

Stephen King

DOCTOR SLEEP *(passages from the novel)*

We stood at the turning point. Half-measures availed us nothing.
—The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous
If we were to live, we had to be free of anger. [It is] the dubious luxury of normal men and women.
—The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous

STEPHEN
KING

DOCTOR SLEEP

A NOVEL

SCRIBNER

New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi

Dedication

When I was playing my primitive brand of rhythm guitar with a group called the Rock Bottom Reminders, Warren Zevon used to gig with us. Warren loved gray t-shirts and movies like *Kingdom of the Spiders*. He insisted I sing lead on his signature tune, “Werewolves of London,” during the encore portion of our shows. I said I was not worthy. He insisted that I was. “Key of G,” Warren told me, “and howl like you mean it. Most important of all, *play like Keith.*”

I’ll never be able to play like Keith Richards, but I always did my best, and with Warren beside me, matching me note for note and laughing his fool head off, I always had a blast.

Warren, this howl is for you, wherever you are. I miss you, buddy.

PREFATORY MATTERS

FEAR stands for fuck everything and run.
—Old AA saying

LOCKBOX

On the second day of December in a year when a Georgia peanut farmer was doing business in the White House, one of Colorado's great resort hotels burned to the ground. The Overlook was declared a total loss. After an investigation, the fire marshal of Jicarilla County ruled the cause had been a defective boiler. The hotel was closed for the winter when the accident occurred, and only four people were present. Three survived. The hotel's off-season caretaker, John Torrance, was killed during an unsuccessful (and heroic) effort to dump the boiler's steam pressure, which had mounted to disastrously high levels due to an inoperative relief valve.

Two of the survivors were the caretaker's wife and young son. The third was the Overlook's chef, Richard Hallorann, who had left his seasonal job in Florida and come to check on the Torrances because of what he called "a powerful hunch" that the family was in trouble. Both surviving adults were quite badly injured in the explosion. Only the child was unhurt.

Physically, at least.

2

Wendy Torrance and her son received a settlement from the corporation that owned the Overlook. It wasn't huge, but enough to get them by for the three years she was unable to work because of back injuries. A lawyer she consulted told her that if she were willing to hold out and play tough, she might get a great deal more, because the corporation was anxious to avoid a court case. But she, like the corporation, wanted only to put that disastrous winter in Colorado behind her. She would convalesce, she said, and she did, although back injuries plagued her until the end of her life. Shattered vertebrae and broken ribs heal, but they never cease crying out.

Winifred and Daniel Torrance lived in the mid-South for awhile, then drifted down to Tampa. Sometimes Dick Hallorann (he of the powerful hunches) came up from Key West to visit with them. To visit with young Danny especially. They shared a bond.

One early morning in March of 1981, Wendy called Dick and asked if he could come. Danny, she said, had awakened her in the night and told her not to go in the bathroom.

After that, he refused to talk at all.

3

He woke up needing to pee. Outside, a strong wind was blowing. It was warm—in Florida it almost always was—but he did not like that sound, and supposed he never would. It reminded him of the Overlook, where the defective boiler had been the very least of the dangers.

He and his mother lived in a cramped second-floor tenement apartment. Danny left the little room next to his mother's and crossed the hall. The wind gusted and a dying palm tree beside the building clattered its leaves. The sound was skeletal. They always left the bathroom door open when no one was using the shower or the toilet, because the lock was broken. Tonight the door was closed. Not because his mother was in there, however. Thanks to facial injuries she'd suffered at the Overlook, she now snored—a soft *queep-queep* sound—and he could hear it coming from her bedroom.

Well, she closed it by accident, that's all.

He knew better, even then (he was possessed of powerful hunches and intuitions himself), but sometimes you had to know. Sometimes you had to *see*. This was something he had found out at the Overlook, in a room on the second floor.

Reaching with an arm that seemed too long, too stretchy, too *boneless*, he turned the knob and opened the door.

The woman from Room 217 was there, as he had known she would be. She was sitting naked on the toilet with her legs spread and her pallid thighs bulging. Her greenish breasts hung down like deflated balloons. The patch of hair below her stomach was gray. Her eyes were also gray, like steel mirrors. She saw him, and her lips stretched back in a grin.

Close your eyes, Dick Hallorann had told him once upon a time. If you see something bad, close your eyes and tell yourself it's not there and when you open them again, it will be gone.

But it hadn't worked in Room 217 when he was five, and it wouldn't work now. He knew it. He could *smell* her. She was decaying.

The woman—he knew her name, it was Mrs. Massey—lumbered to her purple feet, holding out her hands to him. The flesh on her arms hung down, almost dripping. She was smiling the way you do when you see an old friend. Or, perhaps, something good to eat.

With an expression that could have been mistaken for calmness, Danny closed the door softly and stepped back. He watched as the knob turned right... left... right again... then stilled.

He was eight now, and capable of at least some rational thought even in his horror. Partly because, in a deep part of his mind, he had been expecting this. Although he had always thought it would be Horace Derwent who would eventually show up. Or perhaps the bartender, the one his father had called Lloyd. He supposed he should have known it would be Mrs. Massey, though, even before it finally happened. Because of all the undead things in the Overlook, she had been the worst.

The rational part of his mind told him she was just a fragment of unremembered bad dream that had followed him out of sleep and across the hall to the bathroom. That part insisted that if he opened the door again, there would be nothing there. Surely there wouldn't be, now that he was awake. But another part of him, a part that *shone*, knew better. The Overlook wasn't done with him. At least one of its vengeful spirits had followed him all the way to Florida. Once he had come upon that woman sprawled in a bathtub. She had gotten out and tried to choke him with her fishy (but terribly strong) fingers. If he opened the bathroom door now, she would finish the job.

He compromised by putting his ear against the door. At first there was nothing. Then he heard a faint sound.

Dead fingernails scratching on wood.

Danny walked into the kitchen on not-there legs, stood on a chair, and peed into the sink. Then he woke his mother and told her not to go into the bathroom because there was a bad thing there. Once that was done, he went back to bed and sank deep beneath the covers. He wanted to stay there forever, only getting up to pee in the sink. Now that he had warned his mother, he had no interest in talking to her.

His mother knew about the no-talking thing. It had happened after Danny had ventured into Room 217 at the Overlook.

“Will you talk to Dick?”

Lying in his bed, looking up at her, he nodded. His mother called, even though it was four in the morning.

Late the next day, Dick came. He brought something with him. A present.

4

After Wendy called Dick—she made sure Danny heard her doing it—Danny went back to sleep. Although he was now eight and in the third grade, he was sucking his thumb. It hurt her to see him do that. She went to the bathroom door and stood looking at it. She was afraid—Danny had made her afraid—but she had to go, and she had no intention of using the sink as he had. The image of how she would look teetering on the edge of the counter with her butt hanging over the porcelain (even if there was no one there to see) made her wrinkle her nose.

In one hand she had the hammer from her little box of widow's tools. As she turned the knob and pushed the bathroom door open, she raised it. The bathroom was empty, of course, but the ring of the toilet seat was down. She never left it that way before going to bed, because she knew

if Danny wandered in, only ten percent awake, he was apt to forget to put it up and piss all over it. Also, there was a smell. A bad one. As if a rat had died in the walls.

She took a step in, then two. She saw movement and whirled, hammer upraised, to hit whoever

(whatever)

was hiding behind the door. But it was only her shadow. Scared of her own shadow, people sometimes sneered, but who had a better right than Wendy Torrance? After the things she had seen and been through, she knew that shadows could be dangerous. They could have teeth.

No one was in the bathroom, but there was a discolored smear on the toilet seat and another on the shower curtain. Excrement was her first thought, but shit wasn't yellowish-purple. She looked more closely and saw bits of flesh and decayed skin. There was more on the bathmat, in the shape of footprints. She thought them too small—too dainty—to be a man's.

"Oh God," she whispered.

She ended up using the sink after all.

5

Wendy nagged her son out of bed at noon. She managed to get a little soup and half a peanut butter sandwich into him, but then he went back to bed. He still wouldn't speak. Hallorann arrived shortly after five in the afternoon, behind the wheel of his now ancient (but perfectly maintained and blindingly polished) red Cadillac. Wendy had been standing at the window, waiting and watching as she had once waited and watched for her husband, hoping Jack would come home in a good mood. And sober.

She rushed down the stairs and opened the door just as Dick was about to ring the bell marked TORRANCE 2A. He held out his arms and she rushed into them at once, wishing she could be enfolded there for at least an hour. Maybe two.

He let go and held her at arm's length by her shoulders. "You're lookin fine, Wendy. How's the little man? He talkin again?"

"No, but he'll talk to you. Even if he won't do it out loud to start with, you can—" Instead of finishing, she made a finger-gun and pointed it at his forehead.

"Not necessarily," Dick said. His smile revealed a bright new pair of false teeth. The Overlook had taken most of the last set on the night the boiler blew. Jack Torrance swung the mallet that took Dick's dentures and Wendy's ability to walk without a hitch in her stride, but they both understood it had really been the Overlook. "He's very powerful, Wendy. If he wants to block me out, he will. I know from my own experience. Besides, it'd be better if we talk with our mouths. Better for him. Now tell me everything that happened."

After she did that, Wendy took him into the bathroom. She had left the stains for him to see, like a beat cop preserving the scene of a crime for the forensic team. And there had been a crime. One against her boy.

Dick looked for a long time, not touching, then nodded. "Let's see if Danny's up and in the doins."

He wasn't, but Wendy's heart was lightened by the look of gladness that came into her son's face when he saw who was sitting beside him on the bed and shaking his shoulder.

(hey Danny I brought you a present)

(it's not my birthday)

Wendy watched them, knowing they were speaking but not knowing what it was about.

Dick said, "Get on up, honey. We're gonna take a walk on the beach."

(Dick she came back Mrs. Massey from Room 217 came back)

Dick gave his shoulder another shake. "Talk out loud, Dan. You're scarin your ma."

Danny said, "What's my present?"

Dick smiled. "That's better. I like to hear you, and Wendy does, too."

"Yes." It was all she dared say. Otherwise they'd hear the tremble in her voice and be concerned. She didn't want that.

“While we’re gone, you might want to give the bathroom a cleaning,” Dick said to her. “Have you got kitchen gloves?”

She nodded.

“Good. Wear them.”

6

The beach was two miles away. The parking lot was surrounded by tawdry beachfront attractions—funnel cake concessions, hotdog stands, souvenir shops—but this was the tag end of the season, and none were doing much business. They had the beach itself almost entirely to themselves. On the ride from the apartment, Danny had held his present—an oblong package, quite heavy, wrapped in silver paper—on his lap.

“You can open it after we talk a bit,” Dick said.

They walked just above the waves, where the sand was hard and gleaming. Danny walked slowly, because Dick was pretty old. Someday he’d die. Maybe even soon.

“I’m good to go another few years,” Dick said. “Don’t you worry about that. Now tell me about last night. Don’t leave anything out.”

It didn’t take long. The hard part would have been finding words to explain the terror he now felt, and how it was mingled with a suffocating sense of certainty: now that she’d found him, she’d never leave. But because it was Dick, he didn’t need words, although he found some.

“She’ll come back. I know she will. She’ll come back and come back until she gets me.”

“Do you remember when we met?”

Although surprised at the change of direction, Danny nodded. It had been Hallorann who gave him and his parents the guided tour on their first day at the Overlook. Very long ago, that seemed.

“And do you remember the first time I spoke up inside your head?”

“I sure do.”

“What did I say?”

“You asked me if I wanted to go to Florida with you.”

“That’s right. And how did it make you feel, to know you wasn’t alone anymore? That you wasn’t the only one?”

“It was great,” Danny said. “It was so great.”

“Yeah,” Hallorann said. “Yeah, course it was.”

They walked in silence for a bit. Little birds—peeps, Danny’s mother called them—ran in and out of the waves.

“Did it ever strike you funny, how I showed up when you needed me?” He looked down at Danny and smiled. “No. It didn’t. Why would it? You was just a child, but you’re a little older now. A lot older in some ways. Listen to me, Danny. The world has a way of keeping things in balance. I believe that. There’s a saying: When the pupil is ready, the teacher will appear. I was your teacher.”

“You were a lot more than that,” Danny said. He took Dick’s hand. “You were my friend. You saved us.”

Dick ignored this... or seemed to. “My grandma also had the shining—do you remember me telling you that?”

“Yeah. You said you and her could have long conversations without even opening your mouths.”

“That’s right. She me. And it was her great-grandma that taught her, way back in the slave days. Someday, Danny, it will be your turn to be the teacher. The pupil will come.”

“If Mrs. Massey doesn’t get me first,” Danny said morosely.

They came to a bench. Dick sat down. “I don’t dare go any further; I might not make it back. Sit beside me. I want to tell you a story.”

“I don’t want stories,” Danny said. “She’ll come back, don’t you get it? She’ll come back and come back and come back.”

“Shut your mouth and open your ears. Take some instruction.” Then Dick grinned, displaying his gleaming new dentures. “I think you’ll get the point. You’re far from stupid, honey.”

7

Dick’s mother’s mother—the one with the shining—lived in Clearwater. She was the White Gramma. Not because she was Caucasian, of course, but because she was good. His father’s father lived in Dunbrie, Mississippi, a rural community not far from Oxford. His wife had died long before Dick was born. For a man of color in that place and time, he was wealthy. He owned a funeral parlor. Dick and his parents visited four times a year, and young Dick Hallorann hated those visits. He was terrified of Andy Hallorann, and called him—only in his own mind, to speak it aloud would have earned him a smack across the chops—the Black Grampa.

“You know about kiddie-fiddlers?” Dick asked Danny. “Guys who want children for sex?”

“Sort of,” Danny said cautiously. Certainly he knew not to talk to strangers, and never to get into a car with one. Because they might do stuff to you.

“Well, old Andy was more than a kiddie-fiddler. He was a damn sadist, as well.”

“What’s that?”

“Someone who enjoys giving pain.”

Danny nodded in immediate understanding. “Like Frankie Listrone at school. He gives kids Indian burns and Dutch rubs. If he can’t make you cry, he stops. If he can, he never stops.”

“That’s bad, but this was worse.”

Dick lapsed into what would have looked like silence to a passerby, but the story went forward in a series of pictures and connecting phrases. Danny saw the Black Grampa, a tall man in a suit as black as he was, who wore a special kind of

(fedora)

hat on his head. He saw how there were always little buds of spittle at the corners of his mouth, and how his eyes were red-rimmed, like he was tired or had just gotten over crying. He saw how he would take Dick—younger than Danny was now, probably the same age he’d been that winter at the Overlook—on his lap. If they weren’t alone, he might only tickle. If they were, he’d put his hand between Dick’s legs and squeeze his balls until Dick thought he’d faint with the pain.

“Do you like that?” Grampa Andy would pant in his ear. He smelled of cigarettes and White Horse scotch. “Coss you do, every boy likes that. But even if you don’t, you dassn’t tell. If you do, I’ll hurt you. I’ll burn you.”

“Holy shit,” Danny said. “That’s gross.”

“There were other things, too,” Dick said, “but I’ll just tell you one. Grampy hired a woman to help out around the house after his wife died. She cleaned and cooked. At dinnertime, she’d slat out everything on the table at once, from salad to dessert, because that’s the way ole Black Grampa liked it. Dessert was always cake or puddin. It was put down on a little plate or in a little dish next to your dinnerplate so you could look at it and want it while you plowed through the other muck. Grampa’s hard and fast rule was you could look at dessert but you couldn’t eat dessert unless you finished every bite of fried meat and boiled greens and mashed potatoes. You even had to clean up the gravy, which was lumpy and didn’t have much taste. If it wasn’t all gone, Black Grampa’d hand me a hunk of bread and say ‘Sop er up with that, Dickie-Bird, make that plate shine like the dog licked it.’ That’s what he called me, Dickie-Bird.

“Sometimes I couldn’t finish no matter what, and then I didn’t get the cake or the puddin. He’d take it and eat it himself. And sometimes when I could finish all my dinner, I’d find he’d smashed a cigarette butt into my piece of cake or my vanilla puddin. He could do that because he always sat next to me. He’d make like it was a big joke. ‘Whoops, missed the ashtray,’ he’d say. My ma and pa never put a stop to it, although they must have known that even if it was a joke, it wasn’t a fair one to play on a child. They just made out like it was a joke, too.”

“That’s really bad,” Danny said. “Your folks should have stood up for you. My mom does. My daddy would, too.”

“They were scairt of him. And they were right to be scairt. Andy Hallorann was a bad, bad motorcycle. He’d say, ‘Go on, Dickie, eat around it, that won’t poison ya.’ If I took a bite, he’d have Nonnie—that was his housekeeper’s name—bring me a fresh dessert. If I wouldn’t, it just sat there. It got so I could never finish my meal, because my stomach would get all upset.”

“You should have moved your cake or puddin to the other side of your plate,” Danny said.

“I tried that, sure, I wasn’t born foolish. He’d just move it back, saying dessert went on the right.” Dick paused, looking out at the water, where a long white boat was trundling slowly across the dividing line between the sky and the Gulf of Mexico. “Sometimes when he got me alone he bit me. And once, when I said I’d tell my pa if he didn’t leave me alone, he put a cigarette out on my bare foot. He said, ‘Tell him that, too, and see what good it does you. Your daddy knows my ways already and he’ll never say a word, because he yella and because he wants the money I got in the bank when I die, which I ain’t fixing to do soon.’”

Danny listened in wide-eyed fascination. He had always thought the story of Bluebeard was the scariest of all time, the scariest there ever could be, but this one was worse. Because it was true.

“Sometimes he said that he knew a bad man named Charlie Manx, and if I didn’t do what he wanted, he’d call Charlie Manx on the long-distance and he’d come in his fancy car and take me away to a place for bad children. Then Grampa would put his hand between my legs and commence squeezing. ‘So you ain’t gonna say a thing, Dickie-Bird. If you do, ole Charlie will come and keep you with the other children he done stole until you die. And when you do, you’ll go to hell and your body will burn forever. Because you peached. It don’t matter if anybody believes you or not, peaching is peaching.’

“For a long time I believed the old bastard. I didn’t even tell my White Gramma, the one with the shining, because I was afraid she’d think it was my fault. If I’d been older I would’ve known better, but I was just a kid.” He paused. “There was something else, too. Do you know what it was, Danny?”

Danny looked into Dick’s face for a long time, probing the thoughts and images behind his forehead. At last he said, “You wanted your father to get the money. But he never did.”

“No. Black Grampa left it all to a home for Negro orphans in Alabama, and I bet I know why, too. But that’s neither here nor there.”

“And your good gramma never knew? She never guessed?”

“She knew there was something, but I kep it blocked away, and she left me alone about it. Just told me that when I was ready to talk, she was ready to listen. Danny, when Andy Hallorann died—it was a stroke—I was the happiest boy on earth. My ma said I didn’t have to go to the funeral, that I could stay with Gramma Rose—my White Gramma—if I wanted to, but I wanted to go. You bet I did. I wanted to make sure old Black Grampa was really dead.

“It rained that day. Everybody stood around the grave under black umbrellas. I watched his coffin—the biggest and best one in his shop, I have no doubt—go into the ground, and I thought about all the times he’d twisted my balls and all the cigarette butts in my cake and the one he put out on my foot and how he ruled the dinner table like the crazy old king in that Shakespeare play. But most of all I thought about Charlie Manx—who Grampa had no doubt made up out of whole cloth—and how Black Grampa could never call Charlie Manx on the long-distance to come in the night and take me away in his fancy car to live with the other stolen boys and girls.

.....

Andi, who already knew that a girl who has been raped can never be unraped, understood perfectly.

“Do I really have any other choice?”

Rose shrugged. “Only bad ones, dear. But it’s better if you want it. It will make the Turning easier.”

“Does it hurt? This Turning?”

Rose smiled and told the first outright lie. “Not at all.”

7

A summer night on the outskirts of a Midwestern city.

Somewhere people were watching Harrison Ford snap his bullwhip; somewhere the Actor President was no doubt smiling his untrustworthy smile; here, in this campground, Andi Steiner was lying on a discount-store lawn recliner, bathed in the headlights of Rose’s EarthCruiser and someone else’s Winnebago. Rose had explained to her that, while the True Knot owned several campgrounds, this wasn’t one of them. But their advance man was able to four-wall places like this, businesses tottering on the edge of insolvency. America was suffering a recession, but for the True, money was not a problem.

“Who is this advance man?” Andi had asked.

“Oh, he’s a very winning fellow,” Rose had said, smiling. “Able to charm the birdies down from the trees. You’ll meet him soon.”

“Is he your special guy?”

Rose had laughed at that and caressed Andi’s cheek. The touch of her fingers caused a hot little worm of excitement in Andi’s stomach. Crazy, but there it was. “You’ve got a twinkle, don’t you? I think you’ll be fine.”

Maybe, but as she lay here, Andi was no longer excited, only scared. News stories slipped through her mind, ones about bodies found in ditches, bodies found in wooded clearings, bodies found at the bottom of dry wells. Women and girls. Almost always women and girls. It wasn’t Rose who scared her—not exactly—and there were other women here, but there were also men.

Rose knelt beside her. The glare of the headlights should have turned her face into a harsh and ugly landscape of blacks and whites, but the opposite was true: it only made her more beautiful. Once again she caressed Andi’s cheek. “No fear,” she said. “No fear.”

She turned to one of the other women, a pallidly pretty creature Rose called Silent Sarey, and nodded. Sarey nodded back and went into Rose’s monster RV. The others, meanwhile, began to form a circle around the lawn recliner. Andi didn’t like that. There was something sacrificial about it.

“No fear. Soon you’ll be one of us, Andi. One with us.”

Unless, Rose thought, you cycle out. In which case, we’ll just burn your clothes in the incinerator behind the comfort stations and move on tomorrow. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

But she hoped that wouldn’t happen. She liked this one, and a sleeper talent would come in handy.

Sarey returned with a steel canister that looked like a thermos bottle. She handed it to Rose, who removed the red cap. Beneath was a nozzle and a valve. To Andi the canister looked like an unlabeled can of bug spray. She thought about bolting up from the recliner and running for it, then remembered the movie theater. The hands that had reached inside her head, holding her in place.

“Grampa Flick?” Rose asked. “Will you lead us?”

“Happy to.” It was the old man from the theater. Tonight he was wearing baggy pink Bermuda shorts, white socks that climbed all the way up his scrawny shins to his knees, and Jesus sandals. To Andi he looked like Grandpa Walton after two years in a concentration camp. He raised his hands, and the rest raised theirs with him. Linked that way and silhouetted in the crisscrossing headlight beams, they looked like a chain of weird paperdolls.

“We are the True Knot,” he said. The voice coming from that sunken chest no longer trembled; it was the deep and resonant voice of a much younger and stronger man.

“We are the True Knot,” they responded. “What is tied may never be untied.”

“Here is a woman,” Grampa Flick said. “Would she join us? Would she tie her life to our life and be one with us?”

“Say yes,” Rose said.

“Y-Yes,” Andi managed. Her heart was no longer beating; it was thrumming like a wire.

Rose turned the valve on her canister. There was a small, rueful sigh, and a puff of silver mist escaped. Instead of dissipating on the light evening breeze, it hung just above the canister until Rose leaned forward, pursed those fascinating coral lips, and blew gently. The puff of mist—looking a bit like a comic-strip dialogue balloon without any words in it—drifted until it hovered above Andi’s upturned face and wide eyes.

“We are the True Knot, and we endure,” Grampa Flick proclaimed.

“Sabbatha hanti,” the others responded.

The mist began to descend, very slowly.

“We are the chosen ones.”

“Lodsam hanti,” they responded.

“Breathe deep,” Rose said, and kissed Andi softly on the cheek. “I’ll see you on the other side.”

Maybe.

“We are the fortunate ones.”

“Cahanna risone hanti.”

Then, all together: “We are the True Knot, and we...”

But Andi lost track of it there. The silvery stuff settled over her face and it was cold, cold. When she inhaled, it came to some sort of tenebrous life and began screaming inside her. A child made of mist—whether boy or girl she didn’t know—was struggling to get away but someone was cutting. Rose was cutting, while the others stood close around her (in a knot), shining down a dozen flashlights, illuminating a slow-motion murder.

Andi tried to bolt up from the recliner, but she had no body to bolt with. Her body was gone. Where it had been was only pain in the shape of a human being. The pain of the child’s dying, and of her own.

Embrace it. The thought was like a cool cloth pressed on the burning wound that was her body. That’s the only way through.

I can’t, I’ve been running from this pain my whole life.

Perhaps so, but you’re all out of running room. Embrace it. Swallow it. Take steam or die.

8

The True stood with hands upraised, chanting the old words: sabbatha hanti, lodsam hanti, cahanna risone hanti. They watched as Andi Steiner’s blouse flattened where her breasts had been, as her skirt puffed shut like a closing mouth. They watched as her face turned to milk-glass. Her eyes remained, though, floating like tiny balloons on gauzy strings of nerve.

But they’re going to go, too, Walnut thought. She’s not strong enough. I thought maybe she was, but I was wrong. She may come back a time or two, but then she’ll cycle out. Nothing left but her clothes. He tried to recall his own Turning, and could only remember that the moon had been full and there had been a bonfire instead of headlights. A bonfire, the whicker of horses... and the pain. Could you actually remember pain? He didn’t think so. You knew there was such a thing, and that you had suffered it, but that wasn’t the same.

Andi’s face swam back into existence like the face of a ghost above a medium’s table. The front of her blouse plumped up in curves; her skirt swelled as her hips and thighs returned to the world. She shrieked in agony.

“We are the True Knot and we endure,” they chanted in the crisscrossing beams of the RVs. “Sabbatha hanti. We are the chosen ones, lodsam hanti. We are the fortunate ones, cahanna risone hanti.” They would go on until it was over. One way or the other, it wouldn’t take long.

Andi began to disappear again.