christen the monuments?" she asked lightly.

of surprised me / my surprise me

"I'm talking serious here. ~~ts~~ You can ride the wagon with Davie,
or have a turn on Scorpion ~~mx~~ whenever you feel like. But just come,
why don't you. See all that country again." With me ~~your~~ who is your
even if the country and I
husband, ~~because you innocently~~ are not what you came expecting. With
our son of this country and its namesake Two Medicine River. ~~We three~~ Come and
make us the complete three, the McCaskills of Montana, America.

She watched me as if sympathetic to what I was saying, but then
shook her head. "I suppose I think I saw the country as much as I
am able to that first time, Angus. No, I'd better ~~my~~ stay." ~~Adair~~ She
lifted her head in the self-mocking way and pronounced: "Adair will take
care of here while you and Varick have to be there."

"Well, I tried. But if you can't be budged without a crowbar--"
Surprising again, how strong my pang that ~~Adair~~ she wouldn't be sharing
this Two Medicine journey with me. "Goodbye, ~~Love~~ Dair."
This wife of mine
~~she~~ came up on tiptoes and kissed me memorably. "Goodbye yourself,
Angus McCaskill."

Varick
saying always
+ had better
get used to--
Practicing
to be
done again.

impression
only then
it was
not on
I will

—

132
"I'm talking I saw what was in his eyes. He watched me as if sympathetic to what I was saying, but then

or have a turn on Scorpion as whenever you feel like. But just come,

why don't you. See all that country again." With me again who is your

husband, because you innocently even if the country and I are not what you came expecting. With

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She watched me as if sympathetic to what I was saying, but then

shook her head. "I suppose I think I saw the country that first time,

Angus.

came of here while you and Varick have to be there."

The bell of the lead wether, the latest Percy, led us all.

(no #)

A thousand ewes and their thousand lambs, and Varick and Davie

and I and two sheepdogs to propel them across forty miles to the northern

grass. By all known rules of good sense there was much that I ought

to have been apprehensive about. Weather first and last. The very

morning we started, the mountains looked windy, rain-brewing; one of

those restless days of the Rockies when a storm seems to be issuing

out of every canyon, too many to ^{ever} possibly miss us. Well, we of Scotch

Heaven had seen weather before. The ^{under-the-sky} perils that sheep invite on themselves

were another matter. ~~There could be~~ fatal patches of death camas or

^{could be hiding} lupine ahead amid these grass miles that neither Davie nor I had local

knowledge of. ^{which would be their last wander.} Alkali bogs that lambs could wander into, ~~The creeks~~

Of course, coyotes. Cayuse...Papoose...Coyote. Rob, Angus, is our

serenade coming from a coyote? Badger Creek two days ahead, and Birch

Creek a day before that, creeks usually lazily fordable but if spring runoff

was still brimming them... Things left, right and sideways all could go

wrong, but they were going to have to do it over the top of me, weren't

they. I had never in my life felt so troubleproof. This I ~~can~~ ^{master,} do,

know the tune of,

conviction sang in me from the first minute of that sheep drive. This

band of sheep was Varick's future, his foothold into Two Medicine life

when he would need it. ~~By then~~ For his sake, if it ended up that I

had to carry each and every last wonderful woolly fool of a sheep on my back these forty miles, this I know the tune of.

As the first hard drops of rain swept onto us we were shoving
the sheep ~~onto~~ ^{across} the short bridge ~~across~~ ^{over} Noon Creek. In less time than
it takes to tell, Varick and ^{Darrie and} I in our ~~slick~~ slickers were wet yellow
creatures, the ewes and lambs were gray wet ones, as we pressed across
creek water through storm water. But the rain was traveling through so
swiftly that the lambs did not stay chilled and begin to stiffen too
much to walk, and there was the first woe we hadn't met.

This I ~~can do~~. know the time of.

All of life seemed fresh, sharp, to me as we spread the sheep into a
quick grazing pace. The mountains from an
angle different ~~from~~ ^{than} the one I had ~~seen~~ ^{known} every day for more than twenty
years were somehow an encouragement ^{ing chorus up there,} news that the world is more than
the everyday route of our eyes. I could even look west to the Reese
ranch nestled in the farthest willow bends of Noon Creek and not crush
down under the weight of what my life and Anna's could have been, much.
After a last glance west I swallowed away the thought of her,

love for Anna Ramsay Reese, at least away as far as it would ever go,

and dogged my wing of the band of sheep into quicker steps, and pointed us north.

Now the rise of the long hills beyond the Double W, their pancake summits the high flat edge of the Birch ^{Birch Creek} country ahead. I called out to Davie, and to Adair in my imagination, that these bare ridgelines were in dire need of our sheepherder monuments. But there are monuments not just of stone, aren't there. When the sheep were topping that first great ridge north of where the buildings of the Double W lay white and sprawling, there on that divide I climbed off Scorpion, unbuttoned my slicker, and pissed down in the direction of Wampus Cat Williamson.

Overnight at Birch Creek, and then across the ford of the creek at dawn and through the gate of the Reservation fence and into the first of the Blackfeet Reservation and a land immediately different, ^{more} drier, more prairielike, the benchlands flatter and more isolated.

no 41 Here toward the northern heart of the Two country, every distance seemed to increase, as if giving space to the Blackfeet grassland. The mountains no longer were head-on and near, but marching off northwestward toward the peak called the Chief which stood out separate as if reviewing

his?
(Davie's
monuments)

no
bedden
don't

no
Rover
face

them. Benchlands here were bigger and higher and more separate than we were used to, so that cattle and horses looked surprisingly small in the Indian pastures we passed, and when I rode ahead a mile or so to be sure of water, ^{for noon,} our band of sheep was hard to spot at all.

know the tune of. But did I.
~~this~~ This I ~~can do~~. At the end of that day, bridgeless Badger Creek.

Bridgeless and brimfull. Time to turn sheep into fish. I had Varick

lead Percy across, the wether,

^{to sheep from} uneasy about the creek water up to his belly but going through with his leadership role. His followers were none. For an endless hour there on the brink of dark, we relearned that making sheep wade water is a task that would cause a convent to curse in chorus. At last by main strength Varick and I half-led half-hurled enough sheep into the water to give the others the idea, and the community swim began. ^{crack} _{p role...}

no 9 There was a last mob of lambs, frantic about not being across with their mamas but also frantic about the water. Varick and Davie and the dogs and I fought them into the creek, lambs splashing, ~~missing~~ thrashing, blatting, and when there ~~was nothing more to do~~ were no more kinds of panic to invent, swimming. This I ~~can do~~ know the tune of. _{cut off}

From dawn of the next day, with not a stormcloud in the Blackfeet sky and a fine solid bridge ahead of us at the Two Medicine River, I could feel our ~~successful~~ ^{great} journey as if it already had happened, as if now we, Varick and I and our poor ^{bent} Davie, we incomparable three had only to walk steadily in its tracks. Hour on hour, life sang out to me.

Any moment that my eyes were not on the sheep and the land, they were on Varick. More and more he was growing to resemble me; the long frame, the face that was a mustacheless version of mine, probably of all McCaskills back to old Alexander hewing the Bell Rock lighthouse into the sea. The job was there...it was to be done. We ~~were~~ still were living resemblances of old Alexander Angus McCaskill in that, too, ~~work-deft~~ ^{is work} this son of mine born attuned to this country and I who had spent every effort I knew to learn it. Time upon time that day, I stood in my stirrups and gazed for the sheer pleasure of gazing.

1130A

(no 41) →

The land ^{rolled} ~~rolling~~ north with ^{grassy} promise in every

man
you
cat

^{we were} ridge. The pothole lakes ~~I was~~ passing, with clouds of ducks indignantly

rising at the sight of ^{us} ~~us~~, seemed a ^{wondrous} ~~wonderful~~ advent. Even ^{old Scorpion under me} ~~Felloe~~

seemed more interested in ~~him~~ being a horse.

By the holy, I was right. Right to have brought these sheep, for

Varick's sake. Right, even, to have married Adair and persisted through

^{distanced life together}
our strange ~~as~~ if this strong son was our result.

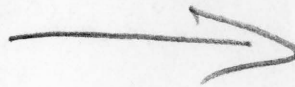


We came to the Two Medicine River in sunny mid-afternoon and were met by gusts of west wind that shimmered the strong new green of the cottonwood and aspen groves into the lighter tint of the leaves' bottom sides, so that tree after tree seemed to be trying to turn itself inside out. In the moving air as we and the sheep went down the high bluff, a crow lifted off, straight up and lofted backwards, letting the gale loop him upward. I called to Varick my theory that maybe wind and not water had bored this colossal open tunnel the Two Medicine flowed through. And then we bedded the sheep, under the tall trees beside the river.

add.
by 1/20
clips

beaded.
"keep
150 ft.
night?"

When morning came, I was sorry this was about to be over. All the green miles of May that we



~~I was sorry it was about to be over. All the green miles of May that we~~

had come, the saddle hours in company with Varick, the hand-to-hand
contest with the sheep to impel them across brimming Badger Creek,
yesterday's sight of the Two Medicine ^{and its buffalo} cliffs like the edge of an older
and more patient planet. Every minute of it I ~~eagerly~~ ^{keenly} would have
lived over and over again. This I ~~knew~~ ^{knew} the tune of.

~~This is
can
master~~

The sheep crossed the bridge of the Two Medicine in a series of
hoofed stammers. Up the long slope from the river Varick and Davie and
the dogs and I pushed them. When they were atop the brow of the first
big ridge north of the river, we called ourselves off and simply stood
to watch.

On the lovely grass that once fed the buffalo, the sheep spread
themselves into a calm cloud-colored scatter and began to graze, that
first day of June of 1914.

me e
Angus-Lucas NF
discussion?

What can you have in life? Who gets to do the portioning?

The sheep crossed the bridge of the Two Medicine in a series of
hoofed stammers. Up the long slope from the river Varick and Davis and
the dogs and I pushed them. When they were atop the brow of the first
big ridge north of the river, we called ourselves off and simply stood
to watch.

On the lovely grass that once fed the buffalo, the sheep spread
themselves into a calm cloud-colored scatter and began to graze, that

first day of June of 1911.