

A white wolf with striking blue eyes is the central focus, looking slightly to the left. The wolf's fur is thick and white, with some grey shading around its eyes and nose. The background is a soft-focus winter scene with snow-covered ground and evergreen trees. In the foreground, a rustic wooden fence with a lattice pattern is visible, partially covered in snow. The overall mood is serene and mysterious.

# Mystic Wolf

*A Novel by*  
**David F. DeHart**



*Writer Monty Harrison is miserable. His wife's death, coupled with his inability to please his publisher, has him in a deep depression. Maybe a month-long exile at a "writers retreat," among a mysterious group known as the "Alaska Writers Kolony," can rekindle his waning literary fires. The writers' captivating stories may not salvage Monty's career but his encounter with an Arctic white wolf, known as "The Mystic Wolf," will become a life-changing experience.*

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# **Mystic Wolf**



## CHAPTER ONE

I RAISED MY CRYSTAL TUMBLER TO THE glinting rays of sun that filtered through the patio curtains, and sloshed the ice and scotch, fascinated by the sharp distorted angles of light flashing before me. The reflections were a kaleidoscope of drunken fairies dancing on the face of a drunk. Me.

I can't remember when I last took time to appreciate the finer nuances of drinking. In the past, before writer's block, love-of-life block, and every other kind of block set in, just having a glass of good scotch nearby was enough to fuel my desire to write. More often than not, the ice melted and diluted the fifty-dollar single malt to tasteless colored water.

Things were different then. Drinking now to obliterate heartache and to convince myself that life could continue without my wife of thirty years, was different, and, as far as I could tell, a completely wasted effort.

The telephone across the room rang for the fifth time in the past hour. Apparently the only way to stop it was to take it off the damn hook or, better yet, rip it from the wall.

Opting for the latter, I pried myself loose from my leather recliner, feeling the cushions peel away from my sweaty shirt. Steadying myself by grabbing furniture as I stumbled across the room, I reached for the phone and was about to toss it out the patio door when I caught a hazy glimpse of the caller ID: Dianne's cell phone. My screwed-up, twenty-five year-old

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daughter only called when she wanted money. I never minded her asking, but I could not tolerate it being used to feed her drug habit, as I guessed this was one of those times.

I had neither seen nor heard from her since the family gathering following her mother's funeral last year. Even then, Dianne had worked hard to keep her distance from me, giving me only a slight smirk in lieu of a smile. She had stood across the room, smoking, inhaling deeply as if it was her last cigarette. Her eyes were dead, a hollow heroin-user's nothingness, her fidgeting and quaking shoulders revealing her continued addiction. She had left the reception before I had the chance to try bridging the gap that had now widened with time.

The phone rang again. It took so much strength to pick up the receiver, that when I finally spoke, I was out of breath, my voice a hoarse whisper.

"Yes?" I croaked.

"Dad? You okay? Not that I give a shit one way or the other."

"Yeah, tis I dear daughter."

"Are you alone?"

"Yes and no. Just me and Mr. Chivas Regal," I said, holding up the glass. "Or what's left of him."

"You're smashed! Jesus. And you get on my case." She sighed solemnly to emphasize her disgust.

"Did you call just to discuss my drinking habits?"

"No, I was thinking about Mom. I...do you know if the lawyers have got the will thing taken care of? Mom must have left me something, but I haven't heard. . . Fuck. You know what I mean."

David F. DeHart

I tried to ignore her whining and looked outside, past the tall junipers flanking the patio—out toward West Seattle across Elliott Bay, where, if I squinted hard, I could make out the diminutive version of the Statue of Liberty that stood on its cairn of rocks—a green-patina of beachfront patriotism. It marked the spot where I first entered the realm of a fiction writer thirty years ago, then a twenty-two year old fledgling scribe, and a week-old husband.

My parents had made up their minds that they were going to buy us a house for a wedding gift, but I turned them down. I reasoned that a man had to start caring for himself and his new wife on his own. Thinking back, the brashness of that statement was ridiculous, considering the fact that I was near broke; had not yet had a novel published, and was barely getting by on periodic bond redemptions left in a trust by my grandfather.

Meg and I had picked out a rental cottage across the street from the beach, a place for me to write the *Great American Novel* and for her to pursue her art career. West Seattle was a haven for wannabe artistic hippies. Our foray into the subculture was quickly concluded when a New York editor discovered that I had an unusual talent for mystery writing. I quickly became a commercial grade author, a wealthy writer...writing crap. Cheap words had made me rich, words that enticed readers to pay \$24.95 to ride-along with a half-assed but likeable private eye. My ticket to literary fame was in the hands of "Dallas Rockland," handsome daredevil chick magnet, capable of leaping tall villains in a single bound, known to outrun nine-millimeter bullets with regularity. Dallas was just cautious enough so as not to jeopardize the next episode of trashy literature. On second thought, to

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characterize my work as literature was to disgrace writers of even marginal talent.

Dianne's voice on the phone jarred me. "Dad? Are you listening to me? Set down your booze and listen for a second."

I turned away from the snapshot of my past and took another sip of my drink.

"Dianne, I'm going to hang up if you're asking for money again."

"Damn it Dad!"

"I've told you, get yourself off that shit and I'll help."

Her breathing slowed audibly and I sensed she was gathering the words to respond. "Please listen to me."

She began to cry, no longer able to suppress her feelings.

"I'm listening." Was I being too hard-nosed? My son, Conrad, the shrink, had told me the so-called tough-love approach was the only way to handle Dianne's particular addiction, short of intervention, and that had failed twice before.

She sobbed unabashedly now, heavy, gulping words. "Dad, I'm sorry. I'll let you go."

"No. Come on over. I'll buzz you in."

I heard her trying to stifle her crying, and taking a deep drag on her cigarette, blowing smoke into the phone.

"Dianne? You still there?"

"Yes?" Her voice now soft and breathy.

"Love you."

I replaced the phone on its stand, finished the last of my drink, and carefully placed the tumbler on a doily left by Meg—one of a thousand little reminders of her absence.



*David F. DeHart*

*"Monty Harrison,"* I addressed myself in the mirror above telephone table, "If they gave awards for being an asshole, you'd get the Lifetime Achievement trophy."

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I woke with a start, jerked to a sitting position and wiped the perspiration from my face. Was it just a dream? Had I really just encountered the voice and sweet warm breath of my wife?

The greenish glow of the bedside clock told me it was 1:00 AM, the witching hour. I kicked away the covers and stepped out onto the bedroom balcony for a cigar. The night air was heavy. Downtown Seattle's nocturnal sighs of rain-dampened streets mingled with the briny breeze from the bay to my right.

Nightmares came and went with the territory inhabited by those in mourning, according to my son Conrad. And since he was a psychiatrist, I supposed he possessed the credentials to make such supercilious platitudes.

Christ. Was I ever tired of the inane attempts to placate me? My friends and the few remaining relatives bombarded me with: "It takes time to overcome grief." And my all-time favorite, "Time will heal." Bullshit! Time healed nothing. My heart still ached and my depression grew darker and deeper, driving me to the brink of...

"Monty? Just stop it! Now!" I yelled, shattering the silence of a city at sleep.

I dropped the half-finished stogie in the patio ashtray and slumped back into living room. There was no way that I would be able to go back to bed, so I plopped down into my recliner again and pondered my circumstances.

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I had not written a single word in twelve months. This was completely out of sync with my life, a life of writing; sometimes compulsively pouring out endless streams of plot, characterizations, and dwelling on the sensory elements of scenes. Never in my life had I *not* been able to write.

That had all changed with Meg's protracted battle with cancer.

At 2:15 in the morning the persistent door buzzer woke me from a deep alcohol-induced sleep. I descended to the street level door of my condominium, where, instead of Dianne, I found two Seattle policemen who informed me that my daughter's body had been found floating in Lake Union below the Ships Canal Bridge.



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