If Lexa were to win the coin flip, she would have to argue for Seattle over Montana; Mitch, she realizes, now could go either way, live either place.

--Mariah is committed to Montana.

--possibly plant in background that Lexa could go back to school;

or revise the Palmer @ the zoo situation, have him single and available?

Ornithology could be her field, this time.
"It's time we had a family gutspill."

"You think so, do you. Lexa, I--"

"Save it." She went over to Mitch...

"This is more irrigation of rocks, is it?"

"Sort of. We'll catch up with you... Don't peek, or you'll turn into a pillar of bear crap."

... 

"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."

Mariah looked bleak. "So what do you want to do? Push me off the mountain? Or shall I just hold my nose and jump?"

Lexa was silent a moment. "We can leave it to physics." She knuckled Mariah's arm. "Lucky for you I always carry phone food."

Lexa unzipped a side pocket of her backpack, and tore out a strip of duct tape with quarters stuck to it, you never knew when you might come out of the mountains...
"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—"
She wondered how that went last night, Mitch's get-together with
his daughter the toxic blimp. It could not have gone much worse than
when Jocelyn, up here for a seminar in counter-intuitive advertising
(rain-in-your-face Seattle was paradoxically famous for buying more
sunglasses per capita than anywhere else), came to dinner and behaved
as though every substance she came into contact with had mold on it.

Lexa, relieved mother of none that night, could not help but remember
how Jocelyn had taken a look at the picture on the refrigerator,
the one of Lexa on the beach, copper hair against the salal, yellow
boots and a yellow rainsuit; peeking around her hip was the square of
duct tape that reinforced the seat of the rainpants. What she held
in her arms, what lay all around, what had so famously happened:

Jocelyn said nothing, asked nothing. No curiosity. All cool. So
let her be, the sad-ass little girl the size of a ten-year-linebacker.

Mitch's son, Laurits, she'd never met; like the other half of his
generation, he was teaching English in Japan. If his accent was anything
like Jocelyn's, there would soon be busloads of Japanese tourists talking
like a Tennessee Williams play. The gator branch of the family, Lexa
thought of them as, but was honest enough to know she had a stake in their absence; if Mitch had been raising those kids, she wouldn't have spent night one under the same roof with them.
Lexa had never even met; he was off teaching English in Japan. If his accent was anything like Jocelyn's, there would soon be busloads of Japanese tourists talking like a Tennessee Williams play. The gator branch of the family, Lexa thought of Mitch's sulky grown children as, but was honest enough to admit what a stake she'd had in their absence. If Mitch had been raising those kids, she wouldn't have spent night one under this roof. It about blew her mind sometimes, the crazy arithmetic of chance that had delivered her here.
Lyle in "disposing of" scene tells Mitch his Phantom Woman request "is just between you and me." But it turns out promptly in "The Divide" he'd told Lexa—who jumps Mitch about the hike—and in the bunkhouse pie scene, Lyle had told Mariah as well.
E-mail messages from Jocelyn & Ritz

--should Jocelyn come to Montana?

-- " Ritz " " " ?
Countless times he had told himself he should not care about his father dinking around with life. But there's the dinker, and then there's the dinkee, isn't there. Mitch couldn't get away from the suspicion that his mother bore the brunt of his father's inconstancies.
The freeway sign for the Deer Lodge exit brought to mind the hardcase...

Lyle, where in the world did you get him? Mitch's mother had asked.

Penn State, his father said with a straight face, meaning State pen.
"It started out as kidding, was all. I just
wanted him to know that I knew he was getting
drunk and polished off romance, those trips out to
Falls for 'parts.'"

"Fishing, too, there was some of that.

"Jim never said a word. That's what really
got to ya dad. Joe mares just dropped him
like a paper.
antennae
small of Golun

central
along route

changed 2 changed 2, as though

Vernon of 00 proved part - can window w2 prisms

thin-room

or he

knew how to extract death, NS had given him at least that.

I concluded with God as concerned.
Someone breaks or breaks, its (our) story goes on at a new slant from there.
refusing to be erased, gone
It all waits, unerasable, although maybe a little smeary the way
does.
memory is. He could see the hayfields—the OO, the Donstedder Bench.

And the fields of rock.

always looked
His father's crews were mildly piratical. For a while, two of them
haying
were war buddies, Fritz Mannion, hat on the back of his head; Joe Ferragamo,
big-mouthed
Mitch grew to hate Fritz, but Ferragamo was another matter.
dark and composed. Ferragamo was in the pattern of smeltermen, taking
his vacation and downtime to work in the clear air. It was Ferragamo's
spot on the crew that Mitch was supposed to take, that summer when he
was sixteen. When he veered, instead.

And what was this, if not another veer. Back to
When soldiers talk, it is not of the muck and tedium of combat
life but the furloughs in Herculaneum or Paris.
What happens to a place when it begins to have more dead than living. Maybe the weight of a society shifts some way.
Lyke was made like a wrestler, built quiet
on a low center of gravity that looked even
denser because of way seat of his pants
perpetually drooped down. Time after time Joe
looked at him, when I wasn't aware, I wondered
if he'd ever be able to stand up to work way
I could.
My summer after high school, the wind flung itself across the farmland day upon steady day. As I aimed the tractor up a field, grit stung directly into my face; going down the field, the wind would swirl it in over my shoulder. When I tacked the equipment around a corner, the dust came sideways for the corners of my eyes. The tractor stopped at day's end, the wind would blow up along my body as I climbed down, the dust puffing up the length of my chest into my face. The hell, I spat; books don't blow dust at you all day long.
Her sister Mariah was lanky, daring, and OO. Lexa had grown up watching Mariah take on the world, aiming a camera back at whatever came along. She herself was better at grooves of life...
"Aren't you tired?" he asked her.

"Sure. But it's a good tired." She stretched, arms out and fists balled, the white swaths of scars bright white across the bottom of each clenched hand.
She was stirring the noodle pot when she began to hear tappa tappa.

Mitch was hunched on a log, the PowerBook across his knees.

"What gives?"

"Just looking up stuff. Bob Marshall, mostly."

"You really had to pack that? No wonder I got stuck with the oo.

Mitch, I don't see why--"

Tappa tappa tappa. It seemed to be coming from Mariah's tent.

"You too, Mariah?..."

"My photo inventory is on it. I'm just checking to see--"

"A two-computer backpacking trip, great."
There were muddy pawprints where the bear had felt along the canvas of the tepee, until deciding to rip his way in.

"We can assume the griz isn't in there any more," Lexa said, "or we'd all be eaten by now."
"Our distinguished hitchhiker—why did he want this?"

"Hell if I know," Mitch admitted. "He pounded a nail or two into the firetower, was the best I could get out of him." After a minute he added: "It wasn't like him. He didn't even like hunting in the mountains, he was a 'run-'em-down-on-the-prairie guy."
They climbed to 00 Pass in perfect sunshine and a ripping wind. It caught at their packs, the three of them leaning into the cloudless gale swearing and laughing. Lexa was miffed that she had to shed her hat, Mariah complained that her eyes kept watering up so that she couldn’t see to fire sight in her camera.

Mitch said little. The force of the wind, its air-avalanche down from the mountains into this pass, brought back his awareness of the earth going its own way.

Around them the wildflowers, 00 and 00 and 00, tugged against their stems.
"The fishing's great. The catching isn't worth a crap."

"I thought guys are supposed to be naturals at the hunting-gathering bit."

"Think again. Would you want..."

..."Fishing camp." OO pointed to the rod tips sticking out of the foam rolls.

"Mariah, we've got it made," Lexa said. "Our very own hunter-gatherer along, and here's his clan's fishing gear."

"I'm a Sagitarrius," Mitch protested. "We sit and think while gearheads are whipping the water with this stuff."

..."It's been forever. (Mitch casting.)"

"Does the body remember how?" (Mariah asks)

"Some. There's a lot of rust, though."

"Mmm."

"Anything worth doing is worth doing so-so."
Supper was snappy in more ways than one. Lexa, giving off about as much heat as the 00 stove she fired up, whipped together a pot of Uwajimaya noodles with carrots sliced in and flecks of basil for flavor. (Mariah: "Can I help?" Lexa: "No. Yes. Dig out the 00 bars for dessert.") They ate in silence, the alternative worse. (Mitch eventually: "Are there more noodles?" Lexa: "See for your goddamn self.")

The setting sun washed the firetower in light, peaks and valleys stroked into heavier outline. The purpling time, the McCaskill sisters knew the moment as, some spectrum shift... The lookout tower was aptly placed, you could look out over watersheds and headwaters, the mountains' 00 pelt of pine, the supple valleys, the half-mile-high walls of stone that fronted the mountain range. Ridiculously on cue, the last of the light set the clouds glowing red, like coals of the sun. Sunset lit up the clouds like glowing coals

"I am out of my mind, I already have fifty zillion pictures of clouds," Mariah said, going out onto the platform to shoot, Lyle reposed again in the bottom compartment of Mitch's backpack. As soon as dark arrived they turned in, Mitch and Mariah all but wordlessly acquiescing to Lexa's more-than-suggestion that they get
an early start in the morning, down out of here. Marching orders were hers, she reflected. 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 OOs?

In the crow's-nest of the continent, Phantom Woman the topmost

Halifax Astoria mast of mountain between New York and Seattle, the three rolled through the night.

Mitch was in half-sleep, the notebook of his brain open but woozy

stuff creeping in...

He heard the dry rustle of a sleeping bag, then a pause. Lexa or Mariah, needing to go down the stairs to take a pee and obviously reluctant about the trip. He settled back into doze. Then heard the scrabbling at the pack. Mice shouldn't be around, but why didn't Lexa or Mariah as the case may be step over there and scare off the little--

He reared up, with a grunt of realization, the sleeping bag cocooned on him. He fought at the zipper, floundering toward his backpack and the pencilbeam of light there.

"Quit! No you don't! Put it back--"
Finally managing to shed the sleeping bag, Mitch closed in on
the figure at the pack. She was holding the box of ashes with both
hands and the tiny flashlight clamped against the box. Faced off
against him in the darkened tower, she feinted the box to one side
and then the other, Mitch remembering that both McCaskill sisters had
been high school basketball standouts.

"Just put it down, okay?"

The hands hesitated. He leaped in and grabbed.

"Take the damned stuff, then." Lexa's voice was...

"I intend to," Mitch said, taking a step backward while cradling
the box tightly. "These are going back down with us," he asserted,
taking another step backward into the stairwell.

He fell like a full keg, tumbling in a clanging commotion down
the chute of stairs and railing until he hit the first landing. His
breath was knocked out of him for a moment. Mashed in his gripping
arms but not leaking was the box of ashes. Toward the base of his
leg was a savage pain he recognized from when he was sixteen years old.

"Christamighty," Mariah said, almost in awe, in the dark at the
top of the stairs.
He had almost asked Juanita Trippe to come along on the Lighthawk flight, Mount St. Helens could snooze through that Sunday morning without one of them on hand. But then he had thought Nah, she'll be in the way.

Juanita's whole approach to life was to be strenuously in the way.
Travis took it without qualm, which was one of the things that got her to wondering about Travis. Tons of bear out there in the bush—shouldn't there be some qualm?
Half the time they knew she was there, that is, there as Mariah, and the other half she was
atmosphere, barely noticeable click floating in and out of conversation like a thoughtful
clock of the tongue.

...  

"I wanted to do this on Mother, Record the last of her. And I couldn’t. Jick was
having a tough enough time as it was. I’d probably have had to fight you on it--"

"You damned bet."

"--and so it ended up I didn’t do it. I just didn’t have the guts."

...  

"The camera finds a certain amount of anybody, and that’s all. Taken me a lot of
years to admit it, but that’s the case. The old ‘soulcatcher’ idea is only half there."

"Maybe it’s the same in my line of work."

He made it a kind of second nature to himself, not really outright posing for her or
even ever wanting to see any of the proof sheets of her shooting. He just was interested in
being part of one last deal--her picture piece for the newspaper. That, and
Lyle looked wistful. "Been a while since there was two people to a bedroom in this house."

"Just here to help out a little while," Lexa emphasized. "Mitch and I will make out fine."

Exercise. He could feel himself waning inside, turning to sludge. His every muscle was yelping its conscience out at him. *Yo, Dairy Queenster, you want us to turn into rubber bands and suet?*

Lanky and shapely as she propped herself against the kitchen doorway, she honestly didn't seem to know she still looked like a million dollars, Lexa thought
angling an elbow toward the photographic gear dangling various places on Mariah.

One of their father's sagest observations was that Mariah liked to go around highly camera'ed up.

Says to tell you hi. He had to go off to Montana to head his dad off from some wild-hair scheme.”

Mariah appraised her sister. “You're looking real good, cookie. Your own catering must agree with you.

“Umm, one of those.”

Many hundreds of foot-pounds of baggage exertion later, they were at Lexa's van in the airport parking garage.

Mariah giggled. “Ghana,” she explained. “I was in Accra, they give names to their jitney taxis there like Consider Your Ways or Don't Do Sin, paint it on the side. You ever go out of the fancy grub business, you and old Can't Complain have a future over there.”

Lexa smiled wickedly. “We'll see what you think about that after you get a taste of my driving.”

Yet by the time he left that bed, onto crutches in late August, he was a deeper, stranger boy. Not exactly proud of the injury, but oddly conscious of its lasting effect. He had some feeling now for fate, for life going off the rails; or at least going into gear while
you were under its Detroit-made chassis. It occurred to Mitch that he had the wound—and if not near-death, at least close-enough death—that his father had escaped in the war. Fritz stopping to adjust his pack, Ferragamo seeing the Japanese ambusher in time; the fate of wound inched away from Lyle Rozier there in New Guinea. And found Mitch, in a Montana field.

...

The good weather was holding, Seattle basking between the blue of water and distant blue forests. “Pretty pretty,” Mariah said and left it at that.

“Remember the damned Gleaner?” The newspaper in Gros Ventre had run the headline: Jick McCaskill Goes to his Reward. Mariah still gritted over it. “Jick would’ve said he’d be happy to refund that one.”

Lexa shook her head. “You’re back from artsy-fartsying around the whole world, we’ve got every kind of catching up on each other to do, and we sit here talking about how people end up dead? What do you think, maybe the McCaskill sisters could stand to lighten up?”

“You two go ahead,” Lyle called from the living room. “I’m kind of on the outs with Murph.”
"We could eat someplace else," Mitch offered. "If there is anyplace else?"

"Naw, that’s okay, get yourselves on down to Murph’s. I’m not hungry anyway.

Want to go out and have a look at the Bench."

"See you later, then."

of the park where picnic tables sat in weatherbeaten lonesomeness

"I don’t know what you’ve got to be so sore about."

"Think back."

"Your mother, I suppose you mean."

That hadn’t been what Mitch meant, but it was now. "Did you enjoy giving her a bad time? All those late-for-suppers, the beers with the boys and that other kiting around you were always doing, is that what that was about?"

"You were such a hotshot at marriage yourself, huh? Now why didn’t I think to ask your advice."

"I’ll tell you what I think. You never stopped being at war."

But Lyle wasn’t having any. "We both know," he said, "there’s been more than one war."
A gust of that wind rattled cottonwood leaves somewhere above the car, startling Mitch as always. Another of the aspects in which the town was stunted was trees, the minerals of the springs and Soda Creek too hard on their roots. But his father had practically ordered the short row of cottonwoods out front not to die, dosing them judiciously with farming fertilizer. Among Mitch’s chores as a boy had been many buckets of water lugged to those famishing trees. They were the most respectable items on the place now.

Twirling her finger in the telephone cord, she gave him a moment to rib her in return, but he didn’t.

Parts of him were going gaunt. His cheekbones dramatized his face, buttresses of a structure starting to give way. His bodily frame was still solid, but the cords on the back of his hands stood out like grim furrows.

Lyle all at once looked weary.

“Lexa, I really don’t want to argue,” he began, setting off her Since when? sector again. “But all my life here I’ve had to keep telling myself that if a man—excuse me up and down, if a person keeps trying, it’s bound to pay off. Trying to do something with
country like this takes patience. Mitch didn’t want to have patience, at least didn’t want to
have it here.

...

She had hoped for a fresh version of that in Alaska. But no kids, for a start; Travis
was shooting blanks. Nor could she ever get comfortable with Alaska; in her experience,
Alaska was cut-something-down or drill-something-up, and she grew damned sick of it.
She knew that Seattle life, the coast, was a kind of retreat. But the rain-rich land there
mended itself. Tundra did not, just as desert did not. People were going to live in places
such as Seattle in multitudes, that was a given. (Until physics, in the form of earthquake or
volcano, leveled the place, Mitch would have duly pointed out.) She’d had to search a little
for elbow room, but so far she had found it. And now it was country like this that she
wanted to keep at arm’s length....

.. Four boys at eight or nine hours of rockpicking, $32 or $36 a day; and the same sum for
Lyle, sitting there guiding the truck along at a mile an hour.

Sharpless said, “Here comes a lateral, Lope.” With both hands he lobbed a rock
the size of a workshoe toward Loper.

Mitch watched several fancy flings of rocks before pulling out the throttle a
fraction to keep the truck going, then stepped out onto the running board.
“Hey, Sharps, and you guys,” he yelled while keeping his hand on the steering wheels. “My old man’s not going to go for that.”

...  

This day Sharpless and Loper gradually giggled themselves into the notion of rearranging the middle rocks of the W. Carry them up and make a bar across the top of the right-hand leg of the W, and there you had it, a slightly askew but perfectly readable TITS.

“Hey, huh uh, bad idea,” Mitch tried with a forced laugh, already knowing this could be major trouble. “The old man will can your asses.”

“Do you want him dead? Is that it?”

Then can’t figure out why he ends up on a rockpile like that.”

This private knowledge—he couldn’t say it gave him satisfaction, but it lent him a certain feeling of awareness.

By then he had been living in excitement and fear around Adele. “Fear” wasn’t quite the word there, either, it ended up amounting to more than that. a lot more.
She could have had a field day scoffing at some of the other ideas. The time Lyle and a few others around town tried to interest bottled water companies. Half of them said the artesian tasted too terrible and the other half said it tasted too good.

The ground under him was a different consistency every day.

The rocks were being dumped in a draw here, not as hungrily yawning as the Donstedder coulee but sharp-sloped enough, the clatter and crack of as he tossed them from the stoneboat, or tipped the largest ones off and let them roll.

... 

The loss of the summer nagged at him. Even working for his father would have been better than being bed-ridden. They lived there like castaways. They were an austere pair, emotionless as ceramic figurines, but aware of it; you had the feeling they would confer, lying in bed like two logs, and decide to give you their year’s crop.

But the Bench, the gravel. He had a distinct feeling this idea was to be a winner.

He did a lot of considering about marrying Marie Tournierre, but in the end, her kids and all, he backed away from it. It just seemed easier to operate by himself. Knowing he was a goner was surprisingly interesting to him in a sort of backwards way, though. So far, dying was like going away somewhere, traveling, being a tourist where nobody really
knew you. Like on that visit of his to Seattle, watching people who didn’t know he
existed.

This was what being sergeant was all about, he figured. The Montanans liked
having one of their own wearing those stripes.

Come right down to it, dying was a person’s own business. There’d been the duty
to eventually tell Mitch, sure, which he had now carried out.

*Your wife*—what’s that wimpy way they put it now—*predeceased you*. .. This

Mariah was a pistol, wasn’t she.
Tocqueville to Tokeville, the American story.
Lyle refusing to eat:

"Isak (dinesen) did. What I read, she (lived on oysters and champagne)...

That Out of Africa.
from yellow pad:

Mitch's ecological distress: a slow terror like sweat from a fever.

---El Nino winter...oceans several degrees warmer than usual...
Lexa:

--Mariah in contrast has an iron drive, straight ahead.

--have her work for the dino dig near Choteau? rodeo stock supplier? dude ranch?

--have her fill in as brand inspector?

--llamas and lattes? ostriches & emus & alpacas?