Or so I thought, until that September. When there was the morning

that

when I looked up from my ride to school and saw teams of horses and earth
equipment coming across the shoulder of Breed Butte. It seemed too many
for road work, but then who knew what royal highroad Rob Barclay had to
have to travel on.

Riding home at the end of that schoolday, I saw what the project
was. The soil was being scraped, hollowed, beneath the spring at the
west edge of Rob's homestead.

"Rop's ressavo" Isaac Reese confirmed to me when I went up
closer.
to see, "We build him deep."

Rob had always said I would see the day he would build a reservoir
here. As I stood beside Isaac, watching the fresnoes and teams of
big workhorses with the Long Cross brand on their sides as they scraped
one last
horse-scrape the hillside down into a dam, it seemed to me a final

barrier was going up between Rob and myself. Spurning my offer that
he could use my portion of the North Fork for his sheep, he was choosing
to store up the spring's trickle instead. Choosing to create water of his
own. That was Rob for you.

As the reservoir rose, it changed the face of the North Fork valley.

A raw dirt pouch beneath the silver eye for the Breed Butte spring; a
catchment inserted into a valley built for flow. Every so often the
Then when Rob brought the Two Medicine sheep home from the Reservation for the
winter, every few days I would see him pushing the band back and forth
across the top of the earthen dam to pack down the dirt, a task sheep's
sharp hooves are ideal for.

Him and his gray conscript column, marching back and forth to imprison
water.

I know as well as you that I had an enlarged sense of justice, where
Rob Barclay was concerned. But that private basin of his up there on
Breed Butte only proved to me, as if I needed any more proof, the
difference in the way he saw the planet and the way I did.
Butte reservoir into permanence, I tried to settle myself into the
long seasons without Adair and Varick that Rob had inflicted on me.

Back across time's distance, when America and Montana began for me
at the Greenock dock, I thought the Atlantic was worth fear. The Atlantic
was a child's teacup compared to the ocean that life could be. The
unexpected ferocities of family I now was up against, their unasked
hold on me, were as implacable in their way as the Atlantic ever was.

This too was a sick scaredness of the kind that gripped me in the steerage
compartment of the Jenny, down in the iron hole in the water.

Suddenly again now my life was not under my own control, now that
everyone I had tried to stretch myself toward had yanked away from me.
I felt so alone on the homestead that if I had shouted, I would have
made no echo. When I tried to occupy myself with tasks and chores, even
time was askew. Hours refused to budge, yet days went to no good use.
I did not even have the usual troublesome company of sheep, for after Rob
and I went our separate ways, that autumn at shipping time I sold my band
separate ways I had sold my portion of the sheep, to provide for Adair
and Varick living in town; somehow two households cost three times as
much to run as one did. I told myself I would soon have heart enough
again to go back into the sheep business, but I did not, even though
there in my ocean fear, the worst that could happen was that my life might promptly end that way. Now the worst was that my life, without Varick at all, without Adair most of the time, without Anna yet, my so-called life might go on and on this way.
I believe this: my South Fork schoolhouse saved my sanity, gave me a place to put my thoughts and not have them fly back shrieking into my face. Life turns on many hinges in a classroom, and day after mentally
day I was thankful for the distraction of Paul Toski and his tadpoles in a jar—thankful too that he hadn't yet quite figured out how to jug up skunks, coyotes, bears. There was the slow circling intelligence of Nellie Thorkelson to watch, and wonder where it would alight.

Charlie

There was Jackie Finletter's war cry at recess-time disputes with Bobby Busby, you whistledick! There was the latest generation of Roziers, none as lethal as Daniel but formidable enough, formidable enough.

During that school year and then the next after that, Scotch Heaven saw Adair ensconced in a rented house in town with Varick and of course

assumed that

she and I had had a falling out and Rob was aloof to me because of start-of-summer

that. But then glance out some sunny spring day and there Adair was, like the turn of the calendar from May into June each year, at the homestead with me again, wasn't she. And Varick nearby, working for Stanley at the ranger station or up in the national forest.
The McCaskills had some strange summer truce, did they? I knew not much more of it than you do, Scotch Heaven. I have turned my brain inside-out with thinking, and still none of it was right. Varick, Adair, Rob—and Anna as ever—each had extracted from my life whatever portions of themselves it suited them to, and I knew nothing to do but try to trudge along with whatever was left.

These were years, 1915 and 1916, when it seemed downright unpatriotic not to be thriving.

I could stay as sunk as a stump if I wanted, but Montana and the homestead boom were rollicking along.

'Steaders were not only retaining those dry-land footholds of theirs that I thought were so flimsy and treacherous, they were drawing in more 'steaders; Montana in these years attracted like a magnet amid iron filings. And while the dry-land acres of farming extended and extended, even the weather applauded. The winters were open and mild.

Each spring and summer, rain became grain. There was even more to it: thanks to the endless appetite of the war in Europe, the price of anything you could grow was higher than you had ever dreamed.

I had been dubious about whether prairie and benchland ought to be farmed, had I? Obviously I didn't know beans from honey.
"Wear it out?" burst from Rob. "Mountains as far as you can see
The other person who did not join in the almost automatic prosperity
Not for lack of trying, on his part. But
was named Rob Barclay. To my surprise, he sold the Two Medicine band
of sheep even before lambing time of the next spring after split.

Rob's decision, I heard by way of Lucas, was to put all of his energy
into land-dealing. See now, there's just no end to people wanting

a piece of this country: I could hear him saying every letter of it.

His misfortune in deciding to become a lord of real estate was that the buying

multitudes had their own ideas. When Rob took the plunge of purchasing
every relinquished homestead he could lay his hands on, under the notion

that he might as well be selling the land to 'stealers as well as
delivering them onto it, he then found that the next season's seekers

were seeking elsewhere--out in the eastern sweeps of Montana where there

still was fresh--"free"--land for homesteading. When he decided next
to enter the sod-breaking business, buying a steam tractor half the
calibre of a locomotive and the spans of ripping plows and hiring the

considerable crew for the apparatus, that was the season he discovered

he was one of many new sodsters, and that there was wasn't enough

'breaking business to go around. No, the more I heard of Rob's endeavors

in these years, the more he sounded to me like a desperate fisherman

trying to catch a bait grasshopper in his hat--always at least one jump

behind, and sometimes several.
Hearsay was my only version of Rob Barclay now, and that was plenty for me. He and I had not spoken to one another since the day of severing our partnership.

He and I did not speak; we tried not even to lay eyes on each other.

This was the other side of the mirror of the past twenty-five years; the two of us who had built ourselves into the Two Medicine country now were assiduously separate existences.

"Angus,

"It's not for me to say so," Ninian began once, "but it seems unnatural to see Robert and you--"

"Then don't say it, Ninian," I closed that off.
"Angus," from Lucas toward the end of that time, "Robbie is losing his shirt in his land dealing, and will keep going to his socks if I'd let him."

By Jesus, I don't mind telling you, it's time I straightened his head around for him again.

So I'm going to back him in buying maybe fifteen hundred head of prime ewes. These prices for wool and lambs are pure glorious. If I can talk Robbie into it, I wonder if you'd consider coming in with us on the deal."

"You can stop wondering," Lucas," I said, "because I won't do any considering of that sort."

And then it was our own war year, 1917. Wilson and America had been saying long and loud that they never would, but now they were going into Europe's bloody mud with both feet. That first week of April, I put down the Cleaner with its declaration-of-war headline, I thought of the maw of trenches from Belgium all across France, and I felt as sick as I ever had. This was the spring Varick would finish high school
hermit lives in this sheepwagon. Something drives the root, something unfolds the furrow.
in Gros Ventre. Less than half a year from now, he would be eighteen years old. If the war did not stop soon—a war that so far had shown no sign it would ever stop—Varick in all soldier-age inevitability would go to it or be sent to it.
"Angus?" from Adair, one of that year's first summer evenings, the dusk long and the air carrying the murmur of the North Fork flowing high with runoff from the mountains. Her first evening at the homestead with me, now that the school year was done.

Now that our son no longer had the safety of being a schoolboy. "I have to tell you. There's something terrible I wish. About Varick."

This was new. I have to truthfully say that each other June, Adair reappeared here in this house just as if she had never been away from me. The homestead simply seemed to take on a questioning air, the same as it had when she first came here, straight from our Breed Butte wedding. Not knowing where we were headed in this adrift marriage of ours, we took considerable care not to jostle one another. But this was open agitation of some sort.

"What's this now, Dair? I don't see the terrible in anything you could--"

"I wish he'd lost that eye." She gazed at me steadily, her voice composed but sad. "In that fire summer, when the stick of kindling flew up, I wish it had taken his eye, Angus."

"Because, because of the war, you mean."

"Is that wrong of me, Angus?" To wish a son saved, from the Army, from the trenches, from metal death? When Samuel Duff enlisted, Ninian subscribed to the daily newspaper from Great Falls and the war news came to us in that, the battle for some French hill in one headline, the sinking of half a convoy in another, in pages worn from reading as they traveled up the North Fork valley. As if tribes were fighting in the night, and messengers were shouting guesses at us.

A person had to wonder. Was this what all the effort, the bringing of yourself around the bend of the world to America and Montana, the making of homesteads, raising of children, was this what it all came to? Our armies trading death with their armies?

"No," I answered my wife. "No, I can't see that you're wrong, Dair. You brought him into the world. You ought to have every right to wish the world wouldn't kill him."
Only a night later, Adair and I had just gone to bed when the scuff of hooves arrived in the yard, then the creak of a saddle being dismounted from the door. I pulled clothes on, went and opened the door to Rob.

Our stiff looks met one another. "I have something to say to Adair," was as much as he let me know.

From behind us, Adair's voice: "Anything you ever say to me, you say to Angus as well."

Rob stepped in around me, toward his sister. He began huskily, "Lucas--"

His voice cut off, swallowed by the emotion of his news. He did not really need to wrench out the rest; Adair and I knew the sentence.

"Do you know, Angus," Lucas's death spoke itself in Toussaint's words the afternoon of the funeral, "we thought he was funning us.

Saturday night, everybody in the Medicine Lodge. Luke pouring drinks left, right, sideways. All to once, he says: 'My hands hurt. They're like fire.' We didn't know. To laugh or not. He rubbed both his stubs on his chest, like so.

Then he fell. Doc was right there. But no use. Luke's heart went out, Doc says."
Lucas's funeral brought people and people and people. His graveside was the gathering of all of us who had come into the Two Medicine country in the years after he did. In its way, Gros Ventre itself seemed to attend, the town and its tree columns of streets at a respectful distance from the graveyard knoll. Around me, the faces.

Around me, the years' worth of faces. Anna and Isaac. Rob and Judith. Duffs, Epskines, Frews, Findlaters, Hahns, Petersons, the rest. Varick arrived with Stanley Meixell, a faded but clean workshirt on each of them, and strode across to join his mother and me, saying nothing to me. Nancy with us too, not wearing widow's weeds... All of us, except the one this death had chosen for its first whittle into us, Lucas's slit in the earth.

I blinked when Ninian Duff stepped from amid us to the head of the grave.

"I have asked Robert whether I may say some words over Lucas," he announced.

The feedbag beard looked even mightier now that it had cloudswirls of gray in it.
I could see in my mind how that asking went; not even Rob could turn down Ninian.

"It is no secret that Lucas and I did not see eye to eye about all of life." Lad, Lucas's voice to me in the Medicine Lodge that year Rob and I arrived to Gros Ventre and the Two Medicine country, how many Bibles do you suppose old Ninian's worn the guts out of? "I bring no Bible here today," Ninian was saying now, "yet there is one passage that I believe even Lucas would not mind to hear, if said in its proper light. It is of sheep, and those of us who make them our livelihood. One of the most ancient livelihoods, for as you will remember, Adam's first son \\* Abel was a keeper of sheep."

its proper light. Ninian, you're as spry as King David up on his hind feet. "The old treasured words come to us from ancient Israel, where the tending of sheep was a work far different from that we know here in Montana. The flocks of that ancient time were small in number and each sheep possessed its own name, and answered to that name when the familiar voice of his shepherd called forth." By Jesus, you are.
heard more of my voice. At least the rifle hadn't turned any farther in my direction. Any mercy there was to this situation, I would devoutly accept. He levied his next words: "You are new to here?"

"As the dew," I admitted, and told him in general but quick about Rob and myself and our homesteading intention, and that if we needed any vouching it could be obtained in full at the Medicine Lodge saloon from none other than Lucas Barc--

By the time I caught up with what my tongue was saying, His Whiskerness made up his mind about me. "Lucas Barclay has had a
May we all go out with the timbre of a Ninian accompanying us; a voice such as that would shut down Hell.

"Ay, and a shepherd of Israel did not herd his little flock from behind, as we do with our bands of a thousand and more. Rather, that shepherd of Israel went before his flock, finding out the safer ways, and his sheep followed him in confidence, depending upon him to lead them to safe watering places and to good pasturage." The North Fork there, that's sinfully fine country. I'll tell you lads what may be the thing, and that's sheep. As sure as the pair of you are sitting here with your faces hanging out, sheep are worth some thinking about. "And too, that same shepherd
of Israel, do you see, carried certain items necessary to the guarding and care of his sheep. His rod was a club of some heft, nailed through at one end, and was used for fighting off wild creatures and robbers. His staff was a longer, lighter tool, used to beat down leaves from trees and shrubs for his sheep to eat when the grass was short, and it had too a crook in one end, for the rescuing of sheep caught in the rocks or tumbled in a stream. Ay, very like our own sheephooks, they were."

"I'll go with you on them. I'll partner the two of you in getting sheep. What do you say to the idea, Angus? Can I count on you both?"

Ninian paused, as if to let the wind carry his words where it wanted before he gave it more to transport. Then he resumed:

"Lucas was stubborn as a stone. They seem to be like that in Nethermuir. But he was no bad man. And like the others of us, all of us who draw breath, he is part of the flock who in one way or another speak through time in the words of the Twenty-Third Psalm." Ninian's beard rose as he put his head back to recite:

"The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters....

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will
fear no evil; for Thou are with me. Thy rod, and thy staff, they comfort me."

By Jesus, the woollies do make a lovely sight. If we could just sell them as scenery, ay?
As the funeral crowd began to disperse and Adair was taking
condolences, I singled out Rob. I would rather have been made to pull
my own toenails out one by one, but this I needed to do.

"Rob," I stepped in while several others were around him and
his family, so that he had no private chance to ignore me, "see you
a minute, I have to."

He came down the slope of the graveyard after me, far enough where
we wouldn't be heard.

I began with it, "I've a thing to ask of you."

"You can always try," came back from him, wintry.

"The remembrance of Lucas for the Gleaner—I, I'd like to write it."

"You would, wouldn't you." It didn't come from Rob as any kind
of commendation. "When all is done, you come prissing around wanting
to have the saying of it, don't you. That's been a failing in you since--"

Since the dock at Greenock, Rob, do you mean? Since the moment you and
I put foot into Helena? Gros Ventre? Scotch Heaven? Where and when
did I become something other than the Argus you have known the length
of your life? Specify, Rob. If you can, man, specify. I'm here waiting.
He didn't finish, but went on: "Well, you've asked. And I'm telling
in big letters, that you know, I'll write the remembrance myself. It's for a Barclay
to have final say about a Barclay. And Christ knows, you've never even
come close to being one."
Two days from then, in the lawyer Dal Copenhaver's office up over
the First National Bank of Gros Ventre, Rob sat at one end of the arc
of chairs in front of the lawyer's desk, I at the other with Adair and
Nancy between us. Gros Ventre's streets of cottonwood trees had grown
up through the years until they now made a shimmering green forest
outside this second-storey window, and I stared out into it trying to
collect my mind. The reading of Lucas's will was just over, and its
effect was beginning.

"Dal, is
this some sort of joke lawyers make?" Rob broke out. "To see
if they can rile up the audience? If so, you've damn well succeeded in
that."

The lawyer shook his head. "I've only read you what's on the
paper. It's an unusual document, I'm the first to admit."

Unusual, he said.

I, Lucas Barclay, being of sound and disposing mind and memory
and mindful of the uncertainty of human life...do hereby make, publish
and declare this to be my last will and testament...
time to wane from the argument about Anna. I knew we would get over it—we had before—and the three or so days before
First: I do hereby give and bequeath to Nancy Buffalo Calf Speaks

Teton

my residence in Gros Ventre, Teton County, Montana, and all my household

furniture, linen, china, household stores and utensils, and all personal

and household effects of whatsoever nature. Further, I direct that

my business property, the Medicine Lodge Saloon, shall be sold, at

public or private sale, by my executor; and that said executor shall
pay over the proceeds of that sale, together with all funds on deposit under my name in the First National Bank of Gros Ventre, to Nancy

Buffalo Calf Speaks in

(such monthly sums as may reasonably be expected to sustain her for the remainder of her life....

Well and good, Lucas. Even Rob, after his involuntary grimace at the news of all that was being bequeathed to Nancy, did not seem unduly surprised. But the rest of that piece of paper.

Second: I direct that my share of the sheep, approximately one five hundred
three thousand head, either owned outright by me or with my personal lien upon them, that are operated in partnership with Robert Burns Barclay, shall be conveyed thusly: said sheep I give devise and bequeath to Robert Burns Barclay, Adair Sybil McCaskill nee Barclay, and Angus Alexander McCaskill, a share and share alike, provided that they operate said sheep in partnership together for three years from the effective date of this will. I expressly stipulate that within that same period of time said sheep cannot be sold by the beneficiaries, nor the proceeds of any such sale derive to them, unless all three
beneficiaries give full and willing agreement to such sale. In the event that said beneficiaries cannot operate in partnership and cannot agree unanimously to sell said sheep, my executor is directed to rescind said sheep and all rights thereunto from said beneficiaries and sell said sheep forthwith, with all proceeds of that sale to be donated to the municipality of Gros Ventre, Montana, for the express purpose of establishing a perpetual fund for the care and upkeep of the Gros Ventre cemetery.

...I hereby nominate and appoint Dalton Copenhaver to be the executor and trustee of this my last will.
"The three of us couldn't pet a cat together," from Rob now, thoroughly incredulous, "and Lucas knew that. So how are we supposed to run three thousand head of sheep—?"

With the endless patience of a person being paid for his time, the lawyer stated: "If it's indeed the case that you can't cooperate in a partnership, then Lucas left you the remedy here in plain sight. The three of you only need to agree to sell, and the money from the sheep holdings can be split among you in equal shares."

From Rob's face, he evidently didn't know which to be at this prospect of getting only a third of all he'd been anticipating, enraged or outraged. But at least he could be quickly rid of Adair and me by agreeing on sale of the sheep. "That's readily enough done," he said with obvious effort not glare in my direction. I nodded sharp agreement. With all that lay between us, there was no way known to man by which the two of us could work as sheep partners again.

"No."

That from Adair, Rob shot her a look and asked what my mind was asking too: "No what?"

"Just that." She returned Rob's gaze, gray eyes to gray eyes. "No."

Silence held the law office. Then the three male tongues in the
room broke into confused chorus.

"Dair," I chided--

"Adair," Rob blurted--

"Mrs. McCaskill," the lawyer overrode us, "we must be very clear about this. You refuse to divide these sheep?"

Adair gave him a floating glance as if he was the biggest silly in the world, talking about dividing sheep as if they were pie pieces.

"I refuse, yes, if that's what it has to be called."

In any other circumstance, I would have sat back and admired. My wife looked as though she had a lifetime of practice at being an intractable heiress. Small, slim, she inhabited the big roundbacked chair as if it was a natural throne. Not a quiver in the ringlets above her composed face. How many times had I seen this before.

Wherever Adair was in that head of hers, she was firmly planted there.

But as rich as the value was in watching Rob goggle at his sister, this was going to be expensive entertainment. Unless that no could be turned around, she nor I nor Rob were going to get so much as a penny from the sale of Lucas's sheep.
Rob gamely began on her. "Adair, what's this about? Unless you agree, the cemetery gets it all when the sheep are sold." Try his utmost, the look on Rob and the strain in his voice both told what a calamity he saw that as. "Robbie is losing his shirt in his land dealing, and he'd go all the way to his socks if I'd let him. Well, well. The skin of Rob's feet were closer to touching disaster than I'd even thought. He was urging Adair now, "And surely to Christ that isn't what you want to happen, is it?"

"Of course it isn't," she responded.

"And you don't either." She regarded Rob patiently. "We can keep that from happening by the three of us running the sheep."

That brought me severely upright. Rob and I exchanged glances of grim recalcitrance.

"See now, Adair"—Rob sounded valiantly reasonable under the circumstances—"we can all grant that Lucas intended well with this piece of paper of his. But you know better than anyone that Angus and we'd just never jibe. It just won't work, is all. The two of us can't work together."

"You did," she said. "You can learn again."

"Dair, it'd be craziness for us to even try," I took my turn at reasoning with her, past my apprehensions that reasoning and Adair weren't always within seeing distance of each other.
"Trying is never crazy," she reported as if telling me the weather.

"Lucas wished us to try this together, and that's what we're going to do."
Rob shifted desperately around in his chair to confront the lawyer again. "Give us some mercy here, why not. All that rant in the will about sound mind and what is it, disposing memory and such; surely to Christ this sheep mess Lucas came up with can't be called sane, am I right?"

"It was up to Lucas to dispose of those sheep as he saw fit," responded Copenhaver. "All I can tell you is, this will is plainly legal in its language." He pushed the paper toward Rob. "And there's Lucas's signature validating it." Even from where Adair and I and Nancy sat, that royal coil of signature could be recognized. Lucas's stubs propelling a pen, proudly saying to Scotland This place Gros Ventre is a coming town, leading Rob and me from Helena with its loops and swirls.

Why did I write it, after these years? Matters pile up in a person. They can surprise you, how they want out. They were out now, weren't they, Lucas. You saying with this [signature] that Rob and Adair and I must make ourselves look at reconciliation, must face it if only to reject it.

"Moreover," the lawyer was asserting to Rob, "the will has been attested by the necessary two witnesses"—he glanced closer at the pair of much smaller ragged scrawls—"Stanley Meixell and Bettina Mraz."
Rob shot the question to Adair and me, but neither of us knew the name Bettina Mraz either.

"Bouncing Betty," said Nancy quietly.

The other four of us swung to Nancy in stupefaction. Her dark eyes chose Rob to look back at. The lifted middle of her lip made it seem as if she was curious to know what he would make of her news to him.

"Spencer's 'niece', once. A year, two, ago. Yellow hair. And--"

Nancy brought her hand and arm up level with her breasts, measuring a further six inches or so in front of them. "Bouncing Betty," she explained again.

Rob was out of his chair as if catapulted now, his knuckles digging into the lawyer's desktop as he leaned forward in half-demand, half-plead:

"Dal, man, a will witnessed by a forest ranger and a whore can't be valid, can it?"

Adair faced around to Rob reproachfully. "Really now, Rob. Just because Stanley Meixell is a forest ranger doesn't give you reason to question--"

"Mrs. McCaskill," the lawyer put up a hand to halt her, "I imagine your brother has reference to the competency of Miss"—he checked again the bottom-most signature on the will—"Mraz as a witness. But unless she has ever been convicted of practicing her purported profession, she..."
is as competent to witness as any of us—and convictions of that sort
are hardly plentiful in Montana. No, there really isn't much hope of
contesting this will on the basis of its witnesses, in my opinion. Nor
on any other that I'm aware of."

Rob looked as if he'd been kicked on both shins. "Adair," he
intoned to her bleakly, "you've got to get us out of this sheep mess
Lucas put us in."

"You know how much I hate to admit it, Dair," I chimed in at my
most persuasive, "but for once in his life Rob happens to be right."

She stated it for us again. "No."

There was a long moment of silence except for the rattle of the
cottonwood breeze in the trees. But everything in my mind was as loud as
banged again and again, it could be and still stay in there: Adair, it seemed, what now?

"Gentlemen," the lawyer summed, "Mrs. McCaskill is entirely within
her rights. If and when the three of your heirs decide to divide
the sheep, I can draw up the necessary papers. But until that decision
is reached, you are in the sheep business together."
At home that night, I tried again.

"Dair, it isn't as if I want to go against something Lucas had his heart set on."

"Then don't," she said.

"If you want us back in the sheep business, I'll find the money somewhere to buy a band of our own."

"We already have sheep," she instructed me, "as of today."

"Dair, you know as well as I do that there's every reason for me to say no of my own. No to her notion that Rob and I together could ever run that band of sheep, yes to the perpetual upkeep of the green bed, ay, Lucas? Yes to a ruination of Rob, as glad a yes as I could utter.

"I'm hoping you won't. I'm asking you not to."

"Because why?"

"Because this is another chance, for each of the three of us. Angus, I've never asked you these words before, but I am now. Will you do this for me?"
I suppose this was the other end of the bargain she quietly broached to me those years ago... (quote: you still have a life to look forward to.)

No recrimination for my loving Anna.

Maybe so, maybe no.
Put that way, this notion of hers resounded. Put that way, it had an inescapable echo. Here was the other end of the bargain she quietly broached to me those years ago: You would still have a life to look to. Her acceptance, her grant, all through our marriage that I still loved Anna. And now this asking, that I make a demented try to partner with Rob again. Because why? Because for better or worse, Adair and I had each other, our marriage, until time told us otherwise.

The Atlantic itself was a field of battle now; there would be no Scotland for Adair until the war wore itself out. Anna's Lisabeth was grown now, I had heard that she was going away to the teachers' college at Dillon in the fall. Peter was a few years from homeleaving.

All the hinges that life turns on. And in the meantime Adair at last was asking a thing of me, repeating it gently as if wondering aloud to herself:

"Will you, Angus?"
How many times had I seen this, now. A Barclay locked into an iron notion. Lucas becoming a builder of the Montana that had torn his hands from him. Rob so outraged toward me about Anna that he pried my son away from me. And now Adair bolting Rob and me into impossible partnership.

"Dair, I don't even want to be around the man. How under thunder am I supposed to run sheep with him?"

"The sheep won't care whether you and Rob have anything to say to one another."

I studied her. "Does Adair? Do you care?"

"In my way, I do."
I went to Breed Butte to begin lockstep sheep-raising.

The sheep were grazing complacently on the shoulder of the butte nearest Rob's reservoir. As I rode Scorpion across the narrow top of the dam I saw that Rob had been packing its dirt down again with the sheep, their small sharp hoofprints leaving every inch of it as pocked as a grater. The damn man and his damn dam.

Rob came out into his yard looking baleful in the extreme. I planted myself to face his harsh silence.

Nothing, from either of us.

Then some more of it.

Eventually I asked:

"How are we going to do this, by signal lamp?"

"Don't I wish."

"Rob, wishing isn't going to help this situation."

"You're one to tell me not to toss away life by wishing, are you. Surprising."

"We'd better stick to the topic of sheep."

Rob looked past me, down the slope of Breed Butte to the sheep shed
that had been ours and now was mine. Then he shifted his gaze to the contented cloud of sheep. I followed his eyes there with my own.

At least neither of us was new to the sheep part of this; after nearly thirty years, we could be said to have commenced at starting to make a stab at a beginning toward knowing a thing or two about the woollies.

After enough stiff silence, he made himself say it. "What brings you? Shearing?"

I confirmed with a nod.

He rapped back, "You know my thoughts on it. Or at least you goddamn ought to, after all these years.

"That doesn't mean I agree with them a whit," I pointed out. "I'm for shearing at the end of this month, to be as sure as possible of the weather."

"That's just the kind of pussyfoot idea you'd have, right enough. I say shear as soon as possible and get the sheep up on the forest grass."

"You've said it, and I still don't agree."
situation. "Goddamn it all to hell, this can never work. We both know Adair means well, but a half-assed situation like this, neither of us able to say a real yes or a real no--how to hell are we ever going to settle anything about the sheep?"

He was right about one matter. Nothing he or I could provide was going to ordain anything to the other.
going to work. I reached in my pocket and showed him what Adair had handed me before I left the house.

Rob stared down at my hand, then sharply up into my eyes. "What's this, now?"

"What it looks like. A deck of cards. Adair says when we can't agree, we're to cut for who gets to decide."

"Jesus' suffering ass!" Rob detonated. "We couldn't run a flock of fifteen hundred chickens on that basis, let alone three thousand goddamn sheep!"

"Adair has one more stipulation," I informed him. "Low card always wins."

You never know. Adair's second stipulation was so dumbfounded Rob that his howl of outrage now dwindled down to a weary mutter, "It'd take that sister of mine to think of that."

"Anyway it's a change from letting magpies decide," I reminded him. "Turning around to Scorpion, I used the pommel of his saddle to shuffle the cards on three times, then held the deck toward Rob: "Your cut."

Five of diamonds.

He grabbed the deck as if he wanted it out of sight of him, shuffled it roughly, held it to me.
Ten of clubs.

Rob ground out.

"Well, now," from Rob, "we'll shear as soon as possible, won't we?"

I nodded once, and left.
The thousand and a half sheep and

The summer went that way. Rob and I and the goddess of chance, also known as Adair. To ask myself how I had got swallowed into all this was to bewilder myself even more, so I tried instead to set myself to wait it through. Waiting was what I had practice in by now.

The deck of cards did me one inadvertent favor. In early August, when I was trying to finish the last of haying, Rob and I cut cards to see who had to camp tend Davie that week, and I lost. Nothing to do but journey on Scorpion pocket my exasperation and begin the trip up into the national forest with the pack horse of Davie's supplies behind. Roman Reef loomed so high and near in the dry summer air that my interest wandered aloft with it rather than the barbwire gate of the boundary fence I was nearing. When I glanced ahead and saw the person off his horse at the gate, performing the courtesy of waiting for me to ride through too before he closed it, at first his brown Stetson made me hope it was Varick. I saw in my next minute of riding up, no, not quite that tall and far from that young.

Stanley Heixell.

"Hullo, Angus," he spoke up as I rode through and stopped my horses on the other side of the gate. "What do you know for sure?"
"Hello, Angus. What do you know for sure?"

Never nearly enough, Stanley. But aloud: "I know we could use rain."

"That we could. There's never enough weather in Montana except when there's too much of it."

Both of us knew I had not stopped Stanley for a climate chat.

I threw away preamble and asked:

"How's Varick doing for you?"

"Just topnotch. He's about a man and a half on anything I put him to. Regular demon for work, and what he can't do a first time he learns before a next time gets here. I tell you, the Yew Ess Forest Service is proud of him."

You maybe heard, he's getting to be just quite a bronc stomper, too."

I had heard, unenthusiastically. The Sunday gatherings of young riders at the Egan ranch on Noon Creek were no longer complete without Varick atop a snorty horse, the report was.

Stanley studied me, then Roman Reef, as if comparison was his profession. "I guess you'd kind of like to know his frame of mind about you, Angus. It's not real good."

"I wish that surprised me." What I went on to say did startle myself: "You know what it's about, this between Varick and me?"
"I do, yeah. Him and me had a session right after the blowup first happened between you two." Stanley regarded me thoughtfully for a moment before saying: "The ladies and us. Never as tidy as you'd think it ought to be, is it."
Definitely not for some of us, Stanley. Others of us, and I could name you one quick, the Bouncing Bettys ricochet soundlessly off of and never leave a whisper in the world.

"Angus, I've tried and tried to tell Varick to let it drop, the ruckus between him and you. And I'll keep on trying. But I've got to say, Varick ain't easy to budge, wherever he gets that from."

Stanley paused again, then: "This probably don't help none, but my guess is it isn't just you that's burdening him, Angus. It's him wanting to be away from home, get out in the world a little."

"He can be out in the world and still have a father."

"Yeah, I suppose. It's a whole hell of a lot easier for you and me to see that than it is for him, though."

It was my turn to glance away at Roman Reef. This deserved to be said, Stanley in his Stanley way had earned the hearing of it:

"Stanley. If I can't have Varick around me at this time of his life, there's nobody I'd rather he was with than you."

The only answer from under the brown hat was a brief session of throat-clearing. After a considerable moment: "Yeah, well, I better get on up the mountain. See you in choir practice, Angus."
At shipping time that fall, for once in our yoked partnership

Rob and I did not need to cut the cards to find a decision.

"Ones like these, I'm going to take leave of my senses and go up

to 20½ cents on," the lamb buyer offered. "However you Scotchmen manage
to do it, you grow goddamn fine lambs."

While keeping a careful straight face Rob glanced at me; I was

already glancing at him. When we both nodded and got out ritual

admissions that we supposed we could accept such a sum of money, the

flabbergasting deal was done. 85 pounds per lamb x 1500 lambs x 20½-

In the years of '93 Rob and I and all

other sheepmen would have gone through life on our knees to get more

five cents a pound for our lambs instead of four, and now these unasked

lofty prices of wartime. Life isn't famous for being fair, is it.

"This doesn't mean one goddamn bit that I want to go through

another year of this with you," Rob lost no time in imparting to me

outside the stockyard as we were pocketing our checks. "If you had

the least lick of sense, you'd go home right now and ask Adair if she

won't let us sell the ewes this fall, too."

"I already asked," I gave him in identical tone. "She won't."