Rainy Season
by Stephen King

It was half past five in the afternoon by the time John and Elise Graham finally
found their way into the little village that lay at the center of Willow, Maine,
like a fleck of grit at the center of some dubious pearl. The village was less than
five miles from the Hempstead Place, but they took two wrong turns on the way.
When they finally arrived on Main Street, both of them were hot and out of sorts. The
Ford's air-conditioner had dropped dead on the trip from St. Louis, and it felt
about a hundred and ten outside. Of course it wasn't anything at all like that, John
Graham thought. As the old-timers said, it wasn't the heat, it was the humidity. He
felt that today it would be almost possible to reach out and wring warm dribbles of
water from the air itself. The sky overhead was a clear and open blue, but that high
humidity made it feel as if it were going to rain any minute. Fuck that -- it felt
as if it were raining already.

"There's the market Milly Cousins told us about," Elise said, and pointed.
John grunted. "Doesn't exactly look like the supermarket of the future."
"No," Elise agreed carefully. They were both being careful. They had been married
almost two years and they still loved each other very much, but it had been a long
trip across country from St. Louis, especially in a car with a broken radio and
air-conditioner. John had every hope they would enjoy the summer here in Willow
(they ought to, with the University of Missouri picking up the tab), but he thought
it might take as long as a week for them to settle in and settle down. And when the
weather turned yellow-dog hot like this, an argument could spin itself out of thin
air. Neither of them wanted that kind of start to their summer.
John drove slowly down Main Street toward the Willow General Mercantile and
Hardware. There was a rusty sign with a blue eagle on it hanging from one corner of
the porch, and he understood this was also the postal substation. The General
Mercantile looked sleepy in the afternoon light, with one single car, a beat-to-shit
Volvo, parked beside the sign advertising
ITALIAN SANDWICHES • PIZZA • GROC • FISHING LICENCES,
but compared with the rest of the town, it seemed to be all but bursting with life.
There was a neon beer sign fizzing away in the window, although it would not be dark
for almost three hours yet. Pretty radical, John thought. Sure hope the owner
clerked that sign with the Board of Selectmen before he put it in.
"I thought Maine turned into vacationland in the summer," Elise murmured.
"Judging from what we've seen so far, I think Willow must be a little off the
tourist track," he replied.
They got out of the car and mounted the porch steps. An elderly man in a straw hat
sat in a rocker with a cane seat, looking at them from shrewd little blue eyes. He
was fiddling a home-made cigarette together and dribbling little bits of tobacco on
the dog which lay crashed out at his feet. It was a big yellow dog of no particular
make or model. Its paws lay directly beneath one of the rocker's curved runners. The
old man took no notice of the dog, seemed not even to realize it was there, but the
runner stopped a quarter of an inch from the vulnerable paws each time the old man
rocked forward. Elise found this unaccountably fascinating.
"Good day to ye, lady n man," the old gentleman said.
"Hello," Elise answered, and offered him a small, tentative smile.
"Hi," John said. "I'm --"
"Mr. Graham," the old man finished placidly. "Mr. and Missus Graham. Ones that took
the Hempstead Place for the summer. Heard you was writin' some kind of book."
"On the in-migration of the French during the seventeenth century," John agreed.
"Word sure gets around, doesn't it?"
"It do travel," the old party agreed. "Small town, don'tcha know. He stuck the
cigarette in his mouth, where it promptly fell apart, sprinkling tobacco all over
his legs and the dog's limp hide. The dog didn't stir. "Aw, flapdoodle," the old man
said, and peeled the uncoiling paper from his lower lip. "Wife doesn't want me to
smoke nunnmore anyway. She says she read it's givin' her cancer as well as m'ownself."
"We came into town to get a few supplies," Elise said. "It's a wonderful old house,
but the cupboard is bare."
"Ayuh," the old man said. "Good to meet you folks. I'm Henry Eden." He hung one
bunched hand out in their direction. John shook with him, and Elise followed suit.
They both did so with care, and the old man nodded as if to say he appreciated it.
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