1. Winter 2

After an early dinner of baked beans, salad, and a roasted chicken they brought with them, they go outside and throw a couple of small logs on the fire pit. They pull up deck chairs close to it, and the firelight flickers off Erik's face. It's an interesting effect that morphs him from handsome to monster. She supposes everyone can be a Jekyll and Hyde. Beauty and beast in the same body.

Something howls in the distance, a plaintive sound that's echoed back by others.

Quince twists around in her seat. "What was that?"

"Just coyotes."

She shivers. Whenever she thinks of coyotes, she thinks of hyenas on those tv nature shows, the stringy flesh of some recently devoured animal dangling from its teeth like drool.

"Coyotes are cool." He hops his chair over until their armrests touch. "A lot of the farmers and ranchers around here shoot them, but we don't. Sometimes I'd drive the combine to level the ground, flatten the squirrel mounds and berms that the rains made. The coyotes would follow me, some to the left and some to the right, snapping at the air. The first time it happened, I couldn't figure it out until I

realized that when I hit the mounds, the combine would kick up mice that had been burrowing in the dirt, and the coyotes were catching them in mid-air. I was like a rodent vending machine."

He sits up straighter, expanding his chest in exaggerated pride. "Yup, I was the Good Humor Mice Cream Man."

