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He met her gaze for a moment, smiled but kept the silence, then they both turned again to the Gates of the Mountains.

"Have I got it right, that we're out here freezing our tails just so's you can sing to us?" the boatman, Harris, was asking Monty.

"This is a new one on me, but that's about the size of it," Monty responded, [so exhilarated he felt] only half there in conversation but [knowing] [knowledgeably apprehensive] enough to try to keep his end up [even with this sour] [looker.] He warmed his hands over the boat engine. "Probably the Major didn't order this wind. Throw it in free, did you?"

Harris hunched farther into his mackinaw and steered toward the middle of the river, giving plenty of leeway to the blunt set of cliffs rearing at the next bend. With mixed feelings Monty took in what was going to be the backdrop for his tryout. *Owes me a little something, around here.* To him this was still the Helena country, although Helena itself had spurned the river in favor of gold-flecked

Answer, according  
to make in,  
act of love.

more  
"shut off"  
to her, too?

out of habit

He

next  
gave him a  
sour look

as if to get  
his bearings!

gulches, so by now the city, the capitol dome or the fancy turreted houses or Clore Street or any of that, lay far out of sight behind the boat. He scanned the range of mountains stacked around the canyon; as scenery went, the Big Belts struck him as dead-end views. Gulches to nowhere, slabs of cliff around every corner, round-shouldered summits that didn't amount to that much. Not like the Two Medicine country he was lifelong used to, with its dune shapes of the Sweetgrass Hills way over east there as if they were pretty mirages that just never faded and the big reefs of the Rockies up everywhere into the sky to the west. This river was something, though, rolling its way mile after mile through rock-solid canyon. The hum came without his even inviting it.

*Oh, Shenandoah, I long to see you*

*Away, you rolling river.*

The memory voice came along with it. "Can you sing that one by yourself, Monty? Mama's mama taught me it, when I was little like you. Here, I'll help you with it."

*Oh, Shenandoah, I'll not deceive you*

*Away, we're bound away, 'cross the wide Missouri.*

Bound away; maybe that was as good a way as any to look at this dizzying

read  
to  
here

more  
had. expect  
some from  
Mojave?

Y. prairie  
in between

Change to  
End of -  
Road?

YES

Whatever  
that word  
was, in my  
eye.

excursion on what was indubitably the Missouri, although this canyon held in the wide.

“Say, how many horses you got going on this pirate ship?” Monty threw out, to get the boatman to talking. Best way to be was to listen more than you spoke.

“About a dozen. Who wants to know?” Harris eyed him as if he resented the challenge to the boat’s horsepower.

The Duesenberg had ninety. “Just wondering. I been around engines quite a little bit myself.” Deciding this was one of those times when there was something to be said for silence, Monty clammed up and warmed his hands again in the radiated heat from the cylinder block. Fingers long and tapered but strong from years of milking cows; pinkish palms that had known their share of calluses--these hands had been his ticket to chauffeuring, that time during his recuperation when he took it upon himself to tinker Mister Whit’s junked Model A back to life, handling each part of the stripped-down engine until he could have assembled them in bed under the covers. ‘Handy’ was one thing that meant what it said. With all due satisfaction he recalled washing these hands over and over at the end of each day spent in the grease, carefully cleaning under the fingernails

with the point of his jackknife blade, to look slick as a whistle when he sat up to the Double W supper table with the hard-used riders and haying crews. Done their job, too, these hands; flagged the Major's attention when he looked around for someone new to be his car man after Frenchy went on one drinking spree too many. Monty kept on rubbing them here for circulation and luck. Now to see what his voicebox could manage.

Still needing to assure himself this was really happening to him, he sneaked another look around the boat. The Major and the music mistress at the bow, taking in the sights. The Major's Helena hired couple huddling under the canvas canopy, bewildered as chickens. Himself and Harris, chauffeurs by land and water. Six folks total on an excursion boat that would hold, what, thirty?

The boatman had followed his glance around the vessel. "Normal people, I don't take out here this soon in the year," Harris muttered.

*Like to meet any of those in this lifetime, normal,* Monty's mind raced on. *But the man has a point. 'Normal' wouldn't cut it for a shindig like this.* Notions jittered in him today like fancywear on a clothesline. It was boggling: a different life to fit over the one he already had on? Was there enough of him to wear all that? Let his imagination tailor it and there was. That write-up he had seen on

Paul Robeson in a Sunday paper the Major had passed along a while back made it sound as if Robeson was up there with the best of them. Singing in ritzy concert halls, consorting with royalty, probably making a bundle. And in a place as big as the U.S. of A., wouldn't it stand to reason there might be room enough for two colored singers? From that piece of thinking it was only a hop and a skip--all right, a hell of a running jump but at least this might give him somewhere to spring from--to a destination like New York. His previous experience there, that time Mister Whit took the rodeo back East, had pretty much been a fizzle.

America had just gone into the war in Europe, you could hardly sneak a go-round of bull riding in before another War Bonds speaker took over the arena, and the bulls were peeved with it all when they did pile out of the chutes. Three days' worth of the roughest clowning he'd ever had to do, was about all he had been able to make New York amount to then. The worst of it was, and it still burned at him, he went through that whole time back there about a day late in catching on to things. Take that first night, when the rest of the rodeo hands put up in the usual kind of flophouse but he of course had to go find one up on the edge of Harlem. Walked in, asked for a room, the mulatto desk clerk shoved the hotel register at him and asked right back, "*You want it furnished?*" He had blinked at the man in

trim or  
cut.  
or more  
top. 68?

Victory?

astonishment. "Hell yes, what do you think?" he said and slapped his money down. Went on up to the room and threw his bag on the bed, glum that people back here evidently could tell by looking at him that he was from someplace like Montana. Try to fob off a room with no furniture on a poor hardworking rodeo hand, huh. He was surprised by the quick knock on the door, and more so by the woman furnished there when he opened it.

Well, whatever could be put down under his name in the book of life by now, at least he wasn't that green any more. If he could get trained up for it, as somebody like Robeson must have had to do too, maybe he could show New York something this time around. He caught himself letting his hopes run too high; there was also every chance his big notion of becoming a singer amounted to a pipe dream that was going to be over the instant he didn't make his mouth work right for that lofty-looking woman up there in the bow.

To be doing something besides picturing himself in full song beneath chandeliers that scintillated like the diamonds in the necklaces and stickpins of the rapt audience one moment and envisioning himself pucker-mouthed and mute as a trout in front of this music woman the next instant, Monty craned out enough to catch a glimpse of the higher reaches of the Big Belt Range. Nice clean fresh

NY, even.

Sure. oo  
while you're  
@ it.

1st thing was  
make

change  
"lofty" here  
suburban party  
7 women  
or just do it @  
"woman"

pair of  
female  
ears

snow on those slopes; good tracking snow. He half wished he were up there hunting, cutting the tracks of a bull elk in one of those open parks near timberline, instead of down here at this. But wishing was what had landed him into this, wasn't it.

Of its own accord his turned-up overcoat collar all at once drooped and let the wind in on him, surprising him the way just about everything was surprising him today. No reason to be jumpy, he told himself as he turned the unruly collar back up. Yes, there was. White lady variety. He sneaked another peek toward the bow of the boat and wondered again about this teacher situation. The Major claimed she was the sharpest thing going, where training up a singing voice was involved. Look at it like resorting to a doctor, one of those specialists. It would be a whole hell of a lot easier on the nerves, though, if her skin tone and his weren't as far apart as those white and black Scotty dog magnets he had played with as a boy, one capable of propelling the other across the floorboards just by being the opposite kind. But that was the kind of principle he would have to put up with to get where he wanted to go.

That's if she consented to take him on, after this. He could kick himself for the way he'd messed up back at the dock. "How do you do, again, Miss

She had  
lofty,  
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height <sup>10' tall</sup>

Ungodly  
tall for  
a woman.  
He needed  
again

Susan," he'd heard come out of his mouth when she stepped aboard the boat and walked up to him as if examining a bad painting. He had no earthly idea why *again* hopped in there that way. It wasn't as if he was on speaking acquaintance with her--although he had heard the rumor about the Major and her, back some years before he was driving for the Major--but somehow the fact that he and she both were originally from the Two Medicine country seemed like a kind of knowing each other or each other's families or general circumstances of growing up there or something. His try at conveying that, though, had come out sounding all too much like they were peas from the same pod.

Snooty wasn't quite the word for the way she stood there giving him a going over, or at least he hoped it wasn't. She came right back at him with: "You seem to have caught the Major's ear, Mister Rathbun. Such a spot for a debut."

"He's giving me a good help, that's sure." He had not known what more to say about the Major providing all of outdoors as a music hall. Being a Williamson, the Major could do about anything he wanted, couldn't he. So with that the two of them ran out of the makings of talk and he'd had to stand there like a mooring post while she and the Major went on with chitchat until the boat chugged to life and he headed to the stern in the natural gravitation of things.

(Keen),  
that was  
it, he  
caught,  
Alleged. told  
in any <sup>had</sup> need to  
case, <sup>convince</sup> well.

whatever.  
correct read  
of her war,

What if he got buck fever, in front of her, and couldn't remember the words? Couldn't possibly forget words to something you'd known all your life.

*"Sing with Mama while she washes, Montgomery. Ah ah AH! That's it, sing with Mama."* Just to make sure, he ran the song through his head again now.

Then what if he sang it word-perfect and she still said she had heard a better voice on a bullfrog?

Nervously he rubbed an eyebrow with the knuckle of his thumb. Nobody around but the clam running the boat and the dumb-cluck hired couple to watch him make a fool of himself, at least. That wasn't always the case <sup>cut?</sup> when he hit the Helena country. Helena had played hell with him, all right, he reflected with overdue wisdom as the boat slowed to a kind of aquatic waddle in the presence of the most imposing cliffs yet. He grimaced, the reminder of his last time in town still so fresh. The dust-up over his fantan debt, nothing really hurt except his dignity; but on top of that, the brush-off from Leticia. A man could hardly come to town any more without getting treated like Job's dog. *"Leticia?"* those joyboys in the Zanzibar had razzed him unmercifully, *"call out the militia!"* This time his wince cut all the way to the heart. He had been stuck on Leticia. She wasn't street baggage, she was a good decent copper-brown woman with a part-interest

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“Probably the Major didn’t order this wind. Throw it in free, did you?”

Harris hunched farther into his mackinaw and steered toward the middle of the river, giving plenty of leeway to the blunt set of cliffs rearing at the next bend. Exhilarated, apprehensive, and all the rest, Monty took a gulp of the spring air, to clear his thinking as much as he could. *There ain’t much I can’t do some of, by now. But this?* He hadn’t expected this dizzying excursion. The most he had been counting on was to-the-point advice from the Major, or possibly a word put

in somewhere, or if he really hit it lucky a nice loan. (*Draw some wages ahead,* was always the way you wanted to put that.) So this was amazing, the Major saying "*I know just the medicine*" and producing this music teacher, [and Mister Whit going along okay with it. The Williamson brothers were not anybody's patsies, after all. Slackwater versions of their father, maybe, who used to boss everybody by roaring around at a pace where you could have played cards on his shirttail. But what child of Warren Williamson wouldn't be a tamer version of the original. And the two of them had more than enough going for themselves. Rough Rider back there in the Spanish-American, and decorated up, down and sideways in the big war, the Major didn't have to back up for any man on the courage score, but he didn't lord it over the Double W crew. Even Mister Whit would cut you a break, if you caught him on the day of the week his heart worked; let you off early for a Saturday night trip to town, say. Or give you a shot at rodeo clowning.

*All my lacks, though. Get past them with something made up out of air, can I? Since when.* That self-skeptical moment he tried to put over the side of the boat, and concentrate instead the voicebox matter. ] The hum came without his even inviting it.

So you ed  
have hooked  
him over w/  
a feather  
when

*You know how you get at the end of the road*

*Trying to stand up under life's load.*

The memory voice came along with it. "*Can you sing that one by yourself, Monty? Mama's mama taught me it, when I was little like you. Here, I'll help you with it.*"

*Done in and done up and down to a speck.*

*That's when the right word will lighten your trek.*

Whatever that word was, in this life.

"Say, how many horses you got going on this pirate ship?" Monty threw out, to get the boatman to talking. Around somebody like him, best way to be was to listen more than you spoke.

"About a dozen. Who wants to know?" Harris eyed him as if he resented the challenge to the boat's horsepower.

The Duesenberg had ninety. "Just wondering. I been around engines quite a little bit myself." Deciding this was one of those times when there was something to be said for silence after all, Monty clammed up and warmed his hands again in the radiated heat from the cylinder block. Fingers long and tapered but strong from years of milking cows; pinkish palms that had known

their share of calluses--these hands had been his ticket to chauffeuring, that time during his recuperation when he took it upon himself to tinker Mister Whit's junked Model A back to life, handling each part of the stripped-down engine until he could have assembled them in bed under the covers. 'Handy' was one thing that meant what it said. With all due satisfaction he recalled washing these hands over and over at the end of each day spent in the grease, carefully cleaning under the fingernails with the point of his jackknife blade, to look slick as a whistle when he sat up to the Double W supper table with the hard-used riders and haying crews. Done their job, too, these hands; flagged the Major's attention when he looked around for someone new to be his car man after Frenchy went on one drinking spree too many. Monty kept on rubbing them here for circulation and luck. Now to see what his voicebox could manage.

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To be doing something besides picturing himself in full song beneath chandeliers that scintillated like the diamonds in the necklaces and stickpins of the rapt audience one moment and envisioning himself pucker-mouthed and mute as a trout in front of this music woman the next instant, Monty craned out enough to catch a glimpse of the higher reaches of the Big Belt Range. Gulches to nowhere, slabs of cliff around every corner, round-shouldered summits that didn't amount

to that much. Not like the Two Medicine country he was lifelong used to, with its dune shapes of the Sweetgrass Hills way over east there as if they were pretty mirages that just never faded and the big reefs of the Rockies up everywhere into the sky to the west. This river was something, though, rolling its way mile after mile through rock-solid canyon. And dead-end views or not, the low mountains stacked around the canyon showed nice clean fresh snow on their slopes; good tracking snow. He half wished he were up there hunting, cutting the tracks of a bull elk in one of those open parks near timberline, instead of down here at this. But wishing was what had landed him into this, wasn't it.

Of its own accord his turned-up overcoat collar all at once drooped and let the wind in on him, surprising him the way just about everything was surprising him today. No reason to be jumpy, he told himself as he turned the unruly collar back up. Yes, there was. White lady variety. They could be worse than the men. Treat you like some kind of moron who sleeps in the sheepdip trough. He sneaked another peek toward the bow of the boat and wondered again about this Miss Duff. Why wasn't she a Mrs. Duff, for starters? She looked lofty, although maybe it was just the altitude temperature that went with her being so ungodly tall

for a woman. The Major claimed she was the sharpest thing going, where training up a singing voice was involved.

Look at it like resorting to a doctor, one of those specialists, that was the point of view he was going to try to take. It would be a whole hell of a lot easier on the nerves, though, if her skin tone and his weren't as far apart as those white and black Scotty dog magnets he had played with as a boy, one capable of propelling the other across the floorboards just by being the opposite kind. But that was the kind of principle he would have to put up with to get where he wanted to go, he resolved again.

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barrels that way, it registered deep. Off she had gone with that slickback head waiter from the Broadwater Hotel, and that was that.

Maybe it had taken him too long to get himself in gear, maybe he shouldn't have needed yet another dose of Clore Street to teach him. But in any case he had dragged his tail back to the ranch admitting to himself that life as he was practicing it was never going to provide beyond what it already did--the room on the back end of the wash-house, the choreboy's place at the long table three times a day, wages that were gone before you could clink the dollars together.

Which is why he had mustered himself and asked the proper source:

*"Major? You know anything about those singers, on stage and that?"*

"Pity." Wes was peering critically at the Missouri's volume of water, already running high with the first of spring melt against the shoreless base of the cliffs.

"What is?"

"Oh, nothing. It would've made a wonderful place to put a railroad through."