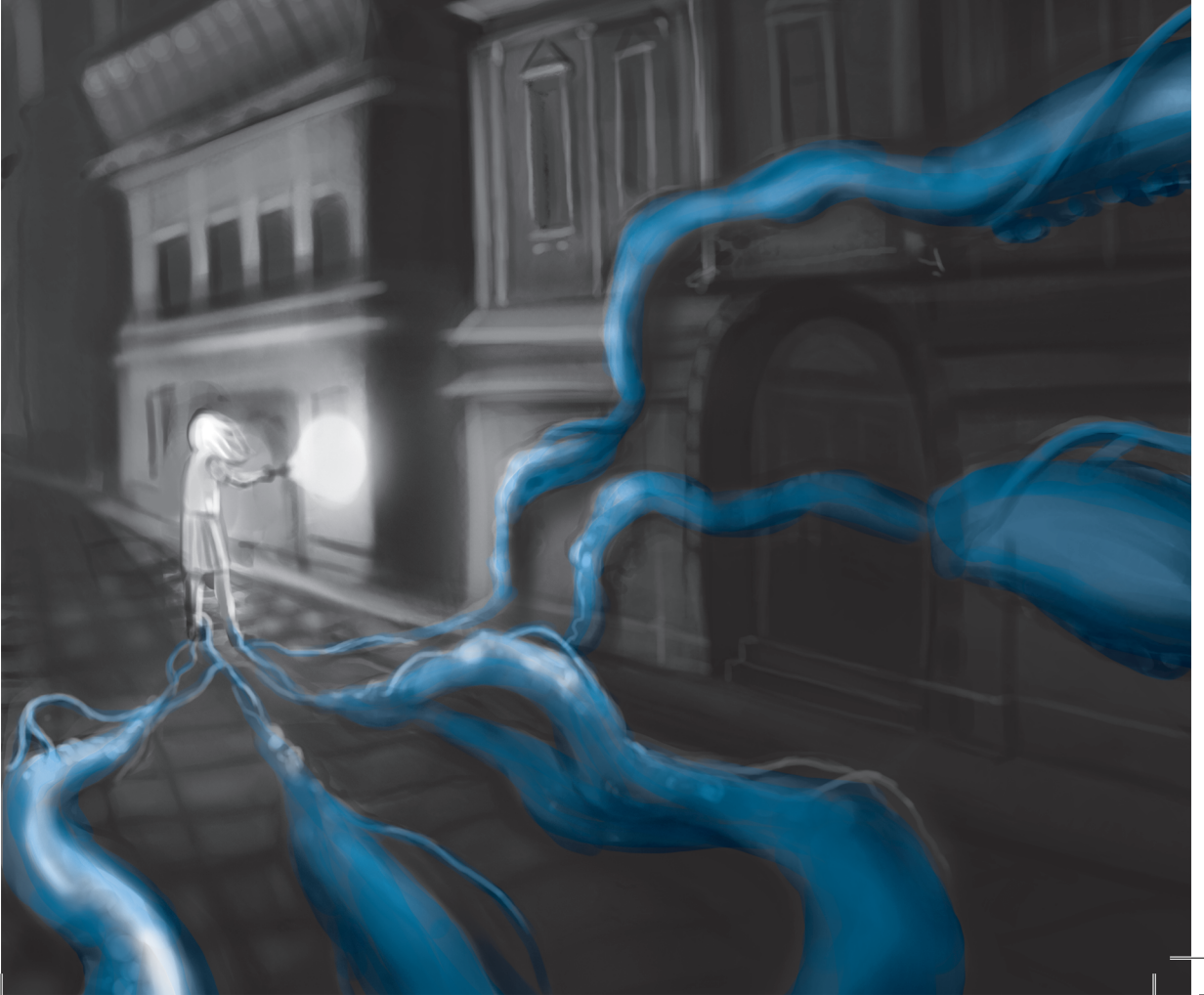


# HORROR



# A Teacher's Rewards

## Robert Phillips (1970)

'What'd you say your name was?' the old lady asked through the screen door. He stood on the dark porch.

'Raybe. Raybe Simpson. You taught me in the third grade, remember?'

'Simpson... Simpson. Yes, I suppose so,' she said. Her hand remained on the latch.

'Of course you do. I was the boy with the white hair. "Old Whitehead", my grandfather used to call me, though you wouldn't know that. I sat in the front row. You used to rap my knuckles with your ruler, remember?'

'Oh, I rapped a lot of knuckles in my time. Boys will be boys. Still, the white hair, the front row...' Her voice trailed off as she made an almost audible effort to engage the ancient machinery of her memory.

'Sure you remember,' he said. "'Miss Scofield never forgets a name.' That's what all the older kids told us. That's what all the other teachers said. "Miss Scofield never forgets a name."'

'Of course she doesn't. I never forgot a pupil's name in forty-eight years of teaching. Come right in.' She unlatched the screen door and swung it wide. The spring creaked.

'I can't stay long. I was in town for the day and thought I'd look you up. You were such a good teacher. I've never forgotten what you did for me.'

'Well, now, I consider that right kindly of you.' She looked him up and down through wire-rimmed spectacles. 'Just when was it I taught you?'

'Nineteen thirty-eight. Out at the old school.'

'Ah, yes. The old school. A pity about that fire.'

'I heard something about it burning down. But I've been away. When was that fire?'

'Oh, years ago. A year or two before I retired. After that I couldn't teach in the new brick schoolhouse they built. Something about the place. Too cold, too bright. And the classroom was so long. A body couldn't hardly see from the one end of it to the other...' She made a helpless gesture with her hand. He watched the hand in its motion: tiny, fragile, transparent, a network of blue veins running clearly beneath the surface; the skin hung in wrinkles like wet crepe paper. Denison paper, it had been called, when he was in school.

'That's rough. But you must have been about ready to retire anyhow, weren't you?'

Her watery blue eyes snapped. 'I should say not! All my life I've had a real calling for teaching. A real calling. I always said I would teach until I

dropped in my tracks. It's such a rewarding field. A teacher gets her reward in something other than money... It was just that new red-brick schoolhouse! The lights were too bright, new-fangled fluorescent lights, bright yellow. And the room was too long...' Her gaze dared him to contradict her.

'I don't think much of these modern buildings, either.'

'Boxes,' she said firmly.

'Come again?'

'Boxes, boxes, nothing but boxes, that's all they are. I don't know what we're coming to, I declare. Well, now, Mr—'

'Simpson. Mr Simpson. But you can call me Raybe, like you always did.'

'Yes. Raybe. That's a nice name. Somehow it has an *honest* sound. Really, the things people name their children *these* days! There's one family named their children Cindy, Heidi and Dawn. They sound like creatures out of Walt Disney. The last year I taught, I had a student named Crystal. A little girl named Crystal! Why not name her Silverware, or China? And a boy named Jet. That was his first name, Jet. Or was it Astronaut? I don't know. Whatever it was it was terrible.'

'You once called me Baby-Raybe, and it caught on. That's what all the kids called me after that.'

'Did I? Oh, dear. Well, you must have done something babyish at the time.'

A shaft of silence fell between them. At last she smiled, as if to herself, and said cheerily, 'I was just fixing to have some tea before you happened by. Would you like some nice hot tea?'

'Well, I wasn't fixing to stay long, like I said.' He shuffled his feet.

'It'll only take a second. The kettle's been on all this time.' She seemed to have her heart set, and he was not one to disappoint. 'Okay, if you're having some.'

'Good. Do you take lemon or cream?'

'Neither. Actually I don't drink much tea. I'll just try it plain. With sugar. I've got a sweet tooth.'

'A sweet tooth! Let me see. Is that one of the things I remember about you? Raybe Simpson, a sweet tooth? No, I don't think so. One of the boys always used to eat Baby Ruth candy bars right in class. The minute my back was turned he'd sneak another Baby Ruth out of his desk. But that wasn't you was it?'

‘No.’

‘I didn’t think it was you,’ she said quickly. ‘I called it the blackboard. Did you know, in that new school building, it was green?’

‘What was green?’

‘The blackboard was *green*. And the chalk was *yellow*. Something about it being easier on the children’s eyes. And they had the nerve to call them blackboards, too, mind you. How do you expect children to learn if you call what’s green, black?’

‘Hmmm.’

She was getting down two dainty cups with pink roses painted on them. She put them on a tin tray and placed a sugar bowl between them. The bowl was cracked down the middle and had been taped with Scotch tape, which had yellowed. When the tea was finally ready, they adjourned to the living room. The parlor, she called it.

‘Well, how’ve you been, Miss Scofield?’ he asked.

‘Can’t complain, except for a little arthritis in my hands. Can’t complain.’

‘Good.’ He studied her hands, then glanced around. ‘Nice little place you got here.’ He took a sip of the tea, found it strong and bitter, added two more heaping spoons of sugar.

‘Well, it’s small, of course, but it serves me. It serves me.’ She settled back in her rocker.

‘You still Miss Scofield?’

‘How’s that?’ She leaned forward on her chair, as if to position her ear closer to the source.

‘I asked you, your name still Miss Scofield? You never got married?’

‘Mercy no. I’ve always been an unclaimed blessing. That’s what I’ve always called myself. “An unclaimed blessing.”’ She smiled sweetly.

‘You still live alone, I take it.’

‘Yes indeed. I did once have a cat. A greedy old alley cat named Tom. But he died. Overeating did it, I think. Ate me out of house and home, pretty near.’

‘You don’t say.’

‘Oh, yes indeed. He’d eat anything. Belly got big as a basketball, nearabout. He was good company, though. Sometimes I miss that old Tom.’

‘I should think so.’

An old-fashioned clock chimed overhead.

‘What business did you say you were in, Mr Simp... Raybe?’

‘Didn’t say.’

‘That’s right, you didn’t say. Well, just what is it?’

‘Right now I’m unemployed.’

She set her teacup upon a lace doily on the tabletop and made a little face of disapproval. ‘Unemployed. I see. Then how do you get along?’

‘Oh, I manage, one way or the other. I’ve been pretty well taken care of these last ten years. I been away.’

‘You’re living with your folks? Is that it?’ Encouragement bloomed on her cheeks.

‘My folks are dead. They were dead when I was your student, if you’ll remember. Grandfather died too. I lived with an aunt. She’s dead now.’

‘Oh, I’m sorry. I don’t think I realized at the time—’

‘No, I don’t think you did... That’s all right, Miss Scofield. You had a lot of students to look after.’

‘Yes, but still and all, it’s unlike me not to have remembered or known that one of my boys was an *orphan*. You don’t mind if I use that word, do you, Mr... Raybe? Lots of people are sensitive about words.’

‘I don’t mind. I’m not sensitive.’

‘No, I should think not. You’re certainly a big boy, now. And what happened to all that hair? Why, you’re as bald as a baby.’ Looking at his head, she laughed a laugh as scattered as buckshot. ‘My, you must be hot in that jacket. Why don’t you take it off? It looks very heavy.’

‘I’ll keep it on, if you don’t mind.’

‘Don’t mind a bit, so long’s you’re comfortable.’ What did he have in that jacket, she wondered. He was carrying something in there.

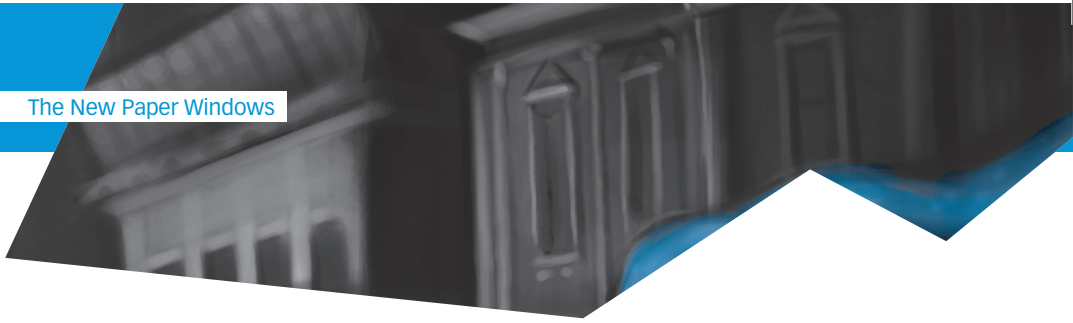
‘I’m just fine,’ he said, patting the jacket.

She began to rock in her chair and looked around the meagre room to check its presentability to unexpected company. Maybe he had his dinner in there, in a paper poke, and was too embarrassed to show it.

‘Well, now, what do you remember about our year together that I may have forgotten? Were you in Jay McMaster’s class? Jay was a lovely boy. So polite. You can always tell good breeding—’

‘He was a year or two ahead of me. You’re getting close, though.’

‘Well, of course I am. How about Nathan Pillsbury? The dentist’s son. He was in your class, wasn’t he?’



‘That’s right.’

‘See!’ She exclaimed triumphantly. ‘Another lovely boy. His parents had a swimming pool. One Christmas Nathan brought me an enormous poinsettia plant. It filled the room, nearly.’

‘He was in my class, all right. He was the teacher’s pet, you might say.’ Raybe observed her over the rim of his bitter cup. He looked at her knuckles.

‘Nathan, my pet? Nathan Pillsbury? I don’t remember any such thing. Besides, I never played favourites. That’s a bad practice.’ She worked her lips to and fro.

‘So’s rapping people’s knuckles,’ he laughed, putting his half-full cup on the floor.

She laughed her scattered little laugh again. ‘Oh, come now, Raybe. Surely it was deserved, if indeed I ever did rap your knuckles.’

‘You rapped them, all right,’ he said soberly.

‘Did I? Did I really? Yes, I suppose I did. What was it for, do you remember? Passing notes? Gawking out the window?’

‘Wasn’t for any one thing. You did it lots of times. *Dozens* of times.’ He cleared his throat.

‘Did I? Mercy me. It doesn’t seem to me that I did. I only rapped knuckles upon extreme provocation, you know. *Extreme* provocation.’ She took a healthy swallow of tea. What was it she especially remembered about this boy? Something. It nagged at her. She couldn’t remember what it was. Some trait of personality.

‘You did it lots of times,’ he continued. ‘In front of the whole class. They laughed at me.’

‘I did? Goodness, what a memory! Well, it doesn’t seem to have done you any harm. A little discipline never hurt anybody... What was it you said you’ve been doing professionally?’

‘I been in prison,’ he said with a pale smile. He watched her mouth draw downward.

‘Prison? You’ve been in *prison*? Oh, I see, it’s a joke.’ She tried to laugh again, but this time the little outburst wouldn’t scatter.

‘*You* try staying behind those walls for ten years and see if you think it’s a joke.’ He fumbled in his pocket for a pack of cigarettes, withdrew a smoke and slowly lit it. He blew a smoke ring across the table.

‘Well, I must say! You’re certainly the only boy I ever had that... that

ended up in prison! But I'm sure there were... *circumstances*... leading up to that. I'm sure you're a fine lad, through it all.' She worked her lips faster now. Her gaze travelled to the window that looked out upon the night.

'Yeah, there were *circumstances*, as you call it. Very special circumstances.' He blew an enormous smoke ring her way. The old woman began to cough.

'It's the smoke. I'm not used to people smoking around me. Do you mind refraining?'

'Yeah, I do mind,' he said roughly. 'I'm going to finish this cigarette, no matter what.'

'Well, if you must, you must,' she said nervously, half-rising. 'But let me just open that window a little—'

'SIT BACK DOWN IN THAT CHAIR!'

She fell back into the rocker.

'Now, you listen to me, you old bitch,' he began.

'Don't call me names. Don't you dare! How *dare* you? No wonder you were behind bars. A common jailbird. A degenerate. No respect for your elders.'

'Shut up, grandma.' He tossed the cigarette butt to the floor and ground it out on what looked like an Oriental rug. Her eyes bulged.

'I remember you very clearly, now,' she exclaimed, her hands to her brow. 'I remember you! You were no good to start with. No motivation. No follow through. I knew just where you'd end up. You've run true to form.' Her gaze was defiant.

'Shut your mouth, bitch,' he said quietly, beginning at last to unzip his leather jacket.

'I will *not*, I'll have my say. You were a troublemaker, too. I remember the day you wrote nasty, nasty words on the wall in the supply closet. Horrible words. And then when I went back to get papers to distribute, I saw those words. I had to read them, and I knew who wrote them, all right.'

'I didn't write them.'

'Oh, you wrote them, all right. And I whacked your knuckles good with a ruler, if I remember right.'

'You whacked my knuckles good, but I didn't write those words.'

'*Did!*'

'*Didn't.*' They sounded like a pair of school children. He squirmed out of the jacket.

'I never made mistakes of that kind,' she said softly, watching him shed the jacket. 'I knew just who needed strict discipline in my class.'

He stood before her now, holding the heavy jacket in his hand. Underneath he wore only a tee shirt of some rough gray linsey-woolsey material. She saw that his arms were heavily muscled, and he saw that she saw. She was positive she could smell the odour of the prison upon him, though the closest she had come to a prison was reading Dickens.

'I never made mistakes,' she repeated feebly. 'And now, you'd better put that coat right back on and leave. Go back to wherever you came from.'

'Can't do that just yet, bitch. I got a score to settle.'

'Score? To settle?' She placed her hands upon the rocker arms for support.

'Yeah. I had a long time to figure it all out. Ten years to figure it out. Lots of nights I'd lie there on that board of a bed in that puke-hole and I'd try to piece it all together. How I come to be *there*. Was it my aunt? Naw, she did the best she could without any money. Was it the fellas I took up with in high school? Naw, something happened before that, or I'd never have taken up with the likes of them in the first place, that rocky crowd. And then one night it came to me. *You* were the one.'

'Me? The one? The one for what?' Her lips worked furiously now, in and out like a bellows. Her hands tightly gripped the rocker's spindle arms.

'The one who sent me there. Because you *picked* on me all the time. Made me out worse than I was. You never gave me the chance the others had. The other kids left me out of things, because you were always saying I was bad. And you always told me I was dirty. Just because my aunt couldn't keep me in clean shirts like some of the others. You punished me for everything that happened. But the worst was the day of the words on the wall. You hit me so hard my knuckles bled. My hands were sore as boils for weeks.'

'*That's* an exaggeration.'

'No it isn't. They're *my* hands, I ought to know. And do you know who wrote those words on the closet wall? *Do you know?*' he screamed, putting his face right down next to hers.

'No, who?' she whispered, breathless with fright.

'*Nathan Pillsbury*, that's who!' he shouted, clenching his teeth and shaking her frail body within his grasp. '*Nathan Pillsbury, Nathan Pillsbury!*'

'Let me go,' she whimpered. 'Let me go.'

'I'll let you go after my score is settled.'

The old woman's eyes rolled towards the black, unseeing windows. 'What are you going to do to me?' she rasped.





‘Just settle, lady,’ he said, taking the hammer from his jacket. ‘Now, put your hands on the tabletop.’

‘My hands? On the tabletop?’ she whispered.

‘On the tabletop,’ he repeated pedantically, a teacher. ‘Like this.’ He made two fists and placed them squarely on the surface.

She refused.

‘*Like this!*’ he yelled, wrenching her quivering hands and forcing them to the tabletop. Then with his free hand he raised the hammer.

For once, he finished something.

# Things Not Seen

## James Robert Smith (1987)

The little boy stood in the corner—out of the couple's way—and stared in wide-eyed horror at the growing stain upon the kitchen floor. While the two adults busied themselves with preparing their supper, he watched as the black-red splotch welled up from the cracks between the shiny tiles. Why didn't they see? Why didn't they take note of the obscene puddle that continued to spread as they went about their pleasure?

It was obvious that they were too involved with what they were doing to notice. The little boy retreated even further into his corner, obeying that quote so often spoken to him: 'Children should be seen and not heard.' The child remained in the shadow near the pantry door and watched.

'Honey.' The man straightened from his task of searching for a dish beneath the counter. 'You'd better check the rolls. I think they should be done now.'

'Oh. Okay.' The young wife hurried across the kitchen floor to the oven. The child's eyes stared fixedly as she stepped directly into the crimson wet and made left-footed tracks wherever she moved. 'You're right,' she said, not seeing. She retrieved the fresh, warm bread and brought it in her mittened hands to the table. This time, her right foot was planted in the pooling stuff and she made another bloody trail across the kitchen.

Then the two were all a-flurry as they made their table ready. They moved from stove to sink to table, each time navigating the puddle. The child gazed in horrified wonder at the maze of tacky, red shoe prints they left behind them. The floor was a gory mess. And still, only he acknowledged it.

Finally, they were finished with their preparations and had seated themselves. The boy watched them from his hiding spot.

The woman's eyes played over the kitchen and dining area. 'Where's Sonny?' she asked.

'Oh, I fed him something earlier and he went out. I expect he's outside playing.' He smiled and looked hungrily at the meal before him.

'Dig in,' he said.

Together they ate, halting from time to time to comment on how good the food tasted or how nice the weather had been for their first, full day in their new home.

They ate, cleared the table and washed the dishes together. They always shared the housework. Inside the pantry, one pair of eyes watched sickly as

the creeping pool began to cool and thicken. In places, it had dried completely and was not affected as they strode upon it. In other spots, it squished under their tread.

In the middle of the floor they met on their ways to finishing their tasks of tidying up. They smiled and embraced.

‘Oh, Bill. I love our new house! We were so lucky to find it!’

Bill squeezed his wife tightly. ‘Well, I want you to be happy. We need a nice home to raise our family in.’ He lifted his right arm and glanced at his watch. ‘We’d better get ready for the Sims couple. They’re supposed to be here in a few minutes.’

They went into the den. The child watched them go. Their shoes were gooey with the stuff and their shins were speckled with droplets. They tracked across the neat, shag carpet. Bill went to the door and Annie set out a candy dish full of caramels and a shiny, unused ashtray. She hoped that neither of their new neighbours smoked; she hated the smell of cigarettes. Still, she felt that she must be hospitable to them.

‘Do you think that they’ll like Sonny?’ Annie watched her husband at the door.

He half turned to her. ‘Sure. Sure, they’ll like Sonny. Why not?’

‘Well, you know how some people are.’ But she had to stop as their visitors came clattering up the front step to the porch. She’d have to remind Bill to fix that loose board.

For an hour the four sat and socialised. Bill made an effort to steer the conversation away from politics and religion and did his best to find out about their new neighbourhood. The evening was pleasant with talk of local shopping centres, car pools and other mundane affairs. The two men found a common fondness for duck hunting and the women found an interest in country crafts. No one mentioned how the blood dried and flaked off their shoes.

A bottle of wine was brought out and the talk began to flow more freely and casually. Eventually, someone mentioned the house’s former tenants.

‘Y’know,’ Mr Sims said, ‘we thought they were never going to put this place on the market.’ He paused and gave the new neighbours a serious, squint-eyed stare. ‘You *do* know about what happened here?’ The women fell silent.

Bill fidgeted. The topic made him feel uncomfortable. ‘Well, yes. We know a little. Though not as much as you do, I suppose.’

‘The guy’s name was Andersen. Al Andersen. Violent bastard. I reckon they had to wait until his sentence was carried out before they could put his house up for sale.’

‘And his wife was such a sweet woman...’ Mrs Sims was interrupted by a whining and a scratching at the front door.

Bill stood and strode across the den. ‘And this,’ he announced, ‘is Sonny.’ He opened the screen and the big, blonde dog trotted in, tongue hanging and tail wagging. There was a sniff for each of the guests before he plopped himself down at Annie’s feet.

They all stared blankly for a moment, out of words.

‘Was there anyone else?’ Annie asked.

‘What do you mean?’ It was Mr Sims.

‘The Andersens. Besides Al Andersen and his wife. Was there anyone else?’

‘Yes,’ Mrs Sims answered, her words very low and hard to hear. She was remembering a playful young voice and appreciated gifts of homemade cookies. ‘They had a sweet child. A little boy.’

Inside the pantry, beneath the low shelves where he was trying to hide, the boy crouched and waited for the brute.



# Birthday

## Mary Roberts (1986)

The overnight bus was packed. Either there was no air conditioning or the driver had been told to conserve petrol, but each breath I took of the stuffy air—heavy with fumes of beer and cigarettes from the noisy gang in the back, made me increasingly nauseated. How humiliating if I had to grope for one of the lined paper bags in the back of the seat ahead. How I wished the fat man next to me, snoring steadily, didn't think my shoulder was his pillow as he slumped sideways.

The din of shouts and laughter from the back rose to a crescendo.

'Hey fellas! What about cutting it out and letting the others get a bit of shut eye?' the driver beseeched.

'Hear hear!' groaned a couple of weary voices.

'You keep your eye on the road, mate,' someone answered. 'We've paid our fares and we wanna relax. That right, chaps?'

'Yairs! Thass right, Shorty.'

I rubbed the steamy window beside me. Gum trees, bleached and dead looking in the glare of the headlights, flashed past. To my weary eyes some looked like menacing figures with weird faces. I counted the red eyes of the white road markers—one, two, three, four... There seemed to be a heavy weight inside me, making it so hard to breathe, pinning me to the sticky seat. If only I were home in my own bed, to sleep...

A sudden lurch jerked me awake. Had the driver closed his eyes for a second? He was dragging on the wheel as he took a corner on the wrong side. There was a sudden explosive sense of danger—headlights blazing—the vast bulk of a semi-trailer, screeching brakes, the shuddering impact of a side swipe and we were crashing through a safety fence.

I can't describe the horror of the next few seconds? minutes? eternity? The falling, crashing, bouncing, screaming, down, down, down! And pain! An agony that crumpled my body like a hand crushing a tissue paper ball! 'Oh God!' I screamed...

I woke to my scream unable to credit I was in my own bed, that the terrifying experience was only a nightmare. My whole body, wet with sweat, was shaking and my pounding heart felt as if it would burst. I switched on the light. 1.35 a.m. Hey, it was Tuesday 9 May, my birthday. I was thirteen. What a start to the day, I thought. How would I go to sleep now?

'I had THE most awful nightmare last night,' I announced at breakfast after I'd opened my cards and presents.

‘What did you have for supper Kate?’ my stepmother asked.

‘Only the usual,’ I said. ‘No, it wasn’t last night—it was early this morning because I looked at my watch and it was 1.35.’

‘Bad enough to wake you up, was it?’ asked Dad.

‘I’ve never had such a vivid dream—never,’ I insisted. ‘It was horrible.’ As I spoke the memory surged back strongly and I found it hard to tell it all. Then I noticed Dad’s face. It was white and his eyes were full of angry pain.

‘Who’s been talking to you?’ he demanded.

‘Talking to me? What d’you mean? Talking about what?’

Dad turned accusingly to my stepmother. ‘Sheila?’

‘Don’t be stupid, David. No! Why should I?’

Dad sighed. ‘Sorry, love. No, of course you wouldn’t. Forgive me.’ He leant forward and grasped my hand. ‘Kate, you’ve shaken me up, I don’t mind telling you. But you’re thirteen now—a teenager—old enough to grapple with the big things in life. You know your mother died when you were a baby?’

‘Yes, of course I know. You told me yourself and Granny’s told me too. She said my Mum died in a car accident, but you weren’t driving or anything.’

‘That’s right,’ Dad said. ‘That’s all we wanted you to know. But here’s why you’ve given me such a shock. What you’ve described is actually what happened. The passenger bus she was on hit a semi-trailer and crashed down a steep gully just after midnight. It was a dreadful accident—ten killed and lots of serious injuries.’

‘And my Mum?’

‘When the rescue party found her, you’d just been born, but she died when they tried to put her on a stretcher. I can’t understand how you could have experienced the crash,’ Dad said slowly.

What was there to say? The three of us sat in silence. A big WHY? nagged me.

You’ve got to believe me when I tell you I had exactly the same experience a year later. Every detail was the same—the atmosphere, the passengers, the talk, the dreadful horror. Again I woke screaming. And again it was 1.35 a.m. It was my fourteenth birthday.

This time I deliberately kept quiet and didn’t tell a soul. But I couldn’t forget.

The night before my fifteenth birthday, I was really scared. I dreaded the hours ahead. I hung around with Dad and Sheila until they went to bed. I

had a nagging fear that maybe the third time I had the nightmare, I mightn't wake up. I might die too. It sounds morbid but the reality of those dreams was so powerful.

I made up my mind to stay up all night: to keep the light on and read; walk the floor if needs be. Never mind if I was zonked next day. I couldn't trust myself to read in bed in case I dozed off. I took a blanket and curled up for warmth in an old armchair by the slightly open window. I'd two good library books to read. I began the first book and was soon deep into it...

The bus droned on. Gum trees loomed up in the ghostly shapes and fled behind us. Passengers slumped uncomfortably in their seats, grunted, sighed, turned.

'Hey, fellas! What about cutting it out and letting the others get a bit of shut eye?' asked the driver amiably.

Suddenly he was wrenching the bus around a bend, lights glared; there was a splintering crash; shouts and screams and we were lurching, toppling, turning and crashing, down, down, down. I was squeezed in what seemed a dark tunnel, a tunnel pressing me tightly. I must escape! Help me! Push me... push me... I was free! Around me was a murky darkness, a blinding moving light, noise, confusion.

I heard an angry, despairing wail—the voice of a new born baby.

The voice was mine.

# A Teacher's Rewards

## Discussion

- 1 Do you think Miss Scofield got what she deserved? Give your reasons.
- 2 What are some of the ideas about school life that the author is asking us to consider? Go into detail in your discussion, and refer closely to the story.
- 3 A *motif* in literature is a recurring image or idea that runs through a piece of writing. In this story the motif of 'hands' is ever-present. Reread the story noting the word each time it occurs. What is the effect of this recurring image?

## Activities

- 1 In one paragraph, describe an empty classroom.
- 2 The story of the attack upon Miss Scofield breaks the following morning. Choose two newspapers, different in their outlook and approach, and write the report in each, showing how an incident can be interpreted in two very different ways.
- 3 'For once, he finished something.' The story ends there, but Miss Scofield's life may not. What do you think happened to her? Devise three possible endings to this story, and relate each one clearly in a paragraph of its own.



# Things Not Seen

## Discussion

- 1 What is going on here? Explain clearly.
- 2 This story has been described as 'a hair-raising view of childhood sensitivity'. What is your reaction to this statement? Discuss your point of view.
- 3 The story is called 'Things Not Seen'. Do you think this title is an appropriate one for the story? Give your reasons. Now create your own title for this story. Discuss your various titles in a group debate. Finally come to some conclusion: *what makes a good short short story title?*

## Activities

- 1 Retell your worst nightmare. How does it end?
- 2 Write 12 bursts of dialogue between two people, each person speaking six times. Make the conversation as sinister and threatening as you can without the conversation becoming melodramatic or comic. Next, act out some of the dialogues to see how well they perform.
- 3 In the old Greek tragedies the horror always took place offstage. Oedipus, for example, gouged his eyes out offstage. The Greeks thought that horror was more effective when imagined rather than seen. What are your thoughts on the subject of horror? Do we need to see the blood and guts on the pavement? Prepare a speech on this topic, collect some good examples, and then argue your case in a group debate.

# Birthday

## Discussion

- 1 Why does Kate wake up screaming every year at 1.35 a.m. on the 9th of May?
- 2 A horror story should horrify. Does 'Birthday' horrify? What do you think makes a good horror story? Give examples of horror films that you have enjoyed. Why do we need them? What makes them work? Why do people often go to see them 'for laughs'? In a broad discussion, debate the topic of 'horror'.
- 3 A technique that writers sometimes use is to *echo at the end of a story a line which appears somewhere near its beginning*. Where does this happen in 'Birthday', and what is the purpose of the repetition? Are there any other types of repetition in this story? If so, what purposes do they serve? Discuss.

## Activities

- 1 Write the first page of a horror story.
- 2 Imagine that it is a year later in 'Birthday', and the date is 8th May. What happens to Kate that night?
- 3 Tell a horror story of your own. It must be so bad that it must make us laugh. You may choose to tell it in any one of the following ways:
  - as a film review
  - as a story told live to the rest of the group
  - as a short story.