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~~Manly - the rest~~

TWO MEDICINE

With water projects abounding from the Sun River in the south to the Two Medicine River in the north, it is evident that the current creed of our region of Montana is "we'll dam every coulee, we'll irrigate every mountain." But the betterment of nature goes on apace in other ways as well. Anna Reese and children Lisabeth and Peter visited Isaac Reese at St. Mary Lake for three days last week, where Isaac is providing the workhorses for the task of building the roadbed from St. Mary to Babb. Isaac sends word through Anna that the summer's work on this and other Glacier National Park roads and trails is progressing satisfactorily.

--Gros Ventre Weekly Gleaner, July 2, 1914

"Prrrrr prrrrr. Right along, Percy, that's the ~~way~~, into the chute, earn a brown cracker. Prrrrr prrrrr. Bring them for their haircut, Percy. Prrrrr."

It stays with me like a verse known by heart, that first ever Two Medicine day of shearing and ~~what~~ ^{all} it brought. Our site of pens and tents atop the arching grass ridge above the river was like being on the bald brow of the earth, with ~~all~~ ^{the sunning} features of the summer face ^{everywhere} of the land delineated below. In the three weeks since Varick and I

departed from

~~left~~ Davie with his browsing cloud of sheep, the Reservation grass had crisped from green to tan, the pothole lakes now were wearing sober

collars of dried shore, the bannerlike flow of the Two Medicine River

had drawn down to orderly instead of headlong. Even the weather was

taking a spell of mildness, a day of bright blue positively innocent

of any intention to bring cold rain pouncing onto newly naked and

shelterless sheep, and with that off my mind I could work at the cutting

gate with an eye to other horizons than the storm foundry of ~~the~~ ^{those} mountains

to the west. A long prairie swooped from our shearing summit several

miles north to Browning and its line of railroad, iron thread to cities

and oceans; the chasm of the Two Medicine River burrowed eastward to graft

itself into the next channel of flow, the Marias, and next after that

the twinned forces of water set forth together to the Missouri--every

view from up here was mighty. ⁹ Not that any scenery short of heaven's

~~ease~~ was ever going to ~~change~~ the hard first hours of shearing. The crew

of shearers laboriously relearning the patterns of the work from the

year before. The sheep alarmed and anarchic. But I could grin at all

Troublewood

that and more. ~~The~~ mood I brought here to the Two Medicine when Varick

~~Varick morning~~

~~Afternoon~~

~~angry cold~~
~~A cold~~

and Davie and I trailed the sheep was still in command of me, still
the frame of all I saw and thought as the swirling commotion of a
thousand ewes was being turned into the ritual of wool. Life and I
still were ~~in~~ hand in hand, weren't we, life.

Past noon, whenever I found chance to gaze up from my cutting gate,
it was south, direction of Scotch Heaven and home, that needed my watching.

Up from the great trench of the Two Medicine River the Gros Ventre-to-
Browning road wove itself in a narrow braid of wheeltracks worn into

the ground, but Rob still had not appeared on that road as promised. First
that first day,

thing after breakfast, Angus, I've got a 'steader to take out to see

in the Lizzie
his claim, but I'll drive up the minute after that's done. You can

get the shearers under way and then I'll be there to pitch in--you

gimp for
and the sheep can get along without me that long, can't you? Aye, yes

and yea, Rob. We could do that and were. It was plain as ~~day~~ ^{noonday} that

these Two Medicine sheep were nowhere near Rob's central enthusiasm

this summer, but I didn't mind. In the eventual, these sheep were not

anyway
for his benefit nor for mine, but for Varick's.



I thought of my son, man of employment now at the ripe age of fifteen, somewhere beside Stanley Meixell there on distant Phantom Woman Mountain or Roman Reef or other venue of the Two Medicine National Forest, hard at the tasks of summer. He'll have misfortunes great and small/
He'll be a credit to us all.

~~at the tasks of summer.~~ In summers to come, if Adair and I could make our financial intention come true, Varick could have his own sheep in those mountains, could be as much a master of flocks ~~as much~~ as Rob or I ever were. So it was befitting that I was here amid earnful sheep, seeing across the miles ~~to~~ from the Two Medicine to Varick's future.

What I still was not seeing any clue of was Rob. I had to be a bit concerned that he wasn't making his appearance at this shearing camp by now. ~~This~~ ^{unlike} ~~It was not like~~ Rob Barclay, to not be where he said he would. As time kept passing, it more than once brought the thought, Rob, is that automobile of yours on its side in a gully somewhere and you under it? I would give him until suppertime, and then serious searching would need to commence.

"Prrrrr, Percy, bring them, that's the lad. Follow Percy, ladies. Time to get out of those winter coats. Prrrrr."

Prog
it
night
disposer
driving

As the end of the afternoon neared I at last saw a wagon begin to climb the road from the river toward our shearing operation. This ~~now~~
 possibly was Rob, resorting to hoof and wheel if his automobile had disgraced itself in some way, and so I kept watch between my chute duties. Before long, though, I could make out that there were most likely three people on the wagon seat, ~~probably~~ a family of Blackfeet going in to Sherburne's trading post ~~in~~ Browning. I dismissed ~~interest in~~ ascending the wagon and went back to sluicing sheep into the shearers' catch pens.

When I happened to glance down the ridge again, the wagon was less than a quarter of a mile away and it was no Blackfeet rig, not with that pair of matched sorrels and the freshly-painted yellow wheel spokes. A gaping moment before I could let myself admit it, the shoulders-back erectness of the driver made me know definitely.

Anna at the reins. Her daughter and son on either side of her.

— She brought the wagon to a stop near the shearing pen. I went flabbergasted over to her dumbfounded. "Anna!" I greeted with more than I wanted to show in front of Lisabeth and Peter, but couldn't help.

mild
weather
May

They were just going to have to take my warm tone as surprised hospitality; in their lack of years, how could they know it as anything more? I made myself speed on to: "You're no small distance from
Noon Creek."

"Angus, hello again." Anna provided me her lifegiving half-smile.)

no⁴ "That husband of mine

is even farther," she divulged. "Isaac is building roads in the national park. ~~this summer~~ He'll be away most of the summer, so we're going up to St. Mary to spend some days with him."

Except for the light veil of time that had put a few small wrinkles into her forehead and at the edges of those forthright eyes, she could have been the glorious young woman gazing back at me that first instant I stepped into her schoolhouse.)

Except for whatever propriety that had managed to find me now that I was a husband and a father, I still was the surprised smitten caller

~~down on that~~ who was perfectly ready to rub my nose off kissing her shadow ~~out~~

schoolroom walls.)

Our eyes held. Was I imagining, or were we both watching this moment thousands and thousands of with greatest care? → "Angus"--how many times, across

the past 17 years, had I missed her saying my name--"how far is it into Browning for the night?"

estimated privilege had an behaving and "msg off again".

except for mistake of a jug had just sent to the right off the

I don't won a brief of beginning had just visiting repeated

unless nothing beatiques and saw like I could a bus broad and a saw

had no mistake

All along the cornice of the big hotel
tax track had been plowed. Icicles hung like winter's laundry.

5A

Eight or ten miles, and I of course ~~said~~ ten. This sudden wild

chance thumped in me as I said what civility would say but with greatly

"That's a lot of wagonwork yet,
more behind it: "Plenty of miles, before dark. You're welcome to stay

here, do I even need to say." >

here." I indicated the shearing camp, our little tent town, oasis ^{impromptu} amid the grassy miles if she would just see it that way.,

~~amid the grassy miles.~~ "Mrs. Veitch is cooking for the crew--you could share the cook tent with her and have proper company for the night."

"Mother, let's!" from the boy Peter, craning his neck toward

the hubbub of the wrangling corral and the

rhythmed grooves of the shearers at work.
men of the crew.

Anna looked north across the expanse of prairie to Browning, the

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(George Veitch)
girl Lisabeth so much like her in face and bearing as she gauged the miles to Browning too.

Anna, stay. I want to see you, here, now, in this least likely place. That same desperate ~~chorus~~ chant in me from the day when Adair and I were wed, yet not the same. This time there was no division in the chorus. This time it wanted only one outcome. Stay, Anna. I want to see you, here, now, in this least likely place.

When Anna stated, "It is a distance--I suppose we had better stay here for the night," Lisabeth nodded firmly, a separate but concurring decision. I breathed a thanks to Montana's geography for its helpful surplus of miles. ~~Young Peter yipped his pleasure and asked to go watch the shearing, could he please, and was away.~~

I helped Lisabeth down from the wagon, then her mother, aware as deep as sensation can go that I was touching the person who might have been my daughter and then the person who might have been my wife.

"We'll of course lend Mrs. Veitch a hand with supper," Anna was detailing to Lisabeth now, "but I don't feel we should impose on her for the night. Under the wagon served us perfectly fine last night and it will again." Both,

"The bed's going to be a snug fit."

Adair turned her face toward me in the lamplight. She asked as

if it was the inquiry she always made in sheepwagons:

"Is that a promise?"

there's no reason why it won't again." Anna sent her gaze around the shearing camp, her eyes eventually coming ~~-----~~ back across my face and lingering a bit there. Or was I imagining? "Beth," she spoke to her daughter,

"why don't you go see the shearing with Peter,
before we pay our respects
to the cook tent.

Mr. McCaskill can help me with our things from the wagon."

The girl's eyes, the same direct sky-source blue as her mother's, examined the bedrolls and other travel gear in the back of the wagon, then Anna and myself as if weighing the capability of adults in such matters. Evidently satisfied that the tasks were not beyond us, she gave that decisive nod again and went to join Peter at the shearing pen. I

- eyes
- up
- across
- down

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watched her go in a gait of grace that was more than a girl's. Lisabeth
was, what, fourteen now, and womanhood had its next priestess arriving.

I said to Anna, "She resembles you so much it must be like meeting
yourself in the mirror."

"People think we're as alike as eggs, yes. ^{Beth} She has a mind of her
own, though." Anna glanced at me. "But then I suppose there are those
who would say an independent child serves me right."

"Send me anybody who says so much as word number one against you
and I'll pound the tongue out of him for you."

Her gaze stayed on me. "You would, too, wouldn't you, Angus.
In spite of everything, you would."

Yes and then some. I would defend her in any arena, even the one
within myself. Every instant of the next minutes, as I helped ^{Anna} her

unhitch the sorrel team and ~~then~~ situate her family's night gear under

the shelter of the wagon, and then accompanied her to the shearing pen
^{adult} a discreet ~~distance~~ distance from where Lisabeth and Peter were ~~were~~ watching the

clipwork, it was beyond belief to me that, yet and now, this still
could be so; but I felt as thundershook by love for this woman as on
that first giddy ride hom~~e~~ from the Noon Creek schoolhouse when it was
all I could do not to fall off the back of Scorpion. Not to fall off
the planet, for that matter.

Like a dozen marionettes, the shearers made their patterned motions, stooping, clipping, rising to begin over again. Like betrayed
The sheep, betrayed and dismayed, gave up their buttery fleeces with helpless blots. While I was there beside Anna assiduously spectating the shearing pageant, my mind was everywhere else.

I knew I had only moments in which to contrive, before ~~Annie~~^{Ale} gathered Lisabeth and they ~~went~~^{marched} off to the cook tent. Yet she wasn't showing great sign of going, was she. → Watching wool depart from sheep seemed the most ~~riveting~~^{absorbing} activity either of us could imagine.

"Anna," I finally began, then found nowhere to go next but ~~to~~^{onto}:

"The times we meet up are few and far between."

"Yes, they are. And now you're busy here--I mustn't take up
~~Angus~~
your time!"

"No, ~~I~~^{thoroughly} wish you would." I signaled to Davie to ~~run~~^{come up and work} the cutting gate for the next ~~refill~~^{batch} of ewes into the catch pens.

"I've had my fill of wool today, the crew can get along fine without me a bit." As I said it wondering: did she know I would be here, handy beside her road north? By now everyone in the Two country above nipple age would have heard of the McCaskill-Barclay advent of sheep onto the

Blackfeet Reservation. But granting that Anna knew, did she come because

I would be here on her plausible route to Isaac? Or in spite of it?

I tried to test that water now. "It's glorious to see you. But

what's Isaac going to think

of you"--I didn't want to say spending the night--"stopping over here?"

"Isaac knows me." I questioned how thoroughly true that could be;

how much any skinsack of existence ever can know of what is in another.

She went on: "If it'll relieve your ~~mind~~ ^{conscience}, he'll at least know nothing ^{out of order}

could happen with so many people around." Yes; two of them his own--

your and his--children. That was unfortunately so, my yearning told me.

*Anna
comes to
see Isaac*

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Yet I was aware there was something else here with us. Her tang of interest toward me. The air's taste of about -to-happen, that I had caught so clearly during our noonhour together the time in Valier. I was every inch conscious of it again, and so was Anna. She was making every effort to say lightly:

"Counting the sheep into the situation, Angus, we have chaperones by the hundred, ~~and all~~ don't we,"
Sheep or not sheep, sentinels were going to have to get up ~~early~~ before to stop me from seeing this woman.)

I gathered it all behind my words--the liquid fire/of strong desire-- and asked her rapidly:

"Anna. Will you do a thing for me?"
scrupulously
She ~~carefully~~ kept her eyes on the wool brawl in front of us.
You know that, Angus.

"If I can, I will. What?"

blue flash of eyes

"See the dawn with me tomorrow." A glance from her, quicker than quick, then away. I reasoned to her profile: "It'd be our one time to talk alone."

There was ~~the~~ same narrow hesitation she had shown when I asked her four years before, Do you have the life you want? Now her answer:

"Yes.

"All right. Show me a Two Medicine dawn."

Rob pulled in just before suppertime, the automobile gray with mud halfway up itself like a pig that has been wallowing, Rob ^{himself} more than a ~~dirt-freckled.~~
little bespattered as well.

"See now, McAngus," he called out, "I'm the only land merchant who carries his real estate on his person."

I had to grin a bit. Even when he was abominably late, the man arrived the way olden travelers might have been announced by a drum.

Rob waved a hand toward his automobile.

"Badger Creek," he explained ruefully. "The Lizzie got stuck in the crossing and I had to troop off and find the nearest Blackfeet to pull me out. You can just about guess how involved an enterprise that turned out to be, Angus. A person might as well dicker with the creek, at least it has some motion to it. How those people manage to--" He broke off.

The girl Lisabeth was stepping out of the cook tent with a kettle to fill from our milk cans of drinking water. Like the wraith of Anna stepping out of years ago.

Rob rid himself of his look of confoundment as fast as he could, then offered speculatively: "Company, have we. I thought Isaac was somewhere ~~to the north~~ ^{on some such} contracting roads."

I had to grin a bit. Even when he was abominably late, the man arrived the way olden travelers might have been announced by a drum.

night & day each was my ~~single~~ claim of myself
window a wedge between the two--Anna and I and the colors of morning
beginning
as it began to come
coming to the Two Medicine country.

10A

"He is," I affirmed. ~~A~~

plainly parked for the night,

Rob scanned around until he found the Reese wagon, and for once seemed not to know what to say. Which of course did not stop him from coming out with: "A girl that age isn't kiting around the country by herself, I hope."

~~Imp. Dave~~

"No," I ^{solemnly} assured him.

He gave me a close look that had me on the verge of answering him by hand. By the holy, how did this man think he was the ~~monitor~~ of my life?

"Angus," he began, "I don't savvy what ~~it~~ ^{in the hell--"} and I didn't want to hear the rest.

"Her brother is with her, Rob. And her mother. She's thoroughly chaperoned," as if I still meant Lisabeth, although we both knew that I now meant Anna. I enlightened him about their journey onward to Isaac in the morning, and he unruffled ~~abit~~ ^{considerably}. But couldn't help adding:

"It's ~~fairly~~ odd to have overnight guests in a shearing camp, is all I meant, ^{Me} Angus."

"Don't worry about your reputation, Rob," I gave him. "I'll vouch for you."

He cocked his head and adjudged, "You're ~~just a bit~~ ^{a trifle} touchy, Angus," which I thought made two of us ~~standing there~~ ^{by that description}. "Well, I'd better wash up. this Blackfeet real estate off me. Dinner guests and all that, a person needs to be on his best behavior, doesn't he."

—

Steel on grindstone and whetstone, the keen-edged chorus of the shearers sharpening for the day. A wisp of wind, the grass nodding to it. ~~and makes noise~~ I leaned over into the corral where the sheep had been wrangled up against the chute mouth by Davie and ~~the Hebrew person~~, and felt the wool on three or four ewes' backs for dewy enough to shear, now that the sun had been up,

for a few hours. ~~H~~ But before beginning the shearing day I cast a look to all the directions, lingering on north and the road to Browning and a team of sorrel horses that had taken a wagon with bright yellow wheels from sight a bit ago.

~~Percy~~ "Prrrrr,
The morning was bright as yesterday and so was I. ~~Percy~~ Percy, you're ready ~~to bring them through~~, are you? Let's start making wool, ~~and~~ blinked idly Percy, what do you say. ~~H~~ The bell wether ~~looked~~ at me in reproach and stayed where he stood in the mouth of the chute. Well, he was right.

I needed to live up to my end of the proposition if I expected him to enter into his, didn't I. Life has its rules of bargaining.

~~He~~ "Here you are, Percy, half a brown cracker. Prrrrr, Percy, come get the rest here at the cutting gate. Prrrrr, sheep, follow Percy, that's the way. Everybody into the chute, prrrrr, prrrrr."

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All the while that I was shunting sheep from the chute into the shearers' catch pens, all the while that the crew was taking their places and beginning the snipwork of taking the fleeces off the ewes, all the while I was not truly seeing any of it, but the ~~time~~ scene at dawn instead. The barest beginning of light in the east, and Anna materializing from the direction of the shearing camp and joining me under the brow of the ridge, out of sight to all but each other.) Then as the colors More
and
again
again

Anna, you need to see it with me, that vow from another June morning,
the first time I saw this green high bluff above the Two Medicine River,
the precipice of the buffalo cliffs, the prairie heaven of grass emerging
from the sky's blue-and-silver one. Then as the warming colors
of morning came, our words back and forth, my hope and her ver--

I felt the hand drop onto my shoulder ^{just} as I finished filling the catch pens. The clamping touch alone told me this was Rob, back from his start-of-day chore of spreading yesterday's shorn sheep along the slope of the ridge to graze. I glanced around at him inquisitively, ^{would} for I'd assumed he ~~would~~ be taking his place behind the sheep to help Davie with the wrangling.

The face on Rob Barclay was ~~thund~~^er~~ous~~. He grated out:

"What in Christ's name is it between you and her, man? Out there this morning, like a couple of slinking collie dogs."

Again, was this. Rob patrolling my life again, Rob the warden of my marriage again. And again no more able than ever to understand the situation between Adair and me, and therefore Anna and me.

"Put it in the poorbox, Rob," I told him. *Hastily*

But plainly he didn't intend to be dissuaded from giving me what was on his mind. He persisted: "You're not answering--"

"Oh, but I am. I'm telling you what I told you before, Anna isn't a topic of discussion between us. So just save yourself the trouble of trying, all right?" Save us both it. The two of us had been through this backwards and forward, after Valier. That outbreak of in-law was more than enough, Rob. Neither of us had one

damn least iota of a thing to gain by-- "Neither of us has a thing to gain by getting into this again," I kept to. "You know my opinion by heart, and yours is stamped all over you."

"You'd ~~just~~ like the trouble saved, wouldn't you. Well, not this time. You're going to hear me, Angus."

Beyond Rob I saw that Davie was watching us wide-eyed, Rob's words loud enough to carry anger above the sounds of sheep and shearing. "Then it better be away from ~~this~~ here," I informed ~~him~~, and I ~~simply~~ went off ~~enough~~ distance from the chute and corral. him after me.

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We faced each other again. Still determined to carry me by the ears, Rob began: "You just won't make yourself stay away from her, will you. Even after that last talking-to I gave you--"

"Try giving me a leaving-alone, why not," I answered. "Anna and still I are none of your business, Adair and I are none of your business, and climbing out of your bed this morning to spy on me was none of your business, either had known Rob." Oh, I knew even while it was happening that Anna and I had been seen. But not by these gray eyes that were auguring into me now. No, it was when Anna returned first from our dawn, went to the wagon and had a look at her sleeping children, and then went on toward the cook tent to begin helping toward breakfast; and I meanwhile came up over the ridge from a deliberately different direction. Beneath the wagon, Lisabeth's head suddenly was up out of the bedroll, she watched her mother go, then she turned enough to watch me come. Across that distance, I knew she knew. The steady attitude of her head, the gauging way she looked at us both, and then conclusion.) That lovely young face in its frame of black hair, like a portrait of Anna gazing from the past, seemed to have seen through the ridge to where her mother and I were together.) And there was no explaining I could do to the girl. It was a situation I would make worse if so much as tried to touch it; Anna would have to be the one to handle it brought out the question. if Lisabeth asked The truth would have to handle it. The truth,

Lisabeth, that I had asked your mother : Anna, when Lisabeth and Peter

and Varick are grown and gone...if Adair takes herself back to Scotland

then...if and when, Anna, is there the chance then of our lives fitting

together? Of you answering my love with yours, if and when? And her,

Angus, you know how I am. Beyond anyone else, really, you grasp the

kind of person I am. So you know all too well,

Angus, you know how I am. I can only decide as far as I see a situation.

The judging hesitation, the click as she gauged. But I can't see ahead

to forever, can I. Whether Isaac is there in my life, after the children

go--or whether.... Her eyes honestly telling me the same as her words.

I'm sorry the words aren't any better than they were, those years ago

when I told you I'd chosen Isaac. You more than deserve better ones

from me. But they're the same, Angus. If I ever see that Isaac and I

have become wrong together, I'll know in the next minute where to turn

for rightness. To you. Again and yet and still: Isaac was not

lastingly innocent of the hazard of losing Anna: I was not irredeemably

guilt of loving her hopelessly.

Not Proven, the verdict one more time. Well, we had ~~some~~ years yet to see

if proof would come, didn't we.



I had lost no ground since our meeting in Valier, I could stay on the

compass setting Adair and I had agreed ~~on~~^{to}, getting on in life ~~as Varick's~~^{with}
as best we could for Varick's sake, hers, mine, ours.

15

"You've utterly got to stop this infatuation of yours," Rob was
urgently
delivering to me now. "It was one thing ~~when~~ when you were just mooning
around like a sick calf over her. But this is the worst yet--meeting
her out there to go at it in the grass."

I stared at Rob as if some ~~terrible~~ ^{malicious} stranger had put his face on.

Go at it in the grass? On the one hand, this slander was the worst thing
that had come out of ~~his mouth~~ yet today, which was saying a lot. On
the other hand, the random stab of what he had just said showed that
at least he hadn't slunk out after us this morning close enough ~~to~~ to count
our pores. All during our meeting of dawn, Anna and I had not so much
as touched. We knew we didn't dare. Starved as I was for her--and I
recognized, from another morning, long ago, that she was more than a
little hungry for me--we didn't appease those cravings. Anna was still
Isaac's, I was still Adair's; until those facts managed to change, we
did not dare make the remembered touches we wanted to on each other's
body, for families and lives would tumble with us.

"Rob," I uttered, ~~flat and hard~~, flat and hard. "You're going ^{way} too far."

"Somebody finally has to tell you what a lovesick sap you're looking
at in the mirror every morning," he retaliated. →

"Adair has been too easy on you, all these years." I burst out.

"Who made you the world's expert on Dair and me?" "Man, just what

is it you want from the two of us--doves and honey every blessed minute?

She and I have what life together we can manage to. And we have Varick.

whatever A Barclay
Those are worth ~~what~~ Dair and I have cost each other." The face bright

with anger wasn't changed by my words. I took a last try. "Rob.

Will you just
Remember that your sister and I are a pair in life you devised yourself.

Dair and I knew from early that we weren't perfect for each other, and

it's damn far past time for you to accept that fact too."

"I'm not accepting that you can sniff off after her"--he jerked his head north toward Anna's route to Isaac--"whenever you get the

least little chance. Angus, how is it you can't see that when you're

a husband
the way you are about Anna, you're only half ~~married~~ to Adair. And

that's not enough."

"Angus and Rob!" Davie had limped halfway our direction to call out worriedly to us. "The shearers are hollering for more sheep."

I gave Davie a wave of reply. And then I answered Rob, one last time. "It'll have to be enough. It's as good as I ever can do."

stonily
Rob shook his head, at me, at my answer, at the existence of Anna.

Each of us had said our all, and we hadn't changed each other a hair.
That was that, then.

I turned from him to go to the shearing pens, but had to let him know
this useless argument couldn't go on perpetually. "Rob, don't give me
any more guff about something that's none of your business, all right?"

Behind me, his tone was tighter than ever. "I'm telling you this.

I'll give you more than guff if you don't get her out of yourself."

—

For the rest of shearing, speaking terms between us were short and narrow. When Rob announced, as soon as we were done loading the woolsacks for hauling to the depot at Browning, that he'd like to get on back to Breed Butte immediately, I nodded and silently applauded. The three or so days before I finished the wool-hauling and ~~intermission~~ made my ride back to Scotch Heaven would give us both some time to wane from the argument about Anna. I just wondered what year it would be on the calendar when Rob Barclay decided he had to get huffy in a major way again.

The third day later, I was atop the divide between Noon Creek and the North Fork when I decided to veer past the ranger station, why not, on my way ~~now~~ to home and Adair. There was no telling how soon I'd see Varick if I didn't snatch this chance to drop in on him at his summer employ, and I much wanted him to hear the news that as far as our Two Medicine sheep and shearing was concerned, the world was wagging its tail at us. When I rode over the crest into sight of the ranger station, I was double glad I'd come by; Varick was out behind the building boiling fire camp utensils in a ^{wash tub} ~~pot~~ of lye water, a snotty job if there ever was one, and good news would sound even better amid that.

Ents. Series:

17B

the son I was seeing ahead of me,
By the holy, I swear ~~my son~~ had put another inch on himself

during the week and a half I'd been at the Two Medicine. Growing

so fast his shadow couldn't keep up with him.

Varick's fire under the lye tub was crackling crisply--odd to hear,
this warm almost-July afternoon--and he was judiciously depositing into
the boiling murky water a series of camp pots as black as tar buckets.

*JL's
P.C.M.*
in lye. (describe) I got down from Scorpion and went over to him.

With a grin I said, "When the Forest Service washes dishes, it really
means it, ay?"

My tall son stayed intently busy with his lye cauldron until all
the pots were drowned, then turned around to me. And delivered:

"You and Mrs. Reese. Is that true?"

The inside of me fell to my shoetops.

Varick's face showed all the strain behind the asking, all the
confoundment of a fifteen-year-old not wanting to believe the world
was askew. I made myself look back at him steadily before I said:
"I suppose that
~~it~~ depends on what you've heard."

"What I hear is that you and her get together any chance you can."

Out in the grass along the Two Medicine, say."

*Mon
9/2*

Mercy I sought, mercy came not. Where had this ~~situation~~ ^{squall} dropped on us from, besides out of the vasty blue? Abruptly my mind saw again the face of the girl Lisabeth, up out of the bedroll beneath the wagon, gazing levelly toward her mother, turning that gaze toward me. No accusation in her look, only judgment: choosing among the three verdicts, innocent or guilty or not proven. But even if she accounted me guilty, would she have sought out Varick with poison such as this? Your father and my mother... A person with any of Anna in her, destructive and vindictive to this degree? In that young Anna-like face beneath the wagon, I just could not see--

~~Accusation still stood there staring at me, waiting, wearing its painful mask of Varick.~~ Pushing the echo of that question at me:

Is that true?

"Son," a confused sound I added to the thudding of my heart, "I did see Anna, yes, but not--"

Varick's next was on its way: "Is that why you put sheep on the Reservation? So you'd have a way to sneak off to her?"

"For Christ's sake, no!"

"Unk says it was."

Disbelief filled me now.[#] And in a sick terrible surge after it,
 belief. [#] The voice I knew as well as any but my own, following me
 across the Two Medicine prairie:

I'll give you more than guff if you don't get her out of yourself.

But Rob, why this? Why drag Varick into the middle between Anna
 and my helpless love for her? Why in all Hell did you ever resort
 to this, Rob?

I struggled to concentrate through my fury at Rob and my anguish
 toward Varick, fight one welter of confusion at a time.

"Varick. You've heard the worst possible version. Nothing
 anywhere near wrong happened)

between Anna and me at the Two Medicine."

"Then what were the two of you doing out there alone that morning?"
 "I asked her to watch the dawn with me."

Varick's look said ~~that~~^{this} confounded him more than ever. He swallowed
 and asked shakily, "What, are you in love with her?"

Truth, were you going to be enough in this situation? Maybe so,
 maybe no.

"Yes." An answer that ~~went~~^{needed to go} back seventeen years had to start

somewhere. "This is hard to find the words for. But I've always been
in love with her, in spite of myself."

Varick, this goes back farther in my life than you. Farther than your
~~how I feel toward--"~~
mother, even. She's known ~~from the first~~

"She knows?"

"Ask her. If you're intent on ~~family~~ history, you'd better get
all sides of it." Not just that meddling bastard Rob Barclay's version.
I tried again to swallow Rob away and say what was needed to make
Varick understand. "Son, your mother and I--"

"I don't savvy any of this!" he blurted.

"Listen to me half a minute, will you. What--"

"You and mother aren't--" the words broke out of him. "You don't--"
"If you're trying to say your mother and I don't love each other,
all I can tell you is we come close enough. Otherwise you wouldn't be
Wouldn't
here." ~~Be here challenging the years we had spent trying to have you,~~
and then to raise you, Varick. "Let's get a grip of ourselves here, ~~son~~
~~to make you see how this is.~~
and I'll try again to ~~explain it.~~ What I feel for Anna Reese

That's the utter truth, son.

has nothing to do with your mother. It began before her, and nothing

she or I have ever been able to do has changed it any. It's something

I have to live with,

is all. And I pretty much do, except when that ~~uncle~~ uncle of yours shoves

his size twenty nose into the ~~goddamn~~ situation."

My words didn't have effect. There wasn't a semblance of understanding
so readily
 on Varick's face. A hurt bafflement instead, My son who could comprehend

the land and its rhythms and its tasks, could not grasp my ~~long~~ invisible
 involvement with a woman not his mother. Those stormy countries of the

mind--love, ~~family~~, loss, yearning--were places he had not yet been. And
experience
 what words were strong enough to bring him there, make him see,

"Varick, there is ~~no~~ ^{just} way to undo the way I've felt for Anna.

I know you're upset about your mother and me, you've every right in

the world to be. But we'll go on as we have been--she and I will ~~be~~ stay

at least
 together~~until~~ until you're grown and gone from home, I promise you that on

all the Bibles there are."

from Varick's pained stare at me,

~~H~~ But I could see I was losing. I could see that whatever I said,

my son was going to look on me ~~as someone he hadn't~~ ^{not} really known.

Even that realization, though, nowhere near prepared me for what came now from him.

"You don't have to say together on my account. Not any more, you don't."

I eyed Varick and tried not to show how his words made me come undone inside. "Meaning what, son?"

"I'm not coming home at the end of this summer. Or any other time."

The clod of realization choked my throat. Any other boy-man, man-boy, whichever this son of mine was, might have been pretending the determination behind that statement. But you could collect all the pretense in Varick on an eyelash--he was like Adair in that. He meant his declaration.

He had gulped in enough breath for the rest, and now was rushing it out:

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"I'll board in town for
to be working
school, but weekends and summers I'm going ~~to work here~~ for Stanley."

"Varick, you're making this a whole hell of a lot worse than it
needs to be."

"I'm not the one who started making it worse, am I. I don't
want to be"--his gaze said be around you--"be part of this situation,
as you call it."

If only the tongue had an eraser on the end of it as a pencil
does, this terrible set of minutes wouldn't need to be called anything.
Rob would unsay his slur, Varick would never need to blurt Is that true?,
I would not have to frantically search for how to keep what little was
after ~~left~~ my son's declaration. "You can't just walk out on
your mother"--I swallowed miserably--"and me."

"I don't see how you're going to stop me from it."

"By stirring your head with a stick, if I have to. Varick, ~~you~~
~~just listen to me~~ Behave toward me the way you feel you ~~have~~ ^{need} to. But not
your mother. Go to her and tell her you take her side in all this,
tell her you're on the outs with me, tell her whatever the hell. But
don't pull away from her." I tried to will into him the urgency of
what I was saying, tried to hold in the ~~pain~~ ^{loss} this was costing me. "If you'll

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keep on terms with her, stay the same as ever with her, you can
throw rocks at me when you see me coming
ignore me or ~~make faces behind my back~~ or whatever will make you feel
any better. If you'll do that, I won't stop you from staying on with
Stanley as much as you want." Until you get your dismay at me out of
your system. If you ever do.

With a wordless nod, my son took that bargain. And turned away
from me to his boiling task.

—

He was on his porch waiting when I rode to Breed Butte.

"~~What~~, Rob?"

I ~~had~~ climbed down from Scorpion and tied his reins to the gate while Rob came across the yard to me.

"McAngus, you've got a face on you that would curdle cream," he began on me. "But man, something had to hammer it home to you about your foolishness over that woman. Maybe this will finally do the job."

The job? As if the life of my family was some task for him to take into his hands, bang us this way and that, twiddle our parts around--

"If I know you," his words kept soiling the air, "you're going to drag out that old argument of yours that I don't have any right to do anything about the mess you're making of your marriage. But

me 41 I told you before, and I'll tell you till the cows come home-- Adair is my sister and she's my right to stop you from making a fool of yourself, any way it takes to do that."

41 Any way? Even by costing me my son?

me 41 Was that ~~crazy~~ gospel you still believed, Rob? After you had returned from the Two Medicine and hotly spilled your words to Varick, didn't you want them back, want them unspoken? Want yourself not to have been the tool of anger that ripped between Varick and me? I stared into you, needing to know. Your face ^{again} now had as much anger as it could ever hold,

But Rob, your eyes did not have enough of ~~red~~ emotion. Or of any other.

Your tranced look, your helmeted mood when you had put yourself where

it all could not but happen. And so I knew, didn't I. Your own belief

in your sabotage wasn't total now, you had to trance yourself now against

the doubt. Not let yourself bend now, from the angle you had talked

yourself into. *

~~the doubt.~~ And now was too late. Doubt and trance didn't count in

your favor now. Nothing did.

"You sanctimonious sonofabitch." My fist following my words,

I swung to destroy that Barclay jaw. Rob was ever quick, though my

haymaker only caught him pulling away, staggering him instead of sending

him down. Which only meant he was ~~up~~ still where I could hammer at him.

The single message thrummed in me, it had built in my blood from the

instant I left Varick to come here and fight Rob. Will I kill him?

How can I not, deserving as he is. He tried to set himself to return

my blows, but I was onto him like fire, punching the side of his head,

his shoulders, forearms, any available part of him. I beat ~~him~~ as ^{that man}

if he was a new drum. He took it grimly and struck back whenever he

could manage. We ~~stood~~ struggled there, I see now, and fought through the years

into our pasts, into the persons we had been.



A Rob stands lordly and bright-faced on the Greenock dock, and my Angus
cocked
of then pummels him in search of the being who hides inside that ~~stance~~.

Rob on the sly with Nancy, and in Lucas's behalf the me whirling in
~~ever~~
from my first North Fork day pounds him with the hands for both of us.

The exultant Rob of the depot at Browning, He never guessed! Adair,
we did it to the man! and the Angus who only ever has wanted Anna
smashes the words back down his throat. The Rob of his ~~all~~ homestead
~~rippling~~
site aloof above the North Fork, ~~the~~ of ever more sheep, ~~the~~ of the
'steaders, I at last was finding them all with my fists ~~the~~ final one,
the Rob who had betrayed by turning my son against me, I wanted to butcher
with my bare hands.
~~with my bare hands.~~ In that Rob's eyes, here, now, amid the thuds of
my blows bringing blood out of him, there was the desperate knowledge
that I was capable of his death.

How many times Rob Barclay went down from my hitting of him, I
have no idea. Not enough for my amount of rage against him and what
he had done. Eventually he stayed down, breathing brokenly. The

sound of him, ragged, helpless at last, came up to me as if it was

pain from a creature trapped under the earth.

A corner of my mind cleared and said, "You're not worth beating to death. You're worse off living with yourself." ^{if} I left him there in the dirt of his Breed Butte.

#

—

Rob
"I wish he hadn't bothered."

"Bothered? Dair, bothered doesn't begin to say it. The damn man has set Varick against me. Nobody has the right to cost me my son." "I suppose Rob thought he was doing ^{what he did} for my sake." Her glance went from me to the rimline of mountains out the window. "As when he brought me over here from Scotland."

"That's as may be." I drew a careful breath. "In both cases he maybe thought he had you at heart, I give him that much. But he can't just glom into our lives whenever something doesn't suit him. We're not his to do with."

"No." She acknowledged that, and me, with her gray eyes. "We're our own to do with, aren't we?" She stayed her distance from me across the kitchen, but her voice was entirely conversational, as if ~~the day~~ today's results were much the same as any other's. I almost thought I had not heard right when she quietly continued: "I'll have to live in town with Varick when school starts." Then, still as if telling me the time of day: "We'll need to get a house in town."

Her words did worse to me than Rob's fists ever could. On every side, my life was caving in. ~~Varick, Rob, now her.. Our marriage had never~~ Varick, Rob, now her.. Our marriage had never never been hazardless, but abrupt abandonment was the one thing we

✓
~~Varick, Rob, now her.. Our marriage had never~~

had guarded ~~each~~ each other against.

Suddenly my despair was speaking. Suddenly I had to know the full sum against me, even if it was more ~~awful~~ ^{severe} than I had ~~ever~~ ^{imagined.} expected.

"Dair. Are you leaving me? Because if you are, ~~let's~~ ^{let's} do the thing straight out, for once."

"Leaving?" She considered the word, as if I had just coined it.

"All I've said is that ~~Varick~~ ^{with Varick} I had better live in town during the school year." She looked straight at me now. "Angus, in all these years you've never really been able to leave Anna. So do you think leaving is something that can be ~~done~~ done, just like that?"

"What do you call this, then, whatever it is you intend?"

"I call it living in town with our son while he goes to school, so that he has at least one of us in his life."

My wife, the ambassadress to my son. How ~~do people~~ ^{does a family} get in such kinks? Trying to keep the ~~shake~~ shake out of my voice, I asked Adair next: "And summers?"

"Summers I'll come back here with you, of course." Of course? Seventeen years with Adair and I still didn't recognize what she saw as the obvious. She was adding: "If you want me to."

"I want you to," I answered. And heard myself add: "Of course."

Lucas ~~had~~ tried to invoke peace. The first time I stopped in at the Gros Ventre mercantile after Rob and I divided, the message was there that Lucas needed to see me.

That didn't surprise me, but his absence at the ~~saloon~~ when I went across to it did. "Luke just works Saturday nights now," I was told by the pompadoured young bartender. Around to the house I went for my next Barclay ^{war council} audience.

Medicine hodge



poor?

H "Angus,

"I'll never defend what Robbie did to you. We both know there
was a time he was half ~~way~~ into the honey jar himself." 9 Lucas inclined

his head to the ~~kitchen~~ kitchen doorway. Nancy ~~wandering~~ could be heard

moving about in there, the plump woman of middle age who had been the
curvaceous

girl at the stove when I walked in on Rob and her. Her lifted front

lip, inquiring my verdict on them. Rob quick to ask my hurry, to blur
So long ago, yet not long at all.

the moment with his smile. "That lad needs some sense pounded into

him every so often," Lucas was going on, then paused. ~~in fact~~ "As I hear

you undertook to do, ay?"

"I was too late with it."
more of it sunk in than you think,"

"Maybe it'll sink in to him eventually," Lucas speculated behind

a puff of his pipe. Does the universe have time enough, Lucas, to ~~want~~
what has and hasn't sunk
~~for something to sink into~~ to a Barclay skull? Enough of that thought

must have come out in my gaze at ~~I~~ him, for Lucas now went to: "None

of this has to be fatal, Angus. It's one pure hell of a shame Varick

got dragged into this, ~~he~~ but he'll get over it sooner or later, I hope

you know."

"I don't know that at all. Nothing I've tried to say to him

✓
m/p 2

does a bit of good. He has that edge to him--that way of drawing back
into himself and the rest of the world can go by if it wants."

"But in the eventual, Angus, he'll--"

Lucas, Lucas. In the eventual was time I could not spare. In the
eventual lay the only possible time-territory of Anna and myself, when
our lives would find their way together if they were ever going to.)

If that was what in the eventual became, my love for my son and my love
for Anna were due for another collision, but a less resounding one, if

Adair had taken herself from the scene by then, no, it was in the now,
in these years before the ~~next~~ possibility of Anna and myself, that I

had to regain my son. To have him grow up understanding as much of me
knotted Varick
as he could. But the task of that, so long as ~~he~~ refused to come near

me in mind or self. My father, in his iron deafness. Varick's father Myself,
encased in my love for Anna.)

They look at us, our fleeceless sons do, and wonder how we ever grew

such awful coats of complication. To understand us asked so much of

sons--and for all I knew, daughters--at the precise time when they least

~~knew~~ how to give.

"Angus, I know that what's between you and Varick, the two of you will have to work out," Lucas was onto now. "But maybe I'm not without some suasion where Robbie is concerned--or where you are either, I hope." He peered at me in his diagnostic way, and wasn't heartened by the signs. "By Jesus, lad"--Lucas threw up his hands, or what would have been his hands~~s~~ at the empty ends of those arms--"I tell you, I just don't see how it helps the situation any for you and Robbie to be reaming ~~arguing~~ the bones out of each other this way."

~~arguing?~~
I shook my head. No, it helped nothing for Rob and me to be in silent war, ~~enmity~~, and no, I would do nothing to change it. The hole in my life where Varick ~~had~~ had been was a complication I wouldn't have but for Rob. In exchange, he could have my enmity.

Lucas's last try.
no 91 "Angus, all those years of you and Robbie count for something."

I looked steadily at Lucas, the age on him gray in his beard and slick on his bald head. Here was a man who knew time, and I wanted to answer him well about those years of Rob and myself: our lives, ~~lives~~. "The trouble is, ~~they~~ Lucas, they don't count for the same in each of us. Maybe they never have, with Rob and me. He sees life as something you put in your pocket as you please. I never find it fits that easily."

"That's as may be, Angus," he said slowly, deliberately, when I was done. "But those differences weren't enough to put you at each other's throats, in all the time before." He gave me one more gaze that searched deep. "I ^{just} can't think it's forever, this between the two of you."

"Lucas,"
"If it's not forever," I responded to the one Barclay in the world that I had ever savvied, "until now, until now, it's as close as can be,"

— Lucas."

In less time than is required to tell it, Rob and I took apart twenty-four years of partnership.

With Adair and Judith, each of them silent and strained, on hand to restrain us, everything went. He ~~bought~~^{took} my share of the Two Medicine band of sheep, I took his share of the band we had in the national forest.

I bought his

half-ownership in the sheep shed we had built together at the edge of my homestead nearest his. Oh, I did let him know he still had watering

freedom on my portion of the North Fork whenever he had sheep at Breed

Butte--my grudge was not against his animals, after all--if he wanted,

and while he most definitely did not want so, he had no choice when the

situation was water or no water. But of all else, we divvied everything

we could think of except Scorpion. There, Rob would not

touch the money I put on the table for his long-ago insistence that

he stand half the price of my ~~horse~~^{saddle}.

Bruised and scabbed as he was from my beating of him, he still wore

that disdainful guise.

There could not be more contempt

than in the wave of Rob's hand ~~then~~^{then}, and his banishing words: "Keep your goddamn Reese horse, as a reminder."