

On the day of the memorial service, Dennis Griffin stood on the lakeshore, under a cold gray sky, facing the water. The whine of a chainsaw echoed somewhere along the shore. The air smelled like pine, wood smoke, and the coming winter.

When the chill got to him, he went inside.

He avoided the post-funeral supper and went instead to the flagstoned entry hall where the guests had hung their coats. He searched through the pockets, stuffing any cash or items of interest he found in his own jacket pockets.

They had arrived yesterday. Dennis had watched from inside the garage as Brenna emerged from the car and embraced her mother, Meg. He'd watched intently as Brenna's little girl, Sadie, stepped out of the back seat but stayed close to the car, looking uncertain, until Meg went to her, scooped her up, and took her inside.

Now, in the front hall, he discovered a black leather purse on a hook behind a dark green coat. The subdued tones of the assembled guests' voices drifted in, but no one came to disturb him. Dennis listened and tried to make out words; he couldn't. He stuck his hand in the purse, rummaging around. He pulled out a red eel-skin wallet, unsnapped it, and found Brenna's driver's license picture staring back at him. She didn't have any cash in her wallet, just photos and credit cards. There was a Mastercard; a Chevron gas card; and a professional-looking wallet-size portrait of Brenna, her husband, Peter, and Sadie seated in a grove of trees, smiling. When Dennis could stand to look no longer, he dropped the wallet back into Brenna's purse.

He sifted through the rest of her things. There was a hairbrush, key ring, packet of Kleenex, pack of Virginia Slims, and a lighter. He spun the wheel on the lighter and it lit up; he put it in his pocket. He removed a snarled ball of hair from her brush and put that in his pocket too. At the bottom of her bag was a small silver flask. Dennis unscrewed the cap and sniffed. He smelled nothing. He took a swig just as he heard his wife calling his name. He tasted vodka.

"Dennis? . . . Dennis?"

The sound of her footsteps got louder. He dropped the flask back into the purse and slipped out the front door into the oncoming evening. He ran silently across the driveway and up the stairs to their apartment above the garage. In the bedroom, he retrieved a leather briefcase (with his initials, *DEG*, embossed on it) from under the bed, and opened it with a small key he got from his sock drawer. He took the hairball out of his pocket and dropped it into the briefcase. He locked it and placed it back under the bed.

That done, he put the key back in the drawer and went back outside, down the stairs, and along the path to the lakeshore. He sat on a log and lit up a cigarette with Brenna's lighter. The air was cold with the promise of snow.