

He came to when the light roared by, dazzling him with noise and its closeness. He'd turned his own lights off, and the car had swerved to avoid him. Blackness closed over the other car's red taillights, and Gordie started driving. He drove with slowness and utter drunken care, craning close to the windshield, one eye shut so that the road would not branch into two before him. Gaining confidence, he rolled down his window and gathered speed. He knew the road to town by heart. The gravel clattered in the wheel wells and the wind blew cold, sweet in his mouth, eager and watery. He felt better. So much better. The turn came so quickly he almost missed it. But he spun the wheel and swerved, catching himself halfway across the concrete road.

Just there, as he concentrated on controlling the speed of the turn, he hit the deer. It floated into the shadow of his headbeams. The lamps blazed stark upon it. A sudden ghost, it vanished. Gordie felt the jolt somewhat after he actually must have hit it, because, when he finally stopped the car, he had to walk back perhaps twenty yards before he found it sprawled oddly on its belly, legs splayed.

He stood over the carcass, nudged it here and there with his foot. Someone would trade it for a bottle, even if it was a tough old doe. It was surprising, Gordie thought, to find one like this, barren from the looks of her, unless her fawn was hidden in the ditch. He looked around, saw nothing, but then the brush was tall, the air black as ink.

Bending slowly, he gripped the delicate fetlocks and pulled her down the road.

When he reached the car, he dropped the deer and fumbled with his pocket. He found the only key he had was the square-headed one for the ignition. He tried to open the trunk, but the key did not fit. The trunk unlocked only with the rounded key he'd left at home.

"Damn their hides," he shouted. Everything worked against him. He could not remember when this had started to happen. Probably from the first, always and ever afterward, things had worked against him. He leaned over the slope of the trunk then turned onto his back. He was shaking hard all over, and his jaw had locked shut. The sky was an impenetrable liquid, starless and grim. He had never really understood before but now, because two keys were made to open his one car, he saw clearly that the setup of life was rigged and he was trapped.

He was shaking dead sick, locked out of his car trunk, with a doe bleeding slowly at his feet.

"I'll throw her in the back then," he said, before confusion smashed down. The seat was vinyl. It was important that he get a bottle, several bottles, to stop the rattling. Once the shaking got a good start on him nothing would help. It would whip him back and forth in its jaws like a dog breaks the spine of a gopher.

He opened the rear door and then, holding the deer under the front legs and cradled with its back against him, ducked into the backseat and pulled her through. She fit nicely, legs curled as if to run, still slightly warm. Gordie opened the opposite door and climbed out. Then he walked around the front and sat down in the driver's seat. He started the car and moved onto the highway. It was harder now to see the road. The night had grown darker or the shaking had obscured his vision. Or maybe the deer had knocked out a headlight. Clearly, he was sure of it, there was less light. He tried to accommodate the shaking. To keep it under control he took deep shuddering breaths that seemed to temporarily loosen its hold, but then it would be back, fiercely jolting him from side to side in his seat, so that the wheel twisted in his hands. He drove with impossible slowness now, hardly able to keep his

course. A mile passed slowly. Perhaps another. Then he came to the big settlement of the Fortiers. Their yard blazed with light. He drove a few yards past their gate, and then something made him even more uncomfortable than the shaking. He sensed someone behind him and glanced in the rearview mirror.

What he saw made him stamp the brake in panic and shock. The deer was up. She'd only been stunned.

Ears pricked, gravely alert, she gazed into the rearview and met Gordie's eyes.

Her look was black and endless and melting pure. She looked through him. She saw into the troubled thrashing woods of him, a rattling thicket of bones. She saw how he'd woven his own crown of thorns. She saw how although he was not worthy he'd jammed this relief on his brow. Her eyes stared into some hidden place but blocked him out. Flat black. He did not understand what he was going to do. He bent, out of her gaze, and groped beneath the front seat for the tire iron, a flat-edged crowbar thick as a child's wrist.

Then he raised it. As he turned he brought it smashing down between her eyes. She sagged back into the seat again. Gordie began to drive.

This time, when the shaking started, there was no limit to the depth. It was in the bones, then the marrow of the bones. It ran all through him. His head snapped back. He stopped the car. The crowbar was in his lap in case she came to life again. He held it, fusing his hands to the iron to keep them still.

He sat there in the front seat, holding tight to the bar, shaking violently all around it. He heard loud voices. The windshield cracked into a spider's nest. The dash fell open and the radio shrieked. The crowbar fell, silencing that too.

The shaking stopped, a sudden lull that surprised him.

In that clear moment it came to his attention that he'd just killed June.

She was in the backseat, sprawled, her short skirt hiked up over her hips. The sheer white panties glowed. Her hair was tossed in a dead black swirl. What had he done this time? Had he used the bar? It was in his hands.

“Get rid of the evidence,” he said, but his fingers locked shut around the iron, as if frozen to it. He would never be able to open his hands again. He was cracking, giving way. Control was caving like weathered ground. The blood roared in his ears. He could not see where he was falling, but he knew, at length, that he'd landed in an area of terrible vastness where nothing was familiar.