

MEMORY

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MEMORY

by Stephen King

Memories are contrary things; if you quit chasing them and turn your back, they often return on their own. That's what Kamen says. I tell him I never chased the memory of my accident. Some things, I say, are better forgotten.

Maybe, but that doesn't matter, either. That's what Kamen says.

My name is Edgar Freemantle. I used to be a big deal in building and construction. This was in Minnesota, in my other life. I was a genuine American-boy success in that life, worked my way up like a motherfucker, and for me, everything worked out. When Minneapolis–St. Paul boomed, The Freemantle Company boomed. When things tightened up, I never tried to force things. But I played my hunches, and most of them played out well. By the time I was fifty, Pam and I were worth about forty million dollars. And what we had together still worked. I looked at other women from time to time but never strayed. At the end of our particular Golden Age, one of our girls was at Brown and the other was teaching in a foreign exchange program. Just before things went wrong, my wife and I were planning to go and visit her.

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I had an accident at a job site. That's what happened. I was in my pickup truck. The right side of my skull was crushed. My ribs were broken. My right hip was shattered. And although I retained sixty per cent of the sight in my right eye (more, on a good day), I lost almost all of my right arm.

I was supposed to lose my life, but I didn't. Then I was supposed to become one of the Vegetable Simpsons, a Coma Homer, but that didn't happen, either. I was one confused American when I came around, but the worst of that passed. By the time it did, my wife had passed, too. She's remarried to a fellow who owns bowling alleys. My older daughter likes him. My younger daughter thinks he's a yank-off. My wife says she'll come around.

Maybe *sí*, maybe *no*. That's what Kamen says.

When I say I was confused, I mean that at first I didn't know who people were, or what had happened, or why I was in such awful pain. I can't remember the quality and pitch of that pain now. I know it was excruciating, but it's all pretty academic. Like a picture of a mountain in *National Geographic* magazine. It wasn't academic at the time. At the time it was more like climbing a mountain.

Maybe the headache was the worst. It wouldn't stop. Behind my forehead it was always midnight in the world's biggest clock-shop. Because my right eye was fucked up, I was seeing the world through a film of blood, and I still hardly knew what the world was. Few things had names. I remember one day when Pam was in the room—I was still in the hospital, this was before the convalescent home—and she was standing by my bed. I knew who she was, but I was extremely pissed that she should be standing when there was the thing you sit in right over in the cornhole.

"Bring the friend," I said. "Sit in the friend."

"What do you mean, Edgar?" she asked.

"The *friend*, the *buddy*!" I shouted. "Bring over the fuck-ing *pal*, you dump bitch!" My head was killing me and she

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was starting to cry. I hated her for starting to cry. She had no business crying, because she wasn't the one in the cage, looking at everything through a red blur. She wasn't the monkey in the cage. And then it came to me. "Bring over the chum and for Christ's sake sick *down!*" It was the closest my rattled-up, fucked-up brain could come to *chair*.

I was angry all the time. There were two older nurses that I called Dry Fuck One and Dry Fuck Two, as if they were characters in a dirty Dr. Seuss story. There was a candystriper I called Pilch Lozenge—I have no idea why, but that nickname also had some sort of sexual connotation. To me, at least. As I grew stronger, I tried to hit people. Twice I tried to stab Pam, and on the first of those two occasions I succeeded, although only with a plastic knife. She still needed stitches in her forearm. I had to be tied down that day.

Here is what I remember most clearly about that part of my other life: a hot afternoon toward the end of my stay in the expensive convalescent home, the air conditioning broken, tied down in my bed, a soap opera on the television, a thousand bells ringing in my head, pain burning my right side like a poker, my missing right arm itching, my missing right fingers twitching, the morphine pump beside the bed making the hollow BONG that meant you couldn't get any more for awhile, and a nurse swims out of the red, a creature coming to look at the monkey in the cage, and the nurse says: "Are you ready to visit with your wife?" And I say: "Only if she brought a gun to shoot me with."

You don't think that kind of pain will pass, but it does. They shipped me home, the red began to drain from my vision, and Kamen showed up. Kamen's a psychologist who specializes in hypnotherapy. He showed me some neat tricks for managing phantom aches and itches in my missing arm. And he brought me Reba.

"This is not approved psychological therapy for anger management," Dr. Kamen said, although I suppose he might

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have been lying about that to make Reba more attractive. He told me I had to give her a hateful name, so I named her after an aunt who used to pinch my fingers when I was small if I didn't eat all of my vegetables. Then, less than two days after getting her, I forgot her name. I could only think of boy names, each one making me angrier: Randall, Russell, Rudolph, even River-fucking-Phoenix.

Pam came in with my lunch and I could see her steeling herself for an outburst. But even though I'd forgotten the name of the fluffy blond rage-doll, I remembered how I was supposed to use it in this situation.

"Pam," I said, "I need five minutes to get myself under control. I can do this."

"Are you sure—"

"Yes, just get that hamhock out of here and stick it up your face-powder. I can do this."

I didn't know if I could or not, but that was what I was supposed to say—I *can do this*. I couldn't remember the fucking doll's name, but I could remember *I can do this*. That is clear about the convalescent part of my other life, how I kept saying *I can do this* even when I knew I was fucked, double-fucked, I was dead-ass-fucked in the pouring rain.

"I can do this," I said, and she backed out without a word, the tray still in her hands and the cup chattering against the plate.

When she was gone, I held the doll up in front of my face, staring into its stupid blue eyes as my thumbs disappeared into its stupid yielding body. "What's your name, you bat-faced bitch?" I shouted at it. It never once occurred to me that Pam was listening on the kitchen intercom, her and the day-nurse both. But if the intercom had been broken they could have heard me through the door. I was in good voice that day.

I shook the doll back and forth. Its head flopped and its dumb hair flew. Its blue cartoon eyes seemed to be saying *Oouuu, you nasty man!*

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“What’s your name, bitch? What’s your name, you cunt? What’s your name, you cheap plastic toe-rag? Tell me your name or I’ll kill you! Tell me your name or I’ll kill you! *Tell me your name or I’ll cut out your eyes and chop off your nose and rip off your—*”

My mind cross-connected then, a thing that still happens now, four years later, although far less often. For a moment I was in my pickup truck, clipboard rattling against my old steel lunchbucket in the passenger footwell (I doubt if I was the only working millionaire in America to carry a lunchbucket, but you probably could have counted us in the dozens), my PowerBook beside me on the seat. And from the radio a woman’s voice cried “*It was RED!*” with evangelical fervor. Only three words, but three was enough. It was the song about the poor woman who turns out her pretty daughter as a prostitute. It was “Fancy,” by Reba McIntire.

I hugged the doll against me. “You’re Reba. Reba-Reba-Reba. I’ll never forget again.” I did, but I didn’t get angry next time. No. I held her against me like a little love, closed my eyes, and visualized the pickup that had been demolished in the accident. I visualized my steel lunchbucket rattling against the steel clip on my clipboard, and the woman’s voice came from the radio once more, exulting with that same evangelical fervor: “*It was RED!*”

Dr. Kamen called it a breakthrough. My wife seemed a good deal less excited, and the kiss she put on my cheek was of the dutiful variety. It was about two months later that she told me she wanted a divorce.

By then the pain had either lessened considerably or my mind had made certain crucial adjustments when it came to dealing with it. The headaches still came, but less often and rarely with the same violence. I was always more than ready for Vicodin at five and OxyContin at eight—could hardly hobble on my bright red Canadian crutch until I’d had them—but my rebuilt hip was starting to mend.

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Kathi Green the Rehab Queen came to Casa Freemantle on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. I was allowed an extra Vicodin before our sessions, and still my screams filled the house by the time we finished the leg-bends that were our grand finale. Our basement rec room had been converted into a therapy suite, complete with a hot tub I could get in and out of on my own. After two months of physical therapy—this would have been almost six months after the accident—I started to go down there on my own in the evenings. Kathi said working out a couple of hours before bed would release endorphins and I'd sleep better. I don't know about the endorphins, but I did start getting a little more sleep.

It was during one of these evening workouts that my wife of a quarter-century came downstairs and told me she wanted a divorce.

I stopped what I was doing—crunches—and looked at her. I was sitting on a floor-pad. She was standing at the foot of the stairs, prudently across the room. I could have asked her if she was serious, but the light down there was very good—those racked fluorescents—and I didn't have to. I don't think it's the sort of thing women joke about six months after their husbands have almost died in accidents, anyway. I could have asked her why, but I knew. I could see the small white scar on her arm where I had stabbed her with the plastic knife from my hospital tray, and that was really the least of it. I thought of telling her, not so long ago, to get the hammock out of here and stick it up her face-powder. I thought of asking her to think about it, but the anger came back. In those days what Dr. Kamen called the *inappropriate anger* often did. And what I was feeling right then did not seem all that inappropriate.

My shirt was off. My right arm ended three and a half inches below the shoulder. I twitched it at her—a twitch was the best I could do with the muscle that was left. "This is me," I said, "giving you the finger. Get out of here if that's how you feel. Get out, you quitting birch."

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The first tears had started rolling down her face, but she tried to smile. “Bitch, Edgar,” she said. “You mean bitch.”

“The word is what I say it is,” I said, and began to do crunches again. It’s harder than hell to do them with an arm gone; your body wants to pull and corkscrew to that side. “I wouldn’t have left *you*, that’s the point. I wouldn’t have left *you*. I would have gone on through the mud and the blood and the piss and the spilled beer.”

“It’s different,” she said. She made no effort to wipe her face. “It’s different and you know it. I couldn’t break you in two if I got into a rage.”

“I’d have a hell of a job breaking you in two with only one amp,” I said, doing crunches faster.

“You stuck me with a knife.” As if that were the point.

“A plastic fife is all it was, I was half out of my mind, and it’ll be your last words on your fucking beth-dead, ‘Eddie staffed me with a plastic fife, goodbye cruel world.’”

“You choked me,” she said in a voice I could barely hear.

I stopped doing crunches and gaped at her. “I choked you? I never choked you!”

“I know you don’t remember, but you did.”

“Shut up,” I said. “You want a divorce, you can have a divorce. Only go do the alligator somewhere else. Get out of here.”

She went up the stairs and closed the door without looking back. And it wasn’t until she was gone that I realized what I’d meant to say: crocodile tears. Go cry your crocodile tears somewhere else.

Oh, well. Close enough for rock and roll. That’s what Kamen says. And I was the one who ended up getting out.

Except for the former Pamela Gustafson, I never had a partner in my other life. I did have an accountant I trusted, however, and it was Tom Riley who helped me move the few things I needed from the house in Mendota Heights to the

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smaller place we kept on Lake Phalen, twenty miles away. Tom, who had been divorced twice, worried at me all the way out. "You don't give up the house in a situation like this," he said. "Not unless the judge kicks you out. It's like giving up home field advantage in a playoff game."

Kathi Green the Rehab Queen only had one divorce under her belt, but she and Tom were on the same wavelength. She thought I was crazy to move out. She sat cross-legged on the lakeporch in her leotard, holding my feet and looking at me with grim outrage.

"What, because you poked her with a plastic hospital knife when you could barely remember your own name? Mood-swings and short-term memory loss following accident trauma are *common*. You suffered three subdural hematomas, for God's sake!"

"Are you sure that's not hematomae?" I asked her.

"Blow me," she said. "And if you've got a good lawyer, you can make her pay for being such a wimp." Some hair had escaped from her Rehab Gestapo ponytail and she blew it back from her forehead. "She *ought* to pay for it. Read my lips, Edgar, *none of this is your fault*."

"She says I tried to choke her."

"And if so, being choked by a one-armed invalid must have been very upsetting. Come on, Eddie, make her pay. I'm sure I'm stepping way out of my place, but I don't care. She should not be doing what she's doing. Make her pay."

Not long after I relocated to the place on Lake Phalen, the girls came to see me—the young women. They brought a picnic hamper and we sat on the piney-smelling lakeporch and looked out at the water and nibbled at the sandwiches. It was past Labor Day by then, most of the floating toys put away for another year. There was also a bottle of wine in the hamper, but I only drank a little. On top of the pain medication, alcohol hit me hard; a single glass could turn me into a slurring drunk. The

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girls—the *young women*—finished the rest between them, and it loosened them up. Melissa, back from France for the second time since my unfortunate argument with the crane and not happy about it, asked me if all adults in their fifties had these unpleasant regressive interludes, did she have that to look forward to. Ilse, the younger, began to cry, leaned against me, and asked why it couldn't be like it was, why couldn't we—meaning her mother and me—be like *we* were.

Lissa's temper and Ilse's tears weren't exactly pleasant, but at least they were honest, and I recognized both reactions from all the years the girls had spent growing up in the house where I lived with them; those responses were as familiar to me as the mole on Ilse's chin or the faint vertical frown-line, which in time would deepen into a groove like her mother's, between Lissa's eyes.

Lissa wanted to know what I was going to do. I told her I didn't know, and in a way that was true. I'd come a long distance toward deciding to end my own life, but I knew that if I did it, it must absolutely look like an accident. I would not leave these two, just starting out in their lives with nothing but fresh tickets on their belts, carrying the residual guilt of their father's suicide. Nor would I leave a load of guilt behind for the woman with whom I had once shared a milkshake in bed, both of us naked and laughing and listening to the Plastic Ono Band on the stereo.

After they'd had a chance to vent—after a *full and complete exchange of feelings*, in Kamen-speak—things calmed down, and my memory is that we actually had a pleasant afternoon, looking at old photo albums Ilse found in a drawer and reminiscing about the past. I think we even laughed a time or two, but not all memories of my other life are to be trusted. Kamen says when it comes to the past, we all stack the deck.

Maybe *sí*, maybe *no*.



Speaking of Kamen, he was my next visitor at Casa Phalen. Three days later, this would have been. Or maybe six. Like many other aspects of my memory during those post-accident months, my time-sense was pretty much *hors de fucky*. I didn't invite him; I had my rehabilitation dominatrix to thank for that.

Although surely no more than forty, Xander Kamen walked like a much older man and wheezed even when he sat, peering at the world through thick glasses and over an enormous pear of a belly. He was very tall and very Afro-American, with features carved so large they seemed unreal. Those great staring eyeballs, that ship's figurehead of a nose, and those totemic lips were awe-inspiring. Kamen looked like a minor god in a suit from Men's Wearhouse. He also looked like a prime candidate for a fatal heart attack or stroke before his fiftieth birthday.

He refused my offer of coffee or a Coke, said he couldn't stay, then put his briefcase aside on the couch as if to contradict that. He sat sunk full fathom five beside the couch's armrest (and going deeper all the time—I feared for the thing's springs), looking at me and wheezing benignly.

"What brings you out this way?" I asked him.

"Oh, Kathi tells me you're planning to off yourself," he said. It was the tone he might have used to say *Kathi tells me you're having a lawn party and there are fresh Krispy Kremes on offer*. "Any truth to that?"

I opened my mouth, then closed it again. Once, when I was ten and growing up in Eau Claire, I took a comic book from a drugstore spin-around, put it down the front of my jeans, then dropped my tee-shirt over it. As I was strolling out the door, feeling clever, a clerk grabbed me by the arm. She lifted my shirt with her other hand and exposed my ill-gotten treasure. "How did *that* get there?" she asked me. Not in the forty years since had I been so completely stuck for an answer to a simple question.

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Finally—long after such a response could have any weight—I said, “That’s ridiculous. I don’t know where she could have gotten such an idea.”

“No?”

“No. Sure you don’t want a Coke?”

“Thanks, but I’ll pass.”

I got up and got a Coke from the kitchen fridge. I tucked the bottle firmly between my stump and my chest-wall—possible but painful, I don’t know what you may have seen in the movies, but broken ribs hurt for a long time—and spun off the cap with my left hand. I’m a southpaw. Caught a break there, *muchacho*, as Kamen says.

“I’m surprised you’d take her seriously in any case,” I said as I came back in. “Kathi’s a hell of a physical therapist, but a headshrinker she’s not.” I paused before sitting down. “Neither are you, actually. In the technical sense.”

Kamen cupped one hand behind an ear that looked roughly the size of a desk drawer. “Do I hear . . . a ratcheting noise? I believe I do!”

“What are you talking about?”

“It’s the charmingly medieval sound a person’s defenses make when they go up.” He tried an ironic wink, but the size of the man’s face made irony impossible; he could only manage burlesque. Still, I took the point. “As for Kathi Green, you’re right, what does she know? All she does is work with paraplegics, quadriplegics, accident-related amps like you, and people recovering from traumatic head injuries—again, like you. For fifteen years Kathi Green’s done this work, she’s had the opportunity to watch a thousand maimed patients reflect on how not even a single second of time can ever be called back, so how could she *possibly* recognize the signs of pre-suicidal depression?”

I sat down in the lumpy easy chair across from the couch, listing to the left as I did it to favor my bad hip, and stared at him sullenly. Here was trouble. No matter how carefully I

crafted my suicide, here was trouble. And Kathi Green was more.

He leaned forward . . . but, given his girth, a few inches was all he could manage. "You have to wait," he said.

I gaped at him. It was the last thing I had expected.

He nodded. "You're surprised. Yes. But I'm not a Christian, let alone a Catholic, and on the subject of suicide my mind is quite open. Yet I'm a believer in responsibilities, and I tell you this: if you kill yourself now . . . or even six months from now . . . your wife and daughters will know. No matter how cleverly you do it, they'll know."

"I don't—"

"And the company that insures your life—for a very large sum, I have no doubt—they'll know, too. They may not be able to prove it . . . but they will try very, very hard. The rumors they start will hurt your children, no matter how well-armored against such things you may think they are."

Melissa was well-armored. Ilse, however, was a different story.

"And in the end, they may prove it." He shrugged his enormous shoulders. "How much of a death-duty that would mean I wouldn't venture to guess, but I know it might erase a great deal of your life's treasure."

I wasn't even thinking about the money. I was thinking about a team of insurance investigators sniffing around whatever I set up, trying to overturn it. And all at once I began to laugh.

Kamen sat with his huge dark hands on his doorstep knees, looking at me with his little *I've-seen-everything* smile. Except on his face nothing was little. He let my laughter run its course and when it had, he asked me what was so funny.

"You're telling me I'm too rich to kill myself," I said.

"I'm telling you to give it time. I have a very strong intuition in your case—the same sort of intuition that caused me to give you the doll you named . . . what did you name her?"

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For a second I couldn't remember. Then I thought, *It was RED!*, and told him what I had named my fluffy blond anger-doll.

He nodded. "Yes. The same sort of intuition that caused me to give you Reba. My intuition is that in your case, time may soothe you. Time and memory."

I didn't tell him I remembered everything I wanted to. He knew my position on that. "How much time are we talking about, Kamen?"

He sighed as a man does before saying something he may regret. "At least a year." He studied my face. "It seems a very long time to you. The way you are now."

"Yes," I said. "Time's different for me now."

"Of course it is," he said. "Pain-time is different. Alone-time is different. Put them together and you have something very different. So pretend you're an alcoholic and do it as they do."

"A day at a time."

He nodded. "A day at a time."

"Kamen, you are so full of bullshit."

He looked at me from the depths of the old couch, not smiling. He'd never get out of there without help.

"Maybe *sí*, maybe *no*," he said. "In the meantime . . . Edgar, does anything make you happy?"

"I don't know . . . I used to sketch."

"When?"

I realized I hadn't done more than doodle while taking telephone calls since an art class for extra credit in high school. I considered lying about this—I was ashamed to seem like such a fixated drudge—and then told the truth. One-armed men should tell the truth whenever possible. Kamen doesn't say that; I do.

"Take it up again," Kamen said. "You need hedges."

"Hedges," I said, bemused.

"Yes, Edgar." He looked surprised and a little disap-

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pointed, as if I had failed to understand a very simple concept. "Hedges against the night."

It might have been a week after Kamen's visit that Tom Riley came to see me. The leaves had started to turn color, and I remember the clerks putting up Halloween posters in the Wal-Mart where I bought sketchpads and various drawing implements a few days before my former accountant's visit; that's the best I can do.

What I remember most clearly about that visit is how embarrassed and ill-at-ease Tom seemed. He was on an errand he didn't want to run.

I offered him a Coke and he took me up on it. When I came back from the kitchen, he was looking at a pen-and-ink I'd done—three palm trees silhouetted against an expanse of water, a bit of tiled roof jutting into the left foreground. "This is pretty good," he said. "You do this?"

"Nah, the elves," I said. "They come in the night. Cobble my shoes and draw the occasional picture."

He laughed too hard and set the picture back down on the desk. "Don't look much like Minnesota, dere," he said, doing a Swedish accent.

"I copied it out of a book," I said. "What can I do for you, Tom? If it's about the business—"

"Actually, Pam asked me to come out." He ducked his head. "I didn't much want to, but I didn't feel I could say no."

"Tom," I said, "go on and spit it out. I'm not going to bite you."

"She's got herself a lawyer. She's going ahead with this divorce business."

"I never thought she wouldn't." It was the truth. I still didn't remember choking her, but I remembered the look in her eyes when she told me I had. I remembered telling her she was a quitting birch and feeling that if she dropped dead at that moment, right there at the foot of the cellar

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stairs, that would be all right with me. Fine, in fact. And setting aside how I'd felt then, once Pam started down a road, she rarely turned around.

"She wants to know if you're going to be using Bozie."

I had to smile at that. William Bozeman III was the wheel-dog of the Minneapolis law-firm the company used, and if he knew Tom and I had been calling him Bozie for the last twenty years, he would probably have a hemorrhage.

"I hadn't thought about it. What's the deal, Tom? What exactly does she want?"

He drank off half his Coke, put the glass on a bookshelf beside my half-assed sketch, and looked at his shoes. "She said she hopes it doesn't have to be mean. She said, 'I don't want to be rich, and I don't want a fight. I just want him to be fair to me and the girls, the way he always was, will you tell him that?' So I am." He shrugged, still looking down at his shoes.

I got up, went to the big window between the living room and the porch, and looked out at the lake. When I turned back, Tom Riley didn't look himself at all. At first I thought he was sick to his stomach. Then I realized he was struggling not to cry.

"Tom, what's the matter?" I asked.

He shook his head, tried to speak, and produced only a watery croak. He cleared his throat and tried again. "Boss, I can't get used to seeing you with just the one arm. I'm so sorry."

It was artless, unrehearsed, and sweet. A straight shot to the heart, in other words. I think there was a moment when we were both close to bawling, like a couple of Sensitive Guys on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. All we needed was Dr. Phil, nodding avuncular approval.

"I'm sorry, too," I said, "but I'm getting along. Really. And I'm going to give you an offer to take back to her. If she likes the shape of it, we can hammer out the details. No lawyers needed. Do-it-yourself deal."

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“Are you serious, Eddie?”

“I am. You do a comprehensive accounting so we have a bottom-line figure to work with. Nothing hidden. Then we divide the swag into four shares. She takes three—seventy-five per cent—for her and the girls. I take the rest. The divorce itself . . . hey, Minnesota’s a no-fault state, she and I can go to lunch and then buy *Divorce for Dummies* at Borders.”

He looked dazed. “Is there such a book?”

“I haven’t researched it, but if there isn’t, I’ll eat your shirts.”

“I think the saying’s ‘eat my shorts.’”

“Isn’t that what I said?”

“Never mind. Eddie, that kind of deal is going to trash the estate.”

“Ask me if I give a shit. Or a shirt, for that matter. All I’m proposing is that we dispense with the ego that usually allows the lawyers to swallow the cream. There’s plenty for all of us, if we’re reasonable.”

He drank some of his Coke, never taking his eyes off me. “Sometimes I wonder if you’re the same man I used to work for,” he said.

“That man died in his pickup truck,” I said.

If you’ve been picturing my convalescent retreat as a lakeside cottage standing in splendid isolation at the end of a lonely dirt road in the north woods, you better think again—this is suburban St. Paul we’re talking about. Our place by the lake stands at the end of Aster Lane, a paved street running from East Hoyt Avenue to the water. In the middle of October I finally took Kathi Green’s advice and began walking. They were only short outings up to East Hoyt Avenue, but I always came back with my bad hip crying for mercy and often with tears standing in my eyes. Yet I also almost always came back feeling like a conquering hero—I’d be a liar if I didn’t admit it. I was returning from one of these walks when Mrs.

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Fevereau hit Gandalf, the pleasant Jack Russell terrier who belonged to the little girl next door.

I was three-quarters of the way home when the Fevereau woman went past me in her ridiculous mustard-colored Hummer. As always, she had her cell phone in one hand and a cigarette in the other; as always she was going too fast. I barely noticed, and I certainly didn't see Gandalf dash into the street up ahead, concentrating only on Monica Goldstein, coming down the other side of the street in full Girl Scout uniform. I was concentrating on my reconstructed hip. As always near the end of these short strolls, this so-called medical marvel felt packed with roughly ten thousand tiny points of broken glass. My clearest memory before the scream of the Hummer's tires was thinking that the Mrs. Fevereaus of the world now lived in a different universe than the one I inhabited, one where all sensations were turned down to half-strength.

Then the tires yowled, and a little girl's scream joined them: "GANDALF, NO!" For a moment I had a clear and unearthly vision of the crane that had almost killed me filling the right window of my pickup truck, the world I'd always lived in suddenly eaten up by a yellow much brighter than Mrs. Fevereau's Hummer, and black letters floating in it, swelling, getting larger.

Then Gandalf began to scream, too, and the flashback—what Dr. Kamen would no doubt have called *a recovered memory*—was gone. Until that afternoon in October four years ago, I hadn't known dogs *could* scream.

I broke into a lurching, crabwise run, pounding the sidewalk with my red crutch. I'm sure it would have appeared ludicrous to an onlooker, but no one was paying any attention to me. Monica Goldstein was kneeling in the middle of the street beside her dog, which lay in front of the Hummer's high, boxy grille. Her face was white above her forest-green uniform, from which a sash of badges and medals hung. The

end of this sash was soaking in a spreading pool of Gandalf's blood. Mrs. Fevereau half-jumped and half-fell from the Hummer's ridiculously high driver's seat. Ava Goldstein came running from the front door of the Goldstein house, crying her daughter's name. Mrs. Goldstein's blouse was half-buttoned and her feet were bare.

"Don't touch him, honey, don't touch him," Mrs. Fevereau said. She was still holding her cigarette and she puffed nervously at it. "He could bite."

Monica paid no attention. She touched Gandalf's side. The dog screamed again when she did—it *was* a scream—and Monica covered her eyes with the heels of her hands. She began to shake her head. I didn't blame her.

Mrs. Fevereau reached out for the girl, then changed her mind. She took two steps back, leaned against the high side of her ridiculous yellow mode of transport, and looked up at the sky.

Mrs. Goldstein knelt beside her daughter. "Honey, oh honey please don't . . ."

Gandalf began to howl. He lay in the street, in a pool of his spreading blood, howling. And now I could also remember the sound the crane had made. Not the *meep-meep-meep* it was supposed to make, because its backup warning had been broken, but the juddering stutter of its diesel engine and the sound of its treads eating up the earth.

"Get her inside, Ava," I said. "Get her in the house."

Mrs. Goldstein got her arm around her daughter's shoulders and urged her up. "Come on, honey. Come inside."

"Not without *Gandalf!*" Monica screamed. She was eleven, and mature for her age, but in those moments she had regressed to three. "Not without my *doggy!*" Her sash, the last three inches now sodden with blood, thwapped the side of her skirt and a long line of blood spattered down her calf.

"Go in and call the vet," I told her. "Say Gandalf's been hit by a car. Say he has to come right away. I'll stay with him."

MEMORY

Monica looked at me with eyes that were more than shocked. They were crazy. I had no trouble holding her gaze, though; I'd seen it often enough in my own mirror. "Do you promise? Big swear? Mother's name?"

"Big swear, mother's name," I said. "Go on, Monica."

She went, casting one more look back and uttering one more bereft wail before starting up the steps to her house. I knelt beside Gandalf, holding onto the Hummer's fender and going down as I always did, painfully and listing severely to the left, trying to keep my right knee from bending any more than it absolutely had to. Still, I voiced my own little cry of pain, and I wondered if I'd be able to get up again without help. It might not be forthcoming from Mrs. Fevereau; she walked over to the lefthand side of the street with her legs stiff and wide apart, then bent at the waist as if bowing to royalty, and vomited in the gutter. She held the hand with the cigarette in it off to one side as she did it.

I turned my attention to Gandalf. He had been struck in the hindquarters. His spine was crushed. Blood and shit oozed sluggishly from between his broken rear legs. His eyes turned up to me and in them I saw a horrible expression of hope. His tongue crept out and licked my inner left wrist. His tongue was dry as carpet, and cold. Gandalf was going to die, but maybe not soon enough. Monica would come out again soon, and I didn't want him alive to lick her wrist when she did.

I understood what I had to do. There was no one to see me do it. Monica and her mother were inside. Mrs. Fevereau's back was still turned. If others on this little stub of a street had come to their windows (or out on their lawns), the Hummer blocked their view of me sitting beside the dog with my bad right leg awkwardly outstretched. I had a few moments, but only a few, and if I stopped to consider, my chance would be lost.

So I took Gandalf's upper body in my good arm and

STEPHEN KING

without a pause I'm back at the Sutton Avenue site, where The Freemantle Company is getting ready to build a forty-story bank building. I'm in my pickup truck. Pat Green's on the radio, singing "Wave on Wave." I suddenly realize the crane's too loud even though I haven't heard any backup beeper and when I look to my right the world in that window is gone. The world on that side has been replaced by yellow. Black letters float there: **LINK-BELT**. They're swelling. I spin the Ram's wheel to the left, all the way to the stop, knowing I'm already too late as the scream of crumpling metal starts, drowning out the song on the radio and shrinking the inside of the cab right to left because the crane's invading my space, *stealing* my space, and the pickup is tipping. I'm trying for the driver's side door but it's no good. I should have done that right away but it got too late real early. The world in front of me disappears as the windshield turns to milk shot through with a million cracks. Then the building site is back, still turning on a hinge as the windshield pops out, *flies* out bent in the middle like a playing-card, and I'm laying on the horn with the points of both elbows, my right arm doing its last job. I can barely hear the horn over the crane's engine. **LINK-BELT** is still moving in, pushing the passenger-side door, closing the passenger-side footwell, eating up the dashboard, splintering it in jagged hunks of plastic. The shit from the glove-compartment floats around like confetti, the radio goes dead, my lunchbucket is tanging against my clipboard, and here comes **LINK-BELT**. **LINK-BELT** is right on top of me, I could stick out my tongue and lick that fucking hyphen. I start screaming because that's when the pressure starts. The pressure is my right arm first pushing against my side, then spreading, then splitting open. Blood douses my lap like a bucket of hot water and I hear something breaking. Probably my ribs. It sounds like chickenbones under a bootheel.

MEMORY

I held Gandalf against me and thought *Bring the friend, sit in the friend, sit in the fucking PAL, you dump bitch!*

Now I'm in sitting in the chum, sitting in the fucking *pal*, it's at home but all the clocks of the world are still ringing inside my cracked head and I can't remember the name of the doll Kamen gave me, all I can remember are boy names: Randall, Russell, Rudolph, even River-fucking-Phoenix. I tell her to leave me alone when she comes in with the lunch I don't want, to give me five minutes to get myself under control. *I can do this*, I say, because it's the phrase Kamen has given me, it's the out, it's the *meep-meep-meep* that says watch out, Pamela, I'm backing up. But instead of leaving she takes the napkin from the lunch tray to wipe the sweat off my forehead and while she's doing that I grab her by the throat because in that moment it seems to me it's her fault I can't remember my doll's name, *everything* is her fault, including LINK-BELT. I grab her with my good left hand, caught a break there, *muchacho*. For a few seconds I want to kill her, and who knows, maybe I almost do. What I do know is I'd rather remember all the accidents in the world than the look in her eyes as she struggles in my grip like a fish stuck on a gaff. Then I think *It was RED!* and let her go.

I held Gandalf against my chest as I once held my infant daughters and thought, *I can do this. I can do this. I can do this*. I felt Gandalf's blood soak through my pants like hot water and thought, *Go on, you sad fuck, get out of Dodge*.

I held Gandalf and thought of how it felt to be crushed alive as the cab of your truck ate the air around you and the breath left your body and the blood blew out of your nose and mouth and those snapping sounds as consciousness fled, those were the bones breaking inside your own body: your ribs, your arm, your hip, your leg, your cheek, your fucking skull.

I held Monica's dog and thought, in a kind of miserable triumph: *It was RED!*

For a moment I was in a darkness shot with that red, and I held Gandalf's neck in the crook of my left arm, which was now doing the work of two and very strong. I flexed that arm as hard as I could, flexed the way I did when I was doing my curls with the ten-pound weight. Then I opened my eyes. Gandalf was silent, staring past my face and past the sky beyond.

"Edgar?" It was Hastings, the old guy who lived two houses up from the Goldsteins. There was an expression of dismay on his face. "You can let go now. That dog is dead."

"Yes," I said, relaxing my grip on Gandalf. "Would you help me get up?"

"I'm not sure I can," Hastings said. "I'd be more apt to pull us both down."

"Then go in and see the Goldsteins," I said.

"It is her dog," he said. "I wasn't sure. I was hoping . . ." He shook his head.

"It's hers. And I don't want her to see him like this."

"Of course not, but—"

"I'll help him," Mrs. Fevereau said. She looked a little better, and she had ditched the cigarette. She reached for my right armpit, then hesitated. "Will that hurt you?"

It would, but less than staying the way I was. As Hastings went up the Goldsteins' walk, I took hold of the Hummer's bumper. Together we managed to get me on my feet.

"I don't supposed you've got anything to cover the dog with?" I asked.

"As a matter of fact, there's a rug remnant in the back." She started around to the rear—it would be a long trek, given the Hummer's size—then turned back. "Thank God it died before the little girl got back."

"Yes," I said. "Thank God."

"Still—she'll never forget it, will she?"

MEMORY

“Well,” I said, “you’re asking the wrong person about that, Mrs. Fevereau. I’m just a retired general contractor.” But when I asked Kamen, he was surprisingly optimistic. He says it’s the bad memories that wear thin first. Then, he says, they tear open and let the light through. I told him he was full of shit and he just laughed.

Maybe *sí*, he says. Maybe *no*.

