

М.С. Кулакович

ДОМАШНЕЕ ЧТЕНИЕ

УЧЕБНО-ПРАКТИЧЕСКОЕ ПОСОБИЕ

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Учебно-практическое пособие предназначено для студентов старших курсов, для которых английский язык является второй специальностью.

Пособие содержит сборник художественных адаптированных текстов американского писателя Стивена Кинга, упражнения к ним, а также краткую информацию о жизни и творчестве писателя. Пособие может быть использовано на групповых занятиях по дисциплинам «Домашнее чтение», «Чтение произведений английских писателей» и курсах иностранных языков, а также для самостоятельной работы.

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ВВЕДЕНИЕ

Данное учебно-практическое пособие предназначено для студентов старших курсов, для которых английский язык является второй специальностью. В пособие включены адаптированные версии рассказов современного американского писателя Стивена Кинга. Данное пособие может быть использовано на групповых занятиях по дисциплинам «Домашнее чтение», «Чтение произведений английских писателей» и курсах иностранных языков, а также для самостоятельной работы.

Основной задачей пособия является умение грамотно пересказать прочитанный текст, справиться с трудностями при его литературном переводе, объяснить на английском языке сложные слова и грамматические реалии, а также свободно выражать свои мысли по содержанию текста.

В пособие включены 12 адаптированных рассказов, задания к ним, а также краткая информация о жизни и творчестве писателя. Задания представляют собой определённую систему. Одни из них помогают студенту лучше понять текст и выразить своё отношение к происходящим событиям. Другие задания нацелены на закрепление грамматических правил и лексических единиц. Третьи, как, например, придумать продолжение рассказа или пересказать историю от лица разных героев, развивают воображение и навыки письменной речи студентов. Кроме того, каждый текст иллюстрирует то или иное социальное, психологическое или научное явление, и ряд заданий направлен на более глубокое понимание этих явлений.

Занимательный сюжет произведений и обсуждение в них жизненно важных проблем помогут студенту развить навыки устной речи и лучше понять стиль и манеру писателя.

BIOGRAPHY OF STEPHEN KING

Stephen Edwin King was born on September 21, 1947 in Portland, Maine. His parents were Nellie Ruth who worked as a caregiver at a mental institute, and Donald Edwin King, a merchant seaman. His father was born under the surname "Pollock", but used the last name "King", under which Stephen was born. Stephen has an elder brother, David. The Kings were a typical family until one night, when Donald said he went for cigarettes and was never heard from again. Actually he had another family but Ruth and children didn't know about this. Ruth raised the family with help from relatives.

Stephen began his actual writing career in January, 1959, when David and Stephen decided to publish their own local newspaper named "Dave's Rag". Stephen attended Lisbon High School in 1962. Later in 1963 Stephen and his best friend Chris Chesley published a collection of 18 short stories called "People, Places, and Things – Volume I".

King made his first actual published appearance in 1965 in the magazine Comics Review with his story "I Was a Teenage Grave Robber". In 1966 he graduated from high school and took a scholarship to attend the University of Maine. Looking back on his high school days, King recalled that "my high school career was totally undistinguished. I was not at the top of my class, nor at the bottom". During his first year at college, King completed his first full-length novel, "The Long Walk".

In June 1970 King graduated from the University of Maine with a bachelor degree in English and a certificate to teach high school. King's next idea came from the poem by Robert Browning, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came". He found bright colored green paper in the library and began work on "The Dark Tower" saga, but he was always in need of money, that's why he soon stopped working on the novel.

In January, 1971, he married Tabitha King (born Tabitha Spruce). Stephen then began work on a short story about a teenage girl named Carietta White who practiced telekinesis. After completing a few pages, he decided it was not a worthy story and threw the pages to the rubbish bin. Fortunately, Tabitha took the pages out and read them. She encouraged her husband to continue the story, which he did. As a result the publishing company Doubleday bought the book. Stephen earned about \$200,000 so he gave up his teaching job and took up writing.

Since then King has had numerous short stories and novels published and movies made from his work. He has been called the "Master of Horror" and "The King of Horror". His books have been translated into 33 different languages, published in over 35 countries. He continues to live in Bangor, Maine, with his wife, and writes out of his home.

In June 1999 King was severely injured in an accident, he was walking alongside a highway and was hit by a car. After three weeks of operations, he was released from the Central Maine Medical Center in Lewiston.

ТЕКСТЫ И ЗАДАНИЯ К НИМ

THE BOOGEYMAN

'I came to you because I want to tell you my story,' the man said to Dr. Harper. 'I know you won't believe me. I don't care. It doesn't matter. Just to tell will be enough.'

The man was Lester Billings from Connecticut. A worker in an industrial firm, divorced, the father of three children. All dead.

'I can't go to church because I'm not religious. I can't go to a lawyer because I haven't done anything criminal. I only killed my kids. One by one. Killed them all.'

'Do you mean you actually killed them, or..?'

'No. But I was responsible. Denny in 1967. Shirl in 1971. And Andy this year. I want to tell you about it.'

Billings lay on the couch. Dr. Harper said nothing and just turned on the tape recorder. He thought that Billings looked tired and old. His hair was thin, his face was pale.

'They were murdered, you see,' Billings stopped and stared across the room. 'What's that?' he asked. 'That door.'

'The closet,' Dr. Harper said. 'Where I keep my coat and shoes.'

'Open it. I want to see.'

Dr. Harper got up from his chair, crossed the room, and opened the closet. Inside there was a raincoat and a pair of shoes. That was all.

'All right?' Dr. Harper asked. 'All right,' said the man and continued his story. 'I married Rita in 1965. We were very young then. Soon she was pregnant. That was Denny. I left college and got a job, but it was OK. I loved both of them. We were very happy. Rita got pregnant again, and

Shirl was born in 1966. Andy came in the summer of 1969, and Denny was already dead by then.'

'So who killed the children?' Dr. Harper asked.

'The boogeyman,' Lester Billings answered. 'The boogeyman killed them all. Just came out of the closet and killed them.' He turned around and smiled. 'You think I'm crazy, right? I see it in your face. But I don't care. All I want to do is tell you my story.'

'I'm listening,' Dr. Harper said.

'It started when Denny was almost two and Shirl was just a baby. He started crying when Rita put him to bed. Shirl slept in a crib in our room. At first I thought he was crying because he was cranky. But you have to be strict with kids or you will spoil them. Then they grow up and break your heart. So when he didn't stop crying, I started putting him to bed myself. I even spanked him. Then Rita said that he was saying "light" over and over again. Well, I didn't know. How can you tell what such little kids are saying? So Rita wanted to put in a nightlight, but I didn't let her. If a kid is afraid of the dark when he's little, what will he do then in life?'

'Anyway, he died the summer after Shirl was born. I put him to bed that night, and he started to cry. I heard what he said that time. He pointed at the closet when he said it. "Boogeyman," the kid said. "Boogeyman, Daddy." I turned off the light, went into our bedroom and asked Rita why she taught the kid such a word. I even wanted to slap her a little, but I didn't. She said she never taught him to say that. I called her a liar.'

'That was a bad summer for me. I worked a lot and was tired all the time. Shirl woke up every night and cried. Sometimes I wanted to throw them both out of the window. Well, the kid woke me at three in the morning. I went to the bathroom, and Rita went to check on Denny. I went back to bed and was almost asleep when she started screaming. I got up and went in. The kid was dead on his back. Just as white as flour. His eyes were open and glassy. Awful, I loved that kid.'

'Did you know it was the boogeyman then?' Dr. Harper asked quietly.

Billings shook his head slowly, then smiled again. 'Oh, no. Not then. But I noticed one thing. It didn't mean anything to me then, but I remembered it anyway.'

'What was that?'

'The closet door was open. Not much. Just a little. But I knew I left it shut.'

'Ok, so what happened then?'

Billings looked at his hands. 'We buried him.'

'Did you call the police?'

'Sure. The doctors said it was a crib death. Can you imagine this nonsense? The kid was three years old!'

'Crib death is common during the first year,' Dr. Harper said carefully, 'but can happen up to the age of five.'

Billings shook his head and went on. 'We moved Shirl into Denny's old room a month later. Rita was against it, but I had the last word. I loved when the kid was with us, but you shouldn't be overprotective. So Shirl went into Denny's crib.'

'So a year passed. One night when I was putting Shirl into her crib, she started to scream and cry. "Boogeyman, Daddy, boogeyman, boogeyman!" I was shocked. It was just like Denny. And I remembered that closet door, open just a little, when we found him. I even wanted to take her into our room for the night.'

'Did you?'

'No. How could I tell Rita that I was wrong? I had to be strong. And a month later the boogeyman got Shirl, too. But something happened before that. I heard a noise in there one night. And then she screamed. I opened the door and... she was sitting in the crib crying and... something moved in the shadows by the closet. Something moved like a snake.'

'Was the closet door open?'

'Just a little. Shirl was screaming about the boogeyman and something else that sounded like "claws". Only she said "craws", you know.'

'Crawset?' Dr. Harper said. 'Crawset... closet. Maybe she was trying to say "closet"?'

'Maybe,' Billings said. 'Maybe. But I don't think so. I think it was "claws". Claws, long claws,' he whispered.

'Did you look in the closet? Was there anything in there? Did you see the..?'

'I didn't see anything!' Billings screamed suddenly. 'When she died, I found her, you see. And she was black. All black. She swallowed her own tongue. She was staring at me, and her eyes were saying "It got me, Daddy, you let it get me, you killed me, you helped it kill me." One very large and silent tear ran down the side of his cheek.

'It was a brain convulsion the doctors said. Kids get them sometimes. A bad signal from the brain. But kids don't just get convulsions. You need to scare a kid into convulsions.'

'Rita was out of her mind. They kept her in hospital, so I went back to the house alone. I slept on the couch with the light on.'

'Did anything happen?'

'I had a dream,' Billings said. 'I was in a dark room, and there was something I couldn't see, in the closet. It made a noise. And when I woke up in the middle of the night, I thought that it was standing right next to me. With its long claws.'

Dr. Harper looked at the clock on the wall. Lester Billings had been speaking for almost half an hour already.

'Anyway,' Billings continued, 'We got over it, and soon Rita wanted another baby. I told her it was a bad idea. Not for ever, but for a while. But you know how it happens? And the next year she was pregnant again. The baby came at the end of the year after Shirl's death. A boy. She named it Andrew Lester Billings. I didn't want it, at least at first. But he was the only

one of them that looked like me. So I brought him presents and played with him a little when I got home from work. I had a better job then, and when Andy was one, we moved to another town. The old place had too many bad memories.'

'That next year was the best one for us. We lived on a quiet street with nice neighbors. We were happy. Rita said that Andy was special. She said he was a child from God. But you know, bad luck comes in threes.'

Billings looked at the ceiling, 'The last year wasn't so good. Something about the house changed. I kept my boots in the hall because I didn't like to open the closet door anymore. I started thinking: Well, what if it's in there? What if it jumps on me when I open the door? And I thought I could hear strange noises, as if something wet was moving in there. I started to think that it lost us for a while when we moved. But it hunted us down. It took a year, but it found us. It was back. It wanted Andy and it wanted me. Rita asked me if I was working too hard, and I started shouting at her, just like the old days. I was so tired of both of them. I just wanted to get out.'

'Andy died in February. Rita wasn't there. She got a call from her father. Her mother had been in a car crash. She took a bus that night. Her mother didn't die, but she was in the hospital for two months, and Rita had to be there. We found a very good woman to stay with Andy days. And nights she spent with me. At first, the kid was sleeping in the room with us. And I didn't want to move him. I was afraid, after Denny and Shirl.'

'But you moved him, didn't you?' Dr. Harper asked.

'Yeah,' Billings said. He smiled a sick smile. 'I did. I had to! It was all right when Rita was there, but when she was gone, and that babysitter woman started...' He looked at Dr. Harper. 'You know what I mean.'

'Strange things started happening. One night every door in the house opened wide. One morning I got up and found some mud between the coat closet and the front door. Was it going out? Coming in? I don't know! Furniture all scratched and covered with mud, broken mirrors, and the

sounds... the sounds... I woke up at night and looked into the dark, and at first I thought, "It's only the clock." But then I could hear something moving or clicking, like claws. And always I was afraid that the noises would stop, and then there would be a laugh right in your face and hands on your throat.' Billings was pale and trembling.

'So I moved Andy. I knew it would go after him because he was weaker. And it did. That first night he cried in the middle of the night and finally, when I came to his room, he was standing up in bed and screaming. "The boogeyman, Daddy, boogeyman. Go with Daddy, go with Daddy." But I couldn't take him, I couldn't. And an hour later there was an awful scream. I ran in. I didn't even turn on the light, but I saw that it had him. It was shaking him, shaking him hard. I heard it when Andy's neck broke.'

'Then what happened?'

'Oh, I ran away,' Billings said in the cool, dead voice.

'I went to a diner and drank six cups of coffee. Then I went home. It was already morning. Andy was lying dead on the floor and staring at me. Blaming me. A bit of blood had run out of one ear. And the closet door was open, but just a little. I called the police.'

Dr. Harper looked at the clock again. Fifty minutes had passed. 'Well, let's make another appointment then, Mr. Billings' he said. 'Tuesday or Thursday?'

'I only came to tell you my story,' Billings said. 'I lied to the police, you see? I told them that the kid must've tried to get out of his crib in the night and... They believed it. Of course they did! That's just what it looked like. An accident, like the others. But Rita knew. Rita finally knew.' He began to cry.

'Mr. Billings, there is a lot we need to talk about,' Dr. Harper said after a pause. 'I think I can help you with the feeling of guilt you have. So, Tuesday or Thursday then?'

'Don't you believe me?' Billings cried. 'Damned doctors! But all right, all right, I'll come again on Tuesday.'

'Very well then,' Dr. Harper said quietly and wrote it down. 'Have a good day.'

Billings laughed nervously and quickly walked out of the office. But as soon as he went into the hall, something started bothering him. Some strange feeling...

Billings turned around and went back into the doctor's office.

'Excuse me, doctor, you...'

The room was empty. But the closet door was open. Just a little.

'So nice,' the voice from the closet said. 'So nice.'

Then the closet door opened slowly.

'So nice,' the boogeyman said as it walked out.

It still held its Dr. Harper mask in its claw-hand.

TASKS ON THE TEXT "THE BOOGEYMAN"

- 1) Write the summary.
- 2) Find some facts about the boogeyman in American culture.
- 3) Explain in English
 - a crib
 - cranky
 - to spank
 - to slap
 - a closet
 - overprotective
 - brain convulsion
 - claws
 - to click
- 4) Explain the grammar in the following sentences:
 - He started crying...

- He smiled a sick smile.
 - Her mother had been in a car crash.
 - ... must've tried to get.
 - she was gone.
- 5) Describe the personality of Lester Billings.
 - 6) Are the surnames of the characters meaningful?
 - 7) Can you explain the plot from the realistic point of view?
 - 8) Were you afraid of the darkness in your childhood? What's happened to your fear then?
 - 9) Write the continuation of the story. What will happen to Lester?
 - 10) Prepare for the social discussion: talking about phobias.

HARVEY'S DREAM

Janet Stevens turned from the sink and saw her gray-haired and ill-looking husband sitting at the kitchen table in a white T-shirt and a pair of boxers, watching her.

More and more often she found him in just this place and dressed just this way on Saturday mornings. They have been married for almost 30 years and had three girls – Trisha, Jenna, and Stephanie, and one of them, Jenna, lived just down the road.

The girls have grown and moved out, and now Janet and Harvey were growing older and becoming even foolish. Janet's friends often frightened each other by the early Alzheimer's stories about elderly people who couldn't remember their wives or the names of their children. But she thought that these Saturday morning appearances had nothing to do with Alzheimer's. On workday mornings Harvey Stevens usually got up by 6:45 a.m., dressed in a nice suit, and looked to her much younger than he was. So, Janet thought that on Saturday mornings he just practised being

old, and she hated it. She was afraid that when he retired, he would look this way every morning, at least until she gave him a glass of orange juice. God, she hoped she's wrong. It made life seem so meaningless somehow.

'How are you this morning?' Harvey asked her when she turned.

The answer, should've been *not very good*, but instead she said, 'Not so bad'.

Janet turned away, not expecting any more surprises, when Harvey said in a strange voice, 'It's good that you weren't sleeping with me last night. I had a bad dream. I actually woke up screaming.'

She was startled and turned to him again, forgetting the pot with the last egg in it. 'You what?'

He had a bad dream? Harvey? He never had a bad dream in his whole life. 'Did you not hear me?'

'No,' she was still looking at him. 'What was your dream about?'

'I don't know if I want to tell you,' he said slowly. 'They say if you tell your dreams, they won't come true,' she told him.

'Do they really say so?'

She opened her mouth to tell him she actually got it wrong. What they really say is that if you tell your dreams, they *will* come true, but it was too late, as Harvey had already started talking.

'I dreamed it was morning and I came to the kitchen,' he said. 'Saturday morning, just like this, only you weren't up yet.'

'I'm always up before you on Saturday mornings,' Janet said.

'I know, but this was a dream,' he said. 'But it was like this, I mean, the sun was shining. I walked to the window and looked out, and I saw there was a dent in the side of the Friedmans' car, and I knew somehow that Frank had been out drinking and that the dent happened when he was coming home.'

Janet suddenly felt dizzy. She saw the dent in the side of Frank Friedman's car herself when she went to the door to get the newspaper, and she also thought that Frank had been out at the pub and dented his car in the parking lot. The idea that Harvey had also seen this surprised her. Certainly it's possible: the guest room where he slept on summer nights overlooked the street. Only Harvey wasn't that sort of man to play tricks on her. Suddenly, she felt sweat on her cheeks, and her heart started beating faster, as she had a sensation of premonition.

'I went to the refrigerator,' Harvey continued, 'and I looked inside, and I saw a plate of eggs. I was very glad because I love it when we have eggs for lunch!' He laughed.

Janet looked down into the pot she was holding in the sink. At the one boiled egg left in it. The others were already in the refrigerator, on a plate beside the jar of mayonnaise. She had been planning to have eggs for lunch, with a green salad.

'I think I don't want to hear it,' Janet said, but too quietly, and Harvey didn't hear her.

'I thought I would have just one,' Harvey told her, 'and then I thought that you'd yell at me. And then the phone rang. I hurried to pick it up because I didn't want it to wake you, and here is the scary part. Do you want to hear the scary part?'

No, she thought, I don't want to hear the scary part. But at the same time she did want to hear the scary part, everyone wants to hear the scary part.

'I picked up the phone,' Harvey said, 'and it was Trisha.' Trisha was their oldest daughter. 'She only said one word at first, just "Dad," but I knew it was Trisha. You know how you always know?'

Yes. She knew how you always knew. How you always knew your own, from the very first word.

'I said, "Hi, Trisha, why are you calling so early, honey? Your mom's still asleep." And at first there was no answer. I thought we'd been cut off, and then I heard these sounds. Not words but half-words. Like she was trying to talk but couldn't. And that was when I got scared.'

Well, then, he's rather slow, isn't he? Because Janet had been scared for some time now. She had been scared even before Harvey mentioned the dent in the side of Frank Friedman's car. She remembered a phone conversation with her friend Hannah not even a week ago. They talked about Frank, and that he had to do something about his drinking and driving, before he killed somebody.

'And then Trisha said what sounded like "lees", and I knew that what she was really saying was "police". I asked her what about the police, what was she trying to say about the police, and I sat down. Right there.' Harvey pointed to the chair near the telephone. 'There was some more silence, then a few more of those whispered half-words. She was making me so mad doing that, but then she said, "number," just as clear as a day. And I knew – just like I knew she was trying to say "police" – that she was trying to tell me that the police had called her because they didn't have our number.'

Janet nodded numbly. *It's just a bad dream, she thought. Dreams don't have to be logical, do they? Dreams are just our subconscious.*

Now, because she couldn't stand still, she went to the kitchen door and looked out into the bright June day. How quiet this morning was! And still she wanted to ask him to stop and not to tell this dream, this terrible dream. Didn't he remember that Jenna lived down the road and often stayed late at the pubs?

'All these whispered little half-words,' Harvey repeated, 'and then I heard "killed," and I knew that one of our girls was dead. I just knew it. Not Trisha, because it was Trisha on the phone, but either Jenna or

Stephanie. And I was so scared. I actually sat there thinking which one I wanted it to be. I started to shout at her. "Tell me which one! Tell me which one! For God's sake, Trisha, tell me which one!" And that's when I woke up.' Harvey laughed, and in the bright morning light Janet saw that there was a red stain in the middle of the dent on the side of Frank Friedman's car.

'And then I knew I was in bed, but I could hear my own voice that didn't sound like mine at all – it sounded like some stranger's voice.'

Tell me which one, Trisha.

Tell me which one, Harvey.

For a while Harvey was silent, thinking. 'I lay there waiting for you to run in and see what was wrong,' he finally said. 'I lay there trembling, telling myself it was just a dream, the way you do, of course, but also thinking how real it was. How amazing, in a horrible way.'

He stopped again, not noticing that his wife hadn't been listening to him. Janet was trying to make herself believe that what she saw was not blood, but just the car's undercoating.

'It's amazing, isn't it, how deep imagination goes?' Harvey said finally. 'A dream like that! Every detail so clear and so bright!'

Janet stood looking at the car across the street. When the phone rang, she wanted to scream and cover her ears but couldn't open her mouth or lift her hands. She heard Harvey get up and pick up the phone.

It's a wrong number, she prayed.

It had to be, because if you told your dreams, they wouldn't come true.

Tasks on the text "Harvey's Dream"

- 1) Write the summary.
- 2) Explain the grammar:

- The answer should've been...
 - Her heart started beating faster.
 - I thought I would have just one.
 - ... she did want...
- 3) Explain in English
- Alzheimer's disease
 - to retire
 - to startle
 - a dent
 - to feel dizzy
 - to play tricks on smb
 - premonition
 - to yell
 - numbly
 - subconsciousness
- 4) Translate the passage:
"Janet Stevens ...meaningless somehow"
- 5) Dwell upon the phrase:
"Everyone wants to hear the scary part".
- 6) Write the continuation of the story.
- 7) Explain the origin of the prophetic dreams. Have you ever had such dreams?

THE REAPER'S IMAGE

'We moved it last year, and it was not easy,' Mr. Carlin said as they walked up the stairs. 'We had to move it by hand, of course. No other way. We insured it before we even took it out of the case in the drawing room.'

Spangler said nothing. The man was a fool. Johnson Spangler had learned a long time ago that the only way to talk to a fool was to ignore him.

'We insured it for a quarter of a million dollars,' Mr. Carlin continued when they reached the second floor. He smiled. 'And it cost a lot, too.' He was a little bald man, wearing glasses, not quite fat.

It was a long corridor, and Spangler looked at the walls with a cool professional eye. Samuel Claggert had bought a lot, but he hadn't bought well. Like so many of the industry emperors of the 1800's, he bought mostly rubbish and understood nothing about Art.

The walls were covered with imitation drapes, madonnas, angels, candelabra, and the like. Of course the old man had a few interesting things. And if the Samuel Claggert Private Museum was 98 percent junk, there were always some things like the precious long rifle over the fireplace, the quaint little casket on the dinner table, and, of course, the...

'The Delver looking-glass was moved from downstairs after a rather unfortunate... incident,' Mr. Carlin said suddenly. 'There had been others, of course, but this time they really tried to *destroy* the mirror. The woman, Miss Sandra Bates, came in with a rock in her pocket. Fortunately, she missed and only damaged a corner of the case. The mirror was unharmed. The Bates girl had a brother...'

'No need to give me the details,' Spangler said quietly. 'I know the history of the Delver glass very well.'

'Amazing, isn't it?' Carlin asked. 'There was that English duchess in 1709... and the Pennsylvania merchant in 1746... not to mention...'

'I know the history,' Spangler repeated quietly. 'It's the authenticity of the glass I'm interested in, not the stories.'

'Well, of course!' Mr. Carlin laughed. 'It's been examined by many experts, Mr. Spangler.'

They walked on in silence. As they came closer to the roof of the house, it became very hot. With the heat came an unpleasant smell that Spangler knew well – the smell of age. It was the smell of museums and old libraries.

Mr. Carlin led Spangler through a maze of statues, portraits, and birdcages. He led him to the far end where there was a ladder to a little padlocked door in the ceiling. A yellow sign on the door said: ABSOLUTELY NO ADMITTANCE.

Mr. Carlin took out a key from his pocket and climbed the ladder. He paused before putting the key in the lock. 'I don't like that mirror,' he said. 'I never did. I'm afraid to look into it. I'm afraid I might look into it one day and see... what the others saw.'

'They saw nothing but themselves,' Spangler said.

Mr. Carlin shook his head and unlocked the door. 'A quarter of a million,' he said. 'A quarter of a million dollars to take that... *thing* from there to here. That goddamned *thing*. And I was hoping – almost praying – that someone would drop it, that the *thing* would fall and break into a million pieces...'

'Facts,' Spangler said. 'Facts, Carlin. Not cheap tabloid stories. *Facts*. Number one: John Delver was an English craftsman who made mirrors in the Elizabethan period of England's history. He lived and died peacefully. No drama. Number two: His mirrors have become collector's items due to the fine craftsmanship and the fact that they are slightly magnifying the image. Number three: Only five Delvers are left in the world – two of them in America. They are priceless. Number four: This Delver and the other one that was destroyed in London during war have got a bad reputation due to rumors and coincidence...'

'Fact number five,' Mr. Carlin said. 'You're an ignorant bastard, aren't you? I was guiding the tour when Sandra Bates's brother looked into your precious Delver mirror, Spangler. He was about sixteen then. I was telling

the history of the glass and had just got to the part about the craftsmanship, when the boy raised his hand. "But what about that black spot in the upper left corner?" he asked. "That looks like a defect." And one of his friends asked him what he meant, so the Bates boy started to tell him, but then stopped. He looked at the mirror very closely, and *then he looked behind him as if he had seen a reflection of someone – of someone in black – standing at his shoulder.* "It looked like a man," he said. "But I couldn't see the face. It's gone now." And that was all.'

'Continue,' Spangler said. 'You want to tell me that it was the Reaper – that is the explanation, isn't it? That some chosen people see the Reaper's image in the glass? Was he later hit by a car? Did he jump out of a window? What?'

Mr. Carlin laughed a little laugh. 'You know better, Spangler. Haven't you told me twice that you know the history of the Delver glass very well? There *were* no such horrible events. That's why the Delver glass isn't among for a curse like the Egyptian pyramids. It's quite boring, compared to them. You think I'm a fool, don't you?'

'Yes,' Spangler said. 'Can we go up now?' 'Of course,' Mr. Carlin said. He pushed the door and disappeared into the shadows. Spangler followed him. The little attic room was hot and dark, lit only by one window. The looking-glass in its wooden frame stood at the wall, catching and reflecting most of light from the window. Mr. Carlin was not looking at it.

'You haven't even covered it,' Spangler said angrily. 'I think of it as an eye,' Mr. Carlin said. 'If it stays open, always open, perhaps it will go blind.'

Spangler didn't pay any attention. He took off his jacket and wiped the dust from the surface of the glass. Then he stood back and looked at it.

It was genuine. There was no doubt about it. It was a perfect example of Delver's craftsmanship. The reflection was all clear and sharp. The magnifying effect of the glass gave everything a slight distortion. It was...

His thoughts were interrupted, and he felt angry again.

'Carlin!'

Carlin said nothing.

'Carlin, you fool! I thought you said that the girl didn't damage the mirror!'

No answer.

Spangler stared at him in the glass. 'There is a piece of tape in the upper left corner. Did she crack it? For God's sake, man, say it!'

'It's the Reaper,' Carlin said calmly. 'There's no tape on the mirror. Put your hand over it. There. Can you feel the tape? Can you pull it off?'

Spangler took his hand away from the mirror and looked into the glass. Everything in it now seemed a little more distorted. There was no crack in the mirror. It was perfect. He felt a sudden dread.

'It looked like him, didn't it?' Mr. Carlin asked. His face was very pale, and he was looking at the floor. 'Say it, Spangler. It looked like a dark figure standing behind you, didn't it?'

'It looked like tape covering a little crack,' Spangler answered. 'Nothing more, nothing less.'

'The Bates boy was quite big and strong,' Carlin said. 'Like a football player. We were on the way to the next hall when...'

'The heat is making me ill,' Spangler said suddenly. He took out a handkerchief and wiped his neck.

'...when he said he wanted a drink of water... a drink of water, for God's sake!'

Carlin turned and stared at Spangler.

'How was I to know? How was I to know?'

'Is there a lavatory? I think I'm going to...'

'I saw him going down the stairs... then...'

'...be sick.'

Carlin shook his head and looked at the floor again. 'Of course. Third door on your left, second floor.' He looked up. 'How was I to *know*? '

But Spangler had already stepped onto the ladder. It shook under his weight, and for a moment Carlin thought that he would fall. He didn't. 'Spangler..?' Carlin asked. But Spangler was gone.

Carlin listened to his footsteps. When they were gone, too, he trembled. He tried to walk to the door, but stood as if frozen. It was as if some invisible hands were pulling his head up. Carlin stared into the Delver looking-glass. There was nothing there. The room was reflected back him as it was. Empty.

And still he could not look away. The boy had wanted a drink of water. He had gone downstairs and...

And had never come back. Ever. Anywhere.

Like the duchess who had paused before her glass for a while, and then decided to go back into the sitting room for her pearls. Like the Pennsylvania merchant who had gone for a carriage ride, and then there was only an empty carriage and two horses.

And the Delver glass had been in New York from 1897 until 1920, had been there when Judge Crater...

Carlin stared into the mirror as if hypnotized. He wait for Spangler like the Bates family waited for their son, like the duchess's husband waited for his wife to return from the sitting room.

He stared into the mirror and waited.

And waited.

And waited.

Tasks on the text "The Reaper's Image"

- 1) Write the summary.
- 2) Explain in English:
 - to insure
 - an industry emperor
 - a candelabrum

- authenticity
 - The Reaper
 - a distortion
 - dread
 - a pearl
- 3) Find some facts about "the Elizabethan period of England's history"; the mystery of looking glasses.
 - 4) Translate the part "Facts ... And that was all".
 - 5) Write the beginning of the story. How did Mr. Carlin get this mirror?
 - 6) Do you believe in superstitions which are connected with old things?
 - 7) Describe an old, precious thing that you or your family have.
 - 8) Ask a problematic question on the story.
 - 9) Prepare for the social discussion: collections.

POPSY

Sheridan was walking around in the shopping mall when he saw the little kid. It was a boy-child, perhaps no more than five years old. On his face was an expression which Sheridan knew very well. The boy was trying not to cry.

Sheridan had left his van right in front of the mall. It had a special 'Disabled' license plate which helped him not only with the parking space, but also with the cops.

Sheridan felt disgusted every time he kidnapped a child. That first time he hadn't slept for a week. He worked for a Turk and didn't know what he did with the children. Sheridan never asked any questions, but he still felt bad about this business.

If you know what's good for you, you won't ask about it, the Turk always smiled.

If only he could change something in his life! But never mind, he was in trouble now, and this kid could solve some very big problems.

Sheridan walked slowly toward the kid, who was looking around with panic. *Yes, Sheridan thought, he was five, maybe even six – very frail.* In the fluorescent light of the mall the boy looked very pale, perhaps scared or even ill. Sheridan thought it was just fear, that's all.

The kid was dressed in jeans and a T-shirt. He looked at the people passing by, looked for help, looked for a friend, looked for somebody to look at him and see that something was wrong, looked for someone to ask the right question – *lost your dad, son?*

Here I am, Sheridan thought, walking closer. Here I am, son – I'll be your friend.

He had almost reached the kid when he saw a mall cop coming their way. In a moment he would see the boy, and Sheridan's whole plan would fail.

Damn it, he thought, but at least the cop wouldn't see him talking to the kid. That would've been worse.

Sheridan stopped by the nearest shop and pretended that he was looking for something in his pockets, as if to make sure he still had his keys. Secretly, he looked from the boy to the cop and back to the boy.

The boy had started to cry. Not loudly – not yet – but big tears rolled down his cheeks. At that moment the girl at the information desk across the hall waved at the cop and said something to him. She was pretty, blond, about twenty-five. The cop turned to her, smiling.

How nice, Sheridan thought. He suddenly decided to take the chance. The kid was sobbing now, and soon someone would notice him. Sheridan didn't like it that the cop was so near, but if he didn't pay his debt to Mr. Reggie in the next twenty-four hours, he would spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair. That is if he is lucky He walked up to the kid, bent over the little boy, and the boy turned his pale, scared face up to look at Sheridan.

His eyes were green and filled with tears. 'You lost your dad, son?' Sheridan asked.

'My *Popsy*,' the kid said, sobbing. 'I... I can't find my P-P-Popsy!'

A woman passing them by glanced around with some concern. 'It's all right,' Sheridan said to her, and she went on.

Sheridan put a comforting arm around the boy's shoulders and pulled him a little to the right... in the direction of the van. Then he looked back. The cop was still talking to the information girl with his back turned to them. Sheridan relaxed: the cop wouldn't notice a thing. This was starting to look like a lucky day.

'I want my Popsy!' the boy sobbed.

'Sure you do, of course you do,' Sheridan said. 'And we're going to find him. Don't worry.' He pulled the kid a little more to the right.

The boy looked up at him, suddenly hopeful. 'Can you? Can you, mister?'

'Sure!' Sheridan said, and smiled. 'Finding lost Popsys is my job.'

'It is?' The kid smiled a little.

'It sure is,' Sheridan said, looking at the cop again. 'What was your Popsy wearing, son?'

'He was wearing his suit,' the boy said. 'He always wears his suit. I only saw him once in jeans.'

'I bet it was a black suit,' Sheridan said.

The boy's eyes lit up. 'You saw him! Where?'

Sheridan had to get him in the van first. But quietly, without making a scene because a scene will be noticed and remembered. The van had tinted windows; it was almost impossible to see things inside of it.

Had to get him in the van.

Sheridan touched the boy on the arm. 'I didn't see him inside here, son. I saw him right over there.' He pointed across the parking lot. At the far end of it there was a McDonald's restaurant.

'Why would Popsy go over *there*?' the boy asked.

'I don't know,' Sheridan said. His mind was working fast. Popsy. Not Dad or Daddy, but Popsy. The kid had corrected him. Maybe Popsy was a Granddad? 'But I'm pretty sure that was him. Older guy in a black suit. White hair... green tie...'

'Popsy had a blue tie,' the boy said. 'He knows that I like it the best. 'Yeah, maybe it was blue,' Sheridan said. 'Come on, get in the van, I'll take you over there to him very fast.'

'Are you *sure* it was Popsy? Because I don't know why he'd go to a place where...'

Sheridan shrugged. 'Look, kid, if you're sure that if wasn't him, maybe you should go and look for him or your own. Maybe you'll find him.' And he started walking away, back toward the van.

The kid didn't move. Sheridan thought about going back, trying again, but it had already gone on for too long. He'd better drive to another mall, maybe, and try there.

'Wait, mister!' It was the kid, with panic in his voice, running behind him.' *Wait!* I told him I was thirsty. Maybe he went there to get me a drink. *Wait!*

Sheridan turned around, smiling. 'I wasn't really going to leave you anyway, son.'

He led the boy to the van. He opened the door and smiled at the kid, who looked up at him doubtfully with his green eyes.

'Get in, buddy,' Sheridan said, and smiled now almost naturally. It was really amazing how good he'd got at this business. The kid did, and although he didn't know it, now belonged to Sheridan.

There was only one problem in Sheridan's life. It wasn't drinking or drugs. No. Sheridan's problem was cards. He had lost jobs, cars, the house his mother had left him. He had never been in jail, but the first time he got in trouble with Mr. Reggie, he'd thought jail would've been a good idea.

One night Sheridan had lost seventeen thousand dollars He could hardly believe it, shocked by the amount of it. He owed Mr. Reggie seventeen thousand.

A couple of days later two gorillas brought him into Mr. Reggie's office.

'I'll pay,' Sheridan said at once. 'I'll pay, listen, it's no problem, a couple of days, a week, two weeks at most...'

'Shut up, Sheridan,' Mr. Reggie said. 'Shut up. If I give you a week, don't you think I know what you'll do? You'll try to play again, that's what you'll do! But you're in a really big trouble already. My guys could put you in the hospital for a long time.'

Sheridan began to sob.

'But I'll give you this,' Mr. Reggie said and pushed a piece of paper across his desk to Sheridan. 'You might even like this guy. He's a Turk, and he calls himself Mr. Wizard. Now get out of here. I'll have you back in here in a week, and you'll pay your debt.'

Sheridan went to see the Turk and heard about the kids. Mr. Wizard also named a figure which was a bit larger than his debt to Mr. Reggie. That was when Sheridan started walking around in the malls.

Sheridan drove out of the mall's main parking lot, looked for traffic, and then drove to the McDonald's. The kid was sitting on the passenger seat in front, hands on the knees, looking alert. Sheridan drove toward the building and past the 'drive-thru' window.

'Why are you going around the back?' the kid asked.

'We have to go around to the other doors,' Sheridan said. 'Calm down, kid. I think I saw him in there.'

'You did? You really did?'

'I'm quite sure, yeah.'

The kid relaxed, and for a moment Sheridan felt sorry for him – hell, he wasn't a monster or a maniac. But his debt was even bigger this time.

It wasn't seventeen thousand, or twenty thousand, or even twenty-five thousand. This time it was thirty-five.

He stopped at the back of the restaurant. No cars were parked there. *Good.* Sheridan quietly reached into his pocket with his left hand and brought out a pair of handcuffs. They were open.

'Why are we stopping here, mister?' the kid asked. There was fear in his voice, but it was a different fear. As if he had suddenly realized that losing his old Popsy in the mall wasn't the worst thing that could happen to him. 'We're not, not really,' Sheridan said calmly. He had learned before that you shouldn't underestimate a six-year-old when they get hysterical. The second kid had kicked him and almost got away. 'I just forgot to put my glasses on when I started driving. They're in that glasses-case there. Can you give them to me?'

The kid got the glasses-case, which was empty. Sheridan leaned and quickly put one of the cuffs on the kid's hand.

And then the trouble started.

The strong little brat fought like crazy – he screamed, and bit, and even managed to open the door. Sheridan could not believe it. He tried to put the other cuff on special metal handle he had built in – and missed. The kid bit his hand twice, bringing blood. God, his teeth were like razors. Sheridan punched the kid in the mouth. The pain in his hand was really bad. No, he didn't blame the kid for fighting – he even admired the kid. Finally, he locked the other cuff on the handle.

Sheridan shut the passenger door and drove around the hamburger restaurant and back onto the main road. He turned left. The Turk had a big house in the suburbs. Sheridan would go there by secondary roads, just to be safe. Thirty miles. Maybe forty-five minutes, maybe an hour. The Turk had promised forty thousand for a boy-child.

'You'll be sorry,' the kid said.

Sheridan looked at him. The kid was crying again, his tears had a weird pinkish color. *Maybe the kid was really ill, even infectious,* Sheridan thought.

'When my Popsy finds you, you'll be sorry,' the kid continued.

'Yeah,' Sheridan said, and lit a cigarette. Soon he turned from the main road onto a narrow lane. There were fields on the left and woods on the right.

The kid pulled at the handcuffs and sobbed.

'Stop it. It won't help you.'

But the kid pulled again. And this time there was a sound Sheridan didn't like *at all*. He looked around and saw that the thick metal handle was twisted.

Jesus! he thought. *He's got teeth like razors, and he's also as strong as an ox. If this is what he's like when he's sick, what can he do when he's well?*

He stopped the van and said, 'Quit it!'

'I *won't!* '

The kid pulled at the handcuff again, and amazed Sheridan saw how the metal handle twisted a little more.

Jesus, how could any kid do that?

It's panic, he answered himself. *That's how he can do it.*

But none of the others had been able to do it, and many of them had been a lot more terrified by this moment than this kid.

Sheridan opened the glove compartment and took out a syringe with a big needle. The Turk had given a tranquilizer to him and told him to use it only when he absolutely had to.

'See this?'

The kid nodded.

'You want me to use it?'

The kid shook his head. Strong or not, he was afraid of the needle, just like any other kid, and Sheridan was happy to see it.

'That's very smart.' He paused. 'It might even kill you.'

The kid stared at him, his lips trembling, his cheeks white with fear.

'You stop pulling at the cuff, and I put the needle away. Deal?'

'Deal,' the kid whispered.

'You promise?'

'Yes.'

'You promise on your mother's name?'

'I never had a mother.'

'Damn,' Sheridan said and started the van again. He drove a little faster now. The kid was *spooky*. Sheridan just wanted to give him to the Turk, get his money, and go.

'My Popsy's really strong, mister.'

'Yeah?' Sheridan asked, and thought: *I bet he is, kid. The strongest guy in the old people's home, right?*

'He'll find me.'

'Uh-huh.'

'He can smell me.'

Sheridan believed it. He could smell the kid, too. Fear had a smell, but this was unreal – the kid smelled like mixture of sweat, mud, and acid. Sheridan was becoming more and more sure that something was seriously wrong with the kid... but soon that would be Mr. Wizard's problem, not his. Sheridan opened his window. On the left, the fields went on and on.

'Popsy can fly.'

'Yeah,' Sheridan said, 'after a couple of bottles I bet he flies like an eagle.'

'Popsy...'

'Enough of the Popsy stuff, kid – okay?'

The kid shut up.

Sheridan looked at the fields, silvery in the moonlight... and then the moonlight was gone. Above them there was a flapping sound of wings.

'Popsy!' the kid cried.

'Shut up. It was only a bird.'

But suddenly Sheridan froze with fear. He looked at the kid. He could see the kid's teeth now. They were very white, very big. No, not big. Big wasn't the right word. *Long* was the right word. Especially the two at the top at each side.

His mind started working very fast again.

I told him I was thirsty.

He'll find me.

He can smell me.

Popsy can fly.

Something landed heavily on the roof of the van.

'Popsy!' the kid cried again almost with delight, and then Sheridan could not see the road anymore – a huge wing covered the windshield from side to side.

Popsy can fly.

Sheridan screamed and stepped on the brakes, hoping that the thing on the roof would fall off.

'He stole me, Popsy!' the kid was crying. *'He stole me, he stole me, the bad man stole me!'*

You don't understand, kid, Sheridan thought. *I'm not a bad guy. I just got in trouble.*

A hand smashed through the side window, and a moment later Popsy pulled the driver's-side door off.

Sheridan saw a black cloak and the creature's blue tie... although actually it was a cravat – just as the boy had said.

Popsy pulled Sheridan out of the car, and his green eyes suddenly turned as red as blood.

'We came to the mall because my grandson wanted some Ninja Turtle figures,' Popsy whispered. 'The ones they show on TV. All the children want them. You should have left him alone. You should have left *us* alone.'

He shook Sheridan hard. Sheridan shrieked, and Popsy shook him again.

Then he heard Popsy asking if the kid was still thirsty.

He heard the kid saying yes, *very*, the bad man had scared him, and his throat was so dry.

And the last things Sheridan saw were the kid's long, teeth, and Popsy, gently stroking the boy's hair with grandfatherly love.

Tasks on the text "Popsy"

1) Write a summary.

2) Explain in English:

- a van
- to feel bad about smth
- to pretend
- to sob
- to shrug
- to belong
- a "drive-thru" window
- handcuffs
- a brat
- a glove compartment
- spooky
- a windshield

3) Explain the grammar

- If only he could change...
- In a moment he would see the boy.
- That would've been worse.

- He'd thought jail would've been a good idea.
- 4) Answer the questions
- Why was the child alone in the mall?
 - What debt should Sheridan pay to Mr. Reggie?
 - Who is Popsy?
 - What's Sheridan's problem?
 - How did Sheridan get the kid into his van?
 - Why is the Turk called Mr. Wizard?
 - What's the atmosphere of the story?
- 5) Write out the words, belonging to the semantic field "look".
- 6) Translate the passage: "Sheridan stopped ... Sheridan asked".
- 7) Prepare for the social discussion: kidnapping.

WORD PROCESSOR OF THE GODS

At first glance this huge word processor looked like an electronic toy typewriter – it had a toy keyboard and a toy case.

'What in the name of *God* is that?' Lina asked as he and Mr. Nordhoff brought it to his study piece by piece.

Mr. Nordhoff had lived next door to Richard Hagstrom's brother's family – Roger, Belinda, and their boy, Jonathan.

'Something Jon built,' Richard said. 'Wanted me to have it, Mr. Nordhoff says. It looks like a word processor.'

'Oh, yeah,' Nordhoff said. 'That's what he said it was, the poor kid...'

'It's heavy,' Richard said, and then called his son, Seth, who was trying to play his new expensive electric guitar downstairs. 'Seth!' he yelled. 'Come and help us!'

Downstairs, Seth just continued playing the guitar.

Richard looked at Mr. Nordhoff and shrugged, ashamed. Nordhoff shrugged back as if to say *Kids! Who expects anything better from them these days?*

But they both knew that Jon – poor Jon Hagstrom, his brother's son – had been better.

'Thank you for helping me with this,' Richard said. 'Seth!' he yelled again. 'Come here and help us, okay? Lina?'

But Seth just went on playing his guitar for which Richard was still paying, and Richard's wife didn't move from the kitchen table, where she was reading a cheap paperback and eating candies.

What is a nice guy like you doing with a family like that? his friend Bernie Epstein had asked him once, and Richard had only shaken his head, feeling the same embarrassment he was feeling now.

He was a nice guy. And yet somehow he had an overweight, sullen wife who thought she deserved a better life, and a sullen fifteen-year-old son who wasn't doing well in the same school where Richard taught – a son who played his guitar morning, noon and night and wanted nothing else.

'Well, what about a beer?' Richard asked Mr. Nordhoff. He didn't want to let Nordhoff go – he wanted to hear more about Jon. Nordhoff agreed.

Richard's study was in a small shed that stood apart from the house – here he could stay away from the stranger he had married and the stranger she had given birth to.

When Lina and he had got married sixteen years before, they had both believed he would become a famous writer, write wonderful novels and make a lot of money. But it didn't happen. Lina didn't support him and refused to work, and that had been the beginning of the end of their marriage. So he got the high school teaching job, but he had never forgotten his dream. Sometimes he wrote short stories and articles.

'You've got a nice place here,' Nordhoff said, looking around the small shed.

The word processor now sat on the desk. Richard's old electric typewriter had been put aside.

Richard nodded at the word processor and asked, 'Do you think this thing really works? Jon was only fourteen.'

'It looks funny, doesn't it?'

'It does,' Richard agreed.

Nordhoff laughed. 'You don't know the half of it,' he said. 'I looked into the back of it, and it's very complicated with all sorts of wires and stuff. Fifteen. Jon had just turned fifteen a couple of days before the accident. He was always crazy about gadgets. Any kind of gadget, you know.'

'I know,' Richard said, thinking of the boxes of Seth's toys – thrown away, forgotten, or broken. He looked at the word processor again. 'It doesn't work, I think.'

'You can't tell until you try it,' Nordhoff said. 'The kid was an electrical genius.'

'It's true. We were all very proud of him.'

But it wasn't exactly true. Richard had been proud, and Jon's mother had been proud, but the boy's father didn't care at all.

'Kids can be very talented sometimes. Super-smart. You might be surprised,' said Nordhoff, drinking his beer.

'Maybe. Maybe. You loved him a little, didn't you?'

'He was a fine boy, Mr. Hagstrom,' Nordhoff said, 'I loved him a lot. He really was a great kid.'

And Richard thought how strange it was — his brother, who had been a troublemaker since the age of six, had got a fine woman and a fine bright son. He himself, who had always tried to be gentle and good, had married Lina, who had developed into a sullen, fat woman, and had got Seth. He was often wondering how that had happened and if it had been his own fault, a result of his weakness.

After Nordhoff had gone, Richard Hagstrom plugged the word processor in and turned it on. There was a hum, and he waited to see if the letters IBM would appear on the screen. They did not. Instead, like a voice from the grave, there were these words written in green: *HAPPY BIRTHDAY, UNCLE RICHARD! JON.*

'Jesus,' Richard whispered.

The accident that had killed his brother, his wife, and their son had happened two weeks before – they had been returning from some trip, and Roger had been drunk.

Being drunk was normal in the life of Roger Hagstrom. But this time he had driven his old van off the edge of a cliff. It had crashed and burned.

Richard's birthday was a week from today. The word processor had been Jon's birthday present for him. Richard had dreamed and talked about a word processor for years and when Lina started laughing at him, he had talked about it to Jon.

'I could write faster, edit faster, and write more,' he had told Jon last summer.

The boy had looked at him seriously. 'Then why don't you get one, Uncle Rich?'

'Because they're expensive,' Richard had said, smiling.

'Well, maybe I'll build you one sometime,' Jon had said.

'Maybe you will,' Richard had said.

Richard wanted to turn the machine off. But instead he pushed the *EXECUTE* button on the keyboard. *EXECUTE* was a funny word to use.

The machine was humming louder now. Richard thought again of Jon's eyes, of his face. Was he jealous of another man's son?

But he should have been mine. I knew it... and I think he knew it, too.

And then there was Belinda, Roger's wife. Belinda who wore sunglasses on cloudy days. The big ones, to cover those bruises around her eyes. He

looked at her sometimes and thought almost the same thing: *She should have been mine.*

They had both known Belinda in high school and had both dated her. But Roger was older and bigger. Roger always got what he wanted. Roger would hurt anyone who tried to stand in his way.

I was scared. I was scared and I lost her.

Was it as simple as that? Dear God help me, I think it was.

If only Lina and Seth had belonged with his brother...

If only Belinda and Jon had belonged with him...

Richard's fingers moved quickly over the keyboard. He looked at the screen and saw the green letters that he had typed: *MY BROTHER WAS A DRUNK.* He erased the phrase.

Then Richard looked around his office and noticed one picture that he didn't like. It was a portrait of Lina, her Christmas present to him two years ago. *I want you to hang it in your study, she'd said, and so of course he had done that. Don't forget me, Richard. I'm here.*

He typed: *MY WIFE'S PHOTOGRAPH IS ON THE WALL OF MY STUDY.*

He looked at the meaningless words and then pushed the *DELETE* button. The words disappeared.

He looked at the wall and saw that his wife's picture had also disappeared. There was a faint smell of something burning, coming from the word processor.

Richard sat there for a very long time looking at the wall where the picture had been. He got up and walked to the wall. The picture had been here, yes, *right here.* It was gone now, and there was not even a hole.

Gone.

The smell of smoke was stronger now, and he could see smoke coming from the word processor's case. The hum was louder, too. It was time to turn it off.

And he would. In just a minute. Richard sat down in front of the screen again and typed: *MY WIFE'S PICTURE IS ON THE WALL.*

He looked at this for a moment, and then pushed the *EXECUTE* button.

He looked at the wall. Lina's picture was back, where it had always been.

'Jesus,' Richard whispered. 'Jesus Christ.'

He rubbed his hands and then typed: *THERE ARE TWELVE TWENTY-DOLLAR GOLD PIECES IN A SMALL COTTON SACK.*

He then added: *ON THE FLOOR.*

He pressed *EXECUTE*.

He looked at the floor. There was now a small white cotton sack that looked heavy.

'Dear Jesus,' he heard himself saying in a voice that wasn't his. 'Dear Jesus, dear Jesus...'

The word processor started beeping, and there was the word *OVERLOAD* on the screen. Richard turned it off in a hurry, took the cotton sack, and left his study.

He called Nordhoff that evening. Seth and his band were downstairs, playing their guitars. Lina was out, playing bingo.

'Does the machine work?' Nordhoff asked. 'It works, all right,' Richard said. 'It works in ways you wouldn't believe.'

'I might,' Nordhoff said calmly. 'He was a very bright boy, and he loved you very much, Mr. Hagstrom. But be careful. A boy is only a boy, you know. Do you understand what I mean?'

Richard didn't understand at all. He felt hot with fever. He calculated the current gold rate – now he owned about \$27,756.

'Mr. Nordhoff, could you come here? Now?'

'Tonight?'

'No,' Nordhoff said. 'No, I don't think I want to do that, Mr. Hagstrom. I think this is only between you and Jon. Just remember what I said and be careful.'

'But...'

There was a small click and Nordhoff was gone.

Richard went to his study again half an hour later and looked at the word processor. Nordhoff said *be careful*. Yes. He will be careful. A machine that could do such a thing...

But how *could* a machine do such a thing? He had no idea. He was an English teacher and sometimes writer, not a technician.

He turned the machine on. As before, it said: *HAPPY BIRTHDAY, UNCLE RICHARD! JON*. He pushed *EXECUTE*, and the message from his nephew disappeared.

The noise from the machine was getting louder again, and more quickly than this afternoon. Already he could smell the smoke.

This machine is not going to work for long, he thought suddenly.

Maybe that was because Jon hadn't had the time – hadn't had a chance – to perfect it.

Magic dream machine.

Word processor of the gods.

Was that what it was? Was that what Jon had planned to give his uncle for his birthday?

Richard heard how the back door of the house opened and then the voices of Seth and some members of his band. The voices were too loud. They had been drinking or smoking weed.

'Where's your old man, Seth?' one of them asked.

'Fooling around in his study, as usual, I guess,' Seth said. Then there was laughter.

Richard sat listening to them, and suddenly he typed: *MY SON IS SETH ROBERT HAGSTROM*.

His finger was now on the *DELETE* button. *What are you doing? Are you serious? Do you want to murder your own son?*

But I'm not going to murder him. I'm going to... DELETE him.

His finger pushed the button. The words *MY SON IS SETH ROBERT HAGSTROM* disappeared from the screen.

Outside, Seth's words disappeared with them. There was no sound out there now.

Richard turned off the word processor and went outside. The driveway was empty. His son's car was not parked there anymore, because Seth wasn't here, Seth had never been here. Seth had been *DELETED*. 'I have no son,' Richard whispered.

Oh yes.

He walked into the house. Seth's tennis shoes were gone from the hall. He went upstairs to Seth's room. It was nice and clean and empty. Just a guest room. There was no sign that a boy named Seth Hagstrom had once lived in this house.

Richard heard a car parking in their driveway. *Lina*, he thought, and felt panic.

It's Lina, back from bingo, and what's she going to say when she sees that Seth is gone? What... what... Murderer! You murdered your boy!

But he hadn't murdered Seth. 'I *DELETED* him,' he whispered, and went downstairs to meet her in the kitchen.

Lina was much fatter now. Jesus, she was *huge!* But the look of contempt in her eyes when she saw him hadn't changed.

'What are you staring at, Richard?' she asked. She was carrying a huge frozen turkey.

You, Lina. I'm staring at you. Because this is how you look in a world where we had no children. You, Lina. That's what I'm staring at. You.

'That bird, Lina,' he said finally. 'That's one of the biggest turkeys I've ever seen.'

'Well don't just stand there looking at it, idiot! Help me with it!'

He took the turkey and put it on the table.

'*Not there!*' she cried angrily. 'Put it in the freezer!'

'Sorry,' he said.

'It was the Thanksgiving bingo,' she said. 'We had it this week instead of the next.' She smiled and grabbed a handful of chocolate candies from a jar.

'Lina,' he said, 'are you sorry we never had children?'

She looked at him as if he had gone crazy. 'Why would I want one of those?' she asked. 'I'm going to bed. Are you coming, or are you going back to your useless typewriter again?'

'I'll go for a little more, I think,' he said. 'I won't be long. I just want to write down a few things.'

'Why don't you write a Nobel Prize-winning novel, or something?' she asked.

'Well,' Richard said, 'I don't know, Lina. But I've got some good ideas tonight. I really do.'

When Lina went upstairs, Richard returned to his study. This time when he turned the word processor on, it didn't just hum – it began to howl. That smell came almost immediately from behind the screen, and as soon as he pushed the *EXECUTE* button after the *HAPPY BIRTHDAY, UNCLE RICHARD* message, the machine began to smoke.

Not much time, he thought. *No... that's not right. No time at all. Jon knew it, and now I know it, too.*

He had two choices: to bring Seth back with the *INSERT* button or finish the job.

The smell was getting thicker. In a few moments the screen would start showing its *OVERLOAD* message.

He typed: *MY WIFE IS ADELINA MABEL WARREN HAGSTROM.*

He pressed the *DELETE* button.

Then he typed: *I AM A MAN WHO LIVES ALONE.*

Now the word *OVERLOAD* began to blink on the screen:
OVERLOAD...OVERLOAD...OVERLOAD.

Please. Please let me finish. Please, please, please...

The smoke coming from the word processor was thick and gray now, and through that smoke Richard could see a red spark of fire.

Should he try again later? But there was no *later*.

He pressed the *INSERT* button.

The screen was dark, except for the constant *OVERLOAD* message.

He typed: *EXCEPT FOR MY WIFE, BELINDA, AND MY SON, JONATHAN.*

Please. Please. Please.

He pressed the *EXECUTE* button.

OVERLOAD was now blinking very fast, and something inside the machine popped. Richard groaned.

Then green letters appeared on the screen: *I AM MAN WHO LIVES ALONE EXCEPT FOR MY WIFE BELINDA, AND MY SON, JONATHAN.*

Richard pressed the *EXECUTE* button twice.

Now, he thought. Now I will type: *I HAVE IDEAS FOR AT LEAST TWENTY BEST-SELLING NOVELS.* Or I'll type: *MY FAMILY AND I ARE GOING TO LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER.* Or I'll type...

But he typed nothing because the screen suddenly filled up with the word: *OVERLOADOVERLOADOVERLOADOVERLOADOVERLOADOVERLOAD.*

There was another pop inside the machine and then an explosion. Richard turned his face away from the screen. When he turned back, he saw that it was dark.

He sat there, looking at the darkness of the screen.

'Dad?'

He turned around in his chair, his heart beating fast.

Jon stood there, alive, Jon Hagstrom, and his face was the same but a bit different. Perhaps, Richard thought, the difference was the difference between two brothers.

'Jon?' he said. 'Jon, it's you, isn't it?'

'Who else could it be?' Jon looked at the word processor. 'Did you hurt yourself when the machine went to data heaven?'

Richard smiled. 'No. I'm fine.'

'I'm sorry it didn't work,' Jon said and shook his head.

'Well,' Richard said, getting up from his chair and putting an arm around his son's shoulders, 'you'll do better next time.'

'Maybe. Or I'll try something else. I'll throw that thing away tomorrow,' Jon said.

Richard nodded. 'Delete it from our lives,' he said as they went into the house, laughing together.

Tasks on the text "Word Processor of the Gods"

1) Write a summary.

2) Explain in English:

- a paperback
- sullen
- a typewriter
- a wire
- a troublemaker
- to execute
- a bruise
- faint
- a gold rate
- contempt
- data heaven

3) Answer the questions:

- Why was Jon Hagstrom better than other kids?
- Answer Bernie's question: what is a nice guy like you doing with a family like that?
- Why does Richard call his wife and son "strangers"?
- Explain the usage of the word "before" not "ago" in the sentence "When Lina and he had got married 16 years before..."
- What happened to Jon and his parents?
- What's the difference between "plug in" and "turn on"?
- What can a word processor do?
- What did Richard do with his son and wife?

4) Fill in prepositions:

- Who wasn't doing well ... the same school.
- We were all very proud ... him.
- Richard plugged the word processor ... and turned it...
- ... he had driven his old van ... the edge of a cliff.
- Richard wanted to turn the machine...
- Was he jealous ... another man's son?
- ... who wore sunglasses ... cloudy days.
- He looked ... this for a moment.
- I'm staring ... you.
- The screen suddenly filled ... with the word.

5) Give a psychological portrait of Richard.

6) Translate the title and the passage "After Nordhoff had gone ... Richard had said".

7) Get some information about the game "Bingo", Thanksgiving, IBM.

8) What would you do if you had such a machine?

9) Write the continuation of the story.

10) Prepare for the social discussion: gadgets.

I KNOW WHAT YOU NEED

'I know what you need.'

Elizabeth looked up from her sociology textbook and saw a rather average young man in a green jacket. For a moment she thought he looked familiar, as if she had known him before; the feeling was close to *deja vu*.

Then it was gone. He was about her height, skinny and perhaps a bit older. He had dark brown eyes, black hair and wore thick horn-rimmed glasses that looked dirty. No, she was quite sure she had never seen him before. 'You know,' she replied, 'I doubt it,' 'You need a strawberry ice-cream cone. Right?' She stared at him, startled. Indeed, she *had* been thinking about an ice cream. She was studying for her finals at the library, and it was time to take a break. 'Right?' he asked again and smiled. The smile made him look almost cute.

She smiled back. 'No, thanks,' she said, since she still had sixteen chapters to review.

'Come on, give yourself a break! You've been studying for two hours.'

'How do you know that?'

'I've been watching you,' he said simply.

'Well, you should stop,' she said. 'I don't like people staring at me.'

'I'm sorry.'

She felt a little sorry for him. Poor guy. His green jacket was too big for him, and his socks didn't match. One black, one brown. 'Well, I've got these finals,' she said gently.

'Sure,' he said. 'Okay.'

He left. She looked after him for a moment and then continued reading her textbook.

When she returned to the dorm, it was already late in the evening, and her roommate Alice was lying on her bed, listening to music and reading a spy story.

'You look mysterious, girl,' Alice greeted her.

'I met a guy tonight. A funny guy, you know.'

'Oh? He must be something if he got you interested.'

'His name is Edward Jackson Hamner, Junior. Short. Skinny. Untidy. Oh, and his socks didn't match. One black, one brown.'

'I thought such guys weren't your type.'

'It's nothing like that, Alice. I was studying at the library, and he just invited me for an ice-cream cone. I told him no and he left. But he made me think about ice-cream, and I couldn't stop. I'd decided to take a break and there he was, standing outside the library, holding a big strawberry cone in each hand.'

'And?'

Elizabeth laughed. 'Well, I couldn't say no. So we sat down to talk, and it turns out he had sociology with the same professor last year. You know how hard this subject is for me. Well, this Ed Hamner said that they use the same final every year, and Ed remembers the text questions *word for word*.'

'You mean he's got a photographic memory?'

'Well, I guess. Look at this.' She opened her sociology book and took out three sheets of paper covered with writing.

Alice looked at them. 'I don't believe it! But it's not my business. I know that you will study for the test anyway,' she said and opened her spy book again.

When Elizabeth came out of the lecture hall after the exam, Ed Hamner was sitting in the lobby, waiting for her. He smiled at her and stood up. 'How did it go?'

Impulsively, she kissed his cheek. 'I think I did fine. Thanks to you.'

'Really? That's great. Would you like a burger?'

'I'd love to,' she said.

Over hamburgers, she asked him how his own finals were going.

'I don't have any. I'm in Honors program, and we don't take them unless we want to. And I didn't.'

'Then why are you still here?'

'I had to see how you did.'

'Oh, Ed, that's so sweet, but...' She recognized the look in his eyes. She had seen it before. She was a very pretty girl. 'But I have a boyfriend, you know.'

'Serious?' he asked.

'Very,' she said, thinking of Tony Lombard. 'Almost engaged.'

'Does he know he's lucky? Does he know how lucky he is, Beth?'

'What?' she asked, startled.

'Nobody calls you Beth, do they? Not even this guy?'

'Why... No, they don't.'

Tony called her Liz. Sometimes Lizzie, which she didn't like at all.

'But Beth is what you like best, isn't it?'

She laughed to hide her confusion. 'But how do you.. ?;

'Never mind,' he smiled. 'I'll call you Beth. That's better.'

When the academic year was over, she collected her papers and said goodbye to Alice. Waiting at the airport for her flight, she was thinking how she and Tony would be working this summer, and about the money they would earn. It was going to be a beautiful summer.

But it was the worst summer of her life.

June was rainy, the tourists were few, and the money she made was little. Even worse, Tony – now working temporarily in a road construction – was pressing her on the subject of marriage. He could get a job while studying, he said, and she could get her degree. She was surprised to find that the idea didn't please her at all.

Something was *wrong*.

She didn't know what, but something was missing.

She had a nightmare in early August. She dreamed that she was lying in an open grave. Rain was falling onto her face. Tony was standing over her.

'Marry me, Liz,' he said, looking down at her. 'Marry me or else.'

She tried to speak, but couldn't. She was paralyzed.

'All right,' he said. 'It's or else, then.'

He went away. Then she heard the bulldozer. He was going to bury her alive.

Suddenly, a familiar voice cried, 'Go! Leave her now! *Go!*'

It was Ed Hamner, in his green jacket. He held his hand to her. 'Get up,' he said gently. 'I know what you need. Get up, Beth.'

She took his hand, looked down, and when she looked up again, she was holding the paw of a huge wolf with red eyes and big teeth. That's when she woke up shaking.

A week later Tony was dead.

One morning she opened the door, expecting to see Tony, but it was Danny Kilmer, one of the guys he worked with. He looked ill.

'Danny?' she asked. 'What...'

'Liz,' he said. 'Liz, you've got to listen to me. You've..! *Oh, God!*'

'Danny, what is it? Is it Tony? Has something..?'

'Tony's dead,' Danny said. 'He was...'

She fainted.

They had been repairing something on Route 16, and Tony was flagging traffic. A kid driving a red Fiat had been coming down the hill. Tony had flagged him, but the kid didn't slow down. Tony had been standing next to a truck, and there was no place to jump back. The kid in the Fiat had only some cuts and a broken arm; he was hysterical and also sober. The police found several holes in his brakes, as if they had overheated and melted. His driving record was perfect; he had simply been unable to stop.

Elizabeth was shocked and depressed for weeks, but a secret part of her was glad it was so because she hadn't wanted to marry Tony...

One day at the end of August she was sitting by the lake, crying, when Ed Hamner walked up behind her and said, 'Beth?'

She turned around, startled, almost expecting to see the wolf from her dream. But it was only Ed. He was wearing shorts and a white T-shirt that made him look even skinnier. He wasn't smiling.

'Ed?' she said. 'Is that really you? How..?'

'Yes, it's me. I've been working in Skowhegan, and that's where I met into your roommate Alice. She told me what had happened. I came right away. Poor Beth.'

She began to cry again. Then he was holding her, and then it was all right.

They had dinner together at a little restaurant which was 25 miles away. They went in Ed's car, a new Corvette, and he drove surprisingly well. She didn't want to talk, and she didn't want to laugh. He seemed to know it, and played quiet music on the car radio. He ordered without asking her – seafood. She thought she wasn't hungry until the food came. When her plate was finally empty, she laughed nervously. Ed was smoking a cigarette and watching her.

'Can I have a cigarette?' she asked him.

'Sure. But they're menthol. Sorry.'

She took one. 'How did you know I didn't like menthol cigarettes?'

He shrugged. 'I guessed.'

She smiled. 'You're funny, do you know that? I thought I didn't want to see anyone. But I'm really glad it was you, Ed.'

He smiled, 'Sometimes it's nice to be with someone you're comfortable with.'

She paused. 'So, who are you, Ed? Who are you really?'

It was suddenly important to her to know.

He shrugged. 'Nobody. Just a funny-looking guy you see walking around the campus with a lot of books under one arm.'

'What about your parents?' she asked. 'Where do you live? What you like to do?'

'Another time,' he said. I want to drive you home now. You've got a long flight back to school tomorrow.'

That evening she felt relief for the first time since Tony's death. She thought she would fall asleep easily, but she did not. She had a lot of questions...

Alice told me he said. But Alice was at her parents' house 80 miles from Skowhegan. She must've traveled there for shopping.

The Corvette, this year's model. Expensive. A summer job in Skowhegan couldn't pay for that. Were his parents rich?

He had ordered just what she liked. Then the menthol cigarettes and how he had kissed her good night. And he also knew that she was going back by plane.

It bothered her. It bothered her because she was almost in love with Ed Hamner.

I know what you need.

He didn't come to see her off at the airport. She surprised and even disappointed.

But then her phone rang, and Ed's voice said, 'Beth? '

'Ed! It's good to hear you. I thought maybe...'

'That I'd meet you?' He laughed. 'You don't need me for that. You're a big strong girl. Beautiful, too. Will I see you at school?'

'I... yes, of course.'

'Good.' There was silence. Then he said, 'Because I love you. I have from the first time I saw you.'

She couldn't speak. A thousand thoughts rushed through her mind.

He laughed again, gently. 'No, don't say anything. Not now. I'll see you. There'll be time then. All the time in the world. Have a good trip, Beth.' And then he was gone.

In September Elizabeth started going to classes, lived in the dorm with Alice again, of course. The event of the summer began to seem dreamlike. In a funny way it sometimes seemed that Tony was just a boy she had known long ago. It still hurt to think about him, and she avoided the subject.

What hurt more was that Ed Hamner didn't call.

A week passed, then two, then it was October. Elizabeth found a student directory and looked up his name, it didn't help; after his name were only the words 'Mill Street', and it was a very long street. So she waited, and when someone called her on a date, she said no. Alice seemed surprised but said nothing; she was busy studying and spent most of her evenings at the library. Elizabeth noticed that once or twice a week her roommate received some long white envelopes in the mail, but she always forgot to ask Alice about them.

When the intercom buzzed Elizabeth went to the door. 'Yes?'

'A gentleman here wants to see you, Liz,' the desk girl said.

'Who is it?' she asked.

'His name is Edward Jackson Hamner, Junior, and his socks don't match.'

'Oh, God!'

Alice watched calmly as Elizabeth was dressing up in a hurry.

Ed looked just the same; he hadn't changed at all. He was wearing his green jacket, and it still looked too big. He was also wearing one green and one brown sock.

And she knew she loved him.

'Why didn't you call before?' she asked him.

He smiled shyly. 'I thought I'd give you some time to date some other guys, to decide what you really want.'

'I think I know what I want,' she said and kissed him.

As the days passed Elizabeth realized that she had never met anyone who understood her needs so perfectly. They had the same tastes. Ed took her to comedy or drama movies. He took her to the circus. He took her to dances and was especially good at the old ones, which she loved. More importantly, he understood when she wanted to be passionate. They often went to Ed's apartment on Mill Street, but he didn't force her or hurry her. He honestly seemed to want what she wanted and she wanted it. And things progressed.

Some time later Elizabeth noticed that her roommate Alice was strangely preoccupied, often looking at some papers that had arrived in a large envelope and frowning.

'Alice, are you okay?' she asked her one evening before she went out to see Ed.

'Well, yes. Actually, no. I have to talk to you, Liz. About Ed.'

Alice looked at her, and Elizabeth suddenly knew that what Alice was going to say was the truth. And she felt scared.

'Two things made me suspicious about Ed Hamner,' Alice said. 'First, you wrote me about Tony's death and how lucky it was that I'd seen Ed in Skowhegan. But I never saw him, Liz. I was never near that place last summer. So how did he know that Tony was dead? I have no idea. I only know he didn't get it from me. The other thing was that sociology test. How could he remember it if he forgot which socks he put on? Besides, Ed Hamner never worked in Skowhegan. He was in Las Vegas last summer. Then he came back in mid-July and took a motel room not far from where you were staying. He was waiting for the right moment to see you.'

'That's crazy! How do you know all this?' Elizabeth cried.

'Since I've known that he had lied to you about some things, I went to my father and asked him for advice. And he let me hire a private detective.'

'To do what?' Elizabeth asked, shocked. 'Stop it, Alice. That's it. I know that he's kind and good and...'

'Love is blind, right?' Alice said and smiled. 'At least, *listen*, please. Then make your own decision.'

Elizabeth turned and looked at her for a long moment, 'OK, then. Maybe you're right. Please go on.'

'Here is what they have found. You knew him a long time ago,' Alice continued. 'You went to the same school in Connecticut. Do you remember him?'

'No, of course not!' Elizabeth was puzzled. 'Alice, are you sure?'

But she *did* remember the feeling of *deja vu* she'd had the first time she had met Ed.

'Pretty girls never notice ugly boys. Maybe he had a crush on you. You were in the first grade with him. Maybe he sat in the back of the room and just... watched you. Just a little kid who probably wore glasses and braces. You can't even remember him, but he remembers you.'

Elizabeth said, 'What else?'

'Well, some things here are scary. His father, Ed Hammer, Senior, was a gambler. He often spent his weekends in Las Vegas, gambling heavily... and losing. Then he started taking Ed Junior with him. And he started to win. Ed's father called Ed his "good luck charm" At first, nobody was against the boy, although it was illegal for him to be in the casinos. Soon they were only winning, and were banned from all the casinos. But his father started a new kind of gambling – the stock market. A year later the father quit his job because he didn't need one anymore. He bought villas, he bought cars for himself and his wife...'

'Are you saying that Ed... that he could..?'

'I don't know, Liz. Maybe he just knew what his daddy needed.'

I know what you need.

'Anyway, Mrs. Hamner spent the next six years in different mental institutions. She said that her son was the devil's child. She even stabbed him with scissors, trying to kill him.'

'The scar,' Elizabeth whispered. 'We went swimming and I saw a deep scar below his left shoulder. He said he fell when he was a little boy.'

'See, Liz? It's true! When his mother returned from a mental institution, the three of them went on a vacation. They stopped for a picnic on Route 101. The boy was making a fire when she drove the car right over the edge of the cliff with both her and her husband in it. Maybe she was trying to kill Ed again. By then he was almost eighteen. His father left him millions of dollars. Ed came here a year and a half later. And that's the end.'

'Now I see why he never wants to talk about his family.' Elizabeth got up and put on her coat. 'I am going to him.'

Alice tried again. 'Are you crazy, Liz? Ed Hamner can do things that we only dream about. He made his father rich by playing the stock market. Maybe he predicts things. Maybe he's some kind of psychic, I don't know. Liz, don't you think that he's made you love him?'

Liz turned to her slowly. 'This is ridiculous.'

'Is it? He gave you that sociology test the same way he gave his father the right answers! He never had any sociology course! I checked. He did it only to get you attention!'

'Stop it!' Liz cried again, but Alice wouldn't.

'Please, Liz, listen. He knew the test, and he knew when Tony was killed, and he knew you were going home by plane! I don't know how he can do those things. Maybe there's no harm, but he's made you love him because he knows every secret thing you want and need, and this isn't love!'

Elizabeth shut the door behind her and ran down the stairs. She caught the last bus into town and sat in the back of it, thinking.

Menthol cigarettes... The stock market... Many other things he knew about her... A little boy sitting at the back of a first grade classroom, looking at a pretty little girl too young to understand that...

I know what you need.

No. No. No. I do love him!

But did she really? Or was she simply glad to be with someone who always knew the right thing for her and didn't want anything that she didn't? Wasn't he like a mirror, showing her only what she wanted to see? The presents he gave her were always the right presents. Everything he did was *just right*. Of course, she was very glad!

That's not love at all.

She had never felt so lonely in her life.

He wasn't home. She stood outside his door and suddenly realized that she had no idea what Ed did or whom he saw when he wasn't with her. They never discussed it.

She felt along the top of the door for the spare key she knew he kept there. She found the key and unlocked the door.

The apartment without Ed looked different – artificial, like a stage. Everything looked so perfect to her. Had he decorated it for her and not himself?

But of course that idea was crazy. Wasn't it?

She went into the bedroom and walked up to the bookcase. One book title caught her attention: *Dances of the Fifties*.

She opened the book and turned a couple of pages. Several sections had been circled in red pencil, and next to them there was the word 'BETH' written in large letters.

I have to go now, Elizabeth told herself. *I can still save something. If he came back now, I could never look him in the face again.* But she couldn't stop, and knew it. Things had gone too far.

She went to the closet and opened it.

The closet was a mess: clothes, books, a tennis racket, tennis shoes, some papers, his green jacket in the corner.

She looked at the book titles there. *The Golden Mean. Ancient Rituals. Modern Mysteries. Voodoo.*

She picked up the green jacket to check its pockets and saw something else.

A small box.

Curiously, she opened it. The doll was on top. The Elizabeth doll.

She looked at it and began to shiver. The doll was dressed in red nylon – a part of the scarf she had lost two or three months before at a movie with Ed. The arms were wrapped in something that looked like moss – graveyard moss, perhaps.

The hair on the doll's head was white and soft. This was the way her hair had been *when she was a little girl.*

Had that long-ago little boy who sat behind her secretly cut her hair and kept it all these years? Elizabeth put the doll aside and looked in the box again.

There was a poker chip with a strange red sign drawn on it. An old newspaper obituary with a photo – Mr. and Mrs. Edward Hamner. There was the same strange sign drawn across their faces. Two more dolls, one male, one female – that looked like the people in the obituary photograph.

And something *else.*

A little toy car. A red Fiat. And a piece of what looked like one of Tony's shirts had been taped to its front.

'So you found it.'

She screamed and dropped the car and the box. Ed was standing in the doorway, looking at her. She had never seen such a look of hate on his face.

She said, 'You killed Tony.'

He smiled. 'Do you think you can prove it?'

'It doesn't matter,' she said. 'I know. And I never want to see you again. Ever.'

His face twisted. 'That's the thanks I get? I gave you everything you ever wanted. No other man could do it. I made you perfectly happy.'

'You *killed* Tony!' she screamed.

'Yes, and I did it for you. And what are you, Beth? You don't know what love is. I loved you from the first time I saw you, more than seventeen years ago. Could Tony say that? It's never been hard for you. You're *pretty*. You never had to think about being lonely. You never had to find other ways to get the things you wanted. There was always someone to give them to you. And I could never get what I wanted that way. Don't you think I tried? It didn't work with my father. He just wanted more and more. He never even kissed me good night or hugged me until I made him rich. And my mother was the same way. I gave her everything, but was that enough for her? She hated me! She wouldn't come near me! She said I was a devil's child!'

He took a step towards her and she stepped back. Accidentally, she stepped on the Elizabeth doll and crushed it. At this moment something inside her flared and then was gone. She had been freed from his magic, and now she wasn't afraid of him. He was just a small boy in a young man's body.

'I think you can't do anything to me now, Ed,' she told him. 'Am I wrong?'

He turned away from her. 'Get out,' he said weakly.

As she was running down the stairs, he shouted: 'Go on then! But you'll never be satisfied with any man after me! And when your looks go and men stop trying to give you anything you want, you'll wish for me! *Because I know what you need!*'

She walked back to the campus, thinking that she actually felt sorry for him: a little boy who tried to make things right and then ruined them with his own hands.

Tasks on the text "I Know What You Need"

- 1) Write a summary.
- 2) Get some information about déjà vu, photographic memory.
- 3) Explain in English:
 - a cone
 - cute
 - a dorm
 - to faint
 - to avoid
 - to frown
 - suspicious
 - to hire
 - a crush
 - a psychic
 - obituary
- 4) Explain the grammar
 - I don't like people staring at me.
 - Nobody calls you Beth, do they?
 - I do love him!
- 5) Fill in prepositions:
 - You've been studying ... 2 hours.
 - She felt a little sorry ... him.
 - When Elizabeth came ... the lecture hall (...).
 - They had dinner together ... a little restaurant.
 - (...) and played quiet music ... the car radio.
 - He didn't come to see her... the airport.
- 6) Answer the questions on the text:

- Who is Edward?
 - What did Beth do in the library?
 - Why was the summer bad for Beth?
 - Describe Beth’s dream.
 - Why didn’t Beth want to marry Tony?
 - Why didn’t Ed call Beth?
 - What was in white envelopes?
 - What did Alice find out about Ed and his family?
 - Why didn’t Beth listen to Alice?
 - What did Beth find in Ed’s room?
- 7) Translate the passage “I know ... reading her textbook”.
- 8) Do you know what you need? Why is it hard to answer this question?
- 9) Explain the proverb “Love is blind”.
- 10) According to the text a relationship with a person who knows what you need, who gives you right presents and who understands all your wishes isn’t love. But what is love?
- 11) Why do people make everything wrong when they want to make it right?
- 12) Prepare for the social discussion: student life in campuses.

SOMETIMES THEY COME BACK

James Norman's wife Sally had been waiting for him, and when she saw his car turning into the driveway of their apartment building, she came out to meet him. He walked up to her, and she put her hands on his shoulders, 'How did it go, Jim?'

Jim smiled. His interview at Harold Davis High School was a success.

But that night, he had the old dream for the first time in a very long time and woke up screaming.

Davis High was quite a good school with mostly smart students from wealthy families. A fine school to teach in. But after the kids were gone, something old seemed to settle in the halls and whisper in the empty rooms. Some black beast, never quite visible. Sometimes, as Jim walked down the corridors toward the parking lot with his paper in one hand, he thought he could almost hear it breathing.

At the end of October he had the dream again.

'Are you all right?' his wife asked, worried. 'Was it nightmare?'

'Yes. My childhood, you know. Sometimes it comes back, that's all.'

For a new teacher, Jim Norman had a good schedule. He taught Grammar, Composition, and American Literature. But there was one difficult class – period seven. The class was called *Living with Literature* – a class for those whom schools normally call 'the slow learners'.

There were 27 'slow learners' in Jim's class – the toughest kids in school who often misbehaved and even teased him. He made interesting lesson plans, used video materials, and picked modern texts – but it didn't work.

One of the biggest problems was a boy named Chip Osway. Once at the end of the semester he met Jim in the corridor.

'If you fail me, we'll get you!' Osway yelled at him. 'We'll get you, creep!'

Jim talked to Mr. Simmons, the principal, who told him just to be patient.

That night Jim had the dream again.

The dream was always very slow. There was time to see and feel everything. He already knew the end and felt helpless.

In the dream he was nine and his brother Wayne was twelve. It was summer vacation. They were walking to the library in Stratford,

Connecticut. Jim's books were two days overdue, and he had four cents in his pocket to pay the fine.

Ahead of them there was a railroad overpass, and on the other side some local losers – five or six boys in jeans and leather jackets – stood near a closed gas station. Jim hated to go by them. They always called them names, and teased, and ran after them.

But Wayne didn't want to take the long way around.

Then in the dream you see how a tall kid with a blond crew cut and a broken nose pushes Wayne against the wall of the overpass and says:
Give us some money.

Leave me alone!

You try to run, but a fat guy with black hair catches and pushes you against the wall next to your brother.

He says: *Come on, kid, how much you've got?*

F-four cents.

You 're a liar!

Wayne tries to free himself and another guy with orange hair helps to hold him. The guy who is holding you suddenly hits you in the mouth, and a dark patch appears on your jeans.

Look, Vinnie, he wet himself!

Wayne almost gets free. Another guy with a scar across his right eyebrow and a small birthmark on his chin throws him back. Then the stone walls of the overpass begin to tremble. Train is coming.

Wayne suddenly kicks one of the kids holding him.

The kid screams.

Vinnie, he's getting away!

They take out switchblades. You hear Wayne screaming:

Run, Jimmy! Run!

You manage to get away. Then you are running back the way you came. You look back over your shoulder and see...

When Jim had looked back, back into the darkness of the overpass, he had seen the blond kid and the kid with a birthmark stab his brother to death.

When school started after Christmas break Mr. Simmons caught Jim on the way to his classroom and handed him a folder.

'New student, period seven. Name is Robert Lawson. Transfer.'

'But I've got 27 in there already.'

'That will still be 27. Bill Stearns was killed after Christmas. Car accident. Hit-and-run.'

'Billy?'

He had been one of the few good ones in *Living with Literature*. Quiet, polite, and smart.

'Jesus, that's awful. Do they know what happened?'

'He was downtown, crossing the street, and an old Ford hit him. No one got the license plate number, but the words "Snake Eyes" were written on the side door. The way a kid would do it.'

During his break Jim looked through Robert Lawson's folder. The first page was a green sheet from Milford High School, which Jim had never heard of. The second was a student personality profile. Low IQ. Lack of skills. The next page was a disciplinary history. Antisocial behavior. Lawson had been in a hundred kinds of trouble. Jim turned the next page, looked at a school photo of Robert Lawson – then looked again. Suddenly, he panicked.

There was a small birthmark on Lawson's chin. By period seven, he had calmed himself down. He told himself there must be thousands of kids with such birthmarks on their chins. He told himself that the kid who had stabbed his brother that day 16 long years ago would now be at least 32.

The kids were waiting for Jim at the door of Room 33. He saw the new boy standing beside Chip Osway. Jim sent Chip to the classroom and turned to Robert Lawson. 'You're new,' he said. 'Yeah, Mr. Norman.'

There was a small scar across his right eyebrow – a scar Jim knew. There could be no mistake. It was crazy, but it was also a fact. Sixteen years ago this kid had stabbed his brother.

The dream was very bad that night. When the kid with the birthmark stabbed his brother with his knife, he called after Jim: *You 're next, kid!*

He woke up screaming.

One morning Jim opened the paper and saw the headline.

'Jesus,' he said and read the news: 'Teenaged Girl Falls to Her Death: Katherine Slavin, a seventeen-year-old student at Harold Davis High School, either fell or was pushed from the roof of her apartment house. A woman in the neighborhood had seen three boys running across the roof, just minutes after the girl's body was found.'

She was one of his period seven students.

Two weeks later, Mr. Simmons met him in the hall after lunch with a folder in his hand, and Jim shivered.

'New student,' he said to Simmons. 'Period seven.'

Simmons was surprised, 'How did you know that?'

Jim shrugged and took the folder. When he was alone in the teachers' room, Jim opened the folder right to the picture. But the face wasn't familiar. Just a kid's face. Maybe he'd seen it before, maybe not. The kid, David Garcia, was a black-haired boy with dark eyes. The yellow sheet said he was also from Milford High. Jim closed the folder with shaky hands.

Garcia had been standing with Lawson and Chip Osway, and when he looked up and saw Jim Norman, he smiled, and voices started whispering in Jim's head:

Come on, kid, how much you've got?

F-four cents.

You're a liar!

Look, Vinnie, he wet himself!

One day after school there was a knock on the teacher room door, and when Jim opened it, he saw Chip Osway standing there. He looked frightened.

'Chip?' Jim asked. 'Is it about your test again?'

'Can I talk to you for a minute, Mr. Norman?' Chip paused. The kid seemed nervous, and his hands trembled slightly. 'It's not about that. Listen, if they do it, I want you to know I wasn't in it! I don't like those guys! They're creeps!

'What guys, Chip?'

'Lawson and Garcia.'

'Are they planning to get me?' He now felt the terror of his dream, and he knew the answer.

'I liked them at first,' Chip said. 'We went out and had a few beers. I started telling them about you and that test. About how I was going to get you and all. But that was just talk! I swear!'

What happened?'

They got excited about it. Asked what time you left school, what kind of car you drove, all that. I asked them what they have got against you, and Garcia said they knew you a long time ago... I asked them when, and Bob Lawson said I was still a rug rat then. But they're seventeen, the same as me.'

'Then what?' Jim asked quietly, almost unable to speak.

'Well, Garcia then asked me what I was going to do, and I said I was going to punch all your tires.' He looked at Jim. 'And then they started laughing at me, and then Garcia took out a switchblade. That's when I got scared and ran away.'

'When was this, Chip?'

'Yesterday. I'm scared to sit with those guys now, Mr. Norman. What should I do?'

'I don't know,' Jim said. 'I really don't.'

On Monday morning he still didn't know. He wanted to talk about it to someone – but who? Sally? Simmons? But it was impossible. They would think he was crazy, and maybe he was.

Am I crazy, then?

If he was, Chip Osway was, too. That thought came to him as he was getting into his car. Of course! He could use Chip Osway's story to support his own.

But that day Chip Osway was absent, and two days later the words 'left school' appeared after his name on the list.

Jim began to wait for Simmons to bring a new folder.

A week later he did.

He looked at the picture. No question about this one. The crew cut was still blond. And the face was the same, Vincent Corey. *Vinnie*, to his friends. He stared at Jim from the picture with a smile on his lips.

When he walked to his period-seven class, his heart was beating fast in his chest. Lawson, Garcia and Vinnie Corey were standing outside the door. Vinnie smiled, but his eyes were cold and dead.

'You must be Mr. Norman. Hi. How's your brother?' Lawson and Garcia laughed.

Jim froze.

Look, Vinnie, he wet himself!

'What do you know about my brother?' he asked.

'Nothing,' Vinnie said. 'Nothing much.'

They all smiled at him with their empty dangerous smiles.

That night Jim went to a drugstore and called police station in Stratford, Connecticut. The policeman back then had been Mr. Nell. In those days he had in his mid-fifties; perhaps now retired.

Jim talked to a police officer on duty, gave him a few details about Mr. Nell and asked for his contact information. It didn't take the officer long

to find address and a phone number. Jim wrote them down, thanked the officer, dialed Mr. Nell's number, and waited.

The phone was picked up and a man's voice said 'Hello?'

'Mr. Nell?' Jim began. 'My name is James Norman. Do you remember me, by any chance?'

'Yes,' the voice answered. 'Your brother was killed stabbed. Such a shame. He was a fine boy.'

'Mr. Nell, those boys were never caught, right?'

'Right,' Nell said. 'But I remember that we had some suspects.'

'Do you by chance remember their names?' Jim asked. 'Let me give you some names and see if they have connection with that case.'

'I don't understand your interest in this now, Mr. Norman, but I will try to help you.'

'Okay, then: Robert Lawson, David Garcia, Vincent Corey.'

'Corey,' Mr. Nell said immediately. 'I do remember Corey. "Vinnie the Viper". Yes, but we had nothing on him. I don't remember any Robert Lawson. That could be anyone's name. But Garcia... I'm not sure.'

'Mr. Nell, could you check on those boys?'

'Well, of course I could, but they aren't boys anymore.'

Oh yeah?

'Listen, Jimmy. Tell me, has one of those boys started harassing you?' Nell asked.

'I don't know, Mr. Nell. Some strange things have been happening. Things connected with the stabbing of my brother.'

'What things?'

'Mr. Nell, I can't tell you. You'll think I'm crazy.'

'Okay, then, I can check the names, and you call me in a couple of days.'

'Thank you. But there is one more thing, Mr. Nell,' Jim said. 'Is there a Milford High School in Stratford?'

'No. The only thing with the name of Milford around here is Milford Cemetery. And no one ever graduated from there.' He laughed dryly.

That day in *Living with Literature* class all the students were writing a composition. All but three. Robert Lawson, sitting in Billy Steam's seat, David Garcia in Kathy Slavin's, Vinnie Corey in Chip Osway's. They sat with their blank papers in front of them, watching Jim.

A moment before the bell rang, Jim said softly, 'I want to talk to you for a minute after class, Mr. Corey.'

'Sure.'

Lawson and Garcia laughed, but the rest of the class did not. When the bell rang, they all passed their papers and left. Lawson closed the door behind them, turned to Jim and smiled.

'I was wondering if you'd ever get to it.'

'Really?' Jim asked. 'Where's the other one? The guy with the funny orange hair. He's alive, isn't he? That's why he's not here. He's alive, and he's 32 or 33, the way you would be if...'

'Relax, man. He's nothing,' Vinnie said. 'I remember you back then, man. You wet your little pants.'

'I suppose you do,' Jim said. 'You gave me sixteen years of bad dreams. Wasn't that enough? Why now? Why me?'

Vinnie looked at him and then smiled again. 'Because you're an unfinished business, man. You've got to be finished.'

'Where were you?' Jim asked. 'Before.'

Vinnie's lips tightened. 'We aren't talking about that, man.'

'You were in a hole, weren't you, Vinnie? Right in the Milford Cemetery.'

'*You shut up!* We're going to kill you, man. You'll find out about that hole.'

'Get out of here.'

'Maybe that little wife of yours, too.'

'If you touch my wife, I'll kill you!'

Vinnie smiled again. 'Kill me? Man, I thought you knew. I'm already dead.'

And he left.

On Thursday evening, when Sally had gone out, Jim called Mr. Nell again.

'You don't have to worry about those guys, son,' said. 'They're all dead. Car crash. Six months after your brother had been killed. A cop was chasing them, and they crashed. The car left the road and hit a power hole.'

Jim closed his eyes. 'Anything on the car?'

'It was a black Ford with "Snake Eyes" written on the side.'

'There was another guy, Mr. Nell. I don't know his name, but his hair was orange.'

'That's Charlie Sponder,' Mr. Nell said. 'I remember him.'

'Do you know what he's doing now?'

'He's an army man.'

'Could I get in touch with him? Can you give me his address?'

'I won't, Jimmy. Not until you tell me what's going on.'

'I can't, Mr. Nell.'

'All right, son. Good-bye then.' The line was dead.

Jim put the phone down. Suddenly, it rang under his hand. It rang three times, four, five. He picked it up. Listened and closed his eyes.

A cop stopped him on his way to the hospital, then drove ahead of him with his siren screaming. There was a young doctor in the emergency room. He looked at Jim with dark, emotionless eyes, 'I'm sorry, Mr. Norman. She died at 9.04 p.m.'

Jim fainted.

After the funeral, when the relatives had gone, the house was his again. He sat down in his chair and looked at the blank TV screen. An idea began to form in his head.

An hour later the phone rang. He picked it up.

'You're next, man.'

'Vinnie?'

'That's right, man.'

'I'll be at the school tonight, Vinnie. Room 33. I'll turn the lights off. It'll be just like the overpass that day. I think I can even bring in the train sounds.'

'Just want to end it all, is that right?'

'That's right,' Jim said. 'Be there.'

'Sure, we will.'

It was almost dark when he got to the school. He parked his car, opened the back door with his key, and went first to the English Department office on the second floor. There he looked through the records for the train sound effects.

Then he went to Room 33.

He turned on the stereo system, and put the train sound track on. The sound filled the whole room. With his eyes closed, he could almost believe that he was under the railroad overpass, watching the little drama of his childhood.

He opened his eyes, stopped the record, and waited. Soon in the street there was a noise, and a car stopped in front of the school building. Jim heard footsteps on the stairs and Robert Lawson's laughter. The three of them came closer.

'Yoo-hoo, man!' David Garcia called.

'Are you there, man?' Lawson whispered and laughed.

When they walked into the classroom, Jim saw that Vinnie was holding a long object in his hand. A switchblade. They were standing by the door, Vinnie in the middle. Now they all were holding knives.

'Here we come, man,' Vinnie said softly. 'Here we come for you.'

Jim turned the stereo system on. This time the sound seemed to be coming not out of the speakers but from some place far away in time and in space.

'I don't like this, man,' Lawson said.

'It's too late,' Vinnie said. He stepped forward with the knife. 'Give us your money, man.'

'Come on, kid, how much you've got?' Garcia cried.

'Four cents,' Jim said. It was true. He had brought four cents with him.

'You're a liar!' Garcia jumped forward and hit Jim in the mouth. Jim felt a sudden heaviness. He looked down and saw a dark patch appearing on his pants.

'Look, Vinnie, he wet himself!' Lawson cried.

Leave him alone!

Lawson looked over his shoulder and his eyes widened. The words were right, but there was an expression of horror on his face. The walls had become light and transparent, and someone was walking through, toward them, someone with the face of a small boy, perhaps twelve years old.

'Leave him alone,' Wayne's voice said. 'Run, Jimmy! Run! Run! Run!'

Falling down on his knees, Jim saw how Vinnie turned and stabbed his knife into Wayne's chest and then screamed, collapsing.

In seconds 'Vinnie the Viper' was gone.

Kill me? Man, I thought you knew. I'm already dead.

There was a flash of light, and a moment later Garcia and Lawson thinned and disappeared, too.

The sound of the train faded. Jim lay on the floor, breathing heavily. His brother was looking down at him.

'Wayne?' Jim said. He wanted to say so much!

Wayne smiled, but then his face changed – his image started melting and disappearing. 'I'll see you, brother, some time,' he whispered. And was gone.

The room was empty. Jim got up slowly and turned the stereo system off. He touched his mouth – it was still bleeding from Garcia's punch. He went to the window and looked out: there was no red car in the parking lot.

Has it really happened? Against the law of nature?

I can't tell you. You 'LL think I'm crazy.

Once people die – they are gone, dead.

But sometimes they come back.

Tasks on the text "Sometimes They Come Back"

1) Write a summary.

2) Explain in English:

- a driveway
- success
- a viper
- to get in touch with
- a fine
- to call names
- a switchblade
- hit-and-run
- a birthmark
- to be a rug rat

3) Answer the questions on the text:

- What is Jim's dream?
- Who are "slow learners"?
- What are new students in Jim's class?
- What piece of news did Jim read in a newspaper?
- What did Chip tell Jim?
- Answer Jim's question: "Am I crazy, then?"
- Why did Jim look for the policeman Mr. Nell?

– What was the conversation between Jim and Vinnie Corey after classes about?

– “An idea began to form in his head”. What is this idea?

– What’s happened to Jim in the night classroom?

4) Imagine that you are a teacher in a “slow learners” class. How would you organize your lessons?

5) Fill in prepositions:

– The kids were waiting ... Jim.

– One day after school there was a knock ... the teacher-room door.

– He stared ... Jim.

– An hour later the phone rang. He picked it

– There he looked ... the records for the train.

6) The three boys symbolize Jim’s three fears. What should a person do to overcome them?

7) What do you feel reading this story?

8) Comment on the phrase, agree or disagree with it:

“Once people die – they are gone, dead”.

9) Prepare for the social discussion: teaching at school.

THE LAST RUNG ON THE LADDER

I got Katrina's letter yesterday, less than a week after my father and I had returned from Los Angeles. It was addressed to Delaware, and I've moved twice since then.

People move so much nowadays. Her letter was tattered, and smudged, and stamped many times. I read what was in it, and then I was standing in the living room with the phone in my hand to call Dad. But I put the phone down with something like horror. He was an old man, and he'd

already had two heart attacks. Should I call him and tell about Katrina's letter so soon? That might kill him.

So I didn't call. And I had no one I could tell...a thing like that letter is too personal to tell anyone except a wife or a very close friend. I haven't made many close friends in the last few years, and my wife Helen and I got divorced.

I've been awake all night because of Katrina's letter. She could've put it on a postcard. There was only one sentence below 'Dear Larry'. But a sentence can say enough.

It can do enough.

We lived in a small town not far from Omaha – my Dad, my Mom, my sister Katrina, and me. I was two years older than Katrina, whom everyone called Kitty.

She was a beautiful child – even at eight, when the incident in the barn happened.

Katrina and I grew up on a farm. My Dad had three hundred acres of land, used for corn and cattle. In those days I walked along a dirt road to a one-room school with books tied together with a string, and Katrina walked with me. Sometimes, in the spring, we went barefoot.

Later on, my mother died – Katrina and I were in high school – and two years after that my dad lost the farm and went to work – selling tractors. It was the end of the family, but that didn't seem so bad then.

Dad was doing fine in his work, and even got a management position about nine years ago. I got a football scholarship to the university and became a lawyer.

And Katrina? But it's her I want to tell you about.

The barn incident happened one Saturday in early November. To tell you the truth, I can't remember the year exactly. Mom was at a bake fair, and Dad had gone to our neighbors to help them fix something. A hired man

was supposed to be on the farm, but he had never come that day, and my Dad fired him a month later.

Dad left me and Kitty a list of chores to do and told us not to play until they were all done. But that wasn't long. It was November, and by that time most of the work on the farm had been finished.

I remember that day very clearly. The sky was gray, but it wasn't cold. The fields were bare. The animals were slow. On a day like that, the only really nice place to be was the barn. It was warm, filled with a pleasant aroma of hay. The barn had a third loft.

There was a ladder nailed to a beam high up in the third loft, a ladder that went down to the main barn floor. We were forbidden to climb on it because it was old and shaky. Dad had promised Mom a thousand times to make a new, stronger one, but never had the time to do it.

If you climbed up that shaky ladder – there were exactly 43 rungs – you got on a beam that was 70 feet above the straw-covered barn floor. And then if you carefully walked along the beam about 12 feet, you would stand above the haymow. And then you could jump off the beam and fall 70 feet down into a huge soft bed of hay, which was horribly hilarious. Hay has a sweet smell, and you'd rest in that smell of summer, and you'd feel... well, like you had been reborn.

It was a forbidden game, of course, because of the ladder, and because if you lost your balance and fell from the beam before you had reached the hay, you would hit the hard barn floor and be dead.

But the temptation was just too great.

That day started like all the others, a feeling of dread mixed with anticipation. We stood at the foot of the ladder, looking at each other.

'You go,' I said.

And Kitty said, 'You go first.'

And then I said, 'Girls go before boys.'

'Not if it's dangerous,' she said. But that was how it was. She would go, but she wouldn't go first.

'Okay,' I said. 'Here I go.'

I think I was ten that year, and Kitty was eight – smaller and lighter than me.

The ladder had always held us before, so we thought it would always hold us again, which is a philosophy that often gets people in trouble.

I could feel it that day beginning to shake a little bit in the dusty barn air as I climbed higher and higher. But I kept going until I could put my hands around the beam and look down.

Kitty's face, turned up to watch me, was so small that she looked like a doll.

'Hi, down there!' I called as usual.

'Hi, up there!'

I stood up, swaying a little, and began to walk along the beam. Once, I had almost lost my balance. I feared that the same thing could happen again.

But not this time. At last I stood above the hay. Now looking down was not so frightening. There was a moment of anticipation. Then I stepped into space, holding my nose for effect, and yelling: *Oh, I'm sorry, I made a mistake, let me back up!*

Then I hit the hay with its sweet and dusty smell, going down as if into water.

I remember how Kitty told me once that after falling into the hay she felt fresh and new, like a baby. I felt that way, too.

I climbed out of the hay on to the barn floor. I had hay in my pants and the back of my shirt. It was in my sneakers and in my hair.

Kitty was halfway up the ladder by then. I remember thinking that I didn't like the way the ladder was swaying – like never before.

Then she was on the beam, high above me – now I was the small toy.

'Hi, down there!'

'Hi, up there!'

She walked along the beam, and I relaxed a little when she was above the hay. I always worried, although she was more graceful and more athletic than me.

She stood with hands out in front of her. And then she jumped. I can't tell you how beautiful that was, how perfect, how real.

For a moment she seemed to hang in the air like a bright little bird with golden feathers. She was Kitty, my sister, and how I loved her for that!

Then she fell down into the hay. She laughed happily, and I'd forgotten about how shaky the ladder had looked with her on it, and then I was halfway up again.

How long did the game go on? It's hard to tell, but some ten or twelve jumps later I saw that it was getting late, and our Mom and Dad would be back soon. We agreed on one more jump each.

I went up first and felt the ladder moving under me. And for the first time I was really, really scared. I was thinking about going down, but the beam was close and seemed safe. Three rungs from the top of the ladder started creaking, and I was suddenly cold with terror that it was too late.

Then I climbed onto the beam, but the fun of the game was gone. I quickly jumped into the hay and for a second imagined hitting the barn floor. Then I came out and saw Kitty climbing up the ladder.

I called: 'Hey, come down! It's not safe!'

'It'll hold me!' she called back. 'I'm lighter than you!'

'Kitty...'

But I never finished that sentence. Because that was when the ladder broke.

It fell down with a crack. I cried and Kitty screamed. She was holding onto the last rung on the ladder more than 60 feet above me, her feet in the air, shrieking '*Larry! Larry! Help me!*'

I knew what had to be done; I saw it right away. I was terribly afraid, but not scared out of my mind.

'Kitty!' I shouted at her. 'Just don't move! *Don't move!*'

She obeyed me instantly. Her legs stopped kicking. She hung straight, her small hands gripping the last rung on the ladder like an acrobat in a circus.

I ran to the haymow, grabbed a double handful of the hay, ran back, and dropped it. I went back again. And again. And again.

I ran back and forth, making a haystack where the ladder had been. It was a very small haystack. Back and forth. Back and forth.

'Larry, I can't hold on much longer!' Kitty cried.

'Kitty, you have to! You have to hold on!'

Back and forth. Back and forth. The haystack was up to my chin now, but the haymow we had been jumping into was much, much deeper. I thought that if she only broke her legs it would be lucky. And I knew if she missed the hay, she would be killed.

'*Larry! The rung! It's breaking!*'

I could hear the sound of the rung cracking under her weight. Her legs began to kick again in panic, but this way she would miss the hay.

'No!' I yelled. 'No! Stop that! Just let go! Let go, Kitty!' Because it was too late for me to get any more hay. Too late for anything except hope.

She let go and dropped when I told her to. She came straight down like a knife. It seemed to me that she dropped forever. She didn't scream. She held her hands in front of her lips, as if praying.

And she hit the hay right in the center. She went down and I heard her body hitting the boards. The sound was too loud, much too loud. I was scared but I had to see.

Starting to cry, I pulled the haystack apart and saw Kitty's face. It was deadly pale and her eyes were closed.

She was dead, I knew it as I looked at her. The world turned gray for me.

And then she opened her eyes.

'Kitty?' I cried. 'Kitty?'

'Larry?' she asked, shocked. 'Am I alive?'

I pulled her out of the hay and hugged her, and she put her arms around me and hugged me back.

'You're alive,' I said. 'You're alive, you're alive, alive.'

She had broken her left ankle and that was all. When Dr. Peterson came to the barn with my father and me, he looked up for a long time. The last rung on the ladder still hung there from one nail. 'A miracle,' he said to my father.

My father put a hand on my shoulder. 'I am going to punish you, Larry,' he said in a very calm voice. 'But every time I hit you, I want you to thank God that your sister is still alive.'

And I did.

They let me see Kitty just before bedtime. She looked at me so long and so lovingly that I was uncomfortable. Then she said, 'Hay. You put down hay.'

'Of course I did,' I said. 'What else would I do? The ladder broke, and there was no way to get up there.'

'I didn't know what you were doing,' she said.

'Really? But I was right under you!'

'I couldn't look down,' she said. 'I was too scared. I kept my eyes closed the whole time.'

I stared at her. 'You didn't know? Didn't know what I was doing?'

She shook her head.

'And when I told you to let go, you... you just *did it*?'

She nodded.

'Kitty, how could you do that?'

She looked at me with her blue eyes. 'I knew that you must've been doing something to fix it,' she said. 'You're my big brother. I knew you'd take care of me.'

'Oh, Kitty, you don't know how close it was.'

She kissed my cheek. 'No,' she said. 'But I knew that you were down there.'

They took off the cast in less than a month, and that was the end of the barn incident. My father made a new strong ladder to the third loft, but I never climbed up to the beam and jumped into the haymow again. Neither did Kitty.

It was the end, but somehow not the end. Somehow it never ended until nine days ago, when Kitty jumped from the top of a tall building in Los Angeles. I have the article from the *L. A. Times* in my wallet. I guess I'll always carry it. The headline says: *CALL GIRL JUMPS TO HER DEATH*.

We grew up. That's all I know. She was planning to go to a business college in Omaha, but in the summer she won a beauty contest and got married.

While I was in law school, she got divorced and wrote me a long letter, telling me how it had been, how messy and awful it had been. She asked me if I could come. But I just couldn't miss classes in law school.

She moved to Los Angeles and got married again. When they broke up, I had already finished the law school. There was another letter, a shorter one, more bitter. She was going to break this vicious circle, to change something, she told me.

There was a P.S. that said: *Can you come, Larry? It's been a while.*

I wrote back and told her that I'd love to come, but I couldn't. I had just got a job in a prestigious firm. If I was going to succeed in life, I had to work hard that year.

I answered all of her letters. But I could never really believe that it was Kitty who was writing them. I couldn't believe that my sister and the

miserable beaten woman who signed her letters 'Kitty' were really the same person. In my mind my sister was still a little girl.

She was the one who stopped writing. I would only get Christmas cards and birthday cards from her. Then I got divorced, and moved, and just forgot to tell her. The next Christmas and the birthday, her cards were forwarded to my new address. The first one. And then to the second one. I was thinking: *I have to write Kitty and tell her that I've moved again.* But I never did.

But these facts don't mean anything. The only things that matter are that we grew up and she jumped from that building. Kitty was the one who always believed the hay would be there. Kitty was the one who had said, *'I knew that you must've been doing something to fix it.'* Those things matter. And Kitty's letter.

People move so much nowadays. There was her return address in the corner of the envelope – the place she'd been staying at until she jumped. A very nice apartment building. Dad and I went there to collect her things.

The letter was postmarked two weeks before she died. It would've got to me much sooner, if not for the forwarding addresses. She must've got tired of waiting.

Dear Larry,

I've been thinking about it a lot lately... and I've decided that it would've been better for me if that last rung had broken before you could put the hay. Yours, Kitty

I hope she didn't think that I must've forgotten. I wouldn't want her to think that.

But I still can't sleep now. When I close my eyes, I see her falling down from the third loft, her eyes wide-open and blue.

She was the one who always knew that the hay would be there.

Tasks on the text "The Last Rung on the Ladder"

- 1) Write a summary.
- 2) Explain in English:
 - a vicious circle
 - a barn
 - to fire
 - a chore
 - a beam
 - a rung
 - a haymow
 - temptation
 - anticipation
 - to creak
 - an ankle
- 3) Translate the passage "The barn incident ... had been reborn".
- 4) Comment on the phrase, agree or disagree with it
"... which is a philosophy that often gets people in trouble".
- 5) Answer the questions on the text:
 - Why didn't the narrator come to visit his sister? Was it only because of his job?
 - Describe the narrator's feelings in detail.
 - What's the difference between the verbs "to cry", "to scream", "to shriek"?
 - Imagine that Kitty had a private diary. Describe the day of the barn incident from her point of view.
 - Describe the feeling the kids have after jumping into the haymow. Have you ever had such a feeling?
 - Why is the story written in the first person?
 - What was in Katrina's letter?
 - What can you say about the narrator's family?

– What’s happened in the barn?

6) Prepare for the social discussion: all our problems are from childhood.

DOLAN'S CADILLAC

I waited and watched for seven years. I saw him come and go – Dolan. I watched him walk into fancy restaurants, dressed in a tuxedo, always with a different woman, always with his pair of bodyguards. I watched his hair turn from gray to silver. I watched him leave Las Vegas; I watched him return. Always in the same gray Cadillac. He did not know I was watching him – I never came close enough for him to know that. I was careful. But I dreamed of revenge.

He killed my wife. Do you want details? Her name was Elizabeth. She taught in the same school where I taught and where I still teach. She taught first-graders. They loved her. I loved her, too, and still love her. She was not beautiful, but she was pretty. She was quiet, but she could laugh. I often dream of her. There has never been another woman for me. Nor ever will be.

He made a mistake – Dolan. And Elizabeth was there, at the wrong place and the wrong time, to see it. She went to the police, and the police sent her to the FBI, and she was questioned, and she agreed to testify. They promised to protect her, but they underestimated Dolan. She got into her car one night, and it exploded. With no witness, he was let free. *He* made me a widower – Dolan.

He went back to his world, I went to mine. I am a schoolteacher. Schoolteachers and people like Dolan don't have the same life style. The penthouse apartment in Vegas for him, the empty home for me. The beautiful women in furs and evening dresses for him, the silence for me.

But I watched. I was careful. Very careful. I knew what he was, what he could do.

During my summer vacation three years ago I even followed him from Las Vegas to Los Angeles, where he went quite often. He stayed in his fine house and had parties, and I stayed in a cheap hotel. I was losing hope. He was well guarded, so well guarded. He went nowhere without his two armed gorillas, and the Cadillac was fully armored, too. Then I followed him back to Las Vegas, always keeping a distance, and when we passed an orange sign which said DETOUR 5 MILES, I saw how it could be done.

I suddenly remembered some movie I had seen years before. In this film a band of robbers had tricked an armored car into the desert by setting fake detour signs. When the driver turned onto a deserted dirt road, the robbers removed the signs. They surrounded the car and killed the guards. I remembered that very well.

My idea of creating a fake detour was romantic and unrealistic. It would be impossible for only one man to do such a thing. And I was only one man. So it wouldn't work. It was just a momentary dream, like the others I'd had over the years.

Best to forget it. But I couldn't. Elizabeth's voice inside my head was whispering: *Detour him and kill him. Kill them all.*

But it wouldn't work. I knew that men like Dolan have a sixth sense, so they can *smell* danger. He would see the detour trick in a minute. I could get real detour signs from some road department and set them up in all the right places. I could even put orange road cones. I could do all that, and Dolan would still smell danger.

Then don't try to fool him with a fake detour, Elizabeth's voice whispered. *Fool him with a real one.* That's when I began to laugh.

The other teachers laughed at me when I joined a gym. I laughed along with them. And why shouldn't I laugh? My wife had been dead for seven years, hadn't she? So why shouldn't I laugh? My muscles ached all

that autumn and winter, and I was constantly hungry. I bought myself a sports machine for Christmas. I was too busy working out, losing weight, building my muscles. In February I began to run every day. That's why I saw Dolan less often.

When summer came, I applied for a job with the Nevada Highway Department. I was hired and went to see my district foreman named Harvey Blocker.

He just looked at me and laughed, 'Are you kidding? What are you in real life, man? An accountant?'

'A teacher,' I said. 'Elementary school.'

'Oh, *Jesus*,' he said, and laughed again. 'Get out of here, okay?'

I had a pocket watch I'd got from my greatgrandfather. I took the watch out and showed it to Blocker. 'See this?' I said. 'It's worth six, maybe seven hundred dollars.'

'Is this a *bribe*?'. Blocker laughed. 'Man, I've heard of people who made deals with the devil, but you're the first one I've ever met who wanted to *bribe* himself into hell. You don't understand what you're getting yourself into. In July it is so hot here that even strong men cry. And you aren't strong, man.'

I said, 'OK, then. Let's do this: the day you decide that I can't do it, I'll quit. Deal?'

'You're crazy.'

I thought of Dolan and of Elizabeth and said nothing.

'You start tomorrow,' Blocker said. 'Like I said, you don't understand what you're getting yourself into. But you will.'

And he was right.

I remember almost nothing about the first few weeks. It was hell indeed. The heat was terrible and the work was exhausting, but I learned a lot about road construction. I was shaking all the time, and it was hard for me not to faint. At such moments Elizabeth spoke inside my mind: *Dolan is*

your business. Remember Dolan. I thought of Dolan and somehow managed to go on working.

All that time Harvey Blocker was looking at me with compassion.

'Why are you doing this?' he sometimes asked.

I've got my reasons. That's what I told him.

I spent that season in hell because I had to get in shape. Preparing to dig a grave for a man may not need such measures, but it was not just a man I wanted to bury.

It was that damned Cadillac.

I spent the whole summer shoveling and driving a loader, and when I went back to school that September the other teachers looked at me and stopped laughing.

I subscribed to the State Highway bulletin, *Nevada Road Signs*, which I received and looked through every month. What I was interested in was always on the last page of the bulletin. This section, titled *The Calendar*, listed the dates and sites of roadwork in each month. I was especially interested in sites marked RPAV or 'repaving', because these operations often meant detours. Sooner or later, I thought, those four letters would spell the end for Dolan. Just four letters, but sometimes I saw them in my dreams: RPAV.

Four things needed to coincide: a trip for Dolan, a vacation time for me, a national holiday, and a three-day weekend. It wouldn't be easy, and it wouldn't be soon – I knew I might have to wait for years. Yes, years, maybe. Or maybe never. But I felt that it *would* happen, and that I would be prepared.

And finally it happened. Not that summer, not that autumn, and not the following spring. But in June of last year I opened *Nevada Road Signs* and saw it in *The Calendar*.

The Fourth of July – Independence Day – fell on a Monday, so here were three of the four coincidences I needed. But what about Dolan? What about the fourth thing?

I remembered how three times before he went to Los Angeles during the week of the Fourth of July. *If only* he went now, too... How could I find it out?

I thought about this for a long time, but couldn't find the answer. Then, on the last day of school, I suddenly realized how I might be able to do it. I began to smile. I was smiling at Elizabeth.

Sheets, I thought. *Sheets and towels and silverware; the rugs; the grounds. Everything has to look perfect. He 'LL want everything to be perfect.* Of course. Having perfect things was a part of Dolan, just like his Cadillac.

School finished on June 10th that year. Twelve days later I flew to Los Angeles where I got a room at a hotel and rented a car. On each of the next six days I drove to the Hollywood Hills and secretly watched Dolan's house. At first there was nothing. The house looked empty. Yet I stayed, wishing and hoping for the fourth coincidence.

Then, on the 29th of June, when I had almost lost hope, a car marked LOS ANGELES SECURITY SERVICES drove through the gate of Dolan's house. I kept watching with a new hope.

About fifteen minutes later a blue van marked BIG JOE'S CLEANING SERVICE stopped in front of Dolan's house. Four cleaning women got out of the van, and the security guard unlocked the gate. The women brought in sheets and towels and two vacuum cleaners.

They were opening the house.

He was coming.

Dolan didn't change his Cadillac every year, or even every two years. The gray one he was riding that June was three years old. I knew its dimensions exactly.

I had then taken three figures (the Cadillac's width, height, and length) to a friend who teaches mathematics at high school. I said I was writing a science fiction story about aliens, and I wanted him to check my calculations.

My friend wanted to know how fast this alien vehicle would be going. 'It's important to know,' he said. 'If you want the alien vehicle in your story to fall right into your trap, the trap has to be exactly the right size.'

The shape was important, too, he said. To make the right trap I needed to widen the entrance. Then there was this problem of speed. If Dolan's Cadillac was going too fast, and the hole was too short, it would fly over it without falling in the hole at all. On the other hand, if the Cadillac was going too slowly, and the hole was long, it might land at the bottom on its nose and stick out of the hole. I calculated the speed very quickly. On the open highway Dolan's driver went between 60 and 65 miles per hour. He would probably be driving a little slower when he saw the signs of construction. Soon I had all the measures ready.

After I had seen the women going into the house with the sheets and towels, I flew back to Las Vegas. I unlocked my house, went into the living room, and picked up the telephone. My hand was shaking a little because now I would have to take a risk. I had made a plan which I thought would work. I would *make* it work.

I found the number of 'Big Joe's Cleaning Service' and dialed it. A man answered.

'This is Bill from "Ron's Catering",' I said. 'We've got a party on Saturday night at Mr. Dolan's residence in Hollywood Hills. I wanted to know if one of your girls could check if they still have that big punchbowl in the cabinet over the stove because our bowl will be in use that day at a wedding reception. Could you do that for me?'

I was asked to wait. With each second I became more and more sure that the man had found my call suspicious and was now checking the information on another line.

At last he returned. '*Saturday* night? Are you sure, mister, because my paper says that Mr. Dolan is expected after 3 p.m. on *Sunday* afternoon,' he said with concern.

'Let me have a look again,' I said. I picked up a textbook and leafed through it close to the phone. 'Oh, it's my mistake. I'm really sorry. The party is on *Sunday* night. Then there's no need for that bowl because our big punchbowl will be back from the wedding reception in the morning.'

'Okay then. Bye.' Comfortable. Unsuspecting. The voice of a man who wasn't going to check it. I hoped.

I began thinking and planning. To get to Los Angeles by three, Dolan would leave Las Vegas at about ten o'clock on Sunday morning. So he would be near the detour site between 11:15 and 11:30, when there wasn't much traffic anyway. I decided it was time to stop dreaming and start acting.

First of all, I bought an old van and a compressor. Late on Friday afternoon I loaded the van with shovels, a big industrial stapler, canvas, wooden planks, the compressor, a toolbox, binoculars, a borrowed Highway Department pneumatic drill for cutting through asphalt, etc. Then I stopped at a shopping center, stole a pair of license plates, put them on my van, and drove to the detour site.

Seventy-six miles west of Las Vegas, I saw the sign I had been waiting for since Elizabeth died: DETOUR AHEAD 6 MILES. I stopped the van and examined the situation. It was almost perfect. The detour was a right turn between two hills. The main road was now blocked by a line of road cones and an orange sign, reading ROAD CLOSED USE DETOUR. Yet the *reason* for the detour was not visible from there, and that was good. I didn't want Dolan to see the trap before he fell into it.

In the evening the road was almost empty. Quickly, I got out of the van, moved the road cones, drove through the gap, and then put them back into places. Now I was there – safe behind the detour. It was time to get to work.

I drove along the closed road, chose a flat spot, stopped and unloaded the van. Then I rested, looking up at the cold desert stars. 'Here we go, Elizabeth,' I whispered.

I marked the dimensions of the grave, using white chalk and the calculations of my friend. I drew lines across this shape, making a grid of 42 squares. When I was done, I looked at the funnel shape and smiled in the dark. Then I started the compressor and went to square one.

The compressor and the pneumatic drill made a lot of noise, but there was no one around – only some abandoned road equipment and machinery. I hoped to finish this part before midnight. The first thing was to cut out the asphalt squares. The work went faster than I had hoped, but not fast enough. It was not done by midnight and not by three in the morning. I decided to stop. *No more, not tonight*, I thought. Under the gloves my hands were covered with blisters. My head, my back, my whole body ached, Even my *teeth* ached. I had cut out only 28 squares. Twenty-eight. Fourteen to go. And that was only the beginning.

Never, I thought. *It's impossible. Can't be done.*

Yes, my darling. Yes, Elizabeth's voice whispered inside my head.

Tomorrow was Saturday... no, today. *Today* was Saturday. Dolan was coming on Sunday. No time.

Yes, my darling.

I'll try, I thought, and then I lay down on the ground and fell into a sleep that was like death.

I woke up with the sun shining in my face. I sat up and almost screamed because all my muscles hurt. Had I thought I was in shape? Had I *really*! How could I cut out 14 more squares of asphalt? I couldn't even *walk*!

I can't do it.

Please darling.

I took four pain killer pills and had a light snack. Then I walked over to the pneumatic drill and started it again. I finished cutting out the last block of asphalt by 11:00. It was time to use one of the abandoned loaders. I climbed into the cabin and looked for the key. There was no key there, of course. I remembered something I had learned that summer when I worked for the Nevada Highway Department where losing one's loader key was an ordinary thing. I pulled and touched the ignition wires together to start the loader. It worked.

The rest of the day I spent removing the asphalt blocks. When all the asphalt pieces were in the ditch, it was almost two o'clock. Then I slept again, and when I woke up in the dark, there was a new moon rising in the purple sky. In its light the cut I had made really looked like a grave.

Never, I told the long hole in the asphalt.

Please, Elizabeth whispered back. *Please... for me.*

I took four more pain killer pills. 'For you,' I said.

After a while I got into the loader again and started to dig, dumping the earth down in the ditch, covering the pieces of asphalt that were already there. Slowly the hole – Dolan's grave – got deeper and deeper.

At dawn I realized that I *was actually getting* near the end. I worked on the loader until nine o'clock and then I quit – there were other things to do, and I was running out of time. My funnel hole was forty feet long. It would be enough. I drove the loader back to its place. I would need it later.

I took a short rest, lying on my back in the van, imagining Dolan.

What if he flies this time? I thought. He had never flown to Los Angeles before – always it had been the Cadillac. *But what if..?*

It was 9:30 when I took out the canvas, the big industrial stapler, and the wooden planks, and began fixing them over to the hole. The work was now easy, compared to drilling and digging, but still the pain in my back

was unbearable. It was beginning to look as if the trap was going to be ready, and that was the most important thing. When I had placed all the planks, I covered them with dark-gray canvas, creating 42 fake feet of Route 71. The illusion was not perfect, of course, but from a distance it looked exactly like the actual surface of the road. It looked better than I had hoped.

On Sunday morning there was hardly any traffic at all. That was fine with me.

First, I drove the van to the beginning of the detour and collected all the road cones. With that done, I drove back and parked the van out of sight. I had taken away the cones, and now all that was left was the big orange sign: ROAD CLOSED USE DETOUR. It was time for some other cars to appear – but not time for Dolan yet, surely.

Soon there was a car coming. I hoped that it wasn't Dolan because I would just go mad if all had been for nothing. But it was just a Chevrolet.

What if he flew?

There was no more time for nerves now. I got my binoculars and walked to the top of the hill as fast as I could. At the top, I lay on the ground and began watching. I could see the road stretch for about three miles. There were six vehicles driving on the road. But no sign of Dolan.

I looked at my watch. 11:25 a.m. He would be here very soon. This was prime time.

But at 11:40 there was still no sign of him.

He's not coming. He went by the Interstate. Or he flew.

No. He 'LL come.

He won't.

There was another car coming in the distance. This car was big. Big enough to be a Cadillac. The car disappeared behind a curve and then came out again. It was a Cadillac, but it wasn't gray. It was green.

I was in agony. What if Dolan had exchanged his old Cadillac for a new one? But he had never owned a green one before. But there's always the first time...

On the other hand, Cadillacs were so common on the road between Los Angeles and Las Vegas. If I waited any longer to see the passengers, it would be too late.

It's almost too late now! Go down and take away the detour sign! You're going to miss him!

But what if it's two rich old people going to Los Angeles to see their children and their grandchildren?

Do it! It's him! It's the only chance you're going to have!

That's right. The only chance. So I can't catch the wrong people!

It's Dolan!

It's not!

I could hear the motor now.

Dolan.

The old people.

'Elizabeth, help me!' I whispered.

Darling, that man has never had a green Cadillac in his life. He never would. Of course it's not him.

Exhausted, I waited to see the driver. It wasn't the old people, but it wasn't Dolan, either. I relaxed a little as the green Cadillac went onto the detour. Slowly, I turned to watch the road again.

And saw him coming.

There was no mistake that it was Dolan's Cadillac – it was gray. It was him – Dolan. It was Dolan, and I didn't have to see that gray Cadillac to know it. I didn't know if he could smell me, but I could smell *him*.

I ran down the hill back to the big DETOUR sign, pulled it out, and threw it far into the ditch. Then I ran to the abandoned machinery and hid behind it, listening for the engine.

But the sound didn't come and didn't come and didn't come.

They turned. He got suspicious.

Was that an engine? No – just the wind.

Not coming. Turned back.

No, it was *not* just the wind. It was a motor, and a few seconds later a vehicle went past my hiding place. I got up to have a better view.

The gray Cadillac went down the hill toward the flat stretch of the road, going 50 or maybe a little more. It never braked. Not even at the end. They never saw it; never had the slightest idea.

What happened was this: there was the illusion that Dolan's Cadillac went through Route 71 and disappeared. I could hear how the canvas-covered planks broke under the car, and then there was a big thud and the sound of breaking glass and metal. A large cloud of dust rose in the air. All of it happened in only three seconds, they are the three seconds I will remember my whole life.

I wanted to go down there right away – but first I had to put the detour sign back.

I didn't want anyone to interrupt us. I ran back and put the DETOUR sign in its place before another car would appear. Then I ran to my van, drove it back to the sign and returned the road cones to their places, too. Then I paused and listened.

I could hear the wind. And from the hole in the road, I could hear the sound of someone shouting... or maybe screaming. Then the shouting stopped, but the screaming got much louder.

I wasn't worried that they were going to get out and attack me or run away into the desert – because they couldn't get out. The trap had worked perfectly.

I drove the van down to the trap and got out. The Cadillac was now sitting on its wheels at the far end of the hole. The three men inside couldn't open their doors because there wasn't enough space. They couldn't open

their windows because their mechanism had been broken. The front end was totally destroyed. The driver and the man in front had been squashed in the crash, but this did not matter to me. I knew that *someone* was still alive in there – Dolan.

I had been worried about the windshield. There was always a chance that it could have broken, allowing Dolan to get out. But his car was fully armored – made for dictators and military leaders. The glass hadn't broken. The back window was even tougher because it was smaller. Dolan couldn't break it – not in the time I was going to give him, certainly – and he wouldn't try to shoot in it, because the bullet would ricochet back into the car.

I threw some dirt onto the Cadillac's roof. The response immediate.

'We need some help, please. We're stuck in here.' Dolan's voice. He sounded calm. But I sensed his fear anyway, and I almost felt sorry for him then. I could imagine him sitting in the back seat of his Cadillac, his two men injured and unconscious, probably even dead. Then I stopped trying to imagine it because it was Dolan who had killed my wife. I threw some more dirt. 'Who's there?'

'Me,' I said, 'but I'm not the help you're waiting for, Dolan.'

Dolan was quiet for a moment. The man outside, the man on top, knew his name. Which meant that this was an extremely dangerous situation for him.

'Who are you?' he finally asked coldly.

'I'm nobody,' I said. 'Just a nobody who had a good reason to put you where you are right now.'

And suddenly Dolan said: 'Is your name Robinson?'

I was shocked. He had made the right connection so fast. But I said, 'My name doesn't matter. You know what happens now, don't you?'

'I can't hear you, man,' Dolan said to me. 'Come little closer.'

I leaned over the hole, but then drew back – and just in time. He fired the revolver four times. Four black holes appeared in the roof of Dolan's Cadillac, and one of the bullets flew past my head.

'Did I get you?' Dolan shouted.

'No,' I said.

'Then I want to make you a proposal,' Dolan said.

I said nothing.

'My friend?'

Silence. He fired the revolver two more times.

'Hey! You!' His voice trembled. 'Are you still up there?'

'I'm here,' I said. 'I was just thinking that you've fired six times. You know, you might want to save one bullet for yourself.'

He was silent for a few moments, thinking.

'What are you planning?'

'I think you already know,' I said. I have spent the last 36 hours digging your grave, and now I'm going to bury you in your Cadillac.'

'You want to hear about my proposal first?'

'I'll listen. In a few seconds. First I have to get something.'

I walked back to the van and got my shovel.

'I'm here,' I said when I got back. 'You talk. I'll listen.'

When he spoke, he sounded more cheerful.

'I'm offering you a million dollars to let me out of here. A million dollars and my personal guarantee that no one will ever touch you... not me, not my men, not anyone else.'

I dug into the ground and threw more dirt on the top of the Cadillac.

'What are you doing?' Dolan cried with alarm.

'I thought I'd keep myself busy while listening,' I said. 'Keep talking.'

Now Dolan spoke faster. My muscles didn't hurt any more. It was amazing. I shoveled steadily, and soon the Cadillac's back part was deep in dirt.

'Look, this is crazy,' Dolan said, and now I could hear panic in his voice. 'I mean it's just crazy.'

'You got that right,' I said, and threw in more dirt.

He held longer than I thought any man could – talking, reasoning, promising. At one point the passenger door opened a little, and I saw a hand with a big ruby ring on the finger. I threw some dirt into the opening. He screamed and shut the door again.

He broke not long after. It was the sound of the dirt falling down that finally got to him, I think. The sound must've been very loud inside the Cadillac. The dirt and stones hitting the roof and falling past the window. He must've finally realized that he was sitting in a coffin.

'Get me out!' he shouted. *'Please! I can't stand it! Get me out!'*

'You want me to get you out?' I asked.

'Yes! Yes! Jesus! Yes! Yes! Yes!'

'Then scream. That's what I want. Scream for me. If you scream loudly enough, I'll get you out.'

He screamed.

'That was *good!*' I said. 'But not good enough.'

I began to dig again, throwing dirt over the roof of the Cadillac. He screamed again, even louder.

'Not bad!' I said, working even harder. I was smiling in spite of my aching back.

'Five million.' It was the last reasonable thing he said.

'I don't think so,' I replied.

So he screamed, and I threw dirt down on the Cadillac. The dirt covered the roof of the car almost from side to side now. For some time he screamed very loudly, but by the time I finally rested, he was producing only grunts.

My hands were bleeding. I looked at my watch. It was just past one o'clock. The wind in the desert was rising. I leaned over the hole, 'Dolan?'

No answer.

'Scream, Dolan.'

No answer at first – then some grunts.

I went back to the van, turned on the radio, and listened to the weather forecast. They promised high winds and visibility problems because of the flying sand. Perfect.

Then I went to the loader and started it. It was time to use it again.

I drove the loader to the hole and was relieved to see that Dolan hadn't broken any glass or got out.

'Dolan,' I said, cheerfully.

There was no answer.

'Dolan.'

No answer.

He's killed himself, I thought, and felt disappointment. Killed himself somehow or died of fright.

'Dolan?'

Then there was laughter, coming from the hole. It was the laughter of a mad man. He laughed and laughed. Then he screamed; then he laughed again. Finally, he did both things together.

For a while I laughed and screamed with him, too, and the wind laughed and screamed at both of us. Then I got into the loader and began to cover him for real. In four minutes even the shape of the Cadillac was gone. There was just a hole filled with dirt.

I thought I could hear something, but with the sound of the wind and the loader's engine, it was hard to tell. It sounded like far down underneath all that dirt Dolan was still laughing. There might've been some words, too. It was hard to tell. I smiled and nodded.

'Scream,' I whispered. 'Scream, if you want.'

When the job was done, I returned the loader to its original place and rubbed all of the metal in the cabin with my shirt to remove any

fingerprints. The wind was stronger than ever, and the sand storm was rising. I needed rest, so I went back to the van and took out my sleeping bag. I was asleep five seconds after I got myself into it.

When I woke up from a nightmare I could not remember, I heard the wind and the sand hitting the van. The outside visibility was down to almost zero, but I found my keys and started the engine. The radio weather report said that all the roads had been closed. But I had to go back the way I had come. I still had to put the 42 blocks of asphalt back.

Stay in. You 're crazy if you go out there.

But I had to finish it.

I worked slowly because the wind blew the sand into my eyes. I lifted, carried, and placed, lifted, carried, and placed. Now I was thinking about Dolan again. Was he dead yet? If no, then how soon would he be dead? Would the Cadillac collapse under the weight of the dirt and asphalt?

'Dolan,' I said, getting down on my knees, 'I've changed my mind and decided to let you out.'

Nothing. No sound at all. Dead for sure this time.

I went back and got another square of asphalt. I placed it, and as I started to rise, I heard faint laughter coming up through the earth. When it stopped, I went back and got another asphalt square.

'For the love of God!' Dolan shrieked. 'For the love of God, Robinson!'

'Yes,' I said, smiling. 'For the love of God.'

I put the block of asphalt down.

Although I listened, I didn't hear him anymore.

They never found him – Dolan.

It was the storm. That lucky storm, I'm sure. The storm almost buried the section of Route 71 which had been closed for repaving. When the road workers went back to work, they didn't remove the new sand dunes and never noticed a short section of broken asphalt. They added gravel and resurfaced it with fresh asphalt.

Sooner or later the Cadillac will collapse, of course, if it hasn't, and the Highway Department will plan another RPAV.

But no one will ever know that down in the darkness there is a grey Cadillac buried with three dead men in it – one of them with a ruby ring on his finger.

Tasks on the text "Dolan's Cadillac"

1) Write a summary.

2) Explain in English:

- a revenge
- to testify
- a widower
- a detour
- a foreman
- a bribe
- compassion
- a coincidence
- a science-fiction story
- to brake

3) Fill in prepositions

- The other teachers laughed ... me.
- I was too busy working
- I applied ... a job.
- Then ... the last day of school (...)
- (...) from the wedding reception ... the morning.
- (...) about ten o'clock ... Sunday morning.
- (...) and I almost felt sorry ... him then.

4) Answer the questions on the text

- Why did the narrator want to revenge Dolan?

- What personality is Dolan?
 - What revenge did the narrator think up?
 - How did he plan to carry out his idea?
 - What are four things that need to coincide to complete the narrator's revenge?
 - Why did he need a Math teacher's help?
 - What was the narrator's motivation to do hard work on the road?
- 5) Comment on the sentence "She was not beautiful, but she was pretty".
 - 6) Get some information about the FBI, the sixth sense, Cadillac cars, Independence Day.
 - 7) How does the author create the atmosphere of suspense in the story?
 - 8) Choose 5 new words from the text and ask your groupmates to explain them.
 - 9) Translate the passage "I spend the whole summer ... in the Calendar".
 - 10) Count how many kilometres per hour are 60 miles per hour, how many metres are 40 feet.
 - 11) When the narrator was waiting for Dolan's gray Cadillac he saw a green one on the road. He had to choose quickly if to remove a detour sign or not. Do you remember any moments in your life when you had to decide or choose anything quickly?
 - 12) Prepare for the social discussion: is a revenge a thing that is better served cold?

CROUCH END

When the young woman had gone, it was nearly 2:30 a.m. Outside the Crouch End police station Tottenham Lane was deserted. London was asleep... or maybe London never sleeps...

Police constable Vetter closed his notebook which was almost filled with the American woman's strange story. Police constable Farnham was drinking coffee. They didn't speak for a while.

'It'll go in the back file,' Vetter finally said, and looked round for a cigarette. 'But I wonder...'

Farnham laughed. 'You don't believe any part of it, do you?'

'Did I say that? No. But you're new here.'

Farnham was 27, recently transferred here to work with Vetter, who was almost twice his age, and who had spent his whole life in the quiet London district of Crouch End.

Vetter lit his cigarette and looked at Farnham. 'You think Crouch End's a very quiet place, then, don't you?'

Farnham shrugged. In truth, he thought that Crouch End was just a boring suburb.

'Yes,' Vetter said, 'I see that you do. And you're right. But I've seen a lot of strange things in Crouch End. If you're here long enough, you'll see them, too. There are more strange things that happen right here in this quiet suburb than anywhere else in London. I know it, and I believe it. It scares me. There was one summer of 1976. Very hot summer it was... It was quite bad that summer, quite bad. There were a lot of us who were afraid they might break through.'

'Who might break through what?' Farnham asked, smiling. Vetter had always been a bit strange. A drunk, probably. Then he saw that Vetter was smiling at him, too.

'You think I'm a crazy old man, I suppose,' he said.

'Not at all, not at all,' Farnham quickly protested.

'Well, still you don't know everything. Crouch End is strange. You must look in the back file sometime, Farnham. Oh, a lot of it is the usual stuff. But in between, there are some stories to make your blood freeze, and some to make you sick.'

'Really?'

Vetter nodded. 'Some of them are very like the one that poor American girl has just told us. She'll not see her husband again, believe me. The file's there. Study it, Farnham, study it.'

Farnham said nothing. The idea that there's a whole series of stories such as the one the American woman had told was quite disturbing.

'Sometimes,' Vetter said, lighting another cigarette, 'I wonder about *Dimensions*.'

'Dimensions?'

'Yes, dimensions. Dimensions close to ours – parallel universes. Full of these monsters that would drive a man crazy. Scary rubbish, of course. But when one of these people like this girl comes in, I wonder if all of it was rubbish. I think to myself then that our world, which we think is nice and normal, might have places where the barriers are thinner. And then I think that Crouch End is one of those thin places. Do you see what I mean?'

'Yes, sir,' Farnham said, and thought: *Oh, Jesus...*

'Do you think that the woman would have told us these things if they weren't true?'

'No, sir. Well...'

Vetter looked at Farnham. 'Think about it. Pretty young woman, 26, two kids back at her hotel, husband's a young lawyer doing well. Why would she tell such a story?'

I don't know,' Farnham said. 'But there may be some reason.'

'Well, I often think about these "thin spots," and I'm worried that one day the thin barrier between us and what's on the other side will just break through.'

Farnham was silent. *Vetter is crazy, all right*, he thought.

'Read the back file,' Vetter said, getting up. I'm going out to get some fresh air.'

He went out. Farnham looked after him with a mixture of amusement and contempt. He decided to go through the back file later. Just for fun. But first he picked up Vetter's notebook and began reading through the girl's story again.

The girl – or young woman – had burst into the station at quarter past ten in the evening, her hair all wet.

'Lonnie,' she cried. 'Oh, please, they've got Lonnie! Please, you have to find him!'

'Well, we'll do our best,' Vetter said. 'But first you have to tell us who Lonnie is.'

'He's dead,' the young woman said. 'I know he is.'

She began to cry. Then she began to laugh. She was hysterical. Vetter pulled a chair for her and called Farnham and Sergeant Raymond.

'What's going *on* out there?' the woman whispered when she sat down. 'What's going *on* out there? Lonnie... The monsters... Will you help me? Will you please help me? Maybe he isn't dead. I'm an American citizen!' Suddenly she cried and then began to sob.

Vetter put his hand on her shoulder. 'Calm down, dear. I think we can help find your Lonnie. Your husband, right?'

Still sobbing, she nodded. 'Our children Danny and Norma are at the hotel... with the babysitter... they'll be sleeping... waiting for him to kiss them when...'

'Now if you could just tell us what happened...'

'And *where* it happened,' Farnham added. Vetter looked up at him, frowning.

'I don't *know* where it happened!' she cried. 'I'm not even sure *what* happened, but it was *horrible*.'

Vetter took out his notebook. 'What's your name?'

'Doris Freeman. My husband is Leonard Freeman. We're staying at the Hotel Inter-Continental. We're American citizens.'

Vetter was writing it all down in his notebook. 'Are you on holiday?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'Now please tell us what happened. Tell it in your own words.'

'Why is it so hard to get a taxi in London?' the woman asked suddenly.

'It's hard to say. Why? Did you have trouble finding someone to take you here to Crouch End?'

'Yes,' she said. 'We left the hotel at three and couldn't find a taxi here. One driver just laughed and shook his head when Lonnie said that we wanted to go to Crouch End. We waited for almost half an hour before we got a driver who said he'd take us. It was 5:30 by then, maybe quarter to six. And that was when Lonnie told me that he'd lost the address.'

'What address? Who were you going to see?' Vetter asked.

'My husband's colleague. A lawyer called John. My husband hadn't met him, but their two firms worked together. So when that lawyer found out about our trip to London, he invited us to his home for dinner. Lonnie had his home address written on a piece of paper. And he had somehow lost it. All he could remember was his name and that it was in Crouch End.'

Vetter said, 'So what did you do then?' She began to tell.

The elderly cab driver listened calmly to Lonnie Freeman's story of the lost address.

'Well, I tell you what,' he said. 'I'll take you to Crouch End, and we'll stop at a phone booth, and you check your friend's address, and I'll drive you right to the door.'

'Thanks,' Lonnie said. He put his arm around Doris and smiled. 'See? No problem.'

'That's wonderful,' Doris said and relaxed.

It was late August. The evening sun was setting, painting everything red. The cab driver was whistling a tune while driving. This was the longest cab ride they had taken. They passed through a fashionable part of the city, then an area of small houses and shops.

'It was then that things began to change,' the woman said, trembling.

'Change? How? How did things change, Mrs. Freeman?' Vetter asked.

They had passed a newsagent's window, and one big headline had read *SIXTY LOST IN UNDERGROUND HORROR*.

'Lonnie, look at that!' she cried.

'What?' He turned around, but the newsagent's was already behind them.

'It said, "Sixty Lost in Underground Horror." Isn't that what they call the subway? The Underground? The Tube? Was it a crash, driver, do you know what that was about? Was there a subway crash?'

'A crash, madam? No, I haven't heard.'

She could see that Lonnie had lost interest, but she couldn't get the headline out of her mind. Shouldn't it have been *SIXTY KILLED IN TUBE CRASH*, and not *SIXTY LOST IN UNDERGROUND HORROR*? It made her feel uneasy. It didn't say 'killed,' it said 'lost'. She didn't like it.

They turned right. Standing on the corner beside their motorcycles were three boys in leather. They looked at the cab, and for a moment it seemed that the bikers did not have human heads at all. They looked like heads of rats with black eyes staring at the cab. Then the light shifted, and

she saw that of course she had been mistaken: there were only three young men smoking cigarettes in front of a store.

'There it is,' Lonnie said, pointing to a sign which read 'Crouch Hill Road.' They saw old brick houses. A few kids there were riding bikes and skateboards. Some men sat together, smoking, talking and watching the children. It all looked quite normal.

The cab stopped in front of a small restaurant. Inside, on the windowsill there slept a huge gray cat. Beside the restaurant stood a phone booth.

Lonnie got out. At first Doris sat in the cab, but then she also got out to stretch her legs. It was hot outside. She looked at the big gray cat in the window. It stared back at her through the glass with its one eye. Half of its face had been badly scratched in some battle, and one ear was torn.

She turned and walked to the phone booth. Lonnie was already talking with someone and writing something down. He smiled at her through the glass. Like the cat. Then he hung up and came out.

'Okay,' he said waving the address at her in triumph. But then he looked past her and frowned. 'Where's the stupid *cab*?'

She turned around. The taxi had disappeared. There was nothing where it had stood. Across the street, two kids were looking at them and giggling. Doris noticed that one of them had a deformed hand which looked more like a claw.

'I don't know,' Doris said. She felt lost and a little stupid.

'What time was it then?' Farnham asked suddenly.

'I'm not sure,' Doris Freeman said. 'Six, I think. Maybe a bit later.'

'I see, go on,' Farnham said, knowing perfectly well that in August sunset would not have begun until well past seven.

'Well, what did he do?' Lonnie asked, still looking around. 'Just left? Without money?'

Doris shrugged. On the other side of Crouch Hill Road the two small children were still giggling. 'Hey!' Lonnie called. 'You kids!'

'You are an American, sir?' the boy with the claw-hand called back.

'Yes,' Lonnie said, smiling. 'Did you see the cab over here? Did you see where it went?'

The two children just laughed, and then the little girl cried: *Yankee go home!* Then they both turned and ran away.

Lonnie looked at Doris, puzzled. 'I guess some of the kids here just don't like Americans,' he said.

She looked around nervously. The street now looked dead and deserted. Lonnie put his arm around her shoulder. 'Well, honey, I can't see any more taxis, so it looks like we will have to walk.'

They were walking up Crouch Hill Road again. She didn't really like this idea. She wished they had stayed at the hotel.

'Lonnie, why would the cab driver leave us here like that? He seemed so nice.'

'I have no idea. But John gave me good directions. He lives in a street called Brass End, not far from Hillfield Avenue. We'll go and find it.'

There was a very detailed map of the Crouch End area on the wall of the police station lobby. Farnham walked up to it and studied it. He put his finger on the spot where the cab had most likely disappeared. The way to their friend's house looked quite short. Crouch Hill Road to Hillfield Avenue, then to Brass End. About a mile, all in all. Even Americans should've been able to walk that far without getting lost.

Soon Doris and Lonnie Freeman turned onto Hillfield Avenue, which had imposing homes.

'So far so good,' Lonnie said.

'Yes, it's...' she began, and that was when the moaning started.

They both stopped. The moaning was coming almost directly from their right where there was a high hedge around a small yard. Lonnie started toward the sound, and she grabbed his arm, 'Lonnie, no!'

'What do you mean, no?' he asked. 'Someone's hurt.'

The hedge was high but thin. He was able to part it and see a small square of lawn and flowers. The lawn was very green. In the center of it was a black, smoking patch — or at least that's what Doris thought it was. When she looked again, she saw it was a hole, man-shaped, and smoke was coming from it.

SIXTY LOST IN UNDERGROUND HORROR, she thought.

The moaning was coming from the hole, and Lonnie began to push himself through the hedge.

'Lonnie,' she said, 'please, don't.'

'Someone's hurt,' he repeated. She saw him going toward the hole, and then the hedge branches closed, and she couldn't see him anymore. The moaning sounds continued, but now they sounded lower – and happier. Couldn't Lonnie hear *that!*

'Lonnie!' she called, suddenly very afraid. 'Lonnie, come back!'

'Just a minute!'

'Hey, is somebody down there?' she heard Lonnie ask. 'Is there – oh! *Jesus!*' And suddenly Lonnie screamed. Now there were sounds of a struggle. The moaning had stopped. But now there were wet sounds from the other side of the hedge. Then, suddenly, Lonnie came rushing through the hedge. The left arm of his coat was torn and covered with some black stuff that was smoking, as the hole in the lawn.

'Doris, run! *Run!*' His face was pale as a sheet.

Doris looked around for a cop. For *anyone*. But Hillfield Avenue was deserted. Then she looked back at the hedge and saw that something else was moving behind there, something that was more than black. A moment

later, the short branches of the hedge began to part. She stared, hypnotized.

At that moment Lonnie grabbed her arm and they ran.

Where? She didn't know. Lonnie was in a hysteria of panic – that was all she really knew. They turned, and then turned again. She remembered how Lonnie had taken off his jacket with that black stuff on it and thrown it away.

At last they came to a bigger street and stopped. They were standing at the corner of Crouch Lane and Norris Road. A sign on the other side of Norris Road said that they were one mile from Slaughter Townen.

'Townen?' Vetter asked.

'No,' Doris Freeman said. 'Slaughter *Towen*.' 'Ever heard of a Crouch Lane?' Farnham asked Vetter.

'Never heard of it,' Vetter replied.

'What about Norris Road?'

'No.'

'What about this Slaughter Townen?'

'In the old Druid language a *touen* or *towen* was a place of ritual sacrifice – where they cut out liver and eyes, in other words.'

Farnham looked at him uneasily. *He made that up*, he told himself. *What can a cop know about the Druids?*

'I must be going crazy,' Lonnie said, and laughed.

Doris had looked at her watch and saw that it was quarter to eight. The light had changed from a clear orange to a thick red that was reflected in the shop windows and the church steeple across the road.

'What did you see back there?' Doris asked. 'What was it, Lonnie? What happened when you went through the hedge?'

'Nothing. I can't remember. It's all a blank. We were there... we heard a sound... then I was running. That's all I can remember. Let's not talk about it. Where are we?' he laughed.

Doris suddenly realized that whatever he had seen there must've shocked him. She was not sure what it was that he had seen. It didn't matter. They had to get out of here. Had to get back to the hotel where the kids were.

'I want to go home. Let's get a cab,' she said.

'Yes, all right. Okay,' Lonnie agreed. 'The only problem is, there aren't any.'

There was, in fact, no traffic at all on Norris Road, which was quite wide. Directly in the center of it ran a set of old tram tracks. On the other side, in front of a flower shop, an ancient-looking car was parked. Farther down on their own side, a Yamaha motorbike stood. That was all. They could *hear* cars, but the sound was faraway.

'We'll walk,' Doris said. 'Away from this Crouch End. We can get a taxi if we get away from here.'

He agreed and they began walking along Norris Road toward the setting sun. The faraway sound of the traffic was constant, but not growing. She felt nervous.

They passed a market that was closed. They passed a launderette. They passed a shop window with an old *TO LEASE* sign. They were coming right to an underpass, and it was dark there.

I can't, she thought. *I can't go there*. They had come closer to the underpass now. Lonnie looked dreamy and exhausted.

'Come on,' she said, trembling, and took his hand. She walked forward and he followed.

They were almost out – it was a very short underpass, she thought with relief – when a hand grabbed her arm. She didn't scream, but she let go of Lonnie's hand. He didn't seem to notice and just walked out on the other side – that's when she saw him for the last time for just one moment – and then he was gone.

The hand holding her arm was hairy. It turned her toward a heavy shape with two green eyes, leaning against the concrete wall of the underpass. Those green eyes were cat's eyes. And suddenly she freed herself from the grip, backed up, and ran not knowing where... or for how long.

Then at some point she realized that Lonnie was gone and stopped running. She was still in Norris Road, but instead of the deserted shops she could see deserted warehouses with strange signs on them.

'Lonnie!' she called. There was no echo, but there was still the sound of traffic, a little closer now. The sky was purple, and the shadows began to fill Norris Road. For the first time she realized she might spend that night here in Crouch End – if she really was *in* Crouch End – and that thought brought new terror.

Doris went on walking, calling for her husband. Her voice didn't echo, but her footsteps seemed to.

It might've been some effect of the twilight, but the warehouses seemed to lean hungrily over the road. The windows seemed to stare at her, and the names on the signs became unpronounceable. The vowels were in the wrong places, and the consonants had been put together in a strange way. *CTHULHU KRYON* said one. *YOGSOGGOTH* read another. *R'YELEH* said yet another. There was one that she remembered particularly: *NRTESNNYARLAHOTEP*.

'How could you remember such abracadabra?' Farnham asked her.

Doris Freeman shook her head. 'I don't know. I really don't. It's like a nightmare you want to forget, but it just stays and stays and stays.'

Norris Road went on and on for infinity. Doris continued to walk, but she no longer called for Lonnie. She felt a terrible fear, a fear so great she would soon go mad or drop dead. It felt as if she were no longer on earth, but on a different planet, a place so alien that the human mind couldn't

even begin to understand it. The *angles* seemed different, the *colors*. She could only walk under a purple sky and hope that it would end.

It did.

She saw two figures standing ahead of her – the children she and Lonnie had seen earlier.

'It's the American woman,' the boy with a claw-hand said.

'She's lost,' said the girl.

'Lost her husband. Lost her way,' he echoed.

'Found the darker way,' the girl chanted. 'The road that leads into the funnel.'

'Lost her hope.'

'Found the Whistler from the Stars, Eater of Dimensions, the Blind Piper...'

Faster and faster their words came. Her head started spinning with them. The buildings leaned. Her hands went to her ears and finally she screamed at them:

'Where's my husband? Where's Lonnie? What have you done to him?'

There was silence. And then the girl said: 'He's gone beneath.'

The boy said: 'Gone to the Goat with a Thousand Young.'

The girl smiled with evil innocence. 'He had to go. The mark was on him. You'll go, too.'

The boy raised his hand and chanted in a language that she could not understand – but the sound of the words was maddening.

'The street began to move then,' Doris told Vetter and Farnham. 'It rose and fell, rose and fell, like in an earthquake. The tram tracks flew into the air – I remember that. All just flew off into the darkness. And something started to *come through*...'

'What?' Vetter asked. 'What did you see? What was it?'

'Tentacles,' she said, slowly. 'I think it was tentacles. But they were thick as old trees, and each of them was made of a thousand smaller ones...'

and there were pink things like suckers... but sometimes they looked like faces... one of them looked like Lonnie's face... and all of them were in agony. Below them, in the darkness under the street there was something else. Something like eyes...'

The next thing she remembered was standing in the doorway of a closed newsagent's shop. There were cars passing back and forth in the street. Two young people had walked in front of her. She came out onto the sidewalk. Across the street there was a jeweler's shop with a large clock in the shop window. It was five minutes to ten.

She walked up to the intersection then. The heel of her shoe was broken, and her muscles ached. At the intersection she saw that somehow she had come to Hillfield Avenue and Tottenham Road. Under a streetlamp she stopped an elderly couple passing by.

'Police,' Doris Freeman whispered. 'Where's the police station? I'm an American citizen... I've lost my husband... I need the police.'

'There's a police station right up Tottenham Road,' the man said.

'What's happened?' the woman asked. 'Car accident?'

'No,' Doris said. 'It... I... I... the street... there was a cat with only one eye... the street opened up... I saw it... and they said something about a Blind Piper... I have to find Lonnie!'

Anyway, she told Vetter and Farnham, after that the man and woman drew away from her, as if she had bubonic plague. The man said something like '*Happened again*'. Very quickly, the two of them began to walk away. Then the woman turned around. 'Don't you come near!' she called. 'Don't you come near, if you've been to Crouch End Townen!'

And with that, the two of them had disappeared into the night.

Farnham had made himself another cup of coffee. Doris had gone back to her hotel, accompanied by the nurse Vetter had called. In the morning she would decide if the woman needed to go to hospital. He wondered what she was going to tell the kids when they woke up tomorrow. Would she tell

them that the big bad monster of Crouch End Town (*Towen*) had eaten their Daddy?

Farnham put down his cup. It wasn't his problem. It was none of his business; he was only a police constable who wanted to forget the whole thing. Let Vetter write the report. Vetter was an old man and could put his name to such a lunacy. He would still be a police constable when he got his gold watch, his pension, and his council flat. Farnham, on the other hand, had ambitions, and that meant he had to be very careful.

Farnham crossed the room and went outside. He stood and stared across Tottenham Road, but he couldn't see Vetter anywhere.

It was past 3:00 a.m., and the street was quiet. He went down the steps and on the sidewalk, feeling uneasy now. It was silly, of course, that the woman's mad story was now affecting him. Farnham walked slowly up to the corner, thinking he would meet Vetter coming back from his night walk. But he wouldn't go farther because he shouldn't leave the station empty.

He reached the corner and looked around. It was funny, but it was completely dark there. The whole street looked different without the lights. *Should he report it?* he wondered. *And where was Vetter?*

He would walk just a little farther, Farnham decided.

But not far.

Just a little.

Vetter came back in less than five minutes after Farnham had left.

'Farnham?' he called.

No answer.

Had Vetter come a minute earlier, he would've seen the young constable turning around the corner and disappearing forever.

Neither police constable Robert Farnham, nor Lonnie Freeman was ever found.

Vetter took early retirement about four months later. Six months later he was found dead of a heart attack.

And in Crouch End, which is really a quiet suburb of London, strange things still happen from time to time, and people still lose their way.

Some of them lose it forever.

Tasks on the text "Crouch End"

- 1) Write a summary.
- 2) Explain in English:
 - a constable
 - to break through
 - a sergeant
 - to giggle
 - a lobby
 - a hedge
 - a launderette
 - concrete
 - a tentacle
 - lunacy
- 3) Answer the questions on the text:
 - Is Crouch End a fictional district of London?
 - Who might break through what?
 - Why is Crouch End a strange place?
 - What was the American's woman story?
 - Who or what was in the hole behind the hedge?
 - What does the word Townen mean?
 - Give a detailed description of Crouch End.
 - Can you translate the signs?
- 4) Get some information about druids; the parallel universes from the scientific point of view.

- 5) Translate the passage "The elderly cab driver ... She didn't like it".
- 6) Retell the story from Lonnie's point of view; from the driver's point of view.
- 7) It often happens in every city that people get lost and never found. What do you think happens to them?
- 8) Prepare for the social discussion: how not to get lost in a new strange place; tolerant attitude to people of different nations.

THE HOUSE ON MAPLE STREET

Melissa, who was only five and the youngest of the Bradbury children, had very sharp eyes. It wasn't really surprising that she was the first to discover that something strange had happened to their house on Maple Street over the summer while they were away on vacation.

She found Brian, Laurie, and Trent, and told them that something was wrong upstairs, on the third floor, at the end of the hall, right past Daddy Lew's study.

And that was a problem.

The Bradbury children disliked their mother's second husband. They still remembered their real father and didn't like his replacement at all. All four of them were even afraid of their stepfather, Daddy Lew, who got very angry when anybody played upstairs where his study was.

Now to see the 'thing' they had to tiptoe past Lew's study because Lew was inside, still unpacking his bags with his notebooks and papers and grumbling. They could hear him opening drawers and shutting them again. A familiar smell was coming from under the door. Lew was smoking his pipe. But their precautions were unnecessary: their stepfather didn't come out of his study.

They stood at the end of the hall, looking at it for a long time.

'What *is* this thing?' Laurie whispered, putting her hand to her lips, when Melissa showed it to them. 'What does it *mean*?'

Even Trent, who was almost fourteen and knew *everything*, didn't know what it was. Probably they should ask some adults. But who? Since their mother was in her bed with a migraine, there was only Lew left, and that was the same as no one at all.

'I don't know,' Trent said, looking into the crack. 'Some kind of metal, I think.'

'Should it be in there?' Laurie asked. 'I mean, *was* it? Before?'

'No,' Trent said. 'I remember when they were redecorating it. That was just after Mom married *him*. There wasn't anything in there – just planks between the plaster and the outside wall of the house.'

Trent put his hand into the crack in the wall and touched the metal which was dull white. The crack was about four inches long and half an inch across. 'They put in pink insulation, too,' he said, frowning. 'I remember.'

'Where is it, then? I don't see any pink stuff,' Brian asked.

'I don't know,' Trent said again. 'That metal in the wall is something new. I wonder how much of it there is, and how far it goes. Is it just up here on the third floor, or..?'

'Or what?' Laurie looked at him with big round eyes. Now she was a little frightened.

'Or is it all over the house,' Trent finished thoughtfully.

After school the next afternoon, the four Bradbury children had a meeting.

'This weird thing should be investigated,' Trent announced.

Trent glanced at the clock on the wall of his room where they had gathered. It was 3:20. Their mother had been up this morning to give Lew his breakfast, but after that she had gone back to bed, and that's where she was. About once a month she had awful headaches, or migraines. So she wouldn't see them on the third floor and ask them what they were doing

there, but Daddy Lew was a different story. His study was just down the hall from the strange crack, so they couldn't avoid his notice and his curiosity. That is why, Trent explained, they needed to make their investigations while he was away at work.

The family had returned home a couple of days before Lew's classes began. That morning Lew had left at 11:00 with a briefcase full of papers. So he was away, and that was good, but he might be back at any time between now and five, and that was bad. Still, they had *some* time.

'Listen to me, guys,' Trent said. 'We'll need some things.'

He began explaining what they were. All three younger children were listening carefully because if their big brother was puzzled by something, if he thought that something was strange and amazing, they all thought so, too.

They went back to the crack with a small flashlight. Now they could all see the metal. It wasn't shiny. Steel, was Trent's opinion, steel, or some sort of alloy. He turned to Laurie and asked her to give him the drill, which was their real father's, and which they had brought from the basement. The children weren't afraid Daddy Lew would notice that someone had been using the drill because he hasn't used any tools since he had married Catherine Bradbury. It was the holes in the wall outside his study that they were worried about.

'Look,' Trent said, holding the drill. The drill is very thin, and we're only going to drill behind the pictures. I don't think we'll have to worry.'

There were about a dozen framed pictures on the third-floor hallway walls. Most of them were very old and uninteresting.

'He doesn't even look *at* them, so he'll never look *behind* them,' Laurie agreed and took off one of the pictures. Trent drilled. They stood watching him in a little circle of three. The drill went easily into the wall, and the hole it made was as tiny as promised.

Then Trent stopped.

'Why have you stop?' Brian asked.

'Hit something hard.'

'More metal? ' Melissa asked.

'I think so. Surely it wasn't wood. Let's see.' Trent shone the flashlight in. They all looked into the hole and the same white metal at the end of it.

'Okay,' Trent said. 'Next picture.'

The drill hit metal behind the second picture, and the third, as well. Behind the fourth picture it went all the way in. This time they saw the pink stuff.

'Yeah, the insulation I told you about,' Trent said to Laurie. 'Let's try the other side of the hall.'

They had to drill behind four pictures on the other side of the corridor and found wood and insulation only behind the fifth one. As they were putting the last picture back, they heard Lew's car turning into the driveway. They almost dropped the picture.

'Go!' Trent whispered. 'Downstairs! To the TV room!'

They had left the TV on. Downstairs the front door shut as Lew came in.

Trent and Laurie looked at each other. If Lew went into the kitchen to get a drink, all still might be well. If he didn't, he would meet them on the stairs. One look at their faces and he'd know that something was going on. Brian and Melissa went first; Trent and Laurie came behind, more slowly, listening.

There was a moment of silence when the only sounds were the little kids' footsteps on the stairs, and then Lew shouted from the kitchen: 'Turn the TV off, *CAN'T YOU?* Your mother is *SLEEPING*'

Late that night Laurie came to Trent's room and sat down beside him on the bed.

'You don't like him, but that's not all,' she said. 'Lew, I mean.'

'Yeah,' Trent said. 'You're right. I don't like him.'

'You're scared of him, too, aren't you?'

After a long, long moment, Trent said: 'Yeah. A little.'

'Just a little?'

'Maybe a little more than a little,' Trent said, smiling at Laurie.

'Why? Do you think he might hurt us?'

Lew shouted at them a lot, but he had never put his hands on them. No, Laurie suddenly remembered, that wasn't quite true. One time when Brian had walked into his study without knocking, Lew had spanked him hard. Brian had tried not to cry, but in the end he had. And Mom had cried, too, although she hadn't tried to stop the spanking. But she must've said something to *him* later, because Laurie had heard Lew shouting at *her*.

'No,' Trent answered her question at last. 'I don't think so. I don't think he *would*... but I think he *could*. I think he's hurting Mom, and I think it is getting a little worse for her every day.'

'She's sorry, isn't she?' Laurie asked. Suddenly she was crying. Why were adults so stupid sometimes about some obvious things? 'She never wanted to go on vacation, and he shouted at her all the time...'

'Don't forget about the headaches,' Trent added. 'He says it's all her fault.'

'Would she ever... divorce him?'

'No,' Trent said. 'Not Mom.'

'Then there's nothing we can do,' Laurie sighed.

'Who knows...,' Trent whispered.

During the next week, they drilled other small holes around the house when there was no one to see them: holes behind posters in their rooms, behind the refrigerator, in the closets. Trent even drilled one in a dining-room wall, in one dark corner, where no one would ever see it. There was no metal anywhere. Just insulation.

The children forgot it for a little while.

One day about a month later, Brian came to Trent and told him that there was another crack in the plaster on the third floor, and that he could

see more metal behind it. Trent and Melissa came at once, and Laurie was still in school.

As the first time they had found the crack, their mother was lying in bed with a headache. The former Mrs. Bradbury looked very pale and thin these days, but when any of the children asked her if she was okay, she always smiled and told them not to worry. Laurie once told her that she looked too thin. *Oh no*, her mother said, *Lew says I have put on weight while on vacation*. She was just trying to get back into shape, that's all. Laurie knew it wasn't true.

Lew had a big argument with their mother the night before, about a party he wanted to have for his faculty members in the History Department. If there was anything the former Mrs. Bradbury hated and feared, it was organizing parties. Lew had insisted on this one, however, and she had finally agreed. Now she was lying in the bedroom while Lew was probably sending invitations to his colleagues.

The new crack was on the other side of the hallway, between the study door and the stairs.

'Are you sure you saw metal in there?' Trent asked. 'We *checked* this side before.'

'Look for yourself,' Brian said, and Trent did. They didn't need a flashlight; this crack was wider, and there was metal in it.

After a long look, Trent went to the hardware store to get some plaster because they didn't want Lew to see that crack – and especially the metal inside it. At least not yet.

They started drilling again, and this time they found metal behind *all* the walls on the third floor, including Lew's study. They drilled there one afternoon while Lew was at the college, and their mother went out shopping for the faculty party.

They drilled holes along the stairs to the second floor and found metal behind these walls, too. It continued down the second-floor hallway and

toward the front of the house. There was metal behind the four walls of Brian's room, but behind only one wall of Laurie's.

'It hasn't finished growing in here,' Laurie said darkly.

Trent looked at her, surprised. 'What?'

'Try the floor, Trent! See if it's there, too.'

Trent drilled into the floor of Laurie's room. The drill went in all the way, but when Trent drilled under his own bed, he soon hit the metal. Then he stood on a stool and drilled into the ceiling.

'More metal,' he said after a few moments, looking troubled.

That night it was Trent who came to Laurie's room. Neither of them had been sleeping very well for the last couple of weeks.

'What did you mean?' Trent whispered, sitting down beside her. 'When you said it hadn't finished growing in your room. What did you mean?'

'I think that stuff is growing all over the house.' Laurie paused. 'No, that's not right. It's growing *in* the house.'

Trent nodded and sat quietly beside her on the bed.

'It acts like it's alive.'

Trent nodded again. He had already thought of this. He had no idea how metal *could* be alive.

'But that isn't the worst.'

'What do you *mean*?'

'It's *sneaking*.' Her eyes were big and frightened. 'That's what I really don't like. I don't know what started it or what it means, and I don't really care. But it's *sneaking*. I think that something is going to happen, Trent, only I don't know what.'

'Yeah,' said Trent. 'I *know* that something is going to happen. I even know what.'

She stared at him. 'You *know*? What? What is it?'

'I am not sure,' Trent said. 'I *think* I know, but I'm not ready to say what I think yet. I have to look at things.'

'If we drill many more holes, the house will fall down!'

'I didn't say *drill*, I said *look*.'

'Look for *what*? '

'For something that isn't here yet – that hasn't grown yet. But when it does, I don't think it will be able to hide.'

'Tell me, Trent!'

'Not yet,' he said and left.

Trent found what he was looking for two days before the big party. Their mother had begun to look extremely unhealthy, with her skin turning from pale to yellow. She had had a migraine for over a week.

It was in the cellar that he finally found it. He had found strange things in other places, too. The day before, in the attic, he had found some thin cables growing in a dark corner. There was a knob of metal sticking out of the ceiling of a second-floor closet. A metal armature had burst through the side of the closet on the third floor.

The metal was dull and gray... until he touched it. When he did that, it turned red, and he heard some humming sound deep in the wall. He took his hand away, and the metal thing turned gray again. The humming stopped. Again, Trent thought he knew. It was hard to believe, but he thought he knew.

What he found in the cellar was just another proof of what he and Laurie already knew – the changes were happening quietly all through the house.

He opened the door, and although what he saw frightened him, it didn't really surprise him. What growing in the cellar looked like consoles and instrument panels with dials and levers. One thing looked like a chair. There were a few lights on the panel, and some of them actually began to blink as he looked at them. Some especially bright red lights caught his attention. The lights were numbers.

These numbers were moving. 72:34:18 became 72:34:17 and then 72:34:16. Trent shivered. It was a digital clock, running backward counting down. And what would happen when it went to 00:00:00 some three days from this afternoon? He was quite sure he knew. Every boy knows that one of two things can happen after countdown: an explosion or a lift-off.

Trent thought that there was too much equipment for it to be an explosion.

He also thought that something had got into the house while they were on vacation. Some spore, perhaps, had drifted through space for a billion years before falling into the chimney of a house on Maple Street. Into the *Bradburys'* house.

He *knew* what was going to happen. He locked the cellar and took the key with him.

Something terrible happened at Lew's faculty party. Trent and Laurie later heard Lew shouting at their mother. 'What the hell's the matter with you?' Trent and Laurie heard him yelling at her. 'Don't you know what people are going to say about this?' Their mother's only reply was soft, helpless crying. It seemed that Catherine Evans (who had now wished to be Catherine Bradbury again) had been lying to everyone. She had had a terrible migraine for not just day or two this time – but for the last two weeks. During that time she hadn't eaten much and lost 15 pounds. At the party she suddenly felt dizzy and fell down, spilling her drink and food onto Mrs. Krutchmer's expensive dress. All four children had been told by Daddy Lew to stay upstairs during the party. 'University people don't like to see children at faculty parties,' Lew had explained.

When the children heard the raised voices, they crept downstairs and saw their mother on the floor. Brian and Melissa had forgotten their stepfather's firm order and ran into the room.

'Mom! Mommy!' Brian cried, shaking the former Catherine Bradbury. '*Mommy!* Wake up!'

'Go upstairs,' Lew said coldly. 'Now. Both of you.'

When they didn't obey, Lew grabbed and squeezed Melissa's shoulder until she cried with pain.

'Take your hand off her,' Trent said clearly at that moment.

Lew and all the others turned to him. Trent and Laurie stood on the stairs, side by side. Trent was pale, but his face was calm. There were people at the party who had known Catherine Evans's first husband, and they agreed later that Trent looked just like his father – as if Bill Bradbury had come back from the dead.

'I want you to go upstairs,' Lew said. 'All four of you. It's not your business. At all.'

'Take your hand off Melissa,' Trent said. 'And get away from our mother,' Laurie said. Now Mrs. Evans was sitting up with her hands to her head, looking around. The headache had been gone. She knew she had done something terrible, embarrassed Lew, but for the moment she was just happy that the pain had stopped. Now she only wanted to go upstairs and lie down.

'You'll be punished for this,' Lew said, looking at his four stepchildren in the shocked silence of the living room. He looked at them one at a time. Melissa began to cry.

'I'm sorry for their misbehavior,' he said to the guests. 'My wife is a bit soft with them, I'm afraid.'

'Don't be an idiot, Lew,' Mrs. Krutchmer said. 'Your wife fainted. They were worried, that's all. Children *should* care about their mothers. And husbands about their wives. '

The children had left, and the party went on. Mrs. Evans went to her room and fell asleep.

Lew's voice sounded quite happy from downstairs. Trent thought that Lew was even enjoying the absence of his mousy wife. He never went upstairs to check on her. Not once. Not until the party was over.

After the last guest had left, Lew walked upstairs and told Catherine to wake up. Next, Lew came into Trent's room.

'I knew you'd all be in here,' he said. 'You're going to be punished, you know. Tomorrow. Tonight I want you to go to bed and think about it. Now go to your rooms.'

Despite Daddy Lew's order, Laurie came back to Trent's room, and they sat listening in silence as their stepfather was shouting at their mother for fainting at *his* party.

'Oh, Trent, what are we going to do?' Laurie asked. Trent's face was pale and still. 'Do?' he said. 'We're not going to do anything.'

'But we *have* to! Trent, we *have* to! We have to help her!'

'No, we don't,' Trent said and looked at his watch. A small and somehow terrible smile played around his lips. 'The house is going to do it for us. At around 3:34 tomorrow afternoon, the house is going to do it all.'

There was no punishment in the morning. Lew Evans was too busy getting ready for work. He told them he would see them in his study that night, one by one, and left. Their mother was still asleep.

Trent called the other children into his room. 'Listen to me,' he said to Brian and Melissa. 'Listen carefully, and don't miss a word. It's important.'

They stared at him silently.

'As soon as your classes finish, come right home... but don't go inside. Wait at the corner of Maple Street. Stand by the blue mailbox. You have to be there by three o'clock, 3:15 at the *latest*. Do you understand?'

'Yes,' Melissa said slowly. 'But why, Trent?'

'Never mind,' Trent said. 'Laurie and I will already be there.'

'How are we going to do that, Trent?' Laurie asked. 'We don't get out of school until three o'clock.'

'We're not *going* to school today,' Trent said.

When the little kids were gone, Laurie asked Trent what was going on.

'Well, what *is* it? Tell me! Is it about this thing that's growing in the house?'

'Come with me to the cellar,' Trent said. 'I want to show you something.'

The cellar didn't look like a cellar at all – now it looked like the insides of a starship. Laurie stood looking at the blinking numbers. They now read 07:49:21.

'Yeah,' she said. 'I think we have to do it to Lew.'

'Yeah,' Trent said. 'I think so, too. If we don't do it, he'll kill her.'

They went into Lew's study together. They found the key to his room in the top drawer. Trent took it. Then they left the house.

They spent the day in the park, and it was the longest day they had ever had.

At 2:30, Trent sent Laurie to the phone booth.

'Do I have to?' she asked. 'I don't want to scare her, especially after last night.'

'Do you want her to be in the house when whatever happens?' Trent asked.

Laurie dialed the number. 'Hello?' Mrs. Evans said in a sleepy voice.

'Oh, hi, Mom,' Laurie said.

'Laurie, why are you calling? Is everything okay?'

'Well, Mom, I hurt myself in the gym. Just a little. It's not bad.'

'What did you do? Jesus! Are you calling from the hospital?'

'Oh, no, it's just my knee. The school nurse asked if you could come and take me home because I can't walk. It really hurts.'

'I'll come right away, honey. Will you be in the nurse's office?'

'Yes,' Laurie lied. 'Don't worry, Mom, I'll be all right.'

After the call they went to the other side of the park to watch the street. In five minutes their mother's car passed them, going in the direction of the school.

Then they went to the phone booth again, and Trent dialed the number of the History Department office. He glanced at his watch. Quarter to three. Less than an hour to go.

'History Department,' a woman's voice said.

'Hi. This is Trent Bradbury. I need to speak with my stepfather, Lewis Evans, please.'

'Professor Evans is in class,' the secretary said.

'I know, but please get him, anyway. It's an emergency. It's about his wife. My mom.'

There was a long pause.

'He's right next door,' the secretary said then. 'I'll get him myself. I'll ask him to call home.'

'No, I'll wait,' Trent insisted.

'All right,' the secretary said.

They stood waiting for a long time.

'Hello?' their stepfather answered finally.

'It's Trent, Lew. Mom's in your study. Her headache is back. She fainted. I can't wake her up. Can you come home right away?'

Trent knew exactly which words would make his stepfather angry.

'My study? *My study*? What was she doing in there?'

'Cleaning, I think. There are papers all over the floor.'

'I'll be right there,' Lew said. He hung up without saying good-bye.

Laurie and Trent ran to the blue mailbox on the corner of Maple Street. The sky was turning dark now as if the storm was coming. Melissa and Brian hadn't arrived yet.

'I want to come with you, Trent,' Laurie said.

'No,' Trent answered. 'Wait here for Brian and Melissa.'

Trent ran to the Bradburys' house. He glanced at his watch. It was 3:12. When he looked around, he saw two little children walking toward Laurie.

Everything goes according to the plan, he thought.

He imagined the clock in the cellar, now reading 00:19:06.

What if Lew was late?

No time to worry about that now.

Trent ran upstairs. He went into Lew's study, opened two or three drawers and threw the papers he found all over the floor. This took only a few moments, but right then he heard Lew's car turning into their driveway. Trent hid in the corner of the third-floor hallway, where they had drilled the first holes, holding the key to Lew's study in his hand.

The car stopped. The driver's door opened and shut. Outside Trent could hear the rumbling of thunder and the first drops of rain hitting the roof. Then somewhere deep in the house something began to hum.

Lew ran up the stairs, shouting his wife's name, then down the hall and straight into his office. Trent understood that he had only one chance. He jumped out of corner and shut the door of the study behind Lew.

Then he put the key in the lock and turned it.

'Hey!' Lew shouted from the inside. 'What are you doing? Where's Catherine? Let me out of here!'

He turned the knob and banged on the door.

Without saying a word, Trent dropped the key and ran downstairs. He looked at his watch again and saw that it was 3:31... then 3:32. The house started vibrating.

And what if his watch was slow?

Trent felt how the house was *rising* under his feet as he dashed out of the front door and into the stormy blackness outside. Lightning flashed across the sky. The wind began to roar like a dragon. Trent ran to the three worried kids waiting for him at the blue mailbox on the corner.

Together they stood watching it happen.

There was something like an earthquake building under the house. The house on Maple Street no longer looked straight and solid – it was shaking.

There were huge cracks in its walls and the foundation. Some glass was breaking.

Trent looked at the third floor windows, where there was Lew's study. He thought that he heard their stepfather screaming from up there.

Cold blue light was shining from under the house. The children covered their eyes and stepped back. The invisible engines roared; then the house pulled up, and the earth let go.

It was a perfect lift-off. The house rose slowly at first, then it began to rise faster and faster, and with a blue flash it disappeared in the dark clouds.

When it was gone, there was only the smoking cellar-hole left in the middle of what used to be their lawn.

'Wow,' Brian said. 'Our house took off!'

'Yeah,' Trent said. He looked at Laurie. Laurie looked back.

'We're free,' Laurie leaned and whispered in Trent's ear.

'It's better than that,' Trent said. '*She* is.'

People were coming out of their houses now. '*What happened?*' they screamed. '*What happened here?*'

But the Bradbury children ignored them. They were laughing and hugging each other.

Then Trent put his arms around the three of them, and they stood together in the pouring rain, waiting for their mother to come home.

Tasks on the text "The House on Maple Street"

1) Write a summary of the story.

2) Explain the words in English:

- to tiptoe
- a precaution
- plaster
- curiosity

- alloy
- to sneak
- a lift-off
- mousy
- emergency
- to take off

3) Answer the questions on the text:

- What is a problem with the house?
- What is a reason of Mother's headaches?
- Why are children afraid of Lew?
- Trent said that he knew what was going to happen. What was his idea? Was he right?
- What terrible happened at Lew's party?
- How did Bill (the father of children) die?

4) Imagine a story how Mrs. Bradbury and Lew got acquainted.

5) Explain the meaning of the surname Bradbury.

6) Why do many women live with mad and cruel husbands?

7) Translate the passage "There was no punishment ... Then they left the house".

MRS. TODD'S SHORTCUT

'There goes the Todd woman,' I said.

Homer Buckland looked at the little Jaguar driving by and nodded. The woman in the car raised her hand to Homer. Homer nodded to her, too.

The Todd family had a big summer house on Castle Lake, and Homer had been their caretaker for a long time. I thought that he disliked Worth Todd's second wife as much as he'd liked Ophelia Todd, the first one.

We were sitting on a bench in front of a convenience store, drinking soda and watching the lake. It was October, which is a peaceful time here.

'She doesn't drive as fast as Ophelia,' Homer said. 'I used to think what an old-fashioned name she had for a woman who could drive a car so fast.'

There was quite a lot of local interest when Ophelia Todd disappeared. She was good-looking and young – maybe thirty-four or thirty-five. But most importantly, Ophelia was a really nice woman, and she had done a lot of good things in town. Nowadays people are willing to spend their money, but then aren't so willing to spend their *time*. But Ophelia Todd seemed *quite willing* to spend it.

A good woman. Not a town woman, but a good woman. And when she disappeared, there was concern – not grieving, because a disappearance is not like a death.

'She drove a Mercedes,' Homer said, answering the question I hadn't asked. 'A sports car. Todd got it for her. You remember how she took the kids to the lake all those years?'

It used to be that Homer never talked about his summer people. But then his wife died. Five years ago it was. He grieved for two years or so and then seemed to feel better. But he was not the same. He seemed waiting for something to happen, waiting for the next thing. *Homer is waiting for the next thing, so he can get married again*. I wouldn't have been waiting for the *next* thing; I would've been waiting for the *last* thing.

But in that waiting period – which ended when Homer went to Vermont a year later – he sometimes talked about the summer people.

'She never drove fast with her husband, you know. But when I drove with her, she made that Mercedes fly. Ophelia was always looking for a shortcut,' Homer continued. 'That woman was mad for a shortcut. I could never understand it. She said if you can save enough distance, you'll save time as well. She said her father had taught her that. He was a salesman,

always on the road, and she went with him when she could, and he was always looking for the shortest way. So she got in the habit. I asked her once: wasn't it funny that she was, on the one hand, spending her time doing good things in town, and, on the other hand, saving a few minutes between here and there? She just looked at me and said, "I like being helpful, Homer. I like driving, too, but I don't like the *time* it takes."

He sipped his soda, and we fell silent a moment, thinking, watching some people drive by to some place.

'And what about her husband?' I asked. 'Didn't he mind her driving every wood-road between here and there just to see if she could save some minutes?'

'He didn't care,' Homer said shortly. They had two or three different cars. There was the Cadillac, and his truck, and her little Mercedes. Besides, he was often away, on business.'

I nodded but didn't speak. I felt that he had been wanting to tell the story of Mrs. Todd's shortcut for a long time.

'Her little car had a special odometer in it that told you how many miles were in a trip, and every time she started from Castle Lake to Bangor, she'd set it to 0-0, and then see how she would do. She had made it look like it was a game, but it was a serious business to her. The glove compartment of the little car was filled with maps, and there were a few more in the back, too. She'd drawn lines on all of them, showing routes she'd taken or tried to take. She'd been stuck a few times and had to get help from some farmers with a tractor.'

He paused, as if thinking that over.

'I was there one day laying tile in the bathroom, and she came and stood in the doorway, talking to me about it for quite a while. I joked with her about it, but I was also interested. I was interested just because a man like me is always interested in knowing the shortest way, even if he doesn't want to take it.'

I agreed with him: there's something powerful in knowing the shortest way.

'Well, she knew the roads like the back of her hand,' Homer said, and smiled. 'She brought a little notebook with all her shortcuts written in it and explained that the way *most* people take to Bangor was 156.4 miles, but if you took secondary roads and some shortcuts, that would be 144.9 miles. I said that it wouldn't save her time. She smiled and replied that if you saved enough miles – soon enough you'd save time.'

Homer's words made me think that maybe there are lots of roads that people have forgotten about. People today prefer just the turnpike, but the truth is that there are thousands of ways of getting someplace. Roads with state numbers, roads without, roads with names, roads without.

'Then she gave me a couple more options, naming the roads I knew myself, and the shortest way to Bangor, as we agreed at first, was 129.2 miles. And that's when she told me about a man who wrote an article in *Science Today* in 1923, proving that no man could run a mile in less than four minutes. He *proved* it with different calculations based on the maximum length of the male thigh-muscles, maximum length of stride, maximum heart rate, etc.'

'But, as I know, Olympic runners run a mile in less time, right?' I asked Homer.

'That's exactly what I told her then, and she said that it showed that laws of physics weren't constant. There are no constants, you see – zero, mortality, eternity – everything eventually changes. It may take a hundred years or thousands of years, but it will happen.'

I couldn't really argue with Homer because I believed in something like that myself. He shut his eyes for a moment, then opened his eyes again and continued.

'Well, she smiled at me slyly, looked through her little notebook and named more shortcuts and side roads and country lanes that I had never

even heard of, although I had lived in the area all my life. She asked me if I knew how long that was to Bangor now, and I said that probably 140 miles. But it was 116.4 miles, she said.'

I laughed. Now I really wanted to hear this story to the end.

'I know. I laughed, too. She saw that I didn't believe her and offered me a ride. There was a devilish sparkle in her eyes. Of course I wanted to go. But I didn't. Not *then*.'

He laughed, and this laughter was gentle. He walked into the store and got himself another drink. Then he sat down and looked at me.

'She must've seen something in my face then and didn't insist. She said we could go any time, if I wanted. I finished the tiles and went home. That evening I took a map and drew a straight line and did the calculations. If you went from Castle Lake straight to Bangor, it would be just about 79 miles. So the next time I worked at the Todds' house I finished earlier and asked her if she wanted to give me a ride to Bangor the short way. She agreed and came back a minute later with the car keys in her hand. She told me that she had found an even *shorter* way.'

He paused again.

'I can't tell you much about what happened after that. I could hardly take my eyes off her. There was something wild in her face, something *wild and* something *free*, and it frightened me. She was beautiful, and I fell in love with her, anyone would. Can you imagine it? At my age? But I was scared of her, too, because she looked like she could kill you. She was wearing blue jeans and a white shirt, but after we had been driving for a while, it seemed like she was dressed in nothing but some white toga. Like an ancient goddess.'

'Like Diana, the huntress that drove the moon across the sky?'

'Yeah. Ophelia looked like that to me. Moon was her car, and all the time she's driving that car along, she was smiling, and her eyes were flashing.'

He thought for a moment, looking across the lake, his face very sad.

'We drove down a lot of wood-roads – the first two or three I knew, and after that I didn't know any of them. Some roads looked like they had been abandoned for, say, five or ten years. We were *alone* there except for the birds and maybe animals. The car motor sound was the only sound I could hear. And although I knew we had to be close to *someplace*, I started to feel like we had gone back in time, and there wasn't *anything*. That if we stopped and I climbed a high tree, I would see just woods and woods and more woods. At some point we went down a nicely paved road with a sign that said MOTORWAY B. Have you ever heard of a road in this state that was called MOTORWAY B?'

'No,' I said. 'Sounds English.'

'It *looked* English, with these trees, like willows, along the road. She laughed and told me to watch out because, as she said, one of those trees had almost grabbed her the time before. I didn't know what she was talking about, but then I noticed that even though there was no wind, the branches of those trees were moving. They looked black and wet and mossy. Then one of them snatched off my cap, and I knew I wasn't asleep. And another one of them snatched at her – I swear it did! It caught her hair and pulled a lock of it out. She yelled and laughed, as if it was exciting, and the car swerved a little. That's when I turned around and looked into the woods. Jesus! *Everything* in there was moving. I couldn't believe what I was seeing.'

'I wouldn't have either!' I said and thought that Homer had got a rich imagination.

'Then we came out of the shade, and half an hour later we were in Bangor. She pointed to that little odometer, and it said 111.6 miles. She was pleased with herself. That wild look had mostly disappeared, and she was just Ophelia Todd again. But that other look wasn't entirely gone. It was like she was two women, Ophelia and Diana. The part of her that was

Diana was in control when she was driving those roads, and the part of her that was Ophelia didn't have any idea that her shortcut went through places... places that aren't on any map. She didn't remember any of the strange stuff. Not even the willows, which weren't willows at all, not even that MOTORWAY B sign. *She didn't remember anything of that!* Either I had dreamed it was there, or she had dreamed it wasn't. All I knew for sure was that we had driven only 111 miles and got to Bangor, and that wasn't a daydream.'

He sat there, looking into the sky.

'She had some business in Bangor and asked me to drive her car back to Castle Lake for her. She looked at me with that same light in her eyes and said that she had seen a couple of side roads that day that might shorten the way by a few more miles. Then she laughed softly, thanked me for riding with her, and gave me a kiss on the cheek, but that was the best kiss I'd ever had in my whole life. I drove home by the turnpike.'

The sun was going down now. Soon Homer would have to go home, and I was going to visit some friends.

'The next summer she disappeared. I didn't see much of her, but I *thought* about her from time to time, and about that day, and about that kiss, and it started to seem like a dream to me. After a while I started thinking that it *really* had been a dream. It's that way, sometimes. There are holes in the *middle* of things. Do you know that? Right in the *middle* of things. They are there, and you go around them. And you forget it.'

'Yes,' I said, thinking of one night when I'd seen some big orange light in the sky. It came down and down, and I stood watching it until it hit the lake and disappeared. I never said anything to anybody because I was afraid they'd laugh. And after a while it seemed like a dream I had once had.

'She disappeared in August. I saw her for the first time that year in early July, and she looked... she looked *gorgeous!* Gorgeous and wild. The

little wrinkles I'd started to notice around her eyes were gone. She told me that she had found two new roads and got to Bangor in just 67 miles. I said that it wasn't possible because I had done the calculations on the map myself, and it was 79 in a straight line. She laughed, and she looked prettier than ever, like a goddess in the sun. She reminded me about running a mile in less than four minutes, but I said that it wasn't the same. She told me to fold the map. She said it could be a little less than a straight line if you fold it a little. Or it can be a lot less if you fold it a lot.'

'You can fold a paper map but you can't fold *land*,' I told Homer. He nodded.

'That's what I said to her. But three weeks later – about two weeks before she disappeared – she called me from Bangor and asked me to go to her place and unlock her house. She said that her husband was in New York, and that she had lost her key. Well, that call was at eight o'clock, and in forty-five minutes I got to the Todds' house. The lights in the house were on, and her little sports car was parked in front of it. The car was covered with mud up to the windows, and there was this stuff in that mud that looked like seaweed... but seemed to be *moving*, slowly, like it was dying. I touched a piece of it, and it tried to wrap itself around my hand. It felt nasty and awful. I went around to the front of the car and looked. Bugs got stuck on the windshield – only they didn't look like any bugs I'd ever seen before. There was a moth that was about the size of a sparrow and mosquitoes the size of dragonflies. And all I could think was: *Where the hell has she been? And how did she get here in only three quarters of an hour?* Then I saw something else.'

I prepared myself to hear that something terrible had happened to *her*.

'There was some kind of an animal smashed onto the radiator grille. It looked like something between a woodchuck and a weasel, but there were other parts in that body that I didn't even want to look at. It hurt your *mind*. It had long claws on its feet. And teeth. Long thin needle teeth,

sticking out of its mouth. Some of them were stuck right in that steel grille. That's why it was still hanging on it – by the teeth. I looked at it and knew that it had a poison just like a snake, and it jumped at that car when it saw it, trying to bite it to death.'

Homer gestured with his left hand, imitating that poisonous thing.

'I went around to the driver's door, opened it, and looked at that special odometer... and it said 31.6. I looked at it for a long time, and then I went to the back door. I saw that she'd broken the glass to let herself in, so my help wasn't needed. I then went back home because I just couldn't talk with her about what I had just seen.'

He paused again and chuckled.

'I saw her only once more, about a week later. I found my courage and said that I had seen something on her car that day, and that she had to stop it. She looked at me, and I could see that other woman in her – that Diana-woman. She laughed and said that she had taken care of that poisonous woodchuck, and that her dad was right: *save enough miles, and you 'LL save time*. That she wasn't going to stop it because it's *there*, and it's *hers*. Then she showed me something. Her red hair was up, and she let it down. It was beautiful. She said it had started to turn gray, but you couldn't see *any* gray in it now. She said that she'd felt different along those roads. That maybe she *was* different then – not Ophelia Todd, Worth Todd's wife, but some goddess.'

'But I think that every woman wants to be like some kind of goddess,' I said.

'I told her to be careful, and a week later Worth reported her missing. Her and the car. Todd had waited seven years before she was declared legally dead, and then he married the second Mrs. Todd – the one who has just driven by.'

Homer got up, then turned around and looked at me.

'I don't expect you to believe a single word of the story,' he said.

'But I do believe you,' I said. 'Every single word. Even if it's not true, Homer, it ought to be. And I believe she's young.'

He laughed and gave me a big hug. Then he got in his truck and drove off.

That was two years ago, and now Homer has gone to live in Vermont.

The night he was leaving he came to see me. His face was clear and his eyes were alive. He looked sixty instead of seventy, and I was glad for him and envied him a little, too. Looking at him, I knew that things were not quite what they seemed.

'I'm going,' he said.

'All right,' I said. 'Give me your address, and I'll write you from time to time.'

'I don't have any yet,' he said.

'All right,' I said again. 'It is Vermont, Homer, *isn't it?*'

'Well,' he said, 'it is – for people who want to know.'

I almost didn't say it, but then I did.

'What does she look like now?'

He paused, turning away and staring into space.

'Like Diana,' he said.

'I envy you, Homer,' I said, and I did.

I stood outside at the door. It was twilight. A car has stopped on the road. Now that I think of it, that car looked like an old sports car. Homer said good-bye to me, walked to the passenger side of the car and opened it. The inside light went on, and just for a moment I saw her – she looked like a girl of no more than sixteen, with long red hair around her face that was shining like the moon. He got in, and they drove away.

I stood on my porch watching the red lights of her little car in the dark. They were getting smaller and smaller, and then they were gone.

Tasks on the text "Mrs. Todd's Shortcut"

- 1) Write a summary.
- 2) Explain in English:
 - a caretaker
 - to will
 - a wood-road
 - an odometer
 - a turnpike
 - a stride
 - gorgeous
 - courage
 - to envy
- 3) Answer the questions on the text:
 - What's happened to Ophelia Todd?
 - Why was Ophelia obsessed with finding shortcuts?
 - What did the narrator experience in the woods?
 - Why do strong, powerful women often have red hair?
- 4) Comment on the phrases:
 - "I knew that things were not quite what they seemed".
 - "Every woman wants to be like some kind of goddess".
 - "There are holes in the middle of things".
- 5) Explain the grammar:
 - I used to think what an old-fashioned...
 - She never drove fast. (Why not Present Perfect is used?)
- 6) Translate the passage
"A good woman ... the time it takes".
- 7) Find some information about the Goddess Diana; Ophelia.
- 8) Write the diary in the name of Ophelia.
- 9) Prepare for the social discussion: wormholes.

БИБЛИОГРАФИЧЕСКИЙ СПИСОК

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