

Chapter 42

The Night That Brought Everything Back

Zoe

I know it's raining outside. Strange, because I don't see outside the window, and I hear no raindrops. But I know it is. Essie is here with me, asleep, thank God. Should his pain surface again, along with everything from his past, I'm not sure what to do. Do we make him forget again? If one endures a year, twenty years, a hundred years of pain, is it meaningless, is it mere vapor, once it goes away? I believe it does change a person, either in a good way or in a bad way. Perhaps it is up to that person to figure out which.

My mother believes painful memories, all memories, have value. Most believe music has value, yet it is ephemeral. Is it? Music stays with a person and has the power to change. But only if we recall it. So perhaps with pain, for it to have value, for one to give it value, and not waste it, one must recall it. I know my memories of pain are very well hidden. Yet, I'm able to recall and make use of them when I wish.

Why do I love him? Even before this trip, he hid his trauma, his own pain. He suffered over several years and hid it, and it made him cynical and depressed. On some level, he must have known his trips to the Irish Wilderness were attempts to lose himself, lose his memory, even to self-harm, all to somehow stop his pain. He wanted to torture himself, even die, because of what he hid from himself. Yet, strangely, that pain also made him more gentle, more empathetic. That's why I love him, because his pain made him kinder, and with other men, it turns them into cruel creatures.

Essie

That night I couldn't sleep. I turned over and looked at her. How can a man who's lost everything, somehow, after so many years, suddenly have everything? She heals me, she makes me whole again. It shouldn't be possible.

I left Zoe in the bed and sneaked out, passed the front door, and strolled through the yard. A storm had come through, clearing the night sky and chilling the air. Looking up to the sky that night, with no moon, the stars were brighter than ever, like a bucket of diamonds scattered across black velvet. They sparkled, and glistened, and they reached into my mind and revealed memories I didn't know existed. I saw a shadow glide silently through the air and land on a nearby tree branch. I squinted and saw that it was a little owl. It was a beautiful, magical creature, and as it examined me I kept an eye on it. I felt someone's arm wrap around mine. I turned my head and Zoe smiled. We both looked up at the stars. And, despite the pain that it would cause, my memory of that trip, and what happened to me, returned.