

**Evening in Missoula**  
Excerpts

**Willy**

Willy crumpled up the empty pack of Marlboros and tossed it on the pile in the middle of the floor. He groped in his jacket pocket for more cigarettes and came up empty.

Another day spent smoking on the La-z-Boy, watching the white haze at the end of his cigarette curl up towards the ceiling. Now the day was almost gone, but he hadn't seen much daylight, on account of his blind being down. He yawned and reached behind him to pull the blind up, but all it did was come down lower and lower, like a roll of toilet paper.

All day he'd sat there thinking about how maybe he should've gone to Seattle with Elvira like she wanted. Truth is, he was scared shitless of big cities. Not that he'd ever been to any, but he'd heard about them. Lots of crazy people running around shooting at each other. You didn't see that kind of thing in Montana.

**Continuing Education**

Bob Hackmann wrote "C+" at the top of the quiz, then rubbed his index finger along the bridge of his nose. Three straight hours of grading and he still wasn't finished. Penny would wonder what was keeping him. She was probably

stirring the soup and listening to Slim Whitman, glancing out the window every time a car drove by.

Bob continued to stare at the stack of papers. He had at least ten more quizzes to correct. Maybe he should call Penny. On the other hand, if he could stay focused it wouldn't take more than a half hour. He riffled through the stack with his thumb and had the sudden sensation of being watched. He looked up. A short heavysset woman stood motionless in the doorway. She wore a nylon jacket, loose-fitting jeans, and combat boots. A stocking cap fit tightly around her head. He couldn't see her eyes--she wore sunglasses--but her mouth was frozen in a grim expression.

"Can I help you?" he asked.

The woman pulled the door shut behind her and approached him. When she reached his desk, she leaned forward and plunked two red scaly hands down next to the stack of quizzes. He caught a whiff of ammonia. Who was she? Someone's mother coming to complain, no doubt.

"Is there something I can do for you?"

She removed the sunglasses. Her right eye was puffy and swollen, a dark circle visible underneath. "Don't you recognize me, Mr. Hackmann?"

The voice sounded familiar, but he couldn't place it. He looked down at his hand gripping the red felt-tip pen. His knuckles were white. "I'm afraid not."

**Back to Nature**

Reed sank into the plush white sofa and waited for the woman to bring the drinks. He tapped his fingers on the glass coffee table and looked out the window. It was dark, but he knew the window faced the mountains. He closed his eyes and imagined the white-capped Rockies jutting into eternity.

When he opened his eyes, the woman was walking towards him with a wine bottle and two glasses. Her hips, encased in black leather pants, swished from side to side. Those poor cows. She knelt down on the Oriental carpet and poured wine into the glasses. He smelled musk. Poor musk deer. "You must have an awesome view of the mountains from here," he said.

The woman smiled. "Dolack captured them well, don't you think?"

"Dolack?"

The woman pointed at a painting on the wall. Low clouds shrouded an icy mountain peak, a foggy rainbow reached down from the clouds towards the foot of the mountain.

### **Going to Paris**

Dorothy leaned back and closed her eyes. She saw Chuck in his Led Zeppelin T-shirt, biceps straining as he heaved the ax in the air. He bore down on the wood, splitting it into

two even pieces. He smiled and set the ax on his work table. "Hey, babe." He held out his grease-smudged arms.

She hesitated, then walked into his embrace. He smelled of sweat and tree sap, a hint of beer on his breath. He bent down to kiss her and she pulled away. "I have some news."

Chuck rubbed his beard then grinned. "Don't tell me you're knocked up."

Knocked up? That's how he thought of it? She felt her shoulders sink.

"What's wrong, baby? I think it's great."

"I'm not pregnant, Chuck. I'm going to Paris."

"Paris, Idaho?"

"Paris, France."

"No shit." He picked up a hammer lying next to the ax and tapped the head of it against the palm of his hand.

"What the hell for?"

"The French department is offering a six-week study program at the Sorbonne."

"A study program at the who?"

"I'm leaving the first part of November."

"Hm." He put the hammer down. "I need a beer. You want a beer?"

**The Wolf**

The bus fishtailed to a stop, narrowly avoiding the black mass. Dave pushed the door open and started down the steps. The woman followed closely behind him, her breath on his neck. He stopped as he reached the bottom step. The mass moved, two yellowish eyes fixed him in their unblinking gaze. Dave let out a whistle between his teeth.

"What is it?" the woman said.

He looked at the grayish fur and the dog-like features, the noble expression even in the throes of dying. "It's a wolf."

"No shit." The woman peered over his shoulder. "Well, Christ, don't just stand there. Do something."

"Don't use the Lord's name in vain."

The wolf, its fur caked with blood, raised its head and whimpered.

The woman pushed past him and stepped onto the ground. She neared the wolf, squatting a few feet in front of him and putting out her hand.

"Careful," he said. Was this woman nuts, holding her hand inches from the wolf's fangs?

Slowly, the woman lowered her hand and placed it on the animal's head. Dave opened his mouth to speak, but only air came out. The wolf whimpered again, and the woman moved her hand back and forth. "There now," she said. The wolf closed his eyes and lowered his head. After a few seconds, the head went limp and the woman removed her hand. Dave couldn't help but think that the wolf had looked peaceful in

the moment before dying. He turned away so the woman wouldn't see the tears in his eyes. He hadn't cried in such a long time. He hadn't even cried when Lucy told him she was going to leave him.