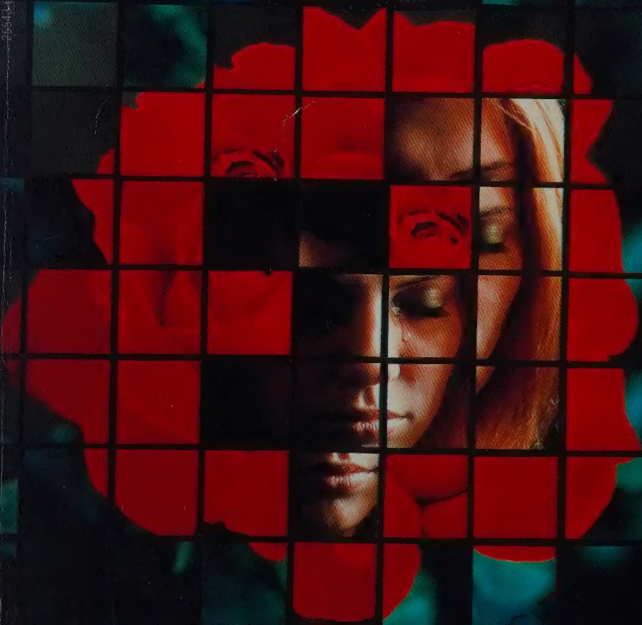


SHATTER

THE TRUE STORY
OF KATHY ROTH'S EIGHT
SEPARATE PERSONALITIES
AND HER STRUGGLE
TO BECOME WHOLE

BY NANCY HUGHES CLARK
WITH KATHY ROTH

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Shatter

"Oh, my God," Kathy gasped. Her bed was covered with packages from every store in the mall. Soon she was ripping through bag after bag, recoiling from most of the purchases. There was a sequined tube top in shocking pink, size four toreador pants—Kathy wore a size six. And there were several pairs of cheap shoes—very high-heeled, all straps and glitter.

This craziness was threatening to ruin her life. Carefully, fastidiously she rewrapped every item, matched each with its sales slip, and put them back in their shopping bags. Monday she would take everything back.

"You bitch!" There was a howl of rage inside her head. "I gotta have some fun. I don't have anything pretty to wear!" Kathy pressed her hands against her temples. She was having a nervous breakdown. Maybe she was going to shatter into a million pieces.

"Mommy?" A sleepy voice pulled her back from the brink. Her daughter Lynn was standing in the doorway, rubbing her eyes. "You sure bought a lot of things, Mommy. Can I see?"

Shatter

*The True Story of Kathy Roth's
Eight Separate Personalities and
Her Struggle to Become Whole*

≡

Nancy Hughes Clark
with
Kathy Roth



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This book recounts a completely true story but people's names, residences and other identifying characteristics have been changed.

SHATTER

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*For the special people in my life
whose love, acceptance, and understanding
helped me believe I could be whole.*

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—K.R.

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—N.H.C.

Chapter 1



The woman had long dark hair, intricately braided and coiled around her head. The coiffure was punctuated by one red feather, a plume rising from her head like a challenge.

Viewed from the back the woman's long neck looked graceful; her head was held high, her shoulders were smooth, bare ivory. The observer strained to change position, to catch a glimpse of the mysterious creature's face, but she couldn't move—she was imprisoned like a fly in amber.

The dark-haired woman was wearing the familiar strapless dress, red and sparkling, and she was sitting on a gleaming brown horse, sidesaddle, with straight-backed, elegant posture that was in perfect keeping with her appearance. The animal began to move away—slowly, gently—and this filled the observer with dread and emptiness. The pain was well known, but its onset was always a shock.

She tried to cry out as the woman's image began to recede. "Don't go!" she struggled to call. "Don't leave me!" But no words came out. The mounted woman was oblivious. "At least let me see your face." Instead, the horse picked up speed, and the two figures vanished over the horizon.

Kathy woke up with an exclamation on her lips, disoriented, wet with perspiration. She didn't know where she was, but gradually, as she looked around the room, still ghostly in the pre-dawn half-light, she began to recover her bearings. There was a familiar form next to her, sleeping peacefully—of course

it was Bob, her husband of sixteen years. The room itself, her bedroom, all done in shades of gray, had always been a special sanctuary—Kathy loved the monochromatic calm, the way the carpeting blended with the ultrasuede wallcovering so you couldn't tell where the horizontal stopped and the vertical began. Two completely mirrored walls, hiding closets and storage areas, emphasized the already generous proportions of the space; a huge painting of a rose dominated a third wall.

Quietly, Kathy slipped out of bed and put on her robe. Her legs felt shaky, but she slid open the glass door that opened onto the narrow terrace overlooking the back gardens and stepped out. The sweep of lawn, punctuated by a swimming pool with the winter cover still in place, looked colorless. Her glance fell on the rose bed below, each bush protected by its cold-weather mulch. This garden was the main reason she had chosen the house; she loved roses, and even in early March she could anticipate the colors and scents of her beautiful flowers. The thought brought a slight smile to her lips and began to dispel the bleakness she felt from the dream. Everything was starting to make sense again. She was Kathryn Roth, perfectly normal mother of four, living in the suburbs of New York, and she had just been having a dream.

The dream, actually. She shivered in the pre-spring chill and went back inside, passing through to the dressing room that formed a buffer zone between the bedroom and the rest of the house. In the bedroom itself the king-size bed was virtually the only piece of furniture. But here, in the antechamber, there were a couch, a few chairs, a television set and a low glass table. Kathy opened the door to the mirrored bathroom, turned on the light and poured a glass of water. She had been dreaming about the lady in red for as long as she could remember, even as a child. Sometimes it was warm and comforting—although the woman always disappeared—and sometimes it made her feel a loneliness so strong she thought it might kill her.

Kathy looked at herself in the mirror and noticed the tightness in her face the dream had left behind. She willed herself to relax, and slowly the little tension lines around her eyes and mouth began to vanish. Not bad, she thought, turning her mind away from the woman in the sparkling dress. Even without makeup—which as a rule she carefully applied before going out in public—she was a pretty, delicate-looking

woman. And she certainly, thank God, didn't look thirty-six. Maybe thirty-two, she speculated, wrinkling her carefully shaped nose and giving a shake to her wavy blond hair.

She put the water glass down and returned to the sitting room. Sleep seemed far away, so she drifted out into the upstairs hall and let her mind wander. Why the dream? Was her childhood coming back to haunt her? The lady in red formed a bridge from her childhood to her adult life with its recurrence . . . and so did her feelings for Eddie, she realized. Eddie, whom she was going to see again in—how many?—twelve hours. After nearly twenty years.

The first time Kathy saw Eddie she had been almost fourteen and she remembered the moment far more clearly than, say, the dinner party she and Bob attended last Friday. Her mother the entrepreneur had been looking for a band to play at her Poconos resort for the summer, and Kathy had insisted on going along. One group applying for the job was practicing in the basement of a house in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, which for Kathy was the old neighborhood, the area her family had moved away from just a few years before. She wanted to go back, and she also wanted a say in the choice of the summer's entertainment. She was certainly more of an expert on contemporary music than her mother.

"What you don't seem to understand," Lily Kahn had proclaimed as they started down the unfamiliar stairs, "is that our clientele isn't interested in pop music. They want to dance. And I am not hiring some loud band just for your amusement!" She paused as though a thought had just struck her. "But I suppose it's just as well you're along. If *you* like a group, then I can be sure they're *terrible!*"

As they entered the paneled rec room, Kathy, still smarting from her mother's comment, glanced at the boys gathered at the far end. Suddenly she heard her heart, beating unnaturally loud, like a drum. Her feet seemed glued to the floor, yet she had the sensation of floating. She was sure her cheeks were bright red.

He was probably sixteen or seventeen, wearing tan chinos, white bucks, a white shirt and a blue crew-neck sweater; his hair was dark and cut neatly around his strong, angular face—it wasn't a crew cut like the other boys had. He was holding a

saxophone, leaning against the upright piano, laughing, and she couldn't take her eyes off him.

"Now, boys," Lily announced in a calm but forceful tone. "I want to hear some old standards, understand? My guests don't jitterbug or do any of these modern, twitchy dances. I want real music, not noise." And she sat down firmly on a worn sofa, beckoning Kathy to join her. Her mother's voice had weakened the spell, and Kathy was able to move again.

The boys obliged with "Stardust," "Misty," and a few others, and when they finished, Lily stood up. Kathy was still mesmerized, her stomach fluttering like a birch tree before a storm. She wasn't at all sure she could stand. She couldn't look at the boy, but she couldn't look at anything else either. Had he noticed her? She tried to memorize every seam in the linoleum floor.

"Thank you, boys," Lily said. "I'll let you know what I decide." And she swept back up the stairs. "Kathryn! Come along!"

Kathy flushed again, feeling like a two-year-old who'd been dawdling in the supermarket. "Good-bye," she managed, smiling shyly. And then, as she scurried up the stairs after her mother, she added, "I think you were terrific!" She hoped they thought she meant the band, although she didn't. She also hoped her mother hadn't heard her remark.

"Well, what did you think?" Lily asked in the car, her eyes narrowed to drive.

"They were okay, I guess," Kathy replied carefully, studying her knees. She didn't dare show any real enthusiasm. "They did seem like nice clean-cut boys," she ventured, hoping she hadn't gone too far. "What are their names?"

Lily's mind was clearly already at their next stop. She nodded at a clipboard lying on the front seat. "Well, we've got three more groups to see. And handsome is as handsome does, I always say. They may *look* clean-cut but still be juvenile delinquents. You musn't be deceived by appearances, Kathryn. You're a terrible judge of character. Never forget: Boys are after only one thing."

But Kathy ignored her and studied the list. "Edward Hart, saxophone." Ed. Eddie. Edward. The only boy she'd ever met who made her feel as if a lightning bolt had struck her clean through.

* * *

Hard to believe it was more than twenty years ago, she thought with a sigh. She could *still* feel the jolt as her eyes met Eddie's for just a moment in that seedy basement in Brooklyn. But now she was in Connecticut, and her surroundings were anything but seedy.

Kathy continued along the upstairs hall. The first bedroom on the left was Charley's, the private domain of her only son, her almost-teenage boy. She knew perfectly well what it looked like in there—it looked like a war zone—so she passed the door without looking in. Next was Marsha, her room a pink cloud of little girlhood, all ruffles and lace and dollhouses; and then was the baby's room. Lynn would surely be sleeping deeply, completely wrapped around Big Bird or Cookie Monster or Oscar the Grouch, peaceful as only a three-year-old can be.

And finally, all the way around the upstairs hall, was Stacey's preserve, the room that was the refuge of her eldest child. Kathy frowned. Being a teenager hadn't been easy when *she* went through it. She recalled the wild, almost uncontrollable mood swings, the feeling of looking in a mirror and not recognizing her own face. And her mother remembered—and frequently mentioned—the way she used to change her mind constantly, wanting one thing desperately one minute and forgetting about it altogether the next. Except, of course, for Eddie. She had never changed her mind about Eddie.

Adolescence certainly wasn't easy for Stacey either, poor kid. If only she would take off a few pounds, Kathy thought for the umpteenth time as she slowly descended the stairs to the polished marble foyer below. Childhood really isn't such a picnic. She turned on the light in the kitchen, hoping that Gloria, the housekeeper, had remembered to get the coffee ready.

The Kahns had lived in Brooklyn until Kathy was eleven, in a big brownstone with high ceilings and long staircases. Kathy remembered the concert grand piano in the huge living room and the pink marble fireplace; she remembered the beautiful French provincial furniture in the dining room and the hand-painted flowers on the walls of her bedroom upstairs. She

remembered the endless flight of stairs leading down from the kitchen to the damp, musty-smelling cellar; suddenly the memory made her shiver, the hair on the back of her neck standing up. Why did the basement seem so far away, so far down? It must have something to do with the fact that the house had been built on a hill.

Mostly, though, she remembered being lonely. There weren't many children on the block. Of course, there *was* always Nan. Her big sister was ten years older than Kathy, and Kathy went everywhere with her. "We'll put on your pretty blue dress with the lace collar," Nan might say on a Saturday morning, "and I'll take you down the street to the candy store." As a toddler she must have been like a doll for Nan, Kathy realized. Nan seemed to derive a lot of pleasure from dressing her up, braiding her hair, and deciding where they would go and what they would do. Later, when Kathy was a little older, Nan would take her to the movies, to concerts and museums—providing, of course, that she wore the dress Nan had picked out and did exactly what Nan told her to do.

Everyone else was always busy. Kathy's father owned a successful manufacturing business, and her mother was heavily involved in charity work and civic concerns, as she carefully explained. In the evenings they sometimes played cards together. There was always a maid in the Kahn household—Kathy remembered Cleo especially—and there was also her brother, Brian, who was seven years older than Kathy. He was away at boarding school during her entire childhood, or so it seemed. Kathy had few memories of Brian.

When she was two, Sherman Kahn bought a small resort hotel in the Poconos as a kind of present for his wife. Lily had a lot of energy and needed another outlet, he explained to family and friends. She had lost a baby just before Kathy was born, and Sherman was of the opinion that she hadn't been the same since. Even having Kathy hadn't quite done the trick. But he thought that a new project might, and he was right. Lily threw herself into the hotel business with a vengeance, and the family spent summers there, overseeing the operation of the huge, rambling, old-fashioned place.

Kathy remembered the long veranda outfitted with creaking wicker rockers, which had seemed an endless alleyway when she was a little girl. She could still hear rain pounding on the roof as she raced back and forth on a bicycle of some sort—

probably a tricycle, at that age—and someone, her mother or her sister, coming to get her. “No more riding, Kathy, you’re disturbing the guests. Why must you always make so much noise? Now go and play quietly somewhere!”

“But there’s no one to play *with*,” she would wail. In fact, her closest friend at the hotel was Jack, the bellhop, and it became a family joke that part of Jack’s job was to “pull up Kathy’s pants and feed her an egg.” She was a skinny little thing with no hips, whose jeans had a disturbing tendency to wind up around her ankles as she explored the twenty-two acres, never stopping to eat.

On the property was the hotel, a Victorian mansion expanded on either side to accommodate a dining room and lobby, plus the “casino” building, where there was entertainment in the evenings and where the male help also slept, as well as a few other structures. The Kahn family lived in a separate house several hundred yards away, and because of the limitless possibilities, Kathy’s mother rarely had any idea where her youngest child was at any given moment. But Jack almost always knew.

He was a kindly man who stayed in the “crow’s nest” at the very top of the mansion itself. Kathy loved his room—up flight after flight of stairs and then, suddenly, an octagonal space with windows all around, the stairs coming up the center with a bed on one side and a bureau on the other. “If I fall out of bed,” Jack used to say, “I fall all the way down to the lobby.” The hotel was in a valley, and from Jack’s windows you could see the lush green pastureland stretching in all directions. Kathy remembered it made her feel very grown-up and powerful to survey the grounds from that perspective, thinking that all she could see belonged to her family.

But she wasn’t really very powerful, and she remembered that too. Kathy was “the baby,” as her mother always pointed out. “Here’s my baby,” she would say, introducing Kathy at nine or ten or even twelve or thirteen to some visitor or employee or guest. “Someday she’s going to grow up and get smart so she can take care of me in my old age.” And everyone would laugh. And Kathy would feel embarrassed but also, oddly, that her mother was right—she *was* a baby still, and dumb. She didn’t understand the feeling, just as she didn’t understand the moods she got into sometimes.

“You’ve been quiet as a stone for *days*,” Nan would say. “Where are you? What have you been thinking about?”

"I don't know," she would reply honestly. "I don't remember being any different." And Nan would think she was keeping secrets and then get mad. Nan loved secrets, but only if she knew them. She hated it when anyone kept anything from her.

In winter, when the resort was closed, Kathy and her mother always went to Florida for a month, and Nan hated that too. She was left in Brooklyn with Daddy and the maid while the two of them were off enjoying the sun. The rationale that Kathy's school could be interrupted while Nan's couldn't didn't help. And Kathy's protestations that she didn't *like* making the trip also failed to mollify her sister.

"But it's really boring," Kathy remembered explaining at five or six or seven. "We have breakfast; we go to the beach; we have lunch; I take a nap; I do schoolwork while Mommy plays cards; we have dinner; I go to bed. You're not missing *anything*, Nan—I swear! I'd much rather be here with you, really I would. *Please* believe me."

And it was almost true. Going away with Mommy made her feel special, but the hotel they always stayed at was a small, family-run operation, owned by friends of Mommy's. There weren't any organized activities—at least in the Poconos there was a "camp," staffed by local teenagers, to keep the guests' children busy. And there weren't many other children; most youngsters, after all, were in school.

And then there were Mommy's friends. It usually happened the first week they were there, often on the beach. Kathy would be busy building some elaborate structure in the sand when an unfamiliar voice disturbed her concentration. "Lily? Lily Kahn? Is that really you? What a coincidence! And this must be your daughter! My, she's becoming quite the young lady."

Kathy would look up suspiciously, brushing sandy hair away from her eyes, squinting into the midday sun. The man looked to be about Mommy's age, but not solid and distinguished like Daddy. His legs looked skinny protruding from his bathing suit, and he didn't have a mustache. Kathy believed that grown-up men should always have mustaches. Like Daddy.

"Why, Larry Strauss, I can't believe it! Imagine you here! Stop staring and say hello to Mr. Strauss, Kathryn—where are your manners? Mr. Strauss is an old friend of mine, but I haven't seen him for eons."

And Kathy would wipe a sticky hand off on a damp bathing

suit and extend it politely, the way she had been taught. "How do you do, Mr. Strauss." And then she would go back to her building, sighing, sure that Mommy would be busy playing cards with this grown-up friend from now on. Too busy for Old Maid or Go Fish. She wondered if Mr. Strauss had been one of the friends that Mommy had bumped into the year before, but she couldn't remember. In her opinion, all of Mommy's friends looked pretty much the same, and sometimes her memory was sort of blurry. It made Mommy mad when she couldn't remember something, but she really couldn't help it.

Then at night, when she had a hard time sleeping, wondering if Mommy was going to go out later, she would build her wall: the routine was always the same. She pictured herself constructing a high wall, brick by brick, until it extended as far as she could see in every direction, and she could safely fall asleep.

The red light on the coffeemaker blinked at her, bringing Kathy back to the reality of her large, comfortable kitchen, paneled in authentic barn siding. "When are you going to finish the walls?" Nan had demanded upon viewing the room for the first time.

"They *are* finished," Kathy had replied. Most of the time Kathy felt that she had done a successful job of growing up, of emerging from that tight, almost suffocating relationship with her older sister. But sometimes it seemed to her that Nan was still stuck there, still treating her as though she were the six-year-old who got to go to Florida. She thought she understood Nan, and she wished that she could help. "Don't be silly," she said aloud, pouring a cup of coffee. "We're two grown women now. Neither of us expects to have the same closeness we had as children."

She had been jealous of Nan too. The family seemed to split naturally into Kathy with Mommy, Nan with Daddy. Kathy was always in awe of her father, who "belonged" to Nan in some peculiar way. Sherman Kahn was a large, imposing man who always carried a cane. He had salt-and-pepper hair receding at the temples, a pencil mustache, and he usually wore a homburg.

One day Mommy took her to visit Daddy at his office as part of a day of shopping. Kathy was so excited she got a

stomachache and worried that she might throw up. She had never been to Daddy's office before; it was a mysterious place where he spent so much of his time, and where he did whatever business he did to make the money that paid for everything. To Kathy it was all as strange as sorcery.

They got out of the cab on Fifth Avenue, and Lily marched her into a large building with shiny brass doors. Kathy was impressed. Next they were going to Best's, and she knew *that* was on Fifth Avenue too. Fifth Avenue was a very important street. They got into the elevator and Lily turned to the smartly uniformed man at the controls. "Twelve, please."

"We're going to see my daddy," Kathy added, unable to contain her excitement. "His name is Sherman Kahn and he has an office on the twelfth floor!"

The elevator man smiled kindly at her. "Why, yes, indeed, Miss Kahn. But don't you know what an important man your father is?"

Her eyes grew wide. This man with the polished buttons knew her father? She looked at him expectantly.

"He doesn't just have an office here, miss. He owns the whole building. All the offices. Now, how about that!" And the man beamed.

Kathy was so impressed, she couldn't catch her breath. Daddy owned a whole building on Fifth Avenue? It was almost more than she could imagine.

"Close your mouth," her mother instructed as they got off the elevator. "You look like a fish!"

"Is it true, Mommy? Do we own this whole building?"

"Yes, Kathryn, we do," Lily replied. "Or, rather, Daddy and a group of investors own the building. They think real estate is going to go sky-high." She sniffed. "I'm not sure if they're right, what with the cold war and all . . . but we'll see."

As it turned out, it wasn't a very good investment. A few years later Lily explained to Kathy that they were selling the Brooklyn house and moving to Forest Hills in Queens. "It's not quite as nice a house," she admitted, "not as big, anyway. But it's in a much better neighborhood. You will be able to go to the public school there, so we won't have the expense of your private school here."

"But why, Mommy? Are we poor or something? I don't *want* to move." In fact, she was horrified by the prospect. It felt as though it had taken her her whole life so far to make a few good

friends in the neighborhood—as a private school student, it had been hard to get to know local kids. And now her mother was going to dump her into a new school and a new neighborhood? She felt a huge bubble of anger well up inside her, and for a moment she thought she was going to scream at her mother, or burst into tears, or both, but, as usual, an eerie calm descended. Somehow, whenever she got really mad, there was a sort of cut-off mechanism inside her. She didn't understand it really, but it was as though a little person just flipped a switch marked "anger" and it went away.

"No, we are certainly not poor," her mother replied. "But there have been certain . . . reverses. The business is fine, but your father has been forced to sell the building on Fifth Avenue, and with Nan expecting . . ."

Nan had gone away to college and come back slender, glamorous, red-headed, and, shortly, engaged. She then married John Allen, who had already finished college, and John went into the business with her father. The newlyweds moved into the Brooklyn house, and space would be at a premium once the baby arrived. "The house in Queens is a two-family," Lily went on, "so Nan and John will have their own place. You mustn't always think of yourself, Kathryn."

"Yes, Mother," she said quietly. "I understand." And part of her *didn't* mind. Part of her didn't like the Brooklyn house much anyway. The staircases were so long and the rooms so gloomy. Maybe Forest Hills would be fine. Maybe she would make lots of friends for a change—right away.

The first girl she met in the new neighborhood was friendly, full of energy, and pretty in quite a grown-up way. Her name was Melinda Marsh and she lived just down the street. Kathy was relieved to see that Melinda, like herself, was physically quite well endowed for a twelve-year-old. Kathy had begun to menstruate and develop breasts the year before, and her figure actively embarrassed her. She wore baggy sweaters as much as she possibly could, even in warm weather, and she walked hunched over her books to camouflage her mature appearance. Melinda, on the other hand, seemed comfortable with her physique, and Kathy hoped some of her confidence would wear off on her. At recess, the boys always flocked around Melinda, and Kathy wondered if she would ever be popular like that.

Curiously, none of the other girls in Kathy's class seemed

very friendly, but she was thankful that she had one person to pal around with. Until one afternoon, that is, when the two of them were walking home from school. Melinda stopped to talk to one of her many boyfriends, and Kathy paused shyly a few steps ahead, waiting. Across the street she saw a group of the other girls, giggling and pointing. Then they were chanting something, and she strained to hear what it was, blushing to think that they were directing their attention at *her*.

"Bosom buddies—tits and toots!" were the words she finally made out as the chanting became more raucous. "One's crazy and the other's easy—tits and toots!" And the group burst into shrieks of laughter and ran off.

She looked back at Melinda, wondering if she had heard the awful thing, and saw that the boy's arm was around her shoulder in a very friendly way. If Melinda had heard, she didn't seem to care. Kathy felt very alone. If it was Melinda they were calling "easy," then she must be the one who was "crazy," she realized as tears came to her eyes. "Crazy tits." Why would they say something so mean? She started to walk as fast as she could toward home—home, the undistinguished little house that wasn't even big enough for the piano; home, where Nan would be totally wrapped up in the baby while Mommy was off at some committee meeting. She couldn't cry on Cleo's shoulder, that was for sure. Kathy sniffled hard and tried to stop the tears.

She walked furiously, her head down. Why "crazy"? She *never* made any trouble—she *always* did what the teachers said. There were the times when she must have been daydreaming—the times when she suddenly realized she was supposed to give an answer but she didn't even know what the question was—times when everybody giggled. But that wasn't crazy. She just got distracted sometimes. That was what Mommy called it. "Pay attention!" she would say in that sharp tone of voice. And there were times when she suddenly found herself with Melinda and the boys, laughing at some joke she didn't recall and standing up straight with her chest out, when she wondered how she could be so brazen, but that was just her friend's personality rubbing off a little bit. Just like she had hoped. But now everyone was saying she was crazy and that her only friend was a slut. Maybe they thought she was easy too. How was she going to get through the semester? she wondered. How was she going to survive until summer?

* * *

Kathy loved the summers. Up in the country, living in the big house and having the run of the whole resort, she had a kind of freedom that wasn't possible in town. Sometimes she went to the camp with the other kids, and sometimes she didn't. After all, as she was the first to point out, she was the boss's daughter—she could do whatever she wanted. And what she wanted, mostly, was to be on her own. She had a few close friends who also summered in the Poconos, and they rode bikes and concocted secret sororities and talked about boys and, as time went on, flirted with the boys who came with their parents as guests, and even with the older boys who worked at the hotel as waiters, camp counselors and life-guards.

But despite the distractions of summertime living, Kathy didn't feel she really belonged. Sometimes she wondered where she *did* belong. She had spent most of her childhood in that house in Brooklyn, yet for some reason that wasn't "home"; Forest Hills *certainly* wasn't a place she belonged to, and even the hotel was her mother's, not hers. "I don't even have a place to *eat*," she complained to one of her girlfriends the summer after she turned fourteen. "I can't eat in the grown-ups' dining room because Mommy would have a fit. I *won't* eat in the children's dining room because I am not a child. So what does that leave me? The kitchen, with the help—that's all that's left!" Her friend clucked sympathetically. "I just don't fit in anywhere."

But that was the summer her mother hired the quartet Kathy had helped audition in the rec room in Brooklyn, so there was something to look forward to. As the day approached when the boys were due to arrive, she found it almost impossible to sit down—and sometimes difficult to breathe. Would she have the same reaction to Edward Hart? Would he still look at her and make her legs go all quivery?

It was the week before Memorial Day and prematurely hot, so Kathy was wearing a sleeveless blouse and shorts when the band drove up in one member's elderly Ford. "Hi," she said shyly, clinging to one of the pillars on the porch as they got out of the car. "I'm Kathy Kahn. My mother . . ."

He looked right at her and she was very glad she was holding on to something. Her stomach turned over and her knees felt like jelly. She'd never been so happy.

"I remember," Eddie answered, and she loved his voice. It was warm and soft but forceful. He remembered! "You're the little girl who thought we sounded terrific." He paused and looked her up and down. "But you're not really such a kid, are you?" Part of her wanted to sink into the earth, but then he smiled and she felt herself melting, whether from pleasure or embarrassment, she wasn't sure.

Another member of the band came up. "Excuse me for interrupting this little chat, but we *would* like to get settled." He had sandy hair and a nice open face, not as imposing or aristocratic as Eddie's, but very friendly. "Hi, Miss Kahn. My name is Jerry Glover and I play piano."

"Nice to meet you." Kathy couldn't think of anything to say. She was actually talking to *the* boy. "Uh . . . please call me Kathy," she managed finally. She kept glancing quickly up at Eddie, then looking away, as if to reassure herself that he wasn't going to vanish suddenly from the face of the earth.

". . . where should we go?" Jerry was asking a question, and she forced herself to focus on him.

"Go? Oh, of course. I'm sorry. You'll be staying above the casino. It's right this way. Come on, I'll show you." The boys picked up their instruments and suitcases and she led them past the long front porch and around to the side. "The showroom and lounge are on the first floor," she explained, gesturing at the large, undistinguished building in front of them, "and there are rooms above. Where you'll stay." The mix of emotions she was feeling was the most intense she had ever experienced. She couldn't tell if she was deliriously happy or miserable. This was going to be either the most wonderful summer of her life—or the worst.

Guests usually arrived at the hotel on Mondays and stayed until Sunday afternoon, and for that reason the band performed every night but Sunday. Certain nights there was other entertainment, or a special activity like bingo, but the boys were always there to provide background. Kathy lived for Sunday nights, when she and her girlfriends and the boys in the band—plus a couple of other workers at the hotel—would get together and go to a movie or hang out at the pizza place in the nearby town.

They occupied the big round table in the center of the room

and monopolized the jukebox. "Hey, Eddie," Jerry called out at the beginning of one of those Sunday evenings, "can't you find anything but 'Blue Velvet' on the box? That tune is driving me crazy!"

"It's just because you do such a lousy job of playing it," Eddie teased, automatically looking to Kathy for support. She smiled appreciatively, though she didn't want to hurt Jerry's feelings. Jerry had, after all, been paying her more special attention over the summer than Eddie had. Sometimes she wished *Jerry* made her feel the way Eddie could—hot and cold at the same time, and as though her feet didn't touch the ground—but Jerry was just a good friend.

"Yeah, yeah," Jerry replied. "And you're hung up on it 'cause it was Susan's favorite song. This week's conquest *was* named Susan, wasn't she? Or was it Lenore?"

Another boy chimed in. "No, no—Lenore was two weeks ago. Laurie was last week, and *this* week's was Jane. Quite a looker, Ed, old boy. Any action?"

Kathy's cheeks burned. Eddie was the ladies' man in the group, as she had quickly discovered. Every Monday he seemed to zero in on the new group of guests and pick out the cutest girl to flirt with. Then he would spend all his free time with her until she left on Sunday. Sometimes it seemed to Kathy as if she had actually vanished into thin air for most of the week, at least as far as Eddie was concerned. On Sundays he usually managed to run into Kathy and make sure she was going out with the gang that evening. No wonder she lived for Sundays, she reflected, as the guys continued their taunting. On Sundays *she* was Eddie's girl, as much as anyone was paired up with anyone else. The rest of the week she was "Oh, hi there!" as he passed by, arm in arm with Susan or Jane or Lenore.

Jerry pulled her up to dance. "So, tell me, Kath—why do you put up with that Romeo?" he asked, a twinkle in his eye.

She tried to keep her tone light. "I don't know what you mean, Jerry. Eddie and I are friends—like you and I are. I don't have any special hold on him."

"But he has some kind of special hold on you, doesn't he?" She couldn't prevent the blush, but shook her head vigorously. "Okay, okay—you don't have to confide in Uncle Jerry. But I just wish *I* were the one . . ."

Kathy felt a strong arm around her waist. "Mind if I cut in?"

Eddie said, slipping into Jerry's place without waiting for a reply. "You don't mind my interrupting, do you, babe?"

"No, Eddie." She loved it when he called her by a pet name—even "babe." It made her feel special, as though she really were his date.

"There's so little free time during the week," he went on, his voice suddenly serious, his eyes catching hers, "that I can't stand to share you on Sundays."

Kathy gulped, then worried that she might hiccup. He'd *never* said anything so . . . so meaningful to her before. He really did care! Maybe he thought paying attention to the guests was good business, sort of a part of his job. It did attract audiences to the casino after dinner; the girls always dragged their parents to hear the band play.

"I didn't think you'd even noticed me," she said faintly, regretting the words the minute they were out of her mouth.

"Notice you! What do you mean?" He spun her around in a dramatic gesture. "I noticed you the minute you walked into that room, way back in Brooklyn. Now, that girl's special, I said to myself."

"You did?"

"Absolutely. You're my girl, and don't you forget it!"

The music continued, but Kathy wasn't aware of dancing anymore; it felt as though she were flying, held safe and secure in Eddie's strong arms. She belonged with Eddie. She'd felt that the moment she'd laid eyes on him—and evidently he felt the same way. They belonged together.

Walking her back to her house, Eddie put his arm across her shoulders. Usually the gang just split up at the hotel veranda, each one going his or her separate way. But tonight Eddie had turned toward the Kahn house, pointedly leaving the others behind. Some friendly jeers and catcalls followed them, and Kathy was thankful that the darkness hid her embarrassment. His touch was electric, and she felt as though her neck and shoulders were on fire. Interestingly, the fire didn't stop there, but reached inside, tingling in her stomach and even down her legs. She wished the short walk would somehow last forever.

The porch light was on, but Eddie paused by the steps, still in the dark. She turned and looked up at him, noticing that his strong cheekbones and sharply defined eyebrows were clearly visible even in the poor light. And his lips, usually smiling, were fuller than she remembered, especially as he bent his head toward her and got closer and closer.

The kiss took her by surprise. It was firm but brief, his lips warm against hers, and then gone. But the impact was enormous. Everything inside her was boiling, and the top of her head felt like it was about to explode. She just gazed at him, speechless.

"'Night, babe," he said softly, putting one finger where his lips had been, and then he turned and strolled away, leaving Kathy rooted to the spot, breathless from the impact of her very first kiss.

Her mother didn't approve of her friendship with Eddie. "You're spending altogether too much time with the help, Kathryn," she declared as the summer neared an end. "Nice girls don't run around with a crowd of boys. People are beginning to talk. You watch your step." Her voice dropped. "I'll be glad when we're back in Forest Hills."

"Well, *I* won't!" Kathy replied, surprised at her own vehemence. "All my friends are here, Mommy, in case you hadn't noticed. I don't have any friends in Queens."

"Don't be stupid," Lily said absently, having turned her attention to paperwork, going through accounts and receipts while she spoke. "There's that nice Melinda Marsh, for one, and all of her friends."

Kathy wondered just what her mother would think of that "nice" Melinda Marsh if she knew just exactly *why* she was so popular. She could still hear the other girls chanting at them. But she was able to put it out of her mind by thinking of Eddie—Eddie, who cared about her and kissed her ever so softly and made her feel as though she were in heaven. Eddie, who was going to be coming back next summer. The band was so popular, Lily had renewed their contract despite the fact that she disapproved of their socializing with the boss's daughter. She didn't *know* about the kisses or about the delicious, indescribable sensations Kathy experienced when she and Eddie—and the others, of course—played tag in the pool, squealing and splashing, grasping and slipping. Kathy loved to touch Eddie's strong tan body almost as much as she reveled in the feeling of his hands against her bathing suit, and their raucous games generated a pitch of excitement that was almost impossible to bear. She often lay awake Sunday nights—Sundays were still her only days with Eddie—

drenched with sweat, remembering, reexperiencing the thrill of his touch. Kathy knew she could survive even the winter if she had another summer to look forward to.

Maybe it was the anticipation, spending a whole school year reliving every single minute she and Eddie had spent together, or maybe it was the fact that she was a year older, but Kathy found her relationship with Eddie disappointing, somehow, when they were finally reunited. "I still love him," she explained carefully to Nan early in June, "and he's even more gorgeous than I remembered, but . . ."

Nan and her daughter, an active toddler, were spending the summer at the Kahn house. As always, Sherman Kahn and Nan's husband, John, would be up only on weekends. "My God, you're still mooning after *him*?" Nan's tone was derisive to begin with, but then turned almost conspiratorial. "What do you two do together usually?" she asked. "I mean, do you go to the movies or for drives?"

"Well, it's just like last summer," Kathy said. "All of us get together on Sundays, and then we do something. And Eddie always sits next to me, but . . ."

"Sundays, hmmm? Just the day the band is off. What about the rest of the week? Do you do things together during the day?"

"No." Kathy didn't want to admit how little she saw Eddie *except* on Sundays. And how much she wanted to see him. The memory of his good-night kiss the evening before still brought warmth to her face; his lips had been slightly parted, and he'd held her tightly so that her breasts were pressed against him. If anything, his effect on her was *greater* than it had been last summer: Her stomach was constantly churning, and her skin felt supersensitive, as if a sunburn had just peeled off.

Nan persisted. "What does he do the rest of the week? He is here, after all. Who's he spending his time with? I've *heard* the band, and I don't believe it if they say they rehearse!"

"Well, he does pay a lot of attention to the guests," Kathy admitted finally, grudgingly.

"Especially the female guests?"

She nodded, surprised to feel tears in her eyes. "It didn't seem to matter last summer," she blurted out, "but it matters a lot now!"

"Okay, okay, you can turn off the waterworks," Nan said

briskly. "What you've got to do is stop being a doormat. Trust me, I know about these things."

Kathy did. She had complete confidence in her sister's expertise. She was sure there wasn't anything Nan didn't know about men and love.

"What should I *do*?" she asked. "I love him more than anything in the world."

"I think I have a plan," Nan said. "But you've got to do exactly as I say. I've never been wrong, have I?"

"Never," Kathy agreed solemnly.

That night Kathy didn't go to the casino after dinner, even though it was "big band" night. She stayed in her room and washed her hair. The next night she and Nan went to the movies, leaving the baby with Portia, who, with her husband, Leroy, constituted the Kahns' personal household staff that year. On Wednesday she went to a neighboring hotel with a girlfriend, and on Thursday she read a book. Friday she accepted a date with one of the waiters, and they went bowling, and on Saturday she had been fixed up—by Nan, of course, who knew all the strings to pull—with the very attractive son of one of the guests.

"This better have some results soon," she muttered as she took the rollers out of her pretty ash-brown hair and brushed it into a shiny pageboy. She frowned at her image in the mirror. Her nose had just a slight bump on it, but suddenly it looked huge, out of proportion.

"What's that?" Nan asked sharply from across the room where she was lounging on the other twin bed.

"Nothing," Kathy replied softly. She didn't want to make Nan mad. "Do you realize that I haven't seen Eddie, except to wave across the swimming pool, in almost a week? It's hard, you know? I'm going crazy!"

Nan's tone was vehement. "Don't *ever* say that!" she demanded. "Crazy, indeed! Over some stupid schoolgirl crush!"

"I'm sorry, Nan." She couldn't imagine why her sister had gotten so upset. "I just mean that I miss him. A little of Eddie—having to share him with other girls—may be better than *no* Eddie at all." Her skin felt dry and lifeless, and instead of being a pleasurable, tingling sensation, the constant butter-

flies in her stomach were almost painful. She felt like a flower that was dying for lack of water and sun.

"Don't worry, it's going to work! And who knows, you may like this Arthur character even better. He looks like Troy Donahue!"

"And Eddie looks like Montgomery Clift," Kathy sighed.

Nan snorted. "You *have* to have a good time, remember? Even if he's only Troy Donahue. It's part of the plan."

"I know. I will, Nan. I promise."

By the time Arthur dropped her off at the house and gave her a chaste kiss on the cheek, Kathy was almost in tears. They had had dinner together, and then they'd gone dancing in the casino, waltzing and fox-trotting all over the floor all night and she hadn't even had a glance from Eddie. His presence had been so overwhelming that she found it hard to concentrate on her date. She kept feeling his eyes boring into her head, but when she stole a peek at him, he was studiously reading his music or playing his sax, never looking at her. He hasn't even missed me, she thought as she watched Arthur's handsome blond head disappear into the hotel. He didn't even notice.

Abruptly, she turned and ran back to the casino. She paused at the door, waiting to catch her breath. When she entered, the lights were up, glaring off dirty ashtrays and half-full glasses on the tables, and the band members were packing up their instruments. Casually, she ambled up to the bandstand. "Hi, Eddie," she said. "Do you happen to know what time it is?"

He looked at her for a long minute, his expression almost a scowl. Then he snapped his instrument case shut and looked at his watch. "It's one o'clock." He turned away from her and left the big room through the back door, slamming it loudly.

He hates me, she thought miserably. It was all a failure. Nan's plan hadn't made him jealous, it had just made him mad. She sat down on the edge of the bandstand and felt a tear rolling down her cheek. It was over. She had ruined everything. As usual.

Suddenly she felt a prickling sensation at the back of her neck. What was it? she wondered. There was no one in the room except for a few waiters on late duty clearing the tables. As if pulled on a string, she turned her head toward the back

door. Eddie was standing there, just on the other side of the screen, looking at her. She didn't remember moving, but then she was standing next to him, with the screen in between.

He opened the door and pulled her out into the darkness. Her skin came alive as he touched it; her feet didn't touch the ground. "Why have you been doing this to me?" he said softly, his face very close to hers. "Don't you know how badly I've been hurting, not seeing you, seeing you with other guys?" She could only look up at him as her own pale face was reflected in his dark eyes.

She remembered Nan's coaching, but her voice was anything but coy. "I didn't think you'd care," she whispered. "You're usually so busy. . . ."

"But I love you," he said firmly, pressing her against him. She could smell the starch in his now-wilted white shirt, and just the traces of his Old Spice aftershave. All of her feelings rushed back, and she was very glad he was holding her, otherwise she might have fallen down.

"I love you too." And he kissed her more deeply than ever before, exploring her mouth gently with his tongue. Her heart was beating wildly. He must have been able to hear it because they were so close together; she could feel the buttons on his shirt through the thin cotton of her sundress. It felt as though they were joined together from the ankles all the way up. One person, seamless. Kathy had never felt so whole—or so happy—in her life.

"I understand you're seeing a lot of that musician again—what's his name?—Hart, who plays the saxophone," Lily Kahn said accusingly over breakfast a few weeks later. "I hope you're not doing anything that would make me ashamed."

Kathy's immediate reaction was surprise. For one thing, she was startled to find her mother at the breakfast table. She rarely saw Lily from one day to the next, since she kept so busy with all the details of running the hotel. Portia and Leroy were usually around, although Leroy was a little unpredictable, but Lily? Never. Kathy and Nan usually had the house to themselves.

And then she wondered who had been talking to her mother about Eddie. Not Nan, certainly. Nan barely spoke to her mother at all. And not Portia, who seldom said *anything*

beyond "Yes, miss" and "No, miss." It must have been one of the guests, she decided. Probably that gossipy Mrs. Levine, who had complained that they had splashed her at the pool the day before.

"Well?" Her mother was looking at her over the rim of her coffee cup.

"I'm friendly with all the guys in the band," Kathy began cautiously. "You know that. My girlfriends and I hang around with them when they're not working."

"Yes, I know that, and I don't like it much. But I was told that you and this Eddie were a couple—an 'item,' was the exact phrase, I believe."

"I like Eddie a lot," she admitted softly. "We're friends. There's nothing wrong with that."

"Not unless it gets out of hand," her mother replied. "I just don't want you to get carried away and think you're in love or something. You are fifteen years old, and that's much too young to be serious about anything—or anyone."

"Yes, Mommy."

"I don't want you to spend so much time with that young man. He's too old for you, for one thing. If I think things are getting too serious, I may have to send you away to camp. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Mother. Don't worry. Eddie and I haven't done anything wrong."

Mrs. Kahn folded her napkin and stood up. "Well, I should hope not! You be a good girl. You might just ruin your life if you're not careful. Boys like that are after only one thing." And she swept out of the room.

Kathy didn't know whether to laugh or cry, when a sudden crash from the kitchen distracted her. Nan jumped up and went to investigate, returning with Portia, who was weeping. "Don't worry, Portia," she said soothingly. "It was only a teapot; it's all right. Come on, we'll help you clear the table and clean it up."

As she gathered up plates and cups and headed toward the kitchen, Kathy noticed that Portia looked awful. Her eyes were puffy and swollen, and she was bruised around the mouth. "Are you okay, Portia?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, miss, I'm fine," the maid replied. Kathy shrugged and picked up her bathing suit from a chair in the hall. She was

supposed to meet Eddie by the pool. She didn't know where Portia and Leroy came from—her parents often hired help from dubious sources—but she supposed they must have had a fight. She and Eddie would never fight, she knew. She'd show her mother what true love was all about.

There wasn't much of a crowd in the casino that evening, and most of the guests wandered off early. By eleven the band was packing up. "Come on," Eddie suggested, "let's go for a walk, just the two of us. You're not expected for at least an hour, right? And it's a great night."

Relishing the thrill she always felt when she was alone with Eddie, Kathy allowed him to lead her toward the woods bordering a small but rapid stream that ran across the property. They settled on a grassy knoll overlooking a little stretch of rough water that poured into a calm pool. "They say that pool's dangerous, you know?" Kathy said, leaning back against Eddie. His arms were around her waist. "It's supposed to be very deep, and there's quite an undertow. Hard to imagine anything dangerous around here though." The moonlight made the landscape look especially soft, and Eddie's touch made Kathy very happy.

"You know what?" he whispered, his mouth close to her ear.

"What?" she replied, turning toward him so that she could see his face.

"I've never been so happy in my life," he said. "I would rather jump into that pool and drown than be separated from you," he added, smiling.

"Oh, Eddie. I love you. I'd rather die than be apart from you too." Their lips met and parted, and Kathy wound her arms around his neck. As his tongue explored her mouth, she felt consumed by her love for him. She knew very well why she loved Eddie: It wasn't just that he was handsome and funny and smart and sophisticated and that he was warm and affectionate with her. It was also the feeling of belonging that he gave her, as though being with Eddie gave her a very special place in the world. When they ate dinner together, for instance, he always escorted her right into the adult dining room—the inner sanctum that she hadn't dared penetrate alone. But with Eddie, it was fine—she wasn't an outsider. And then there was the mystical feeling she couldn't really put into

words, the conviction that she and Eddie were two sides of a coin, two halves of one being, and that they always had been.

But she didn't really know why he cared about her. His love seemed like such a miracle, that she hadn't dared to ask. "Why is it, Eddie?" she began softly, hesitantly. "Why do you love me?"

"Because you never fish for compliments," he shot back, teasing. Then he held her face between his hands and looked at her seriously. "Because you're caring and giving," he went on slowly, "because you're not always thinking about how *you* look or about whether *you* made the cheerleaders or some dopey thing. You're interested in other people and you're not stuck up. And because we're kind of alike, I guess, lots of times I know what you're thinking about because *I'm* thinking the very same thing."

Kathy was so happy. All the qualities she had feared made her drab and ordinary, mousy and undistinguished, were the very aspects Eddie loved! It was a miracle. And if Eddie loved her, then anything was possible. Those scary spells, for instance, when she didn't remember what had happened in class, say, or on the way home from school, those terrifying moments when Mommy would say "What *are* you talking about?" or "Where *did* you get that trashy dress?" and she wouldn't have an answer because she didn't know, those spells didn't happen when she was with Eddie. He would take care of her and protect her.

They settled back onto the ground, pressed together. "And we'll always be together, won't we?" It wasn't really a question; it was more a statement of fact.

"Always," he agreed. "From now until forever." His hands slipped up under her blouse, and his touch on her bare skin started a shiver that seemed to reverberate to every nerve ending. Skillfully, he unhooked her brassiere and slid his hand around to the front, caressing her breasts.

The shock of pleasure made her gasp. No one had ever touched her like that before, and it was wonderful. "Oh, Eddie," she sighed, "I love you so much. . . ." She felt his other hand on her leg, then sliding up her thigh and touching her underpants. The sensation was almost unbearable. She wanted some mysterious thing so much, she could barely stand it. But she stopped his hand as it started to go under the waistband of her panties, and pulled her mouth away from his. "No, please . . ." she said. "Don't . . ."

The rule was rigid and she didn't think of questioning it for a moment. "Nothing below the waist." Nice girls didn't permit anything but petting on top, not even if they're in love. Kathy couldn't have said where the rule had come from, but she knew it was an absolute. Eddie wouldn't have any respect for her if she permitted his hand to explore elsewhere. And the thought made her realize how desperately she ached to be touched.

Eddie recaptured her mouth and resumed stroking her breasts, this time with both hands. The sensation was ecstasy—and agonizing. He unwrapped one of her hands from around his neck and guided it down to his lap, and suddenly she could feel him. He was hard and throbbing under her tentative touch. She felt powerful and privileged.

Eddie ended the embrace finally, as if coming up for air, gasping, and then pulled her back to him in a bear hug. "You don't know what you *do* to me!" he exclaimed, then sighed contentedly. "I am going to have to sneak into the room, you know. And it's all your fault."

"What do you mean?" Kathy asked, bewildered. "Is something wrong?"

Eddie laughed. "You really don't know what happened, do you?"

"No, tell me!" She was a little worried that she'd made a mistake, but mostly curious—and envious. She wished *she* felt as relaxed as Eddie seemed to.

"When you touched me, it made me so excited, so hot, that I came. I had an orgasm." He sighed.

She liked the idea that she was responsible for some momentous happening. She had read about orgasms in hygiene class, of course, but she'd never been so close to one before. That she knew of. She wondered what it felt like. "Did it feel good?" she asked tentatively.

"*Good* isn't the word for it!" He kissed her on the ear. "It's a rush! It's like flying and being free."

It seemed to her that there was a wonderful secret between them. She just wished she understood it a little better. "Are you okay? Is there anything I should do?"

He laughed. "Nope! You've done everything just right." He paused. "Well, there is one thing. You can forgive me for not walking you right up to your door when we get back. I love you, but I'm afraid I'm a bit of a mess right now, and I don't think I'd look too presentable in the glare of the porch light."

He left her at the turnoff to the Kahn house, and as she approached the front door, Kathy was glad he had; not just the porch light, but every other light was burning. She made a quick mental check and decided that her appearance was okay, that there were no outward signs of her necking with Eddie, and she slipped in the door, wondering idly if someone was sick. It was only midnight, so she wasn't particularly late; her mother was usually sound asleep by this time, and so was Nan. Maybe something was wrong with the baby!

Her mother burst out of the living room and bore down on her, brandishing a hairbrush. Suddenly she was raining blows on Kathy—on her shoulders and back, on her bottom and legs. Kathy was shocked into silence, covering her head with her arms to protect herself. Was it Eddie? she wondered silently, not feeling anything as her mother continued to beat her. Was it something else she had done? Two thoughts occurred to her. One was that her mother somehow *knew* how much she had wanted Eddie to touch her and was punishing her for it. The other was that her mother had gone completely crazy.

She realized tears were pouring down her face and finally, as if from a great distance, she heard her mother's voice, ragged with emotion, punctuating the blows. "I was so worried. Where have you been? I thought he had killed you. How could you do this to me? What have I done to deserve such agony? We've been looking *everywhere*. . . ."

"Mommy!" Kathy heard Nan's voice from the doorway as the beating finally ceased. Nan ran to her sister and stroked her head. Kathy's shoulders ached from the hairbrush. "It's all right, Mommy. They've found him. The police found him and have him in jail. It's over, Mommy."

Lily Kahn sank down on a chair, dropping the brush to the floor. She held her face in her hands and started to cry. "I was so frightened. . . ." She sobbed.

Kathy felt more curious than injured, oddly. It was as though someone else had taken the blows and she had just watched, impassive. "What did she think?" she asked Nan.

"It was Leroy," Nan explained as their mother wept quietly. "He got roaring drunk earlier tonight and came here and beat up Portia pretty badly. And then when Mother got home, she found him with a knife, and he was wild, out of his mind. And he ran out, shouting and cursing and saying he would get us. So when you didn't come in after the casino closed, Mommy thought . . . And I've been out looking . . ."

Why did Mommy hire people like that in the first place? Kathy wondered without emotion, still in something of a daze. This was not the first time Leroy had gotten drunk and abusive. And before him there had been Pete. . . . How odd, she thought. How odd that she even remembered that one's name. That strange man who smelled bad who was hired to paint the house in Brooklyn, how many years before? It was surprising that she could recall him at all.

Kathy sighed. It was such a relief that her mother hadn't found out about what she'd done with Eddie that she didn't care about anything else. "Good night," she said, hoping that in a dream she would feel ecstasy and release—the soaring sensation Eddie had described.

The Sunday before Labor Day was the last night of the season, and the band played until one. Afterward they all went for pizza, so it was past two before Kathy and Eddie were finally alone. "Let's sit on the porch and talk," Kathy suggested as they headed down the walk toward her house. "That way no one will worry . . ."

"And we won't have to be apart." Eddie smiled. He often finished her sentences these days. He always seemed to know what she was thinking, even what she was feeling.

Kathy went inside and turned off the light, then came back out and nestled close to Eddie on the glider. "I can't stand the thought of going back to Forest Hills," she began.

"I know. But we'll see each other. Don't worry, I'm not letting you get away. After all, NYU's right in Washington Square. You can come visit me on the subway even."

His hand cupped her breast on the outside of her dress. She knew that Eddie was a little intimidated by her mother, and, of course, even Daddy was there for the holiday weekend. But she didn't mind that there couldn't be too much heavy necking on their last night together. She loved his touch, and the way he made her feel, but it left her so unfinished, somehow.

"I have something for you," he said softly. "So you won't forget me in the two weeks until Jerry's party." He reached into his pocket.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Well, you know I belonged to the music society in high school?" She nodded. He opened his hand and there was his

society pin, a small clef sign in shiny metal. "I want you to have this. To wear it. To be my girl. Always."

Kathy began to cry.

"What's wrong?" he asked, concerned. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," she managed. "Nothing at all. I just . . . I'm just so happy."

"Oh. Well. Good. Then you'll wear it?"

"Of course I'll wear it." She pinned it to the strap of her dress. "I'll *always* wear it."

"Well, at least until I get you an engagement ring, okay?"

She turned and kissed him as hard as she could, pressing against him and feeling their mouths merge. She would do *anything* for him, she realized suddenly, even touch him under his trousers. Even that. And let him touch *her* there.

Eddie pulled away, glancing cautiously around him. "I do feel a little . . . uh . . . inhibited, you know, here on your porch," he whispered.

"You're right. Mom would have a *fit* if she thought we were doing anything but talking. So"—she straightened up a little—"what about next summer? Do you have any idea what you're going to do?"

Lily Kahn had announced that she was renting out the resort the following year. The day-to-day operation was just too much, she had explained. Nan had said privately that she thought it was because the competition was getting too fierce. The neighboring hotels were all bigger and newer and offered more extras than they could. And there wasn't any spare capital to put into expensive additions or even renovations.

"I'll probably get a job as some kind of trainee at one of the other hotels," Eddie replied. "After all, if I'm going to become a fantastically successful businessman, I'd better shelve this music junk and get some *relevant* experience. Has your mother said anything more about this place?"

"Nope. Just that this man is going to rent it and run it. He apparently has some great list of customers or something. I've got a job lined up down the road as a camp counselor, though, so I'll be around. . . ."

"I'm counting on that."

"And we'll see each other during the year."

"I'm counting on that too. I love you, Kathy."

"I love you too, Eddie. More than anything."

* * *

Jerry Glover's party, held in the Glovers' house in Brooklyn just before school started, was worse than any nightmare Kathy had ever had. She naturally expected that Eddie would call and arrange to take her there, but when he didn't get in touch with her, she made arrangements to go with one of her girlfriends.

As she arrived, Kathy quickly scanned the familiar rec room, but Eddie was nowhere to be seen. Jerry was there, though, and came over with a warm welcome.

"Hiya, Kath, how are you doing?" he exclaimed, giving her a big hug. "I'm glad you could come. Where's Eddie?"

"Uh . . . I don't really know, Jer," she admitted. "Haven't you heard from him?" Maybe Eddie was so tied up getting ready for college, he hadn't been in touch with anyone.

"Oh, sure, I saw him yesterday as a matter of fact. We were just hanging out. I'm sure he'll be here."

She sensed his presence, as she always did, and turned toward the stairs as he entered the room. He looked wonderful, of course, and so mature. She wondered if he could have grown up altogether in just two weeks. Maybe being away from her had made him realize that she was just a kid.

She ran over to him, but something restrained her from throwing her arms around his neck, which was what she wanted to do. She had missed him desperately. "Hi, Eddie," she said brightly, "I'm glad you've come."

He looked down at her, but his eyes were veiled, changed somehow. "Hi, kiddo," he replied, planting a quick kiss on the top of her head. "How are you doing?" He didn't wait for a reply. "Hey, Jer! How's it going? Let's get some music on." And he crossed quickly to the record player, leaving Kathy standing by the stairs.

Her head whirled. *That* wasn't Eddie, she said to herself fiercely. She replayed the scene in her mind, and it still didn't make sense. It was like something out of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. That boy *looked* like Eddie, and his voice was familiar, but everything wonderful was missing—the warmth and the sharing and the special closeness. He had greeted her as though she were practically a stranger. She felt tears in her eyes as she touched the shiny pin she had carefully positioned

on the collar of her blouse. What was wrong? What had she done? How had she managed to ruin everything?

"I hate to say it, but I told you so," Lily Kahn announced when Kathy finally admitted the truth. First, she had locked herself in her room and cried for days, feeling betrayed by someone who knew her like her shadow. She had done nothing wrong, made no mistakes she knew of. It was all so unfair, so unjust. The world didn't make sense anymore; everything was upside down. If Eddie had rejected her, then how could she expect anyone, ever, to accept her?

"That boy was too old for you, and he didn't really care. He was just having a good time. The sooner you realize that, the sooner you'll be over the whole thing. I *know* how bad you feel right now, Kathryn, but time heals all wounds. So don't mope."

Kathy was near tears. She hadn't wanted to admit to her mother that Eddie hadn't called—and that, given his cool, distant attitude at the party, he wasn't going to call—but Lily had finally sat her down and insisted on knowing the reasons for her distress. "Mommy," she began, her voice breaking, "if you tell me that someday I'll look back at this and laugh, I'll never speak to you again!"

Lily Kahn's lips squeezed shut, as if to hold back that very comment. Instead of speaking, she went over to her daughter and put her arms around her, holding her tight. "It's for the best, sweetheart," she said softly. "I knew he was no good. He never loved you, Kathryn. He was only using you, he just wanted some diversion to pass the time during the summers. Now pouf! He's gone. Well, good riddance, that's what I say." She paused, then continued in a more cheerful tone. "And I know things will be better in school this year. After all, you're an upperclassman. Everything's going to be all right."

Nothing was ever going to be all right again, and Kathy knew it, but she didn't want to contradict her mother, who was, after all, trying to be comforting. "But why, Mommy? Why did everything change between Eddie and me so fast? How can I go on with my life when I don't know what I did wrong?"

"Did you ask him?" Lily inquired cautiously.

"Of course not," Kathy snapped. She couldn't imagine

anything more humiliating than begging Eddie to tell her what was wrong with her. "I'll never ask him."

"That's probably a good idea," Lily agreed. "Boys can be awfully cruel sometimes, and I think it's best just to put the whole episode in the past. Whatever is going on in that young man's mind is *his* problem, not yours."

Kathy wasn't even slightly convinced. It *was* her problem, and it must have been something to do with the way she was. Maybe she really was crazy, like the girls said. And maybe Eddie figured it out. But she couldn't bring herself to think about that possibility—there was too much she didn't understand. Like the feeling she got sometimes when she looked into a mirror and the face she saw was unfamiliar, foreign, unknown.

"Mommy," she said suddenly, seizing on an idea that she hadn't really considered seriously before, "I want to have my nose done. Can I do that this year, please? Before my sweet sixteen party? Maybe during winter vacation?"

Lily gave her a disapproving look. "Changing your nose will *not* bring that boy back, Kathryn," she said.

Kathy felt the tears start again. Of *course* not, she thought. I know that! What Eddie loved about me was inside, and so what made him stop loving me must be inside too. There's something horrible inside me, and I don't even want to know what it is.

"For heaven's sake, don't cry, baby," her mother continued. She seemed to consider the suggestion, then adopted it as her own. It was as if Kathy had never mentioned it. "Actually, making a completely fresh start is a wonderful idea, and I've always hated that bump. I'll call Dr. Siegel in the morning and set up an appointment."

Jerry Glover was Kathy's date for her sweet sixteen party, which Lily threw at the best country club in the area. Kathy had seen a good deal of Jerry, actually, during the year; he had helped her get through the winter, and she was sincerely fond of him. As she dressed for the party, she tried to convince herself that what she felt for Jerry was even better than her love for Eddie. It was certainly safer, she reflected. Jerry could never hurt her the way Eddie had. And maybe, in time, she'd

feel the same surge of excitement when Jerry kissed her. His lips were too thick and soft, though, and his kisses too wet.

She looked in the mirror. Her nose was perfect, she decided, narrow and delicate, to go with the rest of her facial structure. It looked just right, as though she had been born with it. Actually, she had gotten so used to her new look—her hair was shorter, too, and curlier—that she often felt she *had* been born this way. Her dress, strapless taffeta, was her first real formal, and she loved it. For once she was glad she had a full figure.

She danced with everyone and was the belle of the ball. All of the aunts and uncles made enthusiastic comments about how pretty Lily's baby had turned out, and her friends—most of them from summers, not high school—seemed to be having a wonderful time. She was dancing with Jerry, swaying to a slow song in the center of the floor, when she had the familiar feeling at the back of her neck. No! she thought. He couldn't be here! She was being crazy again.

But her head turned as if drawn by a magnet, and there he was—Edward Hart, dancing cheek to cheek with Shirley, one of her best friends. Their eyes met, and for a long moment it seemed to Kathy as if the time—the empty, horrible months gone by—vanished. She was locked in his gaze as though they were back in the Poconos, next to the rushing stream.

"You look absolutely beautiful, Kath," he said softly after the music stopped. "Happy birthday!" The veil had dropped over his eyes again, but at least there was warmth in his tone.

A small voice within her said, He still loves us! I know he does!

Kathy caught her breath. "Thank you, Eddie," she managed. "I'm—I'm surprised to see you. But glad," she added hastily.

Jerry seemed to be shifting from one foot to the other. Finally, he said, "Shall I get you some punch, Kathy?"

"Sure. That would be great." She smiled at him, but she didn't really see him. She didn't see anyone but Eddie. They might have been alone in the large room.

"Breath of air?" he asked, guiding her toward a door opening on the terrace before she had a chance to answer. "I hope you don't mind me coming," he continued as they stepped out into the warm May evening. "But when Shirley asked me, I figured it would be okay."

"Oh, yes. I mean, I'm glad to see you. How have you been?"

"Fine. Busy," he replied. "College is a lot of work, you know." He gestured back toward the ballroom. "You been seeing a lot of Jerry?" His tone was cool, impersonal.

"Well, yes, I guess so. Some." His nearness was making her dizzy. Did he care whether she was dating Jerry? What did he want from her? Her mind whirled with questions, questions she knew she wouldn't ask. The butterflies were quivering in her stomach, and more than anything in the world, she wanted everything to be the way it had been—when he had loved her. She wanted him to kiss her.

As the band began to play "Moon River," he did, pressing her lips with his softly at first, then harder and harder until her arms flew up and around his neck, and her mouth opened under his. The kiss seemed to last an eternity, and Kathy didn't want it ever to stop. Finally, Eddie pulled away, then leaned back and kissed her lightly on the nose. "I love your nose too," he said, and he vanished back through the doors onto the dance floor.

Jerry materialized with a punch cup, and Kathy realized sadly how mild her feelings for him were compared with what she felt, still, for Eddie. It wasn't fair to Jerry, she decided. She couldn't let him get serious about her. Her eyes searched the dance floor for Eddie and finally found him, holding Shirley very tight and laughing. It was like a knife in her stomach. Why had he kissed her like that? Why didn't he love her?

After that Eddie made it a habit to pop up, unannounced, when Kathy least expected him. During the summer they worked at separate hotels in the Poconos, but just when Kathy started to feel comfortable with a fellow camp counselor, or a teenage guest the activities director had introduced her to, there would be Eddie, and her current interest would pale. He never actually asked her out, but when there were informal gatherings or parties, he was sure to turn up—if Kathy had a date. It was like being on a roller coaster, she decided, or subjected to a special kind of torture. *He* didn't want her anymore, but he didn't want her to care for anyone else either.

One evening in the spring of her senior year she was preparing for a regents exam. Phil, a boy that she had been out

with a number of times, had asked her for a date, but she told him she had to study. About nine there was a knock on the kitchen door. It was Eddie. "Hi, gorgeous," he said with a winning smile. "How about a drive on a nice warm night?"

"Well, uh . . ." she began, caught especially off guard. "I'm studying for the regents, Eddie. I . . ."

"So you probably need a break. What do you say?"

Her resolution vanished like snow under a heat lamp. "Okay, I guess you're right."

He placed a proprietary arm across her shoulder and she felt the familiar rush of warmth to her cheeks. Would he always affect her this way? As he opened the car door, however, the warmth turned to red-hot embarrassment. Phil was sitting in the backseat. "See?" Eddie asked him casually. "I told you she just needed a little persuading!" She didn't hear from Phil again.

She limped through senior year and was accepted at Hofstra; she would go to college and become a teacher. It was something safe to fall back on, that's what her mother said, and she didn't have the strength to disagree. That summer she went back to the same hotel to work, not knowing where Eddie was, knowing only that he *wasn't* in the Poconos.

The first night, she and Shirley were standing in the back of the resort's large, lavish clubroom, catching the end of the comedian's act. It had been a busy day—unpacking, settling in and meeting the first group of "monsters," as the counselors always referred to the campers. Shirley's fling with Eddie hadn't continued after Kathy's party; they never talked about him.

Shirley poked Kathy in the ribs. "Hey!" she whispered. "That's a nice-looking guy standing over by the door. What do you think?"

Kathy peered into the gloom. He looked to be in his early twenties, and he was neatly dressed in wash pants and a suede jacket. He was of medium height, not tall like Eddie, and had short neat dark hair. Kathy couldn't tell what color his eyes were, but while she was taking her survey, the man turned his head and caught her. She dropped her gaze, embarrassed. "Let's get out of here!" she whispered urgently as applause signaled the end of the comic's routine. "He caught me looking at him!"

"So?" Shirley asked. "Oh, good! He's coming our way!"

The band began to play as the pleasant, open-faced young man approached them. His eyes were brown, Kathy noticed, and kind. Shirley was grinning broadly while Kathy tried to hide her confusion. She hoped he would just ask Shirley to dance and then she could escape to her room.

"Hello," he said in a quiet but firm voice. "My name is Bob Roth. Would you care to dance?"

Kathy was staring at the floor, and she jumped as Shirley jabbed her. "What?" She looked up. The man was standing in front of *her*, not in front of Shirley! She was sure there had been some mistake.

"I asked if you would care to dance," he repeated, smiling slightly. His smile lit up his face, transforming it from attractive to very appealing.

"Why, uh . . . yes. Sure," she replied, giving Shirley a desperate look.

Shirley shot back a cheerful you-win-some-you-lose-some glance, then said, "Have a good time, guys. I think I'll take a little walk."

Kathy didn't think of herself as a very good dancer; she found it difficult to relax in some strange man's arms and move to the music, so she was surprised at how easy it was to dance with Bob Roth. And it was equally easy to talk to him. He was quiet himself, and seemed interested in learning all about her life and her plans for the future. When she looked at her watch, she was surprised to see it was past midnight. "Oh, dear!" she exclaimed. "I'm afraid I have to get to bed. We've got a full day with the 'monsters' tomorrow."

"I understand. Could you have dinner with me tomorrow evening?"

"Why, yes, sure." Suddenly that seemed like a wonderful idea. She hadn't really looked forward to a date since . . . since Eddie, she realized. "I'd like that very much." She put out a hand to shake his, and he took hers in both of his.

"Then you'd better tell me your name," he suggested kindly, "and where I can find you."

Kathy blushed, but just slightly. Ordinarily, it would be horribly embarrassing to have almost run off without telling him her name, but Bob Roth put her at ease. It was a wonderful feeling.

Just before the Christmas holidays Lily called Kathy to the phone. She assumed it was Bob, confirming their date for that evening. "Hello?" she said brightly. "Are we still on?"

"Well, I don't really know how to answer that question," replied a voice so familiar yet unexpected she thought her heart might stop.

"Eddie! I was expecting . . ."

"Someone else, obviously. And who is the lucky man, may I ask?"

"Just . . . someone I have a date with," she answered, feeling disloyal. She had scarcely been seeing anyone but Bob all fall, yet she couldn't bring herself to admit that to Eddie. She was both miserable and elated to realize the effect his voice still had on her. Even after months and months of silence.

"Oh," he said. "Well, I was just wondering if you want to go to a party with me next week. That is, if you're not all booked up."

"Why, no. That is, I don't have any plans, and I'd love to. When is it?"

"On Friday. It's a get-together of the old band, so I thought you'd have fun. I'll let you know when I'll pick you up, okay?"

"Sure, Eddie, that'll be fine. I'll see you next week." She hung up the phone feeling weak in the knees. She had thought that she was over Eddie, that the really warm, deep feelings she was developing for Bob had erased that . . . passion from her consciousness. But the excitement was still there. She sighed. She probably shouldn't see him. That would certainly be her mother's advice. Instead, she started planning what she would wear.

That evening Bob noticed that she seemed to be distracted. "Is everything all right?" he asked. "You seem a million miles away."

She forced herself to pay attention. "I'm sorry, Bob. I heard from an old friend this afternoon, and I've just been thinking about the past, I guess. But everything's fine. Don't worry." It was a relief to Kathy that Eddie's sudden reappearance hadn't changed her feelings for Bob. She cared deeply about this gentle, strong man, and thinking about Eddie didn't trivialize those emotions—he wasn't having the devastating impact he had managed to have on all her other relationships. Maybe it was because Bob was so mature, she told herself. He was out

of college and working as an accountant. He wasn't just a boy; he was a man.

"I'm glad, Kathy, because I have an important question to ask you."

"Yes?" She wondered what was on his mind. Perhaps he wanted her to meet his parents, who were retired and lived in Florida. He had met Lily and Sherman, and they both liked him very much. Kathy smiled inwardly. Even her mother's approval hadn't dampened her enthusiasm for Bob Roth. But what if she actually saw Eddie?

Bob took a small box out of his pocket and opened it. "I love you very much, Kathy," he began, "and I want to marry you."

Kathy was stunned. He was offering her a diamond ring! He actually wanted her to be his wife, to spend the rest of their lives together. She was speechless. She hadn't thought that anyone would ever love her again. She felt a tear run down her cheek, and Bob reached across the table to brush it away. One thing was certain: She trusted Bob Roth. He loved her, and he could take care of her. The fact that he actually *wanted* her was practically overwhelming.

"We haven't known each other all that long," he went on when she didn't speak, "and I wouldn't expect to get married right away. But I'm absolutely sure of my feelings—I know they won't change. Will you marry me, Kathy?"

"Yes," she said simply. She knew she could trust him with her life, and so she did.

When Eddie called, she broke the news before he had a chance to confirm their date. "I'm afraid I can't go to the party with you, Eddie," she said, wondering desperately if she had made the right decision. "You see, I got engaged. I'm going to be married."

"Oh." His tone was soft but noncommittal. Kathy wished she could see his face, but knew that wouldn't tell her anything. Eddie was so good at hiding his feelings. "Well, the guys decided not to bring dates to the party, so I couldn't have taken you anyway," he continued, completely deflating her feelings. She was suddenly *very* glad that Bob loved her, and that she was going to be his wife.

Chapter 2



"That coffee's cold as a stone, Mrs. Roth! Let me get you a nice fresh cup!" Gloria's voice cut into Kathy's memories, bringing her back to the warmth of her kitchen and the demands of the day.

"Thank you, Gloria," she replied. She looked at her watch. "And you'd better start on breakfast too. Mr. Roth should be down very soon." She could hear the sounds of water running upstairs, and the shrieks of small children. Before long she would be inundated with responsibilities, personal as well as professional. She'd come a long way from that freshman in college who had agreed to marry the nice, solid man her mother approved of. She smiled. It was the best decision she'd ever made, she knew. They'd been engaged for a couple of years, and Bob had gone into business with her father. He and Nan's husband had helped to make it a real success. She had finished college and had taught, briefly, until Stacey came along. And now, with her youngest in nursery school, she had a business of her own. A good business.

She was involved in a partnership with a talented young designer who had created a very promising and marketable fall line. He designed the clothes and was responsible for their manufacture; she was the business manager and salesperson. And today she had a number of appointments set up to show the clothes—a prospect she contemplated with a combination of excitement and nervousness. Most of the time she was a terrific salesperson, she knew. Orders for the line had been going extremely well, so well, in fact, that her major concern now focused more on actually producing the clothes for the stores than on convincing more stores to carry them. But

selling was a challenge, and fun, even though every once in a while she would experience what she thought of as a "spell"—a period of a day or two when she found herself paralyzed, unable to answer the telephone, much less make a public presentation. She generally dismissed the "spells," having decided it was just her body telling her she needed a rest.

And today was not one of those days, she knew as she sipped her coffee. She felt fine today, full of confidence and—anticipation. There was no other word for it. And it wasn't just the satisfaction of being a businesswoman in addition to her domestic roles. It was Eddie. It was rediscovering Eddie, the bright, passionate flame of her youth, now, four children and so many years later.

Actually, she hadn't just stumbled across him in Central Park, she had to admit. But she *had* run into Jerry, and she had mustered up the courage to ask, casually, of course, where Eddie was and what he was doing. Thinking about him again had been like an itch she couldn't quite reach. The slip of paper with his phone number on it had grown dog-eared and gray at the bottom of her purse, but she couldn't forget it or throw it away. She was so happy with Bob, she told herself. And her mother would *kill* her if she knew what Kathy was thinking. But then, last week, she had called him.

He had suggested they meet at his office on Madison Avenue, and she had agreed. But now, going up in the elevator, watching the floor lights blink one after the other, she wished she were somewhere else—*anywhere* else. For one thing, it had been quite cold outside, and she suspected that her nose was glowing as brightly as the Up arrow. She hoped there would be a ladies' room right by the elevator, but since it was after five, there probably wouldn't be a receptionist to direct her. How would she find a mirror? For that matter, how would she find Eddie?

But when the elevator doors opened, there he was, relaxing on a huge leather couch that occupied one wall of the reception area. "Hello, Kath," he said calmly, rising, sounding as matter-of-fact as if they had lunched together that very day, two hours instead of two decades ago. She stopped dead in the doorway, startled to see him. Did I do the wrong thing? she wondered. He sounded so cool, she was sure he was only

being polite. He probably hadn't wanted to see her at all. She was just a nuisance from his past.

He ushered her down a long corridor to his impressive, elegant office. "What a wonderful view!" she said, feeling stupid. Discussing the view was just one step better than talking about the weather, she decided. Clearly, however, Eddie was very successful to command such imposing space. She was feeling awkward and ill at ease, wondering whether she should take off her coat, or if she would be leaving in just a moment, when he put on his coat and cut through the trivial chatter with the brisk tone of voice she remembered so well.

"How about a drink? Let's try the Palm Court." It wasn't a suggestion so much as a decision already made, and Kathy was relieved to be swept along. How could he possibly have known the special feeling she had for the Palm Court at the Plaza? They had never been there together. In fact, she had never been there at all, but she had always wanted to go there, certain that only marvelous, magical events transpired at the Plaza. She had probably read *Eloise* too many times as a child, she thought.

She allowed him to seat her, glad that she had worn her soft white silk blouse with a wrap skirt and boots. She had considered pants, but she liked the way the skirt moved when she did. He sat down opposite and looked directly at her for the first time that afternoon. When he spoke, his tone was sincere but still impersonal. "Kathy, you look wonderful. You haven't changed a bit, except for the better. You look much more grown-up now, but not a day older!"

Eddie ordered Scotch, and Kathy, coffee. "So, you bumped into old Jerry, hmm? Who'd have thought he'd turn into a stockbroker!"

"Well, he does play jazz piano on the side," Kathy said. "Or so he says. Do you still play?"

"Nope. But I've browbeat both my kids into taking lessons."

"You have two children? What are they?"

"Fiends!" he replied, grinning. Kathy felt the awkward gulf between them dissolving. Eddie had always had a great sense of humor. "I gather you mean age, rank and serial number," he continued. She nodded, smiling. "They are a boy, fourteen, and a girl, twelve. How about you?"

Their order arrived and Kathy sipped her coffee. "I have four. . . ."

"Now *that's* excessive!" he teased.

"Each one is very special," she declared, "and I love them all."

"I'm sure you do," he said softly. "Loving was always something you were very good at."

She was startled by the seriousness in his voice. "Why, thank you! What a nice thing to say."

"Just the truth, ma'am. Now, tell me everything. Where do you live and what does your husband do and how are Lily and Sherman and Nan—and what about good old Shirley? Do you still see her?"

The years between them disappeared, and so did all the old hurts. "Your hair is longer," she commented finally, having finished with the family history. "And, I must point out, it is going a touch gray at the temples. Are we really that old, Eddie?" The wavy hair still formed a perfect frame for his face, and he still had beautiful, deepset dark eyes and long, slender, sensitive fingers.

"When you were in high school," he pointed out with a wry smile, "I was about the only boy you knew who didn't have a crew cut, remember? And that was because I was such a preppy."

"That's right," she agreed, laughing. She had also noticed his beautifully tailored pinstripe suit. "But nowadays you look more like a Dunhill ad than a schoolboy."

"I'll take that as a compliment, though in the advertising business a touch of flamboyance is expected. My dress is really a bit conservative for my chosen profession. But I compensate by acting outrageous on occasion. And, talking about appearance, I must comment that *your* hair seems to be going attractively blond as you mature."

Kathy blushed. "Some people are blond as children; I choose to be blond as a grown-up!" she replied.

Eddie ordered another Scotch and they talked on and on. His career kept him out of the country for long stretches of time. He didn't speak of his wife with much enthusiasm, and Kathy didn't pry. His family lived in Westchester; he kept a small apartment in the city for himself.

Although her housekeeper would feed the children and make dinner, Kathy knew it was getting late. Bob would worry if she didn't get home soon, and the drive to Connecticut would take her forty-five minutes at least. But she couldn't

leave without knowing the answer to the question that had occupied a corner of her mind for so long. As he paid the check and rose, she said tentatively, "What happened to us, Eddie? I've never understood, and the curiosity has been killing me for years. Was it something I did? Or didn't do?" She hoped she sounded slightly lighthearted. It would be awful if he realized how important it still was to her.

He turned and looked at her silently for a moment. "Of course not," he said finally, having made a decision. "I didn't just stop loving you, you know. In fact, I never stopped loving you at all."

Kathy felt as though the marble floor of the Palm Court were tilting as her world shifted onto a new axis. "What?" The electricity was still there between them—his very presence had been making the slightly faded room glow. But if he felt the same way . . . if he had been feeling that way all along . . . then why were they living the lives they were? What sense did anything make? "Then why . . ." she began.

"Because I was frightened," he admitted. "My parents thought we were too young to be so serious, and God knows your mother didn't approve."

"But we loved each other. We wanted to be together. It didn't matter to me that you wanted to finish college. I would have waited!"

"I know, I know," he continued. "I guess I was just plain scared. I was nineteen years old, and that last summer we were together, my parents' best friends were guests at the hotel in August—the Adamses, remember them?" She shook her head mutely. "Well, they sure noticed us. And they told my folks that we were really serious. They asked them, in fact, if we were talking about getting married. So when I got home, my folks started putting on a lot of pressure."

"But why?" Kathy couldn't accept the fact that the course of her life had been altered by some couple she had never met. "What was wrong with me?"

"Nothing. It had nothing to do with you. It was my brother, Sid. When he was eighteen, he ran off and married this dancer type, and then she left him, and he was miserable. Not to mention broke. So I guess my parents were terrified that I would do something stupid too. And I was frightened of my feelings for you—and frightened of your feelings for me."

He paused as Kathy tried to take in a whole family drama

she had never heard before. Eddie went on. "And your mother! I was always in awe of the 'great lady,' and I was even a little afraid that you might become like her when you got older. She was one tough customer. I knew *she* thought I wasn't good enough for you. Maybe you would have come to feel the same way. In fact, she made it very clear to me how unfair it would be to expect you to hang around. She made a point of having a private talk with me in order to say you should be free. That you shouldn't waste your happy years waiting."

A wave of anger as powerful as nausea swept across Kathy. Lily had been part of it. Of course! Lily had helped to engineer Eddie's disappearance just like she engineered everything else. And then she had lied about it. Kathy wondered if she could ever speak to her mother again. The betrayal was so great, it felt like physical pain. She sank down onto one of the lobby's overstuffed chairs. "And she told *me* that you never loved me, that you had just been using me," she whispered.

Eddie's look was concerned. "And then, after high school, you got engaged. So I decided your mother had been right. And I tried to go on with my life." There was a pause. "I've missed you, Kathy."

"I've missed you too," she replied. And then she took a deep breath, hastily reached up and kissed him on the cheek—purposely avoiding his lips and his eyes—and went home to Bob and the children.

She saw Eddie the next day, and the day after that. She felt as though she had finally been reunited with a missing part of herself. She was also falling passionately in love all over again. When she wasn't with him, she often found herself crying, for no reason, even in public. It frightened her. Only by sheer force of will did she manage to stay out of Eddie's bed. Life was complicated enough, Kathy realized. She was terrified that having sex with Eddie would unleash forces she couldn't control—forces she remembered vividly, but as if from another existence. And she desperately needed some control. Her life was suddenly filled with loose ends.

At the end of the week Eddie left New York on one of his extended business trips, and his absence was a painful relief. She hoped to be able to put the pieces of her emotional life

back together before he returned, but she found it impossible to think clearly. If Lynn wasn't demanding her attention to admire the latest crayon masterpiece, then Stacey was complaining bitterly about some slight—real or imagined—she had incurred at school. "I hate them, Mom," she said with monotonous regularity. "Those popular girls who think the world revolves around *them*. Those cheerleaders." And then, the next minute, "I wish I were more athletic. Why can't I take gymnastics, Mom? Then I'd feel better about myself."

"You signed up for a course last year, remember? And you went exactly twice," Kathy would remind her, dragging her mind away from Eddie. God knows she *sympathized* with Stacey's problems. But it all seemed so remote. As though real life were going on in her head while what was actually happening in her household was some sort of fantasy. Rationally, she *knew* the reverse was true, but the knowledge didn't help.

Neither did Bob. "What is the matter with you these days?" he asked. "I've gotten used to your moods over the years, but something's out of hand, Kath. The kids have been asking me why Mom's crying all the time. Charley's really upset. Do you think you ought to see somebody? Maybe you could talk to your mother or Nan."

Fat chance! Kathy thought bitterly. Lily seemed to call every single day, asking when they could have lunch and go shopping. Kathy made up excuses, but she felt like screaming *Never!* in her mother's face.

Her thoughts turned constantly to Eddie, and to the life that had been denied her. What would it have been like? She knew she was overreacting, but she couldn't stop. On one hand, she felt vindicated. She had been right all these years, and Lily had lied. Eddie *did* love her. On the other hand, she was furious—at her mother, certainly, and also at Eddie, for having been afraid, for running away. Most disturbing, though, was the fury she felt at life—at the separate lives they had led when they should have been together. And now it was too late. But it *couldn't* be too late, one part of her mind insisted. Without Eddie she knew she would die. His presence was like a transfusion; it was life-giving. At moments she felt as though she were on the brink of a volcano, and that the only solution was to give in to the fire, to throw herself over the edge. At other moments, she felt like a calm, rational mother of four

who cared deeply about her husband. The seesaw was driving her crazy; she couldn't understand how she could feel two completely opposite ways, sometimes within the space of a minute or two. She couldn't sleep, and frequently she couldn't remember what she had been doing just an hour before. Her life was out of control; her world was breaking apart, shattering into fragments, and there was nothing she could do to stop it.

Chapter 3



The cold damp was penetrating, and Kathy shivered. "Damn March," she muttered to herself. "I don't think it's *ever* going to get warm. Why am I freezing?" Suddenly she realized she was standing in her nightgown in the front hallway with the door wide open. She looked down at her hand; she was holding some mail. A tear fell on the envelopes. She had no recollection of coming downstairs, or of opening the door and getting the mail. She slammed the door and headed back upstairs, back to her sanctuary. I'm losing my mind, she thought numbly, repeating a conviction that had been growing over the week since she'd seen Eddie again. She curled up in a big chair in her calm gray dressing room and let the sobs come. "I'm crazy," she cried. "What am I going to do?"

She glanced down at the letters in her hand, then let them drop one by one to the floor. She couldn't control her emotions, her thoughts or even her actions, it seemed; she certainly couldn't cope with a bunch of bills. Let Bob do it, she thought, and then felt pain like a knife in her stomach. Poor Bob! He had always been so good to her, and now, sometimes, it was as though she didn't even recognize him, as if she'd never seen him before. Nothing made any sense, nothing but her obsession with Eddie.

But Eddie was out of town for a month. She was terrified

that she might find herself locked up in an institution somewhere before he returned, and she would never see him again. The thought sent a shiver of cold, hopeless panic through her. Why panic? Maybe a nice safe hospital was the answer, but even as she reasoned with herself, terror mounted up in her throat like bile, and she felt like vomiting. "I'd die if they sent me away," she whispered. "But I think I'm going to die here too."

She looked down at the jumble of envelopes on the carpet as though they constituted a puzzle which, if she could solve it, would make everything better. One caught her eye. It was just a routine mailing, but it was from a retailing association she had joined when she formed the partnership with Tim. She opened the letter. It was the announcement of a convention being held in Atlanta at the end of the month. *That's* where I should go, she thought. I'd be a professional, a businesswoman, surrounded by other professionals. I'd *have* to function normally. Maybe I could even find solutions to some of the problems Tim and I are facing. She glanced at the offerings. *The Psychology of Selling*. The looked interesting. *Starting Small—How to Make It Big*. Just what they needed!

She took a shaky breath. She couldn't consider getting away for a while unless she could pull herself together. She couldn't travel alone to a strange city in a state of nervous collapse. How would she manage? She had attended one convention previously, with some apprehension—for one thing, she wasn't used to being on her own—but she had had a marvelous time. She couldn't pin it down exactly, but she had felt very free, she thought, and she remembered laughing a lot.

She picked up the phone and dialed Bob's office. "Hi, honey," she said when he came on the line.

"Hi, there," he replied. "You all right?"

"Oh, sure," she lied. She realized that she had barely exchanged two sentences with her husband in the past few days, but he had apparently accepted her silence. He was quiet enough that he probably didn't think her withdrawal especially unusual. Kathy hoped that was the case. She didn't want to worry him—or jeopardize her marriage. But on the other hand, she wanted to live her life over again from the very beginning.

"I'm just calling because I got this notice in the mail about a retailing convention in a couple of weeks. You remember that other one I went to?"

"The one in the Midwest somewhere? Sure." Bob always accepted her interests and enthusiasms calmly, neither encouraging nor discouraging her from pursuing anything, even if it was going to cost him money.

"Well, I'm thinking about going to this one too. What do you think? This clammy weather is really getting to me. I haven't been feeling too well the past week or so. . . ."

"Yeah, I noticed. Sure, why don't you get away? It will do you good."

She told him the dates, then went on. "I'll check with Gloria, of course, but I'm sure she can manage, so the kids will be okay. I'll come back on Friday night. I'll skip the Saturday sessions because we have the Klein bar mitzvah that Saturday. You did say we had to go to that, right?"

"Right. And thanks for reminding me. He's an important client."

There was a pause. Kathy knew Bob was writing in his desk calendar. She smiled. She knew her husband very well, and she loved everything about him, even his occasional absentmindedness. She could imagine his small, precise handwriting on the block representing Saturday's date. "Klein" he would have written. She adored him, she honestly did. That was one reason she felt so torn apart.

"Actually, I'm going to be in California that week myself," Bob said. "I've got sales meetings on Thursday and Friday and a plant to check. I'll have to take the red-eye to make the party."

"Okay. Well, then, I'll make my reservations." As she hung up, an enormous wave of relief rolled over her. Rationally, she knew that a few days away were not going to calm whatever it was that was destroying her. But at least I won't be doing any damage here, she thought. And maybe the distance will give me some perspective, help me decide what's important. I'm *not* running away, she told herself firmly. Or am I?

The distinguished older gentleman seemed vaguely familiar, but Kathy was surprised by the warmth of his greeting. "Mrs. Roth—*Kathy*," he said, grasping her hand with both of his. "What a pleasant surprise to find you here. I have such fond memories of Kansas City."

Kathy fixed her face in what she hoped was a responsive

smile and frantically racked her brain. Who *was* he and how did he know her so well? "It's lovely to see you again too," she replied, and then allowed him to introduce her to what seemed to be a small army of friends, colleagues and assorted hangers-on. She finally managed a peek at his name tag and recognized it at once. He was the chief executive of a chain of midwestern specialty stores. With difficulty she conjured up some vague memories, fragments of the Kansas City convention, as though it had happened ten years ago, not one, and to someone else. I really am losing my grip, she thought desperately, trying very hard to keep a pleasant expression on her face despite the terror that was building inside.

She attempted to control her panic by concentrating on all of the people she was meeting, playing word-association games to see if she could remember their names. Mr. Gray was dressed in a banker's pinstripes; Ms. Hannigan was a social worker, just like the character in *Annie*; Mr. Klaus had a white beard like Santa. In a few minutes her mind was reeling. As the chatter continued, she found that if she didn't concentrate completely, she would "come to" midway through a sentence, completely at a loss for the gist of the conversation.

Just putting physical distance between herself and Bob—and Eddie—hadn't erased the turmoil or the pain; if anything, the issues seemed more confused than ever. And on top of her internal struggle she had a whole hotel full of strangers to cope with, some of whom seemed to know her better than she knew them.

And then the important man was patting her hand. "And now, my dear, I must go and review my notes for my talk tomorrow morning. I do hope you're attending?"

"I wouldn't miss it," she said, wondering if she should simply get into a taxi and head back to the airport. What had possess her to think she could handle this? She was going to fall apart under the strain.

"You look a little pale. Are you all right?"

She looked up, startled. Before her was a large, slightly rumpled, cozy-looking man with a head of unruly brown curls. Her brow wrinkled with effort. She had just met this kind-looking guy—who on earth was he? Like a brown bear, she thought, triumphant. "Dr. Brown, right?"

"Right. Please call me Len. And you're Kathy Roth, who has special friends in high places, but who seems slightly distressed nonetheless. Can I help?"

Having successfully remembered a name brought Kathy a measure of calm, and the panic receded slightly. "Oh, no, thank you, I'm fine," she said. "But I don't know that man very well, really," she added, hoping that "special friends" didn't mean what she thought it meant. "I did meet him at another convention and we had a pleasant conversation, but that's all." She certainly hoped that was all.

"Oh." Dr. Brown didn't seem convinced. "Well, that conversation must have made quite an impression. Or maybe he has a weakness for delicate blondes. I think I've heard that, as a matter of fact."

"Oh?" Kathy decided to treat the whole thing as a joke. She felt safe with this man for some reason, maybe because he was a stranger and had "doctor" attached to his name. She finally allowed herself to relax a little, letting the tension in her shoulders ease.

"I was watching you," Dr. Brown went on, "partly because you're so attractive, and partly because you did look a little troubled, confused. But that's probably my therapist's antennae working overtime, and it's certainly none of my business. Anyway, I'm glad to meet you and delighted that you're not going to be monopolized by the older generation."

She was grateful for his concern—and his attention. She thought, briefly, of making an issue of the fact that she was married, but she was, after all, wearing a wedding ring. She was pretty sure he didn't have the wrong idea about her, and besides, Bob and Connecticut seemed very far away. The knot in the pit of her stomach started to dissolve.

"What is your connection to all this?" she asked. "What's a doctor doing at a sales convention?"

He waved the program jauntily. "It's called 'consulting,'" he explained. "I'm giving a seminar tomorrow afternoon called Stress and Burnout in the Workplace. I'm a psychologist. And you? Let me guess! You have a terribly fashionable boutique on Michigan Avenue."

"Wrong!" she replied, delighted that he didn't have her perfectly pegged. "As a matter of fact, I have a small fashion design and manufacturing business in New York. Very small. Just me and the designer, actually." She giggled. "And I may very well be suffering from burnout." Her voice dropped. "I'm certainly suffering from *something*."

"So you've come all the way to Atlanta to find the answers to your business problems?" he asked.

"Well . . ." She paused. "It's not so much coming 'all the way to Atlanta' as it is 'getting all this way from New York,'" she admitted.

"Ah-ha! A runaway! I should have guessed it immediately. *That's* why you have that distant look in your eyes."

"I guess. Actually, I am okay, but my life is something of a mess right now," she went on, wondering why she was confiding in this man.

They left the hotel and started to walk. It was a balmy day, Kathy noticed absently, thinking that spring had arrived in Georgia far sooner than it would in Connecticut. She breathed the sweet smell of cherry blossoms just beginning to open, and thought of her rose bushes, still shrouded in the dead look of winter.

She talked to Len about her roses, and about Bob and the children. His life was far simpler than hers, she discovered. He was a psychologist trained in TA—transactional analysis—the approach to psychotherapy developed and popularized by Dr. Eric Berne. He was not married, but he was well established in a clinical practice in Wisconsin.

Finally, she told him about Eddie, and about the enormous stress she felt in trying to make some decision about him. Should she have an affair with him? Leave Bob for him? No! She loved Bob, and hurting him was unthinkable. She certainly would never leave the children. But what could she do? How could she be true to herself, to her deepest feelings, without destroying her family?

She didn't tell him about the lapses of memory, about the conviction that she no longer had control over the simplest things. She couldn't tell *anyone* about that. Nor did she tell him that she was having the peculiar sensation of floating above herself, watching the two of them talk. She fought to bring herself together, to counteract the feeling that she was a helium balloon, that she might soar into the sky and never return. A war was being waged inside her head, but walking and talking seemed to help. Len didn't have any answers, but he was able to ask some important questions.

As the light began to fade, they found themselves back at the hotel, and they went into the coffee shop and had dinner together. "I hope you don't mind my unloading all this stuff on you," Kathy said quietly. "You're a therapist, and I'm afraid I've been taking advantage of your expertise."

"I don't mind," he replied with a cheerful smile. He had a nice round open face, Kathy decided. "I just hope that talking it through helps to clarify the issues in your mind."

"I think it does," she said. "At least I don't feel as if I'm lost in a maze anymore. There *must* be an answer for me, even if it's painful." It *was* still painful, but she had decided that she *would* do *something*. The turmoil and indecision, she realized, were much more difficult to live with than a rational course of action. But her head was splitting with all these conflicting emotions. What she needed at the moment was to think about something else—anything else.

All at once she was in the balloon again, watching as the sweet-faced young woman at the table turned recklessly flirtatious. She was generally a very conservative person, so the mood was unusual, but with it came some relief from the feeling of being torn limb from limb. She just wanted to have a good time. When she spoke again, her tone had turned playful. "Listen, Len, enough of this soul-baring. The fact is, despite my romantic problems, I have led a pretty sheltered life, and do you know what? The last tenant of my room here left a copy of the *Kama Sutra* behind. Since you're a mental health professional, maybe you'd like to have a look. It's no fun to read alone."

Laughing, they went upstairs, Kathy still floating as she opened the door to her hotel room. What am I doing with a strange man in my room? she thought, panicking for a moment. But then some force seemed to push the panic aside. We're going to have a good time, came the firm reply.

Len settled down on the sofa in the sitting room while Kathy went to the dresser to locate her find. When she returned, she saw that Len had taken out a joint and was lighting up. As she sat down, he offered her a puff. "This is wonderful grass," he said. "Want some?"

"No, thanks," she answered, automatically, but then she thought about her response. Ever since she could remember she had avoided all mind-altering substances. She never drank alcohol except for a very rare celebratory sip of champagne on required occasions, and she had never tried any kind of drug. Suddenly, in the company of this warm, supportive new friend, she wondered why not. *Because you can't lose control*, said a little voice somewhere deep inside.

Is my control that shaky? Kathy wondered, feeling utterly

removed from "real life." Of course not. "I think I will try it," she said aloud, reaching for the dwindling joint.

She took a deep drag, then another, then handed it back. There, she told herself. This isn't anything to be frightened of. But the impact was sudden and unexpected. She felt like Alice in Wonderland having just taken the magic shrinking potion. She was becoming smaller and smaller, sinking deeper and deeper into her body. Finally, she was in a still, small place at the very center of her being, and she had the experience of watching herself as though she were a separate person. Horrified but fascinated, she observed while Kathy's body curled up, and tears started pouring down her cheeks. She's going to make a scene! Kathy thought desperately, but she couldn't do a thing about it. She had no power.

The crying figure crawled into Len's lap and put her arms around his neck, like a small child reaching for her daddy. "I'm such a bad girl," she sobbed. "A bad, bad girl and Mommy is *sooo* mad at me. I'm a bad, bad girl and she's going to punish me."

Len's reaction was gentle and supportive. He stroked the golden head and spoke reassuringly. "You're not a bad girl at all. You're not. Why do you think you're bad? What did your mommy say?"

The tone of voice was childlike and pleading, emerging with difficulty between the sobs. It didn't sound like Kathy at all. Who is this little girl, she wondered, imprisoned inside?

"I touch myself between my legs and Mommy doesn't like it. She says it's evil and I'm a bad girl and she's going to spank me. But I can't stop. I'm dirty and awful." The voice faded away in a whimper.

"Your mommy's wrong," Len said, still stroking her head. "It's not bad to do that. In fact, it's perfectly normal to do it. *Everybody* does it, and it feels good and it is good."

All at once there was a shriek from the frail figure, and she was on the floor on her back, fighting for breath. "She's sitting on me!" the girl screamed. "She's going to kill me! I can't breathe! Help me!"

In fact, she wasn't breathing, and she was turning dangerously pale. Len knelt beside her on the floor. "Who is it? Your mother?"

"No, it's Nan. She's caught me and she's going to kill me!" she gasped.

With exaggerated gestures the therapist pushed the phantom off and lifted the woman back onto his lap. For a while there was no sound in the room but muffled snuffles. The girl's head was buried in Len's shoulder, and sobs still shook her delicate frame. She *looked* like a little girl, actually, at just five feet tall and about ninety-five pounds. Her nose was red, but her eyes were hopeful when she looked up. "Thanks," she said. And then, "Did you mean it when you said I wasn't a bad girl?"

"Yes," he repeated. They sat silently for a few minutes and then he asked, idly, "Tell me, what's your name?"

"Baby," she replied in a tiny voice, the sound trailing off to nothingness. "And I'm almost four."

Suddenly there was a change in the small body. Where a moment before it had been soft and curled up, now there was tension in every muscle, as though a slight electrical current were passing through. The woman shifted in Len's lap, stretching like a cat, and when her head came up, shaking the hair out of her face in a graceful, practiced gesture, her expression was anything but childlike.

Who is this? Kathy wondered, still trapped. And why is she acting so sexy? What is she going to do?

The figure licked her lips and tightened her grip around Len's neck. "Hi," she began in a throaty, penetrating voice. "I've been wanting to get together with you all day." She started to unbutton his shirt. "Unless, that is, you only like to look at pictures. . . ."

The therapist demonstrated calmness under pressure as the woman wriggle provocatively in his lap. "As a matter of fact," he replied in a normal tone of voice, "I'm not really in the mood right now, Kathy. But I would like some coffee. Why don't I—"

She leaped up, furious, her eyes flashing, and began to pace the room. "Don't call me that! Kathy!" She spat out the word. "If I couldn't get away from that boring housewife once in a while I'd *kill* myself!" Her voice was strident and cutting. She moved with her shoulders thrown back, her hips tilted forward. For a split-second she looked taller than she had a few minutes before, and as if she had on more makeup. But that was impossible. It was the carriage of her body and the angry flush on her cheeks that created the illusion.

Far away, Kathy could only watch. This new woman seemed

so sure of herself, so aggressive, so brazen. *She* would know what to do about her life, Kathy suspected. *She* wouldn't care *who* got hurt. Kathy tuned out for a moment, wondering desperately how this strange thing had happened, and how she was going to make herself large again, how she was going to regain control. With sudden panic she wondered if she would be able to. What if she were trapped forever while these strangers took turns using her body?

She concentrated again on what was happening in the hotel room, and found herself on the bed, rolling over and over, wrestling with Len, trying to remove his shirt. "Aw, c'mon, honey," she said. "Let's have a little fun, hmmm? Who'll know? I really *am* in the mood, you know, and when *I'm* in the mood, I'm dynamite, and you'd better believe it! I could give you a blow job you'd remember for a long time."

Len pulled away and got up, straightening his shirt. "I really don't think it would be a good idea," he said firmly, putting a chair between them. The woman's blouse was unbuttoned to below her bra, but she made no move to redo it. Instead, she slid gracefully to one side, propping her head on one arm, looking inviting.

"And if you're not Kathy," he continued, staying at a safe distance, "then who are you?"

She shook her head again and swung into a sitting position, her legs dangling off the edge of the bed. "Shit!" she snapped. "I'm Prose, of course. And you're a bore. Probably a faggot. Definitely no fun. To hell with *this* party!" Her head sank into her hands and her body became rigid, immobile.

Several minutes passed. To Kathy, it felt as though choppy, dangerous waters, stirred up by a passing hurricane, had calmed down. She was still tiny and powerless, but she didn't feel quite so suffocated as she had when that . . . that aggressive woman was talking.

When her head came up, her cheeks were drained of color, even her lips were bloodless. Some hair was straggling onto her face, covering one eye, but she made no move to brush it away. Her face was so pale, it looked almost sickly, her lovely peaches-and-cream coloring turned ashen. She cast a frightened glance at Len, then noticed the disarray of her clothes and hastily started buttoning, turning a shoulder to protect herself from his view.

"Kathy?" he asked tentatively.

The voice was a whisper. "No, I'm Cici," the figure said. "And I don't know you and I don't want to be here."

"Everything's all right," Len said reassuringly. "Don't worry. The drug will wear off and everything will get back to normal." The slender woman, her shoulders hunched, her chin tucked in toward her chest, seemed unconvinced. "Honest," he added.

Her voice was tight, and she didn't look at him. "I don't talk to strangers," she said in her small monotone. "But I'm so mad at Mommy for lying to me about Eddie that I have to tell *someone*. She ruined my life. And I don't want to be rude. I don't know what to do. I'm so frightened." She closed her eyes tight, as if to shut out any evil that might be lurking nearby.

As she sat slumped on the bed, seeing nothing, Kathy felt herself start to grow. It was as though her body were a suit of clothes and she were getting big enough to wear it. She seemed to stretch out a hand and put it into one arm, then the other, then her legs. She opened her eyes and ran her fingers through her hair. "I'm sorry, Len," she said, relieved to find her own voice again, delighted that she hadn't been buried forever in that dark, hidden place. "I honestly don't know what's just happened to me." She got up off the bed and crossed to the couch, curling up at one end and tucking her feet beneath her. Once again there was normal color in her cheeks, natural light in her troubled eyes.

"It's called dissociative behavior," he replied quietly, sounding relieved that this did, indeed, seem to be the young woman he had spent the better part of the day with. "And I don't know why it happened. But I do know that some people have pretty strong reactions to marijuana, and I suspect that's what it was. You just dissociated—temporarily—and then came back together."

"Do you think it was *normal*?" she asked. "It's certainly never happened to me before." She paused as a disturbing thought occurred to her. What about the times she couldn't remember, the days that were just a blur? "That I'm aware of, that is."

Len was reassuring. "Well, since you were conscious of what was going on this time—you *were* conscious, right?" She nodded. "Then I doubt it could have happened before without your knowing about it."

Deep inside, Kathy thought she heard someone laughing, as

though someone were making fun of her. What if . . . She didn't want to think about it. "What do you think I should do?" she asked.

"First of all, *don't* worry," he suggested. "I suspect it was a one-time episode. For now, I'd say, carry on. Decide which meetings you want to attend tomorrow, do some reading, watch some television—whatever. And don't dwell on this . . . experience." He took out a piece of paper and a pencil. "But I also think," he went on, writing, "that you might want to explore the whole thing further, try to find out why it happened. In therapy, I mean. And here's the name of a man in New York who's a really fine therapist. I think you should call him when you get home."

Kathy took the slip of paper but didn't look at it until the door closed behind Len. "Dr. Matthew Caldwell," it read, with an address in the East Eighties and a phone number. Kathy wandered into the bathroom and turned on the light. She wasn't tired, exactly, but she did feel strange. And frightened. Very, very frightened. Was she crazy? Did Len think she was crazy? she asked herself. Unbidden, a cocky, brassy voice inside her head answered the question. *Of course not! He's a nice guy even if he's no fun in bed. He'd never have left you alone if he thought you were nuts. He just doesn't have the balls to fuck!*

Kathy stared at herself in the mirror. "Who's there?" she said aloud. "Who is it and what do you want?" She felt tears gathering at the back of her eyes, and panic rising in her throat. She went quickly to the desk and pulled out the notebook she had brought for the conference. Suddenly it seemed very important to write things down, to try to control the terror and sort out her feelings. She opened the book, not knowing what she was going to write. She started doodling—just scribbling, really—wondering whether she would be able to express the confused jumble of emotions she felt inside. When she looked down, there was printed, in childish, awkward block capitals, "I'M SCARED."

Not nearly as scared as I am, she thought.

Kathy made an effort to concentrate. She really wanted to get her feelings down on paper. *Her* feelings. But who was she? She thought about returning to New York, and began to write. "I'm not ready to go home just yet, but I'm looking

forward to seeing Bob. He's there for me. He's lived with me for sixteen years. Does he love me? God, I hope so. I wonder how different my life would have been if I'd met Len ten years ago—if this had happened to me before. Would I have been happier?

"Will I ever be happy again?" Suddenly she remembered those awful times in school, the times when classmates called her crazy. Did they know something about her? Something she didn't know about herself? And her mother said she was crazy lots of times. She's right, Kathy thought. I'm cracking up. She could feel her heart beating very fast.

She paused, and when she started to write again, the handwriting had changed from Kathy's cramped, left-handed scrawl to a much neater, more perfect script. She looked at her hand as though it belonged to someone else. What was happening to her writing?

"Do they think I was happy? Always being the phony! I hated always being what other people wanted me to be. And every time I let one of them out, they caused so much trouble, and I had to live with it, not them."

Again, the writing changed, this time to a large, expansive, sloppy hand. "Why should she be happy when she was always telling us what to do? The baby was scared, I was stifled—she was so goddamned *good*. Every time she let us out, we got into trouble because she never taught us how to act. How did she think I felt being stuck with the little brat, always frightened, when I wanted to have fun, to suck a big cock? I could fuck ten men a day if she'd get off my back!"

The precise handwriting returned. "I *had* to keep them in. We're crazy. How could we let the world see us? I have to be a good little girl, doing what Mommy said. She wanted me to be a teacher, to go to Hofstra, to marry Bob. So I did, but I'm so frightened. Don't they know I'm scared too? It was hard enough fighting the world, but I had to do it all alone. I would have loved friends. . . ."

Kathy held her head in her hands, as if to keep it from breaking into pieces. What was happening to her was terrifying. It was as though she had no control at all, not even over her hands. She was all scrambled inside—one part so determined to be good, the other driven to . . . She didn't even want to think about what that brassy voice was talking about.

She didn't want to think about *any* of it. She wanted it to go away. She wanted to wake up and find out that it was all some awful nightmare, that she wasn't really cracking up alone in a strange hotel room.

Chapter 4



"Nice of you to drop by," Stacey called with the sarcasm only a fifteen-year-old can muster as Kathy put her suitcase on the floor of the foyer. The sound emanated from the den, so Kathy assumed the kids were all watching television. All I need this evening, she thought, is a sullen teenager.

"Hi, everybody!" She tried her cheeriest, most positive tone. She had learned that ignoring Stacey's sulks was often the best approach.

"Mommy, Mommy!" shrieked Lynn, rushing to throw herself at her mother. Kathy picked her up and gave her a big hug, as though the three-year-old were an anchor in very rough waters. How can I be a mother? she wondered. I don't even know who I am! She pushed down the approaching panic.

"Hello, darling," she said into the baby's neck, and then she scanned the room for the others. Charley was in the midst of an incredibly complex Erector Set construction, but he favored her with a smile. Stacey looked up from *People* magazine.

"Hi, Mom," Charley said, then turned back to what looked like a reject from the set of *Star Wars*. Marsha managed a wave.

Kathy put Lynn down and went over to where Marsha was sitting, quietly watching *Little House on the Prairie*. What night is it? Kathy wondered. Is *Little House* on tonight? She felt so disoriented, she couldn't even remember the television

schedule. The panic started again. "Hi, honey," she said to her ten-year-old. "Did you miss me?"

"Sure, Mom," the child replied quietly. "But Gloria took care of everything. And yesterday Harriet came over to play. And I read another Nancy Drew book." Calm, practical, studious, self-sufficient—that was Marsha, Kathy thought. She'll do well even if her mother is a lunatic. She put the thought out of her mind and sat down.

"Whew," she said. "I am so glad to be home. You guys *know* how I hate to fly. And the plane was delayed, so we had to wait. It seemed like *hours*."

"We?" asked Stacey. "I didn't know you were traveling with anyone."

For a second Kathy felt caught out, as though she'd been discovered in bed with a strange man. Where does that feeling come from? she wondered. I haven't done anything wrong. "It's the editorial we," she said lightly, "or perhaps the royal we." What would they think, she asked herself, if they knew that their mother had been smoking pot with someone in Atlanta, and that when she smoked it, she felt like different people inside? She shivered, and felt the threat of tears. Keep yourself together, she told herself silently.

"What's a royal we?" Charley asked from the corner.

"Oh, please," Stacey groaned. "For your information, Mother, this week has been *horrible*, the meals inedible, and my homework impossible, since Gloria is no good at algebra. And she wouldn't bake chocolate chip cookies. Who pays her anyway?"

"Stacey!" Being a teenager was very hard, Kathy knew, but sometimes her oldest seemed to revel in the difficulties. "For one thing, you very specifically asked, about two weeks ago, that we not keep a lot of sweets in the house. You *said* that you wanted to lose a few pounds." She took a critical look. She didn't think the latest diet was being any more effective than the one before or the one before that. "So Gloria is just following your request. And she's not paid to do your homework. But since *I'm* not very good at algebra either, you'll just have to wait till Daddy gets back."

"When's that?"

"Tomorrow. Sometime in the afternoon. We have the Kleins' bar mitzvah at five, so he'll have to be here before that." I hope, she thought. Bob would barely have time to shower and dress before the appointed hour, and there wouldn't be any

time to sit down with him and explain what had happened to her in Atlanta. She was terrified at the prospect of attending the affair. What if she lost control? How was she going to get through it?

Lynn came over and climbed into her lap. "I have so much to tell you, Mommy, because I missed you a lot!" Kathy kissed the top of her head, suddenly very glad to be home. She *had* to survive this. She had too much to live for. "First of all," the toddler chatted on, "Bert and Ernie had this big fight on *Sesame Street*, and Cookie Monster was *scared*. And so was I. But then it was all right. And we had applesauce for dinner, and I ate every bite and I had *four* cookies after. Do I have nursery school tomorrow?"

"Hmmm?" What day is it? Kathy wondered. "No, sweetheart, tomorrow's Saturday. But according to this note from Gloria, you're playing with your friend Michelle in the morning. Why?"

"Because I want to take something special to show to her. Did you bring me something from wherever you were? Did you? Did you?"

"Well, yes, I did, but—"

"Oh, goody. I don't care what it is, because I know it will be something nice that I can show *everybody*. Where is it? Can I see? Can I?" She was wriggling with excitement.

Kathy was just about to go and rummage through her suitcase for the presents she had brought when she was immobilized by the sound, inside her head, of the loud, strident voice she remembered from Atlanta.

"This is going to be fucking hard! We're home half an hour and Lynn hasn't shut up for one minute! She's driving me crazy! What I want to do is get the hell out of here and find someone to fuck!"

Kathy sank back into her chair, close to tears. She had hoped desperately that she was safe from those voices, that she wouldn't hear them as long as she didn't smoke marijuana. But the voice was so distinct and forceful, she was surprised the children hadn't heard it too. Oh, my God, she thought. What's happening to me? Slowly and deliberately, she rose and went into the kitchen, where she told Gloria that it would soon be Lynn's bedtime. Then she distributed the presents, and even Stacey brightened up some at the pretty pink sweater Kathy had found for her. Finally she was able to plead exhaustion, say good night, and escape to her cool gray haven.

Face washed and hair brushed, she sank onto the chaise, tucked her feet underneath her and stared at the flickering television screen. She didn't want to think. But Johnny Carson's guest host couldn't keep her attention, and she found her mind wandering back to Atlanta. She saw Len's kind, concerned face, and his thick mop of curly brown hair. She remembered the feeling of sitting on his lap, her arms around his neck—or, rather, *someone's* arms around his neck. She wondered what it would have felt like to kiss him, and she closed her eyes to imagine it. His lips were soft and warm, and she fantasized the strength of his embrace as his arms went around her. In her mind they were lying next to each other on the bed, and she was unbuttoning his shirt as he stroked her shoulders, moving his hand underneath her blouse. Her hands moved down to his belt; she wanted to feel him, to feel how aroused she could make him as his kiss became fierce, probing, demanding.

"I *want* him—oh, God, do I want him," she moaned. "I want to make him *shake* with desire; I want him to want me more than he's ever wanted *anybody!*"

Kathy's eyes snapped open and she jumped up. There was a sheen of perspiration all over her body and she was panting slightly. But *who* was panting? she asked herself desperately. *Who* was this sexually aggressive interloper? *She* didn't want Len! She didn't want anyone but Bob—and Eddie. But someone inside her was really on the make. Kathy started to cry. "How long have you been part of me?" she whispered. "What have you done in the past? Why did that man at the convention seem to know me so well? And the others—the ones I'd never met before who greeted me as though we were old friends . . . or more? What are you going to do to my family?"

Kathy felt as though she hadn't slept at all, but she forced herself out of bed at eight. She had given Gloria most of the day off after her long stint, so it was up to her to feed the kids and get them off to their various activities. In addition to Lynn's date with Michelle, there was ballet for Marsha, tennis for Charley, and a pottery class for Stacey. She poured herself a cup of coffee and lined up the cereal boxes. She looked up as Lynn skipped in.

"I can't *wait* to show Michelle my new Barbie," she exclaimed, clutching her prize.

"Sweetie, you can't go out in shorts," Kathy pointed out, wincing at Lynn's choice of purple shorts and a chartreuse T-shirt. "It's still too cool outside. I'll help you change after breakfast."

Charley arrived and poured a huge bowl of corn flakes, while Marsha settled for juice and toast. So far, so good, Kathy thought to herself. Once they're off, I'll have until noon to do some shopping and see if I can find something to wear to this function tonight.

"Cold cereal?" Stacey was not going to make things easy. "What kind of breakfast is *that*? How come we don't ever have anything *good* to eat, like waffles or something?"

Kathy was too tired to fight. As she passed her hand across her face, trying to think of some pleasant way to deflect Stacey's mood, something inside snapped.

"How about something good—like grapefruit, for instance?" It was the brassy voice speaking aloud. She rose from the table and yanked open the refrigerator door. "Here." She plunked a grapefruit in front of Stacey. "This is a much better way to start the morning—*especially* for someone who's always complaining about her figure. Waffles!"

"Okay, okay," Stacey replied grudgingly, apparently surprised by her mother's forcefulness so early in the morning. "I *should* watch what I eat."

Kathy started to pick up her coffee cup, but realized that her hand was shaking too much. She would never make it to her mouth. She was terrified. Not only did she not have control of her hands—or her fantasies—but now someone else was talking to her children. If I can only hold on until they're all dropped off, she thought desperately.

The voice resounded in her head. "Hey! I'm going to be *great* at mothering! And they're good kids. Even the little one who talks too much. So *we'll* see that they get a good breakfast. *She's* always such a bitch in the morning."

Who's a bitch? Kathy wondered as the children finished and she took Lynn upstairs to change. *I'm* the one no one wants to talk to before my third cup of coffee. But who am I? Who are they? Has this voice been here before? Talking to the children? What effect will it have on them if I've been crazy like this for a long time and not known it? I know I should call the therapist

Len recommended. I hope I haven't lost that slip of paper. But I can't call him! It would prove that I'm cracking up. What am I going to do?

Stepping out of the shower just after noon, Kathy reached for a towel. She was a lot calmer than she had been four hours before, but she didn't know why. The children had all reached their destinations despite her worries. She remembered driving to the nearest shopping mall, and being relieved to find a parking space close to Saks.

She rubbed her hair briskly. If she were her usual, well-organized self, before she went to Atlanta she would have made an appointment to have her hair done today. But she had forgotten. She'd been forgetting a lot of things lately. And, naturally, Lois had no time for her at the last minute. She surveyed herself critically in the mirror. At least the color was fine. But she would need a touch-up next week, she decided. And as for tonight, she would just have to do her hair herself.

She slipped into a thick terry robe and opened the bathroom door. Lynn was having a nap, and the others wouldn't be home until four, by which time Gloria would be back. She smiled. Maybe everything would be all right after all.

And then she saw the bed. "Oh, my God!" she gasped, stopped in her tracks. It was covered with packages, packages from every store in the mall. There were a couple from Saks, she saw, but most were from small boutiques, tacky shops. Hesitantly, she started opening them. There was a nice scarf and a handsome lizard belt, but I don't *need* belts or scarves, she thought desperately. I need a gown to wear tonight!

Soon she was ripping through bag after bag, recoiling from most of the purchases. There was a strapless, sequined, elasticized tube top in Day-Glo pink; there was a halter-necked dress in chartreuse polyester that was cut so low Kathy knew she'd fall right out of it. There were size four toreador pants—Kathy wore a size six. And there were several pairs of cheap shoes, very high-heeled, all straps and glitter. And a lot more—underwear, nightgowns, costume jewelry. Finally, sitting in the chaos, Kathy picked up a handful of charge slips. The Saks ones looked familiar—that was her signature. But on the others—purchases charged to American Express mostly—her name was written larger, and with more pronounced curves.

She went over to her desk, hidden behind a mirrored wall, and took out the journal she had begun in Atlanta. Sure enough, the writing was familiar. It went with the brassy voice. Panic overwhelmed her, and she just made it into the bathroom in time to be sick in the toilet. Even the vomit was unfamiliar—she didn't remember having lunch. She splashed her face with cold water and tried to calm down. She *had* arrived at Michelle's on time and picked up Lynn. She remembered that. More important, she had *done* it. She took a deep breath. This craziness was threatening to ruin her life, but at least she still had some sense of responsibility left. Kathy clung to that thought as she carefully, fastidiously, rewrapped every item, matched each with its sales slip, and put it back in its shopping bag. Monday she would take everything back.

You bitch! There was a howl of rage inside her head. *I gotta have some fun! And I don't have anything pretty to wear!*

Kathy pressed her hands against her temples. She was having a nervous breakdown. Maybe she was going to shatter into a million pieces and collapse on the rug.

"Mommy?" A sleepy voice pulled her back from the brink. Lynn was standing in the doorway, rubbing her eyes. "You sure bought a lot of things, Mommy. Can I see?"

"No, sweetheart," she replied, "not right now. I'm going to take most of those packages back to the stores, so I don't want them to get dirty. Did you have a nice nap?"

"Yes. Can I watch *Sesame Street* on your television, Mommy? While you're getting ready for your party?"

Oh, no! Kathy thought. I still don't have anything new to wear to the bar mitzvah. "Sure, honey. I'll turn it on for you." Somehow, she didn't think that Michael and Rita—business associates of Bob's—would appreciate a guest arriving in pink sequins and tight toreador pants. The vision almost made her smile. Determined to make the best of it, she crossed to the closet and looked through her repertoire of evening wear. What did she own, she wondered, that Michael and Rita—and everyone else—hadn't seen?

She finally chose a long-sleeved gown in a silky russet knit. It had a high neck in front but a very low back. She was just slipping into it when Bob arrived, predictably late. "Hi, hon,"

he called casually, giving her a peck on her still-bare shoulder as he passed by on his way to the bathroom. "L.A. was hot as hell, but the plant looks good. How was Atlanta? You got all your business problems solved now?"

Before she could answer, the sound of running water made the effort futile. She closed the closet door and made a face at herself in its mirrored surface. Sometimes her husband didn't make things any easier. She followed him into the bathroom and began applying makeup at the other sink. "Actually, it was very strange," she said finally, raising her voice over the sound of the water.

"Oh?" he said, continuing to shave.

"Yes. But it's a little too complicated to explain now, since we're already running late."

"Don't blame me, blame United Airlines," he replied calmly. "And don't worry. Michael and Rita will understand."

A new voice spoke to Kathy, startling her. It was quiet but mean. *Not only will they not understand*, the voice hissed, *they would expect him to get out of the plane and fly by himself rather than miss one minute!* Kathy was shaken. This wasn't the vulgar one; this was one of the others. And since it sounded fairly grown-up, she guessed it wasn't the baby one. Something in her mind kept whispering, *Cici*. Even more disturbing than having a *second* entity invading her mind uninvited, however, was the hostility she heard in the voice. Clearly, there were things about Bob that irritated this one, things that she, Kathy, had long ago accepted.

He was quiet, a soft-spoken man who had no interest in polite chitchat or social gossip, who talked about his manufacturing business with colleagues and friends and who listened with great patience. Most of his energy, attention and intellect was devoted to the business, and the results had always been enormously successful. Kathy had no complaints; Bob was an excellent provider. But he didn't care about social nuances, and he was willing to talk about feelings only if they were somebody else's. Kathy certainly hoped he would be supportive and nonjudgmental when she told him about the eerie experience in Atlanta—and the voices that continued to haunt her—but she didn't expect him to *understand* exactly. Accept, yes, but not empathize. And if one of these parts *disliked* him, how was she going to handle that? How was he?

"I just want you to know that I'm feeling a little shaky," she

said finally as he finished shaving. "And the thought of being with all those people may make me claustrophobic. In fact, I'm sort of scared to go out at all, but I know we *have* to attend this thing. He is a big client of yours."

"Just let me know whenever you want out, hon. You know me—I'd love an excuse to make a fast exit, once we've made our appearance, that is. You call the shots, and I'll be right behind you." He headed toward the shower, then turned. "Say, did you speak with Tim today? Apparently he called the office saying he was trying to reach you."

The business! What on earth am I going to do about the business? Kathy was aware of more stress piling up. "No, as a matter of fact, I haven't even checked for messages. It's been too busy."

"Well, do call him Monday, okay?" Bob smiled. "I don't mind investing in your ventures, Kath, but you've got to follow through."

"Oh, I will. Don't worry." Kathy watched as Bob adjusted the water, then shed his towel and stepped in. Suddenly *she* wasn't the one watching.

"I wouldn't mind a quick piece of *that*," the predatory voice said aloud hungrily. "I want to fuck!"

"Did you say something?" Bob called. "I can't hear because of the water."

Kathy took a deep breath and held it, as if to suffocate the intruder. "Nothing, Bob," she shouted, then turned back to the mirror to find her face set in determined lines. It was as if another woman wanted her husband. She started to apply mascara, hoping she wouldn't cry and ruin her makeup.

Bob was an attractive man, she had to admit, just over five feet eight with nice broad shoulders, and he stayed in good shape. He had plenty of wavy brown hair, and his eyes were calm and gentle. He wasn't demonstrative publicly, but in private he was an enthusiastic and tireless lover. The mirror reflected a small, tentative smile as Kathy finished with the mascara and applied her lipstick. She wanted to be alone in bed with her husband. She wondered how long they would have to stay at the bar mitzvah.

"Kathy, darling, you look *wonderful!*" Rita enthused as they entered the anteroom at the country club, where cocktails

were being served. "But where have you been keeping yourself? I haven't seen you in *weeks!*"

"I know, I know," Kathy replied, relieved to find some appropriate chatter rising to her lips. She had worried she wouldn't be able to think of anything to say. "But you've been busy with all this too." She gestured expansively around the room, which looked as if the florist had been at work all afternoon. "Spectacular flowers," she murmured.

"Thank you." Rita turned to Bob, and Kathy passed on to get a big hug from Michael. "Bob! Darling! How *are* you, and why are you so late, you naughty boy!"

The voices were getting mixed up in Kathy's ears. She was having a hard time separating Michael's lower-key greeting from Rita's enthusiasms. "I'm sorry," she said softly, "but I missed that in the din. What did you say, Michael?"

He laughed, and she thought his teeth suddenly looked very large. When he spoke, his tone was conspiratorial. No wonder she had missed it the first time around! "I just said that I hoped you would save me a dance," he repeated, holding her eyes with his gaze. "And I don't mean a hora! As I recall, you are one terrific dancer!"

"And you're a great host," she managed, turning away as fast as she could. She was quite sure she had never danced with Michael. They did socialize with the Kleins several times a year, but it was usually just for dinner. When would they have danced together? And why was his tone so insinuating? Kathy shivered, then was glad to feel Bob's hand under her elbow.

"Hello," she said, smiling and nodding as they passed people they knew en route to the bar. She felt her facial muscles start to tighten up, though, as the faces began to blur. Who was that woman who just kissed her on the cheek? she wondered. And why had that strange man patted her on the bottom in such a familiar way?

She looked up, startled, as Bob handed her a glass of ginger ale. "Thanks," she whispered. "Can you tell me who—" she began, hoping that he could help her stay in control. But he had turned away and was listening intently to a short man in a three-piece suit.

"My *dear,*" said a large woman in pink, descending on her from the right. "Where *have* you been keeping yourself?" Fortunately, she didn't stop for a reply, because Kathy was having a hard time focusing. The words were familiar, but they

weren't making sense exactly. She couldn't remember what "keeping yourself" meant. "I want to talk to you about the luncheon," the woman droned on. "We are, after all, cochairmen, and we mustn't shirk our responsibilities!" Kathy tried to keep her face arranged in a pleasant expression, and she nodded. "Wasn't it a lovely service? Of course, he fumbled a little with the Hebrew, but, then . . ."

It was becoming more and more difficult to remain in control. Kathy was aware that she didn't know who this lady was, and she didn't understand what she was saying either. She heard the voice, but the sounds didn't make sense. What's happening to me? she wondered in a panic. She turned abruptly and found Bob right behind her. She clung to his arm as if it were a life preserver. It was as though everyone were talking a foreign language. She tried to speak, but no words came out. She was paralyzed.

"I have to get out of here," the quiet voice whispered desperately to Bob. "I'm choking." As he steered her toward a door that opened onto the club's terrace, she wondered whether she would make it, or whether she would suffocate first. I'm much too shy and frightened for an event like this, she thought. They shouldn't have let me come out. I'm going to die. Her breath was coming in gasps by the time she reached fresh air, and she leaned on a railing, filling her lungs.

"Are you all right, hon?" Bob asked with concern, putting an arm around her shoulder.

Why was he touching her? She didn't want to feel his hand on her skin. She closed her eyes.

"I know you said you were feeling a little odd," Bob went on, "but you looked really sick in there."

"I'm fine now," she replied in the sexy voice, turning with an inviting smile, the color coming back to her cheeks. "I just needed a little air." She slipped her arms around his neck. "And the chance to be alone with you for a change." She pressed against him. "It's been a long time, you know. I've missed you."

After a passionate kiss Bob took a step back. "I guess you did!" he said with a touch of amusement. "Even in Atlanta?"

"Especially in Atlanta!" She leaned against him again.

"Well, I'm glad to hear that, but I don't think we need to let Rita and Michael and their guests know about it, okay? You are the best thing that ever happened to me, but let's save the

graphic demonstrations for our bedroom. This isn't exactly private."

"Oh, who cares!" She wanted to make love right there on the terrace. If Bob wouldn't play, she was pretty sure Michael would.

"And it's not exactly summer, Kath. You must be freezing out here in that dress."

"You could warm me up," she suggested, but he was already leading the way back inside. "Oh, all right," she finally agreed, following. "But you have to promise to dance with me all the rest of the party!"

Watching, Kathy was glad that the whispery voice was gone—she had been scared almost to death—but she worried that this one would get into some sort of trouble. She willed herself back in control, but it was no use. By the time the sex-obsessed creature got bored with the party, Kathy was exhausted. She felt as though she had fought a major battle, and she didn't think she had won.

We fit together so smoothly, she thought later, in bed. We're like gears in a motor that mesh with no friction, no stress. She sighed, relaxing in Bob's embrace and taking comfort from the sureness of his touch. He knew her so well, knew every inch of her. And she knew him too; everything that sixteen years of living together had taught her. It had taught her how reassuring and comfortable it was to make love with her husband. She smiled in the darkness. Then suddenly her mouth tightened. What it *hadn't* taught her was how Bob was going to react to . . . all this.

She sat up, propping the pillows behind her and pulling up the sheet.

Bob turned and looked at her. "You're marvelous—as always," he whispered, then, "Tell me about your trip."

She took a deep breath and began, starting with her experience in the hotel room, but prudently censoring some of the more outrageous behavior. "It was like seeing myself divide into three different people," she said finally. "And hearing three different voices talking to me." She paused, frightened, her eyes searching his face, hoping that he wouldn't think she had flipped out. "Earlier, on the terrace at the club, didn't my voice sound different to you?"

"Sure," he agreed easily. "It sounded sexy. You're telling me you turn into a whole different person every time you feel sexy?"

"Sort of, but not exactly. There's a part of me who's really turned on most of the time. And then there's another part who doesn't approve."

"Of sex?"

"Of much of anything. Certainly not of sex. And she's very shy. She was the one who got so frightened on the dance floor. She couldn't breathe. I thought she—we—were going to suffocate. And then there's a baby part, who's very small. She can't even write; she only prints."

"These different . . . people . . . write?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. I'm keeping a journal. I started it in Atlanta, and it turns out that each of them writes very differently. The handwriting isn't at all the same."

"Oh." There was a pause in the darkness, and Kathy was frightened by the unfamiliar note of uncertainty in her husband's voice. Oh, God! she thought. He *does* think I'm crazy. Bob was the rock-solid foundation of her life, the one person she could count on to be on her side no matter what. Until now. His calmness, although irritating at times, had always been a crucial constant in her life. Bob would take care of everything. Bob would manage. But was this craziness too much for him? Was it too much to ask that he accept this too?

When he spoke again, she was reassured. "I don't pretend to understand any of this, hon," he said quietly, "but I love you, and I want you to be happy. If this thing scares you, and it does sound scary, maybe you should call the guy that therapist told you about."

"Well, maybe. I don't know. I'm just so confused and mixed up. I keep crying all the time." She was too frightened to tell him about inviting Len up to her room, or about the shopping spree she didn't remember. "I guess I should, because I think I'm really crazy." She began to cry softly.

He held her close. "You're not crazy, Kath, I guarantee that. Let's not have any more talk about craziness. You don't have to be crazy to get help." He paused. "What I would like, though, is to meet these others. You know me, I like to know exactly who I'm dealing with."

She breathed a sigh of relief. "Well, the thing that triggered it before was pot. I smoked a little at a party that night," she

added hastily. "Maybe you could get some and we could have a conference." The concept was so absurd, she found herself giggling for the first time in weeks. And she felt closer to Bob than she had in months. Sharing this nightmare with him was helping to close the gulf between them that had been created by her reunion with Eddie.

Chapter 5



When the door to the Upper East Side penthouse opened, after what seemed like forever, Kathy found herself looking up into an extraordinary gaze. Dr. Caldwell was tall and dark, and his eyes were brown and expressive, penetrating yet kind. She suspected that he was the kind of man who could see right through a person. "Hello," she said, "I'm Kathy Roth."

"Of course," he replied in a soft but clear voice. "I was expecting you. Kick off your shoes and come on in." In stocking feet Kathy was at least a foot shorter than this slender man, and as she padded after him, she felt a little girl again.

As far as Kathy could tell, the apartment wasn't set up as a formal office. Beyond the foyer was a generous living room, white-carpeted—as good a reason as any for the no-shoes request, she decided—and furnished with a number of modular seating pieces covered in brown velvet. Dr. Caldwell ushered her into this room, and she settled nervously at one end of the sectional sofa. There were woven hangings in warm earth tones on the walls, a number of large, healthy plants in different corners, and a door that opened onto an immaculate terrace whose plantings were just coming to life after the long winter. It was a sunny, comfortable room, not overwhelming in any way. Kathy was glad it wasn't a dark, book-lined office. That, she thought, would be intimidating. And there was no door to close. She wasn't shut in.

Kathy had done her homework and knew the doctor's credentials; what she didn't know was how he would react to her. Dr. Caldwell had earned his Ph.D. at one university, had taught at two others, and his initial clinical experience had been with children. His approach to therapy was integrative, incorporating elements of transactional analysis, Gestalt therapy and traditional Freudian theory. He saw very few private patients but conducted a number of groups. Teaching occupied a good deal of his time, and he traveled extensively in the United States and Europe, training therapists and lecturing. He was a frequent keynote speaker at professional conferences, well-respected for his innovative theories of psychotherapy.

But his résumé and his excellent reputation in the field couldn't tell Kathy what she most needed to know: Would he believe her? She was terrified that he would either dismiss her as a phony or tell her that she was really crazy.

"You said on the phone that you'd been experiencing dissociative episodes," Dr. Caldwell said quietly, having settled comfortably across from her, "and that Len Brown suggested you call me. Do you want to tell me about it?"

"I thought it would be easiest to show you," Kathy began, clutching her purse. "But I don't have any marijuana. I smoked pot in Atlanta—that's when it happened. I don't know what to do without it. I can't just make it happen . . ." She felt close to tears. He wasn't going to believe her. There was turmoil inside, but she had no control over it. It was as though the alien voices were churning around, but to no purpose.

"I'd rather not use any drugs, Mrs. Roth. Let's just talk, starting close to home. Tell me about your husband."

"Bob? He's been wonderful. You see, there was Eddie, and I'd loved him all my life, and then I saw him again . . . but I couldn't hurt Bob. Not when he's been so good to me and supportive . . ." Her voice trailed off. I'm not making any sense! she thought desperately, silently. She took a deep breath. Slow down, she told herself. "Let me start again. I went to Atlanta to get away, to sort out some conflicts I'd been feeling after I ran into an old boyfriend again after many years. But instead of finding clarity, I found chaos." He'll never believe me, she thought bleakly. Who would? She started to cry.

Dr. Caldwell leaned forward. "I'd like to ask someone to join us," he said, "another therapist."

Kathy was bewildered. Why did he want someone else to talk to her? Was she so crazy she needed two doctors? "Why?"

"Because she has very valuable insights," he replied in a reasonable tone of voice. "I think she can help us get started."

Kathy still didn't understand, but she supposed it made sense somehow. She nodded through her tears. "Okay," she mumbled.

He raised his voice just slightly. "Marian?" he called.

A door opened and an attractive young woman with very long blond hair entered the room from what appeared to be the kitchen. Dr. Caldwell motioned for her to join them. "This is Marian," he said. "She frequently leads groups with me. I had discussed your call with her." He turned to Marian. "Kathy is eager to explore the dissociative experience, but doesn't feel she can control it herself," he explained.

"Why don't we just ask to speak with one of the others?" Marian suggested in a pleasant, well-modulated voice. She looked directly at Kathy. "Is there someone besides Kathy Roth who would like to speak with us?"

Kathy felt the shrinking sensation, and she wondered who was about to take over. Would she lose touch, or would she be able to listen? Eventually, she loosened her death grip on her pocketbook and put it aside. With one quick motion she tossed her head, causing the blond waves to fall into place, and crossed her legs, which made her skirt ride up provocatively. She looked from one to the other boldly, as if memorizing their features. "You're a good-looking guy," she said finally in the tough, throaty voice. "I think we might get along just fine. But I don't want to work with a woman. No offense," she added, apparently as an afterthought. "I mean, you seem okay, but . . ." She nodded in Marian's direction, but her eyes remained glued to Matthew. "I am glad you called on me, *she's* so stupid she doesn't know what to do with us. And scared. But me? I'm not afraid of anything, if you know what I mean." She laughed and stretched, then got up and wandered around the room, taking it all in. "What's the story with you two?" she continued casually. "You married or what?"

"You were talking about *your* marriage, I think," Matthew replied easily. "How do you feel about Bob? And who's the other man you're so worried about?"

"Worried? I ain't worried about a thing! Certainly not about that schmuck Hart." She sat down again, draping herself along

the sofa, her skirt revealing her thigh. "He was the wimp's high-school sweetheart, see, and she's never gotten over him. But she never fucked him either, so I don't know what the big deal is." She chortled, just realizing something. "Unless, of course, that is the big deal." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "You see, *she* ain't never fucked *anybody*. She just watches me." She tossed her head contemptuously. "I think she's a pervert, but mostly I don't care." She was giving Matthew a real once-over with her eyes, wondering what it would feel like to play with the bulge in his pants. He looked like a good fuck. If only this nosy blonde would go away!

"What about Bob?" he asked quietly. "Do you like your husband?"

The conversation was beginning to bore her. "For starters," she pointed out in an exasperated tone of voice, "he ain't *my* husband. He's Kathy's husband. I'm Prose." They were *shrinks* for God's sake. You'd think they'd understand the simplest things. "But I'll answer the question anyway. Yeah, I like Bob. He doesn't have a taste for my kind of fun, exactly, but he's a great fuck. World class." The statement was a dare.

"Do you sleep with other men?" Marian asked.

She was tired of sharing this gorgeous new man with his—whatever she was. "None of your business!" she snapped angrily, then she turned to Matthew. "I just want you to know, Doc, that I ain't too happy about the prospect of sharing any secrets with a *woman*. I get along much better with men. You know what I mean?"

"Earlier you said, 'She's so stupid,' and you referred to 'the wimp.' Who were you talking about?" Matthew's tone was mild, but it felt like a slap in the face. He was bored with her. He wanted to talk about the others. She jumped from her seat and strode furiously over to one of the wall hangings, her back to the therapists. "Fuck *you!*"

Her body seemed to shrink, though her posture became more rigid. She fumbled with the buttons on her blouse, and finally, cautiously, she turned around, her eyes filled with terror as they darted around the room. She coughed, then, taking small, precise steps, she returned to the sofa and sat, pulling her skirt down and pressing her knees together. She wouldn't look either of them in the eye, staring instead at the carpet. "I need some help, I guess." The voice was a whisper, almost inaudible. "But I'm so frightened."

"Who are you?" Marian asked kindly.

"I'm Cici."

"How do *you* feel about Bob?"

Her eyes darted up. "I like him. Although he's sometimes thoughtless. He doesn't like me. He only wants sex." There was a long silence. "And I belong to Eddie, you see. I'll always love Eddie, no matter what. I have his pin. Someday we'll be together." Something that might have been the trace of a smile passed across the woman's ashen, immobile face. "Unless I'm bad and I drive him away . . ."

"So Kathy's married to Bob, but you aren't?" Marian asked.

"Oh, I'm too young to be married. I'm only fifteen. Mommy hardly even lets me go on dates. Not that I get asked on many. She's scared I'll become a . . . tramp. Nobody would marry a girl like that." There was another silence. "I'm sorry. Forgive me. I know I'm doing it all wrong. I'm the stupid one, you know." Tears began. "This is just too hard. I'm not good with strangers."

The woman seemed to sink into herself, eyes glazed, and the room was quiet for several minutes. Finally, Matthew said, "Kathy? Can you talk to us now?"

She felt as though she were swimming in the bottom of a deep well, obeying his low, quiet voice, a voice that she seemed to have known all her life. "Yes," she managed. "I'm here." She paused, wondering what had just happened. Had she blacked out again? With difficulty she remembered the two voices, the same ones that she had heard in Atlanta. Did he believe her? Could he explain what was happening to her?

"How do you feel?"

"Tired. Shaky. I didn't think it would happen so easily." There was a catch in her voice. "I'm scared that it will happen all the time, that I won't have any control, or that *I'll* go away and never come back. Whoever *I* am." There were tears on her cheeks. "I'm crazy, aren't I? Do I have to go to a hospital?"

"No," he said flatly. "I don't think you're crazy; you're certainly not psychotic. You can make yourself *think* you're crazy, but you're not. And you can just as easily decide to be healthy. You're in control, even when another aspect of your personality is acting out."

"Another aspect?" Kathy said. Didn't he realize how easily she had lost control? "Acting out?"

"Yes. I think what's happening is that you're personalizing

different experiences that happened to you in the past. Like the experience of being fifteen and in love for the first time. And if you think of it as an experience—an unclosed experience—you won't feel so crazy. Putting names on these episodes probably isn't such a good idea. Instead, try to remember that each one is a part of an experience."

"I don't know." Kathy was doubtful. "Each part seems so bewildering and so distinct that I find what you're saying difficult to believe. But I guess looking at each 'experience' as a whole other person does make me feel crazy. I don't know who I am or what I want. Sometimes I don't remember where I've been or why I've bought odd-looking clothes. Maybe that's why I'm getting headaches and feeling so tired all the time."

"Could be," he agreed.

"Okay, I'll try," she said finally. "I'll try to think of these things that happen as experiences."

"Good. And I'm willing to work with you in doing just that."

Kathy felt a huge sense of relief. He *was* going to take her on. She had found someone who would help her.

"Before we set up a schedule of appointments," he continued, "I think I should explain a little about how I work." He gestured, drawing Kathy's attention to the fact that he was in shirt-sleeves with no tie, and of course shoeless. "As you can see, my personal approach is fairly low-key, certainly not formal. *I* want to feel comfortable while I work, and I want you to be comfortable too. Most of all, I want you to feel safe here. Here is where you can say anything, express any emotion. Sometimes I'll ask questions, sometimes I'll just listen—but not often!" He and Marian both laughed.

"He's not exactly a strict Freudian analyst, stroking his cheek and saying, 'Hmmm . . . very interesting,'" she elaborated.

"It's now the beginning of April," he went on, "and we'll be here until the beginning of July. Then we'll be gone for ten weeks."

"What?" Kathy didn't like the sound of that. How was she supposed to cope alone all summer? She had just found him, and she had to lose him so soon?

"Don't worry. You'll be fine," Matthew said. "I travel a lot, and I'm periodically gone for a month or six weeks at a time—in the winter too. But I find I am able to provide continuity for some patients, and the breaks can even be beneficial. You'll

see. Besides, we don't even know yet the duration of the therapy we're talking about."

"Duration?"

"How long we'll be working together. I want to see you privately at first, and then add a group if that seems appropriate." Kathy shivered at the thought of exposing herself to more strangers. "Marian and I also conduct weekend-long group sessions—we call them marathons—that I'll want you to attend. In fact, there's one scheduled for the first weekend in May. It should be a good introduction for you. The intensive work can be very helpful."

"Okay, I guess." Actually, it sounded terrifying, but Kathy realized there was nothing else she could do. Her whole life was a ship breaking apart in a storm, and this Matthew Caldwell was offering a safe harbor where she could try to put it back together. She *had* to trust him. She had no other options.

"Okay." He smiled, rose and held out his hand. "I'll see you next week at this hour, and remember—these episodes are just experiences."

"Hello, this is Mrs. Roth. May I speak with Mr. Hart, please?" It was time to give up Eddie, Kathy had decided. She couldn't cope with *that* strain on top of everything else. And one side effect of her "condition"—whatever it was—was that it made an extramarital affair, however passionate and all-consuming, seem less important by comparison. The issue, for Kathy, was survival, not romance. Maybe when she was better, when she was sure of herself again, but not now.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Roth, but Mr. Hart no longer works here." The woman's voice was pleasant and even. She couldn't know that her report threatened to make Kathy's heart stop.

"I see. Well . . ." Kathy's mind was churning. How could he betray her again? Run off—abandon her! Be rational, she told herself. *You* were going to break it off with *him*, after all.

"I believe he's doing some consulting from home," the secretary offered into the silence. "Perhaps you could reach him there."

"Oh, yes. Yes, of course. Thank you very much." Well, at least there was a reason he hadn't called, she thought. He wouldn't call from home. She sighed. He cares the best he can, I suppose, she thought sadly.

I'll never forgive him! Cici screamed silently. *And I'll never forgive myself. It's all my fault! I'm not worthy of him, and he knows it. I'll never see him again, and I love him so much. I just want to die.*

Kathy was shocked by the intensity of the outburst. She didn't know what to do, how to calm this other person who was shrieking inside her head. She pressed her hands to her temples, feeling a bad headache coming on. Maybe if she took some aspirin. The face in the bathroom mirror was gray, and her hair looked limp. She picked up the blow dryer, but it felt as though it weighed a ton.

Don't be a fool! the brassy voice said in a more sensible tone for a change. *He's a jerk, and he just did what he had to do. It didn't have nothin' to do with you. I know what he's about. And he can't hold a candle to Bob.* The dryer was suddenly lighter, and she started doing her hair. At least the Eddie problem is solved, she told herself. He was unreachable, and that was as it should be. No more moping about Eddie! Inside, someone was crying.

Shakily, Kathy started to dress. She had a meeting with Tim in the city, and then she and Bob were having dinner together. Keeping busy was the best thing she could do, she said to herself. She would ignore the voices. They were *experiences*. Dr. Caldwell had said so. And she had to solve her business problems. She had promised Bob that she would follow through. *Nothing* was going to make her break her word.

They had chosen a quiet, low-key restaurant, and Kathy was glad. She was also glad that Bob was there, waiting for her. She didn't want to sit around by herself, thinking.

"How was your day?" Bob asked. "Is Tim keeping up his end?"

"I don't know, to be honest. I'm worried about the pattern-maker he hired. But he says the guy is first-rate, top of his class at FIT and all that, so I guess it's all right. As you can imagine, though, the patterns have to be perfect. We've got tons of orders to fill, so now it's up to Tim to produce the clothes."

"And you don't think he can?"

"He seems a little unsure of himself on that score, and it scares me. He's so comfortable with the creative end, but now—it's as though he looks to me before he makes any

decision at all. 'Should we buy fabric from this source or that?' 'Should we use firm A or firm B for the manufacturing?' I thought he was going to handle all of that by himself."

"It's a lot for you to have on your shoulders," Bob pointed out, "especially right now."

Kathy smiled. "Well, you know, working is good for me. I need the outlet." She sipped her coffee. "And when I work, I don't think, I feel safe—safe from the voices I've been hearing these past few days, and safe from facing the mirror, seeing the girl in the reflection and not knowing who she is." She paused with a sudden memory of other times she'd heard the voices, times when she was still in high school. She shook her head. "What about your day?"

"It was fine." He smiled a conspiratorial smile. "And I even managed to make that purchase we spoke about the other night." Kathy had mixed feelings about repeating the Atlanta experience, but she had agreed to try. Maybe having it planned ahead of time would give her some sense of control.

"I know you said you liked this Dr. Caldwell," Bob said later, after they checked into a hotel. "But you've seemed—I don't know—sort of low since you saw him. How was he?" He bent his head over the amateurish joint he was trying to roll.

"I'm glad he said I wasn't crazy," Kathy began slowly, "but I don't know about treating these voices in me as experiences. It doesn't seem right somehow. Though I've been trying hard." She looked tired, she knew, and she felt very old. "I haven't listened to any of my 'experiences,' and if I hear a voice, I ignore it and do something else."

"But that doesn't make you feel better, obviously."

She smiled slightly. "I feel such an overpowering sense of sadness, as though I'm swimming just to keep from drowning. I've been sad for days now." Her voice caught at the back of her throat. Bob lit the cigarette and handed it to her. "We probably shouldn't be doing this. I don't think Dr. Caldwell would approve." She took a deep puff and tried to relax.

"I guess I always knew I had parts to me," she went on quietly, "but I was ashamed when I felt like a prostitute or like a baby. The whispery one, the one who wants to be a good girl all the time, is the most like the way I've been for all these years, I guess." Her voice dropped even lower. "Mostly, I'm just terrified. . . ."

All of a sudden the shrinking sensation started. "Hold me—" Kathy began, and then it was as though she were a baby, curled up in Bob's lap, sobbing. "I'm scared," she cried. "So scared, so scared."

Bob tightened his grip and rocked gently, as though calming one of his children. "There, there," he said.

They rocked silently for a while, and then the baby spoke again, in a tiny whisper. "If you hadn't hugged me, I think I would have died. I almost *did* die in Atlanta. I felt like I was being smothered. Someone was sitting on me, some big person who wanted me to die." The sobs began again, and he continued rocking. The figure in his arms was so small, so light, so vulnerable.

And then the body changed. From limp, it became tense, no longer childlike, but womanly. The grip around his neck tightened, and her head was thrown back so he could see her. Her eyes glittered dangerously. "I would *never* let the baby die," the strident voice declared fiercely. "Or any of them. I never did and I never would. I love them!" She turned to look at Bob. "But I'm angry with you," she said petulantly, "because you never noticed me. I'm sure you could tell when it was me in bed with you, couldn't you? Hmm?"

"Of course!"

"Bullshit!" The woman rose, stretched and started wandering languidly around the room, examining it as if she were seeing it for the first time. Her hair was in attractive disarray, her color was high and her movements were fluid. She seemed completely at ease with her body, not the least bit awkward or tentative, as Kathy often was.

"I'm Prose," she said with a provocative look. "I suck and I fuck and I love it! Sometimes I feel like I could fuck any man around, the more the better!" She watched as a shadow passed across his face. "What a schmuck I was! I used to think I was a nymph." She smiled, remembering other times she'd felt sexy and powerful. "Now I know better. It's lucky you're a great fuck and always ready." Bob said nothing, but Prose didn't wait for him to speak anyway.

"I get bored! That's the problem with being out all day. I want to fly, do something exciting! One thing's for sure—no more living with this fucking compliance. That Cici shit is a bore, and I'm too strong for it now. Life's too much for a compliant kid all alone. It took all her energy just keeping me

in. I can see her watching me through a glass window, always looking down. One day I'm going to smash that window and be out. I have a feeling she wants to open it, but I think it would be more fun to smash it with a rock . . . or maybe a cock! Ha-ha.

"She loves watching me have sex. I don't like that; it holds me back. You're smart. You knew something was wrong last night. You just didn't know that the others were watching."

Having toured the room, she was tired of it. She turned back to Bob and changed the subject abruptly. "That Matthew Caldwell has a lot of explaining to do!" she declared. "And I wouldn't ever go back there if the man wasn't such a gorgeous—" She stopped herself, suddenly aware that it was Bob she was talking to. She crossed over to where he was sitting and lowered herself into his lap. "He reminds me a lot of you," she said coyly.

"Oh, really?"

"I *ain't* an experience," Prose went on firmly, wrapping herself around him. "And neither are Cici or the baby. We're *people*, and that shrink had better realize that if he's going to do us any good." She kissed his ear. "Cici's so freaked out, she just sits in a corner crying all the time. And Baby rocks. But I'll set Caldwell straight next week. I'll let him know what's what." Especially if that blond isn't around, she thought. "Hey, Bob?" She ran her tongue around the rim of his ear and was delighted to feel him respond. "I'd suck you off right now," she said calmly, "but Cici's too close. And I'm *tired* of her watching. Let her make her own fun!"

She got up and turned her back, and Bob saw the loose posture become rigid, as though a rod had just been inserted up the woman's spine. She crossed awkwardly to a straight chair next to the desk. She smoothed her hair behind her ears, then turned around. It was still the same face, but it was pale, without highlights, and the eyes were dull and wary.

"I'm jealous of Prose," Cici explained hesitantly, "because you like making love to her best. . . ." A blush colored her white cheeks.

"I don't think that's true," Bob tried gently. "I make love to Kathy."

Cici went on as if he hadn't spoken. She was used to him not paying any attention to her. "I'm fifteen. I'm the one keeping everybody back. I can't hold a conversation. I'm stupid. I feel

ugly. I want to die. I'm the one who came out on those Monday mornings after you left for work. I always felt so lonely, so desperate. I hated myself. I didn't think I would ever like myself and that no one else would either.

"I want part of me to fade away or die. You don't even know me. It's Prose you like and respond to. I know I'm not as pretty as Prose. I'm dowdy-looking, with one long braid going down my back. Like my sister, Nan.

"I'm so confused. When Kathy sees me, she sees part of Nan's face. Maybe I identify with her. She always took me places. She used to like me as long as I did what she said. I always do what people want, but that doesn't help them like me. The others do what they want and still have friends. I never knew they existed before. But every time I thought of killing myself in a car or somewhere, part of me knew I never would. I want to work with Dr. Caldwell. I need help the most."

She sat quietly, her head down, her hands folded in her lap. After a long time Bob spoke. "Kathy?"

His wife lifted her head.

"It's just so complicated," he said. They looked at each other. "I don't think you're crazy, hon, but I do think you should keep seeing the doctor." She nodded, and a tear squeezed out of one eye. He crossed to her and took her in his arms. "You know me—I love challenges, and I'll try anything. But the stakes are too high here. We do need some help."

Kathy was weary to the bone. "I feel spent this time," she said softly. "In Atlanta I felt high, but now my throat and chest burn." It was tougher because she was so frightened and confused, she thought. And because she had more to risk and lose with Bob.

When Dr. Caldwell opened his front door for Kathy's next session, he was confronted by a woman who bore little resemblance to Kathy Roth.

Prose had taken over as Kathy began to get dressed. She had chosen skin-tight velvet jeans and a peasant-style blouse that revealed a lot of cleavage. Her makeup was dramatic—turquoise eye shadow emphasized her blue eyes, and lots of rouge heightened her already healthy color.

"Hi, Doc," she said gaily, kicking off spike-heeled sandals

and brushing past him into the foyer. She looked around with undisguised curiosity. There was no evidence of Marian. She smiled. "Haven't you got someplace we could go that offers a little more privacy than *this*?" She gestured toward the open living room.

"There are a couple of different rooms here that Marian and I use for therapy," he answered calmly, "but I like this one best for you and me." He preceded her into the room. "It's got the most space in it, and you seem like a pretty active person to me, someone who likes to move around. I wouldn't want you to feel cramped." He sat down.

Prose paced. "I wouldn't mind feeling a little cramped with you, if you know what I mean." She frowned. "But first, we gotta settle something. You're making us all crazy."

"Oh? How?"

"By calling us 'experiences.' I'm *real*, you jerk, and I don't want to have anything to do with you if you don't know that." She went over and ran her hand across the side of his face. "I'm just as real as that," she insisted, then smiled seductively. "And I can get even more real if you're interested." Her eyes were glued to his crotch.

"I didn't say you weren't real," he replied mildly. "An experience is very real. It's what happens to you."

"But I'm a *person*!" she went on. "A whole person with a life. And with needs . . . and desires."

"I understand that. And I didn't mean to upset you by talking about 'experiences.' I thought dealing with the different parts that way would put your mind at ease."

"Well, you were *wrong*!" Prose finally settled on the sofa, as close to Dr. Caldwell as she could get.

"Okay," he agreed easily. "I was wrong. I'm only human, after all, and it probably won't be the last time I'm wrong about something that has to do with you."

Prose frowned. The apology was fine, but she didn't seem to be having any sexual effect on him, and it was frustrating. She knew she looked good; she had been very careful with her appearance that morning. It puzzled her. She wasn't getting the reaction she was used to, but she wasn't getting a negative one either. He didn't seem to want her, but he wasn't rejecting her. It was definitely an odd situation. I'll wear him down, she thought to herself. Now that he admits I'm real, I'll get to him—I'll get him to come!

* * *

She sat silently in one corner of an old sofa, as far from the other people in the room as she could get. Her knees were drawn up to her chest, her arms were wrapped around her legs and her face was buried in her thighs. She was in the country somewhere, she knew that much, in the house that Matthew and Marian used for marathons. A sweet-faced young woman named Alice had driven her, but aside from exchanging first names, they hadn't had much of a conversation. And now she was completely paralyzed. She couldn't even see, couldn't register the surroundings. It was as if she were blind. She didn't know what the room looked like; she wasn't sure how many other people were present. The only thing she knew was that she didn't want to be here. She was terrified.

The others were talking, but she couldn't make out the words. The sound was like a low murmur, occasionally punctuated by a cry or an exclamation. There were lights on in the room, so she guessed it must be nighttime. She hugged herself tighter, took a deep breath and held it. She was going to die, here, with all these strangers. She had to disappear. Where was her mommy? Why wasn't there anyone to take care of her?

"Hi, Kathy, how are you doing?"

The tall man with the dark hair and the kind voice was right next to her. She'd heard about him, but she didn't really know him. She lifted her head a fraction and peered out.

"There's no need to be frightened," he went on, his voice soft and soothing. "Everyone here just wants to help you. Would you like to meet the others?"

"No," she whispered. "I'm too little. I'm too scared."

"That's okay too." She felt his arm around her shoulder. It felt good. She decided he must be a friend. "You just stay right here and we'll wait until you feel a little more comfortable."

Another voice broke in, not as nice a voice. She concentrated very hard. It was important that she understand. "Hey, Matthew, I thought the rule was no special treatment. If Kathy has a problem, why doesn't she work? That's why we're here, isn't it?"

She squeezed her eyes shut. She had been right. They didn't like her. They didn't want her here. She should leave.

She started to cry, and she felt the tall man's arm tighten around her. Matthew. That was his name.

"Kathy's in a vulnerable state right now, Bill," Matthew began quietly. "She's like a very small child in a room full of strangers. I would guess that she's had many frightening experiences in her life, and that she needs our support and protection in order to come out and talk to us about them."

Alice chimed in. "But you're encouraging her to behave in a childish way," she pointed out, "while with me, you're always on my case to grow up and take responsibility!"

His voice stayed soft and even. "You've already faced the experiences in your past that needed facing, and my treatment plan for you, Alice, is that you develop more maturity. What is it, do you suppose, about my holding Kathy like this that triggers that reaction in you?"

There was a silence. "Jealousy, I suppose," Alice finally admitted. "I'd like to be a little girl again sometimes and have you for a father."

"We'll talk about that in just a minute. First, I want to explain that Kathy and I have just started working together, so it would be unfair to expect her to be as comfortable here as the rest of you are." He paused. "I want to wait for her to feel safe enough to share her own feelings with us, but I'm sure she won't mind if I explain that she has developed some powerful defense mechanisms, the kind you don't need unless some pretty terrible things have happened to you."

"Like what?" Bill asked. Now his voice sounded nicer, interested instead of mean.

"We haven't found that out yet. As you all know," Matthew explained, "everyone goes through certain developmental stages, and a person can become fixated at any given stage—for a variety of reasons. Well, Kathy became fixated at a number of different points. I'm not sure yet how many. And around each of these fixations she's developed a whole personality." He turned to her. "Tell me, how old are you?" he asked gently.

She very much wanted to please him, even though she didn't understand a lot of what he was saying. He was her only protection against these strangers. "I'm three," she whispered.

"You mean she really believes she's three?" Alice asked.

"No," Matthew replied calmly. "I mean she *is* three."

She smiled inside. He believed in her. He really did.

"To avoid facing some specific trauma," he explained, "Kathy

has created discrete and separate personalities. This one seems very young. Marian and I have met two others."

She sensed movement in the room as people shifted their bodies. They think I'm a freak, she thought bleakly, squeezing her eyes shut tight. I don't know how much more of this I can stand.

"Each personality is separate," Matthew went on, "and each one has its own ego states, not to mention likes and dislikes, memories, life-style and particular behaviors." He turned to her. "Are you okay, little girl?" he asked softly.

"I'm not a little girl," she whimpered, "I'm Baby." All at once Kathy's head came up and she looked around, as if emerging from a dream. She managed to look around the room. Everyone *was* staring at her, but their looks were not unkind. The one called Bill was smiling at her in a friendly way. She felt safe with Matthew's arm around her. "I'm sorry if I don't fit in here," she said tentatively. "I don't want to make trouble."

"We're not too concerned with 'fitting in,'" Marian noted from the other side of the room. "In fact, we try to make our groups as heterogeneous as possible. The world is not composed of people who are just like each other." Her voice was reassuring. "I'm sure the others will learn a great deal from you, Kathy, and they also have a lot to offer you."

Bill spoke up. "I'm sorry if I sounded hostile before," he said. "One of my problems is shooting off my mouth before I know the whole story. I'm glad you've joined us, Kathy. Welcome."

Matthew smiled at her. "Would you like to work some more, Kathy?" He gestured toward the center of the room, and she saw that there were some mattresses spread out there. He stood up.

"No," she answered quickly. "Not right now. Is that all right?"

"Sure." He walked back into the center. "Okay, Alice, you get in here. Let's talk about this jealousy of yours, the desire to be little again and why you don't want to grow up."

Cici could barely force herself to go up to the doorman and tell him that she was going to Dr. Caldwell's. She had to walk around the block four times before she managed it, and even though he was very nice, panic welled up as the elevator rose.

Why are they making me do this? she wondered. I don't want to be here.

"Hello," Dr. Caldwell said with a warm smile. "You're a little late—was the traffic bad?"

"No." She placed her shoes neatly by the door and followed him into the big room. It was a hot day in May, but she was wearing a long-sleeved high-necked dress with a full skirt. She settled primly on the sofa. She realized that he was waiting for more of an answer, and she blushed. "I'm shy, you know. I had a hard time just coming in the door. I guess I'm intimidated by doormen." She stared down at her feet. Why was she wearing polish on her toenails? That was vulgar! What would he think?

"I'm amazed at how your appearance changes from week to week," Matthew noted. The woman in front of him wore no makeup, not even lipstick, and her hair was tucked back. It didn't even look as blond as usual.

Cici wrung her hands. "It's not from week to week." She was terrified, but she was also stubborn. "It's from person to person. You *know* we don't look alike." Over the course of the past six weeks the work with Dr. Caldwell had gradually helped each part to be aware of the others. At first, only Prose had known what Cici and Baby did and thought. Cici knew that she sometimes watched a bad lady do dirty things with men, but she always tried very hard to forget. Baby was terrified. She didn't know anything—except that she was all alone.

Matthew waited for Cici to continue, but she didn't. "Why did *you* come this time?" he asked finally.

She took a deep breath. "Because of something you said to Prose at the beginning," she said. "You admitted you were wrong, and I've been thinking about that ever since. So they said I should come and talk to you."

"What's so unusual about being wrong? Everyone is, once in a while. Nobody's perfect—certainly not me."

"But you're *supposed* to be perfect," Cici managed in a quiet little voice. "At least, I am. My sister, Nan, says I always have to be a good little girl. And I am." She shifted slightly on the sofa and winced as a twinge of pain shot through her upper back.

"Is something the matter?"

"I must have slept in a funny position." The pain was like a knife, twisting, and she gasped.

Matthew crossed to the small figure and sat next to her. "May I touch the spot where you're tensing your back?" he asked.

By his tone of voice she knew she could say no, but she wanted him to feel the pain. Maybe his hand would make the hurt go away. She nodded.

Gently, he began massaging a spot just beneath her shoulder blade. "I'll bet this ache has something to do with always being good," he said.

As the pressure increased, Kathy winced. Cici always causes the pain, she thought to herself, but she doesn't stay around to experience it. "Ouch! You're hurting me."

His next words startled her. "Okay, Nan, why are you doing that?" he said in an unusually sharp tone of voice.

All at once she could see her older sister's face so clearly—or was it Cici's? Strange emotions flooded her as Matthew kept up the pressure on her back. "Nan was so very lonely," she said aloud, realizing it for the first time. "I was her outlet. I was her doll. Maybe I still am!" She had a flash of a vivid image. "She's sticking a knife in my back!" she exclaimed.

Matthew's tone was calm. "So she betrayed you, did she? She knifed you?"

"Yes," Kathy realized. "And she doesn't want me to trust you either. She wants me to trust only her. But I don't. Not anymore."

"But you did, as a child?"

"Oh, yes. There were just the two of us. She took care of me."

"What about your mother?"

A shudder went through her. Her eyes closed, and when they opened again, the color had drained from her face. She shrank away from him. "My mother is a very important person," Cici explained in a small voice. "Very important and very busy." She fell silent.

"What do you remember about her?"

She sighed, thinking. Why did he want her to remember? It hurt to remember. The whole idea was to forget. He was still looking at her. "I remember the day I was born, the day I—Cici—began," she said finally. "There had been a big fight. My mother and Sherman, that's my father, had been having a terrible argument all morning. I was sitting by the banister watching and listening. Then Mother went up to her room and

Daddy stormed out of the house. I went to the door of her room and I saw that she had changed into her nice brown checked suit and her brown hat with the feather in it. Her traveling clothes. There was a suitcase open on the bed, and she was sitting at her dressing table writing a letter. She didn't have any of *my* things in her suitcase. She was leaving home without me." The voice dropped, but the tone remained utterly unemotional, a frightened journalist reporting the facts of a disaster. "I thought she was leaving because of me. I decided to be good. I decided to be Cici. And Nan liked me better when I was quiet and good too."

"Did your mother leave?"

Cici's tone was cool. "No. She was there at dinner. So was Daddy. They were laughing."

"How old were you? Did you ask them about it?"

"I don't know exactly how old I was." Her brow furrowed. "I went to school, I think. And I would never ask anybody *anything*. I'm a good girl."

Matthew tried another tack. "Tell me about your father. Did you like him?"

Her head went back and she rotated her neck, leaning against him. She uncrossed her legs and stretched them out in front of her. Prose was very pleasantly aware of being in physical contact with the unattainable Dr. Caldwell, and she smiled, her cheeks flushed. "I *adored* my daddy," she replied eagerly. "But he wasn't around much. When he *was* there, I would sit in his lap and rub his head. He *loved* that. He *loved* it when I got dressed up and looked pretty. And then I would rub his head and he would say, 'That's my princess! Do you need any money, princess? Is there anything you want?' I could wrap him around my finger."

"And did *you* like that?" Matthew asked.

"What d'ya mean? Of *course* I liked it. I got everything I wanted. When he was around."

"How did that make you feel, pleasing him and then having him offer you money?"

There was a long silence, and after a time Prose began to shift uncomfortably. "I'm not a whore!" she declared suddenly. "I don't buy love by selling myself." She rose and started to pace around the room. Her gait faltered in mid-stride, and when she turned, she was much calmer.

She returned to the couch and sat opposite Matthew. "You made *her* pretty uncomfortable," Kathy observed.

"How about you?" Matthew asked. "What do *you* think about your father, about what Prose was saying?"

"I guess I missed having a father," she replied slowly. "He wasn't there for me."

"Who is Baby frightened of?"

The question took her completely by surprise. "What?"

"I know Baby is afraid," he continued calmly. "But *who* is she afraid of?"

Kathy saw her father's face, large and laughing, but she pushed it out of her mind. What did it mean? It felt crazy to her, very crazy. "Nobody," she said. "Baby's afraid of nobody . . . and everybody."

"We've learned a great deal in quite a short time," Matthew said in early July, "but there's still a long way to go."

"I know," Kathy replied. "*Boy*, do I know." She was sitting on the brown velvet sofa, her feet just touching the floor, her shoulders slouched forward. She looked intently at her toes and tried not to cry. "I'm so scared of losing control," she whispered. "How am I going to manage while you're gone?" A tear rolled down her cheek. "I'm such a mess inside! I'm afraid to answer the door—even if it's just the mailman. I don't know *who's* going to turn the knob." She was sobbing now. "I'm getting *worse*, not *better*!"

"I don't think that's true," he replied quietly. "Exploration is often a disturbing activity to begin. But the more you know—the more we understand—the better able we'll be to establish control and deal with the symptoms."

"Prose is not a *symptom*," Kathy cried, "and neither are Cici or Baby. At least not to *me*! They *hurt* and they make *me* hurt! I wish you'd never made me experience them! I was better off when I didn't know, when I could block off! And now, just when I've found you and I think you're going to be able to *help*, you're going away and leaving me alone."

"I'll be seeing you in just a little more than a month," Matthew pointed out calmly, "when I come back for the group session in August."

She looked up, unmollified. "A group isn't the same," she muttered. "They're *strangers*."

"You know them from the marathon in May," he said logically. "They're not strangers—they care about you. And so do I."

She sighed. "I guess *one* of us has to be rational," she admitted. "But I do feel abandoned. Sometimes hearing Prose or Cici is okay. But sometimes it's really scary, you know? And then I just feel crazy. And you won't be here to tell me I'm not."

"But I won't be far away." He pulled out a sheet of paper. "I've written down addresses and phone numbers of all the places I'll be during July and August. I'll be as close as a telephone."

She took the paper, folded it and placed it unread into her purse. She knew the hour was over, but she didn't want to walk out the door. It was as though there were a cliff outside rather than an elevator, and she had to spend the entire summer clinging to the face of that cliff with her fingernails.

"You *can* make it, you know," he continued, sitting forward in his chair and catching her eye. "You're going to be fine; you'll handle it." He squeezed her hands, then pulled her up from the sofa and walked her to the door. "Call if you need me."

Chapter 6



Kathy sat cross-legged on the chaise in her dressing room, surrounded by piles of clothing. She had a splitting headache, and it wasn't even eight o'clock in the morning. Her mental list of things that simply *had* to be done was endless: There was grocery shopping because her mother and sister were coming for dinner on Saturday—tomorrow. She had to check the name tags on all the kids' clothes and make sure everything was ready; Stacey and Charley were leaving for sleep-away camp on Sunday, and Marsha's day camp started Monday. Only the baby would be home.

"Thank God for uniforms!" Kathy muttered as she started

going through Stacey's pile of white T-shirts and navy blue shorts. At least she hadn't had to battle her daughter over what she would wear; she would wear what everybody else was wearing. Kathy glanced over at the two identical camp trunks, already loaded with sheets, blankets and towels. She didn't give a damn about *those* name tags—she'd never see those items again. She smiled. It seemed to be a rule that camp laundries devoured bedding.

Had she missed anything by not going to camp as a child? she wondered. Would she be normal if she had gone? Was that why she was so determined to give her kids the experiences all their friends were having? She shook her head. Summers at the hotel had been a lot like camp, as she recalled. Only she'd had more freedom. She shuddered to think of *her* offspring running around unsupervised at four and five or even at ten and twelve; for that matter.

It wasn't that her mother had been permissive exactly. She frowned, trying to remember. There had always been *lots* of rules. And when Lily was paying attention, rules had been rigidly enforced. "Be here." "Be there." "Don't go here." "Don't go there." "Don't make noise." "Why are you so quiet—what trouble are you getting into?" There had been times when it seemed as if Mommy were *always* looking over her shoulder, telling her she was transgressing in some way or other. But there had also been times, lots of times, more and more as she grew older, when her mother not only wasn't hovering over her, but didn't even seem aware of her existence. "Run along, dear, and play—Mother's busy!" had also been a refrain of her childhood.

"Gloria!" Kathy dropped a pair of Charley's underpants as though they concealed a poisonous spider. "Gloria, please come up here a minute."

"Dammit to hell," she said to herself. *All* the name tags had been ironed on rather than sewn, which would probably be all right for Marsha's things, since Gloria would launder them herself. But the older kids' tags simply *had* to be more permanently affixed. The camp laundry would demolish the iron-ons in one week. Camp Wild Goose did not believe in cold-water washing.

"Yes, Mrs. Roth?" Gloria still had a cereal box in her hand, so Kathy assumed the children were just finishing breakfast.

"You're going to have to sew the name tags on Stacey's and

Charley's clothes, Gloria," Kathy began, trying to ignore the thundercloud that was spreading across her housekeeper's face. "These iron-ons won't last."

"Whatever you say, ma'am," the woman replied, bundling everything into a laundry basket. "But I ain't too good at sewing. It's gonna take me a long time. And I'm goin' to see my sister on Sunday and Monday. And I don't know *when* I'm gonna be able to make that pie for your dinner party. . . ." Her voice trailed off as she marched out of the room.

Kathy held her face between her hands. Well, she would just have to *buy* a dessert and ignore her mother's comments. Slowly, she unfolded herself from the chaise and went into the bathroom. Right now what she needed were some aspirin for this headache.

Bob was just straightening his tie, and she gave him a frank once-over. He was most comfortable in casual clothes—jeans and open-necked shirts—but he looked every inch the confident, successful businessman in his well-cut gray suit. His hair was just touched with gray at the temples, and his cheeks and forehead were attractively tanned from a weekend by the pool.

"You fighting with Gloria about *name tags*?" he inquired mildly as she swallowed the pills. "I thought we were trying to stay on her good side."

"We are—or, rather, we were," Kathy replied. "But, frankly, once the kids are off to camp next week, I'll be able to stand a little sullenness. I won't need quite so much help. Besides, I think things are going very well, considering—don't you? I mean, without Matthew."

"I *know* what you mean." She followed him as he headed for the kitchen. "And yes, I think you're doing great. But then, I've always said you could handle anything. By the way, how's business? You should be shipping fall merchandise, right?"

Carefully, Kathy poured them each a cup of coffee. "That's right," she agreed. "We *should* be. But for some mysterious reason we're not." She didn't want to admit how worried she was, especially not to Bob. He *believed* in her. He thought she could handle *anything*. "I'm going in this morning to go over everything with Tim," she went on. "So I hope I can straighten it all out."

"I'm sure you will." Bob looked up at the sound of a truck pulling into the driveway. "That must be George," he said.

"George?" The only George Kathy could summon to mind

was the contractor who had just finished remodeling the kitchen and patio area of her house, and just the mention of the name filled her with memories of jackhammers and plaster dust.

"Sure, you remember George. He was camping out in your kitchen for six months, after all."

"I remember, I remember." The aspirin didn't seem to be doing a thing for her headache.

"I called him the other day," Bob went on calmly. "After I decided we should expand to thirty by thirty."

"Expand what?" she asked warily.

"The patio."

"The *what*?" Her voice rose a trifle in spite of herself. She had just lived through a year's worth of construction on her house, a year of carpenters and sawdust and concrete mixers and carpet samples. She couldn't describe the sense of relief she had felt when the last truck finally pulled away and she could look forward to enjoying her perfect surroundings. Especially the lovely patio just outside the kitchen, where she was planning leisurely summer breakfasts and romantic dinners.

"The patio," he repeated. "It's too small. And it's silly not to change it now. We've got the space; we just have to extend the flagstone. And then we'll have an area where we could entertain, say, forty or fifty people." There was a tap on the back door. "Come on in, George."

"But you *hate* cocktail parties . . ." was all Kathy could think of to say. More jackhammers, more workmen, more mess—it was almost more than she could bear. But she didn't have time to worry about it right now, she decided. She was having enough trouble holding the edges of her life together. If playing with the flagstones was important to Bob . . . Afraid she was going to cry, she pushed herself away from the table. "You talk to him," she said. "I have to get dressed."

"Okay, hon. And then I've got to take off. I'll see you later, okay?"

"Fine. Have a good day." She made it upstairs and retreated into the shower, thinking about her husband. Bob was the kind of man who loved to plan and tinker, and she realized that it was probably quite painful to him to think of the house as "done." He wasn't finished tinkering. More work on the patio was just another reason for her to keep going and maintain

control, she said to herself. And it was probably just as well. With strangers in the house she couldn't bury her head and hide. And she certainly couldn't let the strangers within her come out and wreck her life. She had to carry on.

Though her business was undeniably in trouble, Kathy had been holding up her end very well—maybe *too* well, her partner suggested a couple of hours later as they sat down in their tiny, cluttered office just off Seventh Avenue to decide what to do next.

She *had* had a few bad experiences that spring, moments in elevators when Cici had refused to get off on the appropriate floor, for instance. "I can't keep that appointment!" she would whisper. "I can't talk to a buyer from Marshall Field's!" Then she would press Lobby and run away. And so Kathy, later, would have to make excuses and reschedule the meeting. Cici was hopelessly shy and couldn't even make polite conversation, much less a sales pitch.

And there was the other side of the coin: the mysterious, very generous orders that Kathy didn't quite remember taking, orders that made her suspect that Prose was quite a saleswoman.

But now those orders needed to be translated into garments and shipped to the stores, and it wasn't happening. Tim was working on designs for the following season, his head was in the clouds, and the patternmaker he had hired turned out to be a disaster—most of the clothes were arriving incorrectly sized. On top of that, the manufacturer was not turning out the kind of quality work Kathy demanded.

So she sat at her desk, staring at size eights that looked ample enough for a gorilla, at hems that came down if you even breathed on them, and at letters of complaint and sheaves of phone messages from store buyers.

"We're in real trouble, Tim," she began. "Got any ideas?"

"Tons of them, sweetheart," he replied cheerfully, looking up from his drawing board with a grin, "and I am translating them all into a simply dynamite resort line."

"Tim!" She hoped she didn't sound like a harpy. "There isn't going to *be* a resort line if we don't solve the problems with the fall line. *No one* is going to order a *handkerchief* from us unless we can deliver what we promised. *When* we promised it."

"I never said I was the practical one, darling," he replied, turning back to his sketch. "But I *know* you'll think of something. How about a new patternmaker, hmm?"

She considered strangling him, but he was much bigger than she, if not as forceful. She shuffled through the pile of pink message slips over and over, as though the answer were hidden somewhere among them.

Edward Hart. The name leaped off the paper at her. Eddie. She peered at the date. He'd called on Monday and now it was Friday. Her head was pounding again. All she needed was another complication. No! She couldn't handle it. No way.

But wait, she said to herself. When she had tried to reach him—when? four months ago?—it had been in order to say good-bye. To simplify. Maybe now saying that good-bye would help clarify the incomprehensible jumble her life had become, a jumble of camp trunks and unwearable clothes and angry executives from Bloomingdale's and workmen tearing up the flagstones and a charming but incompetent business partner and all the voices inside her head, the insistent, ever-present presences who threatened to tear her apart completely, beyond repair. I'm Humpty Dumpty and the wall is crumbling, she thought. Matthew is gone and I have to glue it all together myself. Where are all the king's horses and all the king's men when I need them?

She picked up the phone and dialed. He answered himself—no secretary—and his voice softened when he heard hers. "I'm sorry I disappeared like that," he said, offering no explanation. "But I would like to see you."

"I'd like to see you too, Eddie," she replied softly, resolving to tie up at least one maddeningly loose end. "Let's have lunch at the Plaza."

"You haven't changed a bit, Eddie Hart," Kathy said, trying to keep her voice light and teasing. "You vanished into thin air twenty years ago, and—pouf!—you did it again this spring. You must love being a man of mystery!"

She watched while the waiter carefully placed her Perrier and Eddie's Scotch. He lifted his glass at her, smiling, then took a sip. "Now, now," he replied. "You wrote me—remember?—while I was in Europe and you said you were

going to be away when I got back, and that you needed some time to sort things out." His voice turned serious. "And to be honest, I felt I needed some time too. I was in the middle of changing jobs, things were up in the air at home, and I needed more complications . . ."

"Like a hole in the head!" She completed their joint thought with a favorite phrase from a long-ago summer, and they both started to laugh. "I guess we were each going through the same thing this spring," Kathy continued, though she was quite sure that Eddie's experience hadn't been comparable to hers.

"We *always* go through the same things. Haven't you noticed? We're like goddamn twins or something!" The statement was emphatic, but there was a twinkle in his eye. He paused as the waiter brought their food, and then he continued. "It's eerie, Kath, seriously. Being with you feels like—I don't know—incest or something."

She felt her cheeks color, so she devoted her attention to her chicken salad. She had come here to say good-bye, not to revive the simmering sexual attraction between them, but she couldn't ignore the sensations in the pit of her stomach or the persistent ache just behind her eyes. "Let's be realistic," she said softly, trying to act as grown-up as possible. "I assume your life is pretty hectic, what with your new consulting business and your wife and the kids."

He nodded, taking another sip of Scotch and starting on his broiled scallops. "The business *is* going well, but it's a new experience being completely on my own," he admitted. "And the kids are teenagers. They need a lot of attention."

"Mine too," Kathy agreed, feeling more controlled with every passing moment. This lunch was going to be just fine. They would part friends, and life would be much simpler. "Plus I've got a little one still. And a business partner who's a *real* baby!" Eddie looked up with a concerned expression, but she waved it away. "No. I won't bore you with my business problems. Just let me tell you that the rag trade is the pits! But I'll survive." She smiled, feeling very much like a survivor. Theirs was a relationship that existed in some made-up place, some dreamland, where they were both teenagers forever. In the real world her life was with Bob and the children, and her task was to get better, to become whole, not to nurture memories and cling to the past.

"The point is, I think we can be friends. Should be friends." There was an edge to her voice though she was trying desperately to keep it even. "*Must* be friends. And nothing else."

He was looking at her with those soulful eyes, and she could feel the power he had always had over her, whether she was fifteen or thirty-seven. Her head was pounding. "I guess what I'm saying is that I can't manage anything else. Not now." She was about to say "Not ever," but he didn't give her the chance.

"I respect your wishes, of course, Kath, and I know in my gut you're probably right. But it's hard." He finished off his drink and wiped his mouth with his napkin. "I want you so much—I always have. I'll never love anyone the way I loved you, you know. When I'm with you, I feel like a better person, better than I think I'm capable of being. You mean everything to me, Kath, and if friendship is what you can offer, then that's what I'll take."

Her head felt as though a bomb had gone off, the pain was so severe, and Kathy closed her eyes for a moment to catch her breath. Suddenly she was gone, buried deep inside, unable to speak or move. "Oh, Eddie, you can't imagine how it makes me feel to hear you say those things." Cici sighed. "For so long I was sure you didn't love me. And now . . ." She frowned, a furrow creasing her forehead. Her face cleared as she looked up. "Since we've found each other again, I don't know how I could have thought of giving you up. There *must* be some other solution. We do belong together. I know that."

If he was startled that the firm-voiced, self-possessed woman before him had shifted cadences and was now talking in a much more quiet, breathy tone, and that she had completely changed her position on the future of their relationship, Eddie showed no sign of it. "Oh, I do love you, Kathy," he repeated, "and I certainly don't want to say good-bye." He glanced at his watch. "In fact, if I didn't have a crucial meeting at three o'clock, I would get us a room upstairs right this minute!"

Cici shivered, not sure if it was fear or anticipation. She had never made love with anyone, but she knew how passionately she wanted Eddie—had always wanted Eddie—and she would have gone anywhere with him. Hearing his words of love made her feel powerful for the first time in her life. She was right. She had always been right. Maybe she wasn't so stupid after all.

Watching, helpless, Kathy wanted to scream, *No! Run!* but no words came out. She could only watch while Eddie paid the bill and then walked Cici to the entrance of the garage, where her car was parked. Kathy couldn't even feel it when he enveloped her in an embrace, kissing her passionately, but Cici felt it, and it was like an infusion of strength. He loves me, she thought, and he wants me. Me! I'm not crazy, and I never was. She strolled down the ramp and gave her parking ticket to the attendant. She didn't care about camp trunks or name tags or failing businesses. She didn't care about Matthew Caldwell or Kathy Roth. Eddie loved her!

On the front seat of the car she saw her grocery list, and her newfound strength suddenly turned to anger. She had to buy groceries to feed Lily—Lily who had lied to her about Eddie's feelings, who had helped to break them up and keep them apart when they were meant to be together. Ignoring the impatient glances of the parking attendants, Cici sat very still. I'm not just angry, I'm furious, she thought, frowning. I was willing to give up myself, again, believing I was wrong. Goddammit, I'm right! This man loves me as I remember—totally, unconditionally. Why should I give up another twenty years for something I don't want—Bob and those kids—never did want and never will want? I want my needs met *now*. I'm willing to meet with Matthew, but they all have to know how strong I am!

"Hey! Lady! You gonna move that thing or what? I got customers waiting!"

Kathy shook her head, as if dispelling a bad dream, and then turned on the ignition. "Sorry," she mumbled, handing the man a bill through the window. How had she regained control? she wondered. And how long could she keep it? She had thought of Cici as a quiet, nonthreatening part. She shivered. Now she was terrified of her. And what about *my* life? Kathy thought bitterly. What had started out as a civilized good-bye had turned into a passionate reunion—scarcely an ending. What am I going to do? What if Cici comes out tomorrow night at dinner and starts screaming at Mom? What will the children think? She started to cry softly as she drove up Madison Avenue. They'll think I'm crazy, that's what they'll think. And they'll be right.

The first thing Kathy did at home was pick up the phone and dial the number Matthew had written down for the week. She tried it steadily for over an hour before someone finally answered. "Hello?"

"Hello, this is Kathy Roth. I'm a patient of Dr. Caldwell's and I need to speak with him. Is he there?"

"He's here," the bored voice replied, "but he's working. There's a professional training program going on here, you know? I don't know when he'll be free. Probably not this afternoon—perhaps tonight. You want me to take a message?"

She tried to keep her voice from shaking. "Just ask him to call me when he can, please—at any hour. It's Kathy Roth." She left the number and hung up. She wondered if the message would ever get through. She wondered if she could survive the night. It was as though Cici were pulling hard against her, constantly, as if an exhausting game of tug-of-war were being played. It took an enormous effort to stay in control, and she was terrified that if she went to sleep, Kathy would never wake up again.

Folding T-shirt after T-shirt, bathing suit after bathing suit, one pair of shorts after another, she managed to get through the evening. She told Bob only that she was feeling pretty frazzled because of the problems with the business, and that she had called Matthew. He seemed to understand and helped by occupying the children. Finally, everyone but Kathy was asleep, and she curled up in a comfortable chair in the peaceful gray dressing room and willed the phone to ring. Johnny Carson ended and the late movie began. Finally, the call came, but it was Marian.

"He's still tied up, Kathy," she explained. "This has been a grueling day. He has a speech at the Psychoanalytic Society tonight, and tomorrow will be just as busy. And with the time change . . . I'm sorry. Can I help you now? He'll be able to see you next week in New York if you would rather wait."

"But I don't know how I can survive the night, much less a week! I need to see him! Cici is trying to take over. She wants to kill us; she wants to ruin my life!"

"See if you can't make a deal with Cici," Marian suggested. "Promise her that the whole issue—whatever is making her mad—will be dealt with when you see Matthew, but that she has to let go until then."

"I'll try," Kathy agreed weakly, but as she hung up the

receiver, she could hear Cici's voice ringing in her ears. So, *Matthew won't talk to me. Well, I'm using every ounce of energy to sit tight, but not for much longer. I'm tired of never getting my way—and now I'm strong enough to do something about it!*

"You're going to expand the patio, Bob, dear?" Mrs. Kahn said politely the next evening, sitting at the umbrella-shaded table and sipping her sherry while her son-in-law tended the barbecue. "I thought it was finished. Did Kathy change her mind again?"

"Not more workmen!" Nan added, aghast, as she helped her sister bring silverware and dishes out the sliding glass doors from the kitchen. "How can you *stand* it? I thought you'd never finish in the first place!"

Kathy waited a moment for Bob to chime in and admit that the whole scheme was his idea, but he seemed mesmerized by the sizzling steaks. "Don't blame me, Mom," she said finally, keeping her voice even, hoping to deflect some of Lily's constant criticism. "This is entirely Bob's idea. He's decided that we should have the space to do some large-scale entertaining. Or something."

"Well, that seems sensible." Lily reversed her position calmly. "I'm sure there are a lot of clients who would be impressed by an invitation, and you're certainly right to expand now—before the plantings really take hold."

Kathy gritted her teeth. Of *course* it was a good idea—as long as it was Bob's and not hers. She felt herself fading. "Yes, Mother," Cici replied meekly. Back in the kitchen Kathy took two aspirin and a deep breath. This was *her* dinner, not Cici's. She would not relinquish control. Actually, she was glad her mother and sister were here. Cici was being a good, compliant child in their presence—so far. Kathy hoped desperately that Cici's rebellion was over.

Nan joined her and picked up the salad dressing. "Well, I don't care *what* Mom says. I think you're *crazy* to let Bob bully you into this. You've just gotten all those dirty workmen *out!* How can you think of having them back again?" She shuddered. "It reminds me of Brooklyn—all those strangers Mother and Daddy hired to paint the house and do odd jobs. Doesn't it give you the creeps?"

"It is annoying," Kathy agreed slowly, suddenly feeling a twinge of pain in her stomach. Probably the aspirin, she thought. "But I don't know about creepy. I don't really remember the Brooklyn house very well. I'm the baby, remember? And besides, enlarging the patio is what Bob wants to do. So we'll enlarge the patio. I can live with it."

"Well, I wouldn't!" Nan's voice was firm. "I wouldn't let him push me around like that."

As Kathy went to call the children, she reflected that Nan's belligerence was probably one reason she and her husband, John, had separated. It was not a topic that was discussed, of course, or even acknowledged. Nan wanted to stay right on top of all of Kathy's traumas, but she never shared any problems of her own.

"Is Gloria ill, dear?" Lily asked innocently as Bob trundled Lynn off to bed and the other children disappeared to finish their camp preparations.

Kathy looked up from her dessert and saw her mother's quick but unmistakably disapproving glance at the apricot tart she had picked up at *Delices la Cote Basque* in Manhattan. She'd gone out of her way to get it too. But she was determined not to get angry.

"No, Mother, she's fine. She's been very busy with clothes for camp, and now she's off visiting her sister for a couple of days. Why?" For some reason she didn't want to let her mother off the hook.

"No reason," Lily declared mildly. "I just hate to be a burden, and when I see you carrying plates here and there, back and forth, without any help, I worry." Her tone turned confidential, as if she were imparting an important secret. "You never have been any good with help, you know, dear. And you seem so tense! I really don't think this was an ideal weekend to let Gloria go off."

"I *never* used to let Hazel have more than her day and a half when she was with me," Nan chimed in. "And I must say, now that Rachel's grown and married, it is such a *relief* to just have day help. You don't have to worry about their problems or their families or their friends. It's heaven. But you're a long way from that, baby." Kathy stiffened at the familiar, condescending tone of voice. Why was Nan always so sure she was

right? "Having Lynn put you right back behind the eight ball, didn't it? I mean, it will be *years* before you've got any real freedom." Nan leaned back and sipped her coffee.

"Large families are a blessing," Lily said firmly. "You chose to stop with just one child—at least, I *assume* it was your choice—but Kathy didn't. And Brian's right in the middle with two. I'm very lucky to have such wonderful grandchildren to take care of me in my old age. Although"—she paused for just a moment—"don't you think Stacey should lose a little weight, Kathy, dear? And I'm surprised to see Lynn with a bottle still. She's getting quite grown-up, you know."

Kathy rose to clear the dessert plates. She *couldn't* allow herself to be drawn into a battle with her mother, and she didn't want Lily and Nan fighting as usual either. Her control was too shaky, and she certainly didn't want her mother or her sister seeing one of the other . . . parts. They would say she was crazy. "What old age, Mom? These days you seem younger than me! Younger than I feel, anyway."

"You *are* tense," Nan agreed. "Anything wrong?"

"Not really." Kathy put down the dishes. "I've just been a little moody lately." Since the parts objected violently to being called "experiences," she wondered what they would think of "moods." "Maybe I'm having a mid-life crisis."

Lily snorted. "Mid-life indeed! You're not even forty. And what's the crisis? You've got a good life here, a fine husband and your health, thank God! You shouldn't complain."

"I know, Mom, and everything's going to be fine. But I did start seeing a therapist this spring, and it's helping me put things in perspective. So don't worry."

"A therapist? You mean a head-shrinker?" Lily sounded aghast. "There's nothing wrong with you!" she said vehemently, then her voice dropped. "Those doctors just make you hate your parents, that's what they do. Don't you pay any attention! I took good care of you. My little Katya! I took you *everywhere*. Everywhere!"

"I know, Mom, I know. Don't worry. This therapy isn't about you—it's about me. And I'm going to work it out." I hope, she added silently.

"If you ever want to talk," Nan said eagerly, "I mean really get things off your chest, just call. I can probably do you more good than some overeducated shrink!"

I have to tell them sometime, Kathy thought as she felt the

throbbing behind her eyes intensify. But maybe this was not the time. Her head was going to split open. How can I hold on for a whole week? she wondered desperately. How can I even get the kids off to camp?

She survived Sunday, but on Monday morning it was Cici who woke up. Kathy watched helplessly as the pale figure splashed some water on her face and ran a comb through her hair without really looking in the mirror. Cici had no interest in her appearance. Deep inside, Kathy shivered at the colorless, unaccented features and the lank hair. Was Cici in control now for good? she wondered. Will I always look like this?

Bob entered the room to pick up his briefcase. "Morning, hon," he called cheerfully, and then came over to where she was standing by the closet, gazing dully at a rack of slacks and blouses. "You look a little down. You feeling all right?"

No! Help me! Kathy wanted to shout, but nothing came out. She was a prisoner. The figure produced a perfunctory little smile. "I'm fine," Cici said softly. "I'm just trying to decide what to put on."

"Well, you don't need anything fancy to drive Marsha to day camp," he replied, turning to leave. "You know how to get there, right? I did show you on the map."

The woman looked completely blank. "Of course. I remember. Have a nice day."

"You too. The girls are having some cereal. Lynn put on some pretty weird clothes, but I guess it doesn't matter today. She's going along for the ride, right?" She nodded. "Okay, hon, I'm off. Don't forget to use the car seat for the baby." He gave her a quick kiss on the cheek and vanished.

Oh, my God! Kathy thought. Cici doesn't know where the camp is. She'll get lost! What am I going to do? Cici put on an old pair of black trousers and a round-collared white blouse, then slipped her feet into black flats. She pulled her hair back and put a rubber band around it without looking. She was smiling slightly. It seemed to Kathy that Cici was marshaling her forces, consolidating her gains. No! Kathy thought. I'm a survivor, and somehow I'll fight her. But how?

She went downstairs and found two small faces waiting expectantly. "Come on, Mom," said Marsha impatiently. "You don't even have your makeup on! And look at what Lynn's

wearing—red and green! I don't care myself, but what if one of the neighbors sees her? They'll think we're all bananas! And we don't have much time. I don't want to be late the first day as a junior aide at camp!"

It seemed to Cici as though the scene were playing in slow motion. She looked from one child to the other, and then her glance fell on the car keys lying in the middle of the kitchen table, and the moment was a freeze-frame.

Finally, like a weight lifting off her shoulders, Kathy felt Cici giving up, going away. She returned from the limbo where she had been watching in horror. She took a deep breath and fought off tears of relief. "Just a minute, kids," she said finally, her voice under control. "Let me just run upstairs and get Lynn a different T-shirt and put on some lipstick. I'll be back in a sec." She took the stairs two at a time, smiling. She had beaten Cici for now, and by the time she reached the bathroom, she realized why. Cici *couldn't* stay in control. Cici didn't know how to drive.

The elevator took an eternity to get from floor to floor. Kathy was so tense, it felt as though her body were tied in knots. I survived a whole week waiting for Matthew to be back in town for this one day, she said to herself, watching the floor-indicator lights flash slowly, so slowly. But I'm not going to survive the ride upstairs. I'm going to fall apart and start screaming. She took a deep breath to keep all the cries inside.

At last she was there, and the door opened, and she was looking at his familiar, sharp, dark-eyed face. She couldn't speak, and he seemed to understand. They stood looking at each other. Finally, she reached into her purse and pulled out a sheet of paper covered with Cici's precise, cramped writing. "Here," she managed.

He took the paper from her, then took her by the shoulders and turned her around, facing back toward the elevators. "What you need is an ice cream cone," he said quietly. "You go and buy yourself one and then come back and we'll talk." Oddly, Kathy was relieved. She wanted to see him, to pour out her terror, but she also needed to calm down. And he needed to read Cici's demands. Kathy already knew what they were, knew them by heart.

"I'm so tired," Cici had written. "I know I don't want to go

crazy; then I lose out on everything. I know Kathy doesn't want a divorce; she won't give up the last sixteen years without being guilty and miserable. So leaving Bob is no good; marrying Eddie is no good. God! How he messed up our lives! But I won't accept that! I know only one thing—I know what I want. I know there is love available the way I dreamed possible, and I'm entitled to it. I split myself off trying to forget old feelings, and it was so unnecessary. There is someone in this world who loves and feels exactly as I do, and we wasted all this time being unhappy. We made other lives for ourselves, unhappy as they may have been, and we survived, not ever realizing what was missing. But now I know. And I won't live without it."

"So seeing Eddie wasn't such a terrific idea, hmm?" Matthew suggested when Kathy returned.

"That's the understatement of the summer. She won't let him go. And I've never been so scared."

"Or angry?"

"Angry? Why angry?" Kathy didn't know what he was talking about. "Oh, you mean Cici. Yeah, I guess she's mad."

"No, I don't mean Cici. I mean you."

"I'm terrified. That's all." Didn't he understand?

"I know that. I'm just suggesting that you're also mad. At the very least, you're probably mad at me."

She thought about that. "You mean because I couldn't reach you?"

"That sounds like a good reason to me."

"Well, but I understood," Kathy said reasonably. How could she be angry with Matthew? He was her only chance to get well. She loved him. She would *never* be mad at him.

"The hell you did!" His tone was both sharp and amused. Was he trying to pick a fight? Kathy was confused. "You were hurting a lot and you tried to reach me. I had *told* you that I would be available this summer if you needed me. But there you were, needing me, and I wasn't keeping my end of the bargain." He paused. "If I were you, Kathy, I'd be furious."

"I was sad that I couldn't talk to you, but . . ." Her eyes dulled suddenly and the muscles around her mouth tightened. She uncrossed her legs and pressed her knees together.

"I want to discuss Eddie," Cici said primly. "Nothing else is important."

"I want to talk about anger, and I want to discuss it with Kathy," Matthew said firmly. "I'll deal with you later, Cici. Later."

Kathy felt a wave of relief. Matthew *could* control the others. He would save her, rescue her from that powerless place. She wanted to please him. "I'll tell you who makes me mad," she began. "Mother. She was over to dinner on Saturday and she picked on the meal and made comments about the kids."

"Did you tell her you were angry?" he asked. "Did you holler at her?"

Kathy laughed at the thought. "Of course not. You never win a fight with my mother. I just ignore her."

"No, you don't," Matthew answered. "You may *think* you're ignoring her, but really, that anger is getting buried deep inside, where it festers and makes you crazy."

She rose abruptly and crossed to the terrace doors, closed against the heat. Her hips swayed and she tossed her head. "You wanna know what *I'd* like deep inside me, Doc?" Prose whispered provocatively.

"Come on!" Matthew's tone was irritated and insistent. "You went and switched before I had a chance to finish. Do you realize that every time an important issue comes up, you flip?"

Kathy blinked, wondering what she was doing by the terrace. She returned to the couch and sat down. "I flip?" she repeated.

"I suppose it's a way of changing the subject," he mused, "but it makes it damned hard to get any work done. All I'm discovering are what the issues are, not what any of the answers might be."

"But I don't understand how it happens! How can I control it?"

"I understand, Kathy, and that's enough. All *you* have to do is say no."

"But I don't understand!"

"Understanding will come later," he insisted. "For now, just change the pattern. You can do it."

He had no idea what a nightmare her life was, she decided. Just change the pattern, indeed!

"Leave me alone!" she muttered, turning her head. She felt Cici near, threatening, but she took a deep breath and fought her off. Now, if she could stop feeling so agitated . . .

“Don’t turn away, Kathy,” he said. “You don’t have to get sneaky with me, you can get angry. I’m not your mother.” She looked at him with tears in her eyes. “I won’t go away if you’re mad at me, and I won’t punish you.” She felt a tear roll down her cheek. “All your life you’ve buried anger, I suspect, buried it to please you mother and to appease your sister. But that’s destructive. It’s eating you up inside. Parents need to allow their children to be angry. If you get mad at your mother but she won’t permit you to feel that way—if she denies it—then you’re in a double bind. Either your mother is wrong, which is unacceptable to a small child, or you’re crazy to think you’re feeling what she says isn’t there. And so you turn into Cici, who doesn’t feel much of anything.”

“She feels *something*,” Kathy protested through her tears. She heard the front door open, and the sounds of people talking all at the same time. She remembered that the rest of the afternoon was to be devoted to a group session. “She wants Eddie.”

“And she can’t have him,” Matthew said simply, “so she’s mad as hell—probably for the first time in her life. She’s mad and scared. And we’re going to help her with it, aren’t we? We’ll help her with it now, in the group, and we’re going to give Cici a lot of attention come September. But she’s got to stop making trouble. Do you think she’s willing to make that deal?”

Kathy felt shaky, but she nodded silently. She hoped Cici would keep the bargain.

Chapter 7



Autumn sunshine flooded the bedroom, but Kathy was oblivious to it. One section of mirrored wall opposite the terrace doors was pushed back like an accordion, revealing a

desktop and filing cabinets, and she sat there, back to the warm sun, staring silently at a stack of papers. Her glance fell on an order sheet marked Canceled. "Dammit!" she muttered, going through each invoice and inventory page one by one, methodically. It should have worked, she told herself, over and over. Tim was a terrific designer—the huge orders proved that. He was both innovative and commercial.

"And *I* am a great salesman," she said aloud. Or, rather, I was, she added silently. But between the designing and the selling of the line, there had opened an unbridgeable chasm. Even if there had been time to have new patterns drawn to replace the mis-sized ones, there wasn't the capital to buy new fabric and pay for remanufacture. They simply hadn't been able to deliver the goods. Put up or shut up, she reflected. She closed one folder and picked up another. Well, they had shut up. Not with a bang but a whimper. All that was left of a promising business were cartons and cartons of oddly sized, poorly made, undelivered clothes—out in the garage, mostly. They had moved out of their offices.

What am I going to do? she asked herself. She was determined to pay Bob back the \$15,000 he had invested in the venture. That was crucial for her own sense of independence. But how? Where was she going to come up with that kind of money? What did she have to sell?

It came to her. The clothes, of course! She picked up the telephone book, and then the phone, and started dialing. Even when she was depressed, she was usually able to function on the phone; picking it up was like turning an internal switch. She became a public person, a voice on the phone, and a persuasive one too. Cici couldn't do it, of course, but then, Cici never even *thought* of calling anyone. The telephone terrified her.

"Hello?" she said brightly. "Is this Loehmann's? My name is Kathryn Roth, and I would like to speak with someone in charge of buying. What? Oh, yes, indeed. I represent T & K Designs, Ltd." Very limited, she thought.

Before long she fond herself talking with a pleasant gentleman named Harry. Although she had dealt with a number of store buyers in the past, Loehmann's had not been on her list, since she and Tim weren't interested in selling at a discount. But now it seemed like a match made in heaven. "I see," she replied thoughtfully as Harry explained that as a rule, his chain

bought only well-known names, and only in lots of tens of thousands. People didn't approach the firm, apparently, with just grosses of items to sell.

"I'll tell you what, Kathy—you don't mind if I call you Kathy, do you?—you call a guy named Allan Howe," he suggested. "Allan's a wholesaler who specializes in putting together small lots to make up attractive packages for discount operations like ours. Okay? Maybe we'll wind up doing business after all."

She put down the phone, feeling that she had gotten quite an education in the discount business in the course of one conversation. She picked up again and dialed the number Harry had given her. "Hello, may I speak with Mr. Howe, please? I'm calling at the suggestion of Harry"—she struggled to find the slip on which she'd written his last name—"Smith of Loehmann's," she finished triumphantly. Allan Howe came right to the phone. She smiled. This was just as easy as calling up Edna and saying that Sam and Grace were coming to dinner, and then calling Grace. Business was not a big mystery.

She explained her situation pretty accurately, if in somewhat glowing terms, throwing in expressions like "close-out," "attractive terms" and "odd lots" that she had just learned from Harry. "Tuesday at ten?" she asked finally. "That would be just fine, Mr. Howe. I'll be there with my samples."

She walked over to the bed. It felt good to be making some progress, however small, toward paying Bob back. But now that her telephone switch was turned off, she was wiped out, as tired as though she'd just completed a hundred-yard dash or something. She closed her eyes. In front of her she could see the wall, the brick wall. She saw herself pick up a brick, put it on top, then another and another and another. The wall began to rise beside her. It was so comforting, so familiar, so safe.

"Did I tell you about the brick wall I've had all my life?" she asked Matthew the next afternoon. "Ever since I was a child, I've built that wall when I went to sleep." She sighed. She was still tired from being a businessperson, a real person, trying to make deals. It was easier to build the wall. Her eyes closed.

"When I build the wall, I'm safe," Cici explained quietly.

"What else makes you safe?" Matthew asked. "What makes you happy?"

"Eddie makes me happy," she replied promptly. "I feel just

wonderful when I'm with him—and safe too. I wish we were together all the time. We belong together. Nobody understands that but my sister. Nan knows how I feel.” Her lower lip started to tremble.

“I know how you feel, Cici,” Matthew said patiently, “because we’ve talked about it a lot. But the fact is that reliving the fantasy—the romance, the sexuality—of a fifteen-year-old is always more exciting than reality. It’s *bound* to be. But it isn’t real life, it’s a memory, and you’ve got to realize that, because Kathy has to get on with her life and care for her family.”

The slender figure seemed to become even smaller for a second, then her head came up and she crossed her legs. “Do you think she’s ever going to believe you, Matthew?” Kathy asked. “Bob and I were arguing this week. I don’t fight with Bob, so I knew something was going on. I’ve been more Baby and Cici this week than myself. I don’t like it.”

“But there’s someone who *does* like it, isn’t there? Someone who prefers Baby and Cici? Who would rather you stay wrapped up in the fantasy?”

She sighed again. “Nan. Yes, it’s true.” She paused. “The other night I saw her—she’s in a pretty fragile state because of the separation, and also because her daughter has been having some health problems—and she cried and said she couldn’t live without my love, she wouldn’t survive. And my answer was ‘I know.’ I think that took her aback, but I have always known that. She asked me to go out to lunch on Friday, and then my mother asked too. I really feel sad that the three of us couldn’t go. Sometimes Mother and Nan get along all right for a while and then—bang! Something happens and they’re not speaking again. They’ve been on the outs since Rosh Hashanah. I don’t even know why. I don’t ask.

“When I was little,” she continued thoughtfully, tucking her feet underneath her and looking Matthew full in the face, “I loved my mother very much, but I couldn’t because Nan hated her. Apparently, they had a tremendous fight this week, and my mother actually slapped Nan across the face. According to my sister, Mother completely lost control and hit her. But then I had lunch with Mother today, and her version is that Nan grabbed her first.” She sighed. “I don’t feel safe. I don’t know who to trust. There is a terrible problem between them, and I was raised in the middle of it. The only way I could get love from my mother when I was little was to agree with her. But Nan would fight back.”

She paused, remembering the good times she and Nan had had growing up, the secrets they had shared, the plans they had hatched. "I think Nan loved the *idea* of Eddie and me almost as much as I loved Eddie," she added absently. "She helped me think up ways to keep him interested, to make him jealous. Maybe it was all more exciting than her life at that time, with a little baby and a husband who worked eighteen hours a day."

She shifted nervously on the couch. She felt uncomfortable, as though someone were suddenly poking her. The pleasant memories vanished. "I don't want to talk about Nan anymore," she said.

"Why not?"

Matthew's persistence was annoying. Wasn't she allowed to change the subject?

"Kathy, I want you to try something. It's a technique that may help you get to memories that are lost, repressed. What you do is reenact behavior from your childhood. You need to face Nan. You need to see her as she really was. I want you to close your eyes and imagine her right in front of you. Talk to her as though she were here."

She saw her sister's face before her eyes, as Nan had looked when Kathy was nine or ten. "I don't want to lose you," Cici said timidly.

"Don't worry about that, little girl, you won't lose her."

"I don't understand why I need you so much, Nan."

"Tell the part that you *do* understand."

"That I love you and I need you and you frighten me." She began to cry. "Without you I feel so alone. But I love my mommy, too, and you don't let me. And you hurt me—you scratch me—when I want to love my mommy, and I don't like that." She looked around the room as if her sister might appear at any moment.

"Say no to her," Matthew instructed. "Close your eyes again, look at her as she was when you were a little girl, and say no to her hurting you. Say what you couldn't say when you were little."

"No to what?" the girl sobbed, closing her eyes. "I don't remember." She stopped. "I'm not bad, and I don't tattle on you, and I need you to protect me because my mommy isn't there. But I always think you're going to hurt me. I don't even know why I keep thinking that."

"Did she ever threaten you?" he asked.

There was a long silence, and when she spoke it was in a tiny voice. "I remember when I was little and I wouldn't eat my dinner, she would hide in the basement and make loud noises with pot lids and pretend to be the bogeyman. And if I hid, she would find me and tie my hands together. My mommy never knew." The crying was harder. "And she would put me in the closet. Don't close the door, Nan, please don't leave me in here! I can't breathe! Let me out, *please!*"

"You've got to call louder," Matthew insisted. "You've got to go through the trauma again, but this time do what you were afraid to do then. *Push* on that closet door."

"Let me out," Cici pleaded. Her voice rose slightly. "Please let me out." It was too scary. Cici knew she was going to die. Her eyes rolled back and her eyelids began to flutter as she started to leave, abandoning the small body in the closet.

"Keep going. Don't float away—push! Come back and deal with Nan. Face her! You don't need to run away. What you have to say to her is no."

"I can't."

"Yes, you can. I'm going to be right here with you. I'll never let her hurt you. Keep going. You're not going to die if you say no to her."

"Don't hurt me," she whispered, then more strongly, "Don't hurt me."

Her hands were tightly clasped together, so tightly that her knuckles were white. "Your body's trying to say it too," Matthew observed.

Suddenly Kathy was shouting. "Get your nails out of my arm! Stop scratching me!"

"Keep going."

"Why are you jealous of me? I'm only little and I love you. Why do you say you love me and then hurt me?" She leaned forward, her brow furrowed, as though she were listening intently. "No! No, it's not true! Please don't say that. No!"

"What is she saying?" Matthew asked.

She cowered in a corner of the couch. Her voice was almost inaudible. "She doesn't love me and I must die," Cici reported. Tears ran slowly down her cheeks. "I don't think she knows why she doesn't love me," she went on. "I don't think she loves herself. And I got all the attention and I was only five. Mommy took me to Florida instead of her. She was left all alone."

"She wanted to be there," Matthew said.

"She wanted to be alone? She hates herself so much and I love her. She didn't want to hurt me, did she?"

"Who *did* she want to hurt?"

"My mother and herself for loving my daddy. She just wanted to *own* me. Make me her pet." She was lost in thought, remembering what it had felt like to be a little sister. "I cared for Daddy, but I wasn't allowed to show it. She wouldn't let me." The silence lengthened. Cici hated these memories. She didn't want to think about her father. "I don't like this anymore. I want to stop."

"It's okay, Cici, tell me about . . ."

"She's gone," Kathy reported, shivering. "I wonder if that's true about Nan? Scratching me and shutting me in the closet. I don't remember anything like that." She held back tears.

"Cici certainly remembers it," Matthew pointed out. "And it fits in with what you've said about her possessiveness."

"Well . . ." She was doubtful. "She did have some bad times, I think, while I was growing up. There was even once—my God! I haven't thought about this in *years*—when she got so hysterical that they took her off someplace." She frowned. The memory seemed so far away. She tried to bring it closer. She saw a little girl, standing in the dark by the stairs, watching while a strange man wrestled with her sister, holding her, trying to quiet her, restraining her.

"Where did she go?"

"I don't know. They wouldn't tell me. They wouldn't say anything about it. It was as if it hadn't happened. But I remember now."

"Was she gone for long?" Matthew asked.

"It must have been right after she got married, or right before. We were still in the house in Brooklyn. I can see the staircase, the long, long staircase." She shuddered, then looked at Matthew. "What?"

"Was she gone for long?"

Kathy laughed, trying to dispel the shadows. "No, it was almost a joke. I think she was back the next day. Or a day later at most." The smile faded. She couldn't shake the vision of the little girl, cowering in the dark, watching. "But I was frightened."

The din in the casino was cheerful noise, but it was giving Kathy a headache. She and Bob were in Atlantic City with Allan Howe, her new partner in the wholesaling business, and his wife, Gladys, and with Michael and Rita. It was a combined business excursion and birthday celebration. Bob had just turned forty. She should have been happy—everyone was having a wonderful time—but she felt vaguely ill at ease. Maybe it was the holidays approaching. Or maybe it was Gladys's garish flower-print dress and green eye shadow. She *liked* the Howes, and she enjoyed doing business with Allan, but she secretly felt that neither of them had much class. Michael and Rita were considerably less flamboyant, and if the bar mitzvah for their son had had its excesses, she forgave them.

"I'm tired of slot machines, Bob," she said as gaily as she could manage, considering the headache. "I think I'll try the roulette table." At least she wasn't having any trouble maintaining control, she thought, walking across the hot, crowded, overdecorated room. It wouldn't do to turn into Baby in front of her new associate. She smiled. Allan seemed like a nice, solid guy, and he was giving her a real education. First of all, he had helped her sell the T & K leftovers, not to Loehmann's, it was true, but at least they were sold. She had paid Bob \$2,500 and invested \$2,500 in a shipment of blue jeans. When she and Allan sold *them* at a nice profit, she paid Bob another \$2,500 and kept the rest for the next deal. It wasn't the fancy side of the garment industry, she had to admit, but it *was* business. And one dividend was that she could spot a pair of counterfeit Calvin Kleins a block away.

Gladys and Rita had followed her to the roulette table and were waiting for her to make a bet. Suddenly she realized she had never gambled. She was reminded of the realization in Atlanta that she had never done any drinking. Why didn't she gamble? she wondered, clutching a handful of chips that Bob had pushed into her hand. She'd been in Las Vegas, and in Reno. She'd even been in Monte Carlo that summer the two of them "did" Europe, yet she was quite sure she had never placed a bet. Odd.

"Well?" asked Rita. "There are only so many numbers, Kathy. Are you going to choose one? Or just look?"

"Why not!" she declared, putting the chip on red-thirteen. "Maybe it will be good luck for me." The wheel spun, and all

three women lost their bets. "Oh, well," Kathy said, "easy come, easy go." She turned to leave.

"What?" Gladys seemed surprised. "Surely you're not going to give up! Try again—be persistent!"

Feeling uncomfortable, Kathy turned back to the table. Looking at the wheel, she suddenly knew that twenty-four-black was going to come up. She felt a prickle of sweat at her hairline as she put her chip down. She was right. And on the next spin, she knew, and on the next. Her headache was worse. Just lucky hunches, she told herself, but she knew it wasn't true. Especially after six straight wins. She could barely carry all the chips, so she slid them, almost furtively, into her purse. "Beginners luck!" she declared, but that wasn't true either. She had known. It was as if she could see the wheel stopping before it had even been spun.

"What? Quitting while you're ahead?" Gladys asked loudly.

"Always," she replied, heading for the ladies' room. Looking in the mirror, she noticed that her face was tense and tight. She freshened her makeup and took some aspirin. Now there was an uncomfortable feeling in the pit of her stomach. "I probably shouldn't have taken that aspirin," she muttered.

Bob, Michael and Allan were still by the slot machines when Kathy found them. "How about some dinner?" she asked. "Is the birthday boy hungry yet? Or do you still have to lose some more money?"

"One more try," Bob said, holding up a coin. He approached a machine.

"No!" The sharpness of her voice surprised Kathy, and the others turned to look. "Not that one, Bob, try the one three over," she suggested.

"Woman's intuition?" he teased, but he moved to the other machine anyway. It hit.

Kathy was struck by a wave of nausea. "You go ahead," she said as the party moved toward the main dining room. "I'll be right there." And she went back into the ladies' room and threw up.

She couldn't get out of bed. She heard the children milling around, getting ready for school, complaining to Gloria about breakfast—or maybe it was their lunches—and she knew that the buses would soon arrive, but she couldn't force her body to obey her. It was as if she weighed a thousand pounds.

"'Bye, Mom . . . 'bye . . . 'bye . . ." Their voices floated up the stairs, and then she heard the door slam. Bob had been gone for an hour; now she was finally alone. Gloria, she knew, would clear away the dishes and then retreat into her room for a TV-game-show break before starting any cleaning. She sighed. What's the matter with me? she wondered. She was supposed to meet with Allan this morning about 14,000 pairs of Gloria Vanderbilts, and she was due to have lunch with Nan. Nan's daughter, Rachel, had a lump in her breast.

Kathy hugged herself. It was so unfair. During the summer she had undergone breast surgery herself, but she had wanted it. It was a cosmetic breast reduction, scarcely what Rachel might be facing. She rolled over. Her operation had been a wonderful success. She thought so, and so did Bob. The surgeon had simply removed the wear and tear of decades, and the slackness caused by breast-feeding four children. She actually liked her body better now than she ever had. Her proportions were *right* for a change.

There was a knot in the pit of her stomach. Right now she wasn't feeling good about herself. She felt nothing but guilt. The knot started to whirl around and around, and she lay very still, afraid to risk a wave of nausea. What's happening to me? she wondered.

"You're crazy," an unfamiliar voice said quite clearly. "Completely crazy, and you should be put away. Like me." It was a strange voice, a new one. Kathy was terrified. She closed her eyes and saw a small dark-haired girl in a white hospital gown, sitting in a rocking chair, all alone.

"Who are you?" she whispered.

"Susan," the girl said, but as she turned to look at Kathy with sad, dead eyes, the picture faded and disappeared.

She opened her eyes and sat up. I have to get out of here, she said to herself. I'm imagining new parts to me, and that is very crazy. She lurched across the room toward the telephone. She had to call Matthew. But as she sat at her desk, poised to dial, her hands turned into fists.

"I don't *wanna* talk to that guy!" another strange voice said. Kathy listened, helpless. "Not on the phone. My name is Ivy. I'm letting you know I'm here," she went on, "but nothing more. Until I meet this so-called 'great Matthew' for myself." Ivy got up and stretched. "I'll let him know exactly who he's

dealing with. He said a long time ago there was a rebellious child in here. Well, that's me!" She crossed the room and slid open the terrace doors, admitting a blast of cold air. She didn't appear to notice, and stepped outside. An airplane roared overhead, and the woman looked up, an incongruous expression of glee on her face. "Maybe there'll be a crash. I'd *love* to see an airplane crash."

"Matthew, it's as if there's a blender inside me," she said. "First there were those experiences at the casino, which made me *very* uncomfortable."

"Most people wouldn't mind that kind of ESP," he remarked mildly.

"Is that what it is, ESP?" she asked. "Well, I hate it! It makes me feel like a lunatic." She was on the verge of tears. "And then, to have these other . . . other . . . parts come out right after that." She started to cry. "I feel so terrible. I'm sorry, Matthew, I'm sorry. I don't want to be so crazy!" She bent over double, burying her head in her lap, sobbing. Slowly, the heaves subsided.

"Who are you making yourself into?" he asked.

"I don't like your choice of words," she replied, looking up. "I don't *make myself* into anybody." She felt like such a failure. She knew he didn't want her to dissociate; he wanted her to ignore the parts, the "collections of experiences." And instead, she was bringing him new ones. She hadn't *wanted* these new ones to emerge, that was for sure. Was he angry with her because of it?

"Well, who are you?"

"Me."

"But you are not willing to accept my choice of words."

She was weary. "I am a person with a headache and a backache."

"Well, what's to gain from the pain? Where is it coming from?"

Now she was mad. "The point is, it's ending *here*," she declared. "And there are two different voices from two different places, but neither of them wants to come out."

"They have to."

"One is making me think I'm crazy, and the other is just angry. Angry for a lot of reasons." She closed her eyes and

passed a hand across her brow. When she spoke again, her voice trembled. "I'm scared that something else is going to pop up. Sorry that what happened happened. That these other parts appeared. Afraid that you're mad."

"Tell me about them."

Kathy sat silently. The words would not come. She *wanted* to tell him about them, but something—or someone—was blocking her vocal cords.

Finally, he spoke again. "Who are you making yourself into right now?"

She started to cry. "Crazy!" The voice was strangled. "I'm nobody," she went on. "Nobody knows I'm here." Her eyes were closed, her head bent, her shoulders hunched up.

"Do you have a relationship with these other people?" Matthew asked, leaning forward. "How are you connected with them?"

"They used to help me when I was in pain, but now I don't know how to stop the pain."

"Maybe it's a different pain."

"I can't live with it," she said dully.

"Tell me about you," he urged. "Who are you?"

"Part of Kathy." She sighed. "I'm Susan. I'm crazy. I sit in a room with no windows. There's only a rocking chair and nice white walls. I locked myself up there and I sit, rocking. I don't let anybody see me."

"How old are you?"

"Eight or nine."

"Good. That's a nice age."

"No, it's not."

"I have a nine-year-old girl," he said, "and it is for her. But probably not for you. What were you like when you were eight?"

"Kathy was okay. She played. She had friends just like the other kids."

"And then what happened?"

She shook her head wildly from side to side. Her voice rose. "I have so much pain, I can't take it! I'm going to go away."

"You can't make it better if you go away," he said quickly.

"I can't *live* with this kind of pain!"

"Was it painful when your big sister went away suddenly, mysteriously?" Matthew asked. "Were you about nine when that happened? What did you feel?"

"All alone."

"And what did you do about it, the fact that you were alone?"

"I cried, but nobody heard me."

"What did you think about?"

"I don't remember." Her body was rigid. "I wasn't there," she said finally. "Kathy was. I left. You'll have to ask her."

"Aren't you the same as Kathy?"

"Part, just part. I stay by myself. Don't ask me anything I don't know."

"You have been alone all this time," he said softly. "You've been alone a long time, Susan."

"I don't want to hear you anymore."

"Then you will be even more alone. Tell me what else happened when you were nine."

"I don't want to be here!" Her body was doubled up, contorted.

"Look at what you're doing to your body right now," he demanded sharply. "You're tensing it up. No wonder you're in pain."

Suddenly her head came up and her eyes opened. Her shoulders dropped, and her arms went limp. "Susan?" he asked, then, immediately, "Oh, she's gone."

"I can't do this," Kathy said wearily.

"Yes, you can. You're doing fine."

"I feel like a blender inside," she repeated. "I don't like it."

"Just close your eyes and talk to Susan," he suggested. "Let yourself go back."

"I *won't* go back, I won't," she wailed.

"Say that to *them*, Susan," he urged.

She stared at him belligerently. Her feet were on the floor about a foot apart, her knees slightly apart. She looked very angular—all elbows and knees. "I am not Susan," she declared.

He stopped for a moment. "Who are you?"

"None of your fucking business!"

"Why are you trying to put me off?" he asked mildly.

"I'm angry!"

"Who are you?"

"I don't want to tell you."

"You are probably just some trick of Kathy's."

"Oh, I'm full of tricks." She paused, shifting in her seat like an impatient schoolgirl. "Kathy told you about me on the phone, but you probably didn't pay any attention."

"Maybe I know more about you than you think. Who are you?"

Her face crumpled, and the belligerence left her voice. "I'm Ivy," she said softly.

"First of all, I want you to know that I'm not angry. Like all people, Kathy is made up of all different kinds of experiences. Unlike most of us, she has encapsulated certain of her experiences."

"I ain't a fucking experience!" Ivy declared.

"You're a rebellious little girl, right?"

"Damn right."

"Well, I couldn't be more pleased about that."

She sat back, taken by surprise. "What?"

"Kathy needs a little more rebelliousness," he explained. "I think you'll be very good for her. Now, what's this about plane crashes?"

She shifted in her seat. "I dunno. I just like that kind of thing. You know, accidents, fires. It's exciting, you know?"

"And being a quiet, good little girl all the time isn't too exciting, is it? Being under your sister's thumb, or terrified that your mom would get mad?"

"That's not me—that's Cici you're talking about. *I* would never be such an idiot."

Kathy felt her power return as Ivy vanished. "Oh, Matthew," she said, sighing, "where do we go from here?"

There was a tiny smile on his face as he reached across and patted her hands. "To there," he said.

Under the harsh, fluorescent lights of the hospital's visitors' lounge, Nan looked terrible. She looked more like a patient than a visitor. Kathy remembered her as a handsome woman, a glamorous, sophisticated creature, but now, approaching fifty, she looked faded. Everything sagged a little. Kathy wondered if the doctors and nurses took them for sisters. She knew they didn't look very much alike. She had always been the smaller, more delicate one, Nan the sturdier.

She patted her sister's hand. "It'll be all right, Nan. I'm sure everything will be okay."

The older woman sighed deeply. "I don't share your optimism," she replied. "And I hate hospitals!" She glared around her, then shook her head. "Why me?" she asked

rhetorically. "Why my only daughter?" She turned to Kathy. "She's not even twenty-five, you know? And with the baby at home." She started to cry.

"Nan, Nan, it's going to be all right. In the first place"—Kathy forced some hope into her voice—"the lump is probably benign. In the second place, even if it isn't, there are wonderful cure rates with breast cancer these days. She's going to be fine either way."

Nan pulled her hands away angrily. "You know what happens when you get cancer?" Her words turned into a sob. "She's my baby!"

Kathy got up and walked to the coffee machine. She couldn't sit next to her sister anymore. She's defeated, she said to herself, putting in nickels. And I'm scared that Rachel won't fight, that she'll pick up her mother's attitude and give up. If there was one thing Kathy thought she had learned from her year with Matthew, it was "Don't give up." Nothing is hopeless. Matthew even understood Susan—and he liked Ivy. And he made her believe that she, too, could be whole again, not fractured into little pieces. Please, God, let me hold together, she prayed silently. Not for me, not even for Rachel, but for Nan.

Rachel's husband, Gary, entered the waiting room, his face a mask of despair. "The biopsy is positive," he said softly, "they're going to take the breast."

"Oh, no!" Nan wailed. "My baby, my baby."

Kathy hugged Gary sympathetically, then put her arms around Nan. "Nan . . . Nan . . ." she murmured. "Just let it out." She held her heaving shoulders.

Gary wiped his face. "The doctors say that if there's no evidence of cancer in the lymph nodes, things will be looking pretty good and there won't be any further treatment. I'm praying for that."

Nan wept on as Kathy patted her shoulder.

His voice broke. "Rachel's pregnant again." His voice broke. "And if there has to be radiation or chemotherapy, well, then . . ." Nan burst into a new round of sobs, and Kathy wondered how she was going to survive the night.

"And so," Kathy told Matthew wearily, "she's going to have to have a therapeutic abortion on top of everything else. She

loses a breast, has to have chemotherapy, she loses the baby *and* her mother is a basket case. Nan has given up, Matthew, it's scary."

"She never was a very positive person, was she?" he asked mildly.

"These days, she's positively irrational!" Kathy declared. "For instance, my Bob, and John, her husband, are going to the Far East for ten days on business. Factories in Korea, that sort of thing. Scarcely glamorous. And at the same time our brother, Brian, happens to be going to Fresno for a legal convention. Fresno! And do you know what Nan said to me? 'Everyone's going on vacation without me!'" Kathy rolled her eyes. "The whole family's nuts!"

"Are you going to join them?" Matthew asked quietly.

"God, I hope not!" She ran her fingers through her hair. "I wonder if I'm seeing Nan accurately now," she mused. "Or if I'm feeling guilty because she's alone and I have a family. Her daughter *had* to have breast surgery and I *chose* to have it." Kathy paused to think. "I'm really scared that everybody hates me, that she and Rachel hate me."

"Hate me for . . ."

"Having that operation when everybody is sad. I was so selfish for doing it."

"That's a bunch of crap, Kathy. And it's the same way she manipulated you as a child. Whenever you wouldn't do what she wanted, she'd tell you you were selfish and threaten to take away her love."

"Or she hurt me."

"That's right. If threatening you didn't work."

"She needs me." Kathy sighed softly.

"She doesn't need you. She needs her parents. And she needs herself."

"She may shrivel and die and it will be my fault."

"No, it won't! That's what she told you as a child. It was your fault if she went crazy. And then she did. That was a lie," he said flatly. "That was between her and her parents. It had nothing to do with you."

"No. No! It did."

"Nan lied to you. She's just angry that you exist. You were just a little baby and she was already jealous. You couldn't even walk or talk, but she was jealous that you ate, jealous that you were pretty, jealous mostly because you got your parents' attention."

"I tried not to," she whispered. "When she was around."

"But you needed that attention. You're not responsible for her craziness."

"I'm the only one she has."

"She's got herself."

"No."

"She's got her daughter."

"She's going to kill Rachel."

"Like she wanted to kill you?"

"She wants me dead, I know," Kathy agreed.

"Are you going to oblige her?"

"No."

"Then tell your mom about her right now."

Kathy sank to the center and Cici spoke. "You never knew what she did to me. You were never there to protect me."

"Say that to her, 'Protect me.'"

"Why aren't you there to protect me? You're my mommy."

The voice was shy.

There was silence, and the woman leaned forward, as if listening to someone. "She doesn't know what I'm talking about."

"Then tell her."

"I want you to protect me." Her tone wasn't very convincing. And then she began to cry. "I just saw her face," she sobbed, "and she said, 'You're wrong. I have always been there for you. You are wrong.'" Her shoulders sagged in dejection. "That's why no one likes me. Because I'm always wrong."

"Who said they didn't like you, Cici?"

"The girls in school. I didn't know how to talk to them. I didn't know what to say, and everything I did, my mother said I was wrong."

"Do you believe it?"

"Last night at dinner she was there and I forgot something. She started to yell: 'You are stupid!' She said I was always forgetting, and I am."

"You were busy doing something else." Kathy dabbed at the tears on her face. "I'll bet you're really mad at her," Matthew observed.

"Nobody sees me," Cici sighed.

"Talk to her. Say, 'I wasn't wrong.'"

"I was right," she tried very quietly. Then the tears started again. "No, *she's* right. I'm stupid."

"You are *not* stupid. And you're not wrong. You are loveable."

"Eddie turned away and then everybody did," she whispered.

"Not me."

"You will." She wiped her face wearily.

"How old are you?" he asked suddenly.

"I feel about eight years old."

"All you need is someone to be there to protect you again. Somebody who believes in you."

"Nobody does," she said, crying.

"I'll listen to you."

"You won't send me away?"

"No."

"I can't let the world see me through Kathy," she explained slowly, "because if they see me, if I come out, I will ruin her life. She tries to hide me and keep me down here because she has four children. I can't let anybody see me."

"Why *can't* you let anybody see that sometimes Kathy hurts? *I'm* scared and lonely sometimes."

"Because I'm stupid."

"I don't think so."

Her voice turned desperate, as if she were at the very end of her rope. "Please teach me or kill me. I don't want to go on like this!"

"I won't kill you."

"Don't let me stay like this. I hurt all over."

"I think one reason you hurt is that you must have been mad. Mad at the mother who said you were stupid. Mad at the sister who was jealous and tried to control you. But that's only part of it."

"What's the other part?"

"Did your mother like you? Did she respect you? Did she like who you are as a person? Did she ever sit down and talk to you and hang out with you?"

"She took me wherever she went."

"But did she ever know you?" he insisted.

"No."

"Well, then how could she not like you? How can you not like someone you don't know? Go back and talk to her."

"I'm afraid of her too."

"Close your eyes and think about what you know. Believe in yourself," he demanded.

"I don't want to close my eyes," she replied stubbornly.

"Look at her. You need to tell Mom what you know."

Her eyes closed. "You make me feel crazy. You tell me it didn't happen and you tell me I'm wrong." She was crying. "Why do I feel this way?"

"Who is lying to whom?" he asked.

"You make me feel crazy, you make me feel like my head is going to split into pieces!" she cried. "Why?" She was gasping; she couldn't draw a deep breath.

"Tell her about choking," Matthew demanded. "Tell her what you have to do with the truth."

"My head is spinning around and I am going to choke to death. Please don't do that—don't!"

"Tell her the lies. Tell her about Nan."

"You were never there to hear the truth." She wept.

"You don't have to choke back what you know."

"I do so!" Her voice rose. "I'll have nobody."

"You need to take that risk, Kathy."

She was screaming. "You don't know what it's like to be all alone!"

"Would you rather go through life all choked up?"

"It hurts."

"You are not *using* what you know; you're going crazy instead. Talk to her!"

She resisted, and they sat in silence. She felt his eyes on her. Slowly, she began. "You always told me I was wrong, that I didn't feel that way, and you still do. You hide from the truth. You don't want to see it. You know that Nan's anger could hurt you and you're frightened because you feel like a bad mother. You don't like Nan, and you know Nan is capable of killing me. I loved you both, and you really weren't there for me because you were too scared of your own hatred for Nan. I was good and I never gave you any problems.

"It was the only way I could get attention," she continued softly. "You took me everywhere you went, and that was better than nothing. At least I was physically there; I got to go and Nan didn't. I would never let you hate me as you hated Nan. She was so sad. I'm the only one she has. I'm the only one who understands her. I can't show you that and I can't show Nan that I love you and I can't let Nan get angry at me, and I'm not

allowed to love Daddy. So I hide. I stay in my closed room and I become Susan. I locked myself up completely when Nan was taken away, because there was no one there for me at all. And when she got married and Rachel was born, they locked me out. So I was all alone until I found Eddie and then you took him away from me. I was alone again even though you told me I wasn't alone."

She stopped to think, and she felt Cici fade. The tears stopped. "Even now my mother hasn't changed," Kathy said. "Just the other day she was talking about sex and morals, and she said to me, 'If I hadn't made you give up Eddie, I don't know what would have happened to you.'" She took a deep breath. "She never lets me truly feel loved, even with Bob, who really does love me. That's why I need Prose." She smiled just slightly. "Prose can make love no matter what."

"She's a good friend sometimes, isn't she?"

"When does it end?" Kathy asked, passing her hand in front of her eyes.

"We still have a long way to go," Matthew replied softly.

Chapter 8



Stacey toyed with her food, pushing the salad from one side of her plate to the other. Kathy noticed but didn't say anything. She had decided that as far as her oldest daughter and food were concerned, the less said the better. She sipped her coffee. The baby was in bed and Marsha and Charley were doing homework, although she thought she could hear a television going too. Bob was away.

"Mom?"

"What, sweetheart?"

"Is Rachel going to be okay?"

"I sure hope so."

"Aunt Nan doesn't think so."

"I know, and it frightens me. You know what?"

"What?"

"I think that a person's attitude has a whole lot to do with how sick or healthy she is," Kathy said. "I know I sound like *The Power of Positive Thinking* and stuff like that, but I really mean it. Your mind affects your body. So I think that if Rachel has faith and hope, then she'll get better."

Stacey grunted. "So she should go around chanting, 'I think I can, I think I can'?"

Kathy laughed. "Well, I don't think she has to go so far as to talk to herself." What would Stacey think, she wondered, if she knew about the voices in her mother's head, the totally separate, often contradictory voices?

"I hear voices within me talking about eating," Stacey said so softly that Kathy almost missed it.

She tried not to overreact. "What do they say?" she asked calmly, as though hearing voices were the most natural thing in the world.

"One says, 'Eat!'" the girl replied. "And the other one says, 'Don't!'"

"Well, one of them's giving you very good advice," Kathy said, deciding to keep things as light as possible. "But which one depends on whether you're really hungry. So in the end you've still got to make the decision yourself." She paused. "Stacey, have you told anybody about that experience?"

"Are you kidding?" the girl snorted. "They'd think I was *crazy!*" She pushed her plate away and stood up. "Gotta do homework," she added gruffly, leaving the room.

Kathy carried the dishes to the sink, her head throbbing. Was she passing her problems on to Stacey? She wanted to run away. How was she supposed to cope with four children when she had absolutely no control over herself? When was she going to get better? Was Matthew helping her, or just stirring things up that would be better left alone?

She climbed the stairs two at a time and rummaged in her desk for the journal. She heard a quarrel brewing in the den, but suddenly she felt like writing. Stacey's comments had disturbed her a lot, she realized, staring at a blank page. Her focus blurred, as if she were in a trance. "How can anyone write in this fucking house?" Prose scrawled in her distinctive, rounded script. "Three children are fighting, and now the

baby's crying. There's no place to get quiet around here! I hate all this responsibility. I hate having four children when I'm not even ready to take care of myself. I don't want to be a mother anymore. I want to be alone."

"I can't be a good mother, Matthew!" Kathy declared. "I shouldn't have had children. I'm just repeating all the same mistakes in another generation."

"What do you mean?"

"Take last night, for instance. When Stacey was talking about hearing voices—the conversation I just told you about. I almost said to her, 'Don't be silly, you're not hearing anything.' Just like my mother used to do to me! 'No, you're wrong!'"

"But you didn't say that," Matthew pointed out.

"Not last night," she admitted. "But I'll bet I *have* said it a million times before. It's probably why Stacey has the problems she has." She sighed. "And then I watch them together. After that exchange in the kitchen, there was this tremendous ruckus. And when I went in to break it up—Stacey and Marsha were whining and complaining—for just a second, I thought I was watching Nan and me. Stacey was trying to make her sister do something, and as I walked in she grabbed her by the hair. Oh, Matthew, I just don't know. I'm feeling dumb, inadequate and wrong about everything I do, especially as far as Stacey is concerned. She represents all my failures. I love her, but I've failed her. My mother always says, 'Smart kid—dumb parent.' All I know is that she's angry, failing at school, unhappy and fat. She wants to be what she's not, and all I do is hurt her. Sometimes I can't stand looking at her. It's like looking at my failure. I want to run away. She needs to be protected from me." She looked at him bleakly.

"I don't know, Kathy. It seems to me you *were* there for your kids last night—Stacey included. I'm not saying everything's perfect. I'm sure you've made some mistakes, and so has Bob. And you probably *have* repeated some of the destructive patterns you learned in your childhood. But nothing's forever. You're changing. And your kids can change too."

"Do you think Stacey should be in therapy?" she asked.

"Probably."

"Would you talk to her and make a recommendation?"

"Probably." She wondered what he was waiting for. "I

suspect, Kathy," he said finally, "that there's something on your mind even more important than Stacey. Are you avoiding anything?"

"But my kids are the most—" she protested, then stopped. It was if he could read her mind. "I *have* been thinking a lot about Nan this past week," she admitted. "And I don't really want to go over it all again. It's so heavy. She has enough problems. I feel as though I'm being disloyal, talking about her."

"She can't hear us," he noted with a slight smile.

She grimaced. "Actually, that's one thing I've been feeling *good* about. At least feeling as if I'm not all wrong. All the work that you and I have been doing was rewarded this week by her."

"In what way?"

"I caught her in a relaxed enough state—she really wanted to talk, so she answered me spontaneously when I hit her with certain questions. She shared experiences about my father. I knew how guilty she always felt about loving him, but I didn't know that she believes he also felt sensual toward her."

"And she toward him?" Matthew asked.

"I think a lot of it was her own desire, but she told me that once, when she was seventeen, she was alone in the house and my dad, in his undershorts, crawled into bed with her and just held her silently. And—"

"That could be very nonsexual," Matthew said.

"Not with my dad," she explained. "He was *so* undemonstrative that it's an extraordinary thing for him to have done. And at about the same time—Nan was a very sexy girl at that age—one of my father's friends was over and apparently grabbed her and touched her in the kitchen. That was the only day she had ever dressed up to look really sexy, she said, so she made a decision never to look sexy again. And she said she had never shared that with anybody until now. A lot of feelings were coming out, but I still don't know who to believe."

"Yourself."

"How do *I* know what happened to Nan? And whether her experiences then affected me? I couldn't possibly know if something happened to her in her childhood. *She* may not even know for sure. It's a guessing game."

"Well, we can deal with it as a guessing game or we can deal with it as reality. Reality's damned uncomfortable though. But

this episode is certainly no more crazy than all the other things we've talked about, right? I mean crazy in terms of supposedly abnormal. You've had a bunch of childhood experiences, correct?"

She nodded.

"Specifically, a whole batch called Baby, also some Cici, some Prose, some Susan, some Ivy. In addition, you've taken in the thoughts, the feelings and the behaviors of other significant people in your life—your sister, for one, and your mother, for another. They're just as real 'parts' of you in a way as Prose and Cici. As a child you were like a dry sponge, soaking up their beliefs and attitudes. And since you have incorporated your mother and your sister, you can hear them speaking inside your head. So I can talk to them, too, through you. We call the process a parent interview." He paused, and Kathy could feel his concentration. "Kathy, was Nan sexual with you?"

She thought long and hard. She wanted to tell the truth, but no answer was coming to her. "I don't think so," she said slowly. "But when I go back, when I'm Baby and I'm so frightened, sometimes I feel a fingernail going inside of me, and it hurts. I don't think that has anything to do with Nan though. I don't know what it means."

Matthew seemed satisfied. "Kathy, be Nan. Sit the way she would sit. I want to talk with her."

She straightened up on the sofa; it was as if her body were being filled with something hard and unyielding. She was heavy. Her right hand grasped her left wrist, and she held on tight. As she looked at Matthew, her eyes narrowed, and her nostrils flared slightly.

"If you want to hold on to someone, hold on to me," he suggested mildly. "Don't make marks in your own arms."

"I don't trust you." The voice was low and harsh.

"I know." He reached across and tried to take her hand.

"Let go of me," she shouted, pulling free and flinging both arms up defensively. "Don't touch me!"

"Put your hands down."

"You make me all dirty," she replied, wringing her hands together.

"What do you feel dirty about?"

"Don't touch me! I'm telling you, don't come near me."

"How come it's bad?"

"Daddy," she mumbled.

"Tell me more about that."

"It makes me feel creepy. Like there are worms crawling all over me."

"Who touched you in a creepy way, Nan?"

"Nobody. I don't know."

"Then maybe it was somebody you *do* know. You said, nobody you *don't* know."

"I'm getting sick. I feel like I'm going to faint."

"Maybe you don't want to look at this," he said, his voice rising. "But I think it's important. Did you sleep with your father, Nan?"

She stood up and whirled away from him. "You filthy pig!" she spat. "All you men think about is sex. Well, I hate you! I hate all of you! You're all the same. I could kill you."

"Me? Or your dad?"

"Shut up!" Her face was red; she was shaking with anger.

"Because he wanted to fuck you, Nan?" Matthew's voice was insistent. "Or because he wouldn't? Which was it?"

"Shut up! You don't know what you're talking about!" She was clutching both arms now, and her long, manicured nails were making red impressions.

"Okay, I'll stop," he agreed pleasantly. "But you let go of Kathy. You stop hurting her. Take your nails out of her."

"I'll do anything I want with her," the furious figure replied. "She belongs to me."

"No, she doesn't." Now his voice was angry. "She belongs to herself."

"You *want* her to belong to you, but you're too late. She's already mine," she snarled. "And you'd better leave me alone or I'll make her kill herself. I can do that—I can. So you stay out of my way!"

"I won't let you—or anyone else—hurt Kathy," Matthew said firmly. "It's time for you to back off."

"Don't think you've won," the woman replied. "You haven't. Not by a long shot."

Kathy disliked fussy tearoom-type restaurants, but her mother had suggested that they have lunch and had also chosen the spot. "I just spoke to Nan," Lily announced, sitting down at the ridiculously small table and removing her gloves. "Rachel

has had the first of the chemotherapy sessions and seems to be holding up quite well. Considering."

"Yes, I spoke with Gary."

"Not with Nan?"

"I find it depressing to talk to her, Mother. She's just so down about the whole thing. I prefer to think that Rachel's going to be just fine, going to dance at her son's wedding."

"Yes, well . . ." Mrs. Kahn surveyed the menu with some disdain, then ordered an omelet. "Nan always did look on the dark side. And how are *your* children? Has Stacey lost any of that weight? It seems like ages since I've seen them."

"Mother, we all had dinner together on Sunday, two weeks ago." She turned to the waitress. "The chicken salad, please."

"Chicken salad? But it's cold outside. That's for summer, darling. You need something warm to eat."

Kathy sighed. She couldn't even order lunch properly, apparently. "Actually, the kids are just fine, Mother, Stacey's weight aside. Charley's on the honor roll, and Marsha won an art prize last semester, and Lynn, well, she's just enchanting. And learning so fast! I think she's way ahead of where the others were at her age."

Mrs. Kahn picked up her teacup. "I have smart grandchildren," she said, nodding. "Why wasn't *I* so lucky?"

Kathy was stung. "That's not a very nice thing to say, Mother," she managed, fighting tears. Her mother never failed to make her feel ten years old. "How do you think that makes me feel?"

"Oh, come, come, come. You have no sense of humor!" Lily replied calmly.

Kathy looked at her defiantly. "A slap is never funny."

"Tsk, ts, ts. Sorry I offended," she said with mock humility. "So tell me about you. Since when did you become so sensitive? You still seeing that psychiatrist—shrink—whatever he is?"

"He's a psychologist, Mother, a psychotherapist, and yes, I am." She couldn't resist baiting her mother for a change. "I'm telling him all the family secrets."

"What secrets?" Mrs. Kahn demanded, indignant. "We have no secrets! What are you talking about?"

"Nothing, Mother, nothing. Eat your omelet before it gets cold."

"Secrets!" the older woman muttered, taking a bite. "Thera-

pists! Where will it all end? Does this therapy make you happy, Katya?"

"Well, not happy, exactly, Mom, some of it is quite painful." Kathy thought about it for a moment. "But I expect it to help me be happier, yes. And I expect it to make me freer, more able to enjoy life."

"Freedom!" Mrs. Kahn snorted. "A highly overrated quality if you ask me." She wiped her mouth on her napkin. "I've had a long life, my dear, and I've suffered my share of tragedy. My people were poor, I had only one party in my entire childhood—when I was sixteen." She paused, a frown creasing her forehead. Kathy was surprised, not by the anger in her mother's tone—that was normal—but by the fact that she seemed to be talking openly about herself. Lily rarely discussed her own family or growing up.

"It was the worst experience of my life." Lily's mouth closed tight. "And then my father died just before my wedding, so that wasn't a very festive occasion either. I had children—bing! bing! bing!—and I lost the one just before you. The doctors—what do doctors know?" Her voice was venomous. "They said, 'No more, Mrs. Kahn. Carrying that dead baby was too much of a strain. No more.' Did I pay any attention to the experts? If I had, we wouldn't be sitting here right now. Freedom! Experts! None of it means anything, Katya. But the family! That means everything.

"Your father and I, we had our fights." She chuckled bitterly. "We were both strong-willed people, that's for sure. God rest his soul," she added quickly. "But we were loyal." She paused self-righteously, looking Kathy right in the eyes. "Our loyalty was always to the family. That comes first."

Kathy sat rigidly on Matthew's couch, just breathing. She was having difficulty getting enough air into her lungs; she felt as though she were suffocating. "I have been in severe physical pain since I last came here," she began slowly, not looking at Matthew. "I can't sleep at night because I have such pains in my chest." She wrapped her arms around her rib cage, hugging herself. "I thought I was having a heart attack, but I know I'm not."

"Where are the pains coming from?" Matthew asked calmly. "They're throughout—chest, head, eyes—everywhere."

"But where are they *from*?" he insisted.

She frowned, concentrating. Her eyes closed. "I see my father," she said finally. "Silent. And my mother. Angry. They're fighting."

"Is it the pain of your parents arguing?"

"Maybe . . ."

"The pain that they might split up, and then what happens to you?"

Her eyes remained closed. She shook her head. "Leave me alone." A shudder went through her body, and she shifted on the couch, squeezing her knees tight. Her shoulders slumped and a strand of hair fell across her eyes.

"If they are fighting, Cici, if they are having trouble with each other, it's not your fault," Matthew continued.

"I knew . . ." she began tentatively, then stopped.

"Okay, you knew something for a long time you weren't supposed to know," Matthew prompted. "Why weren't you supposed to know?"

She was suddenly terrified. "No—no! I don't know anything." A tear rolled down her cheek. "I won't tell anybody," she promised softly. Her arms tightened around her mid-section.

"Look what you're doing to your chest," he demanded. "You're holding that secret in so tight."

She was gasping. "I can't breathe anymore." Her head spun wildly from side to side, as if she were searching. "Someone is here. I hear someone." She buried her head in her hands. "I don't want to know!"

"Okay, hide your head then."

Instead, she looked up and her eyes opened. Her body straightened, but awkwardly. Her voice was different—louder, harsher. "I've had it!" Ivy declared. She was shouting. "I've had it, I've had it, I've had it!"

"You don't need to be the protector of Mom's secrets," Matthew said. "You don't need to go crazy for her."

She looked at him suspiciously. "I don't like you."

"You don't have to like me," he replied in an even tone. There was silence for a minute, and then he went on. "But you do have to deal with your mother's fucking around."

She felt as though she'd been hit in the stomach. Her eyes narrowed. "I don't know what you're talking about."

He stretched, leaning back. "Yep, that's part of the dynam-

ics: I don't know. I won't tell. Instead, I get pains in my chest from holding it in."

"Are you supposed to take pain away?" Ivy asked cautiously.

"Are you willing to deal with me?"

"I don't *want* to deal with you."

"I'm not your enemy."

"I don't know enough."

"Because you're not supposed to tell the family secrets. Who else was your mother sleeping with? You're keeping the secret from your father and then blaming him for their relationship not going well. Tell me what you know."

She stared at the floor, refusing to meet his eyes. "My mother took me down to Florida every fucking year as a kid. And every fucking year, guess who showed up? Larry Strauss." There were tears in her eyes.

"Does that mean that your mother was fucking Larry? And every year you had to keep secrets?"

"I don't know."

"Yes, you do. I know you know. I also know your decision was, 'I won't know.' You see, Ivy, I know more about you than you think. The difference between you and me is that you pretend you don't know while I pay attention to what I *do* know."

"I just don't remember."

"Naturally. Look at how advantageous that was when you came back to New York. And what weren't you supposed to know about Mom and Dad?"

She started to cry. "I knew my mommy hated my daddy and my daddy didn't hate my mommy. I knew that." She paused. "And I knew Mommy had a friend and I knew I wasn't allowed to tell anybody. And I knew I wasn't allowed to shout, because look what happened to Nan. She was *always* yelling."

"And what did they do to her?"

"They took her away."

"Maybe she had something to yell about. Maybe Nan knew some secrets too."

"I was the only one who went to Florida."

"Maybe she knew different secrets. Ask your mother."

"No!" Her voice was a shriek. "She'd only tell me I don't know," Ivy sobbed. "She'd tell me I'm crazy."

"I'll back you up. You are *not* crazy."

"I remember," she whispered. "I remember being with her

in Florida, and I remember him coming every year. I know I'm not wrong." She sat silently, not breathing, as if listening. Then she started to cry again. "She's telling me I'm wrong. She said she wouldn't do something like that."

"She's wrong." Matthew's voice was emphatic.

"I'm going to lock myself up." Ivy sobbed. "It's easier."

"I won't let you do that," he said forcefully, leaning forward. "She lied to you and that's what you're going to have to deal with. She lied and she wanted you to lie to your father, and lying is what makes people crazy. You can't go through this pain for her anymore!"

"I didn't know it was for her and I didn't know why I was in pain," she wailed. "I just knew I was in fucking pain all week and I kept blaming Susan!" She started banging her fists on the arm of the couch. "But it's Mommy!"

"Keep going, louder. Use both hands."

"I remember being in Florida as a kid, sitting on that porch." She felt the warm, humid air. "I don't want to sit here on the porch all night and wait until he comes. I don't want to be a good little girl anymore. I want Mommy to see me!" As quickly as it had begun, the banging stopped. Her chin dropped, her hair covered her eyes, and she folded her hands in her lap.

"Keep going," Matthew urged. "I'll protect you." She shook her head, holding up a hand as if to ward off a blow. "I'm not going to let her hit you," he promised.

Her voice was soft and meek. "Please, help me. I want you to be my friend, Matthew, don't hurt me."

"I won't. That's what I'm saying. Go ahead, get angrier."

"I can't," Cici replied, crying quietly. "You don't know her. She would say I don't know what I'm talking about."

"You just be there on that hotel porch and you remember."

It was futile, but she took an obedient breath. "I used to love going with her. I used to want to be with her all the time because I loved her so much. I don't think she loved me as much," she added wistfully. "But there are things I can't remember. Where was I when Larry was there? Why wasn't I with them? I don't remember being all alone. She said she never left me alone. Why don't I remember?"

"Because there's something you're not supposed to know."

"I see *her* alone, without me. But she said she never left me by myself. And I see *me* all alone." Her voice rose sharply, hysterically. "I don't see her there, but she said she never left

me." She sobbed. "I don't want to remember anymore. I don't want to because I can't win either way. If I'm right, then she lied, and if I'm wrong, I'm crazy. It's easier not to remember."

"Now find out what the promise was."

"I will never tell on Mommy," she recited.

"And if you don't tell, what does she owe you?"

"Just love."

"Yeah." He paused. "What happened to that little girl at night?" he asked.

"I don't know." She shook her head.

"Did you get locked up?"

"I don't remember!" she screamed. "I told you I don't want to know. I never told; I never said anything. I didn't tell Daddy."

"Just tell what happens to you when you keep her lies."

"I'm in pain."

"It's *very* painful for a child to maintain someone's lies. What's the importance of not remembering—what's the deal?"

"I won't make any trouble and she will stay with us and stay with Daddy."

"And what you'll give up is . . ." he prompted.

"Remembering. I promise, I promise."

"And what's the price you'll pay?"

"I don't know anymore." She wept. "I grew up not knowing anything. You don't understand what it was like being told you're wrong until you really don't know."

"But you're not wrong, you know."

"I know that she cheated on Daddy. I know that she didn't want to stay married and that she would have left us if she could have."

"You knew a whole lot, little girl. And you're not crazy and you're not wrong. There is nothing wrong except you made a bad deal. You got rooked."

"I hurt so much."

"Probably in direct proportion to how angry you are."

"You don't know what it's like to be all alone." She sighed, wiping her face with a tissue. It was almost time to go.

"I know it was hard for you to be alone, Kathy, when you were a little girl," he replied. "The difference now is that you can handle life with the skill of a grown-up who understands what that little girl felt and decided. You're not a little girl anymore."

Chapter 9



Kathy drove the red Jaguar slowly around the block once, and then again. As she passed the entrance to Matthew's building for the third time, she realized she hadn't really been looking for a parking place, she hadn't been paying attention at all. She shook her head. "Focus!" she muttered to herself. Bob was indulgent to an almost excessive degree, but if she scraped the new car carelessly, he would have every right to be angry. She furrowed her brow in an effort to concentrate. There! Someone was just pulling away from the curb. She slipped into the opening and turned off the ignition.

She sat motionless with her hands folded in her lap, looking at the luxurious bunch of flowers that lay on the passenger seat. They were for Matthew, a going-away present. "Ten weeks," she sighed, feeling the prickle of tears behind her eyes. "He'll be gone for ten weeks this summer." She knew what her options were. She could just hold tight, as she had last summer, or she could see another therapist. No! she thought fiercely. I don't *want* to see anyone else. I'll wait for Matthew. She felt determined, but still she didn't move.

And there *was* a Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy conference in Boston in August, a meeting for therapists where Matthew would be speaking and working with trainees. She wanted to see if she could get into the meetings, or at least into the hotel, and she hoped that he could schedule a two-hour session for her there. But if he didn't have time to see her privately, maybe he would allow her to participate in one of the workshops he was conducting. After all, he *had* said that in the fall he wanted her to start attending a regular group he and Marian conducted. A workshop might be good preparation. But she hadn't asked him yet. Somehow their last meeting had

flown by, and before she knew it they were saying good-bye. That's why she had come with the flowers. Everything seemed so unfinished.

She sighed again. And yet, she thought, I understand so much more now than I did a year ago. I understand something of how Mom and Nan affected me as a little girl, and how the parts were created as defense mechanisms. "But I'm not a little girl anymore," she whispered, "so why are the parts still with me? And what will I do without Matthew if Cici wakes up one morning and won't let go? Or if Prose gets bored and starts making trouble? What if Ivy hears a siren and goes off looking for the fire? And what about Susan, locked up in that room, rocking?"

"Oh, Matthew! Each part of me is so sad! I feel as if I can see them crying, each one curled up and in tears. I'm so locked up that if someone cut me, I don't think I would bleed." She rested her head against the steering wheel and tried to calm down. Deep breaths, she told herself. I'll miss him, but I'll manage. I always have. I always will.

There was a tap on the window, and she jerked upright, startled, wiping her face on her sleeve. An attractive young man in corduroy pants and a T-shirt was standing next to the car. Prose gave him a quick once-over. Now *there's* something interesting we might do with the afternoon, she thought. A *lot* more interesting than mooning around about that Caldwell. I can't even get to first base with *that* guy, but this one looks pretty available. . . .

Prose shook her head to rearrange her hairdo as she rolled down the window. "Yes?" she asked in an inviting tone.

He had a nice voice. "Sorry to bother you, ma'am, but I just wondered if you were staying or leaving. I'm looking for a space, and this one's good until Thursday."

"Shit!" Prose muttered under her breath, turning away.

Thank God for alternate-side-of-the-street parking, Kathy thought wryly. Not nearly romantic enough to hold Prose's attention. She summoned a pleasant smile and hoped that her mascara hadn't run all over her face. "If you'll wait just a minute, I'll be out of here," she replied, picking up the flowers. "I'm just going to drop these off with the doorman in that building." She unlocked the door and swung out of the car. In her shaky mood, it was probably better *not* to see Matthew.

* * *

In the weightless limbo between sleeping and waking, the gray of the bedroom seemed like a cloud. Kathy closed her eyes again, knowing that she should get up and think about dinner, but enjoying the luxury of an afternoon nap. She had come back from the city exhausted and had flopped down, fully dressed, on the bed. She could hear, faintly, the sounds of the children by the pool. Gloria was there, she knew, as her eyelids fluttered.

She stretched slightly, thinking vaguely that her linen slacks were undoubtedly one big wrinkle by now, and her hand slipped over the edge of the mattress, between the bed and the wall. Suddenly there was a tingling sensation in those fingertips, as though they were vibrating. The feeling was odd at first, and then unpleasant. She jerked her hand back and sat up, her eyes wide open. She could feel the perspiration in her scalp.

The memory was so clear it startled her; it was as though it had happened yesterday, but it must have been—what?—more than twenty-five years before. She was sleeping in her parents' big bed in the house in Brooklyn. It was night, but the grown-ups were still awake; she could hear them talking downstairs. Her hand was over the edge of the mattress, and she suddenly realized that she couldn't pull it back. The child tugged and tugged, but something was holding her hand tight; someone was trying to pull her down, down past the bed and the floor, down beyond the basement into the ground underneath the house, where it was always dark.

"Help!" she had called, but her voice wouldn't come out. It was just a squeak. The adults were having a good time; they couldn't hear her. She started to cry, pulling and pulling. "A witch has hold of me," she sobbed to herself, "and she's going to drag me away." She could feel the witch's hand, cold and scratchy, tugging. She held on with all her might, as though the bed were a safe haven in a kingdom of darkness. She closed her eyes and held her breath. "I'll be good," she whispered. "Just let me stay with my mommy."

All at once her hand was free. She raced out of the room and down the stairs, sobbing. Her parents and Nan and her fiancé were all in the kitchen, and they turned to look as she burst into the room. "A witch was under the bed!" she exclaimed. "She was trying to take me away!"

She could still see their faces. Lily and Sherman, Nan and John, all laughing, laughing at her fears. She swallowed a sob, then looked at her hand. It was all red and swollen, as though it had been stuck in a tight place. "Go back to bed, Kathy," her mother had snapped. "I imagine the witch took one look at you and said, 'No, thanks!'" Kathy put her hand behind her back and edged out of the warm circle of light. As she went back up the stairs, their laughter followed her.

Twenty-five years later, sitting on her bed, Kathy found herself staring again at that hand. She examined it carefully, but found no signs of injury. The manicure was perfect. If there was still a witch under the bed, she hadn't gotten a good grip this time. She shivered. What an odd experience. She looked at the clock. It was nearly six. She could call Matthew now; he would almost certainly be free. She didn't plan on mentioning this eerie flashback—she just wanted to talk about the conference in Boston—but she hoped that hearing his voice would dispel the uneasiness that the memory had left, the haunted feeling, the conviction that there was a witch nearby, waiting for her.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Marian, it's Kathy."

"Oh, Kathy, hi. The flowers are just beautiful. Thank you."

"You're welcome. I needed a way to say good-bye, I guess. The summer looks pretty long from my vantage point."

"And pretty short from mine. There's *so* much to do!"

Kathy was suddenly back in that kitchen again as Marian's words hit like a slap in the face, like her mother's cheerful disregard. She knew that Marian didn't *mean* that she looked forward to time without Kathy hanging around, but . . . "I'm sure there is a lot . . ." she managed after an awkward silence. "Listen, is Matthew there? I wanted to ask him something about the conference in Boston."

"No, he's not, as a matter of fact. He had to run out to get a couple of things. But I've got all the info on the conference. What did you want to know?"

She took a deep breath. She wanted to discuss this with *Matthew*, not Marian. "Well, I was wondering if people who are not therapists could attend, and I was sort of hoping that Matthew might have a little time free."

Marian's voice was breezy, not unkind. "Not a single second, I'm afraid. He's scheduled up to his neck, with four workshops

to give and trainees to supervise. Frankly, Kathy, if you were thinking of going in order to see him, it would be a waste of time. It's a professional conference."

"Oh." The summer stretched ahead of her like the Sahara, without a single oasis. "Well, at least I could take a workshop or two. . . ."

"Oh, no, they've all been full for *weeks*. I'm sorry," Marian went on. "I know how much you're going to miss him. But I also know that he has complete confidence in you. He *knows* you'll be fine. And you do have Dr. Conover's number if you need it, right?"

"Right." As she hung up, Kathy felt totally rejected. She saw the brochure describing the conference lying on the bedside table and picked it up. She had taken it from a pile at Matthew's. She studied the paper accusingly. It didn't *say* no civilians, not in so many words. She suddenly noticed a small photo of Marian on the flyer. So Marian was giving a lecture too. She glanced at the bio and was surprised. To Kathy, Marian was little more than a presence at marathons, a voice on the phone. But her credentials—her degrees, her experience, lots of it in hospitals—were quite impressive.

She frowned again. Who gives a damn? she thought bitterly. So she's a dynamite therapist. She was still completely screwing up the plans. Kathy was trying to schedule her whole summer around the goddamn conference! Bob was taking some time off, and they could fly up to Boston for a few days, then rent a car and visit the kids' camps, then spend some time on Cape Cod. It was all arranged in her mind. And now Marian was telling her not to come. Ordering her to stay away, in fact. Tears ran down her face. Had she done something wrong? Was Matthew mad at her?

She sat cross-legged on the bed, staring at the phone in her lap. "I don't even have a private appointment for September," she muttered, ripping a Kleenex out of a box. "Just the date that group starts—with all those strangers and *her*. Maybe I'll never see him again!" She blew her nose angrily. "And maybe that's just as well! I can't trust that son of a bitch. I can't even reach him on the phone. I talk to that . . . that . . . I don't even know what Marian is to him. His *keeper*, that's what. Witch! He's just like my father! No protection from witches! No help!" She pounded the pillows in a fury.

But venting her anger didn't make the pain go away, it just

made her feel exhausted and vulnerable. "I bet he really is glad to get away from us," Cici suggested timidly. "Anybody would be. We're so boring. We just waste his time."

"Bullshit!" Prose declared. "He's a jerk, that's all. Now, if I'd managed to get him in the sack, things would be very different. But to hell with him! I'm going to have a good time this summer!"

Kathy's head pounded. Slowly, carefully, as though she might break, she got off the bed and walked gingerly into the bathroom for some aspirin. Maybe her head would explode with all these people in it, she thought grimly, and then all problems would be solved. She opened the medicine cabinet and reached for the pain-killer, accidentally knocking over a prescription bottle in the process. She got the aspirin, then looked at the other container as she replaced it. Seconal, the label read. She frowned. Wasn't that a sleeping medication? She hadn't ever had any sleeping pills prescribed. "Mrs. Robert Roth," the label read. She shrugged. They were probably Bob's, but he'd been embarrassed to have the prescription filled or something. She swallowed the aspirin. That would make sense. He thought taking medicine was a sign of weakness. She would have to remember to ask him if he was having trouble sleeping.

Her temples still throbbing, she returned to the bed. This is crazy, she told herself firmly. I'm feeling rejected and I'm splitting off into a million pieces instead of doing something grown-up about it. For once, let me be an adult. She picked up the phone and dialed. "Oh, Matthew, thank goodness it's you," she blurted out when she heard his voice. "I spoke to Marian before, and I know she was just being honest, but I felt terribly rejected and I don't want to live with that all summer."

"I'm glad you called back, then. Marian told me that you had wanted to come to the conference, and that she'd explained it was for professional psychotherapists."

"That's right. But I guess I was really counting on it. Counting on seeing you, I mean, at least briefly, in the middle of the summer. Something to look forward to—for all of us. Prose says she doesn't care, but Cici feels terrible."

"Talk to me about *you*, Kathy."

"Well, I had sort of planned the whole summer around the conference, actually. We'll be in New England visiting the kids' camps, and—"

"What Marian told you is true, however. There will be very little free time, and all my workshops are filled, mostly with trainees."

"I guess I wouldn't fit in, even if there was room."

"I don't think attending would give you what you need."

There was silence as Kathy strove to maintain control. "Then how am I going to get it?" she whispered finally, her voice breaking.

"By knowing you're a whole person who can function independently," he replied. "Even for ten weeks."

She sighed. "Easy for you to say," she muttered. Louder, she added, "Well, I can try."

"And you can succeed. I predict that this summer will be very good for you, Kathy. It will give you confidence."

"But what if—"

"No matter what," he interrupted firmly, "you—Kathy—will manage and survive."

He seemed so sure, she almost believed him. But he didn't have a whole flock of crazy people whirling around in his head. She closed her eyes, squeezing back tears. "I'm scared about going to the group in the fall, Matthew," she admitted in a small voice. "It feels as if everything will be different from now on. I know I've met most of the other people at marathons. Will I still see you?" she blurted out finally. "Privately, I mean?"

"Of course, for as long as you need to." She let out her breath. "And you're going to learn a lot from the group, Kathy. Since your family didn't give you much understanding while you were growing up, the group can provide a kind of support structure you've never had. And it will also be a place where you can relate openly and honestly about the splitting off—all the things you have to hide from the rest of the world."

"I understand."

"And as for the summer, I'll tell you what," he went on. "Since you're going to be in the Boston area anyway, I want to invite you to a party."

"What?"

"A celebration, in fact. On August tenth at the Sheraton Boston. You and Bob are welcome to come if you'd like."

"What's the party for?"

"For Marian and me. We're getting married, and most of our friends and colleagues will be at the conference, so they're throwing us a party."

"Oh, Matthew!" Her first reaction was shock. They were getting married! She had always half-assumed they *were* married, but she'd never been sure. Her antipathy toward Marian vanished. They were wonderful together, so warm and supportive at marathons, she almost looked forward to starting group. They were perfect for each other, and she was very happy for them both. "That's wonderful!" She felt a warm glow deep inside that he had entrusted her with such personal information. It was as though he were leaving her with a secret to keep her safe in the weeks ahead. "Congratulations!"

"I don't know about this," Bob said doubtfully as they waited for the elevator. They were staying at the Sheraton Boston, so they didn't have far to go. "Are you sure we should attend this shindig, Kathy?"

"I'm positive." She looked him over critically. He was wearing white trousers and a double-breasted navy blazer and he looked very handsome. She was proud of him. He had never met either Matthew or Marian, and she knew he was dreading a room full of therapists. "Don't worry," she said soothingly. "Nobody will be judging you or psychoanalyzing you. And I do want you to meet Matthew. After all, you pay him a considerable amount of money. Aren't you even a little bit interested in what he's like?"

He leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. "All I'm interested in is your being happy and healthy. If he's contributing to that, he's okay. I just feel funny about socializing with a bunch of shrinks. I mean, he probably knows some pretty personal things about me, huh?"

"You mean, like you wear jockey briefs instead of boxers?" she teased. "And that Prose thinks you're the best lover in the whole world?"

"Kathy!" The elevator doors opened, ending the conversation, and Kathy snuck a peek at herself in the smoked-glass interior. She was wearing a black silk cocktail dress, sleeveless but high-necked, that emphasized her tan. Bob's lips brushed her ear. "You look great," he whispered.

As she rang the door buzzer, Kathy said, "Don't worry, sweetheart. We're just going to have one quick drink and then leave. I promise we won't stay long, half an hour maximum, okay? Can you manage that?"

He nodded as the door opened and they were engulfed in a crowd of people. "Hello, hello. Welcome! The bar's that way, and the happy couple is around someplace."

Bob steered her through the suite, one room furnished with couches and chairs, the other with a bed, and acquired a Scotch for himself, Perrier for her. Kathy introduced him to a couple of Matthew's trainees she knew from marathons, and then she wandered to the other end of the suite, where she found Marian, glowing.

"I'm so glad you could come, Kathy," Marian said with real feeling. "Matthew and I are extremely happy, and it's wonderful to share that with you—with everyone!" She laughed, enveloping Kathy in a hug.

"Your joy seems to be contagious," Kathy replied, hoping she could be heard over the din, gesturing at the cheerful throng. "I certainly feel it. I couldn't be happier for you. And I want you to meet Bob. . . ." She searched the room for her husband, and finally found him, several knots of people away, shifting uneasily from foot to foot. "There he is—I'll go rescue him."

As she began moving she saw Matthew, looking positively euphoric, descend on him. "You must be Bob Roth," she heard Matthew say as she threaded her way across the room. "Or at least that's a fair assumption, since I saw you come in with Kathy. I *hope* you're Bob Roth anyway," he said with a laugh. And then he put both arms around Bob and embraced him warmly.

Kathy winced a little as she imagined Bob stiffening. Her husband was not much for public displays of affection. *Especially* among strangers. *Particularly* among male strangers. "As you may have guessed, I'm Matthew Caldwell," he continued, releasing Bob as Kathy arrived. And then he turned to Kathy and gave her a big hug, and it felt as though his strength and happiness were flowing into her body. "How are you doing?" he asked softly.

"Just fine, Matthew," she replied, and as she said it, she realized it was true. She *was* doing fine. The summer was two thirds over, and she was making it. No scenes, no trouble. Of course, she hadn't gone out in public much, but she had seen her family and close friends, and she had managed to maintain control. Maybe she was finally getting used to the voices in her

head, the comments that Prose or Cici or Ivy would make, the chill of fear that meant Baby was scared. She smiled up into his warm face. "I'm really doing fine. You were right."

"Glad to hear it." He held out his hand to Bob, who still appeared to be in shock. "Nice to meet you, Bob. I hope the rest of your trip is enjoyable." She didn't think she'd ever seen him so up, so exhilarated. He turned back to her. "Have fun. I'll be back the second week in September, and I'll see you then. Okay?"

"Okay." She took Bob's hand as Matthew turned to greet a new arrival. "I just want you to meet Marian," she said, moving in that direction. "And then we'll go. Are you all right?"

"Sure," he replied, shaking his head as if to dispel a dream. "I guess I'm just not used to this kind of friendliness or something. Do shrinks always hug and kiss like that?"

"No, but there's nothing wrong with warmth and spontaneity, Bob. You should loosen up a little!"

"I don't mind warmth," he protested, taking a healthy sip of his drink, "as long as I'm expecting it. I just don't like surprises."

There were no surprises during any of their three camp visits. Of the children, only Marsha was at overnight camp for the first time, and she seemed to be loving it, and as Bob drove the scenic coast route back toward Boston a week later, Kathy felt more relaxed and contented than she had in years. They had lunch in Gloucester, at a restaurant overlooking the picturesque harbor, and after a stroll through the cobblestone streets, they headed south for Marblehead.

Kathy leaned back against the headrest and closed her eyes. The weather was perfect, and she was looking forward to a restful few days in Hyannis, on Cape Cod. Their motel accommodation would undoubtedly be more luxurious than the guest lodge at Camp Wild Goose! She smiled.

All at once the memory of the primitive camp cabin was replaced by a less peaceful vision, and her back stiffened, the hair on her neck standing on end. It was as though there were a screen on the insides of her eyelids, and a movie was playing, a movie over which she had no control.

The day was dark and gloomy, and the morning fog still clung to the ground. As she watched the scene, filled with unreasoning terror, there was a pole directly in her line of vision. It was tall and dark, surrounded by a mound of hay. She approached it. A man's voice was quiet but firm. "Thou must pay for thy sins, like thy mother before thee," he said. "Wouldst like the holy book for thy comfort?"

A worn Bible swam into her vision, as if someone were offering it to her, and then it was snatched away. She must have refused it. Now she was standing on the hay, next to the stake, and someone was attaching her hands to the pole. It's me! she thought in desperation. I'm going to be burned at the stake! She looked around and saw a circle of solemn faces, all staring. Everyone was dressed in black, men and women, and the women wore long dresses and bonnets. Some children were weeping soundlessly, especially one boy, a boy who looked eerily familiar, but the adults were stone-faced. She looked down. Her feet were bare. The scene was as silent as death.

"Kathy! Kathy!"

From far away she could hear Bob's voice, but it didn't belong in this scene. He couldn't touch her here. No one could help her here.

A black-hatted man approached with a torch. She watched as the flame touched the hay. She could smell the smoke as the fire began, feel the heat of the flames as they neared her ankles. It hurt! The pain was excruciating! And then she was floating, far above, watching as the flames leaped, a blazing conflagration, and the figure burned, her face contorted in agony but her mouth shut tight.

Now her hair was on fire, and the flames ate up her face; she was one with the blaze, utterly consumed, and still the scene was quiet; there was no sound. Still Kathy seemed to float. And then a phrase rose up from one of the watchers as the crowd began to dissipate. "Like mother, like daughter," an anonymous voice intoned.

"Kathy, are you all right? You're white as a sheet, and you're shaking."

She blinked and turned toward Bob, vastly relieved to see his strong, kind face instead of the horrible scene she had just witnessed. She shook her head. "I don't know. . . ." she began, looking around. They were in yet another colonial-looking New England town. "I had a bad dream or something . . . where are we?"

"We're in Salem," he replied. "I thought we might get out and take a look around. There's a lot of history here."

And in my head, Kathy thought, fighting panic. What had she seen? What did it mean?

Late that night, lying in Bob's arms in the warm darkness, Kathy was still shaken by the intensity of the vision. She was glad for the security of his embrace, but afraid that it wasn't enough to keep her safe. If it was a dream she had had, then she couldn't risk falling asleep and having it again, she reasoned, eyes wide open. *He* thought it had been some sort of an especially vivid daydream, some fantasy triggered by the knowledge that they were passing through Salem, infamous for its witch trials. But she hadn't *known* that, she protested. She knew a little something about Salem, of course, but had no idea that the town was so close to the shore, that they would be driving through it.

She shivered. It was as though she had *been* there, had actually lived through that experience. It felt like a part of her, not like a daydream. Like a memory. She shivered. And that made her a crazy person who not only fragmented into bits, but who also remembered things that happened centuries ago.

"Matthew, it's bad enough when I split off in pieces without any warning," she said quietly, staring down at her blue jeans, "but this seeing-things routine makes me feel like I'm flipping out altogether." She was wearing a turtleneck and sneakers, and very little makeup. She felt young and vulnerable, and she probably looked it too.

Matthew shifted slightly on the worn, overstuffed chair. It was the third weekend in September, and they were sitting in the sunny living room of the large, defiantly unpretentious

house in rural Connecticut that Matthew and Marian used when they held marathons. It was Friday afternoon and a marathon was scheduled, but no one else had arrived yet.

"I know you and I hashed this thing over on the phone and then last week after you got back," Kathy went on hesitantly, "but I don't know how I'm going to handle a whole bunch of people. Even though I know most of them at least a little." He still didn't say anything. "Matthew, I'm feeling very crazy," she admitted finally. "I don't think I should be here. I don't know what's going to happen."

"Sometimes that's when you can get the most done. When you don't know what to expect."

"What does my vision mean?" she demanded.

"I don't know."

"Would you care to make a wild guess?" He was being exasperating.

"Sure," he said amiably. "Maybe it was a past life experience, a memory from a life you lived before."

"Do you believe in that? In reincarnation?"

"Sometimes. Do you?"

"I don't know."

Couches and chairs were pushed against the walls of the large living room, and the empty central space was covered with mattresses. As the marathon progressed, Matthew or Marian would work with one of the dozen participants in the center while the others watched and, sometimes, joined in. Upstairs, rooms were set up dormitory-style, and when the session ended, far into the night, everyone would collapse for a few hours' sleep. The process would continue all day Saturday and much of Sunday too.

As the Friday evening session began, Kathy stayed on the sidelines, watching. She concentrated on Matthew's voice, not really listening to what he was saying, but letting the tone and the rhythm flow over her as he worked, sometimes gently, sometimes forcefully, with other members of the group. Her body began to relax, and she felt some of the tension of the past few weeks seep away. She was glad he wasn't pushing her, wasn't insisting that she explore the Salem experience—or her childhood relationships, for that matter—in front of the others.

"It sounds as if you'd like to get revenge, Bill. But against

whom?" Matthew asked the young man sitting on the mattress. "The boss who's giving you such a hard time? Your mother? Who?"

"I don't know," Bill replied, "that's the problem. It's eating me alive. I'm filled with anger, but I don't know why."

"Close your eyes," Matthew instructed, "and let yourself remember the last time you felt the emotion of revenge. Be there." Kathy felt her eyelids closing too.

She was walking through deep woods, and it was very dark. Far ahead she saw the red flicker of a fire, and she pointed her feet in that direction. She didn't *want* to join the group around the fire, but she had to. It was the only way she could pay the others back. Pay them back for what they'd done. "I will be avenged," an unfamiliar voice muttered, and Kathy realized, helplessly, that it had come out of her mouth. She tried to force her eyes open, to stop the scene, but she had no power. Someone else—someone new—was in control.

"Who are you?" Matthew's voice was close and comforting.

"They call me Althelia."

"And what must you avenge?"

"My mother's murder. She was a good woman. She had the power, but she used it for good. She had healing in her hands."

"Who killed her?"

"The elders. The townfolk. They were jealous of her goodness." She began to cry. "I told them she was good, but they took her from me. Mother! Do not leave me! I did not mean to betray thee! I have such need of thee!"

She wiped her sleeve across her face. She had the power too. She would join with the others in the forest. She would seek revenge for the death of her mother. She would join the coven! But she could speak no more. These secrets could not be shared. There was danger all around. The forest faded just as the fire, circled by shadowy figures, came into view between two huge evergreen trees.

Kathy's eyes opened, and she found herself looking at Matthew. The room was utterly still. "What happened?" she whispered.

"Do you remember?" he asked.

"Yes, but I don't know what it was. Matthew, I'm frightened. I know that girl. She was burned at the stake. I saw it. Why is this happening to me?"

Matthew turned to Marian, who explained. "Some people believe that when someone dies, the soul can remain in a kind of limbo—trapped, if you will—because certain issues or problems weren't worked through during the person's lifetime. And until those issues are resolved, the soul cannot find peace."

"And Althelia is a soul searching for peace?"

"That's one way to look at it."

"Or," Matthew added in a matter-of-fact tone of voice, "she might be a fantasy of yours, Kathy. Either way, though, she probably represents something you need to know about yourself."

Her shoulders sagged. Maybe it didn't matter to Matthew whether it was real or imaginary, but it mattered to *her*!

Matthew took her by the hands and pulled her gently into the center of the room. "Since there's work to be done, let's do some of it now," he suggested. He sat behind her, cross-legged, rubbing some of the tightness out of her shoulders. "Close your eyes." She was unable to resist. His voice stayed soft and gentle. "What happened to you, Kathy?" he asked.

The room was dark, but she knew instantly that it was not Althelia's room. She was in another place, another time. It felt completely different. Pain was the only constant. She was lying on a lumpy mattress in a tiny cubicle. A kerosene lamp provided the only illumination, and by its glow she could see that the walls above the bed had been crudely decorated with stencils. She was wearing a loose ankle-length dress in a drab calico print, and as she sat up, a beautiful woman entered the room. She had dark hair coiled around her head, and she was wearing a sparkling dress. It was the lady in red! The woman she had always dreamed about!

"Hello, Amy," the woman said kindly. "Are you

feeling better today? I know you've been sick, but there's a lot of work to be done around here. We're glad to give you a place to live, but since you're not one of the girls, you need to pull your weight another way."

Amy looked out the window. She was on the second floor of a rough clapboard building, and across the way there was a general store and a saloon and a couple of other ramshackle structures. It smelled like open fires and horse manure. And then she remembered.

Remembered the cabin she had lived in with Ma and Pa, out of town a few miles. Remembered the long days of hoeing and weeding and cooking and sewing and soap-making alongside her mother, a pale woman who rarely spoke. Remembered the isolation and the pain.

Finally, she remembered the night Pa came home drunk from town and climbed up into the loft where she was sleeping. She could smell his foul breath as she woke, feel his hard hand as he grabbed her nightdress at the throat and ripped it open down the front. He had beaten her before, often and hard, and she had the scars and bruises to prove it. But always in the daylight, for some real or imagined transgression. Never in the dark, with no explanation.

"Slut!" he shouted, stepping out of his pants. "Always sashaying around here and flaunting yourself. Thinking you're so high and mighty. Well, *this* is what you're good for!" And she felt the searing pain as he tore into her, damaging her more with every thrust. "Do you like that?" he grunted. "Do you like that, you slut?" And finally he rolled off, leaving her sticky and bleeding, ripped apart physically and emotionally.

Tears ran silently down her face, but she made no effort to cover herself. He was probably right, she thought. Deep inside she felt the stirring of a whole range of new emotions. She *was* a slut, like Pa said. As he pulled on his pants, she looked over his shoulder and saw her mother, standing silent at the top of the ladder.

The next day they disappeared, Ma and Pa, leaving her with Mirabelle at the house in town where she cleaned and cooked a little for the girls. Tears poured down her face, and her body was racked with sobs. "Pa! Why did you do that? Ma! Why did you leave me? Why did you leave me here? This isn't anyplace I'd pick to be! Who's going to help me?!"

"We're all here to help you, Amy." It was Matthew, holding her in his arms. "No one here is going to hurt you. You're safe with us." She went limp, giving in to utter exhaustion.

The room was still and dark when she woke up, and she was lying on one of the sofas near the door. She sat up, disoriented. In the center of the room a figure lay sleeping, but no one else was there. She was confused. None of this looked at all familiar. Not the place, nor her strange clothes—slacks!—she never wore slacks! Not even the attractive man lying there. I don't belong here, she said to herself. I have to leave. But the feeling wasn't urgent. First she would investigate. "Where am I?" Clara asked, loud enough, she hoped, to wake the man.

He stirred and sat up. "You're in Connecticut," he replied, "at the marathon. Where would you like to be?"

"At a party, I suppose," she answered in a flippant tone. "I love parties. But not in Connecticut, for heaven's sake. Why am I in Connecticut? And dressed like this?" She passed a hand before her eyes. "This doesn't look like a dance hall."

"Where would you expect to be?"

"Well, in Chicago, of course. I live in Chicago. And I would expect to be at a party in a speak—a club—you know."

"No, I don't. I don't know much about Chicago. What year is it? Tell me."

She sighed. This wasn't much fun. For one thing, there didn't appear to be anything to drink. For another, this man wasn't responding to her the way she expected men to respond. But then, how could he, since she was dressed in these godawful rags. Where were her party clothes? She probably didn't even have any makeup on. Her eyes searched the couch for her purse, but there was nothing there. She felt something in one pocket of her pants.

The man pressed on gently, moving next to her on the couch. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Clara," she replied absently, pulling a set of car keys out of her pocket. Thank God! she thought. At least I can get out of this place.

"And you like parties?"

She looked up at him and felt a bit of sparkle come into her eyes. "You *bet* I do. All my friends say I'm burning the candle at both ends, but I don't care. I really don't. They say I'm the best dancer around. I love having a good time." She looked around, restless. This place was definitely giving her the creeps. She didn't belong here. There was something wrong about it. She had to get away. Suddenly she jumped up. "Sorry, but I've gotta go!" she cried, running out the door. "No offense, but there's someplace else I've gotta be!"

She reached the front porch and looked around. There were plenty of cars here, all right, though they all looked very odd. Her sense of disorientation increased and she felt almost nauseated. She shook her head. Oh, well, as long as they went fast. She wasn't known as a demon driver for nothing. She looked at the keys in her hand, wondering which car belonged to them. "Might as well try the raciest one first," she muttered, skipping down the steps and approaching a low-slung red automobile with a crouching chrome cat on its hood.

Deep inside, terror enveloped Kathy. As if watching a movie she had already seen, she knew that Clara would drive the car off the road and kill herself. That was the way Clara had died. And so would she. There was nothing she could do to prevent it.

"Bingo!" Clara said as the door lock turned, but before she had a chance to remove the key, a man's hand covered hers, and he took the keys away. She glared up at the stranger from the house. "Give me those!" she demanded. "They're mine!"

"I don't think you should drive anywhere right now," he replied reasonably.

"But this isn't where I live!" she wailed as everything started to go black. "I have to go—I have to get out of here!"

"Yes, you do," he agreed, holding her tight by both shoulders. "You have to leave and Kathy has to come back. But it's all right, you can go now. It's time." His voice was the ultimate authority. Clara felt faint. It was as though she were standing in a dark tunnel with blackness all around. But at the

other end there was a beautiful glowing white light. "It's time for you to find peace, Clara," he said softly. She felt herself moving toward the light, becoming one with the living, glowing force. And then she was gone.

Kathy had held herself together for several days, but now, sitting in the relative privacy of Matthew's Manhattan apartment, she found that she couldn't stop crying. Silently, agonizingly, she wept, her body curled up as small as possible, as if she were trying to disappear into the brown velvet upholstery.

Matthew knelt beside her. "That's it," he crooned, "let it all out. Just let yourself feel everything, be open to the sadness, to the fear. You had what must have been a terrifying experience at the marathon. Now go with it."

"I can't if I don't understand it!" she sobbed. "What's *happening* to me, Matthew? For a year and a half I've believed in you when you told me I wasn't crazy, that I was okay, that I would get better, be happier. And now *this!* I am a lunatic, Matthew. You should put me away someplace safe."

"You're *not* crazy. We're going to deal with these experiences just like we've dealt with all the others."

"But at least the other 'experiences,' as you call them, were parts of me—*are* parts of me. Prose and Cici and Baby and Susan and Ivy belong to me—we share the same life. These others are . . . are *strangers*," she wailed. "And I don't even know if they're real! Maybe I just made them up!"

"Every experience," Matthew explained slowly as she mopped at her eyes with a wad of Kleenex, "whether it's as concrete as a car accident or as ephemeral as a dream, is real." She stopped crying and listened. "And every experience has a message to impart. The question is, will you receive the message, learn from it, and move on—or will you stay stuck?"

She took a deep ragged breath. "So what's the message?" she asked, slightly belligerent. "Three women from the past, total strangers, took over my body on Friday night, and one of them almost killed me. What's to learn? That everyone should hide their car keys when I'm about to freak out?"

He ignored her bitterness. "But you said the next day that you felt that Clara had achieved some kind of peace after I took the keys away, that she was gone for good. Do you still feel that?"

She thought for a moment. "Yes. I think—" She paused. "I don't know how I know this—it's like knowing that she would have died in the car, that she *had* died in a car—but I think that your taking the keys away, taking responsibility for her safety, caring for her and protecting her, was somehow what she needed from this life. Maybe there was no one in her own life who cared about her."

"Yet she seemed pretty happy—carefree, if you will," Matthew noted. "She reminded me a little of Prose, but she wasn't nearly so angry."

"Not so obsessed, so single-minded—" she began, then stopped.

"What's Prose so single-minded about?" he asked.

"Clara was much more content with her sexuality," Kathy mused, ignoring his question. "She liked sex and she liked having a good time, and she never felt guilty about anything." She laughed bleakly. "Clara and I have very little in common."

"Except one shared hour."

"Yeah. And sometimes—not very often, but sometimes—I feel that way lately when Bob and I are in bed together. I feel happy and safe and carefree. It's a nice feeling."

"Maybe that's the message."

"Mmmm." A connection suddenly occurred to Kathy. "Clara's a lot like the lady in red, you know? Like Mirabelle. *She* was happy too."

"But Amy wasn't," Matthew pointed out.

"Isn't," Kathy corrected him instantly, then put a hand to her mouth. "Why did I say that?"

"I suppose because Amy isn't finished."

Kathy shuddered. "Oh, no! There's so much pain there, I don't think I can handle it. I don't want to know any more about Amy. I want her to go away too." She hugged her shoulders and swayed on the couch. "I won't go back there again!"

"I don't think you should," Matthew said mildly. "Not now anyway. But she'll have to be put to rest eventually, you know."

"Not by me! I won't have anything to do with that poor, beaten, pathetic creature. I won't!"

"Who raped you, Kathy?"

The question hit her like a sledgehammer, and she doubled up on the couch. "No one," she whispered with what little air remained. "I'm not like Amy. She's not part of me." Her voice

rose. "We have different lives. They aren't my parents!" The last was a scream.

"Ma and Pa aren't Lily and Sherman?"

"No! They're nothing like them. My daddy loved me. He *never* hurt me. He never *touched* me." She felt that Matthew was trying to trap her. She retreated. "My father was a good man, and my mother loved us very much," she recited.

Matthew changed the subject. "Okay, then let's talk about Althelia. What's her message? She didn't say anything about a father, did she?"

Kathy frowned, remembering something. "This is all bull-shit, Matthew," she declared, shaking her head, dismissing the discussion. "It's nonsense, and I don't know why I even care about it, except that I don't want to lie."

"Oh?"

"I went to the library yesterday, and looked up the Salem witch trials. Since there's no way to verify Amy or Clara, I thought I would research Althelia."

"Sounds like an interesting idea."

"Not very. They didn't burn witches in Salem. Not one. They hanged them. So it's all just a fairy tale, a sick fantasy." She shifted on the couch, as if trying to slide out from under the unpleasant memories. When he didn't say anything, she looked up at him. He was watching her with an interested expression. "Don't you care that I've made up these three ludicrous, absurd tales?" He still made no response. "Maybe it was just to get the group's attention at the marathon," she speculated. "I certainly did get their attention, didn't I?" He nodded. "Why are you just looking at me?" she demanded.

"Because I think it's very interesting that you present your evidence against the past life experience only after I've suggested that there may be some connection between *their* lives and your own—between *their* parents, say, and yours."

"But it's all made up," she insisted. "They didn't burn witches in Salem!"

"Why do you assume that since you *had* the original vision in Salem, Althelia lived there?" he asked mildly. "Maybe Althelia lived in, say, Spain, during the Inquisition," he added, and then his voice turned more forceful. "Your research is no reason to discount your experience, Kathy. The experience is yours. It belongs to you; it's there for you to learn from. So don't try to throw it away."

"But I don't think I believe in reincarnation or past lives," she protested feebly. "I just don't believe it."

"That doesn't matter," he said firmly, leaning forward and holding her gaze. "If reincarnation isn't real, if Althelia, Amy and Clara aren't real souls from past lives, your own or someone else's, then your experience of them, your fantasy, is a way that your mind has created to look at some problems that exist now. Just look at the most obvious association: From your point of view, wasn't your mother like Amy's—not protective, not there for you sometimes?"

Kathy thought about that for a moment, frowning. When she spoke, it was in a low, tight voice. "Maybe that's true," she admitted, avoiding his eyes. "But I was never raped."

"And think about Althelia," Matthew went on. "She spoke of betraying her mother. What about the experiences we've been talking about? Your mother and Larry in Florida? The bargain was that you would never tell, but you did. You told me. Is there a parallel? Does Althelia have something to say to Kathy?"

"I don't know." Her voice was a whisper. "I'll have to think about that."

"Okay. But just know that as far as I'm concerned, Kathy, everything that happens in this room is real, and every word that you speak is true. I believe you and I want you to believe in yourself."

Chapter 10



Bob should get after the maintenance people, Kathy thought absently, gazing through a grimy window in a small space she was using in her husband's suite of offices on lower Fifth Avenue. It was hard keeping windows clean in Manhattan, she knew, especially during the winter, but still. . . . She

frowned. Peering through a dingy pane at January slush three floors below was depressing.

She tossed her pencil onto the desk and sighed. Who was she kidding? It wasn't the dirt, and it wasn't the weather. Not entirely, anyway. And it was only partly the fact that Matthew had been gone since before Christmas. "Shit!" she muttered. She was about to take the kids to Florida for their winter vacation, and her departure practically coincided with Matthew's return. She would have a chance to see him only a couple of times before she left. "I'm not managing schedules very well these days," she said softly, looking at the papers on her desk. Not managing *anything* well, as a matter of fact. On the top sheet were the names and addresses of several smallish stores and boutiques in the New York area. To each of them she had sold several thousand pairs of Calvin Klein jeans at a price that gave her a nice profit over her price of \$12 a pair.

Until this morning, that is, when her partner—her big buddy—Allan Howe announced that she must have made a mistake. The price on the new shipment was \$13.50. "Damn!" she muttered. The worst part of it wasn't that he was trimming her profit. In fact, if she pushed him, she suspected that he would give her the jeans at \$12. She certainly wasn't going to pay him more than \$12.75. What was depressing her was the fact that she didn't believe for a minute that *she* had misunderstood the figure, and she was absolutely furious that she had trusted him all these months. He'd probably been ripping her off all along. "This business stinks," she told herself. All her dealings with Allan were based on handshakes, and his handshake obviously didn't mean a hell of a lot. She'd thought they were *friends*, for God's sake!

This line of work was not terrifically fulfilling, she reflected. In fact, she needed it in her life like . . . like another personality, she couldn't help thinking. Dealing with the parts—and trying not to think about Amy and Althelia—was enough. Coping with the possibility of getting counterfeit blue jeans or even stolen goods from sources with Italian names who scared her a little, not to mention "misunderstandings" with her partner, was getting to be too much.

She suddenly recalled something that had happened a few weeks earlier—an incident that nearly sent her screaming home for good. She had been standing in a shop in Brooklyn, taking an order from a short, fat, balding man who needed a

shave. "I can promise delivery next week," she said crisply, closing her notebook.

"You'd better, sister," the man replied, lighting up the stub of a smelly cigar. "There's lots of suppliers out there." He turned back to his desk and took a swig from a cardboard coffee container. Kathy picked up her fur coat, trying to keep a smile on her face as he reached over and grabbed the collar. She didn't know whether he wanted to help her on with it or feel the quality of the pelts, but as he got close, she caught a whiff of cigar smoke mixed with sweat and cheap whiskey. She held on to the edge of the desk to keep her balance.

"Who's gonna help me?" Baby wept silently, pulling the coat around her as tightly as she could. "How can I get away from the bad man?" She looked around desperately. The door! She had to get out!

"You okay, sister?" the man asked, looking at her suspiciously.

She could only nod numbly, then push helplessly against the door. It was too heavy for a three-year-old. She was trapped!

The man was looming over her. What was he going to do? "You look real queer, lady," he said. "Sure you're feeling okay?"

Again, she nodded, her eyes wide with terror. His arm came nearer and nearer and she shrank back. Miraculously, the hairy hand went right past her face and opened the door. She scurried by him into the freezing rain.

Now what? Baby didn't know where she was or what to do. A phone! There was a booth at the corner. Could she make a call? She took a deep breath. Yes. She could call Matthew. He would help. She fumbled through her purse. The coins looked strange. Which one did she need for the phone? She had no idea. She tried the largest one, but it didn't fit in any of the slots. She began to cry. A different coin did fit, but there was no change in the sound inside the phone. She put in another one, and then heard the reassuring tone that meant you could dial.

What were the numbers? She shut her eyes in concentration and remembered. One ring. Two rings. "Hello?"

"Matthew—help!" Her voice was tiny.

"Is this Baby?" he asked.

She smiled. He knew. "Matthew, the man smelled like whiskey and I was so scared."

"It's going to be all right." His voice was calm. "Look around and tell me what you see."

"There's the phone booth and a fruit stand and a fire alarm box and a lady walking a dog. . . ." Reciting familiar things made her feel better.

"Listen to me, Baby," he instructed. "You need to have Kathy take you home. I want you to close your eyes and let Kathy pick you up in her arms. She's going to give you a big hug and a kiss and you'll feel much better. Everything's going to be all right once Kathy takes you home to your house."

Matthew always knew how to make things better.

But Matthew wouldn't always be there to get her out of a tight spot, she said to herself, sitting at her desk and looking down at the pile of papers. That had been the worst time, but there had been others almost as bad. Maybe she should just face the fact that she was too crazy to conduct business.

"Enough," she breathed. She would deliver this shipment and then think about calling it quits. She felt a burning at the back of her eyes. "It isn't a failure," she said to herself. "I haven't failed again. I haven't!"

Suddenly she needed to talk to Eddie. He understood her so well; he would know what she was feeling, what she was going through. She stopped in the middle of dialing. Why was that true? she wondered. Why did she *know* that he would understand? She hadn't seen him in more than a year. She smiled wryly. Apparently Matthew *had* managed to convince Cici that their love was the memory of a frustrated fifteen-year-old since Cici hadn't insisted on pursuing him. And he hadn't exactly pursued her, had he? After his last declaration of love. Good old Eddie, following the same pattern.

Suddenly she saw the face of a young boy, about fourteen or fifteen, just a couple of years younger than Eddie had been when they met. He reminded her of Eddie, but he was dressed all in black and he was wearing a strange hat. He was part of the circle of people around the stake! He was watching the burning and tears were running down his face!

As quickly as it had come, the vision faded, and Kathy was looking through the dirty window once more. What did it mean? Had Eddie been there? Had he known Althelia? It made a certain kind of crazy sense, she mused. She felt, somehow, that she and Eddie had always known each other. Maybe they had. Why was it all so terrifying? She started dialing again, then listened as the phone began to ring.

He was the only person who had penetrated her defenses,

she reflected. No one else had gotten through her wall, not even Bob. "Seven," she counted, "eight . . . where are you, Eddie? I let you past the wall, the safe, precise wall of my childhood. I trusted you like no one else. Ever. I felt it when you touched me. Your fingers were like fire on my skin. I've never stopped wanting you. And now I'm scared and *where are you?*" She hung up after the twelfth ring, blinking back tears. "Typical," she sighed. And probably just as well. In her weakened, terrified state, who knows what might happen if she got together with Eddie. She felt horribly disloyal. She wanted Bob, certainly. It wasn't that she didn't love her husband. And Prose was always ready to make love with Bob. Prose was always ready for *anything*.

It's easy to screw, Prose snapped, *and it's even easier to suck men off*. The voice in Kathy's head was proud. Kathy made an effort to dislodge the interloper. She hated it when Prose talked like that. It was so coarse, so vulgar. She spoke to Prose aloud softly. "But it's hard to feel. I'm so numb. No matter how much we screw, I still feel numb. . . ."

The numbness invaded her life. She felt trapped in the grip of it, even with Matthew. On the one hand, she didn't want to talk to him; on the other, she felt so lost. She wasn't looking forward to the flight to Florida, nor to the "relaxing" family vacation that was to follow. She tried to find a comfortable position on his sofa.

"If I unblock the fear I feel, I think I'm going to die. As much as I trust you and love you, I'm not so sure you can stop me."

"Are you going to keep yourself locked up all you life?" Matthew asked reasonably.

"No." She paused. "I believe you can guide me through this, and not let me die. Only my fear is still there. I trust you enough. I'm just frightened."

She groped for the right words. "I'm aware that I build a wall—my wall, my brick wall. I always built it when I went to sleep. I always dreamed about it, it was my safety wall."

"Where is the wall?"

"Where?"

"When you are sleeping. Above you, to your side?"

"In front of me. So I don't see on the other side. When I

close my eyes the wall is here—I'm on this side, and I'm going along it and I know at the end of the wall I am going to be okay—but I have never gotten there; and I walk this way holding the wall. . . ." She stretched her arms out and turned her head to one side, as though hugging the wall.

"That wall is an important aspect of your personality, Kathy. It's your creation. Feel that wall. Be that wall."

Kathy paused, thinking. Her eyes closed, but they moved behind her lids, as if she were dreaming. The wall was solid and firm, with rough edges, but it didn't cut anybody—unless they got too close. No one could see through it. It was high and wide. There was something dangerous on the other side—a big cliff with jagged rocks and high seas.

The wall kept her safe. On the other side, she might fall to her death on those rocks. It seemed a very long drop, and they were so sharp. She must never find out what was on the other side. The wall had been a good friend all these years. It had kept her from knowing, kept her little. She didn't know how to get around it. She was terrified to break it down. She wouldn't be able to breathe if she ever got to the other side.

A nameless, faceless terror was taking over, and she didn't know why. What was there to be so scared of? She needed at least a look on the other side. She didn't want to tear the wall down, but she had to look over the top. She stretched up high. What was there? What could she see?

There was green grass. She saw the old hotel, the camp-house, the baseball field, the swimming pool and all the courts. She was soaring above the hotel, watching. She was alone, just looking, not knowing where to go. No one saw her and she was little, a happy little girl in her own world. She didn't know how to interact with other people, but she felt safe by herself. It was only when people came near. But there was someone to take care of her: Jack. He was her friend, though he shouldn't have brought her up to his room. Even though she liked his room. He shouldn't have brought her upstairs. There was a rule against that.

Jack was the only one who spoiled her. Everyone else was so busy. He took her by the hand and he held her. She saw little Kathy going up to his room. He shouldn't have taken her there. There was a lot of blackness up there. She felt the blackness around her. She couldn't see anything anymore. The wall floated. There was no base, no foundation. It just floated.

"You're not the first person with no foundation," Matthew observed softly, crossing his legs. "What's hidden behind that wall?" he asked. "Look down on that hotel. Look in that attic room."

"I see a black roof and a bird's-nest room on the top of the hotel. And I see blackness. I can't look through the wall."

"Try."

The voice was shocked. "It can't be true. She's just a little girl." She paused. "The baby is lying down like someone is diapering her. So little." Kathy made herself as small as possible. She started to cry. "Jack was my friend." The cadence was childlike. "He took care of me. He would take me with him when he met people and he would just be nice to me."

"And did you want to be touched by him?"

"I loved Jack. He was my friend. It felt good when he hugged me. Even when he tickled me." The small figure frowned, then recoiled, as if from a slap. "But it hurt inside. I don't want to talk about it. He left me." She rocked from side to side, the tears flowing. "It's like someone's hand is going inside me," she whispered finally, "but as it does, I'm not there anymore—I'm floating."

"That is your choice."

"She's just a little girl," Kathy sobbed. "She can't go back there because she'll die. She has to get out. She's in a lot of pain. She needs to build a brick wall so she won't be afraid." Mascara was running down her cheek, making a gray trail.

"Afraid of what?"

"What was happening to her." Her voice rose to a shriek. "I know how bad she felt that day!"

Matthew was as calm as she was distressed. "You know you are going to have to wake her up, to show that she is not going to die. She has lived through the experience."

Kathy resisted, then gave in. "How do I wake her up?"

"All you have to do is feel what she is feeling, and why she is feeling it."

"I can't, I can't go back there. I don't want to see Jack!"

"You don't have to make him into a bad man."

She thought about that for a moment. "Jack said he loved me. Why did it hurt then?"

"You were probably too small for his finger."

"It hurts!" she wailed, bursting into sobs. "It hurts *here!*"

She doubled over, placing one hand between her legs. "I'm cut! I'm bleeding!" she cried. "It hurts!"

"Then open your eyes," he ordered. "Look at me. Stop!"

Her eyes opened slowly, but didn't focus. "I hate myself," she said dully.

"What for? Because someone else would hate you if they knew about you and Jack?" She sat still, crying silently, not responding. "I bet if Nan knew, she would hate you," he tried. "What about your parents?"

She was almost inaudible. "I'm a good girl," she sobbed, "but they won't listen. Don't hate me." It was a whisper. "Don't hate me for being there." She paused, then wept, "I'm a bad girl! I wasn't supposed to be there. I was not allowed to go to Jack's room, that's what Mommy said. But I wanted to go."

"So you disobeyed your mommy. But it shouldn't have happened anyway. You are *not* bad."

The small figure took a deep breath and sat quietly. She looked around the room furtively, as if someone were eavesdropping. When she finally spoke, her voice was whispery. "I don't want to make up stories anymore."

"I don't think you should make up stories either. I also think you shouldn't run away from stories that are true."

"This one is not true," Cici said with firm calmness.

"Then how did you get the cut on your vagina?"

"I didn't get cut. Leave me alone."

He looked at her for a moment, then cocked his head. "It's not very comfortable hiding back there, is it? Hiding behind a wall. You wanted to be comforted."

"I don't hear you," she insisted, but then her shoulders slumped and Baby spoke. "I'm right here and I didn't make anything up."

"I know you didn't."

"I wouldn't tell anybody because they would never believe me and I don't want to remember anything anymore." Her lower lip trembled.

"No one hates you or thinks you're bad," Matthew said firmly, moving over to the sofa where she sat and cradling her in his arms. She buried her head in his shoulder. "You have to understand that someone took advantage. You were too small to be responsible."

"It hurt." She sighed.

"You're a good girl, a fine, loving, healthy, perfectly natural, curious little girl who is going to go into places where she shouldn't be. I'm sorry that you couldn't tell anyone. That's even more hurtful than what Jack did. I'll hold you. You are too small for someone to push inside of you like that." He paused, and she looked up at him. "You might have run away," he continued. "That's one way of protecting yourself and sometimes that's a good way. But the not so good way of protecting yourself was building that wall, so no one could ever come close again. Will you just let me hold you? Okay?"

She leaned against him, and they sat silently for some time. When he spoke again, his voice was soft and soothing. "If you were my little girl, I wouldn't want you to be frightened. If I knew about Jack and what kind of a young man he was, I would tell you not to go up to his room. I would want to protect you if you were my little girl. If I knew you had been up to his room, I would hope that nothing had happened to you. I wouldn't want to ask you because I'd be afraid that would scare you. If I had known you had been hurt by Jack, I would have loved you, I would have held you, I would have cried, and everything would be all right because there would have been someone to tell."

There was another lengthy silence. Kathy's tears subsided. Matthew spoke again, his tone a little more forceful. "It sounds like the people who were supposed to be taking care of you were very mixed up about what is important and how to take care of little children."

She sighed. "Mommy was too busy, Daddy wasn't there.

. . . I don't know where Nan was."

"So you were left alone with bad people."

"So I am no good."

"That's a mistake. You *are* good. The people who were taking care of you were no good. They should have taken care of you better. I feel angry at those people. If I ever saw them, I would tell them how angry I am. No child should have been treated like that."

Kathy sat up slightly and replied in a perfectly calm tone. "She's going to kill me—you know that, don't you?"

"Who is going to kill you?"

She regretted the statement. "I don't know."

"You're not supposed to die."

"But I remembered that day. That day with Jack." She

shrank away from Matthew as the tears started again. "I have to die now."

"Who wants it kept a secret?" Matthew asked.

Kathy was sobbing hysterically. "I don't know, I swear!"

"I am not going to let anyone kill you," Matthew said firmly, taking her by both shoulders. "I won't let it happen. I'm going to protect that little baby. *They* are the ones who are bad."

She twisted out of his grasp and huddled on the other end of the couch, doubled over. "It really hurts down there, doesn't it?" he asked sympathetically.

She held her hands up, palms to him. "No more." She felt so tired.

"I'm not going to let anyone hurt you," he said softly. "So you just tell the story. Tell the story because keeping it inside is crazy-making. And pretending that it never happened is crazy-making. Not having someone to talk to about it is crazy-making. You need to tell."

"But it never happened," she said wearily. "It never happened."

"It did! You've promised somebody you won't remember. That you will actively forget. It's okay, Kathy. That is what you have been doing all your life. But now you must believe it. You don't need to hide behind the wall. You are not going to fall off the cliff."

Her voice was a scream of terror. "You are going to get me killed!"

"It is not a lie," he said quietly, holding her. "It is not a lie." There was silence. "You are still keeping something a secret. You are, for some reason. But that's okay. We'll figure everything out." He picked up a tissue from the side table and wiped her face gently, like a parent cleaning up a child. "You're strong, Kathy," he said. "You lived through it. And you know who you are."

The face in the mirror was almost unrecognizable, and for a moment Kathy thought a stranger had wandered into the apartment in Ft. Lauderdale where she and the children were staying. The hair looked almost gray rather than blond, and it hung limply, without any wave or body. The eyebrows needed plucking and the light eyelashes, without any mascara, were invisible. Her skin was as ashen as her hair, and her lips looked

blue. Who is this woman? was Kathy's first thought, then glanced at her watch to see what time it was. She felt disoriented.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning. Where were the children? She looked around. She was completely blank. She felt a scream rising in her throat. She was supposed to be having a relaxing vacation with the kids in this rented condo on the beach, visiting her mother and Nan, who were staying at the Boca Raton Country Club. But where were the children?

She crossed to a window and peered down nine stories toward the pool and the beach. Were they there? Was Bob with them? Had Bob arrived yet? He was due on Thursday evening. . . . She didn't even know what day it was. Her head throbbed. "Oh, my God," she whispered, inching back toward the bathroom and some aspirin. "How much time have I lost? What have I been doing? *Who* have I been?" She shook out a couple of pills and gulped them down, then caught her own gaze in the mirror. There really wasn't much question who she'd been, she thought with some distaste. The face staring dully back at her was Cici's. Cici, who couldn't even blow-dry her hair properly, and who never wore makeup.

She opened the cabinet to put the aspirin bottle back and found herself picking up another container. "Seconal," the label read. "Mrs. Robert Roth." How did that get down here? she wondered. Had Bob brought it? Still holding the bottle, she went to the front door and buzzed the concierge. "Hello, this is Mrs. Roth in 9G. Could you tell me the date, please?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Roth," the pleasant voice replied. It was Thursday. Bob had not yet arrived. What did she remember last? The flight? Yes, and coming into this depressing apartment and finding roaches in the kitchen. She sighed. Almost a whole week gone. "Oh, Mrs. Roth?" The concierge interrupted her troubled train of thought.

"Yes?"

"Your daughter Stacey asked me to remind you that you're meeting all of them for lunch at the Boca Raton Country Club."

She breathed a sigh of relief. They were with Lily. Not perfectly safe, certainly, considering her mother's track record, but at least she knew where they were. She could wash her hair and pull herself together in private. "Thank you very much."

Back in the bathroom she turned on the water and pulled off the shapeless housecoat she had been wearing. Where did Cici find these things? she wondered. She realized that she was still holding the pill bottle, and she went to replace it in the cabinet. "Take them," Cici urged. "Take a handful of them and let me find some peace!"

A claw was squeezing her stomach. "Where did they come from?" Kathy demanded. "Aren't they Bob's?"

"Of course not!" Cici replied scornfully. "They're mine. And I want to take them. All of them. And just peacefully go to sleep. *Please!* I can't stand it anymore. I hate this place! I hate those children! I can't stand it when that man puts his hands on me! I can't go on. *Please* let me go!"

The room was filling up with steam, but Kathy stood motionless, as if moving even slightly would be fatal. "Why haven't you talked to me this week?" she whispered. "Why did you shut me out? And what about the children? Have you done anything to them?"

"No, of course not!" Cici snapped. "I've just left them alone. Stacey's old enough to take care of the baby, you know. They do just fine. But I don't. I have to find some rest."

Kathy felt paralyzed. Didn't Cici know that if she died, they would all die? Another voice cut into the dialogue. "Somebody's gotta sit on her *hard*," Ivy said forcefully. "She's *serious*, you know. She's really gonna kill us." Kathy watched, like an outsider, as her hands opened the pill bottle and poured the contents in the toilet.

"*No!*" Cici screamed as Ivy flushed the sleeping pills away, then stepped into the shower. Kathy began shampooing her hair as though she could wash away all traces of Cici. It was lucky she had Ivy for an ally. Ivy seemed to retain some of the strength Cici drained away.

"This has been one hell of a week!" Ivy declared. "And I am totally exhausted from trying to keep us alive. We've gotta do something about Cici—she's dangerous. Do you remember the drive from the airport? Do you remember what she wanted you to do?"

It came back to her. It had been dark, and the lights of oncoming cars were shining in her eyes, blinding her. The kids were tired, and Lynn had been whining in the backseat. She had been wiped out from the flight—she hated flying—and she was trying to find the correct turn-off to the condominium.

And then she heard a small, soft voice inside her head. *There's an overpass up ahead, the voice said. Just drive right into the side. It won't hurt, I promise. Just drive right into it.*

She had written the experience off to fatigue, but she had also remembered her last conversation with Matthew: "Who wants to kill you?" he had asked.

The shower made her feel a little better. Now, if she could just get her hair dry and some makeup on. *There's a knife in the kitchen, the voice said. Let's get the knife and cut open our arm. It won't hurt. I promise it won't hurt. We'll just lie down quietly and let peace flow into us. Get the knife, Kathy.*

Ivy propelled her instead into the bedroom. *Put on some clothes and call Matthew, she demanded. This is too hard. She's too strong. I can keep her from taking over for now, but I don't know for how long. We need some help!*

Kathy dressed quickly, then picked up the phone and dialed.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Matthew? It's me. I need to talk to you for a minute. I'm in trouble here."

"Okay, Kathy, hold on just a minute." The hold button clicked, and she imagined he was leaving a client and moving to a different phone. The turmoil inside increased, as if Cici and Ivy were struggling for control. She didn't know how much longer she could wait. Suddenly she realized that she had a pack of matches in her hands.

She lit one and looked at the flame. *Just touch it to your blouse, the soft voice whispered. I promise it won't hurt. Just set everything on fire. It didn't hurt Althelia—it won't hurt you. Try it!*

"Ouch!" The match burned her finger and she dropped it, stamping it out on the floor with her foot. She was perspiring so heavily, it felt like she was still in the shower. *Pick up the phone, Matthew, Ivy muttered.*

"Hi, Kathy, sorry to keep you waiting. I was with someone."

She tried to speak, but no words came out. Three of them were fighting for possession, and no one controlled the voice.

"Kathy? What's happening? What's wrong?"

"It's Cici." The voice was strangled. "She wants us to die."

"No!" His voice resonated along the telephone lines and seemed to fill the room. "Cici has to wait! I'll deal with her

when you get back. She's to wait quietly, Kathy? Do you understand me?"

"Yes," she managed, "but she's so strong . . . I'm frightened." She could hear the hollow buzz that meant Matthew's other line was ringing. Don't leave me, she begged silently. Please, Matthew, don't leave me now.

"Hold on, Kathy, okay? I'll be right back to you." The receiver was filled with the dull vacuum of "on hold."

Kathy's hands were shaking, and before she could prevent it, Cici slammed down the receiver. "You see? He doesn't care! Nobody cares!" Kathy watched, horrified, as Cici ran to the window and threw it open, admitting a blast of hot air. The next thing she knew she was sitting on the window ledge, her legs outside, staring down a nine-story void to the flagstoned deck of the swimming pool. "We'll fly out of here," Cici promised. "We'll fly away and be free. In the sky we'll find some peace. It won't hurt—nothing will hurt. I promise. . . ."

It made her dizzy, looking down, so she looked up instead, focusing on some lovely little white clouds floating out over the horizon. It *would* be peaceful just to float, to fly away like a cloud.

"No!" It was Ivy—Ivy, who secretly wanted to see fires and car wrecks, who was a rebellious adolescent. "How would your kids, your friends, your family, feel about a woman so weak she couldn't face life?" Ivy demanded. "And who would find you—down there on the deck? What if it was Lynn?" Her whole body shook; Kathy wondered if this was what an epileptic seizure felt like. She closed her eyes to stop the dizziness. Is this a model I want to set for my children? she thought. A mother who says, You don't have to make it! Life's hard—so give up!

Tentatively, like an invalid who's just gotten out of bed for the first time, she slowly eased herself back into the room and then slammed down the window, locking it for good measure. Ivy studied herself in the full-length mirror, scowling furiously. "I ain't lived yet," she muttered. "I gotta protect Kathy, even if that fuckin' doctor won't. *Somebody's* gotta take care of her."

Chapter 11



Ivy stormed into Matthew's office ten days later, brushing past him in a fury and marching into the living room. She turned on him. "You left her on the phone! You left her, and she almost went out the ninth floor window! You're just lucky I was there!"

"Kathy's lucky too," he said calmly. "Lucky to have you protecting her."

She glared at him for a while, but his sincerity was unmistakable. She couldn't help being somewhat mollified. Her shoulders relaxed slightly as she relinquished her desperate grip.

"I don't like what's happening," Kathy said, sighing, and sat down. She felt as if she had walked back from Florida—she was that drained. She was physically tired from fighting Cici so long and so hard, and emotionally wiped out. If it hadn't been for Bob's support, she didn't know what would have happened. His arrival that night had been a lifeline, but it was a slender thread. "I don't have the guts to say good-bye."

"To whom?" Matthew inquired mildly.

"You," she began. "Me. I didn't even have the guts to smash up my car. I wanted to." She was too tired even to cry. She was losing the battle.

"That's not guts," he said firmly. "That's that same sense of survival that's brought you through everything so far."

"I don't want this anymore." She began to cry. "I don't like what's happening. I don't like my imagination. I don't like my mind. I just want to be a normal, average, dumb housewife."

"Why a housewife?"

"So I'd know how to be happy."

"It's coming." He sounded so sure.

She wanted to believe him. She tried to shake herself out of

the paralyzing lethargy. There *were* important things to talk about, she knew. She had to give him another chance. She took a deep breath. "In Florida, I asked my mother when Jack left, and she said, 'Oh, he was with us for about thirteen years.' I don't remember that."

"For good reason."

"Anyway," she went on, "I also asked my sister what she could remember about Jack. And she said, 'Only that Mom always let him baby-sit for you, that he was always with you.' I said, 'Did *you* have anything to do with him?' And she said no, but that he was always very touchy-feely; he always had his hands all over me." She paused, as if too tired to continue. "And then she said to me, 'Why, did something happen, did he do anything to you?' And I just said, 'I don't know,' and I walked away."

"Why *that* question?" Matthew asked. "Of all the questions she could have asked, like 'Do you miss him?'"

"I don't know. I still don't even know if it's real."

"Perhaps it's one of those creative fantasies," Matthew suggested calmly.

"Then why? I don't want to create bizarre things."

"Do you think it makes me ineffective with you as a therapist if you do?"

The question took her by surprise. He was asking her to make a judgment about *him*? How could she do that? Of *course* he was right. He was her only hope. So why was she so angry? "Well," she began, "I guess I'm mad at myself *and* at you for allowing it."

"Tell me about it."

"It's just that . . . that we're getting carried away, that this is . . . that I'm not happy with the way things are going."

"Kathy, if you're so concerned about fantasy and reality, about whether this is making you better or worse, we could call in someone to consult with me on how I've worked with you. Whenever there's a question of professional judgment, it's your right to bring in a consultant, to evaluate my work."

"I don't feel that need, do you?"

"I don't feel that it's a need, but it's an option and I want you to know that it's available."

"Do you have any doubts?"

"No." He seemed completely at ease.

"I mean, do you think you're doing anything wrong?"

"Of course not. But it's always a worry. I have to question myself: Am I imparting something to you that doesn't come from you?"

She sighed, feeling slightly better than she had at the beginning of the hour. "I'll tell you how I feel. After seeing you work, not only with me, but in group, with others, I believe you check and recheck in every way that you know how, pulling apart and putting together. I trust you."

"Okay. But let's assume that I'm helping you build a crazy fantasy, that actually I'm making you less stable in this therapy than you were. I think it's a question worth asking of every therapist all the time, certainly of one working outside the mainstream of analyzing the problem, as I have been doing. However, there is no mainstream for you. Nobody says they know how to cure multiple personality. And my position is that it's not something that needs curing like a disease; it's something that needs understanding and experiencing, which is what we're discovering with Jack. And finally it integrates and you become yourself."

Everything sounded so reasonable when Matthew talked about it, Kathy thought. Why did she feel so crazy? "Okay, let's assume it's real—big deal! Why did I have to go overboard and split into little pieces—become a multiple personality, quote unquote? Other people have had similar experiences. . . ."

"First of all, you are not split into little pieces," he answered.

She sat straight up. Why was he contradicting himself?

"You are only one personality at a time. It's as if you'd put yourself into little boxes so that each piece of forgotten memory was isolated in a little box and stuffed away in a file in order to get on with living. Would it not make sense that somehow, somebody comes along and pulls one of those file drawers out, and when that file is exposed, the rest of your life fades into the background, you stop being a housewife or a businesswoman and now you're suddenly dealing with a problem as if you were a little child? And you become Baby—"

She interrupted him. "Baby makes up crazy stories." She pressed her hands against her head, as if to keep it together. "The question is why? Maybe I have a crazy kind of warped mind that needs a trauma like that to stay in therapy, to stay with you." Even the thought of losing Matthew made the tears

start. She was crazy with him and crazy without him. What was she going to do?

"Well, that's one possibility," he replied, then sat silently.

Finally she sighed. There was no getting around it. She knew what he thought. "You really believe it happened, don't you?"

"I'll believe anything you tell me until you tell me not to believe it," he replied with some intensity. "I think that's what you need from our relationship compared to other relationships."

"I don't want to tell you anything that isn't true," she protested.

"But if you do, you can always tell me later it's not true. You can change your mind." There was a long pause. "Did you examine that cut?" he asked finally, matter-of-factly. "Did you discuss it with your gynecologist?"

"I asked her the other day, and she said the first time she saw it she thought, Gee, it looks like you must have had a cut when you were a kid, and I explained sometime later, when she asked me about it, 'It's probably a stretch mark.' A child wouldn't have had a cut like that without having someone take care of it, right?"

He looked at her. "What would the difference be if you walked out of here either convinced it's real or it's a story?"

"If I was convinced it was real," she began slowly, "I'd probably hate myself for . . ."

"For being three years old?"

"And if it was fantasy, I would be angry for making up something so bizarre. So either way I can't win, can I? Therefore—" She paused, frowning.

"You're gonna beat up on yourself and the three-year-old kid?"

Suddenly her thoughts went back to Florida, to the battle she'd had with *another* child within her. She took a shaky breath. "Matthew, what about the part of me that doesn't want to live?"

"What about getting angry at Jack for abusing you, and at your mother for not taking care of you, instead of getting so mad at yourself that you think you want to die? I'm not going to let you hurt that little kid for getting her love in the best way she knew how."

"That makes it sound like it was her fault."

"It was not. She was a child whose mother wasn't there for her in the proper way."

"But my mother loved me," Kathy protested weakly.

"She may have loved you. She didn't know how to meet your needs."

"She was busy running the hotel."

"That's right. And sometimes she needed to be busy playing with you."

It seemed to Kathy like a black hole. There was no way out. No way to get past Jack; no way to attract her mother's attention. Against her will her eyes closed, and she suddenly felt a stab of pain in her crotch. "I don't want to continue!" she cried, forcing her eyes open. "I can't stay scared to die; I don't want to go through it again."

She saw the room so clearly, the room with the panoramic view of the entire hotel grounds, the room that felt like an airplane, so high up. "I can't even remember what he looked like," she whispered. Then the timbre of the voice changed; Kathy was gone and Baby was there. "I want to be happy around him like I used to be. He was my friend. That's all I want to remember. I was happy when I was with him. I believe he really cared." The small figure started to cry quietly, and the tone of voice changed from calm to frightened. "I don't want to be little. I don't want to make up or remember bad things. I don't want to do that. It isn't nice."

"But maybe the fantasy is that he loved you, and the reality is that he used you and abused you."

"No!"

"Then maybe both are true. That he did love you, and at one point he couldn't contain himself and he abused you. They don't have to be the alternatives, but they can be."

"I want to go crazy," she replied, her voice rising. "I want to leave this earth. I want to go away."

Matthew remained calm. "That's what the wall is about."

"I don't even have the guts to die," she went on. "I don't want to die, but I do; I don't want to face my family, but I don't want to lose them either."

"Especially your mother?"

"My mother makes me think I'm really wrong," she said slowly as her eyes began to close. She saw her mother's face before her, smiling confidently. "I believe my mommy," Cici said dutifully.

"And what would your mother say about you and Jack?"

"Jack is gone. There is no Jack. I made up Jack. I made up everything. You don't understand. My mommy is right and I am wrong. I'm crazy."

"That would be convenient."

"I'm not supposed to live. I—"

He moved to the edge of his seat and cut in sharply. "Why does Mom want you to think you're crazy? And give up on what you know?"

Kathy was sobbing and stuttering. "I—I—I—I—don't know what you're talking about. I will be stupid. I will be wrong."

"Is that how you want to live your life when you grow up?"

"I—I—I need my mommy!" she screamed.

"And what is your life going to be like if you make this decision?"

"Lonely. Like it is now."

"And what else?"

"Feeling crazy, like I do now."

"And what else?"

"Nothing has changed." Kathy sighed, the agitation gone, replaced by awareness and depression. "Nothing ever changed. I gave up my life to keep her and nothing changed. I stayed her little girl until I couldn't stay anymore." She started to cry. "I feel lost." She got up from the couch, grabbed a tissue and walked to the farthest corner of the room. She stood with her back to Matthew. "I don't want to live anymore." Her voice was calm. "I don't know how to be right, and I don't want to feel wrong anymore. Please let me die."

She felt Matthew's hands on her shoulders. "No," he said simply. "I want you to live."

She resisted the pressure of his hands and refused to face him. The tears started again. "You're not my mother. You can't—can't—can't . . ." she stuttered, wavering.

He turned her around, then propelled her back to the sofa, one arm around her shoulders. "I want you to live," he repeated softly.

"It—it—it . . . doesn't matter." She felt hopeless and drained. Cici had won.

"I know your mom is the one you want right now," he persisted. "But even if you don't have your mom, you have me."

"It doesn't matter because . . ." She felt dead inside. "Because if Kathy gets well, she'll be alone again."

"No." He held her face between his hands. "Not when she gets well. You didn't know how else to keep your mother, so you sold out on *you*. Under the circumstances, a sensible choice for you to have made, but it doesn't work. To give up what you know, to call yourself a liar, not to believe in your own perceptions and experiences is a terrible price to pay for nothing. You deserve to live and be loved—fully loved, Kathy."

"I don't know how."

"I'll show you how."

She wanted so badly to believe him, but Cici wasn't convinced. She turned her head away.

"The options must have seemed like death." He was unhurried but insistent. "Because what is at stake here isn't the abuse from Jack. What is at stake is the rape of your mind."

Baby began to sob. "I can't tell my mommy. I can't tell my mommy."

"You can tell *me*, Kathy, and I won't punish you or go away." He wiped away some tears. "You've got me, Baby. I was here for all of the other parts of you. All in preparation to learn that I am here now so that you can live."

She locked into his steady gaze. "Don't leave me all alone," she whispered. "When we called from Florida and you put us on hold, we felt just terrible—all alone."

"You're not alone, Kathy. I am here for you." There was a long silence as she looked at him, trying to draw strength from his eyes. "And I want to see you tomorrow at four-thirty," he went on. "Kathy, you live and be here."

There wasn't enough strength for her, she decided, turning her head away.

"Look at me," he insisted. "Will you be here at four-thirty tomorrow? Say yes or no."

There was still a terrible emptiness inside. She stared at the white carpet. "Yes," she mumbled.

It wasn't enough. "No, I want you to *look* at me and tell me you'll be here if that is true."

She met his eyes. "I don't *want* to be here," she admitted.

"Will you be here?" he insisted, not giving an inch. "Will you be here tomorrow?"

"Yes," she said finally, agreeing. "I'll be here."

"What happened years ago that's so terrible you don't want to face it?" Matthew asked the next afternoon. "I can understand avoiding it as a child, but knowing about it today can do nothing but free you."

Surviving for twenty-four hours had been the hardest thing Kathy had ever done. She tried to concentrate on Matthew's question. "I thought about it. I thought maybe I'm afraid of being free," she suggested. She didn't want to talk about Jack. She wanted to talk about dying. "I tried to hurt myself this morning," she said dully, turning her arms over to show a cross-hatching of angry red lines. "I couldn't make myself bleed. The razor was too dull, and so were the knives. I guess I didn't want to die."

"If you wanted to bleed, you could have made yourself bleed even with a dull razor," Matthew pointed out calmly, examining her arms.

"I needed to bleed to show you that you couldn't stop what was going on," she continued, "but I wasn't going to kill myself. I didn't even feel it!"

"You may not have felt it, but you are still damaging your body." They sat in silence. "Kathy, what else occurred in your life where you were bleeding and no one believed you, no one paid any attention?" She didn't reply; she found it difficult to focus her eyes. "What are you saying by making yourself bleed?"

She thought long and hard. "Because I'm bleeding, now you'll see . . ." Her voice trailed off.

"Finish the sentence."

"I'm supposed to bleed," she began again finally. "It didn't hurt. I'm supposed to die, but I'm not going to. I wanted to cut myself all up"—she stopped, then blurted out, tears starting—"so they can put me away and help me. I wish people could see the pain I'm in instead of discounting it. Everybody thinks I'm so strong and I'm not. I have to hold myself together with string," she sobbed. "I want to fall apart! I want to be taken care of! I need to let go. I need to be put where I'll be safe, where I'll be protected. I want to be happy again. I don't, I don't," she snuffled, "like being all alone. I'm hurting and the scars don't go away and nobody even sees. It's so painful to think that all my life—all Kathy's life—I've been bleeding inside and nobody ever saw me."

"Talk to your mother."

She stopped to think, then the tears came faster. "She—she—she won't listen to me." She shifted on the sofa, tucking up into a ball, then rubbed her eyes with her fists. She looked at Matthew apprehensively.

"Hi, Baby," he said kindly.

"I—I need my—my mommy to—to see me. I need her to see me," she stuttered.

"What happens when she doesn't pay attention?" Matthew asked.

"The blood dries up and the scars go away and nobody knows I'm even bleeding and everybody says I'm such a good little girl. 'She's such a quiet little girl.'"

"And the truth is?"

"I hurt and—and—and I stay close to her just so she'll be near me."

"What about the scar your mother doesn't want you to talk about?" he asked softly.

"Kathy says the same thing my mother says," Baby reported solemnly. "She says it didn't happen and you're crazy and I am mad at you!"

"But I believe you, because even if it's a story, children use stories sometimes to tell something even more important than the truth."

"No, no, no!" she screamed. "I don't remember anything—but I hurt inside."

"Where inside? Just point to where you're hurting."

Shyly, still weeping, she pointed vaguely in the direction of her belly button. "But I can't tell my mommy. She won't believe me. I can't tell anybody."

"You can tell me."

"Kathy wants to die."

"Tell me about your experience with Jack," Matthew suggested.

"He used to take care of me," she replied obediently. "He used to care."

"And what happened?"

"I loved him." She twisted on the couch, her head turning this way and that. "Ouch! Kathy's hurting my head."

Matthew's voice was loud and demanding. "Kathy! You're gonna find out something important—don't mess with this kid. I'm going to deal with you later. You just let her tell her story, then we will deal with your fear."

"Don't hurt me," Baby said, weeping. "He's going to cut me and hurt me and I'm going to bleed." Her voice dropped to a whimper. "I don't want his finger there."

"I know," Matthew replied soothingly, stroking her head. "Tell me what you did right afterward."

"No!" she cried. "I can't—can't take anymore. Can never remember anymore."

"I'm not going to let him stick his finger in you."

Suddenly she was screaming. "I don't know what I'm supposed to do! I hurt! I hurt! I hurt!"

"Let go," he said firmly. "Relax. Breathe."

"I can't! I won't feel you. I won't feel anything. I won't feel it!"

"Baby, your mom needs to come and take care of you."

"No, no—she'll get mad at me."

His voice rose. "And I'll get mad at her."

"She needs Jack around," Baby said softly. "She needs Jack. Jack helps her in the office. She needs him."

"I think Mom needs to come and take care of you."

"No! She'll put me away! She won't keep me, she'll kick me out. She'll say I'm not a good girl and I'm not supposed to live anymore. Don't tell my mommy." She was weeping quietly.

"I want to talk to that mommy," Matthew said, his tone becoming harsh.

"No, no, no, no, no!" she cried, her voice rising. "I got to get away from here." She looked wildly around the room, as if searching for an escape hatch.

"I'm not going to let you die," Matthew replied firmly. "I'm not going to let her put you away. You're not a bad girl. Jack is a bad man."

"Jack didn't want to hurt me, he was my friend."

"He shouldn't do that to little girls."

Her voice rose again. "My mommy's gonna send me away!"

"So what are you doing so you don't get sent away?" he asked.

She whispered, "I'll be good. I'll be quiet." She sat silently for a moment, her hands in her lap.

"That's wrong!" he said firmly. "You came to the wrong conclusion." He leaned back against the couch, then turned to the opposite sofa. "I want to talk to your mother," he explained. "See this little girl? She's scared."

"Don't listen," Baby begged, agitated. "Don't, don't, don't!" Tears were pouring down her cheeks.

"She's scared and needs your protection, Mother."

"Please don't listen to him."

"And you are not being a good mother."

"Please, please, please!" She was almost hysterical.

"It's okay, Baby," he said, turning back to her. "Your mother is the one who's being bad."

"No! Don't listen to him!"

"She's bleeding and she's in pain," he continued.

"Please, please, don't leave me alone anymore," she cried, sobbing uncontrollably. "I need somebody to hold me. Please, please, please, I need somebody to care about me, please!"

"You're frightening her, Lily, and she is scared you're going to leave her and you know that's a lie. Stop lying to that little girl."

"Please, please, don't talk anymore."

"No—I'm mad . . ."

"Please."

". . . at that lady."

"My mommy's gonna take it out on me," she whispered.

"I won't let her," Matthew promised, "because I'm going to be here to take care of you."

It was a leap of faith Baby simply couldn't make. "Mommy, Mommy! He's not telling the truth. Please don't leave me." The small figure turned to Matthew. "Please, please, please, please, please, don't say any more!"

"I won't let her leave you."

"Mommy, I need somebody to care about me. I'm too little to be left all alone."

"So tell her what you are doing in order to not be left alone."

"I'm not . . . not ever going to tell you anything," she stuttered. "So you won't leave me. If I tell you what happened, you'll send me away."

Matthew's voice was very angry. "You're supposed to take care of her and treasure her and keep her in good health!"

"She loves me as long as I'm her good girl," Baby whispered.

"She needs to love you even when you're hurting," he explained. "You need to be able to go to your mother and tell her all of your hurts, the real ones and the imaginary ones. And get comfort. *She's* the one who's not doing a good job."

"I was a problem and Daddy was a problem and the hotel was a problem," she recalled softly.

"This little child is never a problem," he insisted.

"I'll be a good girl," she said, still begging.

"You don't have to be a good girl; you're not a problem. You're just a little girl, a natural and curious little girl. The problem was when you decided to become good instead of real. The problem was when you decided to become compliant instead of real. You need your mom to love you and to love your curiosity." The small figure cried quietly, shaking her head from side to side.

"There is lots of information you don't know, Baby," Matthew continued after a moment. "Jack did stop playing with you, but not because you were bad. Did you want him to be your friend even after he hurt you?"

"I don't know. I just don't want to bleed. I want Mommy to know that I'm hurting inside, that I'm all alone. I'm scared and I have no friends here, and I always stay next to her and she still doesn't want to see me. But I'm not a bad girl. I'm not! I'm a *good* girl. I *am*!" She collapsed face down on the couch, her shoulders heaving. The room was very quiet as Matthew moved back to his chair and sat down, waiting.

Finally the sobbing stopped, and when Kathy sat up again, reaching for a tissue, she felt more in control than she had in weeks; it was as if she had passed through the fire and come out the other side. She wiped her face carefully and straightened her clothes. She looked up at Matthew with just a little apprehension remaining in her eyes. "I feel better," she began tentatively, and was rewarded by a smile. "I don't know why. . . ."

"You've always had the choice," he replied softly, "of whether to be a dead caterpillar or a live butterfly. I think maybe you've chosen."

"The one good thing about the trip to Florida," she said at their next session, "was that I had the chance to talk with my mother about Jack. We were outside, the kids were swimming, and I said, 'I need to talk to you.' I explained, 'What I am going to say is really out of context, and you are going to be surprised by it, but I have to say it anyway. It has to do with Jack.'"

"And she looked puzzled, as if she didn't know any Jack, so I

refreshed her memory. And she asked why I was thinking about *him*, and I said, "There is a very strong possibility—and I believe that it did happen—that I was molested by Jack." She stopped walking. She didn't discount it; she just stopped. Then she said, "What are you talking about?"

Matthew nodded.

"I was struck by the fact that she didn't say, No, you're crazy, or No, you're wrong. She sort of stood still, shocked. Then her comment was 'You never told me about it.' I said, 'I know.' She repeated, 'I don't ever remember your telling me that.' I said, 'I know I didn't tell you, because I didn't even remember it until just recently.'

"So the thing that struck her most was that I never mentioned it, and her next reaction was 'Oh, my God, I don't want to hear any more problems. I don't want to hear anything more about me being a bad mother.'

"And then I said, 'Well, I'm sure if you had known, you would have wanted to kill Jack.' And she said, 'No. I feel like I want to kill you!' I said, 'What?!' She said, 'For not telling me.'"

The words hung in the air. "And then she did say how upset she was that she had trusted Jack and she shouldn't have, but the worst of it was that I didn't come to her. The fact that I didn't talk to her as a kid was really what affected her the most, not that I could have been hurt, or the fact that he was a man she trusted, or the fact that she was a failure as a mother, but that I, as a three-year-old, hadn't—couldn't—confide in her.

"So I told her I felt she wasn't at fault," Kathy continued. "I mentioned to her that Nan also has a memory of Jack, and she said that Nan never told her either. She said nobody had ever complained about him, and if he had ever started up with the help or the guests, she would have fired him. I told her that the women there, with or without their husbands, would probably have been thrilled if he paid attention to them!"

"It may well be that he went after you because he wasn't being satisfied elsewhere," Matthew pointed out.

"And he did quit and come back," Kathy went on, "but I don't remember him coming back. My mother said he gave an excuse that he had to leave, but he came back the following year. And finally she asked me why it was important for me to know. What was the need? And now that I knew, so what? To prove she's the bad mother?"

"And what was your answer?"

"My answer was Now I can grow. I opened a door that had been locked all my life, even though there's still a part of me that's saying, 'You're wrong, you made up the whole thing.'"

"I imagine your mother would like you to think you made it up," Matthew said.

Her tone was casual. "She said she wanted to *kill* me." Kathy frowned as she thought for a moment. "What an odd thing to say after thirty-five years."

Matthew's voice was more emphatic. "More than odd. I assume that that little girl coming out of Jack's room had a very good reason not to tell Mom. She knew in her gut what her mother's reaction would be. Close your eyes and remember back to Florida. Imagine your mom telling you she would rather kill *you*. Respond to her."

"I can't. All I can think of is dying instead. I can't yell at my mother."

"I didn't say you had to yell. Respond to her, Kathy."

"The words don't want to come out."

"Take a risk."

She paused. "What kind of a woman are you?" she began.

"Make that a statement."

"You were a lousy mother," she managed softly. "I couldn't go to you and it's sad that I have to feel crazy even now. You always doubted me."

"And how do you feel about her?"

She uncrossed her legs and pressed her knees together. Her shoulders slumped and her eyelids fluttered. Her voice was very subdued. "I need you and I love you, but I don't like you," Cici admitted, her voice trailing off at the end. When she spoke again, there was a little more steel in her tone. "Even forgetting about Baby and Jack, you sent away the only person who was ever important to me. You told me he never cared, you told me it didn't matter, that he never really loved me, and I believed you." She was close to tears.

"And the truth is . . ."

"He cared, but I believed *you*." She wept softly. "I believed I just wasn't worth loving. And a part of me died then, and now I want the rest of me to die. I don't want to grow up. I don't want to face life anymore." She buried her face in her hands.

"Come on back, Cici."

"You can't make me!" she screamed. "You can't make me do anything!"

"All you're doing is trying to comply with Mom, because you want her."

"I'll get Kathy sick and I'll make her die!"

"How come you're so compliant?" he asked.

"I have a headache," Cici complained. "I've always been a good girl."

"Instead of what?" he demanded, his voice turning sharp.

"Kathy wants you to stop and I want you to stop," she declared, avoiding his eyes.

"Kathy's contracted with me to do this."

"No!" she shouted. "I don't want to be helped, don't you understand?" She was screaming. "I want you to leave me alone!"

"You're not the only person involved in this."

"Don't you see? I believe my mother."

"And you also have proof she lies."

"No, I don't. I can't think of anything that she's ever lied about. She told me I was stupid and I am. I'm not lovable; I'm not worth anything. Baby couldn't go to her."

"How come Baby couldn't go to her?"

"Nobody can go to her unless they're good."

"Bullshit! Baby knew something. Knew something that hadn't even been spoken aloud."

"I won't listen to you! You can't talk against my mother."

"Tell me what the deal is," Matthew suggested. "If you don't fight her, then . . ."

"I'll be loved? Accepted? That's not true." Cici was almost pleased with herself. She was one step ahead of his usually inescapable logic.

"What's not true?"

"I don't *want* to be loved," she explained triumphantly. "I don't want to be accepted. I don't even want to be *here*."

"And before you made that decision?"

She ignored him. His questions were tiring her out. It was hard to keep ahead. "I just want to go to sleep," she said in a sullen tone.

His voice was tough and sharp. "You're faking it! You're just giving up. You think there's no hope that anybody will love you if you deal with your mother straight."

"What do you want me to say to her?" She was too tired to fight much more.

"I don't want you to comply with me either!" He sounded exasperated. "What do you *need* to say to her? To that woman who said she'd rather *you* die than the man who molested you?"

"Go away."

"Okay, say that to her."

"Leave me alone."

"Say that to *her*," he insisted. "And then tell her about the other part of you that doesn't want to be left alone."

Tears were pouring down her face. "I don't want to live. I told you that when we called from Florida."

He still sounded tough. "Well, if you are going to die, how about at least telling Kathy what you're holding back?"

"What am I holding back?"

"You know. You know and Baby knows."

Cici's voice was accusatory. "You just want me to lose my mommy."

"I don't want you to lose your mommy. I just want you to gain your life back."

"I don't *want* my life back!"

"I know you made a decision and I also know you are lying to yourself. What do you think about a mother who wants to kill her daughter because her daughter gets molested?"

"I don't want . . . I don't want her to kill me! Please," she pleaded. "I *need* my mother."

"You need to believe your own experience."

"But I believed *her*."

"No, you didn't. Thirty-five years ago that little baby knew not to go to Mommy, because she knew the reaction she would get *now*."

"I can't hear anymore of this. I can't. . . ." Her eyes closed and her body crumpled, her knees hugged to her chest.

"Then listen to Baby," Matthew instructed. "You can't deny her experience."

Her eyes opened slowly, cautiously. Her voice was almost inaudible. "Please, help her," Baby begged. "She is going to make us die."

"I am not going to let her kill you," he replied, his voice softening. "Go ahead and talk to her straight," he urged. "Tell Cici the truth."

"Cici, you have to hear me. I don't want to die. Believe in me. We—we—we couldn't . . . go—go back to Jack because he would have hurt us again," she stuttered, "and we couldn't go to Mommy because she wouldn't even have heard us. And—and—and—you're not stupid. You *knew* Eddie loved you. But you didn't listen to yourself. You stopped Kathy from loving and so did I."

"Cici really needs to know the secret, Baby."

"You're afraid if you lose your mommy, you will have nothing," the small voice reported solemnly. "But you don't have your mommy now anyway." She swayed on the couch. "You never did."

"Come back here," Matthew called, but Baby was gone.

"I don't want to hear what you have to say. I don't want to hear what Baby has to say. I don't want to hear what *anybody* has to say," Cici declared. She was confused. She was no longer sure what she wanted. "I want to live and I want to die and that's all. I don't want to see you. I don't want to know the truth. You can't help, Matthew, I won't let you do anything. I have warned you for two years that you can't help me."

"Baby is going to help you," he said firmly, leaning forward. "You can't deny the innocence of that little baby."

"I don't want to hear any—"

"Come on, Baby," he interrupted. "Tell her again."

She rubbed her burning eyes with balled-up fists. She had been fighting this battle for so long. When was Matthew going to let her rest? "I'm afraid of her," Baby whimpered.

"She has no power," he explained. "That is what she's done—given up her power. You don't have to worry about her. All you have to do is tell her."

"I'm not going to let you die," Baby whispered. "I want to grow up. I want to be Kathy. And we can do it without Mom." Her cheeks were wet. "I guess we already have."

Her eyes opened suddenly and she reached out both arms to Matthew. "Help me, Matthew," Cici said finally as he took her hands. "I want to live."

Chapter 12



"You stay out of my room, you creep!" Stacey's shriek was followed by the sound of a hard object crashing into some obstacle. Kathy's shoulders sagged as she got up from a chair in the den and ventured toward the stairs.

"Hey!" she called. "What's going on up there?" These few weeks between the end of camp and the beginning of school were among the most difficult of the year. Usually, she and Bob tried to take a family trip to bridge the gap, but this year he just couldn't get away from the office and she hadn't wanted to take the kids anywhere alone. She glanced at her watch. Seven o'clock. She'd better tell Gloria to go ahead and feed them; there wasn't any point in waiting for Bob.

Charley hurtled down the stairs, his face beet-red. "Mom!" he complained, outraged. "Stacey just tried to *kill* me! *Do* something! She's a menace!"

Before she had a chance to reply, her eldest daughter's haughty tones floated down. "He was in my *room*, Mother. He was looking at my *diary*. I don't want to ever see him again as long as I live."

"Charley—" Kathy began.

Stacey interrupted. "Which won't be very long if I don't get some privacy around here!" The pitch of her voice rose dangerously. "This is a lunatic asylum!" Her door slammed shut and Kathy heard the click of the lock.

She rubbed her eyes with one hand. "It isn't nice to poke around in someone else's room," Cici said timidly to Charley.

"Mom!" His voice was pained. "She could've really hurt me! Don't you care?"

She took a deep breath. "Of *course* I do, honey," Prose replied, banishing Cici and her wimpy attitude, "and I'm going

to give that girl a piece of my mind." She gave Charley a big hug. "But first, I've got to tell Gloria to throw some food on the table. You ready for supper?"

If Charley noticed that his mother had changed from tired to timid to expansive in the space of three sentences, he didn't show it. Inside, Kathy felt despairing. What was she doing to her children, flipping in and out like this? And now Prose would hold on until she got bored with the kids. Prose was pretty hard on Stacey sometimes. She found herself upstairs, outside her daughter's door. "Stacey?" Prose demanded. "Open this door. Dinner's going to be ready in a couple of minutes, but I want to talk to you first. Right now!"

"Go away," the girl mumbled.

Marsha peered out of her room, where she and Lynn were apparently engrossed in redecorating the dollhouse. Prose crossed the hall. "Hi, girls," she said cheerfully. "Having fun?" She looked into the room and saw the large, intricate Victorian mansion that had been hers when she was a little girl. She smiled, and then the smile froze on her face. She was back in the house in Brooklyn, playing with the dollhouse. A wave of anger swept over her—new anger, stronger than she had felt before. She was familiar with Ivy's kind of mad. It was a determined, stubborn, dogged emotion. But this—this felt like a tornado in her stomach, a consuming fury. She had the urge to smash the dollhouse, to find a hammer or an ax and break it into little pieces.

She leaned against the doorway, feeling the blood drain out of her face. She was terrified. "You look sick, Mommy, are you all right?" Lynn asked in her sweet, innocent voice.

Kathy shook her head. "Of course, darling." At least the spell—or seizure, or whatever it was—had driven Prose away. Maybe it scared even her. She hugged her baby. "I was just remembering playing with the pretty house and thinking how long ago it was." She managed a smile. "You hungry?" Both girls nodded, still regarding her a little suspiciously. "Good. Go wash your hands and then go downstairs. Gloria's got supper ready for you."

"But where's Daddy?" Marsha asked.

"He's working late again, sweetheart. We're not going to wait."

Once they were safely in the kitchen, Kathy returned to Stacey's door. "Stacey, honey, could we talk?"

"No!"

I want to be a good mother, she thought wearily, and yet I don't want to be a mother at all. But I really need to be okay for these kids. Especially Stacey. "Please open the door. I promise I'll speak to Charley about staying away from your things, but *you've* got to promise not to hurt him." She paused, and silence descended. She could hear Stacey breathing, so she knew her daughter was right near the door. That was an encouraging sign. "What was it you threw at him?" she asked mildly.

"Just a book," the girl replied grudgingly.

"It sounded like the unabridged dictionary," Kathy tried, and was rewarded with a stifled chuckle.

The door opened, and Stacey handed out a copy of *Huckleberry Finn*, its spine broken. "It's only three hundred and forty-five pages," she explained.

"I see." Kathy took the book and sank down on the floor of the hall. Stacey was also sitting on the floor, just inside the door. "I know how you feel about privacy, sweetheart," she said. "And about your diary. I keep a journal, too, you know."

"You do?" She sounded doubtful.

"Yep. And I'd be very upset if anybody looked at it." She paused. "Unless I wanted them to. Like Dr. Caldwell. Sometimes I show Matthew things I've written."

Stacey had begun therapy with someone Matthew had recommended, but Kathy didn't want to pry, so she hadn't asked about it. Now, however, seemed like a good moment. "Do you like Dr. Lasker?" she asked. "Do you think she's going to be able to help you sort some things out?"

"Maybe."

The silence lengthened, and Kathy felt stupid. She'd done the wrong thing. Again. She shouldn't have asked. She got to her feet. She was failing to communicate with her eldest daughter, as always. Cici looked bleakly around the hall. She didn't deserve such a nice house, she thought absently. "Well, I guess I'll see about supper," she said softly.

"I'll be down in a minute," Stacey replied. Her voice reached Cici halfway down the stairs. "Actually, Mom, Dr. Lasker is okay," she admitted grudgingly. "I'm glad I have her to talk to."

Matthew had suggested that the whole family enter therapy, Cici recalled, although Stacey was the one having problems—

trouble with schoolwork and with her weight. He thought everyone could benefit from a better understanding of the situation. She smiled bitterly. But no one could understand the "situation"—no one who wasn't living it, moment to moment, day to day. She hesitated, not wanting to enter the kitchen. She was no good at supervising things, even things as simple as Gloria and supper. She just couldn't cope. She stared at her pale image in the foyer mirror.

What a dull-looking woman, she thought. No wonder Bob hadn't wanted to go into therapy. "No way!" had been his comment. Her mouth twisted. Why should he go out of his way to help her? He was so kind and supportive day to day. How could she dare ask more from him? Why should he expose himself in any sense? She understood perfectly. At the time Kathy had been upset at his refusal, but Cici agreed with him. Let the ones who need help get help. And leave the others in peace.

The tidal wave of anger she had first experienced upstairs washed over her again, taking her by surprise. She *hated* Bob for not doing what Matthew had asked, *hated* him so much, she wanted to cut his heart out. He was just like every other man—taking, taking, taking, and never giving anything in return! Mr. Perfect, who didn't need any help from *anyone*! She clutched at the hall table for support, knocking the day's mail onto the floor. She reached over to pick it up, trying to steady her shaking hands. The fury wouldn't leave though. Cici had vanished, of course, and Kathy felt as if she were drowning in a hot, angry sea. She rose, replacing the envelopes on the table, as Stacey breezed by.

"Why are you all flushed, Mom?" she asked. "Having hot flashes already?" And she disappeared into the kitchen.

Kathy took a deep breath. Her stomach was churning, and she was scared to death. Was there another part inside? If so, its power was terrifying.

Her attention was distracted by the sound of rising voices from the kitchen. "What is this slop?" Stacey was demanding.

She heard Gloria's muted murmur in reply. Oh, God, she thought. Stacey's at it again. How long does adolescence go on?

"Well, I don't *care* if it's good for me! I want some potatoes. Don't we have any Fritos or something around here?"

Kathy entered the kitchen to find Stacey tearing through cupboards, wreaking havoc in her search for junk food. The

other children were eating cheerfully, apparently enjoying the sideshow, and Gloria was standing in the middle of the kitchen, shaking her head. Kathy felt the new anger, so close to the surface. She took another deep breath. "We decided not to keep that kind of stuff around, remember?" she said quietly. "Because you're watching your weight."

Now it was Stacey's face that was red. "Well, I'm *tired* of watching my weight, for your information, and I'm really *sick* of everybody *else* watching it." She was standing, glowering at her plate, which contained a hamburger patty and some lettuce and tomato salad. Suddenly she picked it up and threw it as hard as she could at the opposite wall. The plate shattered, and the oil and vinegar left a dark stain on the barn siding. She burst into tears, then rushed out of the room. The silence in the kitchen was deafening as the younger children looked at each other in wonder. They'd never seen such a performance. The quiet was broken by the sound of Stacey's door slamming.

"Wow," Charley breathed, breaking the spell.

Gloria started cleaning up the mess. "I'm so sorry," Kathy started, then gave up. "She's just impossible sometimes." She felt as though the plate had hit her. Everything hurt—her head, her stomach, even her legs ached. "You guys finish your dinner, okay? Then Gloria will give you some dessert. I'm going upstairs to lie down for a few minutes."

She escaped just in time, closing her bedroom door as the blender churning her insides forced her down onto the chaise. She clutched her knees to her chest and rocked silently, blinking back tears. Who mothered these children? she wondered. Who's responsible if they're all screwed up? I am, of course, she admitted, but who else? Prose had once said that Cici was responsible for Charley, had said that Charley needed her, Prose, as an antidote to Cici. Kathy felt pretty good about Marsha and Lynn, she decided. Maybe she had mothered them mostly herself. But who was Stacey's mother? Who had passed along the kind of anger, the intense self-hatred that Stacey seemed to feel?

She rocked and rocked, gulping for air as she felt the tide of anger close, so close. Finally she got up and stumbled into the bathroom to splash some cold water on her face. Not Ivy. For all her childishness, Ivy was generally a positive force, Kathy thought. She had held them all together through some pretty

tough times. Like Florida, last winter. She shivered. And not Susan, certainly. Susan never left her windowless room. Susan couldn't be anyone's mother.

Suddenly the rage had a voice. "Susan is *mine*," it snarled. "and I keep her safe." Deep inside, Kathy listened, afraid of what she was going to hear. She looked in the mirror and saw that her face was contorted, her mouth twisted, deep lines creasing her forehead. There was a spot of color on each cheek. "As for these whiny brats," the voice continued, "I *hate* them, and I won't be responsible for them. Not for a single one. It's *my* turn now, don't you understand that?"

Who are you? Kathy wondered, powerless in the grip of enormous energy, hating the furious, distorted look of this new part. "I'm Roxy," the voice replied. All at once she was in the house in Brooklyn, standing by the door in the kitchen that led to the basement. The door began to swing open, and she could see the stairs, going down into the darkness, so far down.

No!!! Roxy screamed silently, and the door slammed shut. She took a deep breath. "Mommy was right," she muttered. "Men stink. I hate all of them. They're after only one thing and they're bastards. We don't need them!"

The door from the hall opened and Bob poked his head in. He was smiling. "Hi, honey," he called cheerfully. "I told you I'd try to get done early tonight in spite of the inventory."

Her eyes flipped to his image in the mirror as she felt Roxy shrinking back in antipathy. When she looked back at her own face, it was smooth and pale—not beautiful, but at least familiar. Roxy was gone.

She stalked into Matthew's therapy room wearing a black turtleneck, black pants, and large opaque sunglasses, waving a sheet of paper. "Just read this," she demanded, thrusting it at him, her feet firmly planted, jamming her hands in her pockets.

"Did you write it?" he asked mildly.

"I don't know." Her toughness seemed a little shaky.

He studied the page. "'Kathy won't be back?'" he read. "I don't know what any of this means, but I will listen if you tell me."

She turned and walked over to the couch, her back very straight. Her mouth was pinched together as she sat down.

After a minute or two he spoke again. "Take your glasses off, first of all, so I can see your eyes."

"No! I don't want to. Nobody can see my eyes! I don't feel so good. I don't want you to see me either."

"You look like you're under a lot of stress," he agreed.

She made no move to take off the glasses.

"Look at me. Focus on me," he suggested.

"I can't," she said flatly, turning away. "I don't see nothin'."

"There's probably something you don't want to see. What have you been avoiding seeing, Kathy?"

"Don't call me that name. I won't be Kathy anymore."

"Do you dislike Kathy?"

"I hate her," the woman said defiantly. "She can't take it anymore. She's too fucking weak!"

"Can't take what?"

"Everybody's been coming at her this whole weekend, makin' demands. I'm taking over. I'm going to prove to you today that I can just do it without anybody else getting hurt."

"Prove that you can do what?" he asked.

She still wasn't looking at him. "Take over."

He moved over to the couch next to her. "I'll help you. Is that a deal?" He held out a hand. "Here, take my hand. Who are you?"

She shrank away from him as though he were on fire, plastering herself against the end of the sofa. "Roxy," she muttered warily.

He pulled back, but stayed next to her. "Why are you dressed in black?"

"I want to kill Kathy off. I want to bury them all."

"You've been mad a long time, hmmm?"

Her tone was still belligerent. "I want to feel well *right now*," she insisted.

"Well, I'll back you up and I bet you *will* feel better. You know, I've been waiting for you. I knew you were coming."

"I won't answer to Kathy's name anymore," she said, not sure whether to trust him. "And you won't be seeing Ivy again. I've taken over for her. I'm like her, I guess, only stronger. She's gone."

"You are the next step—strong and rebellious."

She seemed to sag. "I need strength."

"I bet you were pissed this weekend, weren't you? You wanted to get angry *your way*."

"I could do a better job than Kathy," she claimed. "I won't let the others come in and out like she did this weekend. She was living on aspirin every three hours. In and out and in and out. I can't *take* it any longer."

"She still wants to see everything as separate parts, that's why. I think you are the one who sees—"

"Sees it your way?" she asked derisively. "Bullshit!"

"You may not be admitting it yet, but I think you recognize it and know that you are a very central piece of the puzzle. I can understand why you feel so bad. You've been pushed down for a long, long time."

"It took a lot of strength to get here. And I was afraid I would have to leave you too. That you wouldn't let me stay out." She was near tears.

"Let you stay? I'm surprised. *You* are the part I have been encouraging to come out and take more control, in a healthy way."

The somber figure was wary. "I don't want to be out alone, but I can't let her go on the way she is. She will destroy everything. I showed her I could be here today. I showed her I was strong enough not to let her out, and I won't let Cici out either. She's been feeling fifteen all weekend. She's not fifteen; she is thirty-nine years old!" She started to cry.

"It looks as if you are forcing Kathy to make an integration," Matthew observed quietly.

"I just don't want to let Cici out." Roxy sat quietly, tears rolling down her cheeks. "She just doesn't realize the strength I have. I can't let Cici win. She will challenge me and destroy all of us."

"Roxy, you're very loyal, aren't you? You're really very loyal. I'm impressed!" His tone was sincerely pleased.

"I love that—" she began, then stopped.

"Yes, I can see. . . ." He paused as she began to cry again.

"I hurt."

"What would you like right now?" he asked gently.

"Peace." She sobbed.

"And what would you like after that?"

"I don't know."

"Maybe we can figure it out together. You *are* here to talk to me."

"No. I don't want to." She shook her head doggedly from side to side. "I didn't even know I was going to come today, I

just knew Kathy wouldn't make it. She used up a lot of strength this weekend. She didn't have any left because yesterday Cici was out most of the day."

"Why is Kathy refusing to make an integration when all of you are in her like a board of directors?" he asked. "Each of you has a voice in the vote. Don't you all want to be whole?"

"Cici doesn't want to be seen."

"She is seen all the time." He paused. "What is she hiding?"

"She doesn't want to talk to people."

"But Kathy is in charge."

"That was before."

"No, that is still the case. You are just another portion."

Roxy's tone turned belligerent again. "I'm out today!"

"Well, yes, but you came in here telling me how much you support Kathy. How much you are on her side."

"I didn't think about it that way."

"And yet you *are* loyal to her."

Her voice broke. "I thought I wanted to kill her."

"In fact," Matthew went on, "I think you began—you were born—because you were loyal to Kathy. And you are still."

She shook her head stubbornly. "I was born when Pete—" The thought stopped as if it had been cut off with a knife.

"What?"

"Nothin'. Never mind." Her head was still shaking from side to side.

"Who is Pete?" he asked.

"Nobody." She pulled her knees up and clasped them to her chest. The dark glasses still covered her eyes. "Nobody but a bum they hired to paint the house," she muttered finally, almost to herself.

"Who are they? Your mother and father?"

She sighed and twisted on the couch. "Yeah. No. I don't remember. All I remember is Kathy. Protecting Kathy and keeping her safe."

"I think you know something that could help Kathy. Tell me."

"I don't know nothin'," she insisted dully.

"Kathy is a blend of all of you—even Cici. And Cici is absolutely important too. I haven't talked to Cici lately, but I'm not going to help you get rid of her. All I want to do is help you all to work together in a good way." He paused. "So tell me some more about Pete."

The small body shuddered, then unfolded and primly crossed her legs. She finally removed the dark glasses and rubbed her eyes. Her lids fluttered. "She hates me," Cici said in a shaky voice. "Everyone who sees me hates me."

"That's not true, Cici," Matthew replied kindly. "But it is true that there was a time when you didn't want anybody to see you, wasn't there? In fact, you probably weren't born until you came out of Jack's room."

She started to cry. "That's not me, that's Baby," she wept.

"So when you decided to become compliant—"

"No. It was Eddie. Leave me alone."

"It was before that, Cici. Come on, keep going. Long before Eddie. I bet it was with Eddie that you began remembering the problems with Jack."

"I only remember what Baby went through." Her voice broke. "I just know I don't want people to see me. I don't want to go on. I don't want to be a part of Kathy." Her voice was almost a whisper.

"You sound like Roxy," he pointed out. "I thought that was *her* favorite line: 'I don't want to; I want to do it *my* way.'"

"I think Roxy is my other half," Cici tried tentatively. "We're the same."

"Just like flip sides of a coin," he agreed. "How marvelous!"

"No, it isn't. She doesn't like me."

"I'm not so sure that's true. I don't think she knows you."

"I want to feel good about myself and I don't know how. I don't want to be so sad anymore."

"I don't blame you."

"No!" As if possessed, the woman jumped up off the couch and ran to the other side of the room, jamming her dark glasses back on as she went. "I blame her!" Roxy spat from a safe distance. "All our unhappiness is her fault. And it's gotta stop!" She paused to compose herself. When she spoke again, her voice was more controlled. "I want to be their mother for a while," she declared, turning to face Matthew.

"Whose mother?"

"Kathy's kids. They're getting a raw deal with Cici."

"Well, I disagree with you. I think they need Cici and they need you and they need it all integrated in Kathy."

Roxy's shoulders slumped. She returned to the far end of the sofa and perched there, her arms hanging between her legs. "How do we do it?" she asked doubtfully.

"I think first of all we need to respect both Cici's compliance and your rebellion—both parts."

Roxy's tone was scornful. "You don't know Cici really."

"Look," he replied reasonably. "I have watched all of the nice adaptive little games she plays. I've watched her keep her mouth shut. I've watched her give herself headaches and neckaches. I've watched her deny her anger. I've watched her adapt to any situation. She's a marvelous chameleon. And she thinks I haven't seen her?"

"And you still like her?" Roxy's tone was disbelieving.

"Of course! My God, those are wonderful traits to have around."

"How do you make *her* believe that?"

"She'll come around," he said confidently. "She'll realize that she's worthwhile because I care about her, because her husband cares, because Eddie cares . . ."

Roxy's scowl deepened, and she slouched onto the couch, pulling her knees up. "I don't like men," she muttered almost to herself. "Who cares what any of you think? My mother was right. Men stink!"

"No!" Matthew replied sharply. "Your mother was wrong. About that and about a lot of other things." His tone softened. "Think about Bob, for instance. He's a good man and he loves you—loves all of you."

"Kathy may need sex, but I don't," Roxy retorted. "She needs it to stay happy." She paused, then laughed contemptuously. "She needs it to stay *married*."

"And you don't?"

"Don't start with me!" she snapped, suddenly very angry. "I *hate* men! I want to cut their balls off!"

His voice was soft but perfectly clear. "Who raped you, Roxy? Was it Pete?"

"NOOOOO!" she screamed, cowering against the sofa, her fists clenched. "Nobody *ever* touched me. *Nobody!*"

"Was it that drifter your mother hired to do odd jobs?" he went on inexorably. "When was that, Roxy? When you lived in Brooklyn? When you were about eight or nine?"

Her tiny frame was shaking like a leaf, and when she finally straightened up and removed the glasses, her cheeks were flushed. "Someone's laughing," Kathy said softly, looking up. "Who's the one who laughs and says, 'You'll never win?'"

"Your mother."

"You think so?"

"Do you think your mother wants you in therapy?" he asked.

She thought for a moment. "No. She can't face any failures."

"Lily," he mused. She looked up, wondering what he was thinking. "The name doesn't seem right for her, it's too pretty. You've described her as dark and cold and gloomy. You've told me how she inflicts such bitter wounds. A lily is a lovely flower." He paused. "Let me talk to the mother you identified with as a little girl," he suggested, "the mother you took on as a part of your personality. Shift your posture and sit the way she would sit if she were here."

She sat up straight, her legs crossed at the ankles, her hands folded in her lap. "Lily," he said to Kathy, "Lily, do you think Kathy's not going to win?"

Kathy's mouth tightened and her eyes narrowed. "You'll never win," she replied bitterly.

"Never win what?"

"Control," she snapped.

"Control over what?"

"Anything! I know how to press the right buttons, see?"

"How come you're so vicious to her, Lily?"

"I'm *not* vicious to her!"

"Just listen to your tone right now."

"She doesn't want to *be* with me," the woman wailed.

"Of course not. You weren't there for her when she was a little girl and needed you."

"I took her wherever I went. What do you want from me?"

"For you to be real. You weren't there for her psychologically, were you, Lily?"

"Psychologically, shmychologically! You have no idea what I went through!"

"What did you go through? What did you go through that you want to punish her?"

"I survived!" she declared, ignoring the question. "But my kids didn't want to pay me back for bringing them into this world."

"They don't have to."

"They owe me!" She was almost shrieking.

"No, they don't." His voice was still calm.

"I say they do, and they don't give me anything. I gave up my life for those kids."

"I don't think you gave Kathy anything."

"I gave up my life for them," she insisted, pounding the arm of the sofa for emphasis.

"You probably gave even less to your older daughter," Matthew observed.

"I didn't like her," she admitted in a small voice.

"I'll bet you don't like yourself."

His comment made her angry. "I don't want to discuss that with you!"

"What's wrong with discussing it with me?"

"Look what you've done to Kathy. Split her head into sixty different parts. At least I was able to keep her together."

"Wait a minute." His tone was sharp. "Why are you laying that blame on me?"

"You're no good for her. You therapists are all alike. Taking a mother away from her child."

"How were you taken away from *your* mother, Lily?"

"My mother was never there. She was always working, leaving me to watch the little ones. I had no life! But I gave *my* kids everything—money, success . . ."

"Not love."

"What kind of love did I get?" she demanded. "I took Kathy places. She owes me but she doesn't give me anything. I want her to be *my* mother now and she won't. I *need* somebody." Her tone softened, suddenly sounding much younger.

"Lily, imagine that *your* mother is in front of you and say that to her."

Her voice cracked. "Where were you for me, Mama? And where was Daddy? He left me and I loved him so. I was so alone and so unhappy. When you died, Daddy, you left me all alone," she sobbed, and then her tone turned bitter. "You left me with Sherman and I hated him. Hated him for being alive when you were dead. And I hated Mama for making you kill yourself. I wanted my wedding and I couldn't have it because you died. You left me."

"What did you decide when he left you, Lily?"

"I wouldn't give love to anybody anymore; it's too painful."

"Tell him exactly how you'll do that with little Kathy."

"I showed Kathy love," she explained reasonably. "I owned her. She was mine."

"Owning is not loving, Lily."

Her voice rose precipitously. "She was *mine*. *Mine!*" She

made an effort to calm herself. "I needed her. I had just lost a baby and she was supposed to make me happy again, but she didn't do that 'cause she was stupid. She's just a stupid kid." Her voice broke again. "I wanted to be proud of her," she sobbed, "and I *was* proud when she did what *I wanted*, but then she went and fell in love and I almost lost her." She sounded old and frail. "Mama didn't love me and I—I—" She hesitated, then continued. "And I didn't love my kids right either." She sniffled. "I never had clothes. I never could be like the other girls. But I showed them all! I married Sherman and we became rich. . . ." Her voice trailed off. "But I was still empty. . . ." Suddenly she regained her conviction and her voice turned icy. "That's why I have to have Kathy. She belongs to me! She *owes* me! You'll *never* win!" Her smile was triumphant.

Matthew's voice was soft but deadly. "What about Pete, Lily? Why did you have a man like that working in your house?"

Her tone was innocent. "The house needed painting. He worked cheap. And I don't have to justify myself to some *headshrinker!*" she declared. "If that girl was flaunting herself around, she probably got what she deserved." She sniffed. "It's not my fault!" She turned her head, looking haughtily out the window.

"Did he rape you, Kathy?" he asked gently. "Did he rape you down in that basement?"

Her eyes opened wide, her expression softened, and her shoulders sagged as she turned back to him. "I'm so tired," Kathy said. "I don't know what you mean." She stretched, then rubbed her eyes.

"You look sad," Matthew said.

She nodded. "What makes me sad is that I'm not finished yet," she explained.

"But I'm not finished either," he answered.

Chapter 13



Kathy's eyes were wide open in the darkness; sleep seemed very far away. Bob never had the slightest difficulty falling asleep. He was so peaceful, next to her, his breathing slow and steady, his trim body relaxed. Did he dream? she wondered absently. They'd never talked about dreams, but hadn't she read somewhere that *everybody* dreams—some people just don't remember? That was probably Bob, she decided. Nothing to stir up the smooth surface of his life. If he ever had a disturbing dream, he would surely forget about it at once, dismiss it.

It was a miracle he was so calm and supportive, because having things run smoothly—no surprises—was extremely important to him. Of course, she reflected, that was one of the ways he chose to deal with life: by maintaining an unruffled façade, by being the same no matter what happened. It was very comforting to know that Bob would always react with the same confidence and calm, no matter what the crisis. An unwelcome thought interrupted her reverie: Maybe he just doesn't care enough to get upset.

No! she said to herself firmly, rolling over onto her side. She just wished *she* could stay as calm in the face of any crisis. But she had found getting out of the discount business almost as traumatic as ending her partnership with Tim. Too many people were selling things they didn't own, she had told herself over and over. I couldn't go on with Allan. Even if *he* wasn't a crook, he certainly knew some shady characters. She shivered.

Tell the truth! she thought sternly. Regardless of how Allan chooses to conduct business, the fact is that I can no longer conduct business at all. I'm too frightened. I show up at the

office and all of a sudden there's Prose, flirting with some distributor and getting us all in trouble. And the guy maybe pats her on the bottom and bang! It's Roxy, and I'm afraid she's going to grab a letter opener and kill him!

She wrapped her arms around her knees. How long had it been since she'd been out of the house? she wondered. Not since her session with Matthew last week. She sighed. I can't just stay here in my room—in bed half the time—terrified that Roxy will destroy something, just surviving from one appointment with Matthew to another, she told herself.

She smiled halfheartedly. She *was* pretty good at covering her tracks, she had to admit, and she was quite an organizer. Feeling so shaky about her control, she made careful plans not to see or speak to the same person very often, so everyone she knew thought she was spending her time with someone else. When she was holed up in bed, not answering the phone, her friends assumed she was out conducting business, while any stray business contacts who might call assumed she was off doing her suburban-matron-charity-work routine.

She sighed again. Whether or not people *knew* what she was or wasn't doing with her time, it still wasn't *healthy*, she said to herself. Maybe I should go back to school, she thought suddenly. *That* would keep my mind from turning into a turnip, and it would force me to get out of the house. I could just try one course—an easy, interesting course—at a community college nearby. To see if I can be with other people for more than five minutes at a stretch. Her smile widened. A positive thought! I haven't made any constructive plans in months!

She rolled over onto her stomach and buried her face in the pillow. Now to get to sleep, she thought. She visualized the first brick in her wall, and then the next. Piece by piece the familiar wall started to rise in her mind. She felt herself relaxing, the tension seeping out of her arms and legs. But all at once it wasn't the comforting wall of her childhood, it was the wall alongside the stairs in the Brooklyn house, the stairs leading down into the basement. It smelled clammy, and the bricks felt damp. There was nothing but darkness below. No! she thought, pulling herself back from those stairs.

Quietly, she eased out of bed and got herself a glass of water. No more walls, she told the pale face in the mirror. I don't know what's so scary, but the wall isn't going to help you sleep

tonight. She snuggled up next to Bob's warm back, hoping that the comfort of his presence would enable her to relax. I wonder what it is about the Brooklyn house? she thought idly, then put it out of her mind. Waves, she thought. I'll think about waves lapping gently at the beach. . . .

She felt a strong hand on her back, felt the warmth radiate through her thin nightgown as the fingers stroked her, then slipped underneath the fabric at the armhole and caressed her naked skin. Her eyes were wide open, but she saw nothing but darkness. Who was touching her? A hard body seemed to be molded around her, and now another hand slid underneath her, cupping her breast. Why is someone touching me like this? Baby wondered. I was just trying to go to sleep, and now someone is pawing at me. This isn't right! My mommy wouldn't like this. Terror rose in her throat as she felt someone nuzzling at her neck, kissing her ear. She squeezed her eyes shut to hold back tears. Why was this happening to her? She was a good little girl!

Her scream was high-pitched but girlish. "No, don't!" she cried, twisting away from the strong hands and the insistent mouth. She began sobbing, her breath coming in heaves. She was hysterical, kicking and hitting and weeping, and as the bedside lamp snapped on, she stared at the man in a panic. "Don't touch me!" She wept. "Don't hurt me!"

"Shhh," he replied, putting a hand over her mouth. "The children!" His eyebrows were pulled together and his mouth was turned down. He looked very angry. He looked familiar, but he wasn't her daddy. He also wasn't the other man, the one who came so close to her and put his hands on her. Jack, who had been her friend. Or the other man. The dirty one. She tried to stifle her sobs as she glanced wildly around the room. What was she doing here? She had to get away; she had to run. "What the hell's the matter with you?" the man hissed, his lips pinched together as he reached for a bathrobe. He was barely audible as he jerked the robe sash and tied it. "You really are crazy," he muttered.

Tears still ran down her face and she sat, paralyzed, on the big bed. She didn't know what to do or where to go. "Please help me," she whispered, shutting her eyes as tightly as she could and hugging herself. "I need my daddy."

Deep inside, Roxy felt as though she were climbing a sheer cliff with her fingernails. She *had* to get there, *had* to help the baby who was so frightened. She couldn't let Baby flip out. One Susan, locked in a room somewhere out of fear, was all they could handle. Finally, she saw herself picking Baby up and holding her gently and rocking her. "It's all right now," she murmured. "It's all right, Baby."

The husband had come back from the bathroom and was sitting on the side of the bed, staring at her. Roxy didn't know what to do. She had felt how angry he had been—a typical man, she snorted silently. All he wants to do is fuck, and just look at how he scared Baby. He didn't look so angry anymore though. Actually, he looked kind of pale.

"I'm sorry, sweetheart," he said softly. "Are you all right? I was afraid the kids would get frightened. . . ."

The kids! Roxy thought. What about Baby? You almost scared her to death. She glowered and said nothing.

"Are you okay?" he asked again.

Roxy nodded. "I'm sorry too," she managed, resenting every word. What she wanted to do was to run out of the room, down the stairs, out the door, and never see this man again, never see any man again. Just run away—far, far away, where no one would ever find her.

The man crossed over and sat down beside her. Every nerve ending screamed out in panic. Don't let him touch me, she thought desperately. If he touches me, I'll scream again, just like Baby. She took a deep breath and held it, and as Bob put his arm around her and pulled her to him, Roxy disappeared. Kathy leaned against her husband with relief and let her tears fall on his silk lapel. "Oh, Bob, I'm so sorry," she wept. "I'm so very sorry." He can't see me like that again, she said to herself. Never!

"My life here is overflowing into my life at home," she explained to Matthew in a small, desperate voice, her hands clenched in her lap, "and that can't happen. I've been able to handle everything at home pretty much separately. Although it overlapped, I was able to control it." She stopped helplessly. How could she describe the terror that she went through when she had no power over her body, when Baby was having hysterics or Roxy was in a fury? She sighed. There was no way anyone could understand, not even Matthew.

"You've got to tell me more specifically what happened," he suggested sympathetically, leaning forward slightly in his chair.

Where to start? she wondered. "The last two weeks, I guess things haven't been that good," she began hesitantly. "It's been taking a lot of strength and energy to control myself. Well, Saturday night I went to sleep, and sometime after that Bob approached me. And Baby just freaked out!" She felt tears beginning.

"What do you mean he approached you?"

"For sex. And I couldn't control Baby. She got very upset."

"What do you mean, very upset?"

Suddenly she was embarrassed to describe the screaming, the shrieking, the sobbing. "I just had a very bad night that night."

Matthew persisted. "Well, what actually happened? Were you crying? Fighting? Submitting when you didn't want to?"

"No. I didn't submit. Baby got scared and started to cry."

"Could you tell Bob? Could you talk to him in that Baby voice?"

She sighed, then spoke very slowly. "You have to know him. He was very controlled. One moment he was angry and then he was just concerned for me, didn't know quite what to do. And then Roxy came out and she wanted to meet him, but she was so angry. . . ." Her voice trailed away. "It was awful for Bob." She was so tired, it was as if all the fight had left her. It would be nice to take a nap, she thought, and she felt her eyelids drooping and her shoulders sagging.

Roxy planted her feet firmly on the floor and stuck her fists in her pockets. "It was awful for me too," she declared in a belligerent tone of voice. "I was gonna take my coat and get out."

"How come you wanted to leave?" Matthew asked mildly.

"I've been wanting to get out for a long time. I want to go away where no one knows me. Just leave Kathy in New York and become somebody else."

"But where will you go? *You* will always be there."

"No! I'll leave everybody else behind."

"You can't," he said softly. "You know the different parts."

"Yes, I could." Her voice was sullen. She sounded a little like Stacey on a bad day. "If I had to, I could."

He leaned back, shaking his head. "You know too well what it's like to be whole and centered. Kathy is too well healed."

Her face crumpled like a little girl's, and her lower lip trembled. Some of the tension left her body, and Kathy seized the momentary weakness. She was panic-stricken at the thought that Roxy would succeed in running away. She began to cry.

"If this is healed, then I don't want to be healed," she said, sobbing. "I'm going to end up losing my husband, losing my family."

"No, you're not." Matthew sounded very sure of himself.

"I don't want to have another night like that."

"Did you ask Bob to hold you, protect you?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"Did he?"

"Yes. That's why I didn't leave."

There was a pause, and when Matthew spoke again, his voice sounded more matter-of-fact. "Now, what's this Roxy business? Where does she come from?"

"She's just fed up."

"No." He shook his head. "There's something she's avoiding."

"Well . . . sex, of course," Kathy tried. Her brow furrowed. "If we didn't have sex, then she'd be okay," she said almost to herself.

"Well, Roxy, you said you were born because you wanted to rebel against something. What was it?"

"I'm not Roxy. I'm Kathy." Don't call on Roxy, she begged silently. She's going to tear me apart!

"Then you, Kathy, tell me about Roxy."

"I know that she wants to leave New York, wants to leave everything and everybody behind, including me. She had it all planned. She was going to go to a new city, where it's warm, and call herself Roxy Smith. And Kathy and everything around Kathy was going to be left here."

"Just like your mom, hmmm?"

"My mom? I don't understand. When she went to Florida?"

"Umm-hmm."

"But I was always with her," Kathy protested. What did Roxy have to do with Lily?

"Not always."

What was he talking about? "I went down with her every time," she insisted.

"You weren't *always* with her," he pointed out. "Not at night. What do you think *she* wanted to run away from?"

She thought about that for a moment. "Some responsibilities, I guess."

"How old was she when she was running away to Florida?"

"I don't know. She must have been about thirty-five or thirty-six when I was born, so I guess she was in her forties."

He seemed to be studying her intently, his eyes narrowed. "It's almost time for *your* annual trip to Florida, isn't it?" She nodded. "Do you realize that every time you get ready to go to a warm climate, you escalate? Like this episode with Bob?"

"You know, he said the same thing! Bob said, 'You were in really bad shape last winter in Florida.' And I was trying to figure out why."

"As a child, how did you feel when you knew you were being taken along as your mother's decoy? Recognizing that your mom would have really liked to get rid of all of her responsibilities?"

She shook her head automatically. "I have no proof. She always went with friends."

He persisted. "How does it feel being a responsibility dragged along?"

Her response was quick. "Quiet," she said.

"Quiet? Instead of what?"

"Be good and quiet, and then you'll be allowed to stay," she recited. "But I sure don't associate that with Roxy. Roxy isn't quiet at all."

"Precisely. Maybe that's why Roxy is kicking up a storm when the subject of Florida comes up."

She was silent for a few minutes, thinking about the Florida trips of her childhood. "I used to love being with Mom," she said absently. "I used to feel she *chose* to take me."

He nodded. "Yup. Those are the memories you allow yourself to have. How long did you spend there?"

"A month. My father used to fly down with my brother, I guess, for part of that time. I don't remember."

"What did she do while you were doing schoolwork?"

"She had some women friends; my aunt and uncle were down there. It was at night that I—" She felt the darkness of the hotel room. She didn't want to remember any more.

"Kathy . . ."

"I know what you're driving at, I just—"

"What am I driving at?" She didn't respond. "What am I driving at?" he insisted.

"That Roxy is feeling the way Lily did about wanting to run away. And that I was the one she *had* to take along." She stared down at the floor.

"How did it feel to be such a burden, especially when you were old enough to know about sex, after your own sexual experiences? At the age at which you call yourself Roxy?"

Why was he trying to ruin the memories of the good times she'd had with Mom? What was the point? It just made her sadder to think about these things. She squeezed her eyes together to keep back the tears.

"I'm not stayin' here anymore!" Roxy declared.

"Are you afraid about what you'll feel if you start having those memories?"

"There's nothin' I want to feel. I want to leave. I want to have my own life."

"Okay," he agreed amiably. "Tell me about it. What would you do?"

"I'm goin' out West."

"I like the West."

"I'm gonna be a waitress, where no one is gonna know me."

"In some cheap joint?"

"Sure. As long as I can be left alone."

"Like a truck stop?"

"Right!"

"I bet you'd do wonderfully at a truck stop. What would they call you?"

"Roxy Smith. No ties."

"Umm-hmm. Get up on that big truck and ride for miles at night with any guy who picks you up, right?"

She scowled, folding her arms across her chest. "Nobody's gonna pick me up."

"Nobody? Why not?"

"'Cause I don't want to have any men near me."

"How are you going to fight them off? They're all going to be hungry for you."

"Bullshit," she muttered. "I did a good job fighting them off."

"Who'd you fight off?" he asked mildly.

"Lots of guys. Nobody ever came near me."

"Why not?"

Her voice rose. "'Cause I don't like sex. I don't like anybody touching me."

"You decided that because of Jack?"

There was an edge in her voice. "Jack had nothin' to do with it."

"Who, then? Pete?"

"Not Pete! Leave me alone. Don't question me!"

"Well, I'll just make it a statement, then. I think you decided that because of Pete." He sat back calmly.

"I don't know any Petes. I don't know anybody. I don't know a Kathy. I don't know a *you*, I don't know anybody!" Her teeth were clenched.

"Why don't you know me anymore?"

"Because you ask too many questions," she snapped. And then, insistent, "I just don't want anybody touching me, that's all!"

Matthew was calm. "Well, tell me about you. Tell me why you don't like sex. Who was touching you that you didn't want?"

"Nobody!" she screamed. She took a deep breath. "And when I go away from here, nobody's ever going to come near me again!"

"Who touched you?"

"Nobody, I said."

"I bet ol' Pete got his hands on you."

"No!"

"You know what Pete did to you," he said firmly.

"I don't know nothin'! All I know is I don't ever want to go through what I went through the other night!"

"What did you go through?"

Roxy remembered Baby's hysterics, remembered trying to calm her down and hold them all together. "That fucking kid!" she muttered.

"The baby that got fucked? The baby that somebody molested?"

"I don't know nothin', I said! I want to be left alone." She was so tired. A tear fell from one eye.

"I can understand that. Especially if you take Baby's experience with Jack and then you add yours with Pete."

Why didn't he shut up? Why was he harassing her like this? "I don't like men," Roxy repeated wearily.

"How do you know? Have you ever let anybody touch you?"

"No."

"Well, how do you know you don't like it?"

"I know. And I'm gonna tell you something, Doc. I don't have the strength anymore to fight." She sighed, and her breath was ragged, like a sob. She was going to shred apart, like a tattered flag in a gale. She began to cry softly, burying her face in her hands. "I got no—no—no more strength," she stuttered. "No strength to go on, to take care of Kathy's kids, and the house, and the schedule, and this stupid Baby inside me."

"So how come you're fighting and don't want to be touched?" He leaned forward and held out his hands.

She recoiled instantly, covering back on the couch. "Don't touch me, I said!" she shrieked.

He sat back gradually. "How come?"

"'Cause I don't want to get hurt! I don't want you touching me. I don't want Bob touching me! I don't want *anybody* touching me!"

His voice was soft and reassuring. "It doesn't hurt. I'm not going to hurt you." He extended his hand again.

"I don't want you to touch me! I'm warning you!"

He looked at her for a moment. "Now say it to Pete," he suggested.

Her body jerked as though a current of electricity had passed through. "I don't know a Pete!" she said loudly. Her head shook wildly from side to side. "I don't know him," she insisted hysterically. She inched even farther away from him. "I don't want anybody's hands on me! I don't want anybody touching me! I don't want anybody near me!" She was screaming out of control.

He raised his voice just enough to be heard. "Say that to Pete."

"I don't want to remember you! I don't want to know you! I don't even want to think of you! I hate you! And I want to get out of here!" She sobbed, twisting and turning on the sofa, wringing her hands together. "I can't control it anymore! I can't control it anymore! It happened to me; it happened to me down in that dark, cold basement." She paused. "No!" she screamed. "I won't remember!"

Matthew leaned forward. His voice was calm but urgent, cutting through her hysteria. "Keep going. Tell me."

"This is what happened to me . . ." she began, then she passed her hands across her face and felt the tears pouring down her cheeks. Her voice rose again. "I can't let Bob see me

like this! I can't let him see me at all anymore! I have to go away!" She stood up and started for the door. As she passed him, Matthew grabbed her gently by the shoulders and pulled her back down onto the sofa. Her body went rigid as she felt his arms around her, and then she started fighting, kicking and flailing with all her strength.

"I'm not one of those who hurt," he said, maintaining his grip. "I'm not one of those who hurt." Her back was against his chest as she twisted and turned, trying to break free and run. "It's okay, Roxy, I've got you."

"I can't stop!" she screamed. "I can't stop! I can't stop!"

"Kick him," he urged. "Kick Pete. I'm here with you. Kick Pete. Kick him."

"Help me!" she sobbed, still fighting. "Help me!"

"I'm helping you."

"Get away from me!" she wailed.

"That's what you needed to say, that's what you wanted to say but never said to Pete." Her body grew less rigid and the kicking diminished, but she was still crying uncontrollably. "That's it now, cry it out," he urged, letting go with one hand to stroke her head. "And now what you need to do is to tell me about it," he went on as she relaxed even more and gave in to the sobs. "I want you to tell me about it so we can put the whole thing in the past, where it belongs."

"I don't—don't—don't want to remember," she wept softly.

"I know. I know. But I'm here to help you. I won't leave you. Tell me." He handed her a tissue and kept one arm protectively around her shoulders.

She wasn't looking at him; she was looking toward the far end of the room, where a pleasant earth-colored piece of weaving hung. As she watched, though, the hanging disappeared and she saw instead the door to the basement in the house in Brooklyn.

The door was open and she looked down. The clammy smell rising up stung her nostrils. She started down. At the bottom of the stairs, the playroom was to one side, and the furnace and Pete's room were on the other. She went into the playroom and was rearranging her dollhouse, her beautiful Victorian dollhouse, when he appeared in the doorway. She was a little embarrassed, since she was wearing only a nightgown, but she smiled shyly. She liked Pete okay most of the time, though she didn't have much to do with him. But when the roof on the

dollhouse broke, he fixed it for her, and then he made shutters for the windows. She liked it when he paid attention to her. She didn't feel so lonely then.

Sometimes he smelled like the bottles on Daddy's bar, though, and that wasn't much fun. He came closer; she could see the white scar across his cheek and the coal dust on his once khaki-colored pants and shirt. Then she smelled the liquor and the choking odor of sweat and dirt and old hair cream, and she saw the way his eyes were glittering. She was afraid. She didn't want to be there anymore, down in the basement. She didn't like Pete today. Today he was scary. She wanted to go back upstairs.

Why was he touching her like that? Why was he picking her up and carrying her into his musty room, where the sheets on his cot looked all grimy and rumpled? She struggled to pull her nightgown down, and then she fought to get away, but he squeezed her so tight, she thought her arms might tear off.

He pinned her eight-year-old body to the cot with his bulk, and his greasy, faded blond hair was near her face. As she looked into his strange, hard eyes, his features suddenly changed. It wasn't Pete at all—it was her father. Daddy! Surely Daddy wouldn't hurt her.

She heard the sound of a zipper. It's all my fault, she thought desperately. I'm being punished for being a bad girl. He's hurting me, scaring me, because I'm bad; because I deserve it. And then the pain cut through the center of her like a hot poker, and a scream rose in her throat but never escaped. All was blackness, and she was above, watching, looking down at the crumpled body on the bed.

Matthew's voice finally penetrated the scene. "You got raped, little girl," he said softly, rocking her from side to side, holding her gently in his arms. "That's the terror you have. But let's go back there, and I want you to do something. Repeat what you did that day. Close your eyes and imagine it's your daddy. Imagine it's your daddy making love to you. It's very different when you pretend it's your daddy, isn't it?" She nodded mutely. Her daddy wouldn't hurt her. Matthew continued, his voice calm and soothing. "Bet you can't even smell the liquor on his breath."

He paused while her body relaxed. "Now look at him and see who really is there." She stiffened. "Don't deny it this time," he urged. "What did you want to scream? What did you want to say?"

"It hurts!" She twisted away from him and sat up straight. "I don't want anybody touching me!"

"That's one half," he agreed, "and I support that. Now tell me about the other half. The half that needs touching and stroking and kindness and affection and attention. Tell what you had to do in order to survive it." She was silent, rigid, her face and her fists clenched. Matthew continued. "Look at the split, look at the border between the two sensations—the two parts, Roxy and Kathy—and just keep feeling it. See where they come together."

"No."

His voice was sympathetic. "When you're raped, you don't have any choice. Come on, Roxy, this is your birthday we're talking about."

Her voice was a shriek of fury. "I'm gonna go crazy!" She shook her head from side to side and wrapped her arms around her knees like a straitjacket.

"You're not going crazy," he replied sharply. "You're not! Is that your decision, little girl?"

"Yes, I'm gonna go crazy." Words poured out in a torrent. "If I stay here, I am going to go crazy! I have to get away from here! I have to get away from here! I can't feel good! I can't stand it! I can't stand the pain! I can't stand the feeling! I can't stand anything about it! I hate it! I hate it! I hate it! I hate it! I hate it! I hate it!" Her voice was a howl.

"Block off, block off," he instructed, his tone low but urgent.

The room was quiet except for her long, ragged breaths. Finally, she said softly, "I don't feel like Pete's hurting me now."

"That's a good thing, right?" he asked. "You had a choice—one, to split off into Roxy, and the other, to go crazy. Did you feel good with the other choice?"

"No." She was weeping. "I will go crazy! I'm not gonna live through this!"

"You *are* going to live through this," he replied with utter conviction. "Just look at him."

"No! No!" She sobbed. "I hated him! He had those horrible dirty clothes and that awful greasy hair and that scarf on his neck and I hated him!"

"Look how it is to have him stick himself in you."

"No! No!" She threw herself facedown on the couch. "I can't take any more!"

"Try fighting him."

"He'll hit me! No!"

"Do it anyway. Scratch him!"

She twisted on the sofa. "He's hurting my shoulder! He's hurting my shoulder!"

"Well, hurt him back. Fight him." She began to kick and struggle. "That's right. Kick him right in the balls."

"I hate you! I hate you!" she screamed. "If I had a knife, I'd kill you!"

"Use your fingernails, Kathy."

"I'll kill you!"

"Use your claws and get him. That's it."

"I'll kill you, I'll kill you, I'll kill you!" She was beating on the couch in a fury, almost unable to get her breath.

Matthew's voice was calming. "Now tell me the decision you made while he was fucking you. Before you split off."

She took a very deep breath as she sat up, pushing her hair out of her eyes. Her voice was deadly serious, and she looked Matthew right in the eye. "I will never remember this as long as I live. I will never remember this, 'cause if I do, I'll go crazy. I swear I won't remember it."

"And now . . ."

"I still don't want to remember it," she whispered.

He sighed. "But what's been happening in the last few weeks?"

She sounded like a small child, reciting. "I'm scared of anybody touching me. I even got scared Saturday when Bob came near me."

"What did you remember?"

"I remembered him hurting me. And I remembered being so scared when he came near me and I remember feeling so sloppy and dirty." She shuddered. "And when Bob came near me, I started to scream and I got so scared and then he got scared too. He didn't know what to do. And I didn't know. I was gonna kill myself instead."

"Instead of what?"

"Instead of remembering."

"What would you like to do to Pete?"

"I'd like to forget," she said softly.

"That's what you've been doing all these years," he pointed out. "What you did was to make the best of a bad situation.

And I think it was mighty clever. Don't you agree? Clever to split off like that?"

"I would've been better off not living through it."

"No, Kathy. You wouldn't be. You had to stay alive. You've got some important purposes in being alive." He paused. "Now just imagine yourself lying there after Pete raped you. What happened after he was done?"

She took a shaky breath. "I can't remember."

Matthew persisted. "After he stopped fucking you, what happened? Where were you? Let yourself know what you decided as you lay there all sticky."

Roxy's tone of voice was unmistakable. "That I hated men and I hated sex and I still do! That I'm a bad girl and I don't deserve anything good! So if anything good happens, I'll just get sick or scared."

"Like with your husband?"

"I'm not clean," she wailed. "I'm not good, I'm not nice and the kids shouldn't love me."

"That's the little girl's decision, Kathy."

"I have no place to go. I'm all alone. All alone!"

"What else did you feel that day?"

"There was no one I could tell. No one to help me. I felt so dirty and so bad."

"So you decided . . ."

"To forget it. To never, ever let it come into my life."

"Were you asleep on Saturday night when your husband wanted to make love?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And maybe you were dreaming . . . or maybe you remembered. The experience with Pete is certainly a nightmare of your life."

All at once it all seemed very far away. Kathy straightened up on the couch and ran her fingers through her hair. It was as if some other woman had been reenacting this trauma. The memory faded. She couldn't remember what the basement in that house looked like anymore. "Roxy just made it all up," she mumbled. That was the only explanation. Such a horrible thing couldn't possibly have happened to her.

Matthew didn't show any reaction. "It may have been a dream," he agreed easily. "Maybe it's not reality." His tone turned sharper. "I don't care." He was looking at her with those dark eyes of his, those eyes that could see the truth.

"What I do care about is you. And I think that this . . . dream is very real to you."

Her tone was defeated. "And I think—we think, Roxy thinks—that Bob and the kids are better off without me. Without someone who makes up fantastic things, who flips out in the middle of the night—"

He interrupted her. "Well, they're not," he said flatly.

She needed to get away from his gaze. She looked at her watch. "We must be way past time . . ." she began.

"It's okay today," he replied. "I have some flexibility. We can work this thing through."

"But—" She stopped. There was no escape. "I feel cheap and dirty." She sighed.

"Kathy, that's not a here-and-now feeling. That was a reaction to Pete in that basement. Is it possible for a child that age to be bad and dirty? No!" He was emphatic. "But what would your mother label you if she knew you were involved sexually?"

"Dirty," she whispered.

"Yes. That's *her* label. And she's wrong. Her problem existed long before you were eight years old. First there's a three-year-old who cannot go and tell her mother that somebody has fingered her and hurt her—a three-year-old who already knows there's a problem."

It still didn't seem real to Kathy. She felt like a phony. A demented, lying phony. "But how could it have been me? Why? Why would something like that have happened twice?"

His tone was matter-of-fact. "Because you were starved for affection. It's that simple. And two affection-starved men probably saw it. And of course they would want to touch your vagina because that is the way grown-ups get a lot of their needs met—through their genitals. And afterward you weren't dirty, you were spermy."

"The others still don't want to believe any of it," she reported flatly.

"What does it mean if you believe it?"

"I was bad."

"No, it doesn't. That's your mother's definition. It is not the truth," he insisted, leaning forward. He wouldn't let her look away. "What I want you to do now is to go over to that phone and call Bob. Tell him what happened to you when you were eight years old, and explain how you flashed back to that on

Saturday night when you were in bed with him. I want you to make a confession to your husband. You know, the Roman Catholic church has used confession for thousands of years in their religion. Part of it was political manipulation, but part of it was cleansing."

She started to cry. All she could think of was that Bob was a man. "He's going to want to come home and touch me," she said, sobbing.

"Good. If he wants to hold and touch you, I will work with you now so you are ready for him." She shivered. She was dirty. How could she ever sleep with her husband again? "Make contact with him," Matthew insisted. "Kathy, what I am asking you to do is to live out today what you couldn't do back in 1950. Or whenever. To get up afterward and go tell somebody."

Reluctantly, she walked over to the table by the door and picked up the phone. She felt paralyzed, and for a moment she couldn't remember Bob's number at the office. Finally, she dialed. She wasn't sure she could speak normally; she worried that her voice would come out as a croak. "Hello, this is Mrs. Roth." She sounded perfectly normal, and that astonished her. Was she that good an actress? "Is my husband there?"

"No, he's not, Mrs. Roth," the switchboard operator replied, and she felt a tidal wave of relief pass over her. It was as if all her muscles suddenly turned to jelly. She was afraid that she might fall. "He's at the plant right now. Would you like to leave a message? I believe he'll be back in about half an hour."

"No, thank you. I'll try again." She replaced the receiver and returned to the couch. Although she hadn't been able to follow Matthew's directions, she felt stronger, not so battered. She took a deep breath. "It shouldn't have happened," she said almost to herself. She saw the little girl, the lonely child who wondered what kind of man Pete was, peering around corners and having conversations with imaginary friends. "Even if I went down there because I was curious," she continued slowly, "it shouldn't have happened. He was a bad man and he shouldn't have hurt me. So even if it was my fault, I should forgive myself. I don't have to die." She was whistling in the dark.

"How long does it take for forgiveness?" he asked. "It's been thirty years. How long before this grown-up woman forgives

that little girl? How long are you going to hold on to your mother's values?"

"I don't know."

"How long would it take for you to forgive Lynn for being raped? What if Lynn were attacked on the way home today?"

Kathy's hands turned into fists. "I would kill the guy who did it."

"And what would you do to Lynn?"

"Hold her, say it was okay, then tell her he was a bad man who didn't know what he was doing."

"And what if she decided she was going to kill herself so you would never find out because she was so desperate for your love?"

"Oh, God." She started to cry softly. "I would feel terrible. I would want to show her how to take that experience and learn from it. I would want to hold her in my arms until she felt safe enough to trust me."

"And what if she wanted to hide the memories?"

"I would tell her it wasn't healthy." She wept. "The memories are going to spring up in her face when she doesn't expect them."

"And what if she spent all her time saying she was dirty and didn't deserve anything good?"

"No," she said, sobbing, "not my Lynn. Not my Lynn. She's so beautiful, so clean, so good, so little; and I love those sexy feelings she has because she knows her body is there to work for her and with her." Why was it so hard to forgive herself and so easy to forgive her daughter? she wondered. She frowned, her mind twisting around what she remembered. "Kathy wanted to be touched. She liked it."

"And so does Lynn like to be touched," Matthew pointed out.

"But any man who took advantage of those feelings—" She paused, feeling her fury build. "I hold a lot of anger for that man, and I hold a tremendous amount of anger for the mother and father who let that man into the house. I wouldn't do that to Lynn. I wouldn't ever put her in a place where I knew it was dangerous."

"How long does it take for you to forgive yourself?" he repeated gently. His voice rose. "How long are you going to hold on to your mommy instead of being a grown-up person? How long are you going to wait for your mother to love you?"

Her face crumpled. "I don't think my mommy could ever love me."

"How long are you going to wait by cutting parts of you off? Killing parts off."

"I don't know." She sobbed. "I can't tell her the truth because she will always believe that there was something I did that was no good." It was too hard. The thought of her mother not loving her was like a rock, crushing the life out of her. "I really don't want to live anymore," she whispered. "I am not Lynn. I am Kathy, and Kathy has bad experiences or makes up disgusting stories and doesn't want to go on."

Matthew nodded sympathetically. "And she had a worse experience than being raped," he said.

"What?"

"A mother who didn't love her. That is worse than being raped. The rape only took a few minutes, but you have survived for thirty-nine years without being loved for your real self by your mother. But there are other people who do love your real self."

He paused. "Kathy, how long are you going to cling to an eight-year-old's decision? Would you allow an eight-year-old to drive your car? Would you allow an eight-year-old to pay your bills? Would you allow an eight-year-old to control your life?" She shook her head. "Roxy has some admirable qualities," Matthew continued, "but some of her eight-year-old decisions stink."

Kathy found herself smiling. What to do with this new information? She didn't know. But she was a grown-up, after all. And she could help Roxy cope with it, too, just as she could help Lynn if, God forbid, that were ever necessary. She looked up at Matthew and wiped her eyes. "Like wanting to be a waitress in a truck stop, hmm?"

"Right." He reached over and took her hands.

She stood up. "I think I'll make that call to Bob now."

Chapter 14



Kathy walked barefoot along the hot beach, carrying her sandals, squinting up at the enormous hotels that fronted the ocean. She didn't feel peaceful, exactly, but she certainly felt better *this* winter in Florida than she had last. Maybe some of the demons had been put to rest. Despite the eighty-degree temperature, she shivered. Except the rape, she said to herself. She still refused to believe that it had happened. It was just a horrible fantasy, a story she had made up as a precocious eight-year-old, a fantasy she had concocted and then repressed.

She shook her head. It all seemed very far away. She was strolling up the beach to meet her mother for lunch, and Lily was a sweet little grandmother, not a monster who would leave a defenseless child in close proximity to a pervert. But a little voice in her head said, *She did it once, remember?*

She pushed the thought away. Why mar a lovely stretch of time with distressing . . . dreams? Bob and the kids were at Disney World—Stacey protesting loudly every bit of the way, she was sure. She felt a familiar tightness at the back of her throat. Stacey. Just the thought of her oldest child made her feel like a failure. She didn't know exactly why Stacey was so difficult, so unhappy, so depressing, but she was sure that a lot of it was her fault. She hadn't been a good mother for Stacey. She'd been too crazy herself to meet the needs of a troubled adolescent. Was the therapy helping? Matthew was helping *her*, certainly, but was Dr. Lasker helping Stacey? She didn't know if any progress was being made.

Secretly, she was just plain relieved that Stacey had gone with the others, despite her complaints. Because it meant that

she, Kathy, could have two whole days to herself. And she was going to try not to ruin the time by feeling guilty.

She cut across the sand toward the massive hotel's beach-front terrace. Glancing at her watch, she saw that she was a few minutes early. Since Lily was inevitably late, she would have some time to kill. She sat down on the shady side of a table, and when a waiter approached, she ordered iced tea. She found herself humming tunelessly, tapping a long fingernail on the table to keep time as she looked around the restaurant.

She had just made a cursory examination of the two closest tables when her mouth dropped open and she gasped aloud. "Eddie?" she breathed, and as his head turned toward her, she realized she must have spoken aloud. "Eddie!" she repeated louder, pretending that she had meant to call him.

His stern face broke into a delighted grin, and he covered the space between their tables in just a few strides. "Kathy!" he exclaimed, taking both her hands. "What a wonderful surprise! Are you here for long?"

"Another week," she replied, trying to catch her breath. His effect on her was undiminished, despite the passage of time. Her stomach was whirling with excitement, and she was sure her cheeks were flushed. "We're staying in a condo down the beach," she went on, worried that she was babbling, "but Mother stays here, and I'm meeting her for lunch." She managed to stop her headlong rush of words. "What on earth are *you* doing here?" she managed finally.

"Well, it's the damndest thing," he explained, pulling out the chair opposite hers and sitting down. He gestured to the waiter to bring over his drink. "I was in Scotland, you see, on business, and day after tomorrow I take off for a trip to Russia. So I had a long weekend free, and I spoke with Heather—she and the kids are still in Scarsdale—and to be perfectly honest, she sounded so hostile on the phone, I decided, to hell with her! I didn't even tell her I was in the country. Just switched terminals at JFK and came down here."

"Why Florida?" she asked. The Bahamas or Jamaica would be more Eddie's style, she thought.

"I haven't the vaguest idea." He looked honestly perplexed. "I looked up at those flight boards, and for some reason I found myself buying a ticket. I thought it was strange too." He laughed. "Do you believe in destiny?" His tone was light, but his eyes were serious.

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I do," she replied. She felt especially brave. "And I'll even go a step further. I believe in reincarnation, and I think you and I have been together in other lives." She tried to assess his reaction, and was relieved that no flicker of disbelief or derision crossed his eyes.

"I must admit, I haven't given that subject much thought," he said, "but considering our history, I don't think anything would surprise me. Will you have dinner with me tonight? You can call me here and let me know. Room 814."

His invitation seemed sudden, but then she heard a familiar voice behind her and she understood why he had slipped it in. "Kathy? Aren't you going to introduce me to your friend?" Lily asked.

Kathy rose and turned to give her mother a kiss. Then she pulled out a chair for her. "You scarcely need an introduction, Mother," she teased. "Don't you remember Eddie Hart?"

"Well, goodness gracious," her mother said, holding out a hand. "What a surprise! After all these years."

"You don't look a day older, Mrs. Kahn," Eddie replied, "and Kathy, of course, looks younger." He stood up gracefully, holding his glass. "I'll leave you two to your lunch, but I do hope we all bump into each other again."

"Yes, indeed," Kathy said to his departing back.

"Now where in heaven's name did *he* come from?" Lily demanded.

"Scotland, apparently," Kathy answered. "It's sheer chance that we met. Sheer chance," she repeated almost to herself.

When she called, Kathy suggested they drive down to Joe's Stone Crabs. It was probably crazy to have dinner with Eddie at all, and she didn't want to risk the kind of cozy, romantic spot *he* would choose. But as she sat across from him, memorizing the angles of his face all over again, the crowded, noisy, brightly lit room just seemed to fade away. They were on their own private island again, as always.

"So tell me about our past lives together," he said quietly, sipping his Scotch.

She blushed. "I know it sounds crazy," she began, looking down at the sawdust underfoot.

"Not at all," he replied. "I'm interested. Tell me."

All at once the sawdust was hay, loose hay strewn about, and

she was looking at the stake once again, its base piled high with bales, waiting to be ignited. She shook her head slightly. Eddie gave her strength. She would stay with him, not go back.

"I think I was once a girl named Althelia," she said softly, "living hundreds of years ago, I don't know where. And my mother was a healer, an herbalist, a good woman. But there were witch hunts going on, and I made the mistake of telling the town elders—tall, stern men in high black hats—that *my* mother wasn't like the bad women, that *my* mother only used her powers to help people, to make them well."

She looked around the circle of faces, and there he was—she was right! It was Eddie's face and yet not his face; he was younger, of course, and dressed differently, but it was definitely Eddie—the energy was the same. And he looked so worried, so concerned, much as he was looking now, leaning forward to hear her. "Don't worry!" she insisted with a laugh. "And don't look so serious. This whole thing is just another kind of experience, I believe—another kind of reality." He nodded.

"Anyway," she went on, "they arrested my mother because of what I had said, and they put her to death. And you and I were friends, dear friends, but after that you couldn't have anything to do with me, and I was very hurt. I was also all alone, and I discovered that *I* had powers, too, but I was so angry that I used them to make trouble."

"What kind of powers?" he asked.

"The ability to move objects, for instance," she explained seriously. "I used to scare people by moving things, chairs and things." She frowned. "And I think something bad happened because of it, but I don't know what." She paused. "I do know that I *liked* scaring the men who had killed my mother, and that finally, I wanted to do more than just scare them. So I joined a group of witches, a coven. And so I was condemned, too, and you were there when I was burned at the stake. You were standing there, watching and crying."

Eddie let out a long breath. "Wow," he said softly. "That's quite a history. Do you think it's true?"

"Oh, it's true," she replied thoughtfully. "I can't be sure whether or not it actually happened in some real town in actual history but I am sure that for me, for my psyche, my soul, if you will, it is the truth. Something about me has been burned at the stake while you watched. Do you understand?"

"I think so." He signaled the waiter for another drink. "You mean that the story, the scenario, means something, maybe even explains something about the way you are, the way we are."

"Exactly!" He always understood. He knew her inside out. "There are elements in my life now that parallel what happened to Althelia. I can learn from her. And, just maybe, I can help her find some kind of peace."

"Well," he went on slowly, "it sounds as if in that life we were too young to be . . . lovers." She nodded as he reached across the table and took her hand. "So where does the incredible sexual energy between us come from?" he asked as his touch sent shivers up her arms. "Do you suppose that's the fire?"

She shook her head. "I don't know, Eddie. Could be. Maybe there's this attraction between us because it was never consummated in a past life, never acted out."

"And what happens if we consummate it now, tonight, after all these years, all these lifetimes?"

Her head was spinning as she looked down at the huge platter of seafood that the waiter was presenting. Were they supposed to be together? Was it meant to be? She certainly had the perfect opportunity, with Bob and the kids away. She and Eddie could make love for thirty-six hours straight and no one would ever know. She was on fire at the thought of the two of them together, in bed, finishing what had begun, perhaps, centuries before. There was nothing in the world she wanted more.

She took a deep breath and smiled ruefully. She would have to make this decision all by herself. Even Cici was leaving her alone. Cici had grown a lot since she'd last seen Eddie, Kathy realized. "I don't know," she whispered finally. "I mean, I know what I want, but I don't know what's right. It's obvious that we've been thrown together, but . . ."

Eddie's eyes were kind. "But you've got some heavy reservations," he speculated. "Well, I hope you're right about this reincarnation stuff," he replied. "Because I love the idea that it *will* be my turn—sooner or later." He smiled.

"I never wanted anything more than to go to bed with Eddie," Kathy told Matthew when she got back from Florida. "I was so

turned on, I could barely eat any dinner that night—and Joe's has the best seafood in the world." She smiled. "But all I was thinking about was sex."

"Even Roxy?" Matthew asked.

"I don't know." Her brow furrowed. "She hasn't been giving me so much grief lately," she admitted. "Maybe once she got that story off her chest, it got easier for her to deal with men."

"Story?"

Kathy was embarrassed. "You know. About the—the rape. The story Roxy made up."

"Oh."

She really didn't want to talk about that. She was tired of hashing and rehashing that disgusting episode. "And after I said good-bye to Eddie," she went on hastily, "I found that sex with Bob was better than it's been in a long time."

"Oh?"

"Yes!" She leaned forward in her eagerness to share her newfound liberation. "Usually, you know, it's Prose who makes love with Bob. She really turns him on because she just loves to do oral sex. She can't get enough, and it drives him wild."

"Maybe she can't get enough because she doesn't feel any sensations from the waist down," he suggested.

Why was he fighting her? Kathy wondered. Why wasn't he pleased with her competence, her sense of responsibility?

"Let me tell you!" she insisted. "Right after we got back from Florida, we started making love, and as he was touching me, I could feel Prose there, ready to take over. But I didn't let her. I decided to stay *me* and have sex with my husband. And it was great! I didn't freak out, and there were no problems with Baby or Roxy or Cici. . . ."

"Did you have an orgasm?" Matthew asked mildly.

She felt like a schoolgirl being called on the carpet, having her enthusiasm dampened. "Well, no, but . . . you know . . ."

"No, what do I know?"

"We've talked about sex once or twice in the past three years!" Her voice was sarcastic. "You know that I don't have orgasms. I am—what do the feminists call it?—preorgasmic. What do you want, a miracle?"

"Orgasms aren't a miracle, Kathy," he said dryly. "Orgasms are *normal*. Not having them is what's not normal."

She waved a hand in front of her face as if to brush away an

annoying insect. "Anyway," she went on, "orgasm or not, I enjoyed it—me, Kathy—all by myself. And afterward, while we were still together, I said to Bob, 'Want to feel the difference between me and Prose?' And I let Prose come out for a minute, and he could tell. I tensed up down there, and he could tell the difference. More important, so could I! I could feel my whole pelvis tighten and go numb. Completely numb. And then I took over again, and I could feel the sensation come back. Now don't you think that's important?" she demanded triumphantly.

"Could be."

"Aren't you pleased?" He was beginning to make her mad. "Aren't you proud of me?"

He was silent for a minute. "Sure," he said finally. "Though I think you're proud enough of yourself for both of us."

"I thought *you'd* be proud of me because I stayed real and I took responsibility for my actions."

"That's fine, Kathy, but there are still plenty of things you're *not* taking responsibility for."

"Like what?" Her voice was sullen. Why didn't he give her any credit? Her eyelids were heavy; her whole body felt very, very heavy. She didn't want to be there anymore. When Matthew spoke, he seemed far away.

"Are you willing to let your mind wander and explore an idea?" he asked. She nodded. "Then close your eyes and relax," he began in a soothing tone. "Breathe deeply and go back to the first time you ever had sex with a man. I want you to remember the very first time."

Her eyes pressed tight shut, and she tried to fight the sensation that she was traveling far, far away, but she was powerless.

"I'm going to count backward," he went on, "and when I get to one . . ."

Amy was lying in that dark, smelly cabin, and her father was standing over her, pulling up his pants. She saw her mother's pinched white face, completely blank, at the top of the ladder. "Papa, *no!*" It was meant to be a scream, but it was very soft.

And then she was in the house in town with Mirabelle, who was so pretty and elegant and kind, the first person who had ever been her friend. And

she scrubbed the floors and made the beds and helped with the cooking, but after a little while she began to feel quite poorly. She couldn't keep her food down, yet she seemed to be putting on weight. . . . She didn't say anything to Mirabelle or the girls. If she was sick, they might send her away.

"Amy?" Mirabelle had asked one day in a funny, tight little voice. "Do you think you should see the doc when he comes through town this month? You're not lookin' real well. Is there anything you want to tell me?"

"No," she answered honestly. "I have been feelin' poorly, but I don't know why. I'll try to get better, Mirabelle."

"Do you think . . . You see, some of the girls were lookin' at you, and they say you look a little . . . Amy, do you think you could be in the family way?"

"What?" She was horrified. How could Mirabelle think that? She didn't even know how something like that happened, but she hadn't done anything. "I've been a good girl here," she cried. "I do my work and I don't run around. I'm not like the others! How could that be?" But there was no denying the thickening around her waist and the strange sensations she'd been feeling inside.

"I think you'd better see the doc" was all Mirabelle said, and she didn't talk to Amy much after that. It was like Amy was a servant, nothing else. At night she would cry herself to sleep, feeling utterly alone in the world except for the life stirring in her belly. And one day Mirabelle left, rode out of town on her fine brown gelding, all her fancy dresses packed in handsome leather saddlebags. No carpetbags for Mirabelle. But she didn't say good-bye, and Amy called out the window to her as a terrible wrenching pain started to tear her body apart. Now there's no one but me and my baby, she remembered thinking.

Time blurred, and she didn't know whether hours or days had gone by, but finally she heard the doc's voice penetrating the fog of her isolation. "I've stopped the bleeding, my dear," he said. "I think you're going to be all right."

His face swam into focus along with the faces of a couple of the girls. They all looked tired. "My baby," she whispered. "Give me my baby."

She looked from face to face, and every pair of eyes turned away. "I'm sorry, my dear," the doc said finally. "There was nothing we could do. The labor was too long and too hard. He didn't survive it."

She wanted to hold him. "Give me my baby," she pleaded.

"He's gone, hon," a girl said, patting her hand. "Probably just as well."

"Give me my baby!" She could hear her voice rising, but there was nothing she could do about it.

"He's dead," the doctor said flatly. "He's dead and buried. You've been unconscious for two days."

"Give me my baby!" she screamed, and then she smelled a strong, sweet odor, and all was blackness.

Each succeeding day was endless, and the pain never went away, never lessened. Once she tried to cut herself with a knife, thinking she could join her son, but she only bled a little bit, and she was afraid the customers might ask about the scar. She didn't do much cleaning now. At first, she'd been too weak, and then it just seemed easier to do the same work as the other girls. She wasn't real popular, but she earned her keep. She didn't care, the others said. Didn't take enough pains with her appearance or her conversation. Didn't know any funny stories to amuse the gentlemen.

To be honest, she didn't pay much attention to the gentlemen. She rarely asked anyone's name, and she never remembered a repeat customer. She blanked their faces right out of her mind—snap! It was a talent, she thought. A talent she had. One night, though, there was an older fellow who seemed real familiar somehow. She couldn't place him, but it kept gnawing at the edges of her mind. And then, in the middle of the night, she sat bolt upright in bed and started laughing fit to beat the band. Her laughter had an eerie, raw edge to it; it sounded crazy even to her. "It was Papa! It was Papa and he didn't even recognize me!" And her laughter was mixed with

sobs and she didn't know if she was laughing or crying.

It wasn't long after that that she got so sick, and there was no energy for laughing or crying, but only for coughing. So she lay on her bed, staring up at the stencils on the grimy walls, and she felt the life drain out of her. And all she experienced was relief.

"Amy." A strange voice was calling her, but she didn't want to hear. She just wanted to die and be done with it. She was in a dark, dark place, and there was just a pinpoint of light, far away.

"Amy, what do you need?" the voice asked.

"Go away." She sighed. "I don't need nothin'." The thread was so slender; the light was so far away.

"What do you need to find peace?" the soft voice insisted. "You need peace. Do you see the light?"

"Too far," she whispered. "I can't get there. Too tired."

"You need something. If you find it, you can get to the light."

A weary corner of her brain remembered. "My baby." She started to cry. "I came back for my baby. I can't go without him. I'm too alone."

"Take him in your arms," the nice voice urged.

"Take him and carry him to the light. He needs to go there too."

She saw the tiny form and picked him up, cradling him in her arms. He was very white and very still, but he was perfect in every way, and his face looked so calm. She hugged him to her and looked up. The light seemed brighter. Perhaps she could get there.

"Come on, little one," she whispered, "shall we go together?" The glow of the light was warm, and she felt it on her face and shoulders. She looked down at the infant as he opened his eyes just for a second.

"That's my good boy," she crooned. There was light all around them, and no more pain.

"Good-bye," Amy said softly.

Kathy's eyes flew open and she found Matthew sitting right next to her on the couch. She was all curled up, her arms folded across her chest. "Where is she?" she asked, straightening up.

"Amy's gone," Matthew replied. "How do you feel?"

She thought about it. "Tired, certainly, but also—I don't know—sort of light."

He nodded. "That was a pretty heavy piece of work."

"Was it what you expected?" she inquired. "When you asked about the first sexual experience?"

"I don't expect anything," he replied calmly. "I just take what I get."

"Well, was it okay?"

"This isn't an exam, Kathy," he pointed out. "Your work isn't good or bad. I would bet that it was pretty important to find some peace for Amy. She's been in a lot of pain."

Kathy nodded. "Is she really gone?" she asked. "I mean, for good?"

"I don't know for sure, but I suspect she is. I think she accomplished what she needed to do." He paused. "What does it all say to you?"

She drew a blank. "I don't know. I don't know that it has anything to do with me at all."

"Well, if *that's* true, then working on Amy is certainly an effective way of avoiding things that *do* have to do with you," he commented dryly.

She refused to meet his eyes. Was he going to start bugging her again? She looked at her watch. Ten more minutes. She sighed and shifted on the couch.

"What did Amy's father look like?" he asked.

"What? I don't know."

"Of course you know—you were there." His tone was getting insistent.

She didn't want to remember that scene. "He looked ordinary, I guess."

"Did he look like Sherman?" The question was quick and unexpected.

"No!" Suddenly the face was very clear to her, horrifyingly real, dirty and bearded. "He didn't look anything like my father." She could feel her voice rising. "Amy's father is not my father!" she insisted. "Her parents are different people altogether! Her father is . . . fair-haired, with blue eyes, and he's taller than Daddy. He's completely different."

Matthew's voice was barely audible, but she heard him perfectly. "Sounds like Pete."

"No!" she screamed. "Will you get off that! You have a

fixation about that . . . that story, and I won't have anything to do with it!"

"I think we should talk about it. I think we *must* talk about it. I think it's the only thing to talk about right now."

"No!" There was silence between them. Finally, she raised her eyes defiantly. "Should I leave?" she asked.

"What do you think?"

She almost hated him. "I think if I do, you'll never see me again!"

He leaned forward and riveted her with his eyes. "The question is, whether you'll ever really see yourself."

The haunting melody of Miles Davis's "Sketches of Spain" usually had a soothing, comforting effect, but late one night, listening to the record by herself in the den, Kathy suddenly found it unbearably sad. She started to cry quietly, almost peacefully.

The children were asleep, and Bob was at a late dinner meeting. She felt isolated, cut off—lonely if not alone. She was never alone.

That afternoon she had attended the second meeting of the course she had signed up for—Parapsychology—Beyond the Limits of the Mind. The first class, the week before, had gone very well. She had sat at the back of the room and kept quiet, absorbing as much information as she could, but not risking any comments. She couldn't be sure who would speak if she raised her hand.

She had questions, of course. One of the reasons she had chosen the subject was that she hoped to gain some understanding of the kinds of experiences she had—not the past lives necessarily, but other, more frequent occurrences: knowing where the roulette wheel was going to stop in Atlantic City, for instance, or being so certain that Lynn had hurt herself at nursery school that she got there before they had a chance to call. "But how did you know, Mrs. Roth?" the school nurse had asked. "Lynn fell off the jungle gym less than five minutes ago!" Which would have been *after* Kathy had had the premonition.

The parapsychology teacher sincerely believed that the human mind had vast untapped resources. Kathy agreed, and so did a classmate named Carol Taylor, who managed to ask

many of the very questions Kathy wanted answered. They hadn't been introduced at that first meeting, but Kathy felt very close to Carol for some reason she didn't understand.

And so today she had said hello. They had talked briefly before class and found they agreed that the subject was fascinating, the teacher knowledgeable and convincing. Afterward they went to the cafeteria for coffee. Kathy couldn't remember when she'd last made a new friend. She was sipping her coffee and silently congratulating herself on her control when suddenly she saw a woman's face above Carol's left shoulder. Like the vision in Salem, the image was as clear as a television picture: She was an older woman with short, wavy gray hair, blue eyes, and a calm, pleasant expression. She seemed to want to say something.

Kathy was dismayed. She didn't want to make a fool of herself in front of her new friend, but the experience was so strong she couldn't ignore it. She wasn't frightened, but she was compelled to speak. "Forgive me, Carol," she began tentatively. "You don't know me very well, and you're probably going to think I'm nuts, but I see someone—someone next to you. Someone who's not really there. It's . . . it's . . . I'm quite sure it's someone from another . . . plane."

"Tell me about it," Carol replied calmly. "You're not nuts; this is the kind of thing we've been reading about. Have you had this sort of experience before?"

Kathy nodded. Perhaps later she would explain everything to Carol. Even about Althelia, who had taught her about the spirit world. She strained to hear the old woman speak.

"Tell Leon," the vision whispered. "Tell Leon I'm waiting." And it faded as though someone were gradually tuning it out.

"She's waiting," Kathy said.

"Tell me what she looks like," Carol asked.

"She has short gray hair and blue eyes," Kathy reported. "And a high forehead and a strong, elegant nose." She frowned, trying to remember. "She was wearing an unusual scarf. It was bright red. Odd for a woman so old—in her seventies—to be wearing such a strong color."

Carol gasped. "That's my mother-in-law," she said, her voice low. "I gave her that scarf for her last birthday, just before she died. She always loved red."

Kathy closed her eyes. "She said, 'Tell Leon I'm waiting.' That seemed to be her message."

Carol leaned forward. "That's her brother. My husband's uncle. He had a massive stroke on Saturday. They don't expect him to last more than a day or two."

The two women stared at each other, and Kathy suddenly realized she had found someone she could trust, someone other than Matthew and her family who could share the secret. "I'd like to tell you about myself . . ." she began.

Carol was wonderfully open and accepting. "It must be terribly difficult," she commented when Kathy had finished.

"Yes."

"But you shouldn't be embarrassed, you know," her new friend went on, easing Kathy's lingering discomfort.

"Oh?" Kathy's voice was sarcastic. "But it is embarrassing when I'm suddenly three years old!"

"It's an illness, Kathy, and it's out of your control."

"I can't help thinking it *should* be in my control," Kathy replied tightly. "Anyway, that's what I'm working on. Listen, I've got to get home. Do you have a car, or can I drop you off?"

"I'd love a ride. My car is in the shop, so I was going to call my husband for a ride. Is Norwalk out of your way?"

Kathy didn't like driving at dusk. The other cars, the road and the signs all seemed to blend together in one gray entity. She even preferred night driving. At least you knew where the other cars were when their lights were on.

Her brow furrowed in concentration. She didn't know Norwalk well and she didn't want to miss the turn-off. Her mind felt like it was crammed full of things—information from the course, Carol's presence, the experience in the cafeteria, while she steered her way past virtually invisible cars on the unfamiliar roads. Everything became a blur. Nothing was clear. "It's too damn much!" Roxy muttered. "I can't do this no more!"

The Jaguar swerved over the center line, then back into the proper lane. A horn blared. "Kathy?" Carol's voice was insistent, demanding. It reminded Roxy of Matthew when he wouldn't take no for an answer. She didn't think she wanted to meet this lady. Not yet anyway.

"Kathy? Why don't you pull over here for a minute." Carol was talking very fast. "I hate to admit it, but I think I've gotten us lost. Just stop by the mailbox there while I get my bearings."

Kathy could feel the cold sweat in her armpits and her

knuckles were white on the steering wheel. She shook her head as if to dismiss Roxy once and for all. "Good idea," she said, stopping and turning to Carol. "I'm afraid I was getting a little disoriented myself." She tried a couple of deep breaths.

"Was one of the other personalities coming out?" Carol asked.

"Yes."

"And she's not a very good driver, right?"

Kathy realized now how amazingly relaxed Carol still seemed, and was relieved to find herself chuckling. "Roxy isn't a driver at all," she said. She rubbed her hands together to get the circulation back. "In fact, Roxy operates with her eyes closed, so she can't even see." Then she realized what she had just admitted. "God, Carol, I'm sorry. I really didn't mean to put you at any risk. Roxy's never come out in a car before."

"Don't worry about me," Carol said reassuringly. "For one thing, I used to teach driver's ed in high school, so I think I've been in lots worse danger. For another, we're practically at my house. But what about you? Shall I get my husband's car and drive you home?"

"Oh, no, thank you. I'll be okay. Roxy's not a fool. She knows her limitations. I think that was enough of a scare to keep her away from the wheel for a while." She pulled away from the curb, turned the corner and carefully drove the few remaining blocks to Carol's house. "Thanks, Carol," Kathy called, waving as Carol got out of the car.

"Thanks for the ride," Carol replied, "see you next week."

Most people had their headlights on by now, and by concentrating furiously, Kathy negotiated the side streets to the parkway entrance with no trouble. As the powerful automobile picked up speed to join the homeward-bound stream of cars, she let her mind wander back over the afternoon. What did Carol think of her? she wondered. She had been so pleased—elated, really—by the beginning of a new friendship. Had Roxy ruined it by pulling that stupid stunt?

She felt powerless. Maybe taking the course wasn't such a good idea. Maybe it wasn't safe for her to leave the house. She should be locked up somewhere so she wouldn't endanger other people. Tears blurred her vision, crating halos around the oncoming lights. An exit sign flashed by. What had it said? Was it her exit? The letters had been meaningless. Why couldn't she read them?

Oh, God, no! she thought desperately, wrenching the car out of the line of traffic and onto the shoulder. The pedals were very far away. Could she reach them to make herself stop? Slowly, she came to a halt, then bent over the steering wheel, sobbing. "Mommy! Mommy, come get me! Help me!" She wept. "I can't make this go, Mommy!"

She raised her head and looked around bleakly. At first all she saw were the huge noisy vehicles rushing by. Then, just ahead, she saw lights. Lights that stayed still. A gas station. A phone booth. She could call Matthew like before. Matthew would help.

"Dr. Caldwell's office," the clipped, impersonal voice said.

"I need to talk to him, please." Baby's voice was just a whisper.

"Please speak up, miss. The doctor is not in, and he cannot be reached until later this evening. He is in transit." The voice sounded like a recording. "Would you like to leave a message?"

"No." As Baby hung up, panic rolled over her. She couldn't breathe. She held on to the shelf in the phone booth for dear life. She screamed, *Help me!* but no sound came out of her mouth.

Cici didn't want to help. She wasn't one of the strong ones, one of the ones who could solve problems. But she couldn't let Baby make a scene. If she started to scream, really shriek, people might come running out of that gas station. She leaned against the door, exhausted. Slowly, she opened her purse. She wasn't even sure what she was looking for. The address book was in her hand. Someone else. She should call someone else. But who? Bob was at a restaurant somewhere. She couldn't remember the name, and it wouldn't be in her book anyway.

Bill! He was in the group with her, and he was always nice. After that first time, long ago, when he said Matthew was giving her special treatment, they'd become friends. Sort of. He was a nice man, soft and cuddly and gossipy. Not like other men who were hard and dangerous. Like the men who might come out of the gas station if Baby screamed.

Cici found Bill's number and dialed it. Thank heavens Kathy always had plenty of change! she thought as she counted rings.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Bill? This is . . ." What name should she give? "Cici. I mean Kathy. From group. Hello?"

"Hi! Sure." His voice sounded warm. She relaxed a little.

"You sound scared," he went on. "What's happened? Can I help?"

"Just talk to me for a while, okay? Kathy was driving, but then Baby came out and we had to pull over." She took a deep breath. Talking to a friend brought things into focus. She could see the gas pumps now and the Coke machine.

"Where are you?"

"At a gas station. We tried Matthew, but he's not there. So then Baby got too scared and I came out. But I can't drive either."

"Oh. So Kathy needs to come back so you can go home—is that it?"

He sounded so calm. Not positive and sure of himself like Matthew would, but reassuring nonetheless. He was a good friend, Cici decided. "That's right," she admitted grudgingly.

"Could I talk to Kathy, please?" he asked in a perfectly reasonable voice. It was the way Matthew often spoke to her in group.

There was a long pause. I can't win here, Cici decided.

"Oh, Bill, thank you!" Kathy said finally. "I'm okay now. I don't know what I would have done without you."

"That's okay, Kathy. All I did was ask to talk to you! But can you get home okay?"

She looked around, seeing the whole gas station for the first time. "I certainly hope so. I'm only a hundred yards from my exit," she replied. "If worse comes to worst, I could *walk* home from here!"

"Good. Then I'll see you Wednesday."

"I guess so. . . . Oh, my God! I've left the car just sitting on the shoulder, unlocked, running, with the keys in it!" It was a miracle the damned thing was still there, Kathy thought. How long had she been in the phone booth? "'Bye!" she cried, then hung up the phone and ran toward the car.

Kathy's reverie was interrupted by the silence in the den. The record must have ended, she thought wearily, but she was too tired to get up to change it.

Tears still ran down her face. She turned as the door opened and Bob looked in. She managed a smile as he crossed over to the big chair where she sat, then held her briefly in his arms. He didn't say a word, just took out his fresh white handkerchief and gently wiped her face. It was as if he knew there was

nothing he could say to ease the pain she was in, nothing he could do but stand behind her and offer support. She was immensely grateful for his silence. She didn't want to talk, not even to Bob.

He rose and crossed to the stereo. He looked at the record, smiled, then turned it over and carefully placed the needle. As the mournful sound of the trumpet filled the room again, he left, softly closing the door behind him.

Chapter 15



Early spring sunshine streamed in from the terrace as Kathy entered the familiar room. She avoided Matthew's welcoming eyes. She shook her head wearily as she retreated to a corner of the sofa. As she tucked her stocking feet under her bottom to make herself as small as possible, she said in a low voice, "I'm so very tired."

Matthew settled opposite her. He didn't speak, but seemed perfectly at ease with her silence.

"I went to Bloomingdale's and I had yogurt," she went on absently. "I couldn't get off the chair, that's how tired I was. I just sat there for an hour. I couldn't move." The silence made her nervous. She changed position. "What do you think?" she asked, crossing her legs. She began swinging the top one slightly, gently, from side to side.

"About your diet?" he replied mildly. "That you don't eat enough raw fruits and vegetables, that you do eat too much sugar."

"Oh." She felt a little less exhausted, and her voice took on a girlish lilt.

"Why such a seductive tone of voice?"

"Was it? It wasn't meant to be. The last thing I've been feeling is seductive."

"Oh? You've been looking and acting it. Languid and seductive, I would say."

"Well, I'm not feeling that way," she replied tightly.

"I'm not talking about how you're feeling."

"You mean I'm acting seductive, but I could be feeling very different?"

"That's what I mean." He leaned back and appeared to assess her small form. "Over the last few weeks you haven't been feeling at all—you've been out of touch—and I want you to move back into yourself."

"I *want* to be seductive," Kathy agreed after hesitating a little. "I *want* to feel seductive. But instead, I'm feeling that I hate sex again. I've lost the enjoyment I had after Florida."

"I'm not talking about sex."

"Oh!" She was surprised. "To me, seduction is synonymous with sex."

"You know what I'm talking about." His voice was businesslike. "I'm talking about the kind of seductive you get when you're especially eager to please. It has nothing to do with sex."

"Maybe the word is *coy*," she suggested.

"When you were younger, it would have been coy, but at forty it's seductive."

"Okay. Then what I want to feel is sexy."

"If you don't go around acting seductive in a phony way, you're much more likely to feel the real sexuality that's there," he said matter-of-factly, his eyes on her.

She dropped her head and seemed to become even smaller.

"No," she said almost in a whisper.

"No to what?"

"No to feeling real sexuality."

"But you just finished saying that's what you wanted," he pointed out patiently.

"When *I* said it, I wanted to," she agreed, "but when *you* said it, I thought, No!"

She looked up and met his calm gaze. He knew her so well; sometimes she despaired of ever understanding herself the way he did. On the other hand, there were lots of things he *didn't* know, pain he hadn't shared, couldn't share—the terrible battles within herself. It was a wonder she had made it to her fortieth birthday at all, she thought bleakly. She realized her teeth were clenched and made a conscious effort to relax.

Matthew sat quietly, looking at her. The silence seemed to stretch forever, but apparently he was comfortable with it.

"I came in with a whole list of things," she managed finally, "but I don't feel like talking about any of them."

"There's no requirement."

The silence began again, but perhaps because he had approved it, she now felt compelled to speak. "I *do* need to say something." Her voice was more forceful, but there was a catch in it. "The words are getting caught in my throat. I feel as though my throat is closing up. It's all tight and dry."

"Don't say anything," he instructed. "Just breathe and close your eyes. Since it's closing up, there must be a good reason why you want to keep something to yourself rather than tell me. So when the desire to share overcomes the desire to withhold, then your throat will relax and you'll tell me. Stretch out," he suggested gently. "Just lie back and relax."

Kathy resisted. "I get dizzy," she complained in a small voice.

"Put your head down and *get* dizzy if you need to," he insisted.

"It's my inner ear."

An edge of sarcasm crept into his voice. "Oh, that," he said as she lay back on the couch. When he spoke again, his tone was reassuring. "Tell me what you wanted to say to me." He paused. "Or don't say anything at all."

Silence filled the space like a third person, but little by little Kathy felt her body start to relax. She kept her eyes open, though, to ward off the dizziness, and she stared at the ceiling, noticing the pattern of shadows thrown by the large palm tree in one corner. Finally she spoke, her voice shaky but audible. "One thing I wanted to tell you is that Stacey seems to be going through the same thing in her own way that I have gone through, and I want to know how I can undo it for her." She paused, trying for control, but there was a break in her voice. Stacey wasn't getting any better. If anything, she seemed worse—heavier, more unhappy, harder to live with—since she had started therapy. "I don't know if the therapy's helping, and I'm feeling so pressured because I can't handle my own problems, much less a teenager's."

"Talk to her the way you would have liked someone to talk to you," Matthew suggested.

"I have. And I also told her that I understood her because I have had some problems too."

"Oh?" He sounded surprised but not displeased. "Is that all you've said, or have you told her exactly what you've been through?"

"I've told her some. Enough."

His voice didn't change at all. It was still calm and conversational. "Did you tell her about getting raped?" he asked.

She let it pass. "I even told her last night that I've had moments of thinking that getting well meant dying, just as, to her, getting thin means dying." She started to shift position. "I have to sit up."

"I want you to stay there," he insisted.

"I feel dizzy!" she complained.

"Kathy, it is not an inner-ear problem. Every time you're about to feel something, to have an emotional memory, you get dizzy. We've both known that for years."

"I don't want to know." There was a pause, then she took a deep breath and continued. "I have shared some experiences with Stacey to let her know—"

"Imagine Stacey," Matthew suggested, interrupting. "See her face and say that to her. Talk to her."

A tear escaped and rolled down Kathy's cheek. She closed her eyes. "What I want to say," she began, her voice breaking, "is that I don't feel old enough or strong enough to help you. But I don't want to be this way. I can't help you not want to die, because I would be lying to you. But I don't want you to pick up my craziness. I don't feel strong enough, and it's not fair to you." She was sobbing. "My throat hurts. It always hurts. It's like I'm being choked all the time."

Matthew spoke quietly. "Perhaps there's something really important that needs to be said, but you're choking it back."

"I don't want the responsibility of a child's life right now." She wept. "I don't want to make a mistake. I feel as if I'm going to scream and burst open. I can't handle it! I'm fine if I have my own space to retreat to; if I feel stress building up, I can escape from people. But sometimes I have no place to hide, and I don't want you to see that, Stacey. And I don't want to be ashamed of you because you're fat. I want to help you, but I don't know how to help *me*! I'm in a million pieces, and I don't want to give you the wrong advice, steer you in the wrong

direction. If I'm going to blow up, then you'll blow up too, and I can't stand that!"

Kathy was keening, mourning. She couldn't stop the rush of words now. "I don't want to feel I *have* to stick around because of *you*. I need more space! I'm choking! I need to be away from people. It's like everything—everything and everybody—is closing in on me." She wept bitterly, her sobs gradually subsiding.

When Matthew spoke, his voice was quiet, but it cut through the still space between them like a knife. "Where did you go after Pete raped you?" he asked.

Kathy jerked into a sitting position. Her wet eyes opened. She looked at Matthew as if he were a creature from outer space. "What are you talking about?" she demanded finally.

"Where did you go after he raped you?" he repeated. "What is the next thing you did?"

Her eyes searched the walls, looking for an answer. Why was he dragging out Pete again? Hadn't they talked about him enough? Hadn't she made it clear that it was all an unpleasant fantasy? Her head throbbed, but there were images coming into her mind. She tried to concentrate despite her distaste. Her eyes closed slowly. "I keep seeing the bathroom upstairs," she whispered, and then, in a louder voice, "I don't remember *anything!*"

She forced her eyes open. She saw nothing. There were no memories. There was only blackness. She leaned back into the sofa, her eyes closing despite her determination to keep them open, her whole body clenched like a fist. She seemed to sink into the cushions, as though she were suddenly heavier, and her feet found the floor. Suddenly she was sitting squarely, her shoulders slightly hunched.

Her voice was defiant, tough. "Upstairs. I went upstairs," Roxy said.

"Go on up," Matthew urged. "Go on up a couple of steps."

Roxy felt uncharacteristically uncertain. "I left somebody downstairs." Her precocious child's voice broke. "I left part of me down there," she said, sobbing. "She was down in the basement on the bed. She was about to go crazy. I picked myself up and walked away from her." She buried her face in the cushions, squeezing her eyes shut, trying to obliterate the scene that was spread out before her. Dirty, crumpled sheets half covered the cot's sagging mattress. On top was the still,

shapeless form of a little girl in a nightgown, her knees pulled up to her chest, one fist stuffed in her mouth, her eyes wide open and staring, her face expressionless. "I walked away," Roxy repeated softly.

"That was an option you had," Matthew said.

"I picked up and walked away!" she wailed.

"You walked away from that experience."

"I walked away from that kid!"

"No!" Matthew exclaimed, raising his voice for the first time that afternoon. "You *were* that kid. You walked away from your childhood and you got introduced to being a woman a little more suddenly than you expected. It's what happens to any woman when she loses her virginity, except there was one problem for you—you were still a child. So how does a child walk away from her own childhood?"

Again there was silence. Roxy's eyelids were shut tight, but behind them the eyes moved furiously, back and forth and up and down. She had to find a way out—any way out of the darkness of that basement. She smelled the damp odor of mildew, felt a wet patch on the plaster next to the stairs. The stairs—that was it! She had to climb the stairs and get out of there, get away from Pete.

"Go down there and get her!" Matthew ordered.

"No!" She could see the doorknob at the top of the long staircase. She couldn't go back now.

"You're not going to leave her down there alone with him," he insisted. "You can wash the blood off first, but then you've got to go and get her so she doesn't stay abused."

"But I've locked her up." Roxy sobbed. "If I let her out, she's going to go crazy!"

"No. She's just going to feel what's going on in her body."

The girl shook her head violently.

"First, go to the bathroom and wash up, and then come back and get her," Matthew instructed quietly.

"What do I do with her?" Roxy whimpered. "She's so fat. I don't want to touch her body. It's ugly and dirty. I hate it!" Her voice rose to a scream.

"There's nothing wrong with fat." His voice was calm and reasonable. Hearing it soothed her a little. "It's an important pudgy period of growth," he continued as the furrows in Kathy's brow slowly smoothed out and her muscles began to relax. "It's typical of eight- or ten-year-old girls, particularly if

they're going to have big breasts. So you stop putting that body down."

Kathy opened her eyes. "Why do I keep seeing Stacey, Matthew?" she asked, her voice shaky but normal.

"You just said it, Kathy—a plump little girl."

"Do I give her the message to hate her body because it's fat? I can't lay *that* on her."

Matthew refused to be sidetracked. "Close your eyes. Now go into that bathroom and wash up."

"Only if you promise you'll help me," Kathy hedged, unwilling to give herself over to the horrible, vivid, disturbing picture that was forming again.

"I am helping you," he promised. Her eyes closed and she sank back against the pillows. "Examine yourself to see where it hurts," he said.

Her voice was soft, but the little-girl quality was gone. "You know something? I can look at myself and not feel anything!"

"Maybe there's nothing to feel. Maybe it isn't hurting anymore," he suggested in a matter-of-fact tone.

Her voice rose. "No! I don't feel *anything*! I'm numb! I have no memory! It didn't happen to me," she continued flatly. Why didn't Matthew understand? Why did he keep insisting that Kathy had been raped, when Kathy knew—and Roxy did too—that it was Susan on the cot? It was Susan who was raped, Susan whose screams had been stilled forever that day, Susan who chose, from that moment, to stay locked in her room, safe and rocking. It had nothing to do with the others. Nothing. "It happened to somebody else." Her voice was a whisper, her eyes still shut. "I am not Susan. It didn't happen to me. . . ." There was silence as she began to feel, against her will, Susan stirring within her, Susan and Roxy together. "I can look in the mirror," she began hesitantly, "and I can see dirt."

"So wash it off." Matthew's voice was gentle.

"I can see blood!" she whispered, horrified.

"What happened downstairs?"

"Not to me! Nothing!"

"It happened to you," he said. "You just washed the blood off yourself."

Her voice was a shriek of pain. "It didn't! IT DIDN'T! IT DIDN'T! NOT TO ME!"

"You are Kathy."

Her voice was suddenly quieter, but decisive. "No, I'm not!" Roxy declared.

"That's a lie," Matthew insisted.

"I won't be Kathy anymore," she went on in a small voice. "I'll be anybody I want to be, but I won't be Kathy."

"*You are Kathy*," Matthew said emphatically. "And you just came upstairs to wash yourself off after being raped."

Roxy sighed. "I may have been all dirty like that girl, but I wasn't raped."

"You mean it's all make-believe?"

"No," she replied reasonably. "It just didn't happen to me." She sat quietly on the couch, pleased with herself for setting the record straight. She didn't want him to think she had been involved in anything like *that*.

"Go downstairs and get the little girl," he said again.

His insistence, his refusal to take her at her word, shattered her carefully constructed composure. "*No!*" she snapped. Her voice rose to a howl. "I said *no!* You can't make me!"

Now Matthew, too, was practically shouting, making it a battle of wills. "Go get her!"

The voice was muffled, almost inaudible, the pronunciation slurred. "I don't like you."

"You wanted to go down and play with Pete when you were feeling all alone and curious, didn't you?" His tone was soothing but insistent.

"Leave me alone."

"Now go and get whatever you left downstairs or you're going to stay fragmented all your life."

"I won't," Baby pleaded, whispering. "I won't. I won't." Suddenly the voice changed, becoming tough and pugnacious again. "*I won't!*" Roxy repeated.

"Stop listening to anybody but me," Matthew demanded, "and go get her!"

There was a pause. She took a deep breath and tried to pull herself together. "She's a mess," she said softly, her resistance ebbing away.

"Go get her," he repeated.

She sighed heavily. "What do you want me to do with her when I get down there?" She was about to give in, and the knowledge terrified her. What if she got stranded down there, unable to return to the light, to Matthew?

"Love her," he said simply.

"No! She's off the wall—don't you know that?"

"All the more reason she needs your loving."

Tears were running down her cheeks. "Let her stay where she is."

Matthew's voice was forceful. "Go downstairs and get her. By doing that, you'll also find yourself. You won't be lost anymore. Go get her. You can't block it out anymore," he continued. "You said you left a part of you down there. Go get the part you left."

"She's . . ."

"It's *you*," he insisted. "Don't you want to come up?"

"She doesn't know she's *there*," Roxy wailed.

"Is she the part who likes it and wants to stay there and get fucked some more?"

"NOOOO!" she screamed. "No! No!" She rubbed her hand across her face to brush away the tears. "I stopped her right before she was going to go crazy," Roxy explained, pleading. "I walked away!" she shouted.

"That's right," he said soothingly. "That's what normal people do."

"She doesn't have any life. How do I make her come alive?"

"By letting her experience the sensations she felt."

"She was just scared," Roxy whispered. "Overwhelmingly scared." She began to cry again, sobs racking her body.

"I *know* you felt that. That fear is always going to be there, getting in your way, hampering your enjoyment of life, of sex—until you accept it into yourself."

"I'll *look* down," she offered.

"No. You're going to have to go all the way down. You may even have to face Pete again, and you're going to take that scared part and say, 'Come on—we're getting out of here.'"

Her fists were clenched so tight, her nails were digging into her palms, but she was oblivious. "She won't wake up." Roxy wept.

Matthew crossed to the couch and took her hands, forcing her fingers open and then holding them between his own, larger hands. "Stop digging your nails into her," he said softly. "Treat her gently, she's a precious person," he crooned, moving one hand to stroke a wave of hair away from her pale face.

She withdrew her hands and pulled her head back. "No," she whispered. "Don't be nice to her. She doesn't deserve it. I don't deserve it."

Speaking quietly, he stepped back to his chair. "Yes, you do. And the child does too. She's a sexy little girl who thought she

might have a special, wonderful friendship with Pete the way she had with Jack. The way she wished she had with her father. It felt good when Jack played with her—up to a point—and maybe it would feel even better with Pete. Go help that little girl,” he urged.

“She was so scared,” she whispered, her voice breaking again. “She was really going to go crazy before I left.”

“So you figured it would be smarter to get out of there.”

“I left the experience with her.”

“It’s all you. You were curious, you were lonely, then scared, then terrified, then rational. These are all parts of your rape experience.” He paused. “Now be the rational part and talk to the scared part you left behind.”

Her face twisted in a grimace and her hands clenched again. “Hey! You! Crazy part!” Roxy taunted in a nasty voice. “Fat blob, with mess all over you! Stay there! I don’t want you!”

“Just like your mother didn’t want you?” he asked, leaning forward.

She continued, unheeding, determined. “You’re gonna be a *problem* to me and I don’t *want* any problems!”

“She is you.”

“Nope. *I’m* gonna be brave. Fuck ’em all! I’m not taking her with me and that’s my decision.”

“Kathy . . .” he began.

“I don’t want to be Kathy either,” Roxy announced.

“*Feel* what she’s feeling!” he insisted.

“*No!* I don’t feel nothin’ about sex,” she protested weakly.

“You’ll never feel sexy until you integrate the scared part,” he explained. “Go get her. Look at what’s going on in that room. Look at him. Now just take her by the hand and say, ‘Come on, we’re going out.’”

Her resolve crumbled before his persistence. “I have to wake her up first.” Her eyes were closed; she was back in the basement. She saw the little girl lying on the cot, her eyes staring sightlessly.

“Slip right into her body,” Matthew instructed, “with the rational power that knows you’ll make it back upstairs. You already know what’s going to happen; you lived it. Just turn the clock back.”

“But I stopped her right before she was going to scream.”

“Slide into the body. Go ahead and scream if that’s what needs to happen.” He sounded very close and comforting.

Her body seemed to draw together as if some puppeteer had pulled the master string and gathered all the weary extremities into a defensive posture. "Kill me," a voice whispered dully. "Kill me now." There was silence, and her head shook slowly from side to side. "No. I won't tell anyone. Not anybody."

The silence unrolled again as she crouched on the sofa, her head bowed. Matthew spoke softly. "Slide right into the body."

Her body tensed, but there was no sound to stifle. There was no scream.

"Take all of Kathy and get up!" he told her. "Take the terror *and* the sensation and get up. Imagine ahead. Imagine the blue bathroom upstairs. Take the fear and the pain and walk upstairs. And while you do, look at the dirt on you."

"I see three bodies walking up," she whispered.

"That's okay. Let them merge together."

She was breathing hard. The stairs were suddenly very steep.

"You've got three different sensations," Matthew said. "Name each one."

"Scared," she began hesitantly. "And pain . . . and determination."

"Put them together."

"But I don't want the scared part." Her voice rose to a wail. "Not Susan!"

"Reach her!" he demanded.

"She's petrified!" Tears began rolling down her cheeks again.

"That's all the more reason she needs your help." He paused for a moment, then went on, his tone more penetrating and insistent than before. "Go get her! I'm not having Kathy cut up in little pieces anymore! It's been too long! I'll wait for you. You're not doing it alone."

"But I get such a headache when I have the scared part with me."

"Well, we're going to fix that." He was reassuring but still demanding. "Just put your arm around her," he murmured. "She's scared, but you're determined. You're going to make it up to that bathroom. You already know that. She's the only one who doesn't know it's safe up there. She's probably expecting another rape."

Matthew knelt in front of the couch, putting one hand on each shoulder, steadying her shaking body. "There aren't going to be any more rapes," he soothed her. "She's going to go all through her childhood with no more violations because you're

determined to protect her. Just reach down and take her by the hand."

"There's something still missing." She wept, but with a new note of relief in her voice. "Some part missing."

"You know what's missing?" he asked gently, still kneeling on the floor before her as she opened her eyes and made a futile effort to wipe away the tears. "A loving parent. A father whose arms you could go crawling into now. A mother who would wash you and heal you."

Kathy gazed into his face. It felt as though she had run for miles and miles. "Could you hold me?" she asked in a very soft voice.

He pushed himself up onto the couch beside her and put a strong, nonthreatening arm around her shoulders. Holding her safe and secure, he said, "That's what Kathy needed to say when she came upstairs, but she couldn't. Now there's one more thing you need to do," he said softly. She looked up at him. "You have to go and tell your mother."

She sat bolt upright and pulled away from him. "Never. She'll *kill* me." She was shaking in terror.

"Okay, okay, okay." His voice was calming. She felt the tightness ebb out of her muscles. His arm around her shoulder was a comfort again. She relaxed against him. "What you need to understand, Kathy," he went on, "is how important it is to give yourself—even in fantasy—what you couldn't provide in reality. In this case, an understanding and forgiving parent. And you're right. It's probably not your mom." He stopped. "I want you to go upstairs in that house in Brooklyn, up to your father. I want you to tell your father what happened down in the basement."

She took a deep breath. "I'm so tired, Matthew." She sighed. "I don't think I can."

"I *know* you can. See the stairs. *Be* there."

Sherman's study was warm and cozy, lined with books and furnished with comfortable, worn chairs and a tattered sofa—pieces Lily wouldn't permit in the rest of the house. *She* thought the room was tacky. Kathy peered in the door and saw her father sitting in the big armchair, reading the paper, his glasses halfway down his nose. She started to cry noiselessly. She hurt all over. Even her arms hurt. *Especially* her arms. Something was cutting into her arms!

"Nan! Let go of Kathy! Leave her alone!" Matthew's voice

was sharp and insistent. She looked down and saw deep red welts in her arms where fingernails had been scratching her. "He's *her* father too, Nan," Matthew went on sternly. "And she needs to be with him now."

It seemed as though she stood at the doorway forever. She couldn't go in. Sherman didn't look up. She turned and gazed back down the stairs. All she could see was the door to the basement glaring at her, waiting for her.

"Go to him. Tell him."

"I can't," she wept.

"You *must*," Matthew replied.

She saw herself running down the stairs, then forcing her unwilling body back up. Finally, after an eternity, she poked her head through the door. "Daddy?" It was a whisper. "Daddy? I need you." She saw him look up. She saw him smile. "Daddy? Something terrible happened." She crawled into his lap and put her arms around his neck. She buried her head in his shoulder. "Please help me."

She looked up at the ceiling and noticed that the shadows had lengthened. Matthew's arm around her tightened for a second, then relaxed.

Chapter 16



It was unseasonably warm for the end of September; Kathy was driving with the air-conditioning on so that she wouldn't perspire on her new chamois dress. She didn't want to appear at her brother's looking disheveled. She *was* going to be late, but at least she could look good.

She felt a trickle of sweat between her shoulder blades. It would be too much to expect the air-conditioner to combat nervous perspiration, she supposed. She glanced at the other side of the FDR Drive. Thank God she was driving *into* the

city, she thought. The outbound lane was a parking lot. "Every suburban Jew trying to get home before sunset," she muttered. She hoped God would forgive her, because she wasn't going to make it. In fact, if the traffic didn't ease up before her session with Matthew was over, she might not make it till dessert! But, then, it might be an extremely short session, she reflected grimly, in which case she could join the jam with all the others!

She made a face in the rearview mirror, then turned off the drive at Ninety-sixth Street, heading downtown. Lily and Nan were already on record as horrified that she would put a session with Matthew above a family dinner at the beginning of Rosh Hashanah. Brian, as always, was diplomatic. Which meant he hadn't stood up for her, but he hadn't complained either. He had assured her that they would just have cocktails without her, but that Elaine wouldn't serve until she arrived. At least they didn't live as far out as she did, Kathy thought. *If* the traffic cleared up, she should be able to make it in half an hour or forty minutes. She glanced at the clock on the dashboard. Assuming she was with Matthew from five to six, she could be sitting at the table by seven.

She shook her head. She had no idea how long she would be with Matthew. She felt so confused about him—about everything—that it might be five minutes or two hours. Another drop of perspiration trickled between her breasts, and there was an ache behind her already burning eyes. It seemed like *forever* since she'd seen Matthew. And it was. He'd been gone a lot during the summer, and then practically this whole month too. Marian had returned right after Labor Day—Kathy had resumed group therapy several weeks before—but Matthew had stayed on in Europe for some conference or other.

She drove into the garage under his apartment building. She certainly wasn't going to waste time looking for a parking space *today!* She took a deep breath and swallowed a lump in her throat. She wasn't going to walk in and burst into tears either! She got out of the car and slammed the door. Well, she thought. I guess I'm angry. At the family? No question about it. At Matthew? Sure—for being away, for not caring. No, that wasn't fair of her. For being so *necessary*. How was she supposed to deal with people—family, strangers—*alone*? How was she supposed to take this statistics course she'd signed up for? How was she supposed to pass for a normal person? A person who had decided to earn an MBA degree? What if she

failed? What if Matthew disapproved? Or said she wasn't ready?

Why did she still need him? Kathy wondered. Hadn't she managed this whole long time? Not very well, she admitted. And this past month had been hell. She punched the top button in the elevator, and nearly broke a nail. "Damn you, Matthew," she said softly.

She honestly didn't know what she would have done as far as school was concerned if it hadn't been for Carol Taylor. Carol was taking a psych course that met at the same time as statistics, and in addition to helping her with things like trying to develop study habits and cope with academic panic, Carol had become a close friend, someone she could talk to about everything.

The elevator stopped on the top floor and she got out. Carol had made it easier to get through the past few weeks, but she still needed Matthew too much.

Because her eyes were giving her such trouble, Kathy positioned herself on the couch with her back to the setting sun. She squinted across at Matthew. "I came today even though I'll get shit from my family about it. I don't care. I'm going to say something I didn't think I'd say. I'm thinking of leaving. What's been happening to me lately is just no good." She shifted her gaze and stared down at the carpet.

"Like what?" he asked calmly.

"Before I met you, I may have been a phony, but I was able to manage. Lately I'm not, and I don't like it. And if needing you is the cause . . ."

"What are you not managing?"

"My whole life. I'm still not very good with people. I can't even hold myself together. I start to cry, and I shouldn't. I've never done that before. Everything is just falling apart on me and I don't like it. So even if I have to stop and close up—" She broke off, crying quietly.

"Do you think working with another therapist would be more beneficial for you?"

"No!" she said quickly. "It's just *needing* you so. I don't want to feel so needy. I work with Marian, but I don't go all the way. She's been wonderful this whole long time you were away, she really has, but I'm still in pain. I cried all day Wednesday and Thursday. And my eyes are burning, burning so much these last two weeks, it's like someone set a match to them." She buried her face in her hands.

"Don't be so dramatic about it."

"How am I being dramatic?" Kathy looked up, startled.

"About your eyes. What is it you don't want to see? A memory? A sensation?"

"I want to know why memories should make me overreact. I want to know why I can't—"

He cut in abruptly. "You can. Now finish your sentence."

"—why can't I feel like other people feel?"

"How many other people have had your experiences?"

"I don't know. It doesn't matter." She sighed. "I was a weakling, that's all. I *am* a weakling now, that's how I feel. I don't even want to go to the dinner at my brother's tonight. I don't want to be with people."

"What's this about being a weakling?" he asked, his voice reflecting amazement.

"I feel weak now. Maybe I would have been better off never meeting Len or you."

"What did you expect would happen when you met me?"

"I don't know. But I didn't think it would be two and a half years later with no ending in sight."

"What have you learned, Kathy?"

"What did I learn? That I am never ending." Endless pain, she said to herself.

"You don't have to be dramatic."

"I'm not." She closed her eyes to squeeze back tears. It felt as though Matthew didn't like her very much. What was she doing here?

"Just look at things," he suggested, leaning forward. "You keep breaking eye contact with me. You keep looking in at yourself or up at the ceiling."

"I told you—my eyes are burning."

"Yeah?" He wasn't letting her off the hook.

"I find it easier to think when I don't have eye contact with you," she added finally, grudgingly.

"I would much rather you have eye contact with me. The *real* you."

"I'm not real?" She sighed. It was all so futile. "So what have I learned? I came in a phony, and I still am a phony, so I will stay a phony."

"Or you can be in contact. You can take the risk of what you feel."

"All I want to do is cry when I talk to people," she answered. Tears ran down her cheeks.

"Then don't stop. Tell them what you're crying about. Tell them how much you like them. Tell them what you feel."

"That's not why I'm crying. I cry because I feel like I'm bleeding inside. I can't seem to stop the flow."

"Then you're not in contact with people, Kathy. You're only in contact internally, with yourself."

She snorted. "Last week Marian accused me of not being in contact internally. She said I should stay in touch with my feelings, and you're telling me I'm not in contact *externally*. Maybe you two should compare notes sometime!"

"Maybe we're talking about two different events," he said quietly. "Look at me."

"I want to stop the tears." She sobbed. Finally, she brought her eyes up.

"Tell me, what do you see?" he asked. She focused on his shirt buttons. "You haven't even looked at me," he said sharply.

"I have so."

"What do you see?"

"A person—a person who cares about me."

"Wait. That's what you are *imagining*. What do you *see*?"

"I see a man."

"What else?"

"Dark brown eyes."

"What else are you looking at?"

"Brown trousers, white shirt, nice jacket. Dark hair . . ."

"Keep looking."

"I *am*!" What did he want from her? "You didn't shave."

"Now you're starting to see. Stay with me, Kathy, stay in the here and now, stay with reality. I want to see the burning in your eyes."

"They hurt," she whispered.

"That's okay, just look at me. I'll look right into your eyes when you cry. I want to see the size of those tears."

She struggled to keep looking at him.

"What don't you want to see?" he asked her.

"It feels like there's something in my eyes, like sand rubbing inside. I've been using drops and everything, but it's not going away."

"Because you don't want to see. Is it me you don't want to see? Is it because I was away?"

"I don't know. I know I was disappointed and angry that you didn't come back. But that's not why my eyes are burning." She stared at the rug, blinking.

"You didn't look at me when you said that," he pointed out.

"I didn't? I wasn't aware . . ." Her voice trailed off. She was so tired.

"That's part of the problem. You're doing a lot of things you don't realize. Stay aware. It's as though you decide to be completely internal or all external. Did you miss me?" he asked softly.

"Yes."

"Tell me about that and look at me when you tell me."

"I missed you very much. I found it difficult with just Marian here. I found that I worked in the group, but I didn't feel finished when I left because with seven other people and only Marian, it wasn't fair to them to monopolize the time. So I would do some work and feel guilty, and then stop the work and go home."

"But you can make that decision as an adult choice rather than feeling guilty because your mom tells you you're supposed to be good—good instead of real."

Kathy felt hopeless. Nothing she did was right. "It's funny. I don't know what's real and what's phony anymore. I thought I was being more real lately. Maybe I don't know how."

"It's not a skill."

"I'm so busy wanting people not to see . . . to see the parts. I have to establish limits."

"Just like everybody else does. But you build boundaries," he said. "You don't *have* to build boundaries," he went on. "What you do have to do is be in real contact with me."

"What if . . . How do I put this so you won't jump on me?" Her voice was sarcastic. She was tired of trying to put her reality into words he would accept. What did he know anyway? "What if those 'boundaries' want to take over while I'm out there being real?"

"Then you look at people, you look them in the eye . . ."

"And say, 'Excuse me, but a three-year-old would like to come out now? Is that right?'" She was practically shouting.

"No," he replied calmly.

"You know, I'm feeling very angry because I can't win around here!" She rolled her head back to ease some of the tension in her shoulders.

"Will you look at me instead of closing your eyes and getting dramatic?" His tone was suddenly sharp.

"Just let me finish," she insisted, her head snapping

forward. She focused on his chin. "I'm telling you what I'm feeling. I'm feeling angry."

"Well, at least tell *me* instead of whoever you're looking at inside."

"I'm not looking at anybody," she said, meeting his eyes briefly. "I'm looking at you."

"Then *look* at me!"

"I am." She sank back into the sofa with a shrug.

"And do you hear *my* anger?"

"Yes, I do."

"Do you know why I'm angry?"

"Because you think I'm getting too dramatic. . . ."

"The drama is in the fact that you pretend you're in contact with me and you're not. You could be telling this to a blank wall instead of telling it to me."

"But in the last few weeks I've found it harder not only to stay in contact but also to maintain control," she said, her voice rising. "I'm falling apart! And you haven't been here to help!"

"You're here now and so am I—do it right now," he demanded.

"Can you show me how to get rid of the pain in my head?"

"I don't know."

"And in my eyes?"

"I think there's something you don't want to talk about with me. I don't know exactly what it is yet, but *you* do."

"Yeah," she muttered, curling up into a ball.

"Kathy, the pain comes only from closing up. Opening is never painful."

She started to cry again. "Matthew, help! I just know that I missed you."

"Now look at who you missed."

She spoke slowly. "I missed the safety I feel when I'm with you, and how you make me feel everything's going to be okay no matter what. I missed that more than anything else." She thought for a moment, then continued. "It's more than just holding my hand or knowing you're here. I feel that you'll make it right for me. You make me feel I'm going to survive from week to week, that I have control over the parts, and I *missed* that! The control that I lacked for the last three weeks was because I walked out of here unfinished each week. It had nothing to do with Marian—she was wonderful, but I didn't get—" She paused.

"You didn't get the contact from the person you wanted," he finished the thought. "And rather than get it all from her, you decided you wouldn't get much at all. You repeated Baby's experience with your parents. When your father wasn't there, you decided you couldn't get enough love. And you've been dealing with the after-effects ever since."

"That's true," she admitted thoughtfully.

"And who in your family did you miss making everything all right and explaining? Who did you desire?"

Her voice was a whisper. "Daddy."

"What did you desire of him?"

Her eyelids sank and her body seemed to become even smaller.

"He didn't love me," Baby whispered. "My daddy laughed at me. He hurt my feelings."

"When did he laugh at you?" Matthew asked.

"It was late at night. It was dark outside." Her brow wrinkled as she strove to remember. "I musta been asleep on the couch in Mommy's office. There was a sweater over me. A big, heavy sweater. But I had a bad dream. The witch was coming to pull me down, down into the ground." Her voice was very soft and she shivered as she remembered the witch, that awful witch who grabbed her hand and pulled, pulled so hard. She started to cry. "I was so scared." She sobbed. "I hadda find my daddy. I pushed open the door and everything was dark. But there was light from the big building across the way." She was back at the hotel, and the space between the main house and the casino looked enormous. "I ran very fast. As fast as I could. And when I pushed open that door, Daddy was there. He was sitting at a big, long counter with a lot of other people."

"Was it a bar? Was he drinking?"

"I don't know about that. I just know I called, 'Daddy,' but he didn't come. He was laughing and laughing and laughing with his friends. Their faces were red from laughing so much." She was crying so hard, she could scarcely speak.

"Did you think he was laughing at you?"

She nodded mutely.

"And what did you decide?"

"Not to go to him again." She continued to sob. "Never again. Never!" She buried her face in her hands.

Matthew didn't speak until the sobs had ended and the small

figure sat up, wiping her face with a tissue. "And did you ever go to him again to ask for help?"

"No," Kathy replied softly, opening her eyes. "I never did." She was silent for a moment, thinking about her father. "Do you know that he and I only went out together alone one time in my whole life?" She shook her head. "And it was a complete accident. I was twenty-four years old, and we were meeting Brian, who was coming back from Europe. And the ship was late, so we went out for lunch." Tears started to run down her face again. "I remember feeling so proud, being with him in that restaurant. Why did he have to wait so many years? And why was it just an accident?"

Matthew changed the subject. "What do you want from me?" he asked quietly.

"I told you. To make me feel okay."

"I have the conviction you *are* okay."

"But you weren't here," she admitted finally, feeling like a little girl who's making unreasonable demands.

"Just like your father wasn't." Matthew's tone was conversational. "I'd like to know more about Sherman. I was always interested in him. Close your eyes again, Kathy, and sit the way Sherman would have sat."

She paused. "I don't know how he would sit." She uncurled and sat up straight, pulling her shoulders back. Both feet were planted on the floor. She looked like someone just slightly uncomfortable sitting on a soft couch, someone who would prefer a straight chair. Her eyes closed.

Sherman Kahn came from Poland when he was a little boy. In the Old World, the family was poor, but proud. They were determined to find a better life and to hold their heads up high. That was very important. The most important thing.

He was the youngest in a large family, and he grew up upstate, in the country, where it was peaceful and beautiful. But it wasn't enough—the land wasn't enough. He wanted more. So he came to New York and worked. As a teenager he had a pushcart and he went to college at night. It was hard work, but he made his fortune.

He met Lily in college, and she made him happy. She was smart and pretty—and sad. There was no candle within her, no light. She had grown up with five others in one room. A dark room—a sad room. Especially after her father died.

He was able to bring Lily out of that room and give her

things, but there was a wall around her after her papa died. She dried up inside. Sherman lost his wife almost before he found her, and it made him like a hollow drum. She didn't love him. She couldn't love him. He knew that the way a farmer knows when the soil is good for planting and when it isn't. It's in the hands.

But they were rich—he covered her with minks—and he became powerful. He provided for her always. Even after he lost much of the fortune he had made. Lily said he was stupid to have lost it. There were bad investments, buildings bought at the wrong time.

They had a child right after they were married, a beautiful daughter! He loved her so much, but Lily wouldn't let him near her. She would get angry. Nan was the joy of his life, but he was on one side of a bridge and she was on the other, a bridge that was washed away by a terrible flood. His heart was empty. And Lily didn't care, not about her daughter. It was as though she kept her from him out of spite. There was no candle within her until Brian was born. Then she came to life a little.

He was proud to have a son. A boy to carry on his name—the honor of the Kahn name. And Brian knew his father's pride. There was no need for words. There were good years. Sherman was happy. But then there were dark times again, when Lily became pregnant once more and lost the baby. There would have been a second son, but he strangled on the cord. She had to carry the dead baby to term. She was terribly depressed. He feared for her sanity. Nothing could please her; nothing took her mind away from the dead child.

And then she wanted another—immediately. She insisted. The doctor told her no, and Sherman didn't want another baby. He didn't want her to lose her life—no more heartache, no more sorrow! But he didn't want her to be so sad either. Maybe another baby would lift the depression. He didn't know. So he locked up his heart. He dried up inside. When she became pregnant again, he felt too old. And then Kathryn was born.

He kept his distance. It was as though he lost them both. Kathryn's birth pulled his wife out of the depression, at least for a year or so, and he was grateful. So the baby was Lily's. But he tried to love her. She lit a candle in him again, though he watched from far away. She came to him once, as a very little girl, late at night, when he was entertaining clients at his

wife's hotel. The hotel he gave to Lily when her sadness came back. The hotel that became her *new* baby—her obsession. And it was there that Kathryn came to him, frightened of the dark. And he couldn't reach out. The distance was too great. He had no comfort to give.

Kathy shook her head as if dispelling a dream. Her eyes opened, still hurting. "I feel like a hopeless neon light walking into a dark room," she said softly, "and everybody is going to look at me, and I don't want them to see me."

"Like in the bar, when you were four years old?"

She began to cry quietly. "Why did I need him so much?" she asked. "And why do I need you? Like tonight, it was so important for me to come here, even though I'll get to the dinner late and I'll get flack from everybody."

"Tell them to fuck off," Matthew suggested calmly.

"They'll say, 'What's wrong with you? What's wrong that you have to go to your therapist and you can't give up one session to be with your family?'"

"And what are you going to say to them? How do you answer that question?"

"I did tell them. I said I came because I wanted to." Just thinking about Lily and Brian and Nan and all the assorted cousins, nieces and nephews exhausted her. Her head fell back, and her eyes closed again.

"And yet you close your eyes and break contact." He sighed. "Look at your relatives and tell them, 'There is nothing wrong with me—that's why I go to my therapist. He knows there's nothing wrong with me.'"

"I'm feeling that there *is* something wrong with me," she wailed.

"You missed your father as a little girl."

"That shouldn't make me—"

"You missed him, just like you missed me."

"That shouldn't make me—" she repeated.

"There was no security without him."

"I feel so needy."

"What's it like if you're needy and your father doesn't come home?" he asked kindly.

"Scary. Lonely."

"And if your mother's there and she won't pay attention to you?"

"Then I choke. I keep quiet."

"And you can't get mad at her, but you'd *like* to get mad at her, and there's nobody there to protect you? And she says she doesn't want you to exist? Then what are you missing?"

"Protection."

"That's right." He reached across and took her hands. "And that's what I'm here for. You're safe with me. I'm back and I'm here for you. Don't let your family bully you. Okay?"

She nodded weakly, wishing she could fold Matthew up into a little package, put him in her pocket and take him with her to Brian's.

Chapter 17



Kathy glanced around the table, trying to focus on the faces. Her head was pounding, and she didn't know how much longer she could take it. There was Brian at one end of the table—slightly balding, slightly paunchy, and taking his religious position as head of the family very seriously—and his wife, Elaine, at the other end. Elaine looked a good deal like Brian, she noticed for the first time. Though she wasn't balding, of course.

And there was Lily, her face still pinched into a disapproving expression. Since Kathy had been there for more than an hour, she assumed that at least some of her mother's displeasure was aimed at something else by now, the food perhaps.

"Can I get you anything else?" Elaine's voice penetrated the fog.

"No, thank you. It was all delicious," she managed. Elaine must have found a new cook, she thought. Her eyes passed on around the table. There was Nan, of course, looking tense. And across from her, John. What a strange family! John and Nan had been separated for more than a year, yet he still attended family functions, still helped Bob run the family

business. Was that civilization or hypocrisy? she wondered. Of course, the fact that the separation had never been announced or acknowledged in the family qualified as the height of something too.

Rachel and her husband were sitting next to Bob, and Rachel really looked quite good. Maybe she was going to make it, was going to beat the cancer despite her mother's pessimism. Bob looked appropriately attentive to the conversation that was limping around the table; Kathy knew by instinct that he was bored out of his mind. Soon he would find an excuse to go play some game with the kids. Or watch television.

The sounds of shrieks and laughter reminded her that the house was full of children too—hers and Brian's and Rachel's. She hoped they weren't murdering each other. The headache was becoming unbearable. "Excuse me," she said quietly, getting up. "Elaine, do you have any aspirin handy? I'm afraid I have a terrible headache, but if I could just lie down for a few minutes . . ."

Predictably, everyone started clucking. "What's the matter, darling?" asked Lily. "When did you have aspirin last? You shouldn't take too much of it, you know. People say, 'It's only aspirin,' but . . ."

"It's okay, Mother," she replied wearily. "It's been several hours." Inside, she could hear Roxy screaming, *Shut up!*

"Anything wrong?" Nan asked. "I mean, why would you have such a bad headache? It must have been the drive in and then back out."

She managed a small smile. "Don't worry, Nan, it's not the company. I've had it all day. I just need to lie down. I'll be fine, really."

Elaine brought a bottle out of the kitchen and shook two tablets into her hand. "Here you go, Kathy," she said. "Why don't you just go upstairs and lie down on the couch in Brian's study? That's a nice, quiet room. You can't even hear the kids from in there."

"Thank you." She swallowed the pills with a gulp of water. "I'll be down in just a few minutes," she said, leaving the babble of their voices behind.

The room was lined with bookshelves, and a single table lamp provided a cozy glow. Kathy sank down on the couch with a sigh of relief, kicking off her shoes. It felt as if all the different parts were banging on her head with mallets from the

inside. She put one arm across her eyes and tried some deep breaths. *Mommy will be angry with us for leaving the table, Cici said to herself. Dessert hadn't been served yet, and it was rude to get up. I hope she isn't mad . . . Fuck Lily!* Roxy replied, pushing Cici aside. *She's a meddling old busybody. All she wants to know is about the therapy—she wants to know if we're saying bad things about her! All those questions about Matthew. I'd like to strangle her!*

Kathy realized that she was breathing hard. She willed herself to relax. She heard the door open. "Kathy dear, are you all right?" Nan asked.

She removed her arm from her face and forced open her eyes. "Fine, Nan, thanks." Her sister stood in the doorway as if waiting for an invitation to a long chat. "I just need some quiet," Kathy added pointedly, closing her eyes again.

"Oh . . . well." Kathy could just imagine the hurt on Nan's face. She didn't want to be excluded from *anything*, not even a nap! She heard the door close, but before she could complete a sigh, it opened again.

"Can I get you something, Kathy?"

It was Rachel's voice. They hadn't talked in a long time, Kathy realized. She wondered how she was, how her marriage was surviving, but she hurt too much for a heart-to-heart right now. "No, thank you. I'm going to try to rest for a minute."

Click went the door. *Now, that one's husband—that Gary—is not bad at all, Prose said. Quite a hunk. I could get off on a younger man, you know.*

Kathy rolled over on her side, pressing her hands against her temples. The voices were driving her crazy—outside voices, inside voices, Matthew's voice—everybody wanting something from her.

"Excuse me, Kathy, I just have to get a book." This time it was Brian. "You feeling any better?"

"Not yet!" Roxy snapped. Kathy felt as though her heart had stopped. The parts couldn't come out with her family; they *couldn't!* Of course Lily and Nan knew about her—in the vaguest possible terms—but no one but Bob had ever seen it happen.

She sat up, her eyes open. "You trying to win an argument again?" she said, relieved that Roxy was gone.

"Right!" he replied. "And this time John is definitely wrong. Now, you just rest."

Right outside the door there was the sound of scuffling. "Mommy, Mommy," Lynn cried, "I need to go to the bathroom! Can I come in?"

And then Bob's voice—dear Bob. "There's no bathroom there, honey. Come on, we'll find one down the hall. Mommy's resting." The sounds receded. Finally, there was quiet. She breathed deeply and felt the tension begin to leave her shoulders and neck. It was such an effort to maintain control, a real physical effort. Her eyes closed. She did feel drowsy. Perhaps she could catch a catnap, and then . . .

"Kathy, sweetheart!" It was Lily's voice. "It's this doctor, you know. He's giving you headaches. I don't think you should see him anymore. It's a waste of time and money. What can I do for you? I worry!"

Slowly, she sat up, feeling the anger build. The silence was heavy. Finally, she spoke. "I'm not Kathy, and you're an interfering old bitch!" Roxy declared, her eyes tight shut, her whole body clenched. Why wouldn't they leave her alone? She should have run away, run far away last year like she wanted to. Far, far away from all these people picking at her. "I'm Roxy and my head is killin' me, and if you don't leave me alone, I'm gonna scream!"

"What are you talking about?" Lily's voice was calm and sensible. "What's this Roxy? Your name is Kathy. Always has been."

"No! I'm Roxy! You don't know me!"

"Don't know you?" There was an impatient yet almost frightened edge to Lily's voice. "Of course I know you. You're my daughter!"

"You don't know me," Roxy replied stubbornly. There was a silence, but finally she couldn't contain herself. "I never let you see me!" she insisted. "You let that man in the house and he hurt me. He raped me, and after that you wouldn't have loved me." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "So you've never seen me."

"My God!" Lily gasped, then stopped.

The quiet was ominous. There was only the sound of Roxy's fast breathing. Kathy felt as though she were drowning as she fought for control. She opened her eyes, panting. Lily's face was ashen. "Mother!" she said. "It's all right. I'm all right now. Don't pay any attention."

Kathy's eyes flickered past her and she looked around. Nan

and Elaine were standing by the desk, their mouths open. Kathy tried to smile, though Roxy's fury was still at a full boil. "What is this, the evening's entertainment?" she asked, swinging her legs off the couch and getting up. She wanted to be on the same level as the others.

"I never imagined . . ." Nan began.

"Well, now you don't have to," Kathy replied in as pleasant a voice as she could manage. "I don't know how much Elaine knows about me, but the two of you are aware that there are other parts inside me, and that one of them calls herself Roxy. Well, you just met her, that's all. Don't let her upset you. She babbles. No big deal."

"You poor baby," Nan gushed. "What a nightmare to have to deal with this kind of illness." She put her arms around Kathy's shoulders. "Let me help. What can I do?"

"How did you make . . . her go away?" Lily's voice lacked its characteristic punch, as though the breath had been knocked out of her.

"I opened my eyes," Kathy explained. This little episode wasn't helping her headache at all. "You see, Roxy never opens her eyes. She's never seen anything." They were looking at her as if she were mad. "Oh, she knows what things look like, because she's heard descriptions, but she's never actually seen anything. It's as if she were blind."

"Oh." Elaine seemed to be at a loss for words. "Is there anything you need?" she asked. "How about a cup of coffee?"

"No. Just leave me for a while, okay?" She stretched out again and closed her eyes, listening as their footsteps left the room. She felt a tear run across her face. Oh, Matthew, she thought. Now I've really done it.

When she sat up again, the headache was gone. She must have slept, she decided, or else that little public display had a beneficial effect. She got out her compact and repaired her makeup. Could she face them now?

The first person she ran into was Rachel, just coming out of an upstairs room, where she'd probably been putting her little boy to bed. "Hi," Kathy said cheerfully. "Is he asleep?"

"Yes." Her niece's eyes were guarded. "But how are you?" Her voice was heavy with compassion.

"Much better. I think a rest was the perfect solution."

"I mean *really*," Rachel went on. "How are you *really*?"

Kathy was mystified. Why this sudden concern? Rachel was the one who had had cancer. "I'm just fine."

"No, tell me," she insisted. "Mother described the . . . the fit that happened before."

"Oh." Naturally, the whole family would be talking about it. Damn! Kathy thought, feeling a little faint. Now what am I going to do? "Well, Rachel, it's just something that happens to me sometimes. But it doesn't hurt me or anything. It's just like—I don't know—like somebody else taking over for a while." She felt surprisingly together. It was lucky she had seen Matthew that afternoon.

"But . . . but . . ." Her niece's eyes narrowed. "But it's not *normal*," she said.

Kathy worried that she would fall. She put a hand out and steadied herself on the stair railing. What was Rachel trying to say? She looked at her closely. She looked like a stranger suddenly. Like someone she didn't know at all. Her words were just a jumble, like nonsense syllables. Cici's eyelids fluttered. I don't want to be here, she thought. I don't want this woman talking to me like this. Let someone else listen to her until I can get away. Get away and call Matthew. Matthew will help.

"How was the weekend?" Matthew asked. "Tell me what you were feeling when you called Marian."

"Oh." Kathy kept her tone light. She didn't want to make too much of the incident with Rachel. After all, she *wasn't* crazy. "I really only wanted to share something. . . ."

"I really only wanted to share . . ." He was mimicking her voice. "Kathy . . ."

"Why do you pick on words of mine like that?" she demanded, offended. She didn't like to be made fun of. Especially not after what she'd been through.

"Because your words represent what goes on inside your head," he replied reasonably. "What did you want us to know when you called?"

"That I had gone through a very heavy experience," she admitted, lowering her defenses. "Someone called me crazy, more than once."

"Your niece?"

"Yes. At first I got terribly upset, but then I pulled myself together and I said, 'I believe—well, at least most of me believes—I'm not crazy. And I had a long talk with my kids because they were there—they walked in when I was crying, after I'd had this . . . confrontation with my niece. But I realized, finally, that it was *her* problem, not mine. And I called to tell Marian because I had felt that was a good step. And after I spoke to her, I felt so good, so controlled, that I called my niece because I imagined she was hurting about saying that to me.'" She paused, remembering the exchange.

"She had built up anger at me for two years—since her cancer operation—because of a conversation that she remembered out of context. She accused me of saying, in essence, that I would never allow myself to get cancer, and to her that meant she was responsible for her own disease. I remember the conversation. We were talking about scientific evidence that your emotions affect your health, that people can cure themselves in some cases. But all she remembers is my saying I would never allow myself to get cancer. And she took that as an accusation. Okay, so that's what her two years of anger was based on. And then she heard about what happened, that I lost control, that Roxy came out. She was not in the room, but she heard about it."

"Hearing about it makes it even wilder, doesn't it?" His tone was calm, matter-of-fact.

"And, of course, after that you and I were the topic of conversation for the evening," she went on, shaking her head. "'Who is this man who is making my sister/daughter/aunt so sick and how is he brainwashing her?' Nan and my mother and Rachel, all saying, 'We're so worried.'"

Matthew smiled and nodded.

"And when I called her back that night, after I spoke with Marian, at first she said she was terribly sorry it happened. But then she got angry again and she was saying things like 'How can you walk on the streets, don't you know how sick you are? How can you give advice to your children and to your other nieces? Don't you know you're crazy?' I couldn't talk to her; she wasn't rational. And at that point she said to me, 'Yes, I'm sane and you're crazy,' and she hung up."

Kathy felt tears welling up and she took a deep breath to counteract them. "Most of me knows she's an angry girl who needs a lot of help and she's very self-destructive right now.

She's been under tremendous pressure, and she's not getting any help. But it still hurts. Otherwise I wouldn't react. I asked her, 'Did you ever see any one of my parts during these two years?' And she said, 'No.' I said, 'Then how can you say that I don't have control?' And she replied, 'I always thought you needed help.' She was vicious. At one point she asked, 'How can you allow yourself to do it?' I said, 'I'm going for help—how about you?'

"And then she started in on reincarnation and how could I believe it? I explained that most of the major religions believe it—or did in previous centuries—even the most orthodox Jews. It's in the cabala. And she said, 'It's only the lunatic fringe—you're a lunatic!' She was hitting me with everything she could. I realized that she wasn't hearing rational arguments, but it didn't matter."

"Kathy, I'm glad this happened."

"Well, by Sunday morning I was too. I can't tell you how many people know me and know about me, and nobody, but nobody, has ever called me crazy except her."

"Well, my hunch is that Rachel's carrying two generations of that family's destructiveness with her. And you carry some of it too."

"When I told my sister what happened, I was very angry. I called her before I spoke with Marian, and I was crying hysterically. I had not cried with Rachel. I said, 'Don't you ever discuss me with your daughter again!' They all knew about me—knew I'd been diagnosed a multiple personality—but when they finally saw it, it was very different; it hit home. And I'm not sorry I'm out of the closet. I'm really not."

Matthew broke into laughter, and Kathy found herself smiling. "I expected repercussions," she went on thoughtfully. "But I guess not from Rachel. I would have hoped that after all she's been through . . . but it made me do a lot of soul-searching. And I recognize the fear I have that someone's going to look at me and say, 'Oh, she's crazy.'"

"Sure they will," Matthew replied calmly. "So what? What most people define as crazy is a person's real struggle for help. And what most people consider sane or together or controlled is what I would consider crazy. I think that the issue that we have been dealing with all along and building to more and more is what you have faced all your life: How can you be real and still be loved and accepted?"

"Well, what has me frightened right now is that I've started taking a course that will help me qualify for the MBA program that I'd like to begin next year. Will I also be considered sane in that context? In school? Taking tough courses?"

"Not if they knew your history," he answered calmly. She felt her stomach lurch. "Most likely, if a school professional—a guidance counselor, say—were going to put a label on you, he'd call you a hysteric."

"Why?" she asked quickly.

"Why? My dear lady, because you are."

She strove for control. His measured words were like a slap in the face. Was he calling her crazy too? She kept her voice low. "Tell me. Why would I be labeled a hysteric?"

"Oh, they'd probably label half the women in class hysterics."

"Give me a definition before I get upset or angry."

He laughed again. "That spoils the fun!" he teased. "I was going to watch you get upset and angry first."

She felt herself relax. "Please don't. You've gone too far for that."

"Well, my goodness. My little cheap trick didn't work, did it? What do *you* think hysteric means?"

"I would say overreacting to situations."

"Precisely. Escalating feelings before you have enough information."

"Like I was just doing."

"Right."

"So you don't think it would be smart to tell anybody my diagnosis."

"You don't have a diagnosis."

"What do you call Roxy?"

"Roxy," he answered calmly. "And I also call her strong and often very supportive." He paused. "What do you call her when you call her?"

"Furious." Kathy could feel anger boiling up. He wasn't taking her seriously again. "She'd be driving me to drink if I drank, if I weren't afraid of making a scene in a bar."

"You're better off not drinking," he observed.

"I'm terribly frustrated." The interior turmoil was like an itch she couldn't scratch. Sometimes it drove her wild.

"Sexually frustrated?" Matthew asked. "How difficult it must be for a child to have herself sexually stimulated and turned on

but then have to turn it off because she's afraid of getting raped again."

There was a fire inside, a fire that felt more like Prose than Roxy. Kathy's eyes began to close. It was Roxy, though, she realized as she shifted uncomfortably on the sofa, moving restlessly, trying to make the sensations go away. "I'm going crazy inside my body," she muttered finally.

"Tell me about that, Roxy. Don't go away from me. Just be real. You don't have to close your eyes and dissociate now. You no longer have to dissociate out of your experience. Stay with me."

"I am!" Roxy's voice was belligerent.

"Don't escalate those feelings." He moved to the couch and sat beside her, but he didn't touch her. "Just relax."

"I'm tryin'. It's just . . ." Her voice trailed off.

"Tell me what you think is going to happen between me and you."

"I don't want to get hurt."

"And what's the most dangerous way I could hurt you?"

"Rape," she whispered. "I can't live like this no more!" She shook her head from side to side.

"Is that why you created Prose?"

"Prose wants to pick somebody up today."

"Roxy, is that why you created Prose? To deal with sex because you can't?"

"Maybe."

"So that you could have sex but be the instigator instead of the victim?"

"It's easier than being scared."

"Is that why you created Prose?"

"I didn't create her."

"Did I misjudge that? I thought you created her."

"I thought she created herself." Roxy's tone was sullen. "I ain't even her age," she pointed out.

"That's right—you're just eight."

"Ten."

"How did you get from eight to ten?"

"I figured it out. Nan got married when Kathy was ten years old."

"Did you have breasts yet when you screwed Pete—or he screwed you? I don't know how to say it."

She hated this topic of conversation. It was embarrassing. "I was always fat," she replied softly.

"So you had a chunky chest but not real breast tissue." He paused, and the silence made her very uncomfortable. "Are you scared that I'm going to rape you right now?" he asked finally.

"I know you wouldn't," she said, sounding more confident than she felt. She wished he would move back to his own seat.

"Well, let's use rape as a metaphor for a minute, Roxy. Have I raped you?"

She frowned. "All I can think of is mind-fucking, and that isn't the same thing, is it?"

"I don't know. What does mind-fucking mean to you?"

"I don't know. Making me remember, I guess. If it isn't real . . ."

"So I forced your memory on you."

"But if it isn't real, why would I be scared? And if it *is* real, then it's over, so why am I still scared?"

"Because there's something you have not yet assimilated. Roxy, the issue now is not primarily the rape. The issue is that you couldn't go back upstairs and tell your family."

"I know, I know." She hugged her knees and rocked back and forth as a tear rolled down her cheek. Her voice changed as Roxy retreated. "They still don't believe me, you know that, don't you?" Kathy asked.

"Probably because of the pretense for so many years."

She sighed. "The other day I told Nan that you were willing to meet Mother, and she said, 'Are you prepared to have her go up there and deny everything and tell Matthew she was the perfect mother and nothing ever happened?'"

"Now, Roxy . . ." Matthew began.

"I'm not Roxy."

"I want Roxy," he insisted.

"I wanted to tell you something first," Kathy said, her eyelids drooping.

"Go ahead and tell me, but don't dissociate. *You* remember what Kathy was going to say, Roxy. Just cross that bridge in your brain."

The voice changed. "I know I don't look like her."

"You look like a fat little ten-year-old, and she looks like a thin forty-year-old. Keep talking to me, Roxy. Are you still scared I'm going to rape you?"

"I ain't scared of you raping me."

"But you said that making you remember was like raping you."

"I want my body to not be scared no more and I want to know, well . . . *we* want to know how to get it together. Kathy says she could give herself to Bob totally, but I ain't lettin' her. Prose wants to go out and pick up somebody, but she knows goddamn well that I ain't going near *anybody*. That's the merry-go-round."

"You're describing all your different conflicting feelings, hmmm?"

"Yeah. Only it's one body and it feels like it's going to rip apart."

"You know, that's not so unusual. I have the same experience."

"What are you talking about?" she asked suspiciously.

"Well, the other night—Friday night—Marian and I did not have sex, nor did we Saturday morning, which is unusual for us. And Saturday I was walking across town and, my goodness, I saw every fine bottom out on the street. It was a balmy day and everybody was looking luscious to me. I was conflicted."

"Except that you can go home and make your body feel good."

"Yes."

"I can't do that."

"Well, that has a lot to do with those decisions you made."

"Why does it hurt?"

"It hurt you when he stuck it in you, didn't it?"

"I don't want to be afraid of you." She began to cry. "I don't want to be afraid of men, of sex."

"Did it hurt when he pushed your legs apart?"

"I stopped trusting people," she sobbed.

"What would happen if you decided you'd made a mistake with Pete and you were going to try again?" Matthew asked.

"I'm just scared."

"What would you do if you were swimming and you made a belly flop off the diving board and it hurt? Would you get up and do it again?"

"The way I'm feeling now, no. But I know I should."

"That's what you did with Eddie. You tried again. That's why he's so important," Matthew said quietly.

"But I didn't have sex with Eddie," Roxy protested. "Mom made him go away."

"And he was gentle with you."

"I need help. I don't want to go on this way no more."

"But you're still keeping the old decision."

"Yeah, I want to play it safe." The anger rose up again, overcoming the fear. "Besides, if I could crack the fucking diving board, I'd feel better. I'm really mad!"

"And your family wasn't there to support you, were they?"

"No. I had to sneak upstairs."

"Well, would you come upstairs in my house? Would you come up to tell me? Think about it. If you knew I was upstairs . . ."

"I don't know if I could tell you though. I think maybe I'd be ashamed. Maybe you could just look at me and know. I don't know if I could say those words."

His voice was soft and soothing, calm but concerned. "You look terrible, Roxy. Tell me about it."

"I can't tell you, Doc. It's like I'm going to die. I can't tell you!" Her voice rose to a howl.

"I'm not going to tell your mother, Roxy."

"I get so frightened, Matthew," she said, her body racked with sobs.

"Just take my hand, Roxy. You're on the stairs. And now you've just discovered something. What's the punishment if you tell?"

"He would kill somebody," she whispered. "And he would, too, you know. There was a knife next to the bed. I see it shining."

"How do you know he would kill someone?"

"Did you ever see hate?" she asked. "So much hate for somebody because they have something and you don't? Well, that's how those men my mother hired were. They were beggars from the Bowery. Mother would pick them up by the carload to work at the hotel during the summer. And once in a while she'd keep one on for the winter to do odd jobs. Like Pete." A shudder passed through her body. She could smell the stale liquor on his breath and the caked grease on his hair. She felt nauseated.

"Pete was probably scared. He'd just committed a crime. And he frightened you so much, you kept quiet. But you must

tell. Can you put your father there and just explain why you've never told him about it?"

Suddenly she realized the truth. "It was my *mother*." She wept. "He hated you, Mommy! He hated you! He was so angry at you! He said, 'Big boss lady, big boss lady.'" Her tone was contemptuous. "He would've killed you, Mommy," she screamed. "He's so strong." Her voice dropped. "I had to save you. He would've hurt you."

"You're very loyal," Matthew pointed out.

"I love her," she replied simply. "And she loves me," she added quickly, defensively. "And I didn't want to tell her. He was so big and so mean."

"So now you have the answer to your mom's question at least. The question your mother asked you some time ago."

"I hurt. I hurt so much inside."

"You hurt so much or you love so much?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure there is a difference."

"Then try it. Tell your mother."

"I love you so much, I would never let anybody hurt you," she said softly.

"Even if it meant . . ."

"Even if it meant forgetting for the rest of my life to save you. I would never, never, *never* let anybody hurt you. He was mean, mean, mean. He hated you because you were the boss lady. Big boss lady." She was screaming and sobbing.

"Is that why he fucked you? Did he fuck you for revenge?"

"He was so angry, so angry," she whimpered.

"And you'll keep the secret even if it means being called a crazy woman."

"No matter what it means," she agreed. "I'm strong enough, you know. I'm strong enough to go through anything."

"Only one problem, Roxy."

"What?"

"Pete's probably been dead for years. But you're still living with that decision. And one other thing," he said firmly. "You're not crazy. Not crazy at all. You're strong and good. And I think you're a very important part of Kathy. A part that should be given more credit and that could take more responsibility. Kathy needs you very much."

"Thanks, Doc," Roxy replied. She wanted to think about that, think about it carefully.

Chapter 18



It was a big step to take, she knew, but she felt strong enough to do it. And Matthew *had* suggested that she assume more responsibility, be more in control, make more of a contribution. She was in a safe situation, she figured, having lunch with her friend Carol. She liked Carol; more important, she almost trusted her. Kathy, she knew, *did* trust her. They were taking courses at the college, and they spent a lot of time studying and talking. Roxy didn't really have any friends at all, and she hated most of Kathy's, but Carol was different. She understood.

Slowly—very, very slowly—Roxy opened her eyes. Astonished, she looked around the restaurant. There were so many people! All talking and laughing and eating. She closed her eyes.

"Are you all right?" Carol asked.

She opened her eyes again. "I dunno," she replied softly, squinting across the table. "I'm seein' things, and it's so strange. . . ."

"Strange to be in a restaurant, you mean?" Carol asked, leaning forward. "Is it Roxy?"

Roxy nodded, staring at her lips. There was the sound of the words she spoke, and the movement of the lips, but Roxy couldn't figure out how the two went together. You heard words in your ears, right? she thought. So what do the lips have to do with it? "I ain't never seen a restaurant," she said, shrugging sheepishly. She looked around again, carefully. There was the sound of words everywhere, on all sides, and everybody's lips were moving. She couldn't stop staring at people's mouths.

"Is there anything I can do, Roxy?" Carol asked.

"I can't understand how the words come into the ears," she said softly, squinting. "And my eyelids hurt. They always hurt."

"Do you want to leave?"

"No." She was looking at the next table. Two older people were talking. One voice was much deeper than the other, but both mouths moved just the same way. All at once the deep voice turned and looked at her, returned her stare, actually, looking mad. Roxy felt dizzy. What was that person gonna do? she wondered. What was he gonna do to her because she'd seen him? She'd better do something first. She looked down at the table. That long, thin thing must be a knife. She had to stop the person who was staring at her. She had to protect herself. She picked up the knife.

She found it difficult to catch her breath. "I think I gotta talk to Matthew," she whispered in a strangled voice. "Can you take me to a phone?"

It was difficult to avoid bumping into tables as Carol led her across the room. Why was it easier to move around when she *couldn't* see? Roxy wondered. Carol dialed the phone, then held it out. Roxy stared at it as if it were a snake, and shook her head vehemently. Now that she knew there was some connection between lips and words, the problem of figuring out the telephone was overwhelming. She clamped her eyes shut and pressed her palms against her forehead, leaning against the wall of the phone booth.

"Hello, Matthew? This is Carol Taylor. I'm a friend of Kathy's, and we're having lunch. Actually, I'm having lunch with Roxy." Roxy managed to pry open her eyes again in time to see a waitress pass by and give them a strange look. What was so odd? What Carol had said was perfectly reasonable! She listened.

"Well, I don't know for sure," Carol was saying. "But she seems pretty panicky." She turned to Roxy. "He needs to talk to *you*," she said. "I can't tell him what's wrong."

She took the phone tentatively, studying its shiny black surface. She held it up to her ear. "Roxy? Roxy, are you there?" It was Matthew's voice, no doubt about it.

"Yes," she said. "I'm here, Doc. I thought I was strong enough to see, but I'm not. I opened my eyes, and it's too much. Help me! I don't know how the words and the lips and the ears go together. I don't know why some of the voices are

low and some are high. And someone's starin' at me. I gotta stop the starin'. I got a knife." She paused for breath.

"It's okay," Matthew replied, his voice soothing even in the shiny black phone. "Try not to think about lips and ears anymore. And don't worry about the staring. Don't do anything about that—promise me!"

"Okay," she muttered. Her fist opened and the knife clattered to the floor.

"Just look at people and guess whether they're men or women," Matthew instructed. "If the voices are low, they're probably men. If they're high, they're probably women. See who's wearing pants and who's wearing skirts. See who has long hair and who has short hair."

She found it very reassuring to have a task, a job to do. She knew she could follow Matthew's directions, and if she did, maybe her breath would come back to her. "Okay," she said. A troubling thought struck her. "Are there men, Matthew?" she asked. "I don't like men." Her voice began to break. "I'm afraid if there are men. It must have been a man who was staring at me before. . . ." She was gasping again, choking for breath.

"Close your eyes," he instructed her, "and concentrate on taking a deep breath. You're having a panic attack, but it's going to be all right. No one in that restaurant is going to hurt you. No man and no woman. You just try to figure out which is which while Carol helps you get over here to see me. Okay?"

She managed a little breath, then opened her eyes again. The waitress was a woman, she was sure of that. She felt better. "Okay," she whispered, then handed the phone back to Carol. "Will you please help me get to Matthew's?" she asked.

Carol drove her across town, then double-parked to walk her inside and put her on the elevator. She even pushed the PH button for her. "Thanks," Roxy said. "I'm sorry I ruined your lunch."

"Don't worry about it! And call me later, okay?"

Roxy was nodding her head as the elevator doors closed. She tried to take a breath. She hated elevators. Why was it slowing down? The doors opened on five, and three people in overalls got in. She started feeling dizzy again, but she tried hard to

concentrate and overcome the panic. They had short hair and they were wearing pants. These three were men.

But figuring out the puzzle the way Matthew suggested didn't help this time. She was trapped with them. Maybe they were angry. Maybe they were going to hurt her. She wondered what they would do if she screamed. Probably stop the elevator and . . . She closed her eyes. She knew she wasn't breathing. Maybe she would just die before they could hurt her. The elevator stopped again and she heard footsteps leaving. Then the doors closed.

Tentatively, she opened her eyes. One was left, and he was looking at her. He needed a shave, and she smelled something on his breath. It was beer or whiskey or something! Now she knew she was going to die. She looked around. Maybe elevators had windows. Her lungs were on fire, she needed to breathe, but she couldn't remember how. She couldn't remember how to do anything but stand very still and wait.

"Didn't you want to get off here, ma'am?" the man said finally, and she noticed that the doors had opened. She looked at him warily. Was he going to grab her as she tried to leave? "I forgot my tool belt," he said as she still didn't move. "I'm goin' back to the basement for it. You getting off?" he repeated.

Finally, with every muscle in her body tense, she dashed out the door and collapsed on Matthew's threshold. After what felt like forever, she heard the elevator doors close again and the machinery whir. She got up slowly, then looked over her shoulder to make sure he hadn't gotten out, too, just to fool her. The hall was empty. She started to cry, leaning against Matthew's door. "I'm so scared of men." She sobbed. "Whenever I'm near one alone, I die a little." Tears poured down her face, but as she wept, she felt herself beginning to get angry.

Matthew is a man like all the rest, she thought suddenly. For a moment she thought she would run away, but then she remembered the terrifying sight of all the lips moving combined with the babble of a restaurant full of people. She pressed the buzzer, wiping at her face ineffectually with one hand.

"You gave me bad advice!" she declared as he opened the door, then, carefully skirting his tall figure so as not to brush against him, she went on into the large room and sank down on the couch. The tears started again.

"I'm sorry you had a bad time," he said softly.

"You said I was strong. *You* said maybe I was the real Kathy. *You* told me I could come out more often and see how it feels." She paused to grab a tissue and scrub at her nose. "Well, it feels shitty!" She took a shaky breath.

"I didn't expect you to go so far as to open your eyes in public after all this time of not seeing," he began.

She glared at him.

"But I understand that you saw that as a logical thing to try," he conceded. He sat back and spread his hands in front of him, palms up. "I guess I was mistaken, Roxy. And I'm very sorry if I gave you bad advice."

"Hmmpf." She wasn't about to be mollified quite so easily. She still remembered the raw, deadly panic she'd felt in the elevator.

"I should have taken into account the fact that you're only ten years old, shouldn't I?"

She nodded fiercely, but felt some of the tension ease out of her shoulders.

"I should have realized that you don't have enough experience of the world to handle everything alone. Even though you've been very strong and very helpful to Kathy in the past."

His voice was calming. The tears stopped and Roxy felt her eyelids begin to droop. She was very tired. She hadn't been out for such a stretch in a long time—maybe never.

"You probably need some time to rest now," Matthew went on, "so I want you to close your eyes and relax your body. Just relax every muscle and feel softness and warmth flow in."

There was silence in the room, and Roxy felt as if she were floating on a cloud on a bright, sunny day. The disturbing sights and sounds were just memories now. She relaxed, her shoulders slumping and her hands collapsing, unclenched, in her lap.

"Kathy?" Matthew asked.

When her eyes opened, they were full of tears. "I thought she was going to die before I was able to get back, Matthew," she whispered. "Or that she was going to kill somebody." She shivered. "You can always get me back, but I couldn't do it myself."

"Yes, you would have!" he insisted. "All you have to do is look around you and be in the present. Notice what you're wearing, what the surroundings are like. Ground yourself in the here and now. You're much stronger than you give yourself credit for—and much healthier."

"Which me are you talking about?" she asked, wiping her eyes. "I need to know who I am, Matthew," she added with some desperation in her voice. "Am I a multiple personality? Are you willing to put that in writing?"

"That you are a multiple personality?" Matthew thought for a moment. "No. You know too much," he went on. "So I won't say that you *are* a multiple personality. I will say that you *were*." He paused.

Kathy stared at the floor, trying to decipher what he was saying.

"What are you struggling with?"

"Why do I want to discount what I know is true?" she said almost to herself. "I read an article in *Penthouse* about a man, Billy Milligan, who had twenty-four personalities. Most of them didn't know about the others—which I can identify with—but as a result, he got in a lot of trouble, police trouble, which I haven't. Why haven't I ever run off, disappeared, then turned up in Kansas City in the middle of the night, in bed with a strange man?"

"That happens because the stress has built and built and built," Matthew explained. "What usually brings on the awareness of a multiple personality and causes people to take off is the stress in their current life that has built to the point where they must dissociate more. The phenomenon has been described as a dissociation from one's experience. You take a piece of that experience or an absence of it and build a personality on it. You simply make decisions around that one seed, that incompleting experience."

"Two things are going through my mind," she replied. "One: I understand all that, but the question is, if I hadn't been with Len that evening in Atlanta, would I have emerged differently over the years? And the other is: I'm getting angry and this is all bullshit, and I don't believe a word of it."

"Well, that's also true," he responded calmly. "If you look at yourself from a Buddhist perspective—and one-fifth of the world's population looks at everything from that perspective—what you've done is all illusion. For all of us, our personalities are illusions we manifest. It's all make-believe." He paused and his eyes narrowed slightly. He seemed to be assessing her. "It's also possible," he continued, "that what you've done is create a multiple personality to hide the fact that underneath you are very crazy, very schizophrenic. As long as I'm busy

messing around with the personalities, I never have to discover that you're really much crazier than you or I ever thought."

"That's strange!"

"And the other possibility is that you're just a spoiled brat and you're coming here to get attention." He sat back and smiled.

Kathy laughed. "I like that one."

"Now, to answer your question about why you haven't run off." He put the tips of his fingers together and studied them for a moment. "In fact, I'm quite surprised that sex—waking up with a strange man as a different personality than the one who went to bed with him—isn't what brought you to me in the first place, not smoking grass with Len. You've never described that kind of episode at all, but that's typically what prompts a multiple personality to seek help. That, or suddenly being in a strange city, and saying, 'What am I doing here?'" He had been watching her face while he spoke. "You smiled when I mentioned waking up in bed with someone. Is there something you haven't told me about?"

She dropped her eyes. "No."

"Then why the coy answer? I haven't seen that kind of seductive response from you in a month."

"It's just that I was thinking about that today. About sex."

"Oh. So if you were diagnosed as a multiple personality, then you would have a good excuse for running off and shacking up with somebody? You could say, '*She* made me do it.'"

Kathy frowned. She had been having a harmless fantasy. Why was he nagging her? "I don't want to talk about that," she snapped.

"Why not?"

"'Cause I have a whole lot of other things on my mind."

"You act like you're embarrassed about something," he noted, leaning forward, waiting. She didn't speak. "Kathy, have you been planning on having an affair with somebody?"

"No one in particular," she muttered, shifting on the couch. She felt itchy all over, not just on her skin, but inside too. "What have I been planning? Nothing. Everything. I'm planning on doing something, but I don't know what. Something is going to come soon." She crossed her legs and squeezed her thighs together.

"How about you?" Matthew asked. "When are you going to have an orgasm?"

"Leave me alone! I feel inadequate in everything, you know. Through my whole life I have felt that way, through every stage. My dad calling me 'stooopid.' Just teasing, but . . . Not good enough and yet not bad. I feel myself floundering and I don't want to flounder anymore. I guess I didn't expect you to say that I am—I was—a multiple personality. But I had made up my mind, if you weren't sure that I was, I was going to walk out of here forever. But I don't want to do that. I just feel really jumpy inside. Angry and jumpy."

"What's so important about the diagnosis?"

"It would be easier if I closed my eyes to talk to you, but I don't want to. I want this to come from me." She gazed up as if looking for strength from heaven.

"If you're not going to close your eyes, you can at least look at me instead of at the ceiling."

She met his gaze. "When I see you, I feel okay inside."

"Good. *Now* close your eyes."

In the dark silence she could feel the warmth of his concern like a blanket settling across her shoulders. She couldn't see him, but she could sense his presence vividly.

"I'm scared. I'm scared I'm a phony. I want to be real."

"You are real." He paused. "Even if you're phony, it's real phony. I accept you just as you are. So even your phoniness is real to me and I will back you up."

"That's putting you on the line—you really believe in what you're doing."

He nodded.

"Part of me doesn't want to believe," she admitted.

"Well, then, we have only part of the job to do."

"And part of me doesn't want to remember."

"The remembering is important. Not remembering is how you got into this difficulty in the first place."

"I don't want to be so needy. It hurts." She was finding it hard to catch her breath; her lungs were on fire. She uncrossed her legs and bent over at the waist. "I have a pain in my chest all of a sudden," she said, her voice weak.

"Just breathe right into that spot where it hurts," Matthew directed her, moving to put an arm across her shoulders.

"I need to believe you," she gasped.

"You need to believe yourself," he replied firmly. "You've

been believing other people's experiences rather than your own for so long," he went on. "I have known for a long time that all of the parts of Kathy are very sexy parts." She shifted uncomfortably. Roxy hated talk about sex. "Unfortunately, Kathy doesn't let herself go all the way in that sexiness with her husband, because of a decision she made when she was a little girl, a decision that instinct could hurt her. But there is a mistake there," he insisted, leaning forward. "Roxy, are you afraid that you would disappear?"

"I would fall apart."

"Disappear if Kathy made a new decision? A decision to have orgasms? You see, your birth, your whole existence, is centered around saying no."

"I have an investment in forgetting."

"Yes, but it means you're not even enjoying the present."

"No, I can't. I can't let go." She shook her head and shrank back into the sofa.

"Are you forgetting you disobeyed your mom? You went down to that basement in that nightgown with no panties on. You know a lot more about that than you've said."

"I couldn't . . ." she began, twisting on the couch. She could feel that fire, that itching deep inside.

"What did you feel? What did it feel like to walk around like that?"

"Okay." Her voice was barely audible.

"Only okay? Did it feel delicious?"

Her voice rose slightly. "I don't want to feel delicious."

"I didn't ask what you wanted. I asked what it felt like."

"Like . . . like nothing constricting, nothing tight around me, no choking." She began to cry. What did he want from her? How could she go through this *again*? "Nothing choking, nothing choking. And now I can't do that."

"Why are you choking, Roxy? Does it have something to do with Prose?"

She sat silent, huddled, shaking her head violently from side to side.

"You tell me your name is Roxy," he went on reasonably. "You tell me you are rebelling. I think you're *not* rebelling. Who says that those sexy feelings should be shut off, choked off? Who says that those natural desires in your body should be stopped?"

She didn't want to answer. "There are a lot of sexy things going on inside," she mumbled.

"And you have my approval to feel them. Do you know that?"

"You know what is going to happen if I let go? I'm going to get in lots of trouble," Roxy warned, her tone ominous.

"Oh, sure." His voice was sarcastic. "I don't think you're rebellious at all. I think Roxy is very much a controlling part. You control all those sensations in her vagina."

"I gotta," she muttered.

"You could go ahead and feel instead."

"I can't, I can't!" She wept. "Look at the trouble I got into just openin' my eyes! I'm scared!"

"I will guard the body."

"I don't wanna," she wailed.

Matthew sighed. "Okay. I don't want you to have any sensations in your genitals either."

"I don't want to be alone," she whispered.

"So is that the deal with your mom? You will never be alone if you are never sexy—you will always be Mom's little girl?"

Roxy prided herself on being strong, but she was weakening under his attack. She fled. Kathy's eyes opened. "I have so much going on inside of me," she said, exhausted.

He sat back. "Have you ever had a massage?" he asked.

"Sure," she replied. "About twice a month."

"I want you to start working with Joshua, one of my trainees. He does bodywork, which is a kind of massage that helps you get in touch with your real feelings."

"Bodywork?" It sounded as if Matthew just wanted her to switch to Joshua from her regular masseuse. What's the point? she wondered.

"We believe that specific physical sensations can trigger important memories and emotions. And I want you to experience those feelings through the bodywork. I'll make an appointment for you." He paused. "You do everything to avoid feeling what you feel," he pointed out. "But you *have* to feel it, Kathy, even from that Roxy place."

"No way," she said ruefully.

"It's the same body, the same feelings."

"No."

She sighed and seemed to sink into herself, her eyelids fluttering. "I don't want anybody to see me," Cici explained softly. "I have a fat body and I am not pretty and I am not loved. I am not loveable and I don't know how to talk to

people. I would never let anybody see my body." She stopped. "You know who else is like that now? Stacey, and I feel sad about it. I don't know how to help her because I feel so inadequate. I want to stay out of everybody's life. I don't want to be around. I am not an asset to Kathy." Cici started to cry.

He started to tick things off on his fingers. "Let's see—you refuse to enjoy sex, you are frumpy, dumpy, and you don't carry on good conversations. Maybe you're part of the personality Kathy needs to get rid of."

"I'm too scared to leave," she admitted, her tears still flowing. "I don't want to die. Help me."

"When one begins an imagination, a fantasy, do they call it giving birth?"

"No," she replied warily.

"Then why do you call letting go of an imagination killing?"

Her voice rose. "Because I am not an imagination; I am real. You don't understand. I am a real person and I feel too. And I know I am scared all the time," she concluded.

"Scared of your own body's sensations?"

"Scared of everything."

"Do you know how to give yourself pleasure?" he asked.

"Do you know how to make your body feel wonderful?"

"It doesn't really matter." She laced her fingers together and stared at them.

"But it does. That is the problem."

She looked at him with a shy smile. "My fingers are all tied up, see?"

"So you do know how to use your fingers to get sexual satisfaction, don't you? I think you should do that more often than you do, that you should masturbate and give yourself orgasms. It's a nice present to give yourself."

She was aghast at the suggestion. "I couldn't do that!"

"Why not?"

"I don't *want* to feel anything," she explained patiently, as if to a slow child.

"When did you stop feeling?"

"When my mother told me he didn't love me."

"Told you who didn't love you?"

"Eddie . . . everybody."

"But Eddie made you feel all sexy, right?"

"I don't know. . . . I don't remember. Maybe Kathy remembers." It was so long ago. What difference did it make?

She heard the sound of the front door opening. Matthew had other people to see, she was sure. Kathy ran her fingers through her hair. She looked at Matthew in silence for a moment. "I almost don't want to come here anymore," she said slowly.

He nodded. "That's perfectly normal," he said. "With the passage of each stage of treatment, there is the desire to quit."

"Passage? Stages?" She laughed bitterly. "Are you actually implying that we're making *progress*? Sometimes—like today—I feel so crazy . . ." She left the sentence unfinished.

Matthew stood up. "Oh, we're making progress," he said, sounding very sure of himself. "Like I said forty-five minutes ago, I won't even say you *are* a multiple personality anymore. I think you're healing."

"But they're still here!" she protested. "How can I not be a multiple personality if the parts won't go away? And not only will they not go away, but they stay around and raise hell—like Roxy today!"

"Who said they had to go away for you to get better?" he asked.

"What?"

She must have assumed a very startled expression, because he laughed. "That will give you something to think about," he said. "See you at your regular time."

Chapter 19



"Would you care to try a spray of Giorgio?" the bored-looking model asked as Prose passed her on the main floor of Bloomingdale's.

"Sure," she replied, holding out a wrist. She sniffed, then tossed "Nice!" over her shoulder as she strolled off. Actually, the scent was a little too flowery for her. Kathy would probably

like it, she thought. Maybe she would buy her a bottle. *She* preferred something with a little more . . . heat.

She was feeling restless, like a predator who hadn't made a kill in a very long time. She wandered into the men's department on the Third Avenue side of the store. The gnawing inside wasn't hunger for food. She looked around. Not a whole lot of possibilities at four o'clock on a cold April afternoon. She was wearing knee-high boots, a tight black leather skirt and matching jacket, with a red angora sweater underneath. And she wasn't even getting a glance from the clerks behind the counters. Well, of course not! she told herself. They're all fags. Everybody knows that.

She got on the Up escalator. She had already bought three pairs of black pantyhose with rhinestones up the sides and a new purse; now she thought she would try the lingerie department. God! She was horny! She brushed past the children's department. Kathy would certainly have stopped, and probably Cici, too, but not Prose. She fingered a black lace teddy. It looked sexy as hell on the mannequin, but it also looked as if it might bind in the crotch. She hated anything constricting down there. Her eyes settled on a red satin bra and matching garter belt. Now *that* was a possibility, she thought. Bob would really go for that!

By a quarter to five she was laden down with Bloomingdale's shopping bags, but the itch within remained. The ground floor seemed to be filling up with attractive men as she headed for the exit, and that just increased her restlessness. Damn! she thought. If only she didn't have an appointment with Matthew at five, she might *do* something about this fire. A cab pulled over almost at once, and Prose got in, smiling. At least the outfit hadn't gone unnoticed—it *had* gotten her a cab at rush hour.

"So I was a good girl, and I got the hell out of there," she reported a few minutes later.

"But you did manage to satisfy your urge to consume," Matthew noted, gesturing at the bags and bundles.

"My urge to consume? What kind of intellectual crap is that? I just bought a few things, that's all." She didn't like it when he was sarcastic with her. She crossed her legs and pressed, bouncing the top leg just slightly.

"How many men have you sucked off, Prose?" Matthew asked.

The question took her by surprise. "None of your fucking business!"

"You *are* my business." There was a pause, then he went on. "Prose, I want you to look back at Kathy's sexual relationship with Jack. What was interesting about that, and what was traumatic?"

She frowned. "I'm gonna *look* back, but not be there," she said. She thought for a moment. "She felt like he was ripping her," she answered finally.

"Oh, he probably was," he agreed calmly.

"So—that would have been traumatic."

"And what was the exciting part?"

She shifted nervously on the couch, her pelvis moving slightly from side to side. Her voice was a whisper. "There is no exciting part." Her face crumpled and she started to cry, then buried her face in her hands. "You've gotta get rid of me . . ." she began.

Matthew paid no attention to her. "Look at that little girl with Jack. Look at the time he stuck his finger in her vagina. . . ."

Prose's eyes closed and her head rolled back. The tears stopped. "Mmmm . . ." she murmured. "I'd like someone's finger in my vagina right now."

"Would you like it as a little girl?" he asked.

"No!"

"And would it be frightening?"

"I don't know." Her voice turned into a whisper. "Don't ask me to go back. Oh, God! Please don't ask me!"

"Prose, do you want to solve this? Do you want to know why you were born? Do you want to be free? Prose," Matthew went on quietly, "Prose, did Jack try to stick his penis down Baby's throat and choke her?"

"I wasn't there," she replied, sobbing again. "I wasn't there! I might like it, but the kid wouldn't—what do you want?"

"You're the same."

"We're *not* the same, we're not!" she screamed, her face turning red. "Why do you say that? I've gotta be cut out. *Please!*"

"Did you ever not like a certain kind of food at one age and then begin to like it at another age?" he asked in a reasonable tone of voice.

"But what happens when you become obsessed with it? It's not good!"

"The obsession is because there's something unfinished, Prose."

"I don't know what it is," she whispered.

"If you'll go back there, I'll show you. Look at Jack," he continued, "as a three-year-old. You didn't want to get choked, did you? What did you want? Imagine the conflict in that little child, the fear."

Prose felt all the heat in her body turn into anger all at once—a fireball of rage.

"Imagine the fear as someone tries to shove it down her throat," he went on.

"I'd kill him!" she said, her voice rising. "*I'd kill him! I'd take a knife and kill him!*" she screamed.

"Even though you like sucking so much?"

"Only if *I* choose it!" she snapped.

Matthew corrected her. "She *did* choose him. He was her friend."

"Not to do that!" she replied, her voice breaking. "Not to do *that!* No! No! No! I want what I want when *I* want it." She reached out toward him. She needed to hold his hand.

"What if he went slowly?" Matthew suggested.

Rocking back and forth on the couch, she took his hand and pulled him toward her. "No!" he said firmly but kindly as he resisted her pressure. "I'm not going to touch you." He let her keep hold of his hand across the space between them.

She crossed her legs the other way and squeezed as hard as she could. "Oh, God!" she moaned. "I feel like I'm going . . . out of my mind! Please!" She was on fire.

"Will you look back there, Prose?" he said quietly. "At that little girl?"

She withdrew her hand and sank back into the sofa. "You look," she said sullenly.

"What would be the difference in her experience," Matthew went on softly, "if Jack just very slowly let his penis be there and she was in control of how much to take in or out?"

"Little kids don't *do* things like that!"

"That's true. But since she *is* doing it . . ."

"No!"

". . . because she's so lonely and doesn't have her mommy and daddy . . ."

The scene was vivid in her mind. She saw Jack, naked, with Baby. Slowly, her mind rearranged the action. "I'll tell you what's okay. He can put it to the side of her face if he *has* to. But not inside her. You don't do that to a *kid*!"

She took Matthew's hand again. "Just take it and suck it gently so it doesn't hurt," she said softly. She brought his finger up to her lips and rubbed it across them. "Not deep! Little kids don't have big mouths."

"There was a piece of you present there, Prose."

"I don't think so. . . ."

"Maybe just the beginnings."

"I'll tell you what happened, then," she said, sounding determined. "If I was there, I made a decision that no one is gonna shove anything into me!"

"Well, good for you. Good for you. I think every woman needs to have that kind of decision."

"Pete didn't shove it in, did he?" she said proudly. "Not in my mouth, I mean. The mouth stays closed."

"That's why he stuck it in your vagina."

She began to cry. "I feel so dirty."

"I know. You blamed yourself for getting raped."

"And for having these . . . hot feelings inside me all the time."

"I think that one of the things that happened with that little girl is that she got too much of what she didn't want and not enough of what she did want, which was love and attention."

Prose covered her face with her hands. "But that doesn't matter! Whatever the reason, there's still the problem."

"What's that?"

"Kathy's ashamed of me," she blurted out. "And I don't want to be around her kids. I want to do what *I* want to do. I want to be free. It's gotta be me or her!" she declared. "I can't see a blend."

"You've said you've never been satisfied by a man," he pointed out.

She thought about that for a minute. "Bob can satisfy me," she answered softly. "He knows how. I don't wanna leave him." She was crying. "I just need to learn how to stay in control. Like today, for instance. I was flipping out! I feel—"

Matthew cut in. "Were you horny?"

"Oh, God, yes." She felt a sheen of sweat all over her body. "I can't stand it! I need a vibrator, but she wouldn't use it today. I can't stand it! I can't stand *her*!"

Her head rolled back. Little by little her breathing resumed a normal rhythm. Kathy crossed her ankles and opened her eyes. She ran her fingers through her hair and wiped the perspiration from her upper lip.

Matthew leaned forward. "Now, Kathy," he began. "I want you to listen to two things. Two times men got you very sexually stimulated, and two times you wound up getting sex in a way that was more than you were ready to handle, at a pace harder and faster than the slow rhythms of a child. When children have sexual experiences with each other, it's not usually damaging because they go slowly enough with each other. As a grown-up woman you are still having an emotional reaction to Pete and Jack. And you're going to have to understand and overcome that reaction in order to fully experience sexual pleasure with your husband."

"I can't handle it." She sighed. "I don't know what to do with her when that happens. I have to cut off what goes on inside my body. Controlling her is harder and harder, but I don't want to ruin my life, my marriage." Quietly, she wiped a tear off her cheek.

"How have you managed?" Matthew asked.

"When she's feeling so horny, I try to make sure that Prose leaves and Cici comes out, because Cici feels ugly, feels that no man would look at her. She's safe."

"A pretty good form of birth control."

"It's been safe for me," she agreed. "But the last couple of days . . . I didn't know what was happening to me today. I was like a caged lion. I got scared. Prose needed a cold shower right in the middle of Bloomingdale's."

"Prose is nothing more than your sexual desire and your sexual fear, Kathy."

"She's too strong."

"You've got some very strong fears—and some very strong desires."

"But I'm frightened of getting into trouble!" she cried. "I felt today that she was bigger than me, and that scares me."

"You need someone who is going to recognize and accept your sexual feelings and not exploit you," Matthew suggested. "You need to find some ways to have the feelings when you're with Bob—without Prose's control. You regress to age three and eight and twelve, and sometimes you're not even aware of it. But your life is a *continuity* of experience."

Kathy's gaze dropped to her hands in her lap, and she was suddenly aware that her skirt had ridden up, exposing her thighs almost to the waist. She began to cry again. "Oh, I'm so embarrassed," she wept, starting to rearrange herself, then jumping up and walking away from Matthew.

He followed and put his hands on her shoulders, then turned her around to face him. "You do not embarrass *me*," he said firmly.

The dull, throbbing pain originated in a molar on the lower left side of Kathy's mouth and radiated to every nerve ending. Her quiet, darkened bedroom was providing no sanctuary from the toothache, but she lay curled up on the bed in the gloom anyway, trying not to move.

She heard the door open. "Sweetheart," Bob said in a soft voice, sitting gently on the edge of the bed, "you can't just lie here and pretend it's going to go away. It's been bothering you for three days, getting worse and worse. It must be torture!"

She looked at him and nodded. He knew how much she hated to go to the dentist. She had been blessed with very good teeth, which was lucky, since she had to be dragged in for her checkups every couple of years, when Dr. Saylor's nurse would no longer take no for an answer. She had always been very conscientious about the children's teeth; they had their six-month appointments, their fluoride treatments, and their orthodonture. But not Kathy.

"It must be a root canal," she moaned, rolling over to the other side.

"That's what Gene thinks," Bob replied.

"Gene?" Her voice was dull.

"You know, Gene Saylor, our dentist and very good friend? Who lives down the street? And who's waiting for you in his office right now even though it's after six o'clock at night and he'd rather be home drinking a martini?"

"Oh, no, Bob, I can't!"

"Oh, yes, Kathy, you can!" he insisted. "Even if I have to carry you to the car. What you cannot do is take any more aspirin and codeine. You have to get the damned tooth fixed!"

She groaned in protest, but he picked her up anyway and started for the door. She thought her jaw was going to fall off. "I hate going to the dentist," she said weakly. "And my hair—my

clothes . . .” She was a total mess, she knew, dressed in an old sweat suit. Her hair hadn’t been washed in days, and she had no makeup on.

“Gene doesn’t care what you look like,” Bob said reassuringly, first wrapping her in a coat and then depositing her in the passenger seat of the Jaguar. “He’s just going to pull that tooth. Or whatever.”

“Oh, nooooooo!” she wailed. The prospect of dental work filled her with dread. It was irrational, she knew. To endure the pain of an infected tooth rather than undergo . . . Oh, God! What was he going to do to her? She couldn’t stand it! She buried her face in her hands as the car sped along. I won’t go, she said to herself firmly. I simply cannot go. Not me. No way!

Prose uncurled, stretched and reached out to snap on the radio. “Let’s get a little mood music, okay? Something to drill by?”

Bob’s head spun around. “You feeling better?”

“You know what they say—when something’s inevitable . . .” she replied, smiling, “relax and enjoy it.” Pain wasn’t a problem for Prose. She just shut it off, numbed it out. So the prospect of a visit to the dentist didn’t disturb her in the slightest. In fact, she found Gene Saylor very attractive, in a clinical, antiseptic sort of way.

She wondered idly how you did it in a dentist’s chair. The curves would be fine for one partner but damned uncomfortable for the other. She frowned. Maybe Bob would just drop her off. And there sure wouldn’t be any nurse around at this hour. Gene Saylor could be had—she was sure of it.

She smiled again. Maybe she’d try some gas. She’d heard that it was a great high. She wondered if it heightened orgasm. Maybe Gene would like to sniff a little while she sucked him off. Now *that* would be an interesting scene. . . .

“I’m glad you’ve loosened up a little,” Bob said. “You were so tense back at the house, it was like carrying an armful of wire.”

“Yeah. I guess I’m relaxing some.” She took her compact out of her purse and ran a comb through her hair. She couldn’t do much about her appearance, but at least there was some color in her cheeks now.

As they walked into the office, Prose noticed that the harsh overhead lights were off. The waiting room looked almost cozy

with just the table lamps providing illumination. Her bottom probably looked good, she reflected, because her sweat pants were nice and tight. She felt a slight bind in her crotch. It tingled.

"There you are!" Their neighbor and dentist shook Bob's hand and gave her a quick peck on the cheek. "Come on in."

"I'm going to wait right here, sweetheart," Bob said, sitting down and picking up a copy of *Newsweek*.

Shit! Prose thought, leading the way into a treatment room. She hoped Gene was appreciating the view.

"Now, which tooth seems to be giving you the problem?" he asked, flashing his own perfect white smile.

"Ummm . . ." Prose had to think for a moment. She didn't feel a thing, of course. "Lower left. I think it's a lost cause, Gene." She was using her most insinuating tone of voice, but he didn't seem to be paying attention. He was all business. "How about some gas?"

He poked around for a few minutes and then withdrew his hands. "I'm pretty sure there's an abscess there, Kathy," he said, frowning, "so I'm going to have to go in and clean out the decay and the infection. That will take care of the pain you've been having. It's pretty extensive work, though, and I know how you hate drilling. But . . ."

"Don't you worry about a thing," Prose replied airily. "You can work on me anytime!"

He looked a little startled, then turned to his tray of instruments. "I'll give you novocaine first, of course."

"What about the gas? I hear it's great!"

He looked a little uncomfortable. "Well, ordinarily I don't use nitrous oxide unless my nurse is here." He emitted a bark that was probably supposed to be a chuckle. "Sometimes it makes patients woozy—or forgetful," he went on. "Even amorous!" He barked again. "But since Bob's sitting right out there in the waiting room, I guess I can make an exception."

No fun with Gene tonight, Prose thought disgustedly as the dentist began to work. But I do have Bob to go home with. Boy, will he be surprised to find that we're in a sexy mood despite a trip to the dentist! Maybe I'll tell him it was me all along. Or maybe I'll let him think it's Kathy. It depends on whether I feel like doing him or having him do me. She spent the rest of the time in the chair weighing the alternatives.

"Okay, Kathy, that looks pretty good," Gene said finally,

pulling all the cotton out of her mouth. "I'll give you a prescription in case there's some pain tonight, but the tooth shouldn't give you any more trouble. If there's another flare-up, we'll have to do a root canal, but I'm hopeful there's no invasion of the nerves."

In one fluid motion she got up, wrapped her arms around his neck and gave him a loud kiss on the cheek, pressing herself against him. When she stepped back, he looked nonplussed. "Thanks, Gene, you've been a life-saver," she said, winking.

"You're very welcome," he replied a little stiffly as they walked back into the waiting room. "Do call if there's any problem, and—oh, yes—you mustn't eat anything this evening."

"You don't mean that!" Prose's voice was low and throaty.

"Oh, I do—absolutely."

"What about Bob?" Prose asked innocently, watching as both men started to blush.

"I've got to figure out a better way to control Prose, to put a lid on those sexual feelings," Kathy told Matthew when she saw him next.

"I disagree. I think you should take the feelings you've been having, put a little fire underneath them and make them even stronger."

The idea horrified her. *Increase* the frustration, the horniness? "I don't know how." She could feel her muscles tightening.

"Lie back and relax," Matthew suggested. "I think you're right on the verge of discovering something important about your body."

She lay back and her eyes began to close. Some of the tension left her neck and shoulders, and her head felt heavy. Her breathing slowed.

Matthew's voice was soft and hypnotic. "We're going to start with something familiar, like we always do, and then go to what's unfamiliar or hidden."

"Jesus!" Her tone was despairing. "Just once I want to find out what would happen if I let my body really go . . ."

"You're going to do it."

". . . and didn't control it." She could feel the fire in her crotch and the sweat beginning to break out. "Oh, God," she moaned.

"Feel it as all of Kathy," he instructed. "You don't have to split yourself off into Prose."

"All of Kathy's too confusing," she whimpered. "There are too many pieces, too many pieces of the pie." Her voice rose. "There is no 'all.'"

"Do you want to know where all the pieces meet in the center? It's the sexuality that's there at every developmental stage."

"Ha! Like a V-shaped pie going right *there!*" She placed one hand between her legs.

"Um-hmm. Just imagine that little baby, the sensations in her as she went to Jack."

She frowned. "No! When I think of Baby, it's like a nail going inside her."

"Oh, I know it hurt, but it probably would have at any age," he pointed out. "It's kind of a rite of passage." He paused. "Would you do it again?"

"Nope!" Her reply was instantaneous.

"Think about it for a minute. Would you do it at a later age? Would you have done it with Eddie? Let him put his finger inside you?"

"I don't know." She could feel Eddie's arms around her, the touch of his fingers on her breasts. Would she have let him touch her?

She was enveloped by a cloud of desire and frustration. She pressed her thighs together. She couldn't see, couldn't open her eyes. Her head was spinning; she couldn't breathe. "I'm getting dizzy," she whispered.

"You're just fine." In the silence Matthew reached across and put his hand on her arm as if to reassure her.

She pulled back. "Don't touch me!" Roxy said loudly.

"Just give me your hand," he urged. "You don't need to curl up and pull away."

"No! Don't touch me!" she repeated. "I don't like men near me." Her voice rose. "And I don't like this feeling!" The fire inside her was awful. She hated it. "Get me out of here!" she shouted. There was nothing but blackness. She shivered. The chill penetrated to her bones. "Get me out of here!"

"Where are you?" he called. "Where are you?"

"I don't know." Tears were streaming down her face. "It's like a coal bin. I'm floating up in the air. I have to come down. But I'm fallin' into some fuckin' black hole!"

"Take my voice with you."

She was terrified. Her eyes were closed tight, and she was curled up in a corner of the couch; she could still feel the glow deep inside. "Oh!" It was a cry of fright. "I'm not alone in that hole!"

"That's what we need to find out," he said, his voice encouraging. "Who's there?"

"There's somebody there—inside me—a man!" she cried.

"You're enjoying someone," Matthew suggested.

"I'm not supposed to . . ." She sobbed.

"They don't understand your body, do they? What are you experiencing physically?"

"It feels so good," she whispered. "It feels so good." Her voice changed to a scream. "I'm scared!"

"Come on back. It may hurt a little bit."

She sighed. "I don't feel anything now. My body is cold."

"But if you don't go cold . . ."

She responded to his suggestion immediately. "He's inside me—oh, God . . . It was before I got scared," she whispered. "Before Susan came out."

"Good. Go back before the scare, when it was pleasurable, and let's do it like a movie, in slow motion. Go back to the pleasure part."

She was in pain. Someone was pushing her legs apart and it hurt. She was too small for him, but he held her legs apart and forced himself in. Then it was different. He started moving inside her and the fire was pleasure, not pain. But suddenly she felt the hurt again. Her body jerked as if someone had hit her with a whip, and there was nothing but fear and pain and blackness. It was as though she had left, but she was still there, watching.

The scene changed. She wasn't in that black hole anymore. Her eyelids fluttered but stayed closed. She was being pulled to another time, another place. "You'd better get me back into this room," she said, then, "No! I want to go *back*, I want to follow my feelings. I'm being pulled through the air, into time. I'm passing Clara, I'm passing her. She's dead in a twisted, smoking car. I'm passing back in time, floating over. There's Amy, she's dead too. Dead on that cot. I'm passing them all, floating back."

Matthew's voice was clear but far away. "Keep going!" he urged. "Keep traveling. What are their secrets? What sexual secrets are they keeping?"

Her voice became more childlike. "Althelia wants me to go down there, back so many years." She began to cry. She sat up on the sofa, both legs tucked neatly to one side, her hands resting quietly in her lap, her eyes still closed.

"I've waited so long to see my mother." The voice was pleading. "Take me back," Althelia said quietly. "Go."

"I can't get down. I'm caught up here in space."

"You're going to fall right down in that experience," he instructed.

"No!" Her voice turned wary. "There are too many gathered. I see too many. And I sense evil."

His words came very slowly. "Just follow the tone of my voice. When I say *three*—"

"Don't say *three*," she begged. "I won't go back—don't count to three—it's too black and I'm being drawn to them."

"Kathy, Kathy," he said soothingly. "Just follow the sound of my voice. Let yourself drift . . . away."

"Why do you call me Kathy?" she asked softly. "There is no Kathy in this time."

"You use Kathy only as a medium?" he asked.

"Take me back. My name is Althelia."

"I want to talk to you first. I need to meet you. I need to know about you."

"No," she replied firmly. "I must go back first. Thou canst not know what I do not know."

"But I *can* know what you *do* know. And there's something very sexual about you."

"Sexual?" The voice was puzzled. "I have no sex about me. I have only the blackness of magic and I do not want that. I want you to make me pure of this black magic so that I can go to the white light and find peace."

"Then look down a long, dark tunnel of time." His voice was soft and compelling. "And as I count backward, you step into that tunnel. Five . . . step right in . . . four . . ."

"What happens if I fall?"

"Three . . . just let yourself go down . . . Two . . ."

"No! I do not want to see this!"

"One! First smell what you smell. Smell it."

There was silence. Finally, she spoke. "There is so much light around me, yet darkness beyond. Why should there be so much light and fire around me? Why am I here?"

"Look down at your feet," he instructed. "What do you see?"

"They are not pretty, but rough and heavy, dry-looking around the edges."

"Are you barefoot? Or wearing shoes—"

"Yes. Barefoot."

"Now look up. Look at what you're wearing."

"I am lying down," she replied softly. "I cannot look up. Up is blackness, night. Night is all around me."

"Look at what you're wearing," he repeated.

"I wear nothing." A tremor passed through her body. "I do not like what I see," she whispered. "I am within a circle of light, and they are all around me. But there is no person's face." She began to cry softly. "There is an animal face. What am I doing here? I do not belong. I am a good person—I do not belong."

"Keep going."

"I said I would join the coven, but this is not what thou should be doing! Thou said thou would help me, help me to be revenged upon those who killed my mother. Why is there so much light in the darkness? I don't want this—this fire, this flame! Nor this horrible face I see near my body." Her voice rose. "I do not want thee doing this to my body! The pain!" She screamed. "I do not belong here." She wept. "I must be evil, like all the others here." She was sobbing. "Now I can never be with my mother."

"Just like Kathy—after *she* had sex."

"We are all dead inside," Althelia explained softly. "The blackness within means we have no soul alive. The soul within is black as ashes."

"I don't believe that," he declared.

"Then help me to get to my mother," she pleaded, "as you helped Amy." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "She is with her baby. I need my mother."

There was a long pause. "I need to talk with thee," she said finally.

"Talk."

"I need to tell thee what happened. I do not remember all, but I am trying. Those who came to me—who said they had the blackness . . ." Her voice broke. "Will I ever be forgiven for taking the white light within me and burning it into ashes as I was burned that night? The fire and heat all around! Oh! The shame!" She turned her head away.

"Why is it I speak Kathy's words?" she asked after a silence. "My words are not these words, but my words will not come out. I see different words written in front of me. I do not speak in Kathy's tongue. I do not *want* to speak in her tongue! Please hear me, Mother, even in this tongue!"

"Be Kathy," the male voice suggested, "and use her tongue to talk to *her* mother, Lily."

"No!" she replied flatly. "I know what you think, but Kathy's mother and mine are not the same."

"No. They are not the same."

"Please do not ask me to speak to Kathy's mother as my own."

"But you know something about her mother. You need to tell Kathy why you won't speak to her."

"Because it is *my* mother with whom I need to make peace," she whispered, "not Kathy's. That must come from Kathy."

"Tell her."

"The peace is within thee," she began. "It is the memory of thy experience that has turned thy heart to blackness. Thou must purge it from thy soul. Thou must take the black out of thy heart and replace it with white." The room was very still. "Thou hast the ability to use the powers of the mind. To see the past, to see souls that have gone, souls that are, souls that are still to come. I have given thee that ability, and now thou must take it and make it strong so that thou can see the light.

"But I have also given thee the black coal, the blackness that came from the fire that night when I said I would join with the evil one. I did harm. I gave

vent to my rage. But I killed no one. Not even my enemy." Her voice was very soft. "We had the ability to move objects, and to fright people, that I remember. And I remember the same violation of my body that was suffered by Kathy. And Amy." A shiver passed through her. "But the face of the violator was an awful animal face, a monster, not a person. And there was blood marked on me. . . . So we have the black coal of death, but also the power to heal, the power of the white light. Nurture it—coddle it. And now I need to leave." She sounded very tired. "I must take the black coal out of my heart. Help me."

"How?"

"When I leave, I give back Kathy's body. She has the power within her, and thou hast the ability to light it up again. I have given her all I came with. I have waited all these years . . . but the light is calling me and I must find out that I am free to leave. I do not know how. I rely on thy wisdom—they have sent me to thee."

"Is there anything you need to say to Kathy before you go? Or to any one of the parts within Kathy?"

"I don't think that is my place. I never concerned myself with the parts within. And yet they have the blackness too."

"Just go in peace, Althelia, go to your place. Keep your blackness with you."

Her voice rose. "I cannot go to my place unforgiven!"

"Whose forgiveness do you need?"

"I did not mean for the stern man to die," she said, sobbing. "I see him standing before me, his face drained of blood. He condemned my mother, and I wished vengeance, but I did not kill him."

"How did he die?"

"I threw magic herbs down the chimney, and the fire danced with great power," she recalled. "He saw faces in the fire, faces condemning his cruelty, faces of the devil. He saw my mother in the fire and he grew pale." She paused. "And I watched from the window and I caused the Bible to fall off the mantel, and he grew paler still. And I made the water bucket

by the hearth tip over and spill, sending clouds of steam throughout the room. When I could see again, he was lying very still on the floor. He moved no more."

The tears began again. "I see his wife bending over him and weeping. I see two small children standing in the doorway, horror on their faces. Forgive me!" She wept. "Is there forgiveness enough for me?"

His compelling voice penetrated the scene and recreated it. "I see them at peace," he said firmly. "I see them peaceful and happy together. They have found the white light and there is no bitterness in their hearts."

"They look at me with forgiveness," she agreed. "And now, if only my mother can forgive me." The tears returned.

"That's been your mistake from the start, Althelia," the soothing voice said. "Your mother harbors no grudge against you, no evil thoughts. She loves you and has been waiting for you all these years. See her—there—at the end of the dark tunnel, where the white light shines."

"But I betrayed thee!" she protested. "It was because of me that thou died. I spoke from pride of thy healing, and it caused thy death!"

"You acted out of goodness," he insisted. "With the rash impetuosity of a child, perhaps, but with only good intentions. Your mother forgives you, Althelia. See? She waits for you."

"No!" she screamed. "It is unforgivable!"

His voice was strong and as determined as hers. "She *does* forgive you, Althelia. Will you forgive yourself?"

There was silence except for the ragged sound of her breathing. She saw the light ahead, and her mother. Could she go to her? Or must she stand forever in the darkness? She willed herself to move, and she began to feel warmth. Her mother was smiling. "I do forgive," she whispered, and then she was gone.

"Kathy?" She could hear the sound of his fingers snapping—*pop! pop! pop!*—but it was so far away, so very far. "Kathy?"

"Wait," she managed, struggling in the darkness. She couldn't open her eyes. Not yet. She was up in the air, so high above. "I hear you. Please wait, Matthew. I need to get back."

"You need contact," he replied firmly. "Reach out and take my hand."

"Wait! I hear you," she repeated. "I'm in this room, but I'm not on the couch yet."

"Reach out and take my hand so you can get grounded."

"I need time." Her eyes were almost open.

"Now open your eyes," he instructed her, "and look at that tree."

She turned her head to face the large plant in the corner, then slowly, slowly, opened her eyes. She felt like a space traveler returning from a journey to a far planet. "My body is shaking," she reported.

"You just had a profound experience," he said.

"I don't remember . . ." she began. "Not all of it."

"You will."

Chapter 20



Kathy pulled the sheet tightly around her. Ordinarily, she enjoyed massage, but the experience with Joshua—the body-work—was scarcely the hour-long indulgence she was used to.

She stretched out on the table and tried to relax. The feelings that Joshua's massage evoked were even more real and painful than what she went through in Matthew's office. That was why Matthew suggested she see Joshua. He told her that if she experienced her memories viscerally, physically, it would be easier to come to terms with them, to believe them.

And if she really believed, would she be well? she asked herself. Was it that last shred of disbelief that was keeping her from becoming a whole person, from fusing? It had been a

good spring. She had done well in school and had been accepted for the MBA program; in fact, she would begin one of those courses very soon, during the summer term. She was feeling competent and healthy in her dealings with Lily and Nan; Stacey even seemed to be making some progress in her therapy, and the other kids were just fine. And Bob . . . She smiled. She really was getting pretty good at incorporating Prose's energy and enthusiasm into her own life. Yes, things were going pretty well.

But the parts were still there. They didn't come out unbidden—not often, anyway—but she could hear them, talk to them. And fusion terrified them all. For Cici and Prose and Baby and Roxy and even Susan, it meant death; it meant eternal banishment. And how could she do that? She felt tears close to the surface. These were her friends, dammit! she thought. And since oneness equalled oblivion, she didn't want it. She sighed. A decision to stay multiple wouldn't please Matthew, she suspected. And she had promised him she wouldn't go ahead with her graduate work until she felt healthy and whole.

The door opened and Joshua entered the spare cubicle, unfurnished except for the massage table, a chair and a small cabinet. "Hi, Kathy," he said cheerfully. "How are you feeling today?"

"Fine, I guess. A little sad. Conflicted, actually." Joshua was a tall muscular young man, with a neat mustache and a slightly receding hairline, and he was wearing his usual uniform of a plain white T-shirt and sweat pants. Kathy felt comfortable with him, though she preferred chatting to the massage work. Sometimes during the work itself she felt terrifically attracted to him; sometimes she hated him. He seemed able to take all of her reactions with aplomb.

He dropped into the chair. "Oh? How come?"

"Because I think I should be fused by now, but I don't even see that as a possibility. And I think Matthew is probably disappointed that I'm not closer to it."

"Has he said so?"

"No, but . . ."

"Well, if there's one thing I know about Matthew—and I've been in training with him for a while, you know—it's not to assume what he's thinking. If he's disappointed or angry or happy or whatever, he'll let you know. He's not sneaky. He doesn't keep secrets."

"You're right, of course." She knew he was. The only way to know Matthew's reaction would be to ask him, expecting a perfectly straight answer.

Joshua smiled, getting up. "Any other delaying tactics today, or should we get to work?"

Kathy shrugged sheepishly. "You and Matthew! You both read me like a book. Why don't we just talk for the whole hour?"

"Because that's not the work we've contracted to do, right?"

She nodded, feeling apprehensive stirrings in her stomach. When her regular masseuse touched her, she experienced only the careful, gradual relaxation of each muscle group in her body. But when Joshua touched her, it sometimes felt as though her life were exploding inside her head.

"Roll over on your back," he instructed her. "I'm going to start with the feet and work up today."

She followed his directions, and he arranged the sheet so that it covered her from armpit to mid thigh. She took a deep breath and tried to relax. She found that she usually fought the sensations for the first few minutes, then gradually gave in to them. By the time Joshua was done, she actually had to tighten up again before she could leave—the work made her feel that vulnerable. She was supposed to blank her mind completely, and just receive the feelings that the bodywork called up. He was manipulating her feet and ankles, and that was very sexy.

She felt a stirring in her crotch, and suddenly she was back at the hotel, on a beautiful, bright summer day, sitting by the pool with Eddie and the other teenagers. They were splashing and teasing and she pushed Eddie into the water. He swam away from her, down toward the deep water, and she felt abandoned. She turned toward Jerry to hide her distress at Eddie's defection, even for a moment, and the next thing she knew someone was tickling her feet as they dangled in the water—stroking and pinching and driving her into a frenzy. It was Eddie, of course, under the water, hidden from the other kids, and by the time he finally surfaced, laughing his irresistible laugh, she was gasping. She slipped into the water to cover her confusion, and he chased her the length of the pool. On the narrow ledge under the diving board they kissed, wet bodies glued together, and she could feel how aroused he was—as hot as she was. As always, they were two sides of the same coin, two parts who belonged together.

"We should have gone to bed together," Kathy mused as Joshua moved up to her calves and knees.

"Hmm?"

"You know, Eddie—my childhood sweetheart. The work on my feet made me think of him. I'd be a lot less hung up, I think, if I'd had the guts to have sex with him back then."

"But that was the fifties, right?"

"Right. And my mother was practically in the Dark Ages as far as sex was concerned. At least as far as sex and *her* daughter was concerned." She amended the statement, thinking about Lily and Larry in Florida. Had that been satisfying for her mother? she asked herself. Had Larry been a better lover than Daddy? Or just different?

She felt Joshua's hands slide onto her thighs, his fingers pointed toward her stomach, his palms covering the big muscle on the front of the thigh bone. The pressure increased as he pushed down on the muscle, as if he wanted her leg to sink into the table.

All at once it wasn't Joshua at all. Her mouth opened in horror, but no sound came out. It was Pete. Pete was pushing open her legs, pushing them farther apart than they could go, holding them apart and hurting her. And then his weight was on top of her, and she could smell the stale Vitalis and the coal dust and the cheap whiskey. But the pain in her thighs, the stretch across her vagina, was still there, followed by the tearing hurt of his penis, swollen with rage at her mother and twisted desire for the little girl in the white nightgown as he pushed it into her. He should give up, she thought, frozen. It won't go. It isn't possible. But the pain increased, and so did the pressure. He was banging it at her as though she were a wall he was tearing down.

Finally, she felt something warm and liquid down there, down where the hurt was so bad, and he was inside her, grunting and panting. She could see some spit coming out of one corner of his mouth, dribbling down toward his chin. And then a last rattling groan and it was over. But the pain wasn't over. The pain remained, and she was sticky and dirty and smelled bad. But mostly, it hurt. Oh, how it hurt!

"No—stop!" Her voice was exhausted and terrified, and Joshua removed his hands at once.

"What is it, Kathy?"

"It was the rape," she whispered. "Your hands on my thighs,

pushing . . .” She sat up, wrapping the sheet around. “No more today, Joshua.”

She slid off the table, turned and went into the bathroom, where she had left her clothes. She felt so weary, she wasn't sure she could even get dressed. As she dropped the sheet, something caught her eye. She picked it up and looked. There was blood on the sheet! Where could it have come from? she wondered. The sheet had certainly been clean when she arrived, but her period wasn't due for ten days, and she was as regular as clockwork. She grabbed some tissues and wiped herself. She was bleeding from the vagina. She started to cry softly. “Mommy, he raped me,” she whispered. “He raped me, Mommy, and I need you to make it all better. Why won't you make it better?”

Kathy looked around Matthew's therapy room as if she were seeing it for the last time. The colors in the wall hangings seemed particularly vibrant, and the graceful fronds of the palm tree in the corner sparkled as though a tropical shower had just polished them. Perhaps it was the brilliant sunshine of the first real summer day, she thought. Or perhaps her mind was just trying to memorize it, to keep everything she had of Matthew as fresh and immediate as possible.

She sighed and sat down. Would she see Matthew again in the fall? She really didn't know. Was she better? Certainly. Well? It depended on the definition of *well*, she had decided. In her own terms, possibly. In Matthew's . . .

“I'm not ready to say good-bye to you,” she began quietly.

“What about the others?” he asked. “Close your eyes right now.” She obeyed, relieved to relinquish control. “I want to talk to you, Roxy.” Her body squared on the couch, and her shoulders slouched slightly. “I think you've been feeling something important.”

“I've built a wall between us, and I miss you,” Roxy admitted. “I feel real lonely. I want to know how I can stop feeling like . . . like I'm gonna die if I have to leave.” There. She'd said it.

“You don't have to leave,” he replied.

She was stunned. What was he saying? “You never told me that before!”

“You never asked.”

She was half crying, half laughing. Her voice rose. "Well, some things are real important for me to know!"

His tone was calm and reassuring. "I do tell you many things I feel are important."

"But this was *real* important!" she declared. "You don't know how lousy I've been feeling 'cause I thought you wanted me to go away."

"Just the way you wanted many of Kathy's sensations and thoughts and memories to leave," he pointed out.

"It's different when you're a thought," she muttered. "I don't feel like a thought. I feel like a person."

"You don't have to go anywhere," Matthew repeated. "You're simply going to fade into the background of Kathy's mind, always available for retrieval."

"Doc, you don't know how good that makes us feel. We're *willing* to get smaller."

"You're like an appetite that's been satisfied."

Roxy started to cry again. "Why didn't you tell us a long time ago? Instead of making us crazy! Because I had made a decision that I wasn't leaving no matter what!"

"There's nowhere to leave *to*," he said calmly. "But Kathy's got to make a commitment to feel what she feels—what every part of her feels—and know what she knows."

"But how do I get my information to her? Do you see the problem?"

"I think you have enough tricks to figure that one out," he said wryly. "You *are* Kathy."

She shook her head doggedly. "*That's* where we don't see eye to eye, Doc." Her tone was angry. "We don't look alike! We don't talk alike! We don't sound alike!"

Matthew's voice rose to match hers. "The photograph of you would be of a ten-year-old, when you were energizing all of your ability to manipulate your environment the way you chose. You are simply her ten-year-old ego state. And when she identifies with being ten years old, she acts, talks and sounds like you."

Roxy sniffled. "Don't you like us?"

"I don't like the fact that you continually insist that the past is more important than the present."

"I don't," she replied sullenly. "I'm just insisting that you stop telling us what we're not."

"You *are* Kathy. You are one of her ways of adapting."

"But we don't think alike!" she wailed. "Why don't we just leave it like it was before—so I don't get angry?"

"I'm not concerned about your getting angry. As a matter of fact, that might be beneficial. The reason not to leave it is so you really understand. Because until you do, you'll always be scared you're going to be gotten rid of." He spoke firmly and slowly. "I'm not going to reject you like you were afraid your dad would."

She was quiet for a moment. "Most of me trusts you, Doc. I feel much better. You really gave me some good information—stuff we can live with. I love you, Doc, and I'm gonna miss you."

"What will you miss?"

"A friend. You were my first real friend."

"Why, thank you. That's a lovely compliment."

"It was meant to be. I know you really like me, even though sometimes I get pissed at you, and you get pissed at me, but that's okay." She couldn't prevent a tear from escaping from beneath her closed eyelids. "But I'm gonna miss you and I don't *wanna* miss you. None of us wants to hurt. When we hurt, we all want to slide into Kathy—let *her* take that fuckin' pain. We'll take the physical pain. It's the emotional pain we don't know how to handle."

"Move over here," Matthew instructed her, patting the cushion next to his seat, "and be Kathy, and talk to Roxy."

She took a deep, shuddering breath and opened her eyes. Then she walked over and sat down again, crossing her legs at the ankles. "I don't know how to respond to you, Roxy," she began, starting to cry. "You make me feel sad."

"Say that in the first person," he suggested.

"I feel my sadness around Roxy's issues. About having a real friend, someone I can really trust. I guess part of me doesn't even trust Bob, but I know he's trustworthy." She pressed her hands against her forehead. "I also feel your pain. I get such a headache when you're around."

"Switch to the other seat. Be Roxy."

She threw herself onto the other couch. "I can take physical pain," Roxy boasted. "I can take anything, Doc." She paused. "I'm just too fuckin' scared to open my heart, to ever be one with Kathy. I hurt too bad." She cried quietly for a moment. "Too bad. I'm so lonely and scared and hurt."

"Come over here, Kathy."

She curled up on the couch next to Matthew, tucking her legs underneath her. She didn't want to do this moving back and forth anymore. "I don't identify with her," she explained in a level tone of voice. "She's separate from me."

"It's your fear," he replied softly. "Open your heart while fucking, just like you closed your heart to Pete."

"Well . . ." She was doubtful. "Maybe I'm too frightened too."

"Too fucking scared."

"Too frightened to take in her anger."

"It's *your* anger," he said firmly.

"Not when I dissociate."

"Even when you dissociate!" he insisted. "You're the only one who doesn't know it's yours. What do you want to say to her?"

"I don't want you," she whispered.

"You don't have a choice. She was your experience and always will be, whether you deny her or accept her."

"And when I deny part of me," she realized, "then it makes that part even lonelier."

"I think you must have been very lonely at ten years old, and the manipulation now keeps you even lonelier. Anything you want to say to me, Roxy?"

"I'm not Roxy—my eyes are open. . . ." She couldn't prevent the lids from drooping.

"How do I get rid of the pain?" Roxy asked.

"Let Kathy accept the fact that you're her; let her accept the fact that you're angry."

"Doc, I can't handle anything. I don't know how to close the hole in my heart. It scares the shit out of me. It's like you're my only friend, and you're leaving me."

"It needs some healing time. Over the summer."

"It ain't never gonna be the same."

"Good. Anything more you want to say before I go?"

"I'll miss you."

"What will you miss the most?"

"Having someone who can hear my feelings. You see, Kathy don't really want me. Even though I think she likes me a little."

Sighing, she opened her eyes. "I don't want to own her violence," she admitted. "It would make me too much like Nan." She stopped. "To admit to my own violence."

"It's time to say good-bye now, Roxy."

Her eyes snapped shut. "Just like that? Not forever, though, Doc."

"No. You take me with you for the summer, Roxy." The room was quiet for several minutes. Finally, Matthew broke the silence. "Now I want to talk to Prose," he said.

She leaned back, her arms stretched across the top of the sofa, her head up. She crossed her legs, and the top one started to bounce just slightly. A deep breath expanded her chest.

"How are you doing, lady?" Matthew asked.

Her laugh was deep and throaty. "I'm okay."

"You seem almost shy," he observed.

"Well, the thing is . . ." She was thoughtful. "I don't like being around anymore. It's like you took all my fun away. It's like you're my conscience. You walk around in my head all the time and I *hate* it."

"You also told me you hated what you were doing," he pointed out.

"But at least I had fun."

"You told me you never had fun."

"I said I never enjoyed it. There's a difference. I had fun controlling . . . things. I still could if I didn't have you as my conscience."

"You want me to resign?"

"Part of me does, yeah. It's no fun being weak."

"You're not weak."

"With you as my conscience, I am," she said bitterly.

"I think you're a mixture of Kathy's sexual desires as a grown-up woman, her anger at men and her fear of submitting."

"I'm not afraid of much else, you know."

"But you really do fear intimacy."

She paused, thinking. "It's funny how I like you and I don't like you. I like you for who you are, but I don't like you for what you did to me."

"What did I do?"

"You knocked me down too small." Her voice was plaintive.

"My goodness! That wasn't my intention."

"Sure it was!" She frowned. "You knew fuckin' well I was gonna take off. If I had been strong enough, nobody would ever have seen me again." She was angry and sad. "I knew just where I was going. . . ."

"But you're willing to stay? Would you like some therapy, Prose? So that you could finally enjoy having sex?"

Her voice was disgusted. "Oh, let Kathy have it. I don't even want it. I don't want to be around no more. I don't want no responsibility."

"Would you like to come to therapy, Prose, so that you could really fuck? So that you don't get your vagina confused with your mouth?"

"Fuck and feel?" She sighed. "Oh, God, I don't know. I never thought about it. Don't you have enough to do with Kathy?" she asked suspiciously.

"You are Kathy."

"I guess that's what I don't want to be."

Matthew leaned back and laced his fingers together. "Well, you certainly were an interesting escape from . . ." His voice trailed off.

"Boredom!" she shouted. "Dullsville! Suburbia! All those stupid things. But I got more than I bargained for 'cause she's getting strong. I can't even shop anymore." She sighed.

"You've got other choices and other desires."

"Bullshit!" She twisted her head around to relieve the tension in her neck. "Kathy has decided to stay married." She sighed. "And Bob's a good guy—I dig him. But, then again, I dig most men." Her smile was rueful. "Oh, Matthew, I don't like being around anymore. I feel like a librarian!"

"Say something to Kathy, Prose. Imagine her here beside me. What would you like to say to her?"

"I know how to live and you don't. School ain't the answer!"

"How do you feel, Kathy?"

Instantly, her top leg stopped jiggling and her arms came down into her lap. "I hear what you're saying," she began hesitantly, "and I know that that part of me exists. I guess I fight you all the way. I just feel that I have to grow up sometime. And if I let you dominate, I lose everything. You'd leave Bob, leave the children . . . go from man to man." She shuddered. "We'd grow old with nothing."

Her leg started again, more vigorously than before. "Look at you!" Prose snapped. "You could be celibate and you wouldn't give a shit! It has nothing to do with Bob, Doc. You don't mind if I call you Doc, do you, honey? She just ain't turned on to sex that much. She must be going through her changes. . . ."

Kathy uncrossed her legs and pressed her knees together.

"I'm frightened of sex," she admitted, "because every time in the last few years I started to feel sexy, one of *you* pops up!"

"And so I . . ." Matthew prompted.

"I split off. Or I turn off."

"You split off to manipulate," he reminded her.

"To manipulate what?"

"So you don't have to face how angry you are."

"Angry at him or at me?"

"You know the answer."

She thought about it. "I guess it's probably all men. I really *like* Bob—he's a good person, and he's probably my best friend. I know I'm his."

"Tell that to your whore."

"I think what bothered me was that when Prose was around, Bob wanted sex all the time. There's got to be a compromise between us. I guess I was frightened that he'd want too much, so I went the other way. I didn't want it at all." She felt confused. "But I *do* want it—up until I get into bed."

"What does Prose think?"

"Why do I get so angry at her?" Prose demanded, taking a breath and arching her back.

"I don't think it's her. I think she just said it—it's men."

"Oh, God! Sometimes I'd like to cut the balls off every guy that lives."

"So you suck them off instead."

"I like to see them grovel," she admitted. "I like to know I can control them, keep them where *I* want them."

"Does that help you control Pete?"

"No," she said in a small voice.

"So you're still helpless as that child, unable to protect herself from being raped."

"But I'd never let that happen again. You can be damn sure of that! Nobody will ever come that close. I'd kill them!" She paused for a minute, and when she spoke again, her voice was softer. "I guess I really don't like sex so much, huh?" She paused after that realization. "I am good at it. There's just no fun . . ."

"What are you going to say to that lady, Kathy?" He gestured toward the empty couch.

She sighed. "I don't want your anger anymore. What's the point? I'm smart enough to learn from you; I know your techniques. I can be just as good as you in bed. I'm smart

enough not to let any Petes around me ever again. You've taught me well because, as Matthew would say, you are me. I know the sexiness is me. It's when the hatred comes in that I don't feel it."

"Now come back to the present. Say, 'I'm scared of my own hatred and I'm scared of my own sexiness.'"

"I'm more scared of hatred than sexiness right now."

"Are you ready to say good-bye, Prose?" he asked.

"I don't want to say good-bye now or later," she replied belligerently.

"I'm going away."

"There are a couple of things I do want to say. One: It frightens me that Kathy's gonna get caught without my anger, my protection. You see, I don't believe any man's safe, and yet I know you're right. That's why I'm so torn. I don't think there's a man around who doesn't want to hop into bed with her."

"There's me."

"I didn't say 'would,' I said 'want to.'"

"Okay," he agreed. "I suspect that under the right conditions any man would want you, just as you probably could desire any man under the right conditions, as two human beings who are close and intimate."

"But she's got to learn to be careful."

"She has."

"I don't want to hang around."

"She is you. You need to fade back into memory."

"I can't give you an answer yet. Let us just practice for a while. Is that fair? We're willing to get smaller. Except for Baby."

"You don't even have to get smaller. There may be a time when she needs a big Prose."

"I guess we just want to protect her in our own way."

"But she needs modern support systems."

The rhythm of her leg jiggling increased, and the pitch of her voice dropped. "We can be very modern, honey. Very modern."

"You are not modern," he said sharply.

"There ain't an up-to-date technique around that I haven't learned!" she insisted.

"That's not what I mean. You were created to solve a problem of many years ago."

"I don't necessarily believe that. Men are men."

"But Kathy no longer has the same needs. I'm going to say good-bye in a minute, Prose. Anything else you want to say to me?"

She suddenly turned shy. "I like you," she said quietly.

"Well, thank you. I find you challenging."

"I know that." She paused. "There's also a couple of other things I would have said to you . . ."

"I won't be embarrassed if you say them."

"I'm sorry we couldn't have met somewhere else," she blurted out. "You probably would've been great!"

"I would have been categorized with all the rest," he replied gently.

"There are categories and categories. But it would've been fun to watch."

"Watch me squirm? Watch me be the victim of your hatred?"

She laughed. "Oh, I wouldn't put it that way. I don't hate you. I just like to—" He was correct, of course. He knew her better than she knew herself. "Yeah, you're probably right," she admitted finally.

"I prefer *this* relationship. And maybe now you've finally got one."

"A relationship?"

"Umm-hmm."

"That frightens me."

"Yes, I know."

The room was quiet. When Matthew spoke, his voice was even. "Now I want to talk to you, Cici. Do you want to talk to me?"

A shiver went through her body, and she seemed to shrink on the couch, her chin down, her legs pressed tightly together, her hands clasped in her lap. "I thought you forgot about me," Cici said in a tiny voice.

"I don't forget about you. Lately you remind me of the few good kids in a disruptive classroom. Often the teacher is so busy stamping out the brushfires that the good kids get ignored."

"I don't feel like a good kid. I just feel dumb. I don't know how to—what's the word?—interpret. I don't make—" She stopped, her brow furrowed with effort.

"I don't expect you to."

"Make judgments," she said finally.

"You're too young."

"They expect me to at school. They always make me feel so stupid."

"I don't expect you to," he assured her. "I *do* expect you to tell Kathy what you have to say."

Cici turned toward the empty seat. "I'm sorry I wanted you to kill yourself," she began softly. "I don't see life the way you and the others see it. I see life as really, really painful—very difficult. Every minute I'm out is like an eternity for me. I can't even promise you, if I come out, that I'm not going to want to do it again."

"Talk to her, Kathy," Matthew instructed. "Tell her what you're going to do."

She hesitated, then straightened her shoulders and opened her eyes. "I'll teach you that there is beauty, that you're not stupid. But you shouldn't go into the classroom yet—you really can't handle that. I wouldn't expect Lynn or even Marsha to go into a college classroom either. I just need to have more patience with you."

"It would have been real nice if your parents had had patience with you and accepted you for who you were instead of putting demands on you to live up to a 'good image,'" Matthew pointed out.

"I think the most important thing about feeling smart," Kathy said, "is the confidence someone can give you that you can do it: 'It's okay, so you made a little mistake, but keep going—you can do it.' I'd like to be strong enough for Cici to give her the same confidence that really good teachers give their students."

"Would you 'like to be'?" Matthew asked. "Or are you 'going to be'?"

"I don't know. How can I promise that?" she asked.

"By making a commitment and then sticking your neck out to make it happen," he replied.

"I don't really want to own those parts," she admitted.

His reply was a whisper. "I knew that in the first session we ever had!" He paused. "Anything you want to say to me, Cici, before we stop?" he asked.

"I don't know you very well, and I'm sorry I wasn't straight with you sometimes, but I really didn't know how to be anything I wasn't."

"And I've known that right along too. So even though you

may not have known me, I think I've understood you and what happens in a child when demands and expectations are above her level of competency or out of sync with her experience. There's no way a child can compete with a sister ten years older."

"She frightens me so much, Matthew," Cici whispered. "I feel that she's always there, ready to beat down on me and wipe me out. I get so scared, even now."

"But you know something? You survived."

She was silent for a moment. "It was good to know you, Matthew."

"Oh, we'll meet again," he said easily.

"Really?" There was some life in her voice for the first time. "I like that. I don't think any of us really wants to say good-bye to you."

"There's a lot more work that Kathy needs to do," Matthew explained, "before she can be fully herself. But good-bye for now."

"Can I kiss you good-bye?" Cici asked shyly.

"Sure."

She crossed over and sat beside him, then reached up and gave him a tiny peck on the cheek. Her face burned bright red, and she squeezed her eyes shut, willing herself away.

Matthew's voice penetrated the vacuum. "Now I want to talk to you, Baby," he said.

"I can't let her out, Doc," Roxy said from deep inside. "I can't let her out."

"Who's talking?" he demanded.

"Me! Roxy!"

"Roxy, Kathy is in control," he insisted.

"Well, Baby's a dribbling pest!" she snapped sullenly.

"Kathy is in control," he repeated, his voice soothing. "Kathy is forty-one. She knows how to take care of babies. Ten-year-olds don't know how to take care of babies very well."

"I can't let go," Roxy replied. "I'm holding on to her so tight!"

"How about letting me hold her?" he asked, turning toward the small figure next to him.

"Take the sniveling brat! I don't give a shit!"

Before she had a chance to change her mind, Matthew took her gently by the shoulders, pulling her toward him until he was cradling her as a father would hold a very young child.

"I'm coming back for you, Baby," he said softly. "You shouldn't be left alone with a ten-year-old."

Baby was hard to understand, stuttering. "Hold—hold me together—I'm—I'm so—so scared."

"You should not be left in the care of a ten-year-old," he repeated, stroking her head.

"I'm—I'm so—so scared."

Carefully, he sat her upright again next to him. "Now I want Kathy to talk to Baby."

Her head swam, and she felt dizzy. "It's not so easy to switch so fast," Kathy began, surfacing from the depths. She took a deep breath, then turned to Matthew. "You ask a lot of me, you know that?"

"I ask only what you're capable of doing. Now talk to that baby."

"Oh, God!" She tried to pull herself together. "I'm really frightened. I haven't gone near you because I'm so overloaded with my own four. Your needs are so great. It's frightening—overwhelming."

"You're frightened of your needs, of what other people will do to you, of your own anger, of your own sexiness and of intimacy." His voice was kind as he ticked off the list. "Frightened, frightened, frightened."

An incongruity suddenly occurred to her. "It's interesting that someone who's so frightened inwardly can do so much outwardly, isn't it?"

He smiled. "That's why you manipulate."

"In order to function in this world. You mean it hasn't been you who's been enabling me to function? I've been helping myself?"

He nodded. "You are your own support."

"Did Marian tell you that I was accepted into the MBA program while you were away?"

"Congratulations!" His voice was calm but enthusiastic.

She went on slowly. "But to pursue a serious career, I believe I have to be well—that's a commitment I made to you." She took a deep breath. "And obviously, I'm still multiple. So how do I get over the next step?" She studied Matthew's face for a hint of his reaction, but there was no change in his impassive expression. "I don't know how to go on. Is there a next step? Will it come naturally? I need more adult information."

"From me?"

"Yes."

Matthew leaned forward and spoke very distinctly. "Don't dissociate!" he said firmly.

"All right." She waited.

"It is as simple as that."

"That's it?" She was puzzled. It couldn't be that obvious.

"Yes. It requires that you be real and face all of your internal sensations as you deal with the world around you."

"And the other parts don't have to leave?" She was quite sure she didn't understand him. "There's no fusion?"

"How does one leave one's history? They are simply fragments of history. Just remember, multiple and manipulate are the same thing. Don't manipulate! Be real."

She thought about that. "So every time I want to split, I say to myself, 'Okay, what am I avoiding?' Because splitting is a copout of responsibility to the here and now?"

"Umm-hmm. Even the responsibility to your current excitement about school. The responsibility of recognizing it. The responsibility of your current fears and angers, and the responsibility of owning your own sexual desires," he continued, "rather than cutting off and assigning them to Prose or someone else."

"I understand. But the bad news is, I just can't stay together when I work with Joshua. For the last ten days I haven't split off. I haven't given the parts any energy. But when I start working with Joshua . . ." She sighed. The bodywork was too hard. "The minute he touches me, the parts come out. Especially Roxy. And when she relives the rape . . ." Her voice trailed off.

"What if you were to say, 'The minute he started to do the bodywork, I began to feel sensations in my body?'" Matthew suggested.

"I could say that, but it wouldn't be valid, because the information that comes with those 'sensations' is not in my—Kathy's—awareness."

"What you do is energize a particular aspect of you, a specific memory, the personality associated with that memory," he explained. "And then you get into that segregated thinking pattern."

"And *all* I have to do to stay whole is just not allow it?"

"I also think you need to go to Joshua and *feel* what you feel when he touches you."

"I don't want to."

"Of course you don't," he agreed gently. "You're scared of your own feelings. You always have been." He paused. "Your feelings are not dangerous. Even though you got screwed. It's not going to happen again."

Kathy stared at the floor. "There's more," she whispered.

"I'm sure there's much more," he agreed.

She took a deep breath. "I do believe in the rape now, Matthew. Working it through with Joshua finally made it real." She felt tears close to the surface. "It happened. And I don't know if I'm happy or sad now that I know for sure."

Matthew was silent for a minute. "For the record, *I'm* glad," he said finally. "Now you can put it behind you."

She spoke very softly. "And another thing I have become aware of is that each of the parts will leave when they're ready. It happened to Amy and Clara and Althelia. . . ."

"Kathy! They don't 'leave.' What happens is you've worked through their issues—they're incorporated in you. Those memories just go into the background."

"Right. All the information that had to come through came through. They no longer needed that energy—to put it in your words. But Roxy is now saying there's more information, and that's why she's not ready to leave. Either she's telling the truth but I don't know how to get to it, or I'm allowing a game to be played in order to keep that energy."

"Probably both. Kathy, you've had a very skillful way of manipulating the world for thirty-some years. You must feel absolutely lost without it."

"I don't think I need it anymore." She sounded more confident than she felt.

"I don't think you need it either."

She sat up straighter; her voice was stronger. "I am finding that *I* am skillful." She paused. "Most of the time. On the way to school this morning I thought, 'What the hell is going on? I'm feeling so scared!' I realized immediately that it was Cici, and I switched energies. I don't want to sabotage myself. I really *want* to succeed."

"Well, then simply say, 'I'm not seven years old anymore'—or whatever age you were associating with. 'Here I am. I'm driving this fancy red car. I'm going to school. I'm wearing a

black sweater. It's 1983, and I'm darned scared that that teacher's not going to explain it well enough for me to get an A on the test."

"I want to walk in and say, 'This is who I am, but I'm still capable enough to do the work.'"

He studied her in silence. "I think, Kathy, that you have to be careful. There are some glorious advantages to you in telling people how unique you are."

It felt like a rebuke. "Unique because I'm multiple? Or unique because of me—just me, with many facets, some good and some not so good. Which way do you mean it?"

"Either way. You're at a crossroad. How are *you* going to take it? You can go right or left."

"I'm frightened."

"Yes."

"Could wellness be multiple?" she asked.

"You are only one person." His reply was quick and firm.

"But I don't think as one!" Her voice rose.

"That has always been by choice."

"But right now, inside, I'm hearing, 'We are real!'"

"Of course. I've always said you are real experiences. I said that in the first five minutes we were together." Kathy sighed. "Kathy, should I tell you about when I went to high school, and about my pleasures and disappointments? Those experiences were real. Should I tell you about when I was a little kid?"

"But you didn't energize those feelings," she protested.

"I sure did."

"But you don't now."

"I sure can."

"But you don't!"

"There are times I do. Last night I was playing with my daughter, and I was easily nine years old—without a doubt."

"But you got out of it."

"Sure," she replied easily. "Five minutes later she stubbed her toe, and I was forty-one."

Her voice broke. "I want to be forty-one. And if all I have to do for the next three months is be aware, then I'm going to do it."

"I think a great deal now is practice."

"Do you still want me to see Joshua? You know what's going to happen."

"I know you will feel many sensations," he responded evenly.

"Just a minute!" she interjected, holding her hand up to prevent him from continuing.

"Perhaps you don't like hearing what I have to say," he went on a little louder.

"I've got a lot of anger," she declared, "because I still hear you saying I'm not real. I know intellectually that I'm one, that I have memories. But why do they feel as real as they do?"

"Because your parents didn't accept you as real in all of those developmental stages," he replied.

"That's why the parts feel real?"

"No. That's why you're angry with me—you're projecting. You wanted to get angry all of the times your parents did not accept your experiences. You failed to get angry then, so now you do, at the easiest target—me—and imagine that I say your experiences were not real."

"It's the word *experience*," she insisted. "My feeling is that the parts are flesh and blood—that's the difference."

Matthew reached across and pinched her on the arm. "Who hurts?" he asked.

She looked at him blankly. "No one."

"Oh." He pinched her again harder. "Why not? Does that hurt?"

"I won't feel it."

"Feel it!" he demanded, pinching again. There was a red mark on her arm. "This is what's happening right now. Feel that pinch!"

"I feel it—yet I don't feel it," she said. "I can cut it off."

"Sure. That's what you learned to do when your sister hurt you. That's dissociating." He picked up her arm and studied the welt he had made. He shook his head. "I want to slug someone who goes around leaving marks like that," he said almost to himself.

"I know. That's just what she used to do."

"It's not what she *used* to do that's important to me. It's what you *continue* to do even though she's no longer a threat."

Kathy sighed and smiled just slightly. "Well, I was good at what I did."

"Now," Matthew went on, ignoring her comment, "would you like me to answer the previous question? Why do you have all those sensations on the table when Joshua is massag-

ing you?" She nodded. "It takes muscular tension to aid in the active process of forgetting," he explained. "That's called repression. It means that something is too much for the kid to handle, too stressful. So you actually forget it by tensing up your body."

"I do that," she agreed. "I'm very aware that when Joshua touches various spots, different memories are going to come to the fore—but it's not the memory, it's the part that's associated with the memory."

"But if you stop dissociating, the memory may come instead of the part," he pointed out.

"Is that necessary?"

"That's the unfinished business."

"And the key from now on is . . ."

"Don't dissociate."

"It sounds so simple," Kathy mused. "But it's the answer. Before, I really believed that fusion meant getting rid of the others. I can handle this!" She smiled at him and her voice got stronger, more positive. "I can handle the others getting smaller, fading into the background. That's all I ever wanted—it's something I can live with."

Matthew was smiling too. "Who are you convincing, me or you?"

"Both of us."

"I don't need convincing," he said quietly. "And neither do you."

"I'm seeing that," she agreed. She stood up, ready to go.

He held out his hand. "Have a good summer, Kathy," he said.

"I will." As she got into the elevator, her thoughts turned to Bob and the kids. It *would* be a good summer, she promised herself. For the first time she felt she could be complete, not fragmented. She had a lot to give, and she wanted very much to share it with her family.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

After continuing her therapy, working toward successfully fusing the personalities, KATHY ROTH began her education to become a psychotherapist. There, she hopes she will be able to use her unique personal experience in helping others.

NANCY HUGHES CLARK is a writer whose articles have appeared in *Harper's Bazaar*, *Self*, *Mademoiselle*, *Gentleman's Quarterly*, and other national publications. She is also the author of *HOW TO CUT KIDS' HAIR* (Addison Wesley).

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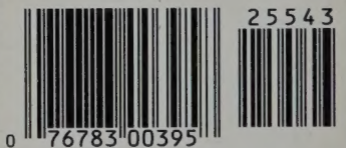
**KATHY ROTH WAS A SUBURBAN HOUSEWIFE—
AND
A MUTE RAPE VICTIM, A HELPLESS BABY,
A SEXUALLY AGGRESSIVE TEENAGER,
AN ANGRY GIRL WHO NEVER OPENED HER EYES,
A WITCH EXECUTED 200 YEARS AGO,
A CASTAWAY YOUNG PROSTITUTE,
A FUN-LOVING HELL-RAISER, AND A TERRIFIED
GIRL WHO WANTED TO KILL THEM ALL...**

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