

Sandrine

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These things happened fifty years ago. It was 1962, the year of the World's Fair in Seattle. I was twenty-one and had just finished my junior year at Utah State University in Logan. My forestry advisor there had wrangled me a summer job as an intern with the National Park Service at Mount Rainier. He said I needed to experience the contrast between the dry pine forests of the interior West and the lush fir forests of the Pacific Northwest.

I went home for a few days before leaving—home being a farm in Curlew Valley about fifty miles west of Logan. On the day I headed for the Northwest, my mother said goodbye by taking my hands and making me look directly into her dark, bespectacled eyes. “Remember, Lewis,” she said, “if it comes to having to make a choice, I'd rather you be good than happy.” Being a conscientious Mormon son, I thought about what she had said for a while after I took to the road. I couldn't imagine a situation where I'd have to make such a choice.

I followed the most direct road between Curlew Valley and Mount Rainier I could find on my Shell Oil road map. I wanted to take in the World's Fair but I figured I could do that later on in the summer. Nothing had prepared me for the spectacle of Mount Rainier. Although it's considered a part of the Cascade Range, it towers over neighboring peaks. Measuring over 14,000 feet, its perpetually snow-covered summit is visible from a hundred miles away.

I was stationed at the primary visitors' center in the park, appropriately called Paradise, which consisted of a big parking lot, a large lodge for tourists, and several smaller dormitories for park staff and for guides belonging to a professional guiding service. I bunked in one of the dormitories with a pleasant high school teacher who spent summers on the seasonal park staff. I quickly

discovered that my duties were far from glorious, consisting mostly of emptying garbage cans, picking up litter, and answering tourist questions. I wasn't unhappy with all that. I was learning a lot about the park and I loved the mountain, especially at dawn and dusk on clear days, when the towering peak burned with a delicate orange alpenglow. That was a sight I never got tired of.

I was on duty six days a week, including Sunday—with an hour and a half off early Sunday morning to attend a small sacrament service for Mormon tourists in the basement of the lodge. My scheduled day off each week was Tuesday. At first, I didn't drive out much on that day, being caught up by exploring the mountain. I visited view points, followed foot trails through the park, and one Tuesday borrowed boots and parka and climbed in the snow to a climber's base camp. But eventually I began to drive off the mountain to explore logging practices on both public and private forest lands—this on the recommendation of my advisor at Utah State.

One Tuesday I ventured up the Carcelle River, a logged-out valley draining out of the northwest corner of the park. In the evening I stopped at a café in Beaufort, a town of about a hundred inhabitants. It was late and the café was empty except for the proprietor, who served me a hot pork sandwich. His name was Maximilian Stewart, Max for short. He was maybe forty-five years old and bald and soft-spoken and he had a hard time looking me in the eyes when he talked. I asked him what he knew about the logging boom along the river during the early twentieth century. He seemed hesitant at first, as if he didn't know much at all about that topic, but pretty soon he opened up and began to talk and I realized I had struck gold.

When I left, I asked him if it would be okay for me to come back on the following Tuesday and he said, sure, he'd be glad to tell me anything he knew about the history of the river. As I got up to leave, his wife came in the front door, and he introduced us and suddenly everything turned topsy-turvy for me. Her name was Sandrine and she was a beauty. There's no other word for it. She was just a beauty—in her early twenties, auburn hair, naturally defined eyebrows, porcelain cheeks.

The problem was I couldn't get her off my mind during the following days, a fact that smacked of a violation of the command-

ment that says thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife. It was so bothersome that I pretty much made up my mind that I wouldn't go back to the café. However, on a routine phone call to my advisor at Utah State, I mentioned Beaufort, and he wanted to know more about the place. I told him it had a post office, a mercantile, a saloon, and of course Max's café. It also had an elementary school to which students were bused from an even smaller town called Limington, which was located on up the river a few miles. "My gad, Lewis," my advisor said over the phone, "do you realize these little derelict logging towns are prime subjects for a study on the sociology of forest-dependent communities. What an opportunity! Don't miss it."

What he was proposing was graduate-level work and I was still an undergrad. But I'd be setting myself up for an exceptional master's thesis a couple of years down the road. I resisted the idea for a few minutes on account of Sandrine, but my advisor wouldn't take no for an answer. As I thought things over, my apprehension began to strike me as just plain silly. I was a Mormon born and bred. I had standards, I recognized boundaries. Admiring Max's wife didn't amount to lusting on her, any more than admiring a beautiful painting amounted to stealing it. So I said okay, and that's how it happened that for the rest of the summer I devoted my day off to a project that I grandiosely entered as "sociological analysis" on my *per diem* requests from the undergraduate research fund at Utah State.

I spent a few Tuesdays creating a population map from county records in Tacoma, which allowed me to document the waxing and waning of Beaufort and Limington. The records also named a couple of sizeable logging camps, Little Quebec and Chambers Landing, that had simply disappeared beneath second-growth trees and brush. After that, my research was basically just a matter of talking to people who lived on the river. I won't say I worked hard at it—it was my day off, after all. Some afternoons I just parked my car, a twelve-year-old Chevrolet, on a Forest Service road and took a nap.

In any event, I made a point of ending my day by having a late supper at the café in Beaufort, where I pumped Max for information. My task became easier as Max became interested in my re-

search project and began asking some of his other customers about things I wanted to know. Naturally, I came to know Sandrine and also their daughter, an eight-year-old named Aubrey, who were usually present. Sandrine kept busy, setting tables or preparing menus for the next day, but she listened to my conversation with Max and sometimes added comments of her own. She had a soft voice and was capable of a radiant smile. But much of the time she seemed tense and preoccupied and prone to answer questions tersely. In contrast, Aubrey was relaxed and cheerful. She had auburn hair, a pug nose, and missing top incisors. She and Max were obviously deeply attached, and she quickly took a shine to me. She liked to sit at the counter and lean against me while I ate my supper or chatted with Max.

Sometimes my conversations with Max got onto personal topics. The fact I was an active Mormon pleased Max. He had worked with a Mormon man in Seattle and liked him. He had the idea that Mormons are extra trustworthy. According to him, that's why a lot of Mormon men were recruited into the FBI and Secret Service. I could believe that easily enough, but to keep things honest I had to tell him that the majority of the felons in the Utah State Penitentiary were Mormons. Max asked if I had been a missionary and when I said no he wanted to know why. It was because I had qualified for a four-year scholarship at Utah State, which I accepted after promising my mother that when I graduated, I would go on a mission.

At any rate, Max decided that I was to be classified among the trustworthy of the world as I learned toward the end of the summer. It was late one Tuesday night after Sandrine had taken Aubrey to their house across the street to put her to bed. As I prepared to leave, Max came from behind the counter and followed me to the door. He said he wanted to ask a favor of me but first he needed to tell me something about Sandrine, which he hoped I would keep a secret.

The secret was she was an ex-junkie whom he had rescued from the alleys of Seattle. The first time he ever saw her, he was on duty at a shipping platform under the viaduct on Elliott Bay. He was old enough, of course, to be her father. He was divorced and his two adult children lived out of state. The shipping platform was a cheerless, noisy place where trucks rumbled in with

produce and hardware, and huffing switch engines positioned freight cars for unloading in front of the platform. Around the corner lived a colony of winos and street dwellers—or at least they slept there in cardboard boxes and sleeping bags. One summer he noticed a new one, Sandrine, who started sitting in the sun at the far edge of the loading dock. After a couple of days Max began to talk to her, and things went from there. She was a wreck, emaciated, listless, and addicted. The child protection agency had put Aubrey into foster care within weeks of her birth. Sandrine didn't know who Aubrey's father was. She told Max it could have been any of a half dozen fellows who traded her a hit for a session down an alley. But dissipation hadn't erased her beauty. Max took her in, cleaned her up, financed her rehab, and married her when she came out. That's when they bought the café in Beaufort. Max wanted Sandrine a long way from downtown Seattle. After a couple of years, the child protection agency turned Aubrey over to them.

As for the favor, Max introduced it in a roundabout way. Before school ended in May, Aubrey's class had gone on a field trip to the World's Fair in Seattle and Sandrine had volunteered to go along as one of the adult chaperones. However, as the time approached, she fell apart—that is, she began having bad dreams at night and bouts of weeping during the day. The upshot of the episode was that Max accompanied Aubrey on the field trip and Sandrine stayed home and kept the restaurant going. "She just couldn't take it, Lewis," Max said. "Too many bad things happened to her in Seattle. Her own mother was a junkie, you know, and her father abandoned the two of them while Sandrine was a little girl."

Aubrey returned from the Fair in May insisting that Sandrine attend. She wanted her mother to see the giant circular fountain that sprayed jets of water high in the air, and she wanted her to go up the Space Needle and ride the monorail. Sandrine said she'd go, but she kept putting it off until here it was the end of August. Unfortunately, a neighbor lady who had promised to go with her had gone off to California to help out at a niece's confinement. Also, one of the waitresses at the café had quit and moved to Missouri. Being shorthanded at the café, Max felt he couldn't go with

Sandrine. But somebody had to and then, as Max said, it hit him like a bolt of lightening who that would be.

“I don’t know why I didn’t think of you earlier,” he said. “You are the one, Lewis! You’re solid, you’re religious, you’ve got ethics. Everybody respects you.”

I began shaking my head the instant I understood what he wanted of me.

“Now don’t get in a hurry to say no,” Max said. “Sandrine has feelings for Seattle. She wants to go. She needs to go. But she shouldn’t go alone. Somebody responsible has to go with her. That’s just all there is to it.”

I shook my head even more emphatically.

“Please just listen me out,” he said. “You are worrying about the appearances of it. Beaufort isn’t a place that pays any attention to things like that. After all, this is the twentieth century. We’re not a bunch of Victorians. I know it would be a big imposition on you. I’ll give you the money for tickets and meals and a tank of gas. And my gosh, Lewis, you need to go for your own sake. The summer’s coming to an end, and you’ll be heading back to Utah shortly. You don’t want to leave Washington without visiting Seattle.”

Eventually I agreed to do it—not that night, but the next Tuesday after I had thought it over for a week. I agreed partly because Max had pressed me so urgently but mostly because it seemed a breach of my faith, a denial of my testimony, to suppose a young man born of goodly Mormon parents might be susceptible to thoughts of adultery even while spending a long, intimate day with the most beautiful woman he had ever met.

The following Tuesday—only a couple of weeks from the scheduled end of my internship—I rolled out of my bunk at a very early hour. My roommate, who was still in his bunk, got up on an elbow and watched me. “Where are you going at this god-awful time of the day?” he said.

“To visit the Fair.”

He shook his head and lay back. “Well, have a good time.”

“I doubt that I will,” I said. “It’s more or less a duty, just to accommodate a friend.”

When I picked up Sandrine, Max came out of the house to see us off. He wrung my hand with gratitude. As I escorted Sandrine

to my old Chevrolet, she paused and looked back. She didn't seem happy. "Go on, honey," Max called. "Have a good time." She waved and we went on. She slid into her seat and I closed the door.

She was wearing a cotton dress and an open sweater. The dress was light blue, with buttons from waist to collar. When she was standing, the hem came slightly below her knees, though of course, when she was seated in the car, it rested slightly above. A lot of people have bony knees. Not Sandrine. Knees, calves, ankles, whatever—as I've said, she was perfection.

We drove for a while without saying much. The silence made me uncomfortable. Words, even banal ones, cover awkward emotions, and I for one was feeling a lot of awkward emotions. At a station on the outskirts of Puyallup, I stopped for gasoline and used the restroom. As we resumed our drive, Sandrine said, "I'm sorry you have to do this for me. But Max wouldn't give up on it. Neither would Aubrey."

"I'm glad to do it," I lied.

"Max is a good man."

"I know he is," I said.

"It isn't his fault I'm a mess," she said.

What could I say to that?

After awhile we passed some goats in a pasture. "They look peaceful," Sandrine said. Her voice struck me as envious.

"I suppose they are," I said. "Their lives aren't very complicated." It occurred to me then that being beautiful might be a terrible handicap for a girl born into precarious circumstances.

"Do you have goats on your farm in Utah?" she said.

"Yes. A pair of them—Sadie and Eliza."

We glanced at each other and she gave me a brief flicker of an incandescent smile.

"What's it like on your farm?" she said.

I began to talk, glad for the topic. I told her our farm was in the middle of a long dry valley. There were drab hills on either side, dotted by scrub juniper and sparse yellow range grass—quite a contrast to the green vines, ferns, and flowers flourishing beneath the towering canopy of the Northwest forests. We had a couple of irrigated fields; otherwise, we planted dry land to winter wheat. I attended grade school in a hamlet called Snowville, and I

went to high school in Garland, a fifty-mile bus ride each way, which meant I left home long before dawn and got home long after dusk in the middle of the winter. We drove to Tremonton for groceries and we attended church in Snowville. Sandrine wanted to know who “we” were. I told her it included my father and mother and my sisters Harriet and Melanie, Harriet being still in grade school and Melanie coming up on her junior year at Bear River High School in Garland. Then, just as an afterthought, I told Sandrine my father was the first Mullen to become a Mormon, but my mother’s line, the Bucyruses, traced their Mormonism back almost to the beginnings in Kirtland, Ohio, which gave her and her family a leg up in the pecking order among their fellow Mormons.

When I glanced at Sandrine, I saw she had relaxed. I supposed she was projecting a lot of wish fulfillment onto my family—likely more than it merited because my father was something of an authoritarian grump and my mother was a world-class worrier.

When we reached Seattle, I parked across the street from the Fair, which was taking place on a large spread of land that is now called Seattle Center. While we stood on the street corner waiting for the traffic light to change, I saw that the tense look had returned to Sandrine’s face. I felt a bit unnerved myself, being reminded how much I hated the rattle and roar of big city traffic. As far as I was concerned, the traffic in Logan, which had no more than 15,000 residents in 1962, was far too thick.

I couldn’t guess how many acres the Fair occupied, but it was enough to get lost in. There were exhibits beyond counting, some of them taking up whole buildings. Theoretically, all the exhibits pointed toward the twenty-first century, the title of the Fair being Century 21 Exposition. I was pleased to see Sandrine get caught up in some of the exhibits. We both liked the displays about space exploration in the United States Science Pavilion, which consisted of several substantial buildings surrounding a courtyard of Gothic arches perched atop slender spider-like legs. Later on I learned that it was a show of bravado for the United States. Our nation was scrambling to make up for the Soviet Union having put up a satellite ahead of us in 1957.

When we emerged from the United States Science Pavilion, I suggested we go up the Space Needle. At the base, we craned our

necks and gaped at the rotating observation deck some 500 feet above us. Ticket holders were queued in a long serpentine line, and a sign at the ticket office predicted a wait of four hours. "It's not worth the wait," Sandrine said.

Just then a man stepped forward and said, "You want to go up? I've got a pair of dinner passes for tonight at 7:00. You get to go to the head of the line. One hundred bucks."

I looked him over. One hundred dollars in 1962 was worth about six hundred today. That's a lot of money for a guy living on a forestry intern's stipend.

"I've got a family emergency," the man said. "I've got to drive to Spokane."

I was about to say nothing doing when I glanced at Sandrine. Her face glowed. So I pulled out my wallet. This was my introduction to scalping. I understood the concept instantly though it would be several years before I encountered the term for it. It was a good experience for me. The naïve have to be trained somehow.

Sandrine and I wandered next into Show Street, a causeway lined with vendor booths. Sandrine paused at a booth selling Alaskan totem figurines. She considered buying one for Aubrey, but decided against it, explaining that Max had bought her a lot of souvenirs when they came in May. A little further along, we came to an arcade featuring peep shows. I stopped and stared, wondering whether a peep show was something like a Punch and Judy show. Smiling slightly, Sandrine said, "I don't think you want to go in there." I realized then that only men were going in and coming out, and my face reddened. I turned and we went back to the entrance of the causeway.

Just outside the entrance, we met an unkempt, sallow-faced fellow who wore a short, patchy beard. Stepping in front of us, he uttered an incredulous, "My God, it's Reen! Babe! Where ya been? Oh, for Christ's sake, imagine running into you here!"

For an instant I assumed it was a case of mistaken identity. But an instant later, I saw it wasn't. Sandrine knew the fellow all too well. Stricken and horrified, she shrank behind me. Something chemical happened inside me. "Get lost," I said to the unkempt fellow, "or I'll put you down." Being a pacifist by nature, I was sur-

prised by the harsh, mean tone in my voice. In any event, the unkempt fellow melted into the crowd and we didn't meet him again.

Sandrine was trembling. No, it was more than that. She was utterly shaken—tears in her eyes, taut shoulders, hands nervously twisting the strap of her purse. Obviously, Max had summarized her past accurately. There was something dire, revolting, truly calamitous about it. The unkempt fellow hadn't seemed *that* ominous to me. In fact, I would have thought him simply nondescript, if indeed I had thought anything about him at all upon some chance encounter. Yet Sandrine's recoil—her terrified eyes, her dive behind my back—implied the presence of a creature who fed on the desolation of others.

Proposing lunch to settle her nerves, I offered her the crook of my arm. She slid her arm through mine and pressed against me as we strolled on. I wondered whether my unthinking offer of the arm was a mistake. I hoped she wouldn't interpret it as something more than a gentlemanly gesture.

We had passed several restaurants in our wandering but Sandrine chose Greek food from an open-sided van. We sat on a varnished wood bench, eating our gyros and baklava and watching iridescent arcs of water spout from the great circular fountain that had fascinated Aubrey so much. The sun was out, the sky was blue, people flocked around us, hurdy-gurdy music tinkled cheerfully in the background. Sandrine scarcely noticed. She was abstracted and withdrawn, thinking—as I supposed—of those dank alleys from which Max had rescued her. I'll admit that I was abstracted and withdrawn too. I couldn't help pondering the diseases she might have picked up on the streets—herpes, gonorrhea, syphilis, chlamydia, or who knew what else?

Eventually, our silence struck me as a mutual display of poor manners and I asked Sandrine the name of the unkempt fellow.

She said, "Noose."

"Noose!"

"That's all I ever heard him called."

"It's too bad we ran into him," I said.

She nodded, her eyes averted.

"Though it doesn't really matter," I said. "He's just a reminder of how lucky you are."

I waited for a response that didn't come. "You've got a good

home,” I explained. “As you say, Max is a good man. You’ve got Aubrey.”

“Yes, I’ve got Aubrey. If it weren’t for her, I’d leave.”

“Don’t you love Max?”

She raised her eyebrows, surprised.

“I don’t love anybody,” she said.

“But you do love Aubrey, don’t you?”

“Yes, but that’s not the kind of love I’m talking about.”

It was my turn to look surprised.

“I’ve never fallen in love with anyone,” she said. “I’d like to.”

I stood up and moved off a few steps. “Let go ride the monorail,” I suggested. She got up and took my arm without it being offered.

The monorail was a light train that as its name implied ran on a single track. It was next to another single track that bore the return train, the two trains giving the appearance of colliding as they approached each other—one of many illusions of the day, I would later think. The track ran about a mile to a station in the center of the city. We got off and sat on a bench watching people use escalators between the station and the street below.

“We could go to Pike Place and watch the fish mongers,” she said. “Or down to Elliott Bay and watch the ferries.”

“If you want to,” I replied.

We went on watching people as if nothing had been said between us. After a while we got on the monorail and went back to the Fair. I suggested we take in the Fine Arts Pavilion, where world-famous works of art had been gathered from dozens of museums. The place was crowded and we filed along slowly, reading descriptions of the paintings and statues from a printed guide. I was overawed by the artists: El Greco, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, among others, some of whom I had encountered in a humanities class at Utah State. We came to a painting of the dead body of Jesus being lifted gently from the cross by his desolate followers. Sandrine turned away, shuddering.

“Can we go?” she pleaded.

We returned to the bench near the circular fountain. “I’m sorry to be such a spoil sport,” Sandrine said. “I’m a mess, just a mess.”

“Do you want to go home?” I asked. “We could give away our dinner tickets. Or maybe somebody will buy them.”

She said no and at seven we went to the entrance to the Space Needle where we found the scalper’s promise held good, our tickets admitting us within minutes of being presented. In the restaurant at the top, the *maître d’* seated us on a terrace somewhat back from the windows but elevated enough to give a view. We dined on steamed mussels and grilled salmon garnished with ginger and orange peel. In the meantime, the pod did a full 360-degree rotation, allowing us to take in the city, the Sound, and two mountain ranges—the Cascades to the east, the Olympics to the west. And, of course, southeastward Rainier loomed in the gathering evening.

Long before the pod had completed its rotation, Sandrine had become radiant, and I was struck again by the intense beauty of her features.

At one point she said, “Can you believe that I love this city?”

“Well, yes, if you say so,” I said. “But I wouldn’t have thought it. It seems pretty loaded with bad memories for you.”

“It is,” she agreed, “but I love it anyway.”

“I guess I can understand that,” I said. I was thinking it was a matter of perspective. Here at the top of the Space Needle, we were above the jostling bodies, the grime, the fetid motivations of predatory human beings. The diminished buildings and streets merged with water, forest, and mountains so that, yes, from this angle it was a beautiful city.

“This has been a very happy day for me,” she said. “Thank you for bringing me.”

“I’ve liked it too,” I said. I wasn’t lying. From our current vantage point, we could see a couple of ferries, whose wakes plowed a white furrow upon the darkling Sound. It was a surreal scene, a transformation of reality.

Then she said, “May I ask you something personal?” and I intuitively knew trouble lay ahead. “Have you ever been in love?”

“We’d better go,” I spluttered. “People are waiting for a table.”

“Have you?” she insisted.

“There was a girl I dated during my freshman year at Utah State,” I said. “I could have fallen in love with her if she had let me.

The missionary she was waiting for came home at the end of the year and they got married.”

We got up and made our way to an elevator. She took my arm while we made our descent. It was full dark by the time we left the elevator and crossed the street to my car. I unlocked the door on the passenger’s side and pulled it open. Rather than getting in, she faced me, closely. “Could you fall in love with me if I let you?” she said.

I froze.

“I’m not waiting for a missionary,” she said.

She got into the car. I went around to the other side and got behind the wheel. She slid close to me—the old Chevrolet having a bench seat that allowed for that. “I *do* know what it is to fall in love,” she said. “I’m in love with you.”

I didn’t start the engine immediately. I had to digest, to assimilate, what was happening. Having been invited to fall in love with Sandrine, I had. Or, to put it more accurately, I was able to admit now that I had been in love with her all along. Moreover, as I recognized all too clearly, she had invited me to a moral disaster. If I wanted to make love to her now—on this very night—I had only to ask.

I started the engine and steered the car onto the busy street. My mother’s earnest voice sounded in my memory: *if it comes to having to make a choice, I’d rather you be good than happy*. My duty was clear. There was no debate as to what I ought to do. I had had a sound Mormon raising. It was what made Mormon men good candidates for the FBI and Secret Service.

Sandrine turned on the car radio and picked up a disc jockey on a Tacoma station. The first song we heard was Ella Fitzgerald with “My Happiness,” an old song that had recently had something of a revival. “Three Coins in the Fountain” followed, also “Vaya Con Dios” and a new one neither of us had ever heard before, “Can’t Help Falling in Love with You.” When sad love stories are made into movies, they are set to haunting music. It has occurred to me that, if this account were made into a movie, one of the songs we heard on the radio that night might serve for the Sandrine theme, as I suppose it would be called.

Unfortunately, that mellow music undid me. My carefully

honed inhibitions receded. They lowered their voices and crept off stage. I kept thinking of a condom machine I had seen in the restroom of the station where I had bought gasoline that morning. My mind was in a dizzy whirl. I couldn't believe Lewis Mulenax would ever purchase a condom.

We passed through Puyallup around midnight. The gas station just beyond the city limits was still open. "I need to use the restroom," I said, pulling over. Inside I used the urinal and washed my hands. I put a couple of quarters in the condom machine and pocketed the tiny packet. I returned to the car, and, as Sandrine slid close to me, drove on. The dash lights illuminated her legs. The hem of her dress lay well above her knees. I took my hand from the wheel and caressed her sculpted knee.

Maybe twenty minutes later I pulled off on a Forest Service road, which I followed until it made a bend and we were out of sight of any cars on the highway. I parked and turned out the headlights. An unbroken wall of trees stood on either side of the road; high overhead stretched a strip of star-lit sky.

"Do you have protection?" she said.

"Yes, but I don't know how to use it," I muttered.

"I'll show you," Sandrine said, opening her door. "Let's get into the back seat."

I opened my door and stepped out of the Mormon universe. Sandrine came around to my side and hugged me. She unbuttoned my shirt and ran her hands across my belly and chest. She unlatched the buttons on her dress and undid her bra and stood expectantly. What could I do but caress her breasts? I was eager, feverish, trembling a bit, fully set on not being deterred, and the words *so this is what it is like, so this is what it is like* cycled impetuously through my mind, not ceasing until we had achieved our full purpose and lay clasped in one another's arms, my energy spent, my self-esteem exhausted.

When we got back into the front seat, she again slid close to me. I gripped the wheel and prepared to start the engine. She lay a hand on my arm and said, "When do you leave for Utah?"

"In a couple of weeks," I replied.

"I want to go with you," she said, snuggling against me.

The idea, the prospect, burned at my elbows and in my finger tips, but I couldn't reply. Sandrine had no idea how visible our liai-

son would be in Utah, at least in the part of Utah that I had to return to. I couldn't share an apartment with another man's wife in Logan. Our neighbors would be scandalized. My parents would find out about it and I wouldn't be able to present her to them. If we met them by accident, they wouldn't refuse to speak to her, but they would be devastated, vastly aggrieved, and their faces would show it.

Sandrine read my thoughts. "You don't want me to go," she said, pulling away.

"I'm not going back to Utah," I said. "At least not to stay."

I started the engine and turned the car around. I looked at my watch. It was a little after one. Sandrine snuggled against me again.

"I am going to transfer to the forestry program at the University of Washington," I said. "Or maybe I'll take a job in Tacoma. There's a couple of wood product companies that hire people like me. The question I have is when to tell my parents about you. It would be easier for me to tell them in a letter after I have come back. And I will come back. I promise."

"You don't need to promise," she said. "I know you'll come back."

"The toughest thing we face," I said, "is telling Max."

"And Aubrey," she added.

I pulled onto the highway and accelerated.

"How shall we do it?" she said.

"I can't say," I replied. "I'll do whatever you want me to do."

"Immediately then? Both of us?"

"If you say so."

"It will be terrible," she said, "just terrible!"

She was sitting close to me, but no longer snuggling. She stared straight ahead into the tunnel of light projected by our head beams upon the pavement.

"Not tonight," she said at last. "It would ruin a happy day. You go back to the park. I'll tell Max in private tomorrow. I'll ask if we can keep Aubrey part of the time."

"Will he agree?"

"I don't know," she said. "Probably not. There's no way to force him. Legally, he's her sole custodian."

I could see the writing on the wall. It was time for me to articulate the inevitable. “Maybe you should stay with Max and Aubrey. I’ll come on weekends.”

“And we’d slip around?” she said.

“Slip around?”

“See each other on the sly. No, please, not that. I am going to live wherever you live—Tacoma, Seattle, I don’t care where. I want to be there with you, out in the open.”

“All right,” I said. “That’s how it will be.”

She snuggled up to me again, affectionate and happy. I felt euphoric too—though also a little light-headed as if I were coming down with something.

“It’s strange, being in love,” I said. “It changes everything. Things slide around into new positions.”

“Things?”

“Obligations, I mean. You are my obligation now,” I said. I meant, of course, that being with her, having her, trumped my Mormon expectations. As I say, I had stepped out of the Mormon universe.

When we arrived, I parked in front of the house and turned off the engine. A porch light burned.

“I won’t see you again till next Tuesday?” Sandrine said.

“Yes, as usual.”

“I can’t do this alone,” she said abruptly. “I can’t tell them until you come back and are ready to take me with you.”

“That makes sense,” I said. “Don’t tell them. We’ll do it together when I come back.”

“Yes,” she said, “that’s what we must do. We’ll tell them together.”

She kissed me and we both got out of the car. The house door opened and Max stepped onto the porch. She went into the house, murmuring something to Max as she brushed by him. I followed her to the porch. “I’m sorry we’re so late,” I said to Max. “We kind of did things to the hilt.”

“I’m glad you did,” Max said. “I can’t thank you enough.”

“I’ll see you next week,” I said.

“You better stay here,” Max said. “I can fix up the sofa.”

“No. I’m on duty at seven. I’d better get on up to the park.”

I’ll try to abridge my final days at the park. The more I have

thought about them over the years the more I have realized that they qualify hands down as the most painful period of equal duration in my entire life.

The euphoria I felt during our return from the Fair didn't survive the night. I arrived at the bunkhouse in time for a couple of hours of sleep. After the alarm went off, I sat on the edge of my bed for a few minutes, still pretty groggy. My roommate came in from the shower room and looked me over. "Man," he said, "you must have painted that town red!"

I shrugged my shoulders and went to my closet and put on my uniform. I left the bunkhouse and started across the main parking lot, which at this early hour was largely empty of automobiles. I found it difficult to focus my thoughts. I wanted to recapture the happy incredulity of the moment I knew Sandrine loved me. But at the back of my mind was one of those half-spoken sentences that govern human behavior even before they have burst into full recognition. When it did come, a couple of days later, it came in connection with my thoughts about Max and Aubrey, who were to lose that which I was to gain. *A decent person doesn't build happiness on another person's devastation*—that was the thought, which, as I realized, was a translation of my mother's wish that, if push came to shove, I should choose to be good rather than happy.

Ironically, as I now saw, I was destined to be neither good nor happy. I was caught between contradictory imperatives. By assuming an obligation toward Sandrine I had not abrogated an obligation toward Max and Aubrey. For the moment I chose to honor my newly-assumed obligation toward Sandrine. It wasn't an entirely self-serving choice. I had reason to believe her best prospect for happiness lay with me. But I also had reason to believe it would be at best a subdued happiness.

I was eager to see Sandrine on Tuesday—yet profoundly apprehensive. I dithered around the bunkhouse all morning, reviewing my field notes and outlining a report I was required to make to the undergraduate research committee that had funded my summer stipend. In the early afternoon, I drove to Limington, where I interviewed an old woman who had lived her entire life there to see whether she had any memory of Little Quebec and Chambers

Landing. Unfortunately, she didn't—which meant those logging camps would appear as no more than names in my report.

Toward evening I backtracked to Beaufort—through which I had driven on my way to Limington. My stomach knotted as I walked into the café. Max beamed with pleasure when he saw me. “Come in, come in!” he said. “Your meal is on the house tonight. You better have a steak with a side of smoked potato salad, which Sandrine made today. It's meet-the-teacher night over at the school, so she's off with Aubrey just now, but they'll be back soon.”

I was relieved to find things so normal. I don't know why I should have expected them to be otherwise. I wasn't hungry, not in the slightest, but when Max put the food before me, I ate. Sandrine and Aubrey came in about the time I finished. Aubrey climbed onto the stool next to me and gave me a big gap-toothed smile. Sandrine went behind the counter and stood beside Max. Her face was taut and her fingers fidgety. I told her the potato salad was delicious and she smiled a little. At that instant I knew, as if by precognition, that I wouldn't be coming back. She and I had had our moment of happiness, and now it was over and we were in for a lot of grieving.

When I left, she followed me out to my car. She put her arms about me and began to sob.

“We can't go through with it, can we?” I said.

“I thought I could,” she sobbed. “I really did.”

“I know you did. I thought I could too.”

“He's too good a man,” she said. “He bet on me when nobody else would. He's kind. He has no end of patience.”

“Yes, and he needs you,” I said. “And Aubrey needs you too.”

“And I need her,” Sandrine said. “I'm split in two.”

There wasn't much else to be said—though there was a great deal of pondering to be done, at least for me. If I had briefly stepped out of the Mormon universe, I was now confronted by the necessity of reentering it. I knew in advance it would take a while.

I came back to Beaufort on the following Friday, which was the day my employment officially ended. I arrived in the early afternoon on that day, having packed my car and said goodbye to a few associates in the morning. Max insisted on serving me the lunch special—remarkably tasty, considering that it was hash.

Sandrine stood behind the counter with Max, her face taut and distant. After a few minutes, she pulled a basket with yarn and knitting needles from under the counter and prepared to knit.

“I didn’t know you knitted,” I said.

“I’m learning,” she said. “The woman down the road is showing me how.”

When I was through eating, she set the basket under the counter and said, “Drive me over to the school. I promised Aubrey I would come in and bring her out to say goodbye. Her teacher won’t mind.”

I got out of the car when Aubrey emerged from the school. She wept a little while she hugged me. “You’ll come back, won’t you?” she said.

“I will.”

“And will you write to us while you are gone?”

“You bet I’ll write.”

“Promise?”

“Yes, I promise,” I said.

Sandrine took Aubrey back into the class and when she returned, she slid across the seat to my side of the car and gave me a long, passionate kiss before returning to the passenger’s side. We both knew I had lied when I told Aubrey I would come back. But I did send a Christmas card for a few years.

As I started the engine, Sandrine said, “You mustn’t stay single. You must find a good woman. I won’t be jealous.”

“Don’t say that!” I protested. The thought of another woman seemed an infidelity, a sacrilege.

When we got back to the café, Max came out onto the steps. Sandrine got out of the car and joined Max on the steps. I waved to them and drove away. I took State Route 410 toward Yakima. Crossing over Chinook Pass near sunset, I caught spectacular glimpses of Rainier in alpenglow. Passing into shadow on the downward side, I lost sight of the mountain’s immense singularity. I tried not to grieve. I wanted to forget the summer of the Seattle Fair. I wanted to forget Max and his café, the fairy child Aubrey, even Sandrine. Yes, especially Sandrine! The sooner forgotten, the better.

But of course forgetting Sandrine was impossible. First of all,

as I have said, I had to grapple with the problem of reentering the Mormon universe. As far as my parents ever knew, I had never left it. But my bishop knew because I told him. I was fortunate in that he gave me a confidential penance, consisting not only of total regularity in performing my duties but also of a quarterly interview with him. Despite his kindness, I found these interviews harrowing, largely because I judged myself incapable of a complete repentance—I could renounce *being with* Sandrine, but I couldn't renounce *loving* her. So the quarterly interviews stretched on for a second year, at the end of which the bishop got tired of the process and declared me a member in full and unblemished standing.

Three years after that, I met a young Mormon woman whom I wanted to marry. I explained up front what had happened during the summer of the Seattle Fair. When I asked her to marry me, she knew that as far as my private feelings were concerned, it was to be my second marriage. She knew I would come to our wedding as a widower. I am grateful that she accepted me on those terms.