

The first one, Foster. Classmate at the Illinois Institute of the Arts. Her birthday or his-- good grief, you'd think you could remember which--a Loop date, deep-dish pizza at the Uno and then music at the Do-Re-Mi Club on lower Dearborn. Whatever the jazz equivalent of a maitre'd is, he took one look at the pair of them--Mariah with the lanky beauty of a blood-bay colt that might win the Derby some day, Foster the finest young manhood Des Moines had to offer--and seated them up next to the piano, inches from the end of the keyboard. They each ordered a beer of a ^{brand} kind they had never heard of, and peeked around at the huge blowup photographs, Krupa on his drums sounding the wake-up call at Carnegie Hall in the Goodman concert, Billie Holliday, the one of Louis Armstrong with his cheeks and eyes as big as his horn, and above him the dance of lettering of his creed, **We all go do-re-mi, but you got to find the rest of the notes for yourself.** When Marian McPartland came on, slight woman in a velvet pantsuit, three-inch earrings dangling like dollhouse chandeliers, she sat down to the piano, glanced, a little startled, at Mariah and Foster and said, "Wow, music in the round." Then shifted slightly sideways toward the audience and began to play. Mariah took it all in, vowed earrings into her life, vowed a life of highwire grace. She watched the astonishing hands, already knobby on a couple of the knuckles, terrifically long spatulate fingers, and the music came and came, Ellington's velvet "Long Valley" and a Coltrane piece called

SLUSH

“Red Planet” that indeed sounded from beyond the bounds of this world and then McPartland’s own “A Delicate Balance”. Came request time--Mariah definitely remembered this--and someone called out, “Love Supreme.” McPartland scoffed, “‘Love Supreme’, my God.” But thought for a moment and caressed into it, her fingers at the black keys and sliding down to the seams of the white. When it was over, Mariah and Foster sailed out of the Do-Re-Mi in a certain state of ecstasy that they both know was going to lead to the next. Desire under the El. They kissed further and further in the swaying seat of the elevated train on their way back to campus and Foster’s room--he had the collection of Rush Street lp’s--and made love that was supreme in its ingenuousness. You could do worse than lose your virginity (she was pretty sure Foster was saying bon voyage to his that night, too) to Chicago jazz.

I am so slow at this.

That’s two of us.

“You are going to have to get over all this, you know.”

“Dispose of the disposing of, you mean. How about giving me a few days to get used to being a cripple again, okay? Then I’ll work on--the everlasting Lyle and the rest of this.”

Great. Meanwhile the house still needed cleaning out, interrupted by the Bob hike.

He had told Aggregate to take a hike.

“I know when I’m outgunned. Trying to make something out of life with Mariah would be like dating Picasso.”

“I don’t have to challenge her to a cookout, to see which of us gets you?”

Mariah crouched at the head of the coulee, wide-angle lens on her camera to take in the vee of rocks and the swirl of ashes when Mitch tossed them.

“You’re lucky it’s not quick-draw with cameras.”

“You’re right. That’s a piece of luck.”

“Why don’t you stay.”

“There’s still a lot to be sorted.”

Lexa studied her. “You’re staying on?”

“Mhmm. I need to hole up and finish the photo book.”

“This is the only part of the world you can think of to do that?”

Mariah took a breath. "If you decide to hang around--then I won't."

"All right, Mariah, what is it with you--a sweet tooth for newspaper guys?"

"Seems like. And after I swore off twice, with Riley."

Mariah chewed a corner of her lip. "Damn it, damn it, *damn* it, Lexa. I didn't intend any of this. I hope you don't think--"

"The sonofabitch, I think I love him."

"I'm kind of that way about both him and you." Lexa tossed her head. "I could see it happening. First time I've had much sympathy for old Travis."

Erasing the blackboard of her mind as rapidly as she could, Lexa stammered to make sure:

"That game of tag is over?"

"I didn't say that." He reached and touched the corner of her lips with his forefinger. "We're It."

Over her shoulder Mitch started at the symbols on the screen. After a bit, he was the one who said:

"Let's get Matthew over here again."

but never figured out why. (But oh no, the Roziers couldn't have settled here where geography amounted to something.)

"...Last person in the world I would have expected to let himself in for love trouble. And with the wife of a guy he was probably closer to than anybody." Mitch broke off to look at the grizzly as they passed the bear pen. Lexa had insisted on stopping by the zoo, although he had been in favor of someplace where they could keep kissing less publicly.

"He must really have wanted to be that guy," Lexa said.

"Got another fellowship. It turns out you land one, you're figured to be qualified for others. Alaska. A dozen of us, painters mostly, to do stuff on the Copper River delta." Mariah looked away. "I thought I might look up Travis."

"Oh, hey. In that case."

She went and got Mitch's outsize purple sleeping bag.

"Travis is skinny," Lexa explained, "but he's pretty tall. Two of you will fit in this wonder, I'm sure of it."

Mariah swatted at her, laughing. "Eat dirt, sis."

With a long OO finger Mariah traced the seared outlines of the nearest few of the brands blazoned into the wall. "Don't these remind you of...here, let's just check it out." She went to her camera bag and pulled out her PowerBook. The twin dents of concentration appeared between her eyes.

"This'd only be a sample, a real software program would have dingbats up the wazoo to work with, wouldn't it. But look."

Wordlessly he agreed and sat on the running board, his head back against the seat cushion where she was ensconced. Without disturbing herself under her hat Lexa reached down and cupped a hand around his shoulder as if he might fall off. They lazed there like that for a little while. Sun and silence for a change felt equally good to Mitch. The town was quiet, unattuned to anything but the welcome weather, there was that about a place that was marooned and knew it. Seattle could use a little of this toasty torpor. He felt his mind go out of high gear, slowing. While he was reposing that way he contemplated the Rozier back yard's maze of machinery carcasses, but drew no new conclusion.

He walked in the bunkhouse door, and his father was everywhere.

Mariah had arranged the prints all over the wall and the table and the bunk bed, and some propped atop her camera gear bags. She was moving around, judging, brisk as a jay.

“Hate to bother you, I know you’re up to your neck in Lyle’s leftovers around here, but I do need to check over the caption stuff with you. Make sure I know what I’m looking at.”

The hard soil of age. Lyle looked dubious of everything over the horizon. Frame by frame around the room, Lyle began to leave life.

Mitch could look at his father with a reporter’s eye, see the act there, and it made no difference. Lyle Rozier was a genuine item.

The bunkhouse held all the men who worked for Lyle. His father’s crews always looked like kids (well, hard-used kids) playing pirate. Every so often, on a crew would be some prodigy with an axe or OO, a sunburst of skill into the do-it-good-enough-to-get-along way of ranching and farming. Fritz and Ferragamo and one-armed Eddie and the three Jensens and the mute Hutterite and...haymakers and drifters and drunks and those

in three years

who were just luckless, it was as if the ghost legion of them was mustered out of the daybook, crowded from wall to wall in this bareboard bunkhouse again now.

Mariah seemed to sense that Mitch was steeped in memory. Her arms crossed, she stood and watched him.

“Never thought I’d be saying so, but your pictures *are* my father. For better or worse.” He smiled congratulations at her. “You nailed him.”

“Just about.”

Mitch took another scan around at the gallery of Lyles as if he might have missed something. “No, really, you--”

Back amid it all, the lost marriage. Riley and her too much with each other, working together at the paper. “Your husband, the camera,” he’d once said. And then back together on the Montana centennial series and damned near making the same mistake all over again.

What is it with you, Mariah, a sweet tooth for newspaper guys?

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“Hate to bother you, I know you’re up to your neck in Lyle’s leftovers around here, but I do need to check over the caption stuff with you. Make sure I know what I’m looking at.”

As a word jockey always fighting for space in the narrow confines of a newspaper, Mitch could take photojournalism or leave it, preferably leave. But this was like a book known by heart. In one of his moments caught by Mariah you could see him sniffing, sneaking that extra air in; it tugged his face up... In another, his lower lip was pooched out as he thought over... Maybe in error, but never in doubt....His eyes drilling through the paper of the photo... There were a number of pictures with cigarette smoke around him like the haze of his life. Another, he was talking and you could tell that this man had a tongue in him like a clapper of a bell. Yet another, he was extended in his easy chair, his younger self on the screen, laidback before the term ever got thought of. Watching himself go by.

The hard soil of age. Lyle looked dubious of everything over the horizon. Frame by frame around the room, Lyle began to leave life.

Older than the volcanic cones Eons of geological thrust and fold, the sharp periods of glaciers... What seemed from the flatter earth to be a congregation on nearer inspection became individual landforms, each a variation of geological process. Roman Reef... Made of time, the mountains stood in ranks. This particular range was the ridgepole of the continent.

Lexa drove to Great Falls for U.S. Geological Survey maps. At their north lay the glossary of the McCaskills...She folded the quadrangle maps with the marked-in route showing out, and put them in a transparent waterproof packet.

Mariah seemed to sense that Mitch was steeped in memory.

Down at its hem, so to speak, was the comblike outcropping of Rooster Mountain. Eons of geological thrust and fold, the sharp periods of glaciers... This particular range was the ridgepole of the continent.

At the mountain's hem, so to speak, the timber was green-black with distance, then grayed away on the upward slopes where long-ago forest fires had woven.

Eighty miles of mountains stood behind these stone shields in jutting ranks. On nearer inspection, what seemed from the flatter earth down below to be a skyline congregation began to sort into individual landforms, each spinnaker pinnacle or blocky summit tipped in mid-dice-throw specifically shaped by geological chance--the tectonic overthrust action that upturned these northern Rockies into a series of tilted slabs like frozen tidal waves aimed east toward the continental beach of plains. Older than the volcanic sleepers of the coast ranges, these interior crags showed their bone structure of strata and their cliff faces gnarled and smoothed by glaciation, the grand intricacy of creation giving them their hewn beauty. In the third row of peaks stood the mountain with the stone suggestion of a woman's face. Fantasy, of a sort, for the features of Phantom Woman were an outcropping that only from a certain angle resembled a nose of delicacy, placement of eyes an accident of symmetry by winsome sockets of rockslide. In all likelihood, the bearing of the mountain brought it its name, comely at first glance but then oddly withdrawing; at its hem, so to speak, the timber was green-black and thick, then grayed away upward on its slopes where forest fires had been

flatsided fundamental rock formations as if the mountains had been tipped over and their undersides were in view.

Carrying the continent, dividing its waters and halving its scenery into the West and the rest, these mountains held lodes of time up their canyon sleeves.

Jericho Reef, two miles of sudden limestone palisade, appeared to arch its back in everlasting surprise as the plains butted into its bedrock.

Across a deep timbered gulch from Jericho, Roman Reef stood higher and a mile longer, its rimrock crest as regular as the frieze of a vestal temple but incalculably more ancient.

Grizzly Reef, true to its name, seemed to threaten on into eternity with its half-turned slab face targeting north toward the flanks of the other two.

The three hikers starting out, Lexa in the lead by unspoken vote, could glimpse between these stone shields the jutting ranks of mountains beyond. There in the skyline congregation of spinnaker pinnacles and blocky thrown-dice summits stood the crag with the stone suggestion of a woman's face. Imagination of course helped with the features of Phantom Woman, for only from a certain angle did its high central outcropping resemble a nose of delicacy, and the placement of eyes were sheerest accident of symmetry by winsome sockets of rockslide. And the invisible told most of all: atop this mountain's particular brow, the beadline of gravity rested. Down Phantom Woman's back, this meant, the snows and rains of the seasons ran off into the westgoing rivers that culminated in the

Columbia and the great gate to the Pacific at Astoria. Those trickling off its front streamed away to the Missouri River and thence the Mississippi River and at last into the vast delta catchment at the Gulf of Mexico.

The first pause in this continental descent came just here, between the farthest-in foothills of the Two Medicine country, in the form of the green-blue lake of Agency Dam.

In its mirror of water the nearest reef, Jericho, was pictured in motionless headstand onto its bowed summit, a perfect unwavering stalactite of itself.

Across the reflecting surface, the images of the two backpacking women and the bulk-carrying man hiking the shore trail were similarly caught upside down.

The sky could not have been more blue, the rim of Jericho Reef as exact as an arced bridge against it. Constant variety of scenery--peaks, square-set ranges with their knees in the air, canyons of Agency Creek,

Smokechasers ran in the family, her grandfather on the forest fires of the dry Thirties, her father a smokejumper at the Missoula base her college summers after World War Two. She had done some herself in Alaska, on the fireline at 00.

For Mitch, in his Coast life and confinement to The Springs whenever he was out here, the Rockies had existed mostly in his eyes and mind. Yet those were powerful old places too, he reminded himself. Carrying the continent, dividing its waters and halving its scenery into the West and the rest, these mountains held lodes of time up their canyon sleeves.

“Why can’t I fluff up the sleeping bags while some warrior woman goes and attacks fish?”

Thin-skinned tectonics, a phrase employed by geologists who were not here on the concrete-hard gray clay of the rising trail, had upturned this section of the Rockies into a series of gigantic tilted slabs like frozen tidal waves aimed east toward the continental beach of plains.

He knew this country was just west of childhood, for them, and they had been along with their father when grazing allotments were allowed, before the expansion of the Wilderness Area.

He concentrated on his tent. Mariah had put up Lexa's tent and her own, and now scooted in out of sight.

A little bulk was worth it if it was food. She always put in the pack a couple of loaves of heavy bread, tough nourishing stuff. Protein was scarce, so cured sausage that would have set off cholesterol sirens in them all down on the flatlands would be welcomed by digestive systems up here.

Up here, the gray clay of the trail was like concrete, or where it wasn't that, it was talus.

"One of Dad's bored shepherders."

"No, couldn't have been. It had to have been before 1940. This was set aside then.

Marshall died the year before, the Forest Service got right on this."

"I thought guys are supposed to be naturals at playing with their food."

"Very very funny. Would you want..."

"We sit and think while gearheads are whipping the water with this stuff."

Those demon hikes were on top of his work.

“Cause of death: living too much. His obits say he went back to Washington from charging around the West on his high lonesomes and right away died on the train to New York.

Every so often, the flash of a doe on the trail ahead. They came out into Big Elk Meadow, a wide green park about a mile long, a fourth of a mile wide. (Mitch had never managed to break himself of estimating distances in football fields.)

. Imagination of course helped with the features of Phantom Woman, for only from a certain angle did its high central outcropping resemble a nose of delicacy, and the placement of eyes were sheerest accident of symmetry by winsome sockets of rockslide.

Green-again slopes below them, slowly changed from the great forest fire of 1929 when the mountain was determined to wear black, darts of flame jumping the firelines for three weeks, scattering the Forest Service crews like refugees under bombardment. And finally, after the climb through the wind, the mountaintop and the Divide.

The mountains opened into a tremendous bowl, mountains on three sides. Through a notch, the farmland pattern of the plains could be seen.

The continent was tipsy with mountains. There now were three ranks in front of them, and several behind, west. Geology and history kissed right here. Its invisible power could not have been more definite; the beadline of gravity rested up there on its brow. Down Phantom Woman's back, this meant, the snows and rains of the seasons ran off into the westgoing rivers that culminated in the Columbia and the great gate to the Pacific at Astoria.

To the north where the Two Medicine River carves its canyon through the prairie of the Blackfeet Reservation, the long flat tops of benchlands stood out as if drawn onto the sky with a yardstick and blackest inks.

They could see the meander-line of Soda Creek finding its way toward the Teton River. The role of drainages was laid out, from up here. Without the town in the way and the benchlands shutting in the Soda Creek valley, this was resounding country. Out there, the tick tack toe of America, squares of strip farming and now rangeland. Those fields salted with his sweat, in the rockpicking years. Those tall islands, the Sweetgrass Hills.

Looking back and below from the trail, he tried to decide if Twin Sulphur Springs would look so shabby if it didn't have the massive mountains around for comparison. Something about the human eye that does not want a close horizon.

They were going into the mountains, Lexa and Mariah, from north of childhood.

The road in took them past the upper end of what had been the McCaskill ranch and was now a Nature Conservancy buffalo preserve.

The ranch had been a beauty for hay. Bottomland meadows of wild brome along Noon Creek, and the big field atop the Noon Creek-English Creek divide which grew dry-land alfalfa. In a wet year, the alfalfa soared up to knee-high and that wide benchland looked as deeply green as the Amazon jungle. English Creek meandered on and joined the Marias River, Mariah's namesake

It could have been country from a picture book. The hay meadows and fenced grazing land and winter wheat fields filled the countryside, a broad peaceful deck of pattern below the high backdrop of summer pasture. Spring and autumn, bands of sheep and herds of cattle could be seen trailing across the valleys in slow flows. The cattle would pool into a dark tide which you could follow from the moment they bawled past until they

drew over a far ridgeline. Sheep were harder to sort from the landscape at a distance, just a softer patch of gray which you had to squint hard at to find. The surest marked for sheep was the rounded white canvas of the herder's wagon, standing up out of the flat grass color like an igloo.

A lot of fencelines between here and there. She caught herself rubbing her wrist scars.

"Our distinguished hitchhiker--why did he want this?"

"Hell if I know," Mitch said. "He once pounded a nail or two into this tower, was the best I could get out of him." After a moment he added: "It wasn't like him. He didn't even come hunting in these mountains, he was a chase 'em with a pickup and gun 'em down on the prairie guy." This drew a look from Lexa.

... (Mariah's voice reciting poetry or singing Bell Rock ballad.)

The three of them just stood on the balcony for a minute, catching their breath in more ways than one.

geology and history rafted together, the construct of the continent angling away in both directions all the timeless twists and turns of earth and humankind.

These early minutes, she loved. Dawn was the part of the day when you met yourself without regrets.

Mitch will have to stay awhile to finish up with his dad's stuff, I guess.

rumpled and stubbled with whiskers and taking in the immense continental rumple of geology and history,

The early minutes, she loved. Dawn was the part of the day when you met yourself without regrets.

Abandoned for years, the cabin was elemental in its furnishings and not built for three.

"I am out of my mind, I already have fifty zillion pictures of clouds," Mariah said, going out onto the platform with camera in hand.

The Divide country had been as glorious as he expected Time was forever in short supply. Life was escapes, plunges, of this sort. His hurry was different this summer, some feeling that impelled him into as many mountains of the West as he could possibly get to. The miles were coming harder now, and there had been that spell of passing out--sunstroke, it only was, he repeated to himself--at 00. Never mind. He and brother George, schoolboys in Central Park playing Lewis and Clark. The family summer place in the Adirondacks.

He believed mountains made the difference. A world all lowland, entirely fields and plains, invited engineering and the tame patterns of residence.

"Help me out on this," he'd asked the Italian boy when the other two were at the tent for more food. "Did your friend say...?" The other CCC boy, though, the barrel-chested one. Something on his mind. Eating at him.

On that deer-hunting day, crisp and bright, her father pulled his .30-30 from the scabbard in the back of the Power Wagon, and looked at Jericho Reef. "Jesus, the country

this is. Lexa, let's go up on the Rocky Mountains and get us some venison." A few hours later and higher, with one of his squinted exact shots, Jick McCaskill downed a three-point buck. Lexa looked at the Power Wagon the size of a pencil point below them. Skid was the word. She took her turn in clear patches, grasping the antlers, the gutted deer sliding on its fur. She knew her father was letting her do a share of the work to make the experience last in her; put it into the bodily memory.

Camera gone too, naturally. She stuck her feet in her boots but didn't lace them, pulled on a sweatshirt and clopped out on the platform.

It was only everything else about life that Mitch, and historically speaking Mariah, would not listen to her about. *How do I keep getting hooked up with hardheads?*

Every so often she shot, not to let some piece of the scene get away.

For two persons who had started off with each other below room temperature, she and Mitch were co-existing surprisingly.

Sleep didn't come, although the recurrent dream that was memory did. The long ago. Growing up on the ranch, in all the weathers there were...by each January the gleam on the snow began to tarnish, and there were a hundred days yet until spring. Was that what turned her toward seasonless work, the camera lens its own fresh day every time? But Lexa with the same starting point had taken to horseback, to running the hills; somehow she was cut out for kid life on the ranch and the rhythm of chores taken in stride from then on. (*There seems to be a lot I'm not cut out for.*) Thinking about Lexa, it all tangled.

"Holler if you need me."

"You'll hear."

You hired on to be tough, didn't you? Their father's old saying whenever she or Lexa made a mouth at long chores. Day one of nursie in the tower had been tough enough on the nerves for anybody. Talk about tough, he looked it, pain-pinched and stubbly as he was. It was a few moments before he wanted to know:

He wondered how far along the trail Lexa was.

use
w
Lexa
in
Seattle
after
split-up?

interior italics are needed for them on the hike

final Lexa-Mariah scene:

Mariah says she has another fellowship; Alaska for summer, Copper R. delta(?)

--Says she might look up Travis.

--Lexa: "Oh, hey. In that case." Goes and gets Mitch's outside sleeping bag.

"Travis is skinny, but he's pretty tall. Two of you will fit."

--"Eat dirt, sis."

flashbacks in this section can be brief, until the longer unfoldings during Lexa's run:

--Mitch weighing ashes

--Lexa and Jick deerhunting

--Mariah w/ Colin; Tairaoa?

Monuments have to be inserted fairly early into hike.

Mitch could fall down fire tower steps on his~~own~~ own, jerking the ashes away from the railing, rather than because of Mariah (or Lexa).

--does Mitch have to think it's Mariah messing w/ the ashes, and it turns out to be Lexa?

--wd have advantage that her solo rescue hike is a redemption

--her forgiveness of Lyle would match w/ Marshall's?

Bob Marshall:

He's on a high lonesome to avoid Region 1 hq, where some still remember *him as bat-eared kid out of Johns Hopkins, the Adirondacks. They're uneasy w/ him in his high FS job.

*who would take off for the Brooks Range or some other mountain venue at the drop of a hiking boot.

--He about had the wilderness designation system in place.

fishing contest:

 didn't tell me you've got
"No fair. You've got coordination."

"It's all in the...Yow!"

"Don't horse him!" Lexa shouted as Mitch instinctively yanked the pole back.

"Play him in toward you... You'll lose him, play him ~~in~~ slow

"Rightrightright. Okay, I'm playing him, come to Papa, come, fishie,

there's a good fishie...

Lexa was laughing so hard she let her line drift into a... "Shit!"

"What's this I here, profainity in the vicinity of my meal?"

She recovered by outfishing him three to two in the next half-hour.

~~Supper~~ Each catch brought ecstatic groans from them about supper.

*No dirty
talk
and my
love,
Miss!*

Night came to the Bob, (sequence of shadows on specific mountains,
their colors, catching last light, etc.)

Lexa in fire tower confrontation: to the effect that Mitch has to
separate the country and his father.