

Robert T. Rogers

UNTITLED

EXTERIOR - SKI RESORT - DAY

*The chair lift arrives at the Maine mountain. ALYO and JEN, strangers, find themselves beside each other. Shortly after ascent, the lift stops. They aren't concerned, but the silence presses until Aloy misreads her sense of humor.*

ALYO: I think my manners are better with married women. I recognize boundaries.

*Jen doesn't feel like looking at him.*

JEN: With unmarried women, fewer manners and boundaries?

ALYO: I misspoke.

JEN: I don't think so. I think you revealed an unpleasant side of yourself and now you backtrack.

ALYO Are you married?

*Her expression shows surprise at his directness.*

JEN: Why?

ALYO: Because if you are my manners are heightened.

JEN: I'm not.

*Her tone is nearly curt. His eyebrows raise.*

ALYO: I wonder if it's attitude?

JEN: Mine?

ALYO: There's no link between whether I'm pleasant or not and the levity or gravity of your relations.

*She rolls her eyes. They could end the conversation, but there's no telling how long they'll be there. Curiosity about the lift matter is undercurrent while they manage the relation they've created, one certainly not lovely. It seems they would rather engage further to resolve the mess.*

JEN: Gravity is the right word for you to use when referring to a committed relationship.

ALYO: I don't follow.

JEN: She might wake up in the grave.

*Alyo knows it's a punch and wants to investigate.*

ALYO: I'm not sure how to process that. What box contains the brain bash, right? You've got maybe a small dose of etymology humor, plus dark humor joined with my joking about your attitude we've already discussed, that it's due to your relationship status or lack thereof. But you don't table that. You've added an insult rooted in, what I guess is, your perception that I can't have a committed relationship because the woman might worry how she'll feel upon waking? At least in the scenario you paint, she wakes up. She didn't die due to my company, or if she did, then it's miraculous she's resurrected, and I got to witness it.

JEN: Jesus Christ.

ALYO: Yeah. I guess He's involved if we're talking resurrection.

JEN: I mean you talk a lot.

ALYO: That I respect, the candor. Sincerity looks good on you.

JEN: Polite, and it didn't require me to change my marital status.

ALYO: Provided we don't have to wait for emergency crews, or even if, would you like coffee with me?

JEN: Are you going to exhaust me carrying on?

ALYO: Why the push to darkness? We can keep it light. I rarely read anymore, except reading about reading. A.I. supported.

JEN: What's a book you haven't read recently, but you've asked A.I. about?

ALYO: Erich Fromm's *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*.

*The lift is moving. It doesn't affect the exchange underway.*

JEN: Dark.

ALYO:            Maybe I nailed something you like. But get this. His bestseller was *The Art of Loving*, the antidote to the destructiveness. Same man. Maybe awareness or, more deeply, understanding of the darkness helps to better appreciate the light?

*Jen smiles slightly then either suppresses it or her straight face returns without the effort. Alyo has not paid as much attention before. As a matter-of-fact statement of generalized philosophy delivered as if wavelengths of existence serve purpose for her to say this:*

JEN:            Light is nice.

*She means it, and Alyo knows it; and he wonders from what gravity she's emerged and after how many cups of coffee over how many lengths of time would she maybe share, which he thinks she might, at which point perhaps he'll determine the most truthful thing from his standpoint is to reply with 'Jesus Christ,' as if evocation makes her resurrection from spiritual depths real, maybe even beckoning Selah.*

ALYO:            To be clear, coffee is a yes?

*Jen's slight smile returns, now held a moment more than before.*

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INTERIOR - COFFEEHOUSE - DAY

*They're at a table in the semi-crowded Maine ski lodge. It's soft enough to hear.*

JEN:            You accepted as true when I said you talk too much.

ALYO:            It seems accurate. Not all the time, but enough.

JEN:            I want to do something now.

*He sips, patient.*

JEN:            I'm curious about your last rabbit hole.

*Alyo smiles.*

ALYO:            I started with Elvis performing 'You Gave Me a Mountain' in Hawaii, visited Egypt where I listened to Coptic, then explored Optina Monastery near Kozelsk, Russia. I wondered if the CIA World Factbook would shed light on Lithuanian monasteries, and the photograph shows 100,000 crosses on a hill. I saw Lykke Li near a food truck in parking lot in Germany, read the lyrics of Robert Hunter, and listened to Agnes Obel. I find it lovely. Same thing with Neko Case performing

'Calling Cards' in Copenhagen a decade ago. It's nostalgic of sorts. For a film break, Jill arrived at the station in Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* to meet her Irish husband with a dream, but he's dead. She's fleeing her past. In New Orleans she had a reputation as a prostitute, but she's cleaned up, and we see her dressed nicely to meet Brett McBain. Her life is about to change heading out west, and it's changing even more in the unsettled terrain, now alone. The camera movement reflects that, from her expressions to slowly rise over the train station to heightened music to show the town that Jill goes into before the majestic landscape. The significant situation packs in 8 minutes. My nightcap was Leon Bridges singing 'The River' where sins flow down the Jordan, and for some reason peculiar for a spiritual song, includes a commercial lyric about a white Mercedes. I started to doze to the Staves in a St. Louis radio station in June 2016 performing 'America.' It's mellow and may sound sad, but she expresses that she's happy to accept what she creates.

JEN: If only the napkin were a therapy bill. Were you describing browsing or did one lead to the next? For instance, you said Elvis and next was Egypt.

ALYO: They relate. I spared details. Graceland is in Memphis, named for Memphis, Egypt, capital of the Old Kingdom. More coffee?

JEN: Tea.

ALYO: I was prepared to interpret your 'yes' or 'no' as indication less about your wish for coffee but rather as whether you want to spend more time with me. I was going to feel good hearing 'yes.' I guess tea substitutes for coffee.

JEN: On the lift you were direct, and you shared a lot when answering what was meant to be a light question. Now instead of asking if I want to stay longer, you reveal you're dynamic by changing tactics, playing a mind game in asking me about coffee but too tethered to truth to keep from sharing your strategy. I said I'll have tea, and you're still here. I was waiting to say 'thanks' once you get back.

ALYO: I see. I'll return with your coffee substitute. Your turn with cyber tales. I won't charge.

JEN: It's not a substitute. Tea is a separate thing.

*As he leaves, Jen checks the time on her phone. Maybe she's short on time; maybe she just likes to know. Even though it's tea, Alyo is sure she'll stay.*

*She looks up Jill in Once Upon a Time in the West. First, to see what she looks like. "Does a woman with baggage determined to improve her lot in life, even if it requires handling situations alone at times, look good? He said she's cleaned up in this train station scene. It seemed like he meant improvement in her character, such as moral qualities, or does he literally mean she looks better? Are those related? As character strengthens, your looks goes up? Jill wouldn't be fine looking all the time. She has to get her hands dirty. She's in the West.*

*Alyo tables her tea. Does the concept of substitution quietly influence her communication? Rather than say 'Thanks,' Jen nonverbally says it with a slight bow. She puts her palms together and leans for a moment. It's not a performance. Alyo figures it's subtlety and might have happened whether or not he observed it. She slightly smiled earlier that light is nice and again when he asked her here. This is similar yet different. It's expression with more motion.*

JEN: I can't believe we haven't introduced ourselves by name.

ALYO: I figured we would.

JEN: I'm Jennifer. Jen.

*When he doesn't volunteer, she asks.*

What's yours?

ALYO: Alyo. Short for Alyosha.

JEN: Do you say it 'Al yo' with two syllables?

ALYO: Some do. Some say my real name.

JEN: As in Alyosha?

ALYO: Tom Revel.

JEN: Why Alyo? Is it a codename?

ALYO: It's my spiritual name.

JEN: Are we in a ghost story?