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Contributor.

"Tu vas a morir! [You're going to die]" Cecilia told Warren when he told her he was taking the bus from Madrid to Munich.

In recent weeks Warren had seen only more frequent demonstrations and ever intensifying riots met with tear gas and rubber bullets from Guardia Civil. Strikes were spreading everywhere, and he feared a re-play of the Spanish Civil War now that Franco was dead. Best to get out to relatively peaceful West Germany.

That night he slept very little in his second-floor room. He saw images, in rapid succession, of the Plaza Mayor, the Prado Museum, the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, El Parque de Retiro, the Hotel Lacorzan where he'd stayed the first three weeks after arriving in Madrid, Avenida de Jose Antonio, the downtown post office (El Correos) — all the places with which he'd become familiar during the past three months. He'd heard the myth about those falling off cliffs seeing a rapid review of their lives before they hit the valley floor below. Maybe he was dying to Madrid. Maybe he'd never see Madrid again.

Early the next morning, Cecilia gave him a kiss at the side of the bus. A stray snowflake drifted by.

Warren got on the coach.

"When are you going to buy me a house — if not in Heritage or the Hart Highlands, at least in College Heights?" Wilma asked Warren after their dinner together Sunday night.

"We've been acquired by a new group," he told her. "We should wait to see what the new general manager does."

Monday morning during the drive to work there was news on the car radio about the cutbacks by the Chretien government. Warren walked toward his desk, but he was told to go directly to a staff meeting in the boardroom with the new general manager, Harrington McTavish.

"You people are lazy," McTavish told the frightened employees. "You haven't had a new idea in years."

"I have a good mind to lay off the whole lot of you!"

After work Warren called his friend, Gary.

"What's the matter, buddy?" Gary said. "Can't you take it?"

"That's the nature of a job, don't you know?" Gary continued. "Maybe you're depressed. You should see your doctor about Prozac."

He called Wilma and said that, in view of the layoff threat, he couldn't see his way to making a down payment on a house quite yet.

"You're lacking in commitment," she said. "It's off. It's over between you and me."