

-Small Normal-

She went straight from David's front door to the car and was on her way downstate as fast as her wheels could take her. State troopers and speed guns be damned. She was getting away from crazy.

David Emory collects souls. No no no no. The damn world had tilted off-axis. She'd opened a gift-wrapped box and found centipedes inside. What the hell had she stumbled into? A guy fresh out of the asylum, with a fascination for dead things. A doctor who sounded sane but clearly wasn't. An entire town pretending it had no idea what was going on right under its nose. Damn. She'd bought a house smack in the middle of a Stephen King story.

Three-plus hours later, secure behind the locked door of the SoHo loft, she spent the rest of the day surrounding herself with ordinariness, putting distance between her head and the lunacy she'd been witness to.

She crept into every nook and corner of the polished modern space, searching for the small normal; seeking out every mundane task she could find, reveling in its tedium. She opened mail. Made lunch. Washed sheets and made the bed. Straightened pictures on the wall. Organized her desk. Dusted Ty's Grammys. Cleaned a bathroom that had already been scrubbed down to its shine. The housekeeper had been there; nothing needed doing. The need was all hers—whatever could bring her back within the safe haven of everyday life.

Yet, as grateful as she was for the small normal, the conversation with Eli Cline wouldn't leave her alone. How could she have read him so badly? She wasn't gullible or naïve. She'd known cultists, fanatics, dellusionals; there was always a hint of wild-eyed *wrong* about them. Not here. She'd seen what she'd seen with clear eyes, she'd heard what she'd heard, and she'd believed what years of experience had assured her was true. Cline had seemed so sane. How could she have been so wrong?

She'd laughed when Cline told her. She shouldn't have. It was the wrongest, most inappropriate, most unprofessional response she could have given. She couldn't help herself.

"Souls?" She had to choke back a smile. "Whose souls?"

"People, animals. Souls. Like that dog in the road. And not collects, exactly. More like he gathers them."

Her professional detachment went out the window. "Cut it out, Eli. Death is death. Souls don't exist."

"And you know that how?"

"Well then, why would anybody bother to collect them? Is it like—what?—a hobby?"

Mistake. She'd been too quick with the sarcasm. She thought for a moment that the doctor would get up and leave. If it hadn't been for David resting in the other room, he probably would have.

"Alright, you tell me," he said. "What do you think it was that you saw in David here today? What did you think you were seeing in the asylum? What did you say to me in my office?"

He had a point. Before she'd had even a hint of this bizarreness, she'd felt certain that David Emory didn't belong in that hospital. And try as she might, she couldn't dismiss Eli's protectiveness: A man like that wouldn't defend insanity, not even in a friend.

"Okay. So you're saying he has... a gift, you called it."

"He has. For years."

No. No. Too much. "You're as crazy as he is."

"Listen, I was like you at first: I didn't want to believe it. I saw the change in him; it took him two years to tell me what it was. But when you've known somebody for as long as I've known David, a change that profound doesn't happen without a reason. After a while, I saw enough to let myself believe."

"Like what?"

"He knows when death is close. Sometimes death just finds him. It's a very sharp-edged gift. I wish it had never happened to him."

"Why?"

He cocked his chin toward the room where David was. "Because it does *that* to him. Once he lets it loose, it's totally out of his control. Sometimes he can't tell the difference between what's here and what isn't. And it's getting worse. When you called, I thought *this is the one he isn't coming back from.*"

"What do you mean, *not coming back*? You're saying this could kill him?"

"No." Cline was somber. "I'm saying that one of these days it will."

-The Road Comes Home-

Just after six, the loft's freight elevator rumbled to life. The freight gate clanked open. The key turned in the front door lock. A familiar voice sang out from the doorway. "McGill, you here? The husband is home!"

She ran to him; threw herself into his long, lean embrace. She was crazy-glad to see him, from the tip of his dyed-sandy head to the knees of his artistically torn jeans to his neon green Chuck Taylors. His arms were laden with travel bag, flowers, champagne, a Japanese animé doll. More than all those things, he'd brought her himself—exactly what she needed after the madness she'd been exposed to.

"My God, what are you doing here?"

"Problem with the Tokyo venue. I've got 36 hours before I've got to head back," he said. "I figured I wouldn't wait for you to miss another plane."

They wasted no time. They were in bed before they'd gotten much past hello. Being with Ty was as passionate as it had always been, and as frenetic. Ty was a fighter plane in bed; he rattled headboards. But he was known territory, this man who had been at the center of her life for so long: his smells, his rhythms, the sound of him, even the rasp of his fret-hand calluses. She knew the set of every muscle and the lie of every hair. For the first time in a week, she knew exactly where she was. The road had come home.

The heavy breathing was barely past when the door buzzer started. Car horns barked from the street. The word had already gotten around that Ty Florey was back in town. And now he belonged to everybody. They got up, got dressed. Idyllic interlude over.

At one club after another, velvet ropes parted for them like automatic doors in a supermarket. Paparazzi flashes left afterburns in their eyes. Cristal and autographs flowed. Ty's entourage grew like a virus, bigger by the minute. The conversation, like the music, was deafening. But Ty was there and she was there, and she remembered how good it could be.

His energy was fun. It always was—for the first few hours. Ty had always been as much about the celebrity as about the music; a hugely magnetic and likeable guy who loved the attention that came with who he was.

His reputation had always been an open invitation to “let’s party”, and he’d earned every second of it. He was a free soul, fearless and open to every kind of experience. He lived with nothing held back; no filters, no restraint or self-denial. He wanted, he took. He thought, he said. He felt, he acted. He swallowed life whole. With Ty, you hung on or you fell away. He’d toughed-out a brutal business and a very public rehab for meth addiction, and he’d wound up bigger than life. A total package that had made him the man-crush of pretty much every twenty-something straight guy in fifteen countries.

She remembered how things had been, early in their relationship, when love was new. It was all-consuming, even then, but different. They were rarely apart, even for an hour. He’d taught her the art of performing...how to let your audience know you were having fun... how to use your body to drive up the groove... how to seem to wring everything out of yourself, and still hold something in reserve. They’d sung together in the shower. He’d sung to her in bed. They’d slow-danced naked on the roof of their apartment building on cool summer nights. That was when it was all-wonderful between them. That was when it was still fun.

Here, now, in the club, the fun was more style than substance. It didn’t take long in the too-bright lights and shouted conversations before McGill started to feel like wallpaper. She tried to tell him about the book going to the top ten. He didn’t hear her. Or didn’t care to. Going solo in the midst of company was the eventual reality of every famous musicians wife: There was always someone who wanted a minute of his time, a piece of his life; always an act that wanted him to sit in for a number or two, always an autograph to sign, a back to slap, an old pal to be greeted or a new one to be made.

Early in their relationship, she’d hated his absences. Later, she’d been resigned to them. Now, she preferred them. The anything-you-want-anything-goes atmosphere of celebrity, the kowtowing laughter, the endless jokes, the pointless, über-extroverted conversations: She found them exhausting. How many rock stars did it take to screw in a light bulb? One to hold the light bulb and know that the world would revolve around him.

As good as it was to have him here, she couldn’t evade the truth of it: Ty hadn’t come back for her, not really. Not once in the hours they’d been together had he asked about herself, her thoughts, her work, her feelings. Fact was, he’d been homesick. He had come back for the photo-op, the familiar turf, and a little sexual home-cookin’. That was what passed for love between them these days.

It took ten minutes to tear him from his conversation. “Ty, could we go home? Just us?”

He looked at her as if she were speaking a foreign language. "It's only one o'clock," he said. Translation: They'd only been partying for five hours; he wasn't spent yet. He threw his arm around her and went back to his conversation: Ty's version of a problem solved.

She waited another hour, waited until he'd stepped away to talk with a record industry exec at the next table, to free herself. She asked Ty's assistant Manny to tell her husband that she'd gone home, and slipped out a side door. It was an exit unnoticed and unremarked; the paparazzi were on the lookout for him, not her.

She could have taken their limo. Didn't want it. The dozing city was a relief after the overheated club, late-April-cool, soothing and quiet in the pink streetlamp twilight. Cabs and limos slowed for her, looking for off-meter fares. But she needed exactly what the night had given her. She oriented herself crosstown, and set out on the mile-plus walk back to the loft.

Her feet found a tempo on the empty sidewalk, and her thoughts fell into pace with it. She had made the bestseller list this week, to public acclaim and a reaction from her husband as nonexistent as if she had dropped her words into the Hudson River the moment they were born. The more time she spent with Ty—the parties, the interviews, the sessions, the tours—the more alone she felt, as if a gaping space had opened up between some invisible-desirable and the person she was. She knew it was her own fault, this inability to accept what he offered her. Standing back from the richness of his life was insanity of a sort. But at least it was an insanity that belonged to no one but herself.

It was three a.m. when she let herself into the silent loft. Three-ten when she tucked herself into the huge bed. Alone.

Thunder.

Not thunder—husband. She woke to find Ty buzzing through their closets like a wasp against glass. Her suitcase lay open on the far end of the mattress, festooned with clothes. He wasn't finding what he was looking for. He was getting pissed about it.

"What are you doing, Ty? Why are you packing my bag?"

"Because you're coming with me. Tokyo venue is still fucked up. Could be a week, now, maybe two before they get it straightened out. We can go spend some time... Maui, maybe. It'll be good."

She should have known this was coming. This what he always did, and it always came out of nowhere. He made decisions. He never asked; he told her, expecting that she would drop everything. Every time she'd gotten

comfortable, thinking that maybe for once they were headed in the right direction, their relationship always turned down the rocky road of control.

“Ty, I can’t. I’m working.” Reflexively, she looked to the nightstand. Her notebook was missing. She panicked. “Ty...where’s my notebook?”

It was on the bed, thrown down among the disorder of his packing. “You mean this?” He took that object that was the most intimate, personal, treasured part of herself; held it out the window. “Aren’t you done playing with your imaginary friends?”

She got up and wrapped the sheet around her. She tried to stay passive. When he was in his mood, any response stronger than a murmur would only make this worse. The least show of temper would come back at her a hundredfold. And her notebook would end up on the pavement, twelve stories down.

“Stop. Please. Give me the notebook. Please? You know I can’t go anywhere. I’m in the middle of interviews.” That was a lie. Technically, the St. Amelia’s article was finished—but Ty wouldn’t know that.

“You don’t interview people: You stalk them.”

“What’s the urgency here, Ty?”

“I’m the urgency. Me. Those interview people will wait. I’m here. I’m real—not on paper. You’ve got a husband who wants you with him...what is so fucking important about writing something nobody wants to read?”

Predictable Ty. Every insecurity, every doubt, every confidence: She could count on him to twist it, distort it, and play it back louder. And now she was angry. “Oh that’s right. Arena rock is the secret to world peace. How could I have forgotten?”

He stepped into her. She could feel his breath on her face. She waited for the blow that would follow it. “Is your life with me so bad? Is it?”

“I’ll tell you, you’re not making it any better right now.”

“McGill, I flew all the way from Japan to be with you. And this is what I get. It’s always the same excuses; always the same damned thing.” He threw her notebook into her bag and threw the bag against the wall. Clothes flew everywhere. Her notebook landed in a mangled heap on top. “Tell you what: Fuck this. Stay here. I don’t want you with me. Getting away from you will be the best thing I could do for myself.”

“Ty....I’m sorry.”

“That’s what you always say, and it never means anything. Let me ask you, McGill, do you think this marriage is working? Because I sure as hell don’t.” He snatched up his travel bag and stormed out of the loft.

She heard the freight elevator gates close in the hall. Ty’s harangue still rang against the walls. She found her notebook; smoothed its pages apologetically as if smoothing a ruffled temper. Ladies and gentlemen, for one night only, the real Mister and Mrs. Ty Forey. Paradise Fail.

As much as she wanted to feel awful about it, there was definitely good news/bad news happening here. Bad news: Her marriage was still a trainwreck. Nothing different there. Good news: She’d gotten through Ty’s departure without a black eye to remember him by. Better still, his steamrolling temper had cut her a clear path to go wherever the work invited her, without fear of interruption or distraction. And she knew exactly where that would be.

She was going back upstate. To where a story still wanted telling. Right about now, compared with real life, even insanity was looking pretty good.

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-Eyes in Twilight-

Grocery bags. Purse. Keys. Travel bag. Laptop. The eternal front-door juggling act of the newly-arrived. This was the moment when the phone was bound to ring. This was the moment when it did.

She dumped her armloads on the counter just as the answering machine picked up. She let the machine screen the call; if this was Ty calling she had no interest in talking to him.

But it wasn’t Ty. It was Kismet.

“McGill? ...ummmm...hi....this is David Emory?” The soft voice on the machine was awkward. Shy. Kind of appealing, really, in a grown man. “Hope you don’t mind my calling. I should be home around six on Saturday afternoon, if you’re available...if you feel like stopping by...ahhhhh...oh, it’s 81 Republic Road. Hope to see you. Thanks.”

She arrived an hour ahead of his invitation, claiming the high ground early as she always did when she was about to interview somebody. David didn’t answer the door. She tried the handle: It wasn’t locked, but she didn’t go in. She wandered around back, to see if she would find him there.

Nice, neat yard. Nature left largely to itself. House and outbuildings set in a clearing, surrounded by trees, bordered on one side by a flower-decked meadow. Flagstone walkways with thyme growing between the stones; an herby smell when you walked there. And, like a gem at the clearing's edge, a beautifully preserved old barn. No sign of David.

A peculiar, rhythmic sound worked its way out into the yard through the barn's tall windows. She followed the sound inside.

The scene was almost too picturesque, too perfect. Like a magazine photo. A third of the old barn had been finished into a huge greatroom, the old post and beam-work exposed from floor to ceiling. Towering windows filled the room with a warm light that a painter would have envied. In the center of the room, a pair of cushy armchairs rested welcomingly on a beautiful Kilim carpet. Along one wall, sat a long wooden farmhouse table laden with books; built high along another were box cubbies, filled with hundreds of skeins of yarn in grays and whites and blacks. Big handmade baskets of washed wool lay here and there. In front of the tall windows stood a great wooden loom. And at that loom sat David.

He was small at the immense mechanism, like an organist at a mighty instrument. He hadn't heard her come in, so utterly engaged was he in his task. She had never seen a man weave. His body worked the cadence of the loom with a lithe, languid grace, no movement wasted. His sure, steady hands moved over the pale grey threads with practiced efficiency. His focus was captivating.

It was only when he sat up to stretch his back that he realized he had a visitor. He looked up at her over the glasses perched halfway down his nose and smiled his welcome. It was the first time she had ever seen him smile: a startling, wonderful, childlike grin with nothing held back, completely unexpected and totally disarming. It changed his face. It changed everything about him. When he smiled, you couldn't help but smile back.

He swung his legs over the bench and came to greet her. She realized that she'd never really seen him upright and full-on. He was taller than she'd thought, narrow through the shoulders, built vertical. His slender frame was draped in charcoal grey head to foot, shirt buttoned to the neck. This was a guy who would have seemed perfectly at home teaching a hip and wildly popular course in Contemporary Art at some first-choice urban university, pedaling to his classes on a bike, worshipped by adoring students. Whatever had been the matter with him those few days ago was gone from him now. The intensity was gone. The distraction was gone. The shy was gone. He didn't look like a man in mortal danger from some improbable gift. Whoever David Emory was, today he was whole.

"You got my phone message. Good. I'd hoped you wouldn't mind my looking up your phone number; Eli Cline told me who you were. Come sit." He led her to one of the comfortable chairs in the center of the room.

"I was wondering where that beautiful white jacket of yours came from," she said admiringly. "Now I think I know."

"My friend Marjorie Maxwell spins for me. Her sister Martha does the sewing. I'll introduce you one of these days; their cottage is right up the road. I hope you like cats." His voice was at the low end of tenor, with a soft smoky cast. For all the cordiality of his welcome, his speech had a halting quality, as if he weren't used to talking for more than a sentence or two at a time. "Can I get you a cup of something..." he glanced at his wristwatch "...or, better still, a glass of something?"

"I will if you will. Thank you."

The place had the heady smell of wood and wool, earth and clean hay. In the field beyond the tall windows, a half-dozen sheep grazed. The peace was exquisite. This was a place where the world didn't come.

He came back to her holding a glass of white wine by its stem, the bowl clouded by the coolness of the golden liquid. "Try that," he said.

"Thank you...may I call you David?"

"I think we're past that formality, don't you?"

"You know, I've driven by this house a dozen times. I've always thought how beautiful it was. We're neighbors. Did you know?"

"I did. You were pretty big news on the small town tom-tom last month. Everybody knows everything about everybody here."

"And you've been here just about forever, I understand. Eli told me that your family was in textiles?"

"Yeah, although I'm not sure they would have understood this." He waved a hand at the room. "For them, it was all about big noisy machines. I'm the only one who ever wove by hand, for the pleasure of it."

"It suits you."

"Keeps me sane. More or less." He quickly changed the subject. "Speaking of Eli, you've made quite an impression on him, you know. I think he likes that you're not afraid of him. Most everybody is, most of the time. Including me."

"I have a particular fondness for tough nuts."

"Then you are going to love Eli. You actually told him he was crazy?"

"That would be me."

"Brave woman." A reflective silence. "I expect you're wondering why I asked you over." Silence again; David had a habit of gathering quiet around him when he was considering what to say. "I wanted to apologize for the other day. In the road. And after. Don't misunderstand: I'm grateful that you were there. But I know it must have been...difficult for you."

He had given her an opening. "Not for me. More for you, I think," she said. "This happens often?"

"More and more often, unfortunately." He paused, prepared, and finally got to the point he'd been hovering around. "I know Eli told you about me. And I know that you're... having a hard time with it."

"I reacted badly. I was rude. I'm sorry."

"No. No. Don't be sorry. I wouldn't believe it either, if I were you."

"You've got to admit, it's not something you hear every day."

"And you accepted my invitation to find out whether I really was around the bend. I get it. But I'm afraid I'm going to disappoint you. I'm a pretty ordinary guy."

"All evidence to the contrary."

A grin. "Well, there's that."

"You know, I followed you to town."

"I know. I saw you. Don't look so disappointed: You're very good at tailing people—really."

"Would it surprise you to hear that more than a few folks in the village think you're crazy? I also heard, let's see...that you're a good guy...eccentric, odd, private, tragic, mysterious...oh, and a murderer. I think that covers it."

He chuckled. "Apparently things are improving over there."

"But crazy, David?"

"You could make a case for crazy."

"I'll tell you who did make a case for it: Doctor Arledge. He made a point of warning me about you."

David fidgeted with his wine glass. For someone whose affect seemed so open, he didn't give a lot away. But his expressive hands said more than he did. She would have to learn to decode them.

"Jon Arledge. I'd wondered whether there was anyone left in town whose ear he hadn't poisoned."

"Why does he have it in for you?"

"The doctor and I are suffering a fundamental difference of opinion. I believe that I'm sane. He believes I should be locked up for the rest of my life."

"Because of your...?"

A gentle evasion. "And other things."

She decided to go for it. "David, how long have you had your gift?"

A hesitation. "A long time."

"They come to you? Animals? People? The dead?"

"Not the dead. But what they were, yes."

"You mean ghosts."

"No, not ghosts. Not like 'I see dead people.' More like when someone you've loved dies you carry a part of that person. Closer to that. But much, much bigger."

"Why collect souls, David?"

His shoulders went up. A defensive tell. David carried his nerves high in his body. She had moved into a very private space and he didn't like it. His shoulders and his silence gave him away.

She took another path. "What's it like when it happens?"

"You mean the *it* you don't believe in?" he asked.

"I'd really like to know."

"Ever bungee jumped?"

"Yes."

"Into a canyon? At night?"

"What does it feel like? Right now?"

The shoulders again. "It feels...busy. Sometimes it feels as if I can't breathe."

"Is it like hearing voices?"

"More like standing in a crowded subway car. It's so crowded nobody can move, yet nobody's actually touching you. Except that you're also the subway car." A weary smile. "It has its good parts. When it happens, I can see color. That's pretty nice..." He tugged at his grey clothing, an explanation. "I'm color-blind."

She looked for the at-war in him; the crazy. It just wasn't there. He wasn't ranting from some imaginary dimension. He was simply telling a truth as he saw it. He seemed saner, smarter, calmer than she'd anticipated. And it made her all the more determined to find out exactly how deep he ran.

"These souls: Do you seek them out?"

"Not at first."

"But now?"

His eyes lowered. A qualified yes. She could see that progress was going to be made by inches with this one. So she did what she always did when a subject wasn't delivering what she wanted. She pushed him, probing with rapid-fire questions for the one unguarded emotion that would bring others along with it.

"How many can you...hold?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I think not one more." There it was: the awareness of what Cline had talked about; the possibility of the fatal full-stop.

"Do they know that the others are there?"

"I do. I don't think they do."

"Can you feel them die?" Not exactly.

"Can you feel what was wrong with them in life?" No.

The harder she pushed, the shorter his answers got; and the paler he became, his impatience drawn so far into him that he could barely speak around it. *David doesn't argue and he won't get angry*, Cline had said. But if he didn't, she felt certain, it was an act of will, not of nature. These answers came from a sense of obligation, not from a desire to make himself known to her.

"How did it start?"

"You mean, did I bump my head and there it was?"

"Okay, *when* did it start?"

"Around the time my wife died."

"Is that what caused it, do you think?"

He balked, the first time she had seen this conflict-averse man come anywhere close to ire. "Does it matter?"

He stood. "I'm sorry. The question-and-answer portion of our program has ended for the day." He was tired. She'd worn his patience raw. But he was too well-mannered to let the mood last long. "Come with me. There's something I wanted to give you."

The "something I wanted to give you" turned out to be the strangest gift of her life.

She followed David out of the barn and down a jeep-wide dirt track that led into the woods. The road narrowed to a well-worn path into the trees, and at the road's terminus stood the stump of a tree that had probably been two hundred years old. Three people holding hands could barely have circled it, it was that big.

She laid her hands on the stump's smooth, flat surface. "What a beautiful tree this must have been."

"It was." His voice was deceptively casual. "This was where my wife died. I had it cut down."

McGill stammered an apology. But it was not David's way to let an uncomfortable moment last long. With his unfailing politeness, he sent the awkwardness away. "Don't be. You couldn't have known. And it's become a *was*, not an *is*. It's past."

"Where are you taking me?"

"Patience. You'll see."

McGill had never been comfortable in the outdoors. Nature was very big and very open, and very scary. But David was here, and David was an education.

No sooner were they past the tree stump and onto the path than the energy of his walk changed. David tuned himself to his surroundings with soft footfalls; an alert, reverent attention that was fascinating to see. She would

have bet that he could tell you the tiniest thing that had happened since he'd last been here—what bud had bloomed, which bird had made a nest. It was an intimacy like a friendship of very long standing, intensely personal but not private; something she could observe but never understand.

Sensing her anxiety, David kept talking, directing her attention to any little thing that offered the potential to distract her. And those distractions were easy enough to come by: The place was beautiful.

Dogwoods bloomed like snowfall under the canopies of taller trees. The path wound past secret galleries—one at the meadow's edge, another in a copse of silver maples, a third beside a tiny, spring-fed pond. Each meditative space framed a jewel-like view, yet each alteration had been coaxed from the landscape with a deference for what Nature had already established there: A wood was still a wood, a meadow stayed a meadow, a pond remained a pond. In some of the galleries, she saw a heart-touching evidence of an unsaid thing... here and there, two chairs, sometimes three, an arrangement for conversations that she suspected rarely ever happened; a life that hadn't turned out quite the way he'd expected it to.

The day retired as they walked. And after ten minutes with no sight of fence, sidewalk or road, the retreat of the light put her on edge. For a queasy moment, she wrestled with the memory of what Arledge had said about David and death. How smart had it been, she wondered, to take a twilight walk into the deep woods with a man she'd met in an asylum for the insane.

"How far does this go on?" she asked uneasily.

"About 300 acres...a little more," he said. "But don't worry: We've arrived. Now come sit."

He guided her the final few steps to a rustic bent-willow bench in a grove of birches at the edge of a lake-sized pond. He sat beside her. The night was balmy. The birch bark glowed white in the failing light. "Okay. Now watch. Listen."

Although McGill had bought a house in the country, she never sat outside at night. Darkness outside was even worse than darkness inside. It was bigger. And darker. And more threatening. And yet, in this huge, suffocating darkness, she found reassurance in the presence of this peculiar man.

Watch. Listen. As the faint fuscina of last light smoldered over the treetops, one by one her senses opened to his invitation. Tree frogs trilled. A breeze rustled the high leaves and whispered through the low places. She smelled the exhaling of green things. She heard the trickle of an unseen creek.

David dug into his pocket and brought out a flashlight the size of a pencil stub, the kind of light made for locating a front door lock and good for little

else. Inexplicably, he leaned forward slowly, held the light close to the ground and clicked it on.

“My God,” she breathed.

Reflections. Eyes. All around them, revealed in the muted light; the eyes of a dozen creatures that had come together at the edge of the gathering dark. Just sitting. Watching. Visiting. Visiting him.

He watched her reaction with tilted head and sidelong glance, enjoying her enjoyment. His smoky two-note chuckle patted the darkness.

She whispered, afraid she’d frighten their guests away. “Does this happen often?”

“Not always. Often enough.”

They sat with their visitors in the electric quiet until the twilight had disappeared. David’s clothing had melted into the grey of the evening; only his white hair was visible, luminous in the dying light. Too soon, it was time to go. Under a pale fingernail moon, he took them back along the unseeable path with an unnervingly sure sense of the way home.

It was only after he had put her into her car and waved her good-bye that she realized what he had done and why. This had been his thank you for her help. An act of unadulterated kindness. And a consolation prize for all those things he had no intention of telling her.

She couldn’t sleep. She paced from one room to the other. Picked books up and put them down. Turned on the TV and switched madly through the channels. The encounter in the woods had left her wired. Dazzled. Restless. Grateful. And a lot of other feelings that she wasn’t sure she wanted to understand.

She did what she never did. What she’d said she wouldn’t do. What she had absolutely no good reason for doing. She called Ty.

She hoped he’d be asleep. She hoped he’d be alone. She hoped his phone would be turned off. She meant only to drop a guerilla “I love you” on him, an innocent enough way to spill off some of the residual voltage left over from two hours with David Emory.

Two rings. Three. Four, before the call got picked up. But it wasn’t Ty answering. It was Manny, wakened from sleep. “This’s Manny. This better be good.”

"Manny, I'm sorry. I was calling Ty. Did I call you by mistake?"

The hostile silence crackled. "No, Gee, this is his phone. He doesn't want to talk to you. You've really pissed him off, this time."

"Are you back in Tokyo?"

"Uh-uh. The whole Japan leg is fucked up, now. Some legal bullshit."

"So where's Ty?"

"You really want to know, McGill? And you think I'd tell you anyway? Why don't you be smart this once and stay out of his face for awhile. Let him cool down."

The slap. The cold water in the face. The bear trap. The iceberg in open water. "Is this really any of your business, Manny?"

"I'm the one holding Ty's phone, so you tell me. Forgive me for saying this, but how stupid are you? Listen—I'm gonna give you some free advice. Whoever this guy is you're seeing on the side, stop it. Don't keep calling it work. It's just pissing Ty off."

"What guy? I'm not...."

"I'm telling you. Don't be stupid. Cut it off. Before something bad happens. You hearing me?" He yawned. "That's all I got. I'm going back to sleep. Ty will call when he feels like it. G'night. Remember what I told you."