

‘Queenie?’

‘Yeah, what now?’

‘I thought I heard your voice. It sounded like you were yelling.’

‘So?’

‘I came here to see if you were all right.’

‘Of course I’m not all right. I’m never all right. I keep telling you.’

‘Why? What’s wrong?’

‘Well for one thing, why is this place always so goddam warm and boring?’

‘Most people love the climate in Southern California, Queenie. That’s why people retire here. Have you taken your medication?’

‘*That’s* all you can think of? “Have you taken your medication?” That’s not what’s wrong. Where’s the damn forest? Why does it never snow? I want the bite of bracing dry air. I never even see my breath mist in this goddam dump. Where are the wolves? Why don’t I hear them howling at night? Where are the bears? I want to go hunting. All I can see out the window is frigging lawn and water sprinklers and mowing machines and weeding and people shaking chemical fertiliser about. What’s the problem with you people? Do you worship grass? What’s happened to your goddam souls?’

‘OK, you definitely haven’t had your medication.’

‘I won’t take that stuff – it’s killing me.’

‘No, Queenie. It calms you down, and that helps you to live longer.’

‘You call this life? Fuck you – all of you. That stuff kills me inside so I don’t feel anything at all – not a goddam thing! I could scream. Maybe I *will* scream.’

‘Queenie, stop it! Or do I have to call for help? Is that what you want?’

She takes a deep breath, holds it, and lets it out slowly.

‘No. Ah, Jeez!’

She submits meekly to the injection: experience has taught her that it’s useless to struggle. Darkness enfolds her. Bleak darkness without the comforting dreams of snow and power. When her eyes open and the room comes into focus, the day is even brighter and the heat still more overpowering. There is a tapping at the door again.