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University of Montana
BEAGLE’S SON
A NOVEL

by

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Date
A different kind of air filled his basement apartment. Beagle Drummond lay in bed with the covers flat over his face, leaving just his hair exposed like some brown bush. He listened to his ceiling, where he could clearly hear mice having a hay-day in the floor above his bed. He had left all of his room’s windows open that night. Beagle didn’t know summertime temps regularly fell below fifty-degrees at night in Montana. He shivered, and the mountain air smelled like ice-water.

5:30 in the morning, and these mice are throwing a three-ring circus six-feet above my face, Beagle said to himself. What was he going to do? Butt a broom handle into the ceiling panel so the whole square piece of generic wood/cardboard could jerk loose and fall into his bed? Not to mention the ten smelly rodents, their babies, and the potpourri of stolen food, nesting and rice-crispy-sized droppings.
Friday. The only objective of the day was to make some friends. He was new in town, and the only person that had said a word to him in three days was a bartender at the Boardroom. The bar ebbed and flowed with perfume and beer, jam-packed with urbane young ladies, and guys Beagle knew would think he was stand-up. If they all could just have a chat, one-on-one. But he ended up drinking gin fizzes by himself near an electronic poker machine, one of three in the place. He told himself he had picked the wrong bar, and the computerized dealer didn’t give Beagle a solid hand the whole night.

Beagle fell back asleep, but the phone made him awake again. It was his dad on the other line, sounding serious and unrelaxed.

"Son," he said. "This is dad." Beagle knew this, though he didn’t say, I know it’s you. But he thought it. "Your dad has got a favor to ask."

Beagle hadn’t said anything into the phone yet, and he was aware of this. It made him think that what his dad was saying, or about to say, was rehearsed. Average people waited for responses and acknowledgments. This made Beagle very skeptical of his dad, and with everything else previous, made Beagle think that his dad was a moron.
"I need you to come home, buddy." What he said next was in a deliberate fashion -- almost the same way someone would explain something to a dummy, or a Golden Retriever. "I need you to go to my house, and get all my guns."

Beagle knew his dad owned a lot of them -- he liked guns. He kept them arranged on the surface of a full-sized pool table in the basement, easy enough for him to go downstairs, and pick any gun off the green felt whenever he wanted. He carefully weighed them in his shooting hand to feel their balance, though he rarely went shooting, or hunting anymore. Beagle guessed some of the guns had never even been fired. His dad also took them apart to clean the insides with Q-tips, but Beagle knew this to be just a put-on so he could piece them back together again. Beagle didn’t know much about guns, but he knew one of the guns on the pool table was the same kind Clint Eastwood used in Dirty Harry - the type of piece that could blow a basketball hoop though a door.

"Are you in jail?" Beagle asked. He thought of his dad leaning on a prison payphone in handcuffs, one hand keeping the phone to his mouth, while the other dangled helplessly below his chin.

"Yep."

"Then you have more to worry about than your guns."
“Whatever you say, son. Do you know the first thing they’re going to do? The police are going into my house, and they’re confiscating anything that looks dangerous. Because I’m a maniac.”

“I just moved,” Beagle told him. “And I’m not coming back.” Which was about right. Beagle had just driven the 2,000 miles from Wisconsin to Montana so he could go to law school, and it wasn’t pretty. The trip took five days, when it should have taken two. But the temperature never went below ninety, and his beaten Wagoneer, fully equipped with a gutless radiator, was mule-stubborn. In Wyoming, Beagle made it the 100 miles of Highway 90 from Gillette to Sheridan in a ten-hour day. His driving compadre, a 100-pound Chesapeake Bay Retriever, needed regular pit-stops from the heat, or there would be sporadic diarrhea puddles in the backseat.

“Well you have to,” his dad said. “I’ll foot the bill, buddy. Put a ticket on your Visa, and I’ll foot the bill.”

“When are you getting out?”

“Couple days, probably. They may be trying to teach me a lesson, huh?”

A couple of days would be enough time to get into the house, load his dad’s pickup with the pool table’s bounty,
and toss every last double-barrel and automatic into the millpond. What would his dad do? He’d more or less have another stroke, Beagle thought, maybe worse than the one he had last summer. That stroke made him walk funny for June and July, like he had rabies. Beagle had seen opossums and raccoons with the disease, and they moved like they weren’t sure how many legs they had. His dad once used a .22 to kill a raccoon that was bumming around the front lawn all day, like a drunken bandit. Then the DNR showed up with a Coleman cooler. He said he was going to cut the dead raccoon’s head off, and mail it to Madison where they could study its brain.

After the stroke, the doctors did some cat scans on his dad’s brain. They told him about a tiny piece that wasn’t being very electrical, and that’s why he was acting rabid. He would be like this for awhile. That made Beagle’s dad get all bent out of shape, and he sputtered, “You masturbating girls,” -- even though just one doctor hung around his bed, and he had a blond mustache.

And Beagle said into the telephone, “So you hit her?”

After an embarrassing speeding ticket, Beagle pulled the squared key from the steering wheel’s neck, and let himself outside into the hot wind. The disc jockey said it was
supposed to get up to 150-degrees, and Beagle absently wondered how sarcastic twits got on the radio, anyway.

The trooper had already vanished, like a combusted bale of hay. The only trace of what had just happened was the pink speeding ticket, and Beagle’s bad mood. The Wagoneer was the only thing on the road now. Beagle noticed this as he went to the back of the truck, and pressed the release button below the license plate -- still of America’s Dairyland. He stepped back when the hatch door snake-hissed open. Then the door was above Beagle’s head, and a large curly dog launched from the backseat and dove to where its owner stood. The dog sat immediately, and took a gaze out to where the Mission Mountains bulged and ranged out at various elevations.

These mountains were different than the ones surrounding the Missoula Valley, Beagle’s new residence. Those were the Selway-Bitterroots, and they were handsome to a Midwesterner. But now they seemed blunt and rounded off, while the Missions were alert and dangerous looking. They seemed to be saying, “The time is at hand.”

The space in between the highway and the Missions was a field blooming in yellow. Beagle didn’t know the plant, just that the flowers would later be strip-harvested, and
boiled to make canola oil. Heavy air blew into Beagle’s mouth, and flipped the dog’s reddish brown ears.

Beagle fisted the keys in his right hand, and he thought they felt like a glowing briquette of charcoal, burning more intense when he squeezed, and lessening as he loosened his grip. Then he said firmly, “Son. Hold.”

The dog heard its name, though it didn’t look up at Beagle. Son held his stare, that must have been aimed directly in between the bases of the Missions and the center of the canola field. Beagle let his throwing arm fall back behind him like Satchel Paige’s would, and he fired the car keys at the mountains. When they fell, Son sighed.

“Hold.”

A Sandhill crane planed low over the canola, lost from the reservoir that Beagle knew was further north. With its legs tucked straight behind its feathers, and its head held level from a crooked neck, the bird looked like a misplaced lightening bolt floating across the blue sky.

“Son,” Beagle said. “Get the duck!”

And the dog disappeared into the field, the same way he was trained to crash into a marsh after a bullseyed Canadian goose.
Chesapeake Bay Retrievers are bred for their dense curly coats that are so oily they give off a distinct odor. The smell is a fair trade-off for the coat’s water-resistance -- a quality taken advantage of by huntsmen, sending their Chessies into icy-edged ponds to catch a fall. Gore-Tex would be no match if it could be compared to a fur coat drawn from four of five of these dead dogs.

Beagle trained Son as a bird dog because he liked the way hunting dogs did anything they were told. One of his uncle’s hunted quail with a German Shorthair named Emok. That dog had a vocabulary that would make Rin Tin-Tin feel thick, and the only dog Beagle ever saw that could have a bowel movement on a whistle command. Two staccato chirps, and the spotted dog hunkered down with all the concentration of a fisherman tying flies.

Beagle trained Son to do everything he was told, and that meant pretending that Jeep keys were dead mallards. This was how it had to be, because Beagle thought keeping a set of guns (there’s a gun for every animal) was a vice he’d rather not have. And vices, he knew, made men into morons.

The thought crossed that maybe Son wouldn’t find the keys. This cheered Beagle up. The idea of postponing the handling of his dad’s guns made Beagle wish his dog would
lose the keys. If he didn’t have them, then he couldn’t be back in town for his flight that left at noon. Not having to bail out his dad was also a promising thought. Moreover, Beagle wouldn’t have to leave his compadre at the animal shelter.

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Five days. That’s how many days it takes before a homeless dog can go up for adoption at your local humane society.

Beagle remembered a girl he knew when he was ten, and how her Pomeranian once disappeared from her house. She panicked and called 9-1-1 to help find her dog. They told her this was an emergency-only line. The next day, her mom took her to the dog pound and they found the Pomeranian. For days, she kept saying, “They said that in three days they would’ve let strangers take Barker home. Can you imagine? Barker living with complete strangers? I would commit suicide.”

Beagle had tried to leave Son at a kennel, but they were chock full because of it being Memorial Day weekend. He tried just showing up at one kennel, imagining the owner might give Beagle a break, and accept Son. But before Beagle stepped out of his Jeep, a blonde woman clumped out of her double-wide manufactured home. She wore a nightgown, and Sorel boots for slippers.
"Keep the dog in the car," she warned. "We got no more runs."

Beagle smiled, and told her he had to leave town. Then he lied and told her his dad had just suffered another stroke. This had become a vice of Beagle’s to make up traumatic stories about his life. For example: Asking for time off at work because his sister (he didn’t have one) had tried to take her own life, or, missing a week of classes and telling the teaching assistant his absence was due to his mother dying of Lyme disease (she was dead, but because of something else). This false violence, to Beagle, made life less predictable and somehow, more reasonable.

He told her his dog was peaceful.

"Mister, we don’t know what kind of dog you have."

"That’s obviously the truth. I’m just asking you to help me out, under the circumstances."

"I ain’t taking your pooch. Over my dead body."

Outside the Missoula Humane Society, Beagle undid the greasy collar that held a name tag and dog license around Son’s neck. "You’ll be a good boy," Beagle said into one of the dog’s ears.
Inside the shelter, an Asian girl met them. Beagle led Son into the building with a piece of boat rope he found in his truck. The girl bent down to the dog, and cooed into his face. Son waved his nappy tail, and sat down on the shelter’s sedge-tiled floor.

“Where did you find him?” she asked Beagle, genuinely concerned. “He looks purebred.”

“In the neighborhood.”

The girl wore a yellow sundress and white canvas shoes with no socks. She had a tanned body, and her black hair made her seem even darker, almost exotic. Beagle wondered if she dressed properly for a dog pound, and if she wore any make-up.

“That’s so dumb,” she said. “People can do the dumbest things. They go buy a purebred, and then they decide they’re tired of having a dog. There should be a jail for these people.”

Beagle immediately thought of a Chinese torture-chamber, where bad pet owners were harshly punished, having their toenails and flexibility put to the test. Then Beagle felt stupid for assuming the girl was Chinese. And as if she could read Beagle’s ignorant thoughts, she stood pouting and shaking her head, like she’d just been cold-cocked.
"They should be the ones put to sleep. Not the dogs."

"Maybe I’ll adopt him," Beagle said.

The girl’s face broke into a broad smile. She had a look that said, *I knew you were a nice guy.*

"Really?"

"I was considering it."

"You’ll need to wait five days."

She said that her name was Yoon, and she wrote down Beagle’s phone number. Beagle had never heard such a smooth-sounding name, slippery like that. She said she could call him as soon as the dog went up for adoption. Then Beagle said goodbye to Son by scrubbing him underneath on the chest.

"I hope your owner doesn’t come looking for you," Beagle told his dog.

"Don’t worry," Yoon said. "They usually don’t."

In Wisconsin, Beagle’s dad still lived in jail. His new wife showed up at the airport in Green Bay, politely waiting for Beagle. She held a piece of cardboard that had "Mr. Drummond" written in magic marker. She waved the joke in her hands when she saw Beagle in the terminal.

"Oh," she said when Beagle came over to her. "You look so serious."
"Let’s get this over with," Beagle said. He didn’t have any luggage they had to wait for.

Her name was Eloise Sammons. She kept her own last name in respect to her husband who had died ten years ago, drowning in some YMCA pool. At the airport, she wore a blouse printed with miniature milk cows, and a denim skirt, the kind that doubled as shorts.

They drove at night, and the pickup’s headlights weren’t very bright, so that only the road directly ahead of the bumper could be seen. In that space, Beagle saw toads just before the tires got them. He noticed Eloise didn’t attempt to avoid the toads at all.

"I think the headlights are filthy," Eloise said. "There must be a zillion mosquitoes plastered on them."

Beagle wondered what she thought about his dad. She married him before the stroke, when their lives must have been a lot more realistic. She must feel sorry for her new husband, and how he once walked like a sick raccoon. Now he just loses his temper when he forgets things, like the name of the day that comes after Sunday. She couldn’t have dreamt about community hospitals and raccoons, and now she ran over toads on purpose.

"I’m sorry I put your father in jail again," she said. She drove with her hands together at the top of the
steering wheel. "He flew off the handle this time. I was scared."

"He said you were cheating on him."

"That’s a tall tale, Beagle." She sounded offended, and Beagle all of a sudden got interested. "I have a new mentor, and your father thinks there’s some sort of hidden romance."

Eloise had been writing a fantasy novel ever since college. Two young sisters wake up in the middle of Lord of the Rings, and they find out they can perform magic, but only when one sister is holding the other’s hand. Or something to that effect. The only real novel Beagle had ever read was Ivanhoe.

"It makes me feel guilty," Eloise said. "But he doesn’t even know how good my fantasy writing is. My mentor thinks it could get published. He says there’s a real power in my characterization."

When they got to the house, Eloise asked Beagle if he was hungry, because she bought salami the other day.

"I’m going to bed now."

"I’d just really like to chat with somebody. I was hoping you’d understand that."

Beagle saw his dad’s Persian cat come into the kitchen where they were. The cat needed a brushing, and its fur
had faded into a molty yellow that clumped into itself. The cat seemed to be satisfied with who stood in its kitchen, and went to see if there was any mix in its food dish.

"Talk to your mentor," Beagle told her, and he went to his bedroom. He thought she might follow him, and then he would have to stay up with her. Just what he needed. He turned his radio on low, and listened to The Five Keys on a golden oldies station. Then the Clovers. He waited for her footsteps, but he couldn't detect any. After awhile the Persian hopped into bed with him. In the dark, Beagle felt for the cat's face. Its muzzle felt soft and wet from the water bowl, or toilet. Then Beagle moved his fingers to the cat's tender belly, where he scratched until he couldn't remember anything else he might have thought about.

2

In the morning, Beagle got up early and took the truck to where he used to know a girl.

She lived in Green Lake, a town that Beagle's baseball team used to play on its non-conference schedule. Those were the only times Beagle and the girl saw each other,
after games. The girl and her friends would take him and
the centerfielder out to where the old marina used to be.
They could sit on the rusted-through shore stations and
drink cans of Old Milwaukee until the odd-out girls wanted
to go home.

Once, after a twilight game, the two girls were the
only ones to take Beagle and the centerfielder to the shore
stations. On the way, Beagle and his friend gave each
other far-reaching looks, one telling the other that this
was playing hardball.

They drove past the old pier, and turned onto a
blacktop driveway that tunneled through a giant shadow of
dark oaks and pines.

“Nobody’s home,” the other girl said. “They’re in St.
Paul this weekend. I know because I baby-sit their kid.”
Beagle and the outfielder still wore their uniforms, and
when they moved their feet Beagle could hear cleats digging
into the Cutlass’s floor mats.

They went into the house through a half-cranked
window, and Beagle’s girl led him up the wooden stairs to
where the master bedroom would be. A liquor cart stood
parked next to a four-posted bed, and Beagle poured them
each a glass of Bombay and charged water.
“Don’t stir mine,” she said. “I like the kick of alcohol at the bottom. It feels like somebody’s touching the back of my brain.”

They drank in quick sips, and when only ice sat in Beagle’s glass, the girl held his hand.

“Lay down on the bed,” she said. “Do it.”

He lay down on the mattress, and felt his spikes snag on the quilt. When she started kissing him and oscillating her tongue inside his ear, Beagle felt all the blood in his body flush beneath the front zipper of his polyester pants. *I’m going to blow to kingdom come,* Beagle thought. The protective cup he still wore created such a constriction that Beagle felt locked into a medieval chastity belt. When he went to pull the plastic guard out, the girl gasped.

“I’m not like this,” she said. “I’m not a hooker.”

“I wasn’t going to do that.” Beagle meant he wasn’t going to get himself off. That would be for later. But she had already swerved out of the room.

He heard her clamoring around downstairs, looking for the other girl. Then she yelled, “Jesse, we need to go.”

Outside, Beagle saw the two girls huddled under a basketball hoop. The centerfielder came over to him,

Beagle went back inside to get the bottle of gin. When he came outside again, he cradled a bottle and the ten-gauge shotgun. He cocked the barrels open, like his dad once showed, and dropped two red shells down each pipe. Then he blasted the gun into the stars.

“Nobody moves, nobody gets hurt!” He yelled this line with a Spanish accent, like Al Pacino in Scarface.

The other three held their ears, and looked at Beagle with their mouths open. He let off another blast.

“Say al-lo to my little fren!”

A neighbor yelled that he was calling the police, which sent them all running into the Cutlass. Nobody thought what Beagle had done was witty. Nobody said a word. When they got to town, Beagle’s girl, her name was Anna, said, “You’re unstable, Beagle. Me and Jess never want to see either of you dolts again.”

Anna opened the door, looking confused.

“Remember me?” Beagle smiled like he was picking her up for the prom.
At first, she seemed glad to see Beagle again. She said, "How did you ever find me? How are you?"

He told her he looked it up in a phonebook, and she admitted it was a dim question she asked. Beagle tried like hell to make eye contact with her, but each time he looked up, her eyes had been focused on his completely. Then he moved his eyes, and looked at the different walls inside her house. Only one of the walls had wallpaper, the rest were paneled in a cheap, shiny wood. Beagle thought the room looked thrown-together.

"How could you have remembered my name?"

Beagle shrugged. He didn’t know either, just that he wanted to take her out for a big breakfast.

"Let me change," she said. All she wore was a satin emerald slip, a long one that went down to the middle of her calves. Her body was still lean, her neck and back having that muscular look that tennis players have.

"You’re fine the way you are," Beagle said.

Anna laughed a little, and turned to go get dressed.

"I’m not kidding," Beagle said. "Go like that."

She turned around and gave him an annoyed face. That’s enough, the look said. Quit it, stupid.
They drove to a restaurant that served breakfast 24 hours. Plastic-covered placemats listed all of the orders, and the plastic was still wet from the waitress’s dish rag.

“I think I’m in the mood for a blue-ribbon omelet,” Beagle said.

Anna still brainstormed different breakfasts to have when the waitress came for the order.

“I dunno what I’m having yet,” and the waitress swiveled around, saying she would be back.

“You should have an omelet, too.”

“What are you doing here?” Anna blurted. She had changed into Levis, a solid red t-shirt and a Packers hat. The hat’s brim had been worn into a dramatic beak-shaped curve, that cast a short shadow over her eyes. With the hat tugged down to her eyebrows, and her face almost hidden, she looked as if she could be anybody. Even a boy.

Beagle acted stupid. Bullshit is what he thought. What do you mean? his upped shoulders asked.

“Why are you here? You didn’t just come to see me, did you?”

“What if I did? We used to kiss, remember?”

“That would be a waste of time. That better not be the reason.”
“When’s the last time we saw each other, Anna?”

Beagle talked easy to her, like cowboys do to keyed-up broncos.

“That’s simple. When me and my friend thought you were gonna’ shoot us. I thought you were nutso. You probably still are.”

Beagle folded his forearms across his placemat. He didn’t think he was nutso. He thought he had manners, that’s all. It’s how Midwesterners are supposed to act like when they don’t know anything else.

“That’s why I’m here. I wanted to apologize for scaring you.”

“That’s ridiculous, Beagle.”

“Because I’m being friendly?”

“No. Because that’s not why you’re here. Nobody in their right mind would apologize for something that happened, what, eight years ago? It’s preposterous.”

Preposterous, Beagle thought. As in absurd. But he had it in his mind that he was about to do something worthwhile. It was necessary to mend their friendship, if that’s what it once was, when she would lick his ears. Now he was twenty-four, and she should be about twenty-two. Anna was the only friend he had, who could help him with what needed to be done.
"I have a present for you," Beagle told her. He pulled a key from his pocket and smacked it on the table beside a silverware bundle.

"A key," she said. "For what? Some storage locker that you keep your dead bodies frozen in?"

"That’s enough." Beagle laughed at what he hoped was sarcasm. Then it bothered him. "Why do you think I’m so naughty? Do you really think I’m such a mass murderer?"

Anna snorted. "Not really. But what you did was unreasonable. It wasn’t normal."

"I know that. This is just my memory, though, but I think you were feeding me gin that night."

"Blame it on the booze. Really brave. Listen, what’s the key for?"

Their waitress came back for the orders. It pleased Beagle when Anna selected a blue-ribbon omelet, holding the sautéed mushrooms. He didn’t mention it.

"What is it?" she asked again.

"The pickup," Beagle said. "It’s yours. If you want it."

Anna said she didn’t want it, and she wouldn’t take it for a million dollars. To Beagle it was quite perceivable, however, that Anna liked his offer. He could see it from the way she adjusted the Packer hat, so it stuck higher up
on her forehead. Now her light blue eyes were clearly visible, and Beagle kept comfortable eye contact with her for the first time.

"I’m giving it to you because I don’t want it. My dad died. It’s his truck, and I don’t want it."

Anna softened when she heard this. She even got up from her side of the booth, and slid into the booth beside Beagle.

"I didn’t know," she said. "Why didn’t you tell me, you dum-dum?" She asked what his father died of.

"Lyme disease."

After that, the two of them ate their omelets and drank coffee. Then they shared one of Anna’s Marlboros. They sat close enough for the outside of Anna’s upper thigh to be touching Beagle’s. Anna told him she would pick up the check, if she was going to be getting an F-150 out of the deal.

And Beagle said, "I just need the truck for one more thing. Will you give me a hand?"

Anna said it was the least she could do.
The only time his dad took him hunting, was when Beagle was fourteen-years-old. Beagle wore his L.L. Bean backpack that he used for school.

It was early August, when there was no hunting allowed, but his dad said those regulations didn’t apply to them. Real huntsmen weren’t told when they could and couldn’t hunt. “Do you think Daniel Boone would’ve been half the man,” his dad said, “if he could only shoot game in September?” Beagle agreed, but he was old enough to know what a poacher was.

His dad parked their truck halfway inside a ditch, where someone had bolted a No Trespassing sign on a lifeless maple. “And forgive those that trespass against us,” his dad said, not intending to be serious.

They hiked upland through an open pasture, where a group of Guernsey cows gawked at them the whole time they were in view. Backgrounding the meadow was a yellow house. From far away, the house looked ghosty and abandoned, but it was just his distant perspective, Beagle knew, that made him think this.

After another mile, they came to a marsh that was mostly coated in an algae film. The grass was tall that surrounded the marsh, and if an arm rubbed one of the
sturdy leaves in the wrong direction, there would be an 
annoying paper-cut. Cattails stood up near the waters’ 
edge, holding their brown bulbs into the sour air.

“It smells like rotten eggs,” Beagle said.

“That’s mother earth,” his dad whispered. “From the 
gases. Now be quiet.”

They were keeping watch on a mixed crew of mallards 
and wood ducks that floated in a corner of the marsh. 
Every once and a while, a bird would quibble, or shudder 
its feathers as if it was going to take off into flight. 
But none did what Beagle’s dad was waiting for - a wide-
open flush.

After a while, his dad asked Beagle if there was 
anything he wanted to know about. Adrenaline surged 
through Beagle’s blood, because he predicted this was going 
to be about sex. Beagle wasn’t comfortable talking with 
his dad anymore, let alone accepting words of advice on the 
vagina. At fourteen-years-old, Beagle had been 
masturbating at a ferocious clip for some time. And for 
the past year, one hundred-percent guilt made Beagle worry 
the next sentence out of his dad’s mouth was going to be 
about making love. Beagle turned green with embarrassment 
from the ominous talk, that hung in the air just as heavy 
as the gross swamp gas.
The whole reason Beagle wanted to go hunting in the first place was to fire his first gun. His dad’s weapons sat in the basement like fireworks that were being saved for July. He wanted to shoot a gun at a pheasant or deer, the same way he wanted to be able to drive a sports car. To him, it was a passage into some sort of generic adulthood, so that he could be more like his dad. His dad owned a yellow Corvette Stingray, though he never drove it—keeping it wrapped snug under a canvas tarp in their garage.

Beagle was agitated. This hunting trip was never supposed to be about fucking.

“Your mother thinks she may be having to go to the hospital.”

Like a D-minus in science class, his dad had no idea what kind of relief he had just given Beagle. He cared about his mother, he loved her to death. But the last time she thought something was wrong with her, she came home with a drugstore-bought inhaler for a mild version of asthma. Visions of Mrs. Butters, Beagle’s science teacher, lap-danced in his masturbating head.

“What’s the matter with mom?”

“She thinks it’s just the stomach flu, but I got her to go see the doc today. Don’t worry, though.”
Beagle didn’t. The hunting trip was on the right track again.

A blue heron slowed and navigated itself over the swamp, then eased itself into the water opposite the ducks.

“Would you look at that,” Beagle’s dad said. “A blue heron.”

“Isn’t that on the endangered-species list, dad?”

“No. Not really.”

His dad plucked a shred of wet grass near his hiking boot. He placed his hands, palms out, in front of his mouth. With his thumbs held together, a tiny window was formed, where he could keep the piece of grass taut.

“Get ready,” his dad told him.

Beagle played the clarinet in music class, so when his dad brought this rigged-up single reed clarinet to his mouth, Beagle understood there was going to be noise.

Earlier, when he had agreed to go hunting, it disappointed Beagle to find just a broom-barreled rifle in the truck. With such a magnificent collection kept on the basement’s pool table, Beagle thought this was a tremendous waste. He took the .357 Magnum, because he had just watched Dirty Harry. Beagle kept the gun safe and sound in his L.L. Bean backpack.
There was a loud noise, sounding as if a circus clown had just gotten belted in his big red nose. All of the birds jilted their heads to where the clown was.

His dad blew into the reed again, and this time the clown really got slugged. Beagle unzipped his bag and brandished the Magnum in one fluid motion, assassin-like, just as a flock of waterfowl flushed from the marsh. Beagle fired twice into the speckled mob, hoping the blasts would hit something. He was glad that he chose to bring Clint Eastwood’s gun. After each triggered explosion, the gun recoiled with all the torque of a rocket engine, real bona fide power. Then his dad tackled him into the weeds, and shook the Magnum out of Beagle’s numb hand.

“Who do you think you are?” he shouted. His head was shaking, his hands waving around. “Where did you get that?”

Beagle saw the piss in his dad’s eyes. And smoke from Clint’s gun was all around. Evidence.

“It’s yours.”

“You mean you stole it?”

I borrowed it, Beagle thought, and if you don’t want to share, then I don’t want to play anymore. His dad eyed him as if this gun had been some kept secret his son was never supposed to know about. What kind of dumb secret
this was. Beagle zipped up his L.L. Bean, and headed back to the truck.

When Beagle found himself in the pasture again, the cows were gone.

“Who knows where the cows are?” Beagle said out loud, to nobody but himself. “Are they getting milked, or are they getting made into porterhouses and dog food?” It brightened Beagle’s mood to think about the Guernseys. Near the yellow house, somebody was wandering around in the backyard. It wasn’t his dad. Beagle could tell, because this person was hanging wash on a clothesline. He imagined it was his science teacher, Mrs. Butters. What was she putting out to dry? The tan tube skirt that she likes to wear on Fridays with a lime green sweater? Bras and panties, some black and some white? Maybe there’s a secret red slip she likes to wear, because it makes her feel sexy in class, even though impotent words like fungi and nomenclature come out of her mouth.

When Beagle got to the truck, it took twenty-minutes before his dad showed up with the blue heron. He tossed the bloody mess onto the hood of the truck. Beagle noticed that most of the heron was gone below the waist, if birds had waists. Just the upper torso, a long gray neck and a scissors beak.
“Look at what you did,” he said to Beagle. “You pubescent, stupid, masturbating little twerp. You blew up a blue heron.” Then he swung the driver’s side door open, and crawled inside to belt Beagle in the meat of his left shoulder.

After leaving the ditch, they didn’t drive long before Beagle’s dad said, “I need a glass of water.”

The truck slowed down where there was a dollhouse planted at the top of a metal post near the side of the road. It was a mailbox, Beagle realized, when he saw the blaze-orange mail flag hinged at the side of the house. It was painted yellow with white, no frills, awnings under each side of the roof. A little further up the gravel drive, they parked next to a much larger version of the yellow dollhouse. A clothesline weighed down with dungarees and flannel shirts led from around the rear of the house.

A woman that looked ten years older than Beagle’s dad came out onto the porch.

“Leopold?” she said. “How lovely it is to see you! How are you?”

Beagle’s dad stepped out of the truck to meet the woman. She was barefoot, and the ends of her jeans were
cropped just below her knees. Beagle watched them embrace, thinking this was some glass of water.

They talked to each other with their hands still on each other’s shoulders, Beagle’s dad looking down toward her. Then he went inside the house, like he owned the place, while the lady came around to Beagle’s side of the truck.

“You’re Beagle,” she said. “I’m Lorena. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“Likewise.”

“Very good!” she said. “And that’s the way a gentleman speaks. Like father like son, though, I guess. Speaking of your father, he’s in the kitchen making some cool-aid. Would you like any refreshments?”

“Okay.” Beagle wanted to see if his dad was really making cool-aid.

They drank from tall glasses that had poker machine cherries on them. Beagle, his dad and Lorena sat on her porch, the two adults sitting together on an old chair-lift swing hung by silver chains. Lorena said she had saved the chair from Powderhorn Mountain, back when she lived northern Michigan.
“They were just going to dump the whole chair lift,” she told Beagle. “It’s comfy looking, isn’t it? Why don’t you come try it out?”

“No thanks,” Beagle said. He was starting to get some feeling back in his shoulder. His whole arm ached, twitching on and off from involuntary muscle spasms, from the charlie horse his dad had given him in the truck.

Lorena’s toenails were painted purple, and her toes were short and naturally spread far apart from one another. They had a webbed look to them. The color of her toenails reminded Beagle of the shade his shoulder was going to be when he took his shirt off. He couldn’t stop looking at her frog feet, next to his dad’s leather boots.

“Lorena says she’ll cook us supper,” Beagle’s dad said. It was the first thing he said to Beagle since the truck.

“And rhubarb pie,” Lorena added. “With vanilla ice cream. How does that sound?”

“Are we having my heron for dinner?”

Lorena laughed and Beagle’s dad frowned. Beagle didn’t think it was possible for anybody to really frown. He thought of this recently when he was saw a political cartoon of Ronald Reagan and his wife, Nancy, in The Milwaukee Journal. Nancy was saying in the cartoon, The
North Star told me your Star Wars program is bunk, dear. And the president stood there, taking it all in with a big frown; an upside down smile. And it hit Beagle that he had never seen a real frown before. Until he saw his dad do it on the chair-lift.

“What heron?” Lorena asked, playing along with Beagle’s little game, though the curiosity in her voice was detectable.

“The one we shot in your marsh. Didn’t you know?”

She smiled politely, and turned to Leopold for help.

“We had an accident, Lorena.”

“You killed a blue heron?” she exclaimed. “Those are nearly extinct.”

“I know, it was an accident. Just bad luck was all.”

“Anyway,” Beagle broke in. “Some of it’s in the truck if you want to cook it for dinner.”

“Is this a joke?” Lorena asked. The quiet told her it wasn’t, and she left the swing to go inside the house.

“I’m calling the DNR.”

Beagle’s dad stood up after her, with such force that the chair swung high enough to bang against the yellow siding. He stopped the swing with his hand, and went to Beagle.
"I’ll deal with you later. And don’t do anything I wouldn’t do." And he went inside after the woman Beagle had never seen before.

It had gotten to be after ten o’clock, and the clothes on the line were still a little wet. The jeans were especially damp, and strong with detergent, but Beagle decided he would fold them all anyway.

His dad had been inside with Lorena for hours, and no police cruiser had come by to arrest them, so Beagle assumed things were going okay. There were lights on all over the house, even upstairs, but Beagle had no idea what room they were in, or if they were even in the house anymore. Beagle felt alone. He was sad, and wished he was drunk or something. He didn’t even know where the cows were.

He folded the long-sleeved shirts to the center, like the department stores did. And the jeans, he folded them half and half until they were damp little packages, ready to be put away in drawers. Everything fit into the two plastic baskets that Lorena had left outside, as if her astrologer had told her a boy was coming over to do her laundry.
Through the biggest window in the house, the one by the doorway, Beagle saw his dad and Lorena holding hands. They weren’t even talking, just looking desperate at each other. Then, from the clothes line, Beagle heard his dad suddenly say in a booming, obvious voice, “Well, Lorena, thanks for having us. It’s time to hit the road.” They weren’t holding hands anymore, like the show was over.

Beagle carried the clothes baskets over to Lorena’s porch, and placed them down on the steps.

“Here ya’ go,” he said to Lorena, who was standing behind her screen door with her arms crossed over her chest. Beagle’s dad was on the porch.

“Thank you, Beagle,” she said. “And just so you know, there’s no hard feelings about the blue heron. It was an accident. Just remember that, okay?” And she meant it.

Nothing was said on the ride home, and the silence made Beagle uneasy. His dad still had to deal with him about a number of things, and for once, Beagle wished it would be about unprotected sex.

He craved for his dad to finally give him the wishy-washy speech on the birds and the bees, and how it was definitely worth it to save yourself for somebody you can say you’re truly in love with. And for kicks, just to
break the ice in an already awkward situation, Beagle would ask, *So how does it come out? – I mean, do you pee inside of her?*

Instead, Beagle said, "So do you think mom’s okay?"

~

Of course, she wasn’t. The doctor said she had had a blood clot, and in the process of letting out the bad artery, something else went wrong. Then the blood wouldn’t stop. They fed her other people’s blood. So much of it, that the doctor told Beagle and his dad that she went through enough blood to supply two more human beings. The doctor told them this, because he was explaining how Beagle’s mother had died.

When the doctor left, Beagle looked at his dad, who was looking out a window. He’s avoiding me, Beagle thought, because I know his secrets. I found out about Clint Eastwood’s gun, and I met the frog lady. Now my mom is in the morgue.

"How long was she sick for?" Beagle asked him, accusing him.

"I didn’t know she was *that* sick."

"How sick was she then?"

"There was blood in the toilet. When I asked about it, she said it was pre-menopause."
And now she’s dead! Beagle thought. Because of menopause.

“Well I guess you were wrong, huh.”

“I’ve been wrong about a lot of things. I shouldn’t have hit you, son.” Then he started choking and weeping.

“Come here, son.”

His dad’s dramatic shift in emotion scared Beagle. His dad heaved, with his arms held wide, inviting. His eyes blinded by tears. Beagle wasn’t ready for a hug.

“I bet mom was wondering where we were. I bet she was worried.”

“What do you mean?” he sobbed, and spitted.

Beagle couldn’t get over this tragedy he was going through, and how everything was so heavy. So made for television.

“When the doctor told her she would be getting surgery,” Beagle said. “Don’t you think she wondered where we were? She must have wanted us to be at the hospital.”

“I’m a fool!” Beagle’s dad declared this to the entire hospital ward. “I’m such a jackass.”

A moron. Beagle thought this word suited his dad better than the others. A moron that killed your wife, Beagle thought. You put my mom to sleep.
"What next?" Beagle asked. "Mom’s dead. Now what am I supposed to do, you moron?"

5

Beagle was relieved to find his step-mom was still out. He told Anna that the guns were downstairs in the basement.

He Anna down the dark stairway, telling her to hold on to the railing because some of the steps were wobbly. He flipped on a light switch at the bottom, and the stained-glass Miller High Life lamp shade lit up the pool table.

“Suckerin’ suckitash," Anna said. “I’ve never seen so many guns."

Beagle found a brass-hinged footlocker his parents were using to stack magazines on. He and Anna filled the box to the lid with guns, and lugged it up the stairs like an old couch. Then they emptied the firearms into the bed of the pickup. They carefully did this gun by gun, in case any of the weapons were loaded. Then they went down to the pool table and loaded the footlocker again. It took nine trips to clear its playing surface.
“Wanna’ play?” Anna asked when they were done, bouncing the rubber heel of a pool cue on the basement floor.

“No thanks,” Beagle answered. “We’re not done yet.”

He let Anna drive, because she didn’t know how to drive stick. Beagle thought he’d better teach her, since his dad’s truck was standard transmission.

“The trick,” Beagle told her. “Is to step on the clutch whenever your hand touches the stick. If you’re going to change gears, you need to step on the clutch.”

Anna nodded nervously, her bangs wet from sweating.

“What happens if I push the clutch, and I don’t change gears?”

“Nothing,” Beagle said. “You just wear out the clutch is all.”

“Oh,” she said. “I don’t want to do that.”

They had made it the length of the block, and Beagle could still see his house through the back window. If his step-mom came home, he told himself he would yank Anna out from behind the steering wheel, and make the getaway to the millpond himself.

“Let’s just go,” Beagle said. “I think you’ve got the idea.”
The truck’s engine lugged at first, because Anna acted stingy with the gas. Once she managed to get the Ford into second gear, though, the ride was smooth again. She drove with her arm out the window, and her hand on the side-view mirror. The truck looked good on her, Beagle thought.

At the pond, Anna tried to downshift from third to first gear, forcing the heavy engine’s RPM needle into the red. She panicked and jerked the stick into fifth gear, so that the truck was as silent as ever, until it finally died. They coasted to a stop near a dock that kids used for diving.

“We’re just tossing them all in?” Anna asked at the tailgate.

“You got it.” He handed her a Winchester rifle. “Throw it as far as you can.”

“Don’t you want to keep any? Because they’re your dad’s? Maybe he would’ve wanted you to take care of them.”

Beagle grabbed a rifle for himself, and a little chrome-plated pistol that looked like it was designed for babies. He went to the end of the dock, and pivoted into a spin the way discus throwers do in the Olympics. He flung the weapons twenty yards into the air, and the guns fell solidly into the pond.

“There,” Beagle said. “Just like that.”
When the back of the truck was empty, Beagle went to the glove compartment and found the title to the Ford. In the white box that listed the amount the vehicle was sold for, Beagle wrote $1. Anna scribbled her signature, and Beagle said, "Nice doing business with you."

"Is there anything else?" Anna asked.

"You should clean the headlights. They have bugs caked on them."

She hugged him, and said that it was a nice thing he did for his dad, may he rest in peace.

"He would have wanted it this way," Beagle agreed.

~

She dropped him off at his parents’ house, where his step mom’s maroon Chrysler was parked in the driveway. Beagle patted Anna on the knee, and said, "We should do this again sometime."

Anna nodded.

"When are you leaving for Montana?"

"Tomorrow, probably."

"What about your dad’s funeral, Beagle?"

"We already had it for him. It was nice, I guess."

Beagle checked her reaction, to see if she was biting.
“Oh. Well maybe I should buy you dinner tonight. I think I owe you.”

“That’s not necessary.”

“It is. Don’t you want to see me again?”

She twisted his arm.

~

The first thing Beagle did was go into the garage. A giant form, looking like a covered boat, stood at the center of the room. It was his dad’s yellow Stingray.

Maybe I should have given this to Anna, Beagle thought. I’d be worth a lot more than dinner, that’s for sure. It was a t-top convertible, and had automatic transmission. She would have loved it.

Beagle unzipped a part of the tarp, so that he could open one of the car’s doors. He opened the driver’s side. The door was thick, and metal, heavy enough to be bulletproof. Beagle slid into the leather bucket seat, and quietly brought the door shut. It was there that he sat for ten-minutes, until he pulled Clint Eastwood’s .357 Magnum from the waist of his jeans, and placed the gun on the dashboard of the Corvette.
Eloise had gone to the jail to get Beagle’s dad. Beagle pised his pants to find him reclined in his corduroy Lay-Z-Boy with his messy cat resting on his lap.

“It’s been a coon’s age, son.”

Eloise rested, too, with her feet up on the couch, and an opened Reader’s Digest folded on her belly.

“Look who’s here,” she said. “It’s your dad.”

I know, Beagle thought. But he kept quiet.

His dad winked, and said, “Why don’t we go downstairs, son? I’d like to show you my guns.”

“I know what your guns look like.”

“Just the same. Let’s go look at them.”

On the way down the stairs, Beagle remembered what the Mission Mountains were saying to him on his last day in Missoula. The time is at hand.

The High Life lamp went on, and Beagle’s dad asked where his guns were.

Say that a class of eight students - girls Q, R, S and T, and boys U, V, and X - is divided into two teams, Team Blue and Team Gold. Each team consists of exactly four students. T and X are on different teams. V and W are on the same team. R is on Team Gold. Each team consists of at least one boy and at least one girl, and consists of an
unequal amount of boys and girls. If T and V are on Team Blue, what is the membership of Team Gold?

This question was on the LSAT exam that Beagle took before applying to law schools. After he read the question, he said “bullshit” to himself about five times, and started to skip questions until he could find one he could handle. To figure out one of the test questions gave Beagle the sensation that his skull was going to collapse, and this was the reason the University of Montana was the only law school to accept him, rather than Michigan or Northwestern, because he couldn’t answer the hard questions. His dad’s question, Where are my guns? had the same sort of effect on Beagle’s brain. He didn’t know what to say.

“Where are they?” his dad asked again.

“In the Corvette.”

“Good,” he said. He seemed pleased with Beagle’s choice of hiding places. He stood in thought, nodding his head in approval. “Good.”

My family, Beagle thought. He felt such a terrible sense that he was never getting out of Wisconsin. Why am I here? He thought. What purpose did it serve for me to come here and throw away the guns? What a childish way to express a failing relationship with your father. And now,
he just may pop a vessel from his already shorted-out brain, because I’m a ruthless fucker. It was a perfect example, Beagle thought, of him not thinking before taking action. Actions that, let’s face it, freaked other people out.

His dad emptied the striped and solid colored balls onto the pool table. He grabbed the wooden triangle that hung on the High Life lamp, and smacked it against the table’s felt surface.

“Let’s play god-dammit. I want to play pool with my kid.”

“I need to get going in a bit. I’m having dinner with a girl.”

“But you just got here. I just got here for cripes sakes – I’ve been in the cooler for the past couple days. All they let me do there was crap in my very own toilet.”

“One game. Then I have to shower.”

“I know what I like,” his dad said. Beagle didn’t try to figure out the context his dad was speaking in. His central nervous system must have been blowing sparks again.

Beagle watched his dad adjust the polished balls (they were never played with because of the guns) into different slots of the triangle. None of the positions seemed to be working, and he was getting frustrated. The trick was to
alternate solids and stripes, and this rule was giving him fits. Instead of playing pool, he was dialing a Rubics Cube.

He gave up on the balls.

"You break," he said to Beagle.

Beagle cracked the cue ball to start the game. The nine ball immediately shot into the high right pocket, while the three ball walked slowly toward the left side pocket. One-Mississippi, two-Mississippi, and the ball dropped. Both were stripes.

"Turkey," his dad said. "My turn."

Beagle was already preparing for his next shot, a combo down below, when his dad said this. Beagle guessed there must have been another short-circuit, and he went ahead and made the combination.

"What the fuck!" his dad shouted. "Cheater!"

"It’s not your turn yet." You weirdo.

His dad went to the pocket the last shot fell in, and pulled the ball out.

"This ball does not count." And he placed the ball where Beagle had hit it from. "Do it again, and I’ll go get something for you in my Corvette."

"I need to leave," Beagle said, and began walking up the stairs.
“Go ahead you lying cheat! I never needed your mangy hide around here anyway!”

My family, Beagle thought.

Upstairs, Eloise was listening to them yelling. When she saw Beagle she yelled at him.

“You leave your father alone. He doesn’t need your help in getting all riled up. He was just trying to see how you’re doing. And you go and make him wild. Who do you think you are, Beagle? Bilbo Baggins?”

7

They had dinner at the Goose Blind, a bar that had enough dead animals on the walls to keep Beagle and Anna entertained for most of the night.

“What’s that one,” Anna asked. They drank old-fashioneds, wells of them. Anna was directing Beagle to look at a stuffed rabbit that had antlers.

“A jackalope. It’s not real.”

“Where are they from?”

“There aren’t any rabbits with horns. A taxidermist thought he was being clever, and glued antlers on a rabbit. That’s all.”
Anna took a sip of her whiskey drink. She was drinking slower, more carefully, than earlier.

“How interesting,” she commented. “I was totallyfooled.”

That was the good thing about Anna, she was okay with just about everything. Jackalopes, for instance, she didn’t mind them. Some girls Beagle had known, not necessarily dated, would have scrunched their upper lips to their nostrils, and said, That’s so dumb. Anna moved on to other subjects.

“Do you know what I think?” she said.

Beagle didn’t know.

“You gave me that truck just to get me in the sack.”

“Why would I want to do that?”

“Why would you fuck me? I don’t know. Maybe because you never got a chance when you were a little buckaroo.”

There it was again. She said ‘buckaroo.’ Not many girls had cowboy slang in their vocabulary. Suckerin’ suckitash.

“You were afraid of me, remember?”

“That’s because I thought you were going to blow me and my girlfiend’s heads off.” Anna shifted her mood to woebegone. “Geez lou-eeze, Beagle.”

“I know, but before that. Up in the bedroom.”
“Oh yeah,” she automatically remembered. “You were taking matters into your own hands. That wasn’t my cup of tea.”

“I was taking the cup out of my supporter. It was hurting me.”

“Really?” she said. “Why were you taking it out, then? It still sounds kinky, if you’re asking.”

Because it was going to break off, Beagle thought.

Their waitress showed up, shy and confused. She told them the bar closed in five minutes. Last call for old fashioneds, or anything else. Anna said she’d like to have the tab, pronto.

“Do you know what I think?” Anna asked Beagle. Beagle didn’t know.

“I think we should go to the shore-stations again.”

“They aren’t there anymore.”

“Oh yes they are. You’re not fooling me. I just saw them last week. I thought of you, you know.”

“I don’t know.”

“Come on,” Anna said. She was excited now. Ready to set the world on fire. “You’re not getting out of this one.”
Anna expertly downshifted into first gear, where the road stopped. She yanked up the parking brake, with a "zeeeet!" "Don't be impressed," she said. "I've been practicing all day."

They had to wade through wet bushes and baby trees to get to the pier. Anna fell down halfway to the water. She just sat on the dirt, her legs sprawled ahead of her.

"Oh, God." She said. "Beagle, help me up."

Beagle straddled her legs and gently pulled both her arms up to his shoulders. After she brushed her rear-end off, they held hands the rest of the way to the lake.

On the dock, Anna crossed her arms in front of her, grabbing the bottom of her shirt with both hands, and lifted it over and off of her head. "First thing's first," she said, and took the rest of her clothes off. Then she took a step back for good measure, and ran off the dock. She must not have realized where the end of the dock was, or she was too drunk to know, because there was no jump or dive. She simply ran to the lake, and vanished when there was nothing left to support her.

Then she yelled for Beagle to join in on the festivities.

"Join in on the festivities! I promise not to squeeze your little pecker!"
Beagle disrobed immediately, and went, like—you’re-born naked, to the end of the pier that Anna had dashed from. He stood erect, listening for Anna’s doggie paddle, his penis pointing at the moon.

“Jump in,” she said. “Do it.”

Beagle jumped in and swam to her. Anna wrapped herself snug around his bony waist and held on to him tight with her thighs. She had her hands on the back of Beagle’s head, hardly even trying to push herself down on him. This is when Beagle realized that she wasn’t even mildly attempting to swim, and he was having to propel his legs like an Evenrude motor to keep them both afloat and fucking. Only then did Beagle think to himself, *Oh my God, I’m gonna’ drown.*

8

Just before Beagle’s flight was to taxi onto the runway for take-off, the captain announced there was definitely going to be a forty-minute wait. They would be in a holding pattern until the flight tower got its act together. In the meantime, the air-conditioning turned off, which caused
a low buzz among the passengers, because it was 95-degrees in Green Bay.

Beagle tried to read the airline’s magazine, but he put it down after he looked at all the coupons. The only real book he ever read was Ivanhoe.

After a half-hour, Beagle heard a woman say to one of the stewards, “Can you believe how well-behaved everyone’s been? I can’t believe it.”

The steward, a black man in a navy blue bow-tie, said, “Well all of these people are from Wisconsin. Wisconsinites are very reasonable people.”

The weather had cooled off in Missoula. A front had recently swooped down from Canada and into western Montana, where the high pressure of the air was going to keep under-average temperatures around for awhile.

When Beagle finally walked outside of the Missoula airport, he remembered the smell of the mountain air and how it kept him in bed. He was anxious to get home.

On the way to the humane society, to adopt his dog, Beagle thought about how things had ended with Anna. Badly.

Beagle told her to stop weighing him down. As she glided up and down on him, her hands still groping his wet
hair, she was quickly becoming an anchor to Beagle -- each squishy thrust nearly submerging, or completely dunking his face. When Anna began to get more lusty, her humping shifting in to more of a bucking, Beagle no longer felt comfortable with the situation. He felt he was being attacked by a sea-monster.

"Anna, you need to start paddling your arms a little. You need to do your part."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"I can’t swim for us both. You’re too heavy. Or we’re both going to drown."

Anna seemed to say to herself, Oh yeah, how do you like this? - when she started bucking so fast that Beagle couldn’t stay above water anymore, and he resigned to merely coming up out of the water for occasional breaths of oxygen. It was a furious act of survival and sex at once, and Beagle wanted it to stop immediately.

Then Anna slid off of Beagle. He thought she had done it by accident, but when he looked to see where she was, Anna was swimming away, like a shy sunfish.

On the dock, Anna yelled to Beagle, “I’m too heavy, huh!”

And then she did something that was very unreasonable, she drove away.
Now Beagle stood outside the Animal Shelter, trying to put on his game-face. When he was ready to pretend Son wasn’t really his own again, he went inside.

The Asian girl, Yoon, was working again. She was talking to a gray-haired woman, and her back was to Beagle. He could tell it was Yoon from her black hair, and the way she dressed - a khaki mini-skirt with a white t-shirt. She was wearing her canvas sneakers, too. Again, not run-of-the-mill animal shelter garb.

When she turned around to see Beagle, her face dumped into a frown. She went to Beagle, and told him she had awful news.

“I don’t think you’re going to like me very much,” she said.

“What?”

Beagle couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Now his dog had been adopted by strangers. It hadn’t been five days, so Beagle felt he had a leg to stand on. He would go to whoever took his dog, and explain the situation. To tell you the truth, I had to fly home to Wisconsin because my father had just suffered his second stroke. Now, I had an understanding with the pound that they would call me as soon as the pooch was up for adoption. And, well, I
couldn’t answer my phone if I was beside my dad’s deathbed? So, give me my dog.

"That dog that you brought in?" Yoon said. "When our kennels get full, we have to make some shitty decisions. People like to get puppies, so the older dogs are the first ones to go. And since that dog you brought in was full-grown, we had to euthanize him."

Beagle felt his groin drop to his knees. It was there, that his testes fell another two feet, hitting the floor so hard that he couldn’t breath.

"We put him to sleep. Last night."

She winced, because Beagle was looking hurt.

"I have some good news, though," she said. "Do you want to hear? We just got a precious Pomeranian left off this morning, and she’s the best dog. Do you want to see? I think you should."

"I don’t want any smelly Pomeranian," Beagle told her. "I want my dog."

"Well where were you? Did you check your machine? I called about a million times. You must not have cared that much. Where were you then?"

"My dad—" but Beagle left without finishing. He drove to his new basement apartment, where dirty mice were taking over things. He lay down in the bed that he made for
himself before the trip to Wisconsin, and stared at the ceiling that was moving on the inside.

Beagle awoke the next morning with a hangover.

He had gone to Ace Hardware the night before to buy mousetraps and poison. Instead of buying mousetraps, he picked out a six-pack of rat-traps. They were three-times the size of the smaller traps, and more expensive. Beagle figured they might be strong enough to strike the heads off any of his mice.

The hardware store was located in an outdoor shopping center, and there was a liquor store at the opposite side of the mall. The store had one large glass face, and on the window the owner had painted that week’s specials in red tempera. And there was a large soldier wearing a white-fluffed marching cap. The painted soldier said, Welcome Back U. of Montana Students. Beagle put the bag of traps and poison in his Wagoneer, and walked to the liquor store. He recognized the soldier from the label on a bottle of Beefeaters.
The store had no name. It seemed right, to Beagle, for a liquor store to be anonymous. All that mattered were the rows of bottles that covered each cement wall six-feet up from the cement floor. A man wearing a Bermuda and pink shorts offered his assistance to Beagle.

“What are you looking for?” the Bermuda man said. His voice was loud enough to sound anxious. He was proud that he had a customer.

“Just looking.” Beagle was close to the man when he said this. He noticed the man was staring at his mouth, waiting for Beagle to say something more. But his mouth felt dry and empty, and he knew the next words out of his mouth he would gag on, so he didn’t say anything.

“Just holler,” the man said, and disappeared outside. Beagle watched him take cigarettes from his ocean-printed shirt.

Beagle decided he would spend a lot. The shelf that he started on had brown bottles. He took single-malt scotch, choosing the red label over the blue, and a narrow bottle each of bourbon and rye.

The rack holding the clear bottles was next, and Beagle picked out gin, vodka, and schnapps. There was a wooden shelf decorated with cognac, and Beagle picked out a bottle that cost fifty-four dollars.
When the Bermuda man returned he laughed at Beagle. As he was checking the prices on each bottle, he told Beagle it was college students that kept him in the black. "If you guys weren't drinking your guts out," he said, "I'd be in the red."

Beagle wanted to surprise the man by telling him he wasn't a student. What would the man say if he told him he was going to drink it all by himself, with no friends? He wasn't planning a party, or stocking his private bar. He would just drink it at the table in his kitchen.

Beagle paid with his Visa, because there wasn't enough in his checking account. His student loan for the fall semester would be coming Friday, because classes started after the weekend.

The man gave Beagle a cardboard box to take the alcohol home in. He was grinning and laughing. He told Beagle he gave him a bargain, and that he saved about fifteen dollars.

"You and your friends are welcome any old time," he said. "The Liquor Lounge needs your business."

~

In his basement apartment, Beagle started on a fifth of scotch. He mixed the whiskey with water and three cubes of ice. Then he went to get a pot from the cupboard to make
macaroni in. He would melt about a pound of Velveeta cheese in it, because he was hungry. He hadn’t eaten since the sub sandwich and potato chips he had on the airplane, somewhere above Minnesota’s lakes.

The pot had a thin layer of mouse droppings inside. Beagle knew before he saw, because he heard them shifting around as he pulled the pot from the shelf. The feces were dry and crusty. They would be easy to clean out. But Beagle decided it was as good a time as any to begin setting the rat traps. He set one in the cupboard, and one each behind the stove and the refrigerator. Soft chunks of Velveeta served as bait. It pleased Beagle when he thought of the little mouse heads he would find on or near the plywood traps. And the gray bodies, that were decapitated all because of the soft cheese. The last traps Beagle set in his ceiling.

He was drunk when it got dark outside. He made a frozen pizza instead of macaroni, and ate half of it. When the bottle of scotch was almost finished, barely enough left to make another drink, Beagle put a flannel shirt on and went downtown.

~

It was Monday night. The bars that smelled like they served dinner were crowded. The bars that were dark and
looked closed were the ones that just served drinks.
Beagle went inside a place attached to an adult video store. Some people were shooting on a coin-operated pool table, while an Indian woman stared at a video poker machine that made digital gulps and blurps. Two men in baseball caps sat at the long bar, watching football on a television that looked glued to the wall.

Beagle sat a few stools over from the men. They watched him sit, then refocused on the football. Beagle could barely hear the game, because of the jukebox. The men at the bar adjusted their hats.

An overweight man in a white dress shirt brought Beagle a bottle of beer. The man undid the top button on his shirt.

“What a game,” the bartender said.

“What’s the score?”

“I dunno. I just like the game. Football. You must like football.”

Beagle said that he did, and asked which teams were on TV.

“Don’t know,” the bartender said. “All I know is football’s good for business. People like to drink beer when they watch it.”
Beagle looked behind at the pool game. An older man and his wife were playing cutthroat against a friend. They jeered each other and laughed. The man kissed his wife after every made shot.

"The thing is," the man in the white shirt said. "I like baseball better than football. But football is better for business."

Beagle drank his beer, and asked for a whiskey to go along with it. The bartender undid the next button on his shirt, looked down his chin at it, and buttoned it up again.

The man placed a thick-glassed double in front of Beagle, along with a plastic cup of peanuts.

"Are you a student?"

"School starts next week."

"I know," the bartender said. "College is good for business." He grinned until Beagle nodded in agreement.

"What are you going to be?"

"I’m in law school. But don’t ask me what I’m going to be."

"You’ll get a good job."

"Don’t be so sure."

"Listen," the bartender said. "I’m gonna make a run next door. Would you watch things until I get back?"
“It’s your bar.”

As soon as the bartender went outside, one of the men with a hat on yelled.

“Hey! Where’s Jonathan going? It’s almost the half!”

“He’ll be back in a minute.”

Beagle was beginning to spin from the alcohol. He didn’t want to be at this bar anymore. He wished he were back at his kitchen table. He would have the radio set on the oldies station, so he could sing to every song.

The Indian woman moved to a machine that made different sounds. She brought a pitcher of beer with her and a glass, and perched them on top of the machine. The pool people were starting to miss more shots, and the man wasn’t kissing his wife anymore.

“It’s the half,” the same man at the bar yelled. He was pointing at the TV screen with his empty pitcher.

Beagle filled their pitcher by leaning over the bar, running the tap backwards. The man took his hat off and pushed his hair back with his hand. “Finally,” he said.

Then Beagle poured himself a highball full of Wild Turkey. He had to crawl over the bar to get to the bottles. On the climb back he slid off the black vinyl of his chair, and lay flat on the floor with the side of his
face on the cool tile. The men watching football whooped, and the pool players glared at him.

Then Beagle was feeding dollar bills to the jukebox, selecting each golden-oldie he saw. First Ray Charles, then Haley and the Comets. Then the Clovers. Beagle didn’t feel dizzy anymore, but everything moved faster. He was dancing near the pool table. Then he was dancing with the Indian woman, twirling her around back and forth. She hugged him tighter after each song, and kissed him on the neck.

The man in the white shirt came back with a magazine. He was showing it to the football men. Beagle bought whiskey for himself and the Indian.

“Get a load of these guys,” the bartender told Beagle. “These guys don’t like Chinese girls.”

The men in hats were paging through the new magazine, and making gagging sounds on purpose. All of the girls in the pictures were Asian.

The bartender winked at Beagle. “The Japanese get me off.”

The Indian girl was kissing Beagle now, with her tongue pushing around inside his mouth. Her big purse was on the bar.
It was Beagle’s turn to look at the magazine. One of the girls had small breasts, and was pretty. Her fingers were inside of her, eyes shut and ignoring the camera.

“Nope,” the bartender said. “I wouldn’t mind her at all.”

“I don’t mind any of them,” Beagle said.

“Japanese girls love sex,” the bartender said.

The Indian left for the poker games without saying anything. The men cheered as a field goal sailed wide of the yellow posts.

Beagle felt a sloppy feeling come over him. He felt hot and ill.

“My dog is dead,” Beagle told the bartender. “I killed him.”

“What breed?”

“I put him to sleep.”

A man at the bar took off his hat and fired it at the bartender.

“I wouldn’t have one of those Chinese if my life depended on it!” He yelled this, intending for everybody in the bar to hear. The people playing pool started to leave, the wife turning for one last look before the door.

The bartender said, “Get out you fuckers. Leave or I’m calling the cops.”
The men stood up to leave, cursing at the bartender and Beagle.

The bartender picked the thrown hat from the floor. He doused the cap with gin and lit a match to it. He held the brim of the hat, waving the ball of fire at the two men.

“How’s this?” The hat’s flame lifted itself to a point.

The men made like they wanted to get behind the bar, but the overweight man picked up the phone to call the cops. Beagle saw the phone was a rotary.

“It don’t matter,” the hatless man said. “It’s my wife’s hat anyway.”

When they left, the bartender brought Beagle a whiskey on the house.

“That phone’s not even connected,” he told Beagle.

“You had to get them out.”

He brought Beagle some more whiskey. He nodded at the woman who was pouring herself another glass at the poker games.

“Now why did you shoot your dog?”

“I left him at the shelter.”

“That’s not so bad. Lots of people do that. What breed?”
The Indian woman reappeared and put her big purse back on the bar. She plopped herself on Beagle’s lap and held his shoulder for balance. The bartender grinned and went to the TV. He changed the channel to the evening news, where a lady was saying how a mountain lion had run away with somebody’s five-year-old boy.

Beagle didn’t wake up until eleven the next morning. He felt the weight of his hangover, and didn’t move. He looked at his alarm clock and realized he must have been drunkeer than he thought last night. He folded his hands behind his pillow, and waited for his head to loosen. Something behind his face started doing figure-eights, and Beagle rolled on his side to fall back asleep.

Before he could drift off, the phone rang. His brain immediately booted up the image of the Indian woman from last night. When he left the bar, she wanted to go with him. She complained that she lived all the way up in Charlo. When he told her no, she asked him to go to Charlo with her. She said she had a new triple-wide trailer home and a waterbed. But Beagle left her.

The girl on the other line was a law student.
“I’m Beth Brink,” she said. “I’m your mentor.”

Her reminder that he was a law student made Beagle’s hangover feel worse. The pushing-out sensation from behind his eyes made them water, and he was taken-over by an incredible urge to drink water. He remembered dreaming about the gallon of water in his fridge, and drinking it down without any breaths in between gulps.

“Where were you?” she asked.

“For what?”

“Orientation. Everybody was there except for you. I was the only mentor without anything to do.”

Beagle remembered the invitation that had a red foil seal stuck on it. There was going to be a cookout afterwards.

“I’m sorry.”

“That’s alright,” she said. “You’re not booted out yet.”

Beagle could sense she was nervous, and he felt more at ease with her. It would have been different if a professor were wondering where in the hell he was for the cookout.

“Listen,” she said. “If you’re free this afternoon, I can show you the school. Get you acquainted with stuff.”
The thought of being escorted around campus made Beagle’s shoulders stiffen. He tried to imagine what this girl looked like, and decided she wasn’t worth it. He didn’t even know where the campus was.

“No thanks.”

“Are you gonna know where to go next week for class?”

“I think I can manage.” Without a mentor, Beagle thought.

“Okay, I guess. Have you bought your books yet?”

Beagle knew it was a bad thing that he didn’t have his books yet. The letters over the summer warned him to start reading before the first day of classes. He was beginning to feel put-out by this girl. Beagle lied and told her he bought them all.

“That’s good,” she said, sounding relieved. “Then which classes are you in?”

The alcohol that was still bringing his brain kept Beagle from remembering. All he knew was there were four classes.

“I can’t remember them all.”

“Oh,” she said. “Well I’m Beth Brink, if you ever need some help.”

He hung up with her, and went back to sleep.
He dreamt some more about drinking water, infinite gallon after infinite gallon. Just letting his entire body soak it up.

There was a scene with his father, and they were on the world’s largest ferris wheel at Cedar Point in Ohio. The amusement park was empty, except for the carnies, and his father was explaining hunting. It was his father, but he was the body of Beagle’s dead mother. This made no difference in the dream—it was his father Beagle was talking to—and Beagle wouldn’t realize it was his mother, too, until he woke up.

His father was telling how you hunt deer the same as you hunt squirrels, and a bear has to be shot with the same care as a rattlesnake. Beagle was finding this all very important. He asked his dad what the difference was between a cow and a lion. Nothing, his dad answered.

Beagle fell out of bed for the day and decided he was going to a grocery store. He wanted to eat something that didn’t involve any pots or pans.

He went to a store called the Food Farm, and all he brought home was a gallon of vanilla ice cream, some Whip-
It, hot fudge, and a can of salted almonds. He made a hot fudge sundae in a deep cereal bowl, with the nuts sprinkled on top of the whipped cream. To wash it down, he opened the pricey bottle of cognac.

He had this meal on his bed. He hadn’t showered since Wisconsin, and the smell of his hair was enough to make Beagle rub his scalp, then sniff his fingers to check how greasy his head really was. The odor reminded him of Son, and how his dog’s greasy coat had a distinct smell that was almost offensive. He decided his hands smelled worse than his dog ever did, and rinsed them in soap.

After the cereal bowl was clean, Beagle shed the pants he still wore from the night before. He found a pair of shorts that had large pockets on each leg and pulled them on. When he took the loose change from his pants (there was a fresh tear on a knee, he must have fallen on the walk home from the bar), he also pulled out a claim ticket from the poker machine he and the Indian woman were winning on at the bar. The claim was for $6.50.

He found his sunglasses, and walked up the carpeted stairs, then outside. A pair of women jogged down his street in blue sport bras, and they both looked at Beagle. They didn’t smile, and kept their pace until they turned down the road that led to a river Beagle didn’t know the
name of yet. He took the opposite direction of the joggers, and headed downtown. The day was clean and clear, and Beagle wished his sunglasses had a darker tint.

The heavy man was bartending again. Beagle sat down and showed the man his claim ticket.

“That’ll buy the first couple,” the bartender said.

12

A customer came in the bar. He was a tanned and muscular-looking Indian, with a thick black beard. He looked like a bison wearing a torn red t-shirt and jeans cut-off at the knees. He wanted to know where his wife was.

“Sit down for a drink, Phillip.” The bartender gave the Indian a Coke and a cup of peanuts. Beagle looked at his beer, and heard peanuts being pulled apart.

“She disappeared again, Jon. When she comes home this time I’m locking her up in the closet.”

“That’s not gonna solve a thing,” the bartender said. He looked at Beagle’s bottle and asked how it was doing.

“I’ll know where she is,” Phillip said. “At least I’ll know that. She took the truck this time.”

“How did you get into town?”
“My brother’s buying work gloves. They’re cheaper here.”

Beagle kept his eyes on the bar while he listened. He didn’t want to get involved in the conversation. But he didn’t leave his seat, or go look at the jukebox. He wanted to hear more about the wife.

“She didn’t come in last night, Jon?”

The bartender swept a rag underneath the cup of peanuts, and shook the shells into a bucket.

“I haven’t seen her for a week. Maybe she went to Butte.”

“She better not be in Butte. I’m not driving down to Butte.”

The man asked for a beer this time, and the bartender asked how Beagle’s drink was doing again. Beagle thought of the ten-dollar bill in his wallet, and asked for gin and tonic.

“That’s a good drink on a day like this,” Phillip told Beagle. “It’s warm out.”

“I shouldn’t be drinking this early,” Beagle apologized.

“Say,” Phillip asked. “Do you want to buy some elk meat?”
The bartender brought their drinks, and Phillip moved to the stool beside Beagle’s. Beagle tried to picture what elk meat looked like. If it was red, like a steak. The bartender had vanished.

“My brother and I shot a bull this morning, on our way to town.”

“Is that legal?”

“For me it is. I have the right. I live on the reservation up in Charlo.”

This was news to Beagle, that Indians could shoot whenever they wanted. Deep inside, Beagle resented the idea of someone stopping off the highway to shoot an elk. It seemed like cheating.

“How does forty-dollars sound, for the whole shooting match?”

“I don’t have a freezer.”

“What a bargain! I can’t believe you’re passing on my bargain!” He rolled his shoulders forward in disbelief, his big back shifting into a boulder.

“Sorry.”

Phillip leaned forward into the bar and produced a wallet from a rear pocket of his denim shorts. The wallet was hand-made and leather, with a flying trout beveled into
the hide. The leather was tanned in the shade of a baseball glove.

"How about this wallet?" Phillip asked. "I’ll sell it to you."

Beagle already felt bad for not having a freezer for the elk meat. The Indian took his ID and some bills from the wallet. Beagle asked how much it was worth.

"Thirty-five dollars. And my wife made it for me. She’s Blackfeet."

Beagle thought of the ten dollars in his wallet. He knew this man took him for a drunk — the only fool that would buy a used wallet for thirty-five dollars. Am I drunk? Beagle thought. He sat surprised, wondering how the booze had sabotaged him. The bartender reappeared with fruit and a cutting board.

"I only have ten-dollars."

Phillip laughed through his nostrils and teeth.

"That’s not enough."

Beagle found his checkbook in another pocket, not knowing how it got there. He wrote a check for the trout-wallet. The rest of Phillip’s name was Tans-Many-Hides. Hearing this name disorientated Beagle, and Phillip had to repeat it twice before he held his check.
Phillip stood from his stool and held a hand good-bye, while Beagle quickly moved the guts from his old wallet to the trout-wallet. A new wallet almost meant starting over. He left the ten-dollars on the bar so he could drink it, and Phillip exited into the shiny street.

"You know who’s husband that was," the bartender said. Beagle nodded. He had her wallet.

13

Just as the sun was beginning to touch the Bitterroots, Beagle walked away from the bar to eat something. It was 8:30. Couples were holding each other’s hands and smiling straight-ahead, while groups of men left bars walking heavily, and smoking cigarettes. The movie-theater had a line that fish-hooked around the corner.

The sundae Beagle ate for lunch hadn’t done its job, and his belly was aching. He walked by a green school bus that had a kitchenette built inside. Smoke wrapped up from the long row of windows that had been shoved open up and down the bus, and a man and a woman were passing out burritos they wrapped in napkins. The customers would walk a block away from the bus before they held their food in front of their faces to take a bite. A woman wearing a
long dress took one taste, and passed it to her man, who took alternate bites from both of his burritos.

Beagle ordered the special, that was a shredded beef burrito and a small soda. The food was made before Beagle handed the woman the remainder of his ten-dollar bill. She was sweaty and looking miserable, from the way she didn’t lift her eyes from the counter. The man wasn’t shouting, but he was talking fast at her. “How are we on beef? What about guacamole? Are you cooking the rice?”

Beagle didn’t go far, and sat on the curb of the main drag. One option was going to an automatic teller for money. He had been doing the math, and there should’ve been at least thirty dollars in his account. And his loan money was coming Friday. On the other hand, he hadn’t met anybody besides Phillip and his wife.

He wondered if the woman had driven to Butte in the stolen truck. The only Butte Beagle knew was what he had seen from the highway on his move from the Midwest. His Wagoneer had labored up the Deerlodge pass in first gear, and Beagle heard the coolant boiling in the radiator. Then the Continental Divide, until the truck was happy again as they lost elevation and the engine was inhaling the quicker air. It was dark out when he saw the Butte Valley, that
was lit up like the spaceship from *Close Encounters*, with its yellow lights and signs all glowing.

There was supposed to be better dancing in Butte. She must have known this when she drove there, probably wearing her softest shoes. She would dance with cowboys and guys that worked in the mine, all the while thinking how she would get them to take her home. If everything failed, like the night she was kissing Beagle on the neck, she would drive to be alone somewhere else.

~

Beagle finished the night at the same bar. He drank whiskey drinks, lakes of them, mixed with Angostra bitters. A middle-aged woman was moving behind the bar with the bartender Beagle knew. She was pouring most of the drinks, while the man kept an eye on the television. Each bottle that she turned upside down, she did in her wrist. It bothered Beagle that the jukebox was turned off.

"You should look in a mirror," she said to Beagle when there were less customers. "You have crud on your face."

Beagle thought of the burrito, then how the woman’s shoulders looked beneath her shirt. She wore an embroidered cowboy shirt tucked in. Her shoulders looked like the hitch-up knobs that pickup trucks have.

"That’s my dinner," Beagle said.
“There’s no excuse. You should go clean up.”

“For what?”

“Young men aren’t supposed to act like bums,” she said. “That’s exactly what you look like.”

“That’s what you say.”

She went to wrist some more drinks. The bartender Beagle knew kept alternating the TV between two channels, while Beagle wiped his face with his hands and looked at them.

“How’s that?” Beagle asked her when she passed again.

“It’s out of my hands,” she said.

~

Beagle wasn’t very drunk when he got home, but he was near it. Instead of brushing his teeth, he checked himself in the mirror of the medicine cabinet. He wondered if, then decided that his face had a certain amount of contentment to it. Of course, nothing spectacular had happened to him that night, but he wasn’t feeling lousy. What he could feel was the comfortable buzz of alcohol in his blood. His cheeks, in particular, felt battery-charged. When he concentrated, he could sense his cheeks involving the rest of his face, until Beagle realized it was as if he were wearing a comfortable mask.
Somebody was coming downstairs. Beagle saw the feet first, then the legs, the chest, until the body that was Phillip’s wife. She held a six-pack of Rainier beer close to her belly.

“What are you doing here? I thought you were in Butte.”

“Butte?” she said. “I don’t know anyone in Butte.”

“Your husband is looking for you.”

“That’s okay.” She hung her purse on Beagle’s coat rack. “You met my Phillip?”

Oddly, she mentioned him with affection. She lifted the hair behind her neck and let it fall again.

“At the same bar, he wanted to know where you were.”

“Did you tell him?”

“I didn’t know, of course.”

“But you didn’t tell him about us?”

“There wouldn’t be much to tell. But I didn’t.”

“Would you drink some beer with me?” She offered the beer to him, like a good neighbor.

She wasn’t looking her best, Beagle thought. The dress she wore was wrinkled and had a small tear in a shoulder seam. Her flat-healed shoes were cracked and red, her bobby socks a not-very-clean white. There must have
been better days, but he hadn’t known her long enough. She ought to try a little harder, Beagle thought.

"Let’s drink this, and watch TV."

"I guess."

She went to the television and turned it on. Then she dropped herself on the couch, with the six-pack in her lap. Beagle sat on the armrest of the couch.

"I don’t even know your name," Beagle said.

"It’s Rose."

She seemed to be enjoying herself. She had taken off her shoes and socks, and kept them underneath the coffee table. Her bare feet were on the table, and she patted a cushion for Beagle to sit.

"Stay awhile," she said.

Rose took big swallows from her can. After every drink, she put the beer back on the table.

"Hold my hand," Rose said. "I don’t think we held hands at the bar, did we?"

Beagle couldn’t remember. He said they didn’t.

Her hands were big, each finger felt like a good-sized stick. Beagle was wishing she had gone to Butte, he liked her better down there.

"Were you at the bar tonight?"

"Yes."
"I know," she said. "I saw you go in there. Was Phillip there?"

"You should know, if you were watching."

"Oh, I wasn’t watching all night. So he wasn’t?"

Beagle thought of Phillip finding everything out, and the consequence of being locked in a closet to die with Rose. Or he would get gutted like an elk, miles out of Missoula, somewhere off the side of the road. Rose stood up and went into the kitchen. She swung open some cupboards, then returned with a bottle of bourbon.

"You’re drinking too slow," she said. "Have a boilermaker."

Rose poured whiskey straight from the bottle into his beer can. Beagle took a pull, choked, and put the beer beside Rose’s on the table. She punched him on the shoulder and whinnied.

~

After two more crude boilermakers, they made their way to Beagle’s bed. It wasn’t difficult, because the bed was in the same room as the couch.

"Are you okay with this?" Beagle asked her, because he wasn’t so sure himself. She clucked her tongue.

"That’s a dumb question when I’m in bed with you."
Her dress fell to the carpet after she contorted her hand to the back zipper. Then she crawled on top of Beagle and pulled off his shorts.

“Your penis isn’t very large,” she said.

“It’s doing its best.”

She wrapped her arms around Beagle the whole time, and crossed her feet, with her ankles locked behind his rear-end. After the electric part, she unfolded from his chest like a broken chaise-lounge. She didn’t stir to get out of bed, or ask if she could stay the night.

“I’m lonely,” was all she said.