

# Wild Night

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**"Wild Night"**

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Wild Night

Jennifer Crusie and Bob Mayer

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Glenda Wayne sat on a bench on the midway of Dreamland Amusement Park and thought, *I don't belong here.*

People strolled down the parkway in the brightly lit night, clutching snocones and taffy and french fries in paper cups, amusement park food, holding onto teddy bears and balloons and canes, amusement park trophies, and they acted like they knew the place because they'd been there before, probably dozens of times before, but they didn't know it. There was another life behind the scenes, a darker life she was pretty sure, and even marrying the guy who owned the park and moving into his trailer behind the Dragon Coaster hadn't given her access. She was as much an outsider as anybody walking around in a Dreamland T-shirt, and right now, she realized, she was pretty pissed about that.

She didn't know where Tom was. He'd been with her, and she'd been trying to find out what was wrong, and he'd said, "stay here," and he was gone, and she was left holding his beer, saying, "wait a damn minute," while he went to do . . . something. Something with Gus who'd left the Dragon Coaster to his high school kid assistant, something with Delpha who'd put a "Back Soon" sign on her psychic tent and disappeared, something with Fred who was late to do

his comic bit in the restaurant in the Keep, something to do with Petra who had turned the Dream Cream over to her assistant, something to do with goddamn everybody but *her*—

“Glenda Palmer?”

Glenda looked up and saw Alison Brannigan looking at her with disapproval, her brown eyes sharp under her yanked-back red hair. Alison had been looking at her with disapproval since the first day of kindergarten fourteen years ago. One of the best things about graduating from high school four months before had been never seeing Alison’s pruned-up face again or listen to her repeat her mother’s nutso warnings about Dreamland.

“Glenda *Wayne*,” the tall, thin guy with her said reprovingly, as if calling her by her maiden name was a crime. “A woman gets married, she becomes her husband’s.”

“Her husband’s what?” Glenda said, annoyed.

“Property,” the guy said, and Alison nodded.

“David’s right. I should have said Glenda Wayne.” Alison smiled, lifting her chin. “This is David Hockstetter, Glenda. He’s at the *seminary*. My mother told him about the park, so he’s come to see for himself.” *And brought me*, her expression said. *I have a date. With a seminarian.*

David nodded, every hair on his head in place and staying there.

“Fabulous,” Glenda said.

Alison looked around the midway at all the laughing people, most of them adults and most of them drunk since it was nearing midnight. She shook her head. "I do not understand how you can profit from this den of sin."

"We make people pay before they come through the gate," Glenda said. "So I understand why David's here, but what are you doing in this den of sin?"

"I've never been before," Alison said, and Glenda thought, *of course you haven't, that wingnut of a mother wouldn't let you come.*

"But I told her, I'd be right here with her," David said, putting his arm around Alison. "There is no sin if you have a righteous heart and a strong man to protect you."

"I never thought of Alison as needing anybody to protect her," Glenda told him. "I've known Alison a long time, and she can kick ass when she needs to, I've seen her do it."

"There's no need to be crude," Alison said, but her mouth quirked a little, as if she liked the idea of being somebody who kicked ass.

"She's a lady," David said pointedly.

Glenda ignored him. "So you're not buying your mom's idea there are demons here, I guess," she said to Alison.

"The devil is here, that's for sure," David said.

"The devil's in every one of us," Alison said, the quirk gone from her mouth.

*The devil was in me a couple of hours ago,* Glenda thought, remembering rolling hot in the dark with her insatiable husband. Twice. But the second time,

something was wrong at the end, and now Tom wouldn't talk about it, and she was pretty sure whatever had happened was why he was out there somewhere—

“You should have Bible verses posted,” David said. “To alert people to sin.”

“You could put them on the cups,” Alison said helpfully, and Glenda thought, *Yeah, people love Bible verses with their cheap beer.*

“I'd be pleased to come by and preach of an evening,” David said.

“I'll mention that to my husband,” Glenda told him, intending to do it just to hear Tom's booming laugh. “You two go have a good time now. Ride the Dragon Coaster, there's no sin in that, and it's a really wild ride.”

“Dragon Coaster?” Alison said, looking both timid and interested.

“I'll have my arm around you the whole time,” David promised her, keeping it right where it was, draped across her shoulders.

“Well, I don't know,” Alison said, but she walked down the midway with him just the same.

“I don't know, either,” Glenda said, and looked around again. The “Back Soon” sign was still on the psychic tent, the dock was still empty, and Tom was nowhere to be seen. “Be right back, my ass,” Glenda said and sat down to wait.

She'd have gone to find him if she'd had any idea of where he was. She'd have gone to help him if she'd had any idea of what he needed. She was

going to kick his ass once he got back to her because this was no way to treat a bride of four months.

But until then, she was going to have to wait right there for him, holding his damn beer.

She sat down on the bench and looked at the trashcan across the way, topped with the head of the park's clown mascot, FunFun.

"Welcome to Dreamland," she said to the clown and drank some of Tom's beer.

#

Tom paused at the iron railings and jerked one of the long, pointed metal pickets back, then to the side. It came free and he hefted the spear, searching the darkness. The damn orange cellophane Glenda had insisted on putting over all the lamps were a nice touch for Halloween, his bride was a smart little gal, but it made searching the park a lot more difficult. At least the park was starting to empty now, getting all the civilians out of the danger. Almost all, he reminded himself, now that Glenda was living in his trailer.

He reached into his shoulder pack and pulled out a foot-long metal tube. He pulled one end off and slid it on the bottom. Aiming for a spot high above the Keep, he slammed the base and the flare shot out of the tube, arcing up high, then popping, bathing Dreamland in a sputtering white glow.

In the sudden illumination, he spotted someone heading toward him from the direction of the Demon Drop and he wheeled, spear at the ready. He didn't relax when he recognized Petra, thin and deathly pale in the orange light, because, damn it, if a demon had been able to take him while he was making love to Glenda, well, then no one was safe.

"Have you seen that devil Kharos?" he called out to Petra.

"Yes," Petra said. "I'm the one who let him out."

Tom lunged at her on instinct, stopping with the spear point just an inch from her throat. "You *what*?"

"I am sorry. I thought—" she shook her head, eyes glistening in her sickly face. "Do it." She pressed her neck onto the point.

"Are the others out? Selvans? Vanth? The mermaid and the clown?"

Petra shook her head. "I don't know. I only freed Kharos."

Tom pulled back the spear and stepped closer to her. "*Why*?"

"He promised me life. I'm dying, Tom. And I'm not ready to go."

Tom could see it now in her eyes, in the dying flickers of the flare—the despair, the sickness. She was the Sorceress and she'd been able to hide it well, but it was clear now. Her end must be near.

"Where's his chalice?"

Petra held up the wooden cup in one hand, the lid in the other. Tom heard people running and wheeled, lifting the spear, stopping only when he saw Fred and Delpha speeding toward them holding iron picket-spears, too.

"Which demons are out?" Delpha demanded.

“Kharos, at least.” Tom gestured with the spear toward the tresses and struts of the Dragon Coaster as the thousands of bulbs that lined the ride came alive, meaning Gus was back on the job “Okay, we’re going to link up with Gus. He’s doing the midnight run to get the demon count now. Then we’ll hunt them down. In other words, a normal Halloween in Dreamland.” He smiled at all of them—*See, I’m not worried*—and turned to Petra. “Are you with us?”

Petra nodded, swallowing hard. “I’ve got nothing to lose now.”

Fred came running up, Delpha close behind him, and Tom said, “Follow me.” He ran toward the Dragon, the others behind him. He heard the rattle as the Coaster began its midnight run and spotted Jimmy Ferriswheel heading toward the beer pavilion. Jimmy gave a friendly wave, then noted the spears. “Careful with those,” he called out as they ran past, and Tom stopped in his tracks, caught by how uncharacteristically cheerful Jimmy was

“Good luck with that!” Jimmy said, picking up speed.

“Fuflungs,” Tom said to Fred, and Fred flung out his hand and said, “*Specto!*”

Jimmy began to shiver and then collapsed to the pavement. Standing over him was a half-man, half-goat, rolling his golden eyes in exasperation but still laughing, Fuflungs, the happiest of the five demons imprisoned at Dreamland.

Formerly imprisoned.

Tom leveled the spear at the demon. “Fred, get his damn chalice from the statue. Fast.”

“Hey, am I running?” Fufuns smiled and spread his arms in a gesture of innocence. “I think we should talk about this.”

Delpha took a step toward him as Fred raced off around the moat.

“We can work together,” Fufuns said. “Against Kharos. I can tell you--”

Delpha put her hands up and said, “*Specto!*” and froze the demon in place.

Fufun’s smile turned into a grimace as the demon strained to move, and Tom put the tip of the spear right where the thing’s heart should be, if it had one. He couldn’t kill an Untouchable Demon, but he could make him scream in pain if he shoved iron into him, and the look in Fufuns’ eyes told him the demon knew it.

Fred came sprinting up, a wooden chalice in his hands.

Tom lowered the spear and stepped next to the demon, chests almost touching. “*Capio!*” he said, and Fufuns’ form wavered, and then became a golden fog.

As if taking a deep breath with his heart, Tom drew the fog into his chest. He was filled with unimaginable joy for a moment--Fufuns, the happiest of demons--not caring about anything any more except Glenda, he should go to Glenda, Glenda was where happiness was, and then Petra put a hand on his shoulder and said, “*Redimio,*” and the gold flowed out of Tom and into the chalice, and he was the Hunter again.

Fred slapped the top on; looking worried as Fufuns strained from within to knock the lid off. “We need the Keeper *now* or else—“

Gus came running toward them from the direction of the Dragon Coaster with a chalice in his hands. He skidded to a halt, saw the chalice in Fred's hand and called out "Servo!" and Fufuns was sealed.

Tom felt a moment's relief, then Gus grabbed him. "Selvans is out. He's got one of the Ferriswheel boys."

A large teenager lumbered toward them, a four-by-four wooden beam in his hands, Carl Ferriswheel to look at him, but Tom knew Selvans had possessed him.

Tom looked at the four Guardia surrounding him. "Take him."

Gus grabbed his arm. "Kharos and Vanth are on the midway. You know they're going to grab a couple and go in the Tunnel of Love. And Tura's probably hunting for a cheater to kill there, too."

"We'll get them next," Tom said. "But first we get the guy we know."

"*Frustro!*" Fred yelled at Selvans, and Carl Ferriswheel fell to the ground unconscious as the giant orange demon who'd possessed him rose out of him, roared, and charged swinging his fist at Petra who screamed, "*Specto!*" and then fell under a blow that cracked her skull.

Selvans froze, immobilized by Petra's last word, and the rest of the Guardia sprang into action, sealing him in his chalice.

"Three more," Delpha said, looking at the body of their sorceress.

Gus looked sick as he stood over Petra. "How the hell did they get out? Whoever set them free has a death on his hands, and I want to avenge it."

"It's avenged," Delpha the Seer said and turned and walked away.

“Put her in the control booth for the Dragon,” Tom told Gus and Fred.  
“Then get to the Tunnel. We’re going after Kharos next.”

Then he turned and walked back up the midway to the most dangerous of the demons, somewhere out there in the night.

And somewhere out there, Glenda was waiting for him.

*Fuck*, he thought, and began to run.

#

Glenda was still contemplating divorce, or at least a night on the Airstream’s couch for Tom, when a rolling wave of nausea hit her, of displacement, as if the world had just shifted and she was someplace else, someone else. She shuddered and gagged, leaning on the bench, and when somebody said, “Are you all right?” she looked up to see Alison again, her hair disheveled, probably from the Dragon ride.

It sure as hell wasn’t from David who still had his arm chastely around her shoulder.

“Felt sick for a minute,” Glenda said, breathless.

“Maybe you’re pregnant!” Alison said.

Glenda considered it, dizzy though she was. She and Tom weren’t very careful. It was possible.

“That would be a fine gift for your husband,” David said.

Glenda frowned up at him. “What planet are you from?”

“He likes that song,” Alison said, her face screwing up a little as if she was annoyed. “You know, the one about ‘having my baby.’”

“Of course he does,” Glenda said, while her stomach rolled.

“You shouldn’t be drinking that beer if you’ve got a baby in you,” David said, pointing to the cup in Glenda’s hand.

*Up yours*, Glenda thought, wishing she wasn’t holding the cup. “I don’t see a beer,” she said, just to annoy him. “Where do you see a beer?”

“What the hell?” David said, startled, staring at her hand.

Glenda looked down. The beer was gone.

“How’d you do that?” David said, backing away and taking an equally startled Alison with him. “You *are* a demon.”

“Well, no,” Glenda said, thinking *Where the hell did that beer go?*

“Nothing wrong with being a demon,” Alison said, her voice sultry and low. Glenda jerked her head up, expecting to see David to smack Alison up side the head with his Bible, but instead he moved his hand from her shoulder to her butt and gave her a full-handed squeeze.

“Nothing wrong at all,” he said, his voice harsh and deep as his eyes locked on hers.

Alison reached up and grabbed his hair and yanked his face down to hers and kissed him so long that Glenda thought, *My god, she’s going for his tonsils.*

David pulled back and growled, “*It’s been too long,*” to Alison, and Alison laughed, a wild, free, sexy laugh that made Glenda forget all about her nausea for a moment.

“Are you guys okay?” she said, but they were already stumbling toward the Tunnel, hands all over each other, pushing to the front of the line, ignoring the protests to kiss again.

Delpha came up to her, breathless.

“Have you seen anybody acting strangely?” she said, her normal calm gone, her neatly dressed hair sticking out on all sides.

“Besides you?” Glenda said. “Alison and David. Very weird. I could use a drink after that.”

“Alison and David who?” Delpha looked around wildly. “Where are they?”

Glenda gestured toward the Tunnel and beer slopped out of the cup she was holding.

She was holding a cup again.

“And then there’s *me*,” she said, staring at the cup.

“They went into the Tunnel?” Delpha said and then stopped, really looking at her this time. “What’s wrong with you?”

“Do you see this cup of beer?” Glenda said, holding it up.

“Yes.”

“Well, it disappeared a minute ago.”

She waited for Delpha to say, “That’s impossible,” or “Maybe you’re drunk,” or “You’re nuts,” but all Delpha said was, “Did you want it to?”

“Did I . . .” *David was hassling me about it. I wished it wasn’t there.*

“Yes.”

Delpha sat down beside her on the bench. "Give me your hand."

Glenda swallowed hard. The thing about Delpha was, she really was a psychic. She could see things. Maybe—

"*Give me your hand,*" Delpha said and Glenda gave it to her.

Delpha held onto her, palm to palm for a very long minute and then she looked at her, almost sadly.

"What?" Glenda said. "I'm having a really lousy night, Delpha, don't screw around with me."

"You're pregnant," Delpha said. "Not very long ago. You're going to have a boy. A great Hunter."

"Uh," Glenda said, gobsmacked by the news that she was pregnant and evidently full up on venison for life. "Are you sure?"

"It was not long ago," Delpha said. "Maybe four or five hours. And fifteen minutes ago, you became a Sorceress."

"No, I didn't," Glenda said. "Fifteen minutes ago, I became nauseated. Unless 'sorceress' means 'getting ready to heave,' I'm not--"

"You're sick because you just got Petra's powers."

"Petra? Petra has powers? Petra makes snocones."

"Petra's dead." Delpha said the words with such finality that Glenda knew they were true. "She was killed by a demon named Selvans trying to put him back in his cell, which is a wooden cup, a chalice."

Delpha was talking crazy, but she was calm again. "Have you been drinking?" Glenda said. "Not that I'm judging."

“Dreamland is a prison for demons,” Delpha said. “The five worst demons in the history of the world. They can’t be exorcised, but they can be held and guarded, and that’s what we do, the Guardia. There are five of us: the Trickster, the Seer, the Sorceress, the Hunter, and the Keeper. And now you’re one of us.”

“You’re nuts,” Glenda said, trying to take her hand back.

“What the hell?” Tom stood in front of them, breathless. “*Delpha, we need--*”

“Kharos and Vanth have taken a couple and gone into the Tunnel,” Delpha said calmly.

“Okay, then.” Tom smiled at Glenda. “Kharos and Vanth are, uh, conmen who--”

“And Glenda is the new Sorceress,” Delpha finished.

Tom stopped, looking at Glenda with horror.

“I made a beer disappear,” she said, hoping he’d laugh.

“*Fuck,*” he said.

#

It made perfect sense, but Tom didn’t want sense right now. He didn’t want Glenda anywhere near demons.

“Don’t worry, the beer came back,” Glenda said, trying to hand it to him.

“We’ve got demons loose,” Tom said.

Gus and Fred came running up, spears at the ready.

Tom checked his watch. "We have to get Tura, then go after Kharos and Vanth. It will be midnight soon."

"How long has Kharos been out?" Gus asked.

"At least four hours," Tom said, not wanting to explain what had happened in the trailer with Glenda four hours before. "Let's go. We know what Tura will be doing."

"Hold on," Glenda said. "I don't get any of this. So if this is some game--"

"It's real, and you'll be fine," Delpha said, which Tom considered optimistic.

Tom put an arm around Glenda's shoulder. "Demons take over people. So we have to get them out and put them back in their chalices. Fred startles the demon, then Delpha freezes it. Then I take the demon into me and hold it until you say '*redimio*' and move the demon from me into the chalice. Then Gus seals the chalice."

"Very complicated," Glenda asked. "And the spears are for . . .?"

"Sometimes they fight back," Tom said, hustling her along. "We don't want to hurt anyone if we can help it."

"Then I'd put down the spears," Glenda said. "Do not play games with weapons."

Gus pointed. "There."

"That's Barb Whackamole," Glenda said.

Tom saw the young woman in the darker shadows near the Mermaid ride, Tura's stomping grounds. "Fred. Do your thing."

Fred morphed from park comedian to the cliché of the married, traveling salesman, right down to cheap shoes and thin wedding band. He staggered as if drunk.

Tom heard Glenda suck in her breath. "What happened to Fred?" she asked as he walked up to Barbara. "Who's that guy? *What happened to Fred?*"

"Get ready," Tom warned.

Fred leaned in and whispered in Barbara's ear, and she giggled. Then he put his hand on her butt and whispered again, and she wrapped her arms around him and kissed him hard.

"Barb?" Glenda said. "Barb's engaged to the Roundabout guy, what's she *doing?*"

"It's the demon in her," Delpha said, just as Fred's form flickered and then he was Fred again, shouting, "*Frustro!*" Barb stepped back, and Delpha yelled, "*Specto!*" as Barb raked her nails across Fred's face, leaving a trail of torn skin and blood. Then she shivered and fell to her knees as a blue-green cloud flowed out of her and into Tom as he said: "*Capio.*"

He felt Tura enter him, all lust and sensuality, permeated with burning anger over betrayal.

Sounding very far away, Tom could hear Gus talk to Glenda. "Say, *Redimio!*" Gus told her, the chalice at the ready.

“*Redimio*,” Glenda said, a little bit uncertainly, and the fog flowed out of Tom’s chest and into the chalice. “*Frustrro*,” Gus said, sealing the lid.

“You all right?” Tom asked Fred, but he was looking at Glenda, still swamped with Tura’s lust, wanting her as badly as he had those few hours ago. It was all he could do to keep from leaping on her even with Kharos near, even with the chance that Kharos would possess him again as he touched her--

“Steady,” Delpha whispered to him.

Fred pulled his flask out and took a long drink, then he dabbed his handkerchief with the alcohol and wiped down the wounds. “We need to be faster.”

Tom tore his eyes from Glenda and looked past Fred, toward the Tunnel of Love. The lights were on.

“Kharos and Vanth took a man and a woman in there for the last ride,” Delpha said.

“Alison Brannigan and her boyfriend, David,” Glenda said, looking shaken and sick. “Are you telling me they’re demons? There really are demons here? Alison’s mother is *right*?”

“Yes,” Tom said. “We’ve got to split up Kharos and Vanth. Fred?”

“Yeah?” Fred was trying to find the bottom of his flask.

“You become Alison and distract Kharos. We grab the real Alison and hustle her out of there, and *capiro* Vanth out of her. Then we go for Kharos.”

“I’m not sure I like that plan,” Fred argued. “First, I’ve got to change sex. Second, I’ve got to do it with the woman Kharos wants. Third, you’re leaving me alone with Kharos.”

“Here.” Gus pulled his own flask out and handed it to Fred. “You’re going to need it more than me.”

“Let’s do it,” Tom said.

He led the way, positioning his Guardia so they were arrayed around the exit, Glenda still torn between disbelief and fear. Well, he’d felt the same way when he’d been called. Fucking demons. “Fred, you take point. As soon as they come out, we’ll snatch the woman. Delpha, give us a diversion.”

“No,” Delpha said. “You need a sorceress for that.”

Tom could hear voices, echoing off the walls of the Tunnel, coming closer. He looked at Glenda. “I need a dragon,” he said. “You’re going to think of a dragon and make it appear when I tell you to.”

“Wait a minute,” Glenda said, but Tom turned back to the tunnel. She was a smart woman, and he didn’t have time for handholding. A swan-head prow appeared, and then a man and woman entwined and exhausted inside the boat, their clothing disheveled and open.

Tom said, “Now,” and Glenda said, “Uh . . . dragon, *dragon*” and shut her eyes, squinching them up as she concentrated. Tom thought, *Oh, fuck, she can’t do it*, and then a huge roaring dragon exploded in front of him, razor-sharp talons raking the air, blue fire blazing out of its mouth. “*Crap!*” Gus said as Delpha gasped, and Tom thought, *That’s my girl*.

The man in the boat jumped to his feet, tripping over his loose trousers, his eyes blazing red. Glenda lowered her hands and the dragon wrapped itself around the man's head, blinding him as it sang what Tom would have sworn was "Having My Baby."

He looked back at Glenda who shrugged, but Fred was already taking advantage of the distraction, jumping into the boat and morphing, shoving the real, shrieking, glowing-blue-eyed Alison overboard. Tom and Gus dragged her, kicking and fighting with demon strength, down the tunnel. They made it to the first turn and halted, dragging Alison up into the Adam and Eve diorama, Glenda and Delpha right behind them.

"How do we do this without Fred?" Delpha said, but Tom leaned down and looked into the demon's glowing blue eyes and said, "*Frustro!*", his voice like a lash.

The spirit didn't leap from Alison as much as it shrank from him, loosening its hold on the girl enough that Delpha could shout, "*Specto!*" and immobilize it as Alison slumped to the floor of the diorama, unconscious under the snake in the tree.

Tom focused on the demon form struggling against Delpha's spell. "*Capio.*"

Tom felt Vanth fill him, felt her yearning for Kharos, as strong as his love for Glenda. He sucked the emotion into his heart and then Glenda was at his side.

“*Redimio*,” she said, still uncertain, and the demon flowed out of Tom into the chalice and Gus sealed it. “Are you all right?” she said to Tom. “I don’t understand any of this. *Are you all right?*”

“I love you,” he said, and kissed her, all his love and need for her mixed up with all Vanth’s love and need, and all Tura’s lust and--

“Hey, Kharos!” Gus said. “Fred’s back there with him. We have to--”

“*Crap.*” Tom let go of Glenda and ran down the service walkway to the swan boat. There was no sign of David. Fred, back to being Fred, was seated in the boat, hands wrapped around blood pouring from the iron spear protruding from his shoulder. The point of the spear poked out the back of his shoulder.

“Should have been faster,” Fred said, attempting his trademark smile.

Tom checked the wound. “It didn’t hit anything vital.”

“I’m not vital?” Fred asked.

“Just keep pressure on it,” Tom said, “and don’t try to pull out the spear. We’ll get you to the hospital soon. You’re not losing much blood.”

“Kharos used your iron spear against you?” Gus asked.

“He grabbed it from me,” Fred said. “His hands were smoking, but he didn’t care. He’s not like the others.”

“Which way did he go?” Tom asked.

Fred pointed, past the dark form of the Keep to the blinking red light on top of the metal tower that marked the highest point in Dreamland. “He said he’d meet you on the Devil’s Drop. Good luck.”

Tom surveyed his bedraggled team. Fred's eyes were closed in pain. Glenda looked confused and scared and worried for Fred, but she was Glenda, she'd stick. Delpha, was calm as ever, and good old Gus looked ready to take on a pack of demons. "Let's go."

They walked down the midway, and Tom felt Delpha's small hand on his arm. "You must take care of Glenda now," she whispered, and he bent to hear her better. "She's carrying your son. He will be a great Hunter. Like you."

A son. He almost stumbled. A new Hunter, like his father and his grandfather and all the Hunters before him. His son. And Glenda's. He led them toward the blinking red light of the Devil's Drop, his chest aching from possessing demons and from Delpha's words. He was going to his greatest battle with the greatest news possible: it was a magnificent night, the best of his life.

Tom paused when he saw a dark figure on the Devil's Drop ladder, silhouetted against the moon, climbing swiftly toward the star-shaped platform from which the ride's parachutes dangled.

"He's going to take us one by one as we get to the top," Gus said. "We won't be able to act as a team."

"I'll go first," Delpha said. "Hold him long enough for the rest of him."

Tom smiled at her courage. "We're talking about Kharos, not Fuflluns. You can't hold him more than a second."

"What are we going to do?" Glenda asked.

“I go first,” Tom said. “I don’t have to hold Kharos, I have to hold the body he’s in. If he flees the body, there’s no one but Guardia close by and he can’t take any of us. Then we track down his spirit.”

“And if he doesn’t flee the body?” Gus asked. “What if he decides to fight you in the body?”

“Then David is going to be a little worse for the wear.”

“I don’t like it,” Delpha said. “Kharos will give the body extra strength. How long do you think you can stand against that?”

“As long as I have to. I want Delpha behind me, Gus behind her, and Glenda last.”

“No,” Glenda said. “You need me before you need Gus. *‘Redimio’* before *‘servo.’*”

“All right,” Tom said, knowing it wasn’t all right at all. He headed to the metal ladder bolted to one of the legs of the Devil’s Drop, but Glenda put a hand on his shoulder. “Delpha says I’m pregnant. With a son.”

“I know,” Tom said. “We’re going to celebrate all night when this is done. But first, we have to get this bastard.”

“Just be careful. Our son is going to need a father. And I’d really suck as a single mother.”

“You’d be great as a single mother,” Tom said, “but you’re never going to be one.” He bent and kissed her, loving her more than he’d ever thought was possible, and then he let go. “Let’s do this.”

She nodded and let go, and Tom began to climb the ladder slowly, allowing the rest to keep up. The wind was picking up and he felt the metal tower sway. Just before he got to the top, he halted and looked down. Delpha, Glenda and Gus were all clinging to the metal rungs, tightly bunched below him.

Taking a deep breath, Tom clambered up the last few rungs and leapt onto the metal grillwork. Kharos kicked him in the face, sending him sprawling. Tom rolled to his feet and charged, wrapping both arms around the demon.

Kharos laughed, a deep, rumbling noise that seemed to emanate from the tower itself. Tom felt heat radiating from the body he was holding, then he was flying through the air, tossed aside like a doll.

Tom hit the metal platform and felt something ram into his back. He was in the center of the platform, and he'd hit the hammer sticking up in the center, the key to Kharos's cell, the key Petra had put in to free the demon, and the real reason they were here. Kharos was trying to steal his own key, to ensure he'd be free forever.

Delpha was scrambling onto the platform and Tom knew he had to hold Kharos again so she could freeze him. He pulled the iron spear from his belt and charged Kharos.

The iron hit flesh and Tom could hear ribs crack, but Kharos laughed and smashed an inhumanly powerful fist into Tom's head.

Tom collapsed to his knees, head ringing, trying to remain conscious. "*Frustrò*," he gasped, rage making him powerful, and Kharos surged up out of David's body, huge and red and seething, thrusting David behind him as rose.

Tom heard Delpha cry out, “*Specto*,” as he staggered to his feet, and then he said, “*Capio*.”

The red force that slammed into his chest knocked him flat on his back. The anger, the rage, the evilness of it filled him, threatening to consume him, the red darkness searing his chest.

“*I will have her again*.” The voice boomed inside Tom’s head, heavy with the promise of a master demon.

“*Redimio!* For God’s sake, *Redimio!*” Glenda said, her hands on his chest, frantic for him.

Tom gasped as Kharos surged out of his chest, forming an image in the air above for just a moment, a towering red demon, then vanishing into the chalice as if sucked into hell.

Gus slammed shut the lid. “*Servo*.”

“David!” Glenda screamed.

Tom looked and saw David, disoriented from Tom’s blow, staggering out along one of the five metal arms, burned hands clutching his broken ribs. Tom rolled to his feet and ran out onto the arm, Gus was right behind, and reached David just as he put one foot out into thin air. He grabbed the back of David’s jacket and spun him about, shoving him toward Gus as he tried to regain his balance.

The world swung around, a beautiful world full of Glenda and his son and Dreamland, and then he fell, hitting the top of the anchored parachute, and felt

his back crack. He slid down the nylon chute, scrambling to grab hold of the edge, his fingers digging in as he caught the edge of the chute.

He looked up and saw Glenda screaming his name in terror.

“Take care of the park!” Tom yelled. “Take care of our son! I love you!”

Then the chute ripped free, and he fell, everything he had to live for torn away from him forever.

#

Glenda sat on the bench across from the Tunnel of Love and thought; *I don't think I can stand this.* The deserted park was strewn with snocone and taffy wrappers, burst balloons and broken canes, the detritus of a night in Dreamland, and the people who'd dropped all that stuff had acted like they knew the place, but they didn't know it.

She did.

*Take care of the park,* Tom had yelled at the end, and as she looked around now, she thought, *I don't like this mess.*

The garbage disappeared.

She wondered if it had gone someplace else, all that crap suddenly appearing in somebody's living room. She wondered if this new power was something that could be used up, that if she went on a power spree she could get rid of it in one night. She wondered why the hell there were demons at all—weren't they supposed to be down in hell, running the place?

But it was all white noise, all stuff she was thinking to cover up the unthinkable, the black hole in the center of her mind, the thing she couldn't bear—

*He's gone forever.*

The years opened up before her, years she'd planned to fill with love and sex and children, the calm, normal, everyday life she'd planned for herself. She'd just wanted Tom and a family, that was all. And now there was no Tom, and her family was a bunch of amusement park weirdoes and a baby on the way.

"I can't stand it," she said, feeling the tears start again, which should have been impossible, she'd cried over Tom's body, cried when the ambulance had taken him and David away, cried when Delpha and Gus had tried to make her go back to the trailer, wept for hours on this damn bench on the deserted midway, and now the sun was coming up, she could hear birds start that tentative tweeting they did when the sun was just below the horizon, and all she wanted was to see her husband again, to have him say, "It didn't happen, it was all a nightmare, I'm right here . . ."

She lifted her face from the midway and he was there, standing tall and handsome and proud, smiling at her, and she said, "Tom!" and reached out for him, but he just stood there, smiling, and she realized he wasn't real, that she'd created him the way she'd created the dragon, that he was just an illusion, the way that all the peace and love and safety that Tom had wrapped around her was an illusion.

“No,” she said to the illusion, and the not-Tom wavered and then vanished, gone forever, her life and her love were gone, and her heart broke with the certainty of it.

“Have you been here all night?” Delpha said, and Glenda looked up to see the little woman standing in front of her, shaking her head. “This isn’t good for the baby.” She looked around the midway and said, “And this is a waste of your power.”

Glenda followed her eyes and realized the midway was still clean. *Bring it back*, she thought, and the midway was a mess again.

“You have to do better than this,” Delpha said. “You’re our leader now. Tom gave the care of the park to you. You have to stand up, be a woman.”

“I’m not your leader,” Glenda said bitterly. “I don’t want anything to do with any of you. Go get yourself a new hunter and a new sorceress. I’m leaving.”

“You can’t,” Delpha said, serene and quiet. “You belong to the park now. And so does your son.”

“*My son* will never have anything to do with this,” Glenda said.

“You’ve been called,” Delpha said. “You belong here. And so does he. Come back to your trailer now. You need your rest. When you wake, I will tell you everything you need to know about your park.”

“I don’t--” Glenda began.

“*Stand up*,” Delpha snapped, and Glenda did, her muscles aching and her heart torn. “You’re not a girl any more, you’re a leader and a mother, and

you're the person who stands between the world and evil. Stop whining, mourn like a woman, and pick up the sword that has been handed to you. It's a noble calling, Glenda. And it's yours."

A sword. Anger cut through her misery like a sword. "That son of a bitch demon killed him," she told Delpha. "That son of a bitch demon sent David toward the edge on purpose. He knew Tom would save him. He--"

"Then avenge your lover by keeping Kharos imprisoned forever," Delpha said. "It's your duty."

The midway was brighter now; the sky gray instead of black, the birds chirping like crazy, but her life was still a nightmare of loss and pain. Only now it had some direction. Now . . .

"All right," Glenda said. "I will get some sleep and you can tell me about this mess and I will keep it going for Tom. But my son will never be part of this."

"If it's his destiny, he will be," Delpha said.

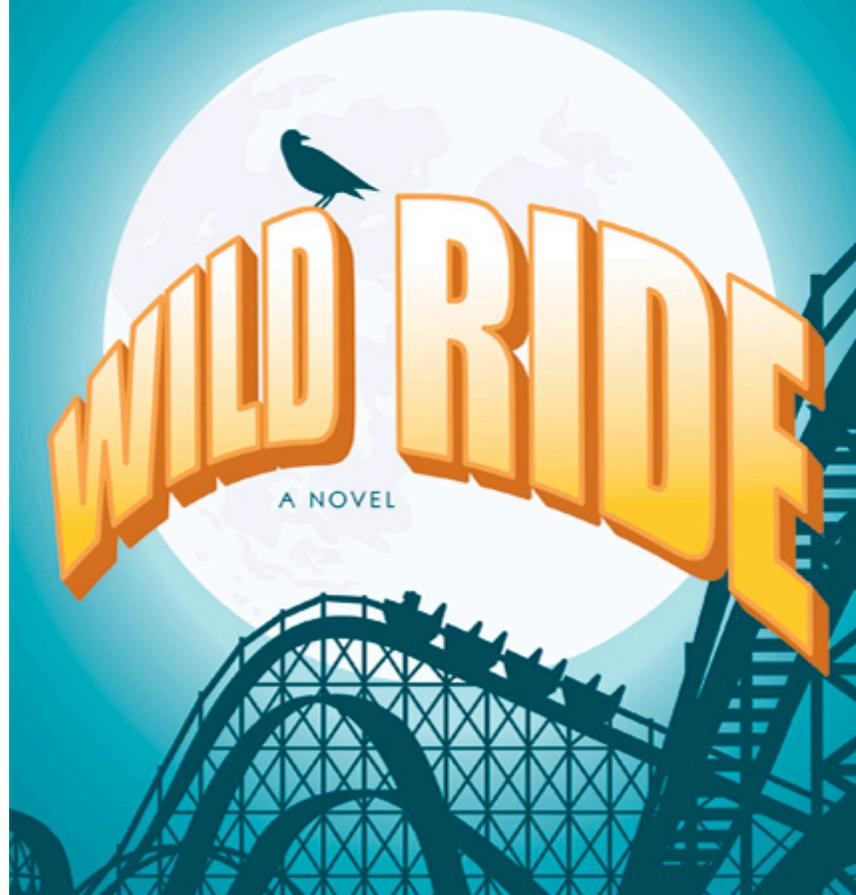
Glenda shook her head and walked alone down the midway of her park to the trailer she'd never share with Tom again.

She might belong here now, but her son never would.

She'd see to it.

New York Times Bestselling Authors of  
*Agnes and the Hitman*

# JENNIFER CRUSIE BOB MAYER



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