

DAY ONE

He'd been here ten times, this was the tenth time. Every year on the same day, the Ides of September, nine fifteen. The promise had been that first time and they'd kept it nine times. We'll do this every year.

He felt better tonight, strong for some reason, but he'd been getting better since walking out of jail twenty days ago. It could have been so much worse.

DAY TWO

Every day since he had walked away from the jail had been a lesson in assembling himself, and he did not want to lose that.

It was in this place that Mack always began to feel finally a long way from his truck, from town, from all of it. He could breathe, they were almost in.

DAY THREE

Mack's heart was up, working the way it did when he felt he was really in the woods.

I don't have enough surprises in my own life.

The angle of light grew fragile; it made him want to hurry. It had always chilled to him, and now it hurt. You always felt him as a terrible heartbeat in the mountains. The days were short.

MACK

DAY SIX

Something very bad has happened, boy. How do you feel about the place now? ... I still love it.

You did the right thing, but it isn't going to be easy, none of it. Right, but not easy.

DAY FIVE

But he could feel the pressure in his hand, the fever, moving across, working now steadily behind his eyes.

"Hi Vernie," he said aloud, walking and talking. "Just where have you been? Well, hello Vernie. It's dark and Olaf's got the soup on Vernie, that I was impossible to live with does not alter the fact that I love you and would like to try again. No, I mean, Vernie, I'm happy you've found a

DAY FOUR

He'd had a bad ten months and now he was better. He could almost accept it; he could get through a day. He was back and back, working his body firm.

Mack felt it in his gut, the worry, but talking could keep it off him.