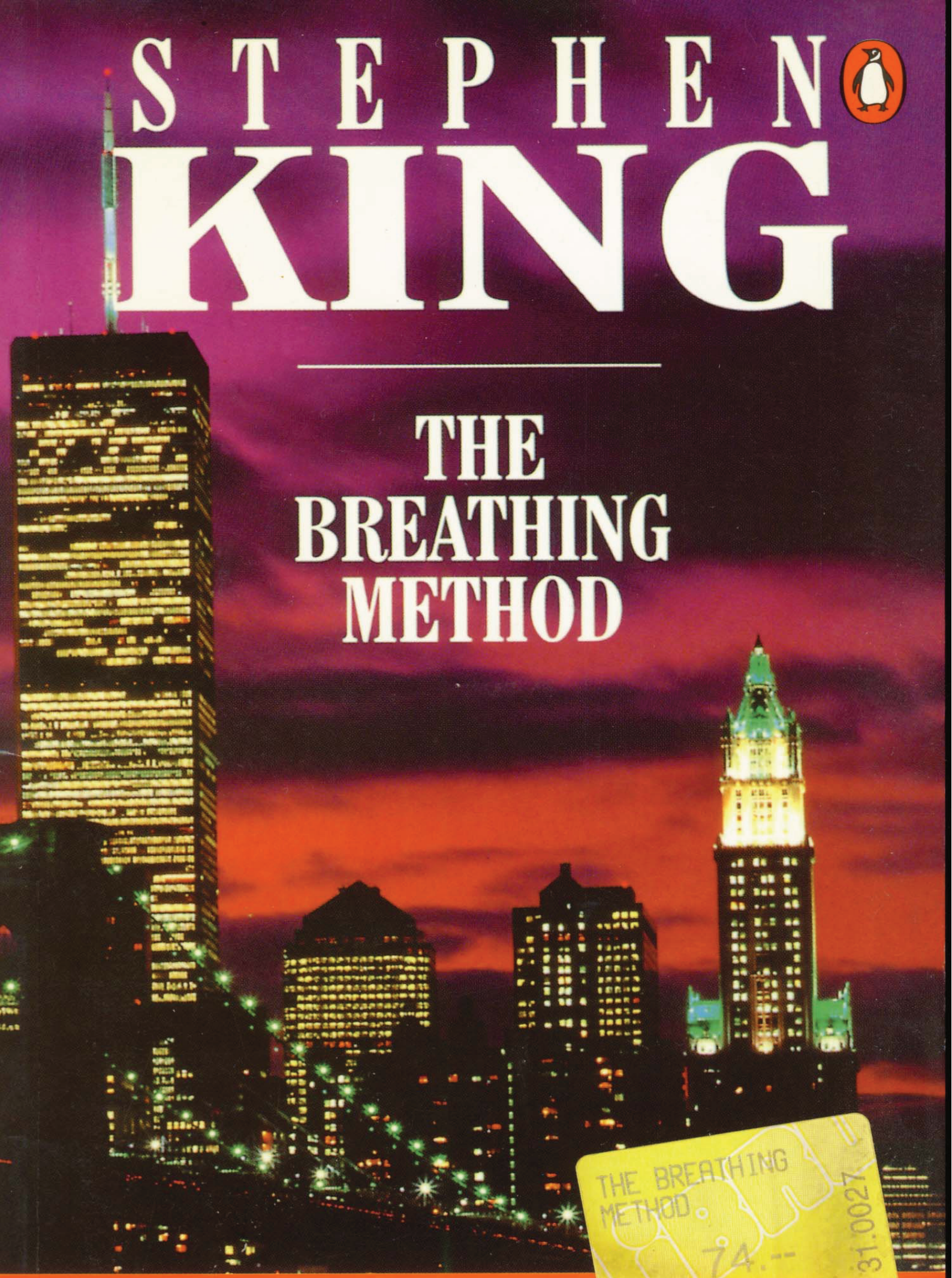
STEPHEN KING

THE BREATHING METHOD



THE BREATHING METHOD
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A Winter's Tale: The Breathing Method

STEPHEN KING

Level 4

Retold by John Escort
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Introduction

'I have a feeling, Dr McCarron, sometimes quite a strong feeling, that something terrible is going to happen to me.'

Do you like stories? There are some men who meet at 249 East 35th Street, New York. They like stories. All through the year they meet in the strange house to tell each other stories. No one knows who the house belongs to. No one knows what the noises are that they hear from behind walls. No one knows how many rooms the house has, or how many entrances and exits. But no one asks. No one dares. The visitors to the house tell their stories, then leave.

And sometimes they are terrible stories — stories the men wish they had not heard. Like the one that Dr McCarron tells on a freezing winter's night. The story of Sandra Stansfield and her baby. The story of the doctor's Breathing Method and how poor Sandra uses it in the last, terrible moments of her life.

Stephen King is the number one best-selling author in the world. He makes $2 million a month from his books and the many films made from them. He was born in Portland, Maine, in the north-eastern United States, and began writing stories at school. He continued to write while working as a teacher and sold his first novel, *Carrie* (1973), for such a large sum of money that he was able to give up teaching and write full-time.

He lives with his wife and three children in a small town in Maine. He writes for 362 days of the year, only stopping for Christmas Day, his birthday and Independence Day (4th July). He listens to rock and roll music while he works.

The Breathing Method comes from a book of stories, called *Different Seasons,* which he wrote in 1982. Other famous books include *The Shining, Salem's Lot* and *Misery. Misery* and *The Body* are also in Penguin Readers.

Stevens was there, holding the door open, and a moment later I was inside.

Chapter 1 The Club

I have to say that I dressed with more than my usual speed that night of 23 December, 197-, and I suspect that there were other members of the club who did the same. Outside, snow lay on the ground, and a biting cold wind blew through the streets of New York. It is difficult to get a taxi on that sort of night, so I had phoned for one to call for me at eight o'clock. I had done this at 5.30 p.m., when my wife looked a little surprised but said nothing.

By 7.45 p.m., I was waiting outside the apartment building on East 58th Street where Ellen and I have lived since 1946. And when the taxi was five minutes late, I found myself walking up and down, feeling annoyed. But when it arrived at 8.10 p.m. and I got in, I was too glad to be out of the wind to be angry with the driver.

It began to snow again, and when at last I got out of the taxi, I had to bend over against the wind and hold my hat on my head with one hand as I walked the last few yards. At seventy-three, a man feels the cold quicker and deeper. That man should be at home in front of a warm fire.

Snow was blowing into my face as I arrived at the house at 249 East 35th Street. I was glad to see that Stevens had cleaned the snow off the steps outside. Stevens knew about old bones breaking easily.

He was there, holding the door open, and a moment later I was inside. I went into the room which was the library, reading-room and bar. It was a dark room with occasional circles of light from reading lamps. A large fire burned in the fireplace and its heat came all the way across to meet me. Surely there is no better welcome for anyone than a warm fire.

Stevens helped me take off my overcoat, saying that it was an awful, cold night and that there would be more snow before morning. I agreed, and looked back into that high-ceilinged room again. A cold night, a big warm fire . . . and a ghost story. I felt something warm in my chest at the thought . . . something not caused by the fire or Stevens's welcome.

I think it was because it was McCarron's turn to tell the tale.

On the night Emlyn McCarron told his story — the story of the Breathing Method - there were perhaps thirteen members, although only six of us had come out on that freezing night.

I had visited the house which stands at 249 East 35th Street for ten years. Not quite a regular visitor, but almost. In my own mind I think of it as a 'gentleman's club', but I am not sure it really is.

How did the 'club' begin? I suppose Stevens might know, because I am sure he has been there from the beginning, whenever that was. And I am sure Stevens is much older than he looks. Much, ***much*** older. He speaks with a New York accent, but is as cool and correct as an English servant. His small smile is a locked door to the room where he keeps his thoughts.

There are no phones at 249 East 35th. There is no club secretary. And the club - if it ***is*** a club - has never had a name . . .

•

I first came there as a guest of George Waterhouse, my boss at the law company where I worked in New York. I had been with the company since 1951, although I was still not a partner, and there were other men who began at the same time as me but who now had more important jobs than I did.

Waterhouse and I were friendly enough, but no more than that. So it was a surprise when he came into my office that day in November of 196—. For most of the time he was there, he talked about unimportant things, and I began to wonder why he had *really* come to see me.

Then he said, 'There's a place where I go on Thursday nights — a sort of club. Old men, most of them are, but some have interesting stories to tell, and the wine is excellent. Why don't you come down one night, David, as my guest?'

I gave some sort of reply, which I don't remember, because I was so surprised by his offer. It *sounded* like something he had just thought of, but one look at his ice-blue eyes told me that he had planned it.

Yet suddenly I had the strange feeling I'd known that this would happen.

Ellen was both amused and annoyed that evening when I told her about the invitation. I had been with Waterhouse, Carden, Lawton, Frasier and Effingham for almost twenty years and was not likely to move any higher than my present job. It was her opinion that this was the company's way of keeping me happy without paying me any more money or making me a partner.

'It will be a lot of old men telling war stories or playing card games,' she said about the club.

Nothing happened for several weeks. When I remembered Waterhouse's odd offer — from a man I usually met less than ten or twelve times a year - I guessed I had made a mistake about that look in his eyes. It had not been a serious offer after all, just something to make conversation. Perhaps he was sorry now that he had invited me, I thought.

And then one afternoon, as I was leaving the office, he said: 'Why not come and have a drink at the club tonight?'

'Well. . . I. . .'

'Good,' he said, and put a piece of paper into my hand. 'Here's the address.'

He was waiting for me outside 249 East 35th Street that evening, where Stevens held open the door for us to go in.

The wine ***was*** excellent. Waterhouse did not introduce me to any of the others, but two or three introduced themselves to me. One was Emlyn McCarron, then in his early seventies. He held out a hand and I took it for a moment. His skin was dry and hard, and he asked me if I played cards. I said that I did not.

'Good,' he said. 'Cards have done more to kill after-dinner conversation than anything I can think of.' And he walked away into a corner of the library, where shelves of books went high up into the darkness above.

Waterhouse had disappeared, so I walked across to the fireplace, feeling a little uncomfortable as I sometimes do amongst strangers. The fireplace was big enough to cook a cow - whole. Cut into the stone above it were some words: IT IS THE TALE, NOT HE WHO TELLS IT.

'Here you are, David,' Waterhouse said from behind me, and I jumped. He gave me a glass. 'A Martini, yes?'

'Yes. Thank you, Mr Waterhouse.'

'George,' he said. 'Here it's just George.'

'George, then,' I said, although it seemed a little mad to be using his first name. 'What is all of-?'

'Cheers!' he said.

We drank.

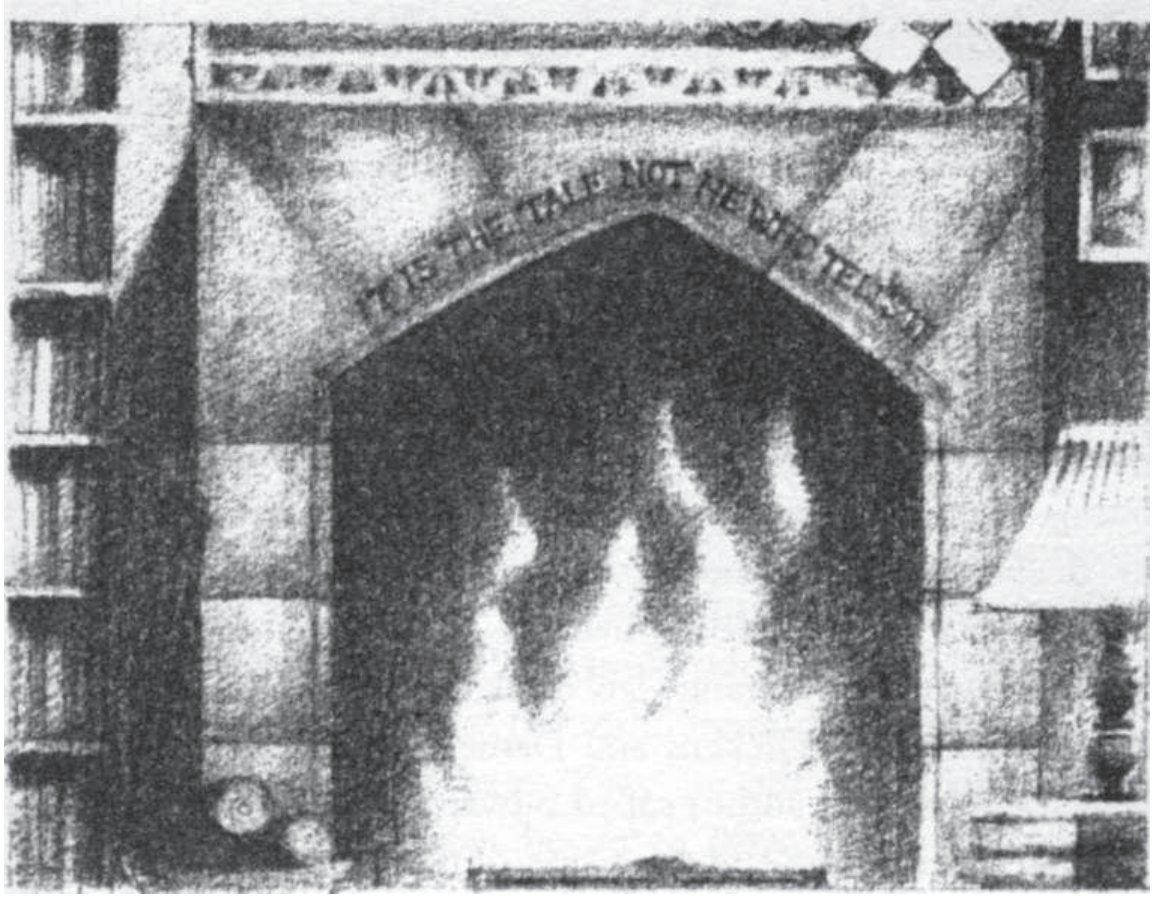
'Perfect,' I said, instead of finishing my question.

'Stevens looks after the bar. He makes excellent Martinis.'

'Should I sign a guest book?' I asked.

He looked surprised. 'We don't have anything like that,' he said. 'Or I don't ***think*** we do.'

I saw Stevens walk past in a doorway at the far end of the



Cut into the stone above it were some words: IT IS THE TALE, NOT HE WHO TELLS IT.

room. He looked like a ghost in his white bar jacket. George put his drink on a table and threw some wood on to the fire.

'What does that mean?' I asked, pointing to the words over the fireplace.

Waterhouse read it carefully, as if for the first time. IT IS THE TALE, NOT HE WHO TELLS IT.

'I suppose I have an idea about it,' he said. 'You may, too, in time. If you come back. Enjoy yourself, David.'

He walked away.

And I did enjoy myself. To begin with, I have always loved books, and there were hundreds of interesting ones to look at there. I walked slowly along beside the shelves, reading the titles and the names of the authors. Once, I stopped by a narrow

window and looked out at a traffic light on 2nd Avenue. I watched the colours change through the ice-covered glass - red to green and back to red again — and suddenly, *yet slowly,* a peaceful feeling came over me.

I cannot explain that feeling. It made no sense. But it made me think, for the first time for years, about winter nights in the Wisconsin farmhouse where I grew up. It made me remember lying in my bed in a cold upstairs room and listening to the biting wind outside; and the way I thought about the miles of deep snow, and then compared it with my warm and comfortable body inside my bed . . .

There were some strange law books on the library shelves, and others by Charles Dickens and Daniel Defoe. There were also eleven books by an author called Edward Gray Seville. These had green leather covers and the name of the publisher was printed in gold: Stedham and Son. I had never heard of Seville or his publishers. The first book - *These Were Our Brothers* - had the date 1911 inside; the last — *Breakers* — 1935.

At some time during the evening, Stevens came by with a second Martini. It was as perfect as the first. As I drank it slowly, I saw George Gregson and Harry Stein (who had been dead six years when Emlyn McCarron told us the story of the Breathing Method) leave the room through a strange door. It was less than three feet high. They left it open, and soon after I heard the soft sounds of a billiard game.

Stevens passed by and asked if I wanted another Martini. I was really sorry to have to say no. He nodded. 'Very good, sir.' His face never changed, but I got the feeling that I had pleased him.

Later, someone threw something into the fire, and for a few moments the flames changed colours. It made me remember a time when I had done something similar as a child. The memory was strong and not at all sad, just pleasant. (I feel it is important to say that, although I don't know why.)

I saw that most of the others had pulled chairs around the fire in a half-circle. Then Stevens came with a plate of hot sausages. Harry Stein returned through the small door and introduced himself to me. Gregson stayed in the billiard room.

After a moment, I went and sat with the others. A story was told - not a pleasant one. It was Norman Stett who told it. I do not intend to repeat it here, but perhaps you will understand the sort of story it was if I tell you it was about a man who drowned in a telephone box.

When Stett (who is also dead now) had finished, someone said, 'You should have saved it for Christmas, Norman.' The others laughed, which I did not understand then but do now.

There were other stories (Waterhouse told a funny one), but I will pull a curtain over them. They are not my stories tonight. Just before midnight, men began to leave. I saw Waterhouse putting on the overcoat which Stevens was holding for him, and decided it was the right time for me to leave, too. It seemed strange that Waterhouse might go without saying anything to me, but no stranger than the other things that had happened that evening.

I stepped out just behind him, and Waterhouse looked round, as if he was surprised to see me . . . and almost as if he had just woken up from a light sleep.

'Shall we share a taxi?' he said, as if we had just met by accident on this empty, windy street.

'Thank you,' I said, and wanted it to mean more than just thanks for his offer to share a taxi. And when we were inside the car, I said, 'I enjoyed your story very much. It was very funny.'

'It's kind of you to say so,' he said in a polite but cold voice, so that I felt embarrassed.

When the taxi stopped in front of my building, I thanked him again, and this time his voice was a little warmer.

'It was good of you to come,' he said. 'Come again, if you like.

Don't wait for an invitation. Thursdays are best for stories, but the club is there every night.'

So am I a member now?

The question was on my Hps. I was going to ask it. It seemed *necessary* to ask it. But before I could find the right words, Waterhouse told the taxi driver to drive on. I stood there in the street, the wind blowing my overcoat around my legs, thinking: *He knew I was going to ask that question, but he told the driver to drive on before I could ask it. He did it on purpose.* Then I told myself that was stupid. And it was. But it was also true, I was certain of that.

I walked slowly to the door of my building and went inside.

Ellen was almost asleep when I sat down on the bed to take off my shoes. 'How was the club?' she said, half-asleep.

A thought came into my head: *If I tell her, I will never see the other side of that door again.*

'It was all right,' I heard myself saying. 'Old men telling war stories.'

'I told you it was going to be.'

'But it wasn't bad. I might go back again. It might do me some good at the company.'

Ellen laughed, but fell asleep moments later.

I went down to the kitchen and poured myself a glass of beer. I sat at the table, drinking it slowly and looking out of the window. The thought that had come into my head when Ellen had asked me about the club . . . and the thought I'd had when George Waterhouse's taxi had driven away . . . both were foolish. Weren't they? What could be wrong with telling my wife about a harmless evening at my boss's club? And suppose something *was* wrong with telling her. Who could know that I had? No, it was as silly as some of the other strange feelings I'd had earlier.

Wasn't it?

He knew I was going to ask that question, but he told the driver to drive on before I could ask it.

•

I met George Waterhouse the next day in the office. Although it would be truer to say that I passed by him. He nodded at me and went on by without speaking . . . the way he had done for years.

Three weeks passed. Four . . . five. No second invitation came from Waterhouse. I hadn't been the right sort of person, I told myself. I was sorry, but I was sure I would soon forget about the club.

But I didn't. I remembered the circles of light from the lamps in that quiet, peaceful library. I remembered the rich smell of leather between the shelves of books. Most of all, I remembered standing by that narrow window and watching the frozen snow on the glass change from red to green to red. And I thought of the peaceful feeling I'd had.

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During those five weeks, I went to the New York Public Library and looked for some stories by Edward Gray Seville. There were no books by that author.

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Come again, if you like. Don't wait for an invitation . . .

But I was waiting for an invitation, of course. My mother once taught me that people who say 'Come again' don't always mean it. But when no invitation seemed likely to come, I decided to go-

So, on 10 December that year, I found myself putting on my dark brown trousers again, and looking for my dark red tie. As I dressed, I could hear my heart in my chest.

'Has George Waterhouse finally asked you to go again?' Ellen said.

'That's right,' I said. It was the second He I had told her about the club, I realized.

'Well, maybe it really will help you to get a better job in the company,' she said, but without much hope.

'Stranger things have happened,' I said, and kissed her goodbye.

The taxi ride that night seemed very long, and I was feeling excited when at last it stopped in front of 249 East 35th Street. I paid the driver, got out, and walked towards the steps leading to the front door. As I climbed them, my excitement turned to doubt. What was I doing here?

The door was made of a thick wood, and looked to me as strong as the door of a castle. There was no door bell, nothing to knock on it with, and of course no Waterhouse waiting to take me in. I looked round. The street suddenly looked darker, colder, more dangerous. The houses all looked as if they held secrets. Or were hiding things that were better left a mystery. Their windows looked like eyes.

Somewhere, behind one of those windows, there may be a man or woman planning murder, I thought, ***or maybe . . . doing it.***

Then suddenly the door was open, and Stevens was there.

But his eyes did not know me.

Then there was another moment when I saw, in perfect detail, the rest of my evening. Three hours in a quiet bar. Three Martinis (perhaps four) to help me forget that I had been a fool, going where I wasn't wanted. I saw myself going home a little drunk, and pretending to Ellen that I had become bored with the same old war stories. 'Go back?' I might say. 'Perhaps, but I doubt it.' And that would be the end of it. Except for my own embarrassment.

I saw all this in the emptiness of Stevens's eyes. Then the eyes warmed. He smiled a little and said, 'Mr Adley! Come in. I'll take your coat.'

I went inside and Stevens closed the door firmly behind me. How different a door can feel when you are on the warm side of it! He took my coat and went away with it.

I went into the library.

A man called Johanssen was there, reading his newspaper. In another island of light, Emlyn McCarron was playing a card game with Peter Andrews. Waterhouse was there, reading The *New York Times.* He looked up, nodded at me without surprise, and disappeared behind his newspaper again.

Stevens brought me a Martini, without my asking him.

I took it in among the shelves and found those green leather books by Edward Gray Seville. I began reading them that night, starting with the first - *These Were Our Brothers.* Since that night I have read them all, and believe them to be eleven of the best stories written in the past hundred years.

Near the end of that evening there was a story —just one — and Stevens brought wine for us to drink while we listened. After the tale was told, and people were getting ready to leave, he asked, 'Who will bring us a tale for Christmas?'

'I have something I've been thinking about,' Peter Andrews said. 'I don't know if it's quite —'

'Thank you,' Stevens said.

People began to leave, and then Stevens was there, as if by magic, holding my coat for me. 'Good evening, Mr Adley. It was good to see you.'

'Do you really meet on Christmas night?' I asked. Ellen and I had planned to go away and I was sorry that I would miss Andrews's story.

Stevens managed to look shocked and amused at the same time. 'Oh, no, Mr Adley. Christmas is a night when a man must be with his family. We always meet the Thursday before Christmas. It's the one night of the year when we can be sure of a large number of gentlemen coming.'

He hadn't used the word *members,* I noticed. On purpose?

'We have heard many tales here, Mr Adley. But on the Thursday before Christmas, it is always one of mystery or strange happenings. It has been like that for as long as I can remember.'

This explained why the others had told Norman Stett that his story was more suitable for Christmas. I was about to ask other questions, but I saw the look in Stevens's eyes. It wasn't a warning that he would not answer my questions; it was a warning to me *not to ask them.*

'Was there something more, Mr Adley?'

We were alone now, the others had gone. Suddenly, it seemed darker. Stevens's long face seemed whiter, his lips redder. And I thought I heard a noise come from one of those rooms which I had not yet been inside. It was a horrible sound. Like a snake dropping to the ground through thick mud. I did not like it. Not at all.

'No,' I said, in a voice that did not sound like my own. 'Nothing more.'

'Good night then,' Stevens said.

The heavy door closed behind me. I heard the lock turn. And then I was walking towards the lights of 2nd Avenue, not looking back over my shoulder. Afraid to look back. Afraid I might find some horrible thing was following me, or see some secret that was better not known. I got to the corner, saw an empty taxi, and waved at it to stop.

'More war stories?' Ellen asked me that night.

'There was a war story or two,' I said, taking off my overcoat. 'Most of the time I sat and read a book.'

'Are you going to join this club?'

'I suppose I might . . . if I'm asked.' I felt uncomfortable. If there were members at 249 East 35th, I knew that I already was one.

The Thursday before Christmas came. That evening was similar to the others, but different in two ways. There were more men there, perhaps as many as eighteen. And there was a feeling of excitement in the air.

When it got to the time when people usually began to leave, I saw Peter Andrews sitting by the fire with a small packet in his hand. He threw it on to the flames without opening it, and a moment later the fire began to dance with every colour you can imagine, and some you can't, before turning yellow again. Chairs were pulled around it. Over the fireplace, I could see the words: IT IS THE TALE, NOT HE WHO TELLS IT.

Stevens passed among us with wine. 'Happy Christmas' was said several times, and Stevens was quietly given money. Although I was not a rich man, I found my own wallet and took out fifty dollars. I put it into his hand when he gave me my wine.

'Happy Christmas, Stevens,' I said.

'Thank you, sir. And the same to you.'

He finished giving us our wine and taking the presents of money, then he disappeared. Later, when Peter Andrews was telling his story, I saw Stevens standing by the big double doors of the room. A big, man-shaped shadow, still and silent.

'I'm a lawyer now,' Andrews began, after taking a drink from his glass. 'I've had an office in Park Avenue for the last twenty-two years, but before that I worked in Washington, DC. One night in July I was working late when a man came in. He was a very important man in Washington at that time, and I knew this. His shirt was covered with blood and his eyes were wide and wild with fear.

His shirt was covered with blood and his eyes were wide and wild with fear.

' "I've got to talk to Joe," he said. Joe was Joseph Woods, my boss, and a good friend of this man.

' "He went home hours ago," I said. I was very frightened. He looked like a man who had just walked away from a terrible car accident, or perhaps from a knife-fight. I knew his face well, I had seen it on TV and in the newspapers, but I had never seen it like this. I was already reaching for the phone. "I can phone him if you -" I looked behind him and saw the bloody footmarks he had left on the carpet.

' "I must talk to Joe now," he said, as if he hadn't heard me. "There's something in the back of my car ... something I found out at the Virginia place. I've shot it and pushed my knife into it, and I can't kill it. It's not human, and I can't kill it!"

'He began to laugh . . . and then to scream. And he was still screaming when I finally got Mr Woods on the phone and told him to come as fast as he could . . .'

I do not intend to tell all of Peter Andrews's story. I am not sure I dare to tell it. But it was a tale so horrible that I dreamed of it for weeks afterwards. One morning at breakfast, Ellen asked me why I had suddenly called out 'His head! His head is still speaking in the ground!' in the middle of the night.

'I suppose it was a bad dream,' I said. 'One of those which you can't remember afterwards.'

But I could not look at her, and I think Ellen knew that I was telling a lie that time.

•

One day in August the next year, I was asked to go and see George Waterhouse in his office. When I got there, I saw that Robert Carden and Henry Effingham were also there. For a moment I was afraid I had done something badly wrong and was going to be asked to explain it.

Then Carden said, 'George thinks the time has come to make you a partner, David. The rest of us agree.'

There were no bad dreams that night. Ellen and I went to a restaurant for dinner, drank too much, then went on to a club where we listened to music until two o'clock in the morning. We were both unable to completely believe what had happened.

Later that year, I was sent to Copenhagen on business for six weeks. I returned to discover that John Hanrahan, one of the men who came to 249 East 35th, had died. The rest of us gave money for his wife and it was given to Stevens to post to her.

Arlene Hanrahan was a member of Ellen's Theatre Club, and Ellen told me some time later that Arlene had received ten thousand four hundred dollars. The message with it had said: 'From friends of your husband, John', nothing more.

'Isn't that the strangest thing you've ever heard in your *life?'* Ellen asked me.

•

The years went by. I discovered other rooms upstairs at 249. There was a writing room. And a bedroom where guests sometimes stayed overnight (although after that snake-in- the-mud noise I had heard — or imagined I had heard — I could never sleep there).

In those same years, I read again the books of Edward Gray Seville, and discovered the books of a wonderful poet called Norber Rosen. All three of his books were published by Stedham and Son, New York and Boston.

I remember going back to the New York Public Library, but although I searched through many books and magazines, some of them twenty years old, I could discover nothing at all about a publisher called Stedham and Son. A year later -

The map Carruthers had pointed at was now part of his face.

perhaps two years later - I was talking with a man whose business was very old books. I asked him about Stedham and Son. He said he had never heard of them.

I thought about asking Stevens - saw that warning light in his eyes — and changed my mind.

•

And there were stories during those years.

Tales, to use Stevens's word. Funny tales, tales of love, frightening tales. Yes, and a few war stories, but not the sort Ellen imagined.

I specially remember Gerard Tozeman's story - the tale of an American General called Carruthers who was killed by a bomb. Carruthers was thought to be mad. He was responsible for more

than eighteen *thousand* of his soldiers getting killed, up to that time. At the moment the bomb fell, Carruthers was pointing at a map, explaining another mad plan of his own — a plan which would only result in even more of his soldiers being killed. Gerard was among those in the room, listening to him, when the bomb fell.

Afterwards, when the dust began to clear, Gerard Tozeman was the only one still alive. Deaf and covered in blood, he saw the body of Carruthers. . . and began to scream and laugh. The map Carruthers had pointed at *was now part of his face.* There was Brittany above Carruthers's eyebrow. Here was the river Rhine in a blue line down his left cheek. And across one staring, open eye was the word V E R S A I L L E S .

That was our Christmas story in the year 197-.

•

And then, two weeks before Christmas this year, Stevens asked us who was going to tell our Christmas tale.

'I suppose I've got one I can tell,' Emlyn McCarron said.

McCarron had never told a story before. Not since I had begun coming to 249. Perhaps that's why I called the taxi so early. Perhaps that's why I felt excited. And I saw the same feelings of excitement on the faces of the five others who had come out that awful, freezing December night.

McCarron was old, and with skin like leather. He sat in the big chair by the fire. The packet was in his hands, and he threw it on to the flames. They changed colours madly before returning to yellow again. Stevens passed among us with wine. Money was quietly pressed into his hand. It was ten years since I first came to 249 with George Waterhouse, and much had changed in the world. But nothing had changed in here. And Stevens did not look a single day older.

He moved back into the shadows. For a moment, there was a

perfect silence. McCarron looked into the fire, and we did the same. The flames seemed specially wild that night. Then McCarron began to speak . . .

Chapter 2 McCarron's Story: The Breathing Method

Most of you know the Harriet White Hospital, the building almost opposite Madison Square Garden. It is named after Harriet White, my grandfather's first wife. She died before I was born, but there is a statue of her in front of the hospital building. If you have seen it, you may be surprised to learn that someone who looks so cold and stiff and unfeeling was a nurse.

I was born inside that grey stone building on 20 March 1900. I returned there as a young hospital doctor in 1926. Before this, I had been a doctor in France at the end of World War I. The Harriet White Hospital plays an important part in the story I am going to tell you. It is about something that happened in 1935.

Birth, gentlemen, is an unpleasant thing to many people. These days, fathers are often there when their child is born, which seems to me to be a very healthy and sensible thing. But I have seen men leave the delivery room with white faces and sick stomachs after hearing the cries and seeing the blood. Birth is wonderful, gentlemen, but I have never found it beautiful. A woman's womb is like an engine. As the birth of her child gets nearer, the speed of that engine becomes faster and faster, louder and louder, until finally it's like the roar of a wild animal. Once that silent 'engine' has been turned on, every mother understands that either she will bring that baby into the world, or that engine will get louder

and harder and faster until it bursts, killing her in blood and pain.

This is the story of a birth, gentlemen. I tell it to you at Christmas, when we remember that other birth which happened almost two thousand years ago.

I began to practise medicine in 1929, but it was in April 1935 that a young woman - I will call her Sandra Stansfield - came to see me. The name is close enough to her real name. She was a young white woman who said her age was twenty-eight. After examining her, I guessed her real age to be four or five years younger. She had fair hair and was about five feet eight inches tall. She was quite beautiful, but with a cool look in her eye. She was intelligent, and looked like the sort of person who got what they wanted from life. Something about the firm line of her mouth reminded me of Harriet White's statue outside the hospital. The name she put on her form was not Sandra Stansfield but Jane Smith. My examination told me that she was two months pregnant. She was not wearing a wedding ring.

Jane Smith?' my nurse said to me after the young woman had gone. 'That's not her real name.'

I agreed. But I liked the way she had given a simple name, and not tried to think of a more complicated one, hoping that I would believe it was real.

You need a name for your form, she seemed to be saying, *because that is the law. So here is a name.*

Ella, my nurse, said something about 'modern girls' and 'they don't care who knows', but she knew it was not like that. 'Jane Smith' was a very serious young woman. It was difficult and unpleasant to be unmarried and pregnant at that time, but she intended to do her best for herself and her baby.

'You're pregnant,' I said. 'You were almost sure of that, weren't you ?'

She came back a week later. It was a wonderful spring day, a warm sun, a blue sky. The sort of day when you wish you did not have to work or be responsible, but could sit on a beach by a warm sea, perhaps. Sit opposite a lovely woman of your own, who looks as pretty as the day in a big white hat and a dress covered with flowers.

Jane Smith's dress was white, but was still almost as pretty as the day. She wore brown shoes, white gloves, and a small round hat that was no longer quite the fashion. It was the first sign to tell me that she was not at all a rich woman.

'You're pregnant,' I said. 'You were almost sure of that, weren't you?'

If there are to be tears, I thought, they will come now.

'Yes,' she replied calmly. There were no tears. 'When will I deliver?'

'It will be a Christmas baby,' I said. 'The date I will give you is 10 December, but it may be two weeks before or after that.'

'All right.' She was silent for a moment, then went on, 'I'm not married. Will you deliver the baby?'

'Yes,' I said. 'But you must do something first.'

Her face became more serious. It looked even more like the face of Harriet White. 'And what is that?' she asked in a cool voice.

'I must know your real name,' I said. 'You can continue to pay me in cash, and I can continue to give you a receipt in the name of Jane Smith. But if we are going to travel through the next seven months together, I want to be able to call you by the name you use during the rest of your life.'

I watched her. Was she going to thank me for my time and leave? I would be sorry if that happened. I liked her. And I liked the way she was managing a problem which caused most other women shame and embarrassment at that time. I suppose many

young people today would find that sort of thinking quite stupid. But at that time, a married pregnant woman was a proud and happy woman, doing what God intended her to do. An unmarried pregnant woman was not so lucky. She was made to feel a deep and awful shame. She often went away to have her baby in another town or city, or to take pills or jump from a high building. Others got rid of their unwanted babies themselves, or went to some butcher of a doctor to do the job.

'All right,' she said. 'My name is Sandra Stansfield. I hope we can be friends. I need a friend just now. I'm quite frightened.'

'I can understand that,' I said. 'I'll try to be your friend if I can, Miss Stansfield. Is there anything I can do for you now?'

She opened her bag and took out a pen and some paper. 'I want to know the best things to eat, for the baby, I mean.'

'I will give you a little book for pregnant women. It tells you all about food and weight and drinking and smoking. Please don't laugh, but I wrote it myself

It was called *A Guide to Pregnancy and Delivery.* I was specially interested in pregnancy and birth - I still am - and I read all the latest information on the subject. And because my opinions were strong and enthusiastic, I wrote my own book instead of just passing on the old, tired advice given to young mothers then. There was a lot of it, at that time, but I'll just tell you two things.

Pregnant women were told to stay off their feet as much as possible, and not to walk long distances. Now giving birth is hard work. And that sort of advice is like telling a football player to prepare for a big game by sitting down as much as possible, so that he doesn't get himself too tired! Another popular piece of advice given to pregnant women by many doctors was to start *smoking,* to keep down their weight. Smoking!

I gave Miss Stansfield my little book and she looked at it for

five minutes without speaking, but turning the pages. When she did look up, there was a small smile on her Hps. 'You are . . . different, Dr McCarron. Walking . . . swimming . . . vitamin pills for pregnant women . . . and breathing exercises! What breathing exercises?'

I smiled back at her. 'I'll tell you later on. If you will see my nurse, Mrs Davidson, she will arrange for you to come and see me again.'

'Mrs Davidson has not got a good opinion of me,' she said.

'I'm sure that's not true,' I said, but I've never been able to tell lies very well. The warm feeling between us suddenly disappeared.

She walked to the door.

'Do you intend to keep the baby?' I asked her.

She turned and smiled — a secret smile which I am sure only pregnant women know. 'Oh, yes,' she said. And she went out of the door.

After that, I forgot all about her until the end of the day when Ella Davidson spoke about her.

'Your Miss Jane Smith did something strange after she saw you this morning,' she said.

I saw from the look on her face that her opinion of the young woman had changed.

'What was that?'

'She said, "How much will it cost for all my visits to Dr McCarron, for the delivery, and for the time I stay in hospital? Can you add up the figures and tell me exactly?" '

That *was* strange. This was 1935, remember, and Miss Stansfield seemed to be a woman on her own. Did she have a lot of money? I didn't think so.

'Did you do it?' I asked.

Mrs Davidson looked at me as if I was mad. *'Did* I? *Of course* I did! And she paid it all. In cash.'

'She took a bank book out of her bag, opened it, and counted the money out on to my desk.'

The cash had surprised Mrs Davidson (in a pleasant way, of course). It didn't surprise me. One thing which the Jane Smiths of this world can't do is write cheques.

'She took a bank book out of her bag, opened it, and counted the money out on to my desk,' Mrs Davidson continued. 'Then she put her receipt into the bank book, and put both book and receipt back into her bag. When you think of the way we have to chase some of the "nice" people to pay their bills —!'

'I know,' I said. But I was not happy with the Stansfield woman for paying that way, and I was not happy with Mrs Davidson for being so pleased. And something about the whole thing made *me* feel small.

'How can she pay for her time in hospital now?' I asked. 'How

long will she be in there? We don't know. Or can you suddenly see into the future, Ella?'

'I told her that. "How long is usual if everything goes well?" she asked. I told her three days. Was I right, Dr McCarron?'

I agreed that she was.

'She said, "I'll pay for three days, and if it is longer I will pay the extra money. And if—" '

'If it is shorter, we can give her back some money,' I finished. She was a brave woman, I could not deny that.

Mrs Davidson's smile seemed to show that she agreed.

•

A month went by, and Miss Stansfield came again. She wore a blue dress which looked fresh and pretty. Her shoes did not match it. They were the same brown ones which she had worn before.

I examined her carefully and saw that everything was all right. I told her this, and she was pleased.

'I discovered the vitamin pills which you suggested, Dr McCarron.'

'Did you? That's good.'

She smiled a cheeky smile. 'The chemist advised me not to take them.'

'He thought it was odd because vitamins for pregnant women are a new idea,' I told her. 'Did you take his advice?'

'No, I took yours. You're my doctor.'

'Thank you.'

Her look became serious. 'Dr McCarron, when will it begin to show that I'm pregnant?'

'Not until August. September, if you choose the right clothes.'

'Thank you.' She picked up her bag but did not immediately

get up to go. She seemed to want to talk, but didn't know where to begin.

'Are you a working woman?' I asked.

She nodded. 'Yes, I work.'

'Can I ask where?'

'In a large shop. What other job can an unmarried woman do in the city? I sell clothes to fat ladies who colour their hair.'

I smiled. 'How long will you continue?'

'Until somebody notices that I'm pregnant and have no wedding ring. Then they'll ask me to leave, before the fat ladies become shocked and begin to complain.'

Quite suddenly, her eyes were bright with tears. I put my hand in a pocket for a handkerchief, but the tears didn't fall, not a single one. Her lips became tight. . . and then smooth again. She simply decided to control her feelings, and she did.

'I'm sorry,' she said. 'You've been very kind to me. I won't tell you my very ordinary, boring story.' She stood up.

'I can listen,' I said, 'and I have some time.'

'No,' she said. 'Thank you, but no.'

'All right,' I said. 'But there's another thing I want to say.'

'Yes?'

'I never ask people to pay for all their visits before they have made them. I hope if you . . . if you feel you want to . . . or have to . . .' I stopped, uncertain what to say next.

'I've lived in New York four years, Dr McCarron, and I'm careful with my money. After August - or September - I'll have to live on the money I've saved, until I can go back to work again. I don't have a lot of money, and sometimes at night I become frightened.' She looked at me with those wonderful brown eyes. 'It seems better to pay for the baby first, because that's where the baby is in my thoughts. It's better if the money is with you so that I can't spend it later, when things get difficult.'

'All right, but please tell me if you need it,' I said. 'Do you intend to work as long as possible?'

'Yes, I have to. Why?'

'I think I'm going to frighten you a little before you go,' I said.

Her eyes opened wider. 'Don't do that,' she said. 'I'm frightened enough already.'

'Please,' I said, 'sit down again.'

After a moment, she sat down on the chair.

'Things are very difficult for you,' I said, 'and you are managing them very well.' She began to speak but I stopped her. 'That's good. But I don't want to see you hurt your baby because you feel you need more money. There was a woman who did not take my advice. She pushed and packed herself into tight clothes which became tighter and tighter each month. She was a silly woman who did not want people to notice that she was pregnant. I don't believe she really wanted the baby. Some people might say she was trying to kill it.'

'And did she?' Miss Stansfield's face was very still.

'No, but the baby was born with a damaged brain. Now, it may not have been the woman's foolish way of dressing that damaged the baby, but we can't be sure.'

'I understand,' she said, quietly. 'You don't want me to . . . to pack myself in so that I can work another month or six weeks. I did think about it, so thank you for frightening me a little.'

I walked to the door with her.

How much — or how little — money had she saved?

How much was left?

I wanted to ask her these things, but I knew that she would not answer them. So I said goodbye.

•

I learned her story a bit at a time over the next six months.

She came to the city from a small town in Iowa or Nebraska, I don't remember now. She wanted to be an actress. She came to New York because she didn't believe the magazine stories that said any girl going to Hollywood could become a filmstar. And I think she thought that the theatre was more interesting than the film business.

She got a job in one of the large shops, and joined an acting school. She was clever, she worked hard, but she was lonely. Very lonely. Lonely in the way that only single girls from small towns can understand.

There was a young man in her acting school. The two of them went out together, several times. She did not love him, but she needed a friend. By the time she discovered he was not that, she was pregnant. She told the young man, and he said he was going to 'do the right thing' and marry her. A week later, he was gone from the place where he lived. He left no other address.

That was when she came to me.

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During her fourth month, I introduced Miss Stansfield to the Breathing Method - what is today called the Lamaze Method. In those days, Monsieur Lamaze was still not known.

Forty-five years ago, a visit to the delivery rooms in any large American hospital sounded like a visit to a madhouse. Women crying, women screaming that they wanted to be dead, women screaming for God to help them, women screaming out words which their husbands and fathers did not realize they knew! All this was quite usual, although most of the world's women give birth in almost complete silence, except for the. sort of sounds made by anyone doing a hard job of work.

Doctors were responsible for some of this madness, I'm sorry to say. And so were the stories a pregnant woman heard from friends and relations who had given birth. Believe me, if you are told that something is going to hurt, then it *will* hurt. Most pain is in the mind. And when a woman has been told by her mother, her sisters, her married friends, *and* her doctor — that woman is *ready and waiting* to feel pain.

I read a lot about the subject of pregnancy. While doing this, I discovered the idea of the silent birth and the Breathing Method - a method of giving birth which helped the mother use her breath in a more useful way than by screaming. It was used in India and Africa at that time, but most doctors in the West were not interested in it. One doctor — an intelligent man - returned my little book with a red line through the part about the Breathing Method. He wrote a note beside it, saying that it was dangerous rubbish.

Well, I didn't take out the part about the Breathing Method. Some women used it and succeeded. Others understood the idea, but discovered that they could not use it when they came to give birth. But these were often women who were told by friends and relations that the idea could not work.

A woman using the Breathing Method begins with a number of short, regular breaths when she feels a contraction coming on. Later, when the more painful contractions start coming every fifteen minutes, the woman changes her breathing to long breaths, like a long-distance runner at the end of a long run. When the birth is very close, the woman changes her breathing again. Today, it's often called the 'choo-choo' way of breathing, when the mother takes and lets out short, sharp breaths between her lips. It really does sound like a child pretending to be a steam train!

All of this helps the mother's body, but it also helps her *mind.*

She feels she is helping and guiding her baby into the world. She feels *on top of* the pain.

Miss Stansfield was the perfect person for the Breathing Method. She had no friends or relations to frighten her. She believed in it.

'I will practise, Dr McCarron,' she said. And she did.

She also found it helped her in other ways. Like the day she finished working at the shop. It came at the end of August when, quite suddenly, her body began to show that she was pregnant.

She came to see me on the first day of September.

'I've discovered that the Breathing Method is useful for other things,' she said, smiling.

'What's that?' I asked.

'It's better than counting up to ten when you're angry with someone,' she said. 'Although people do look at you as if you're mad when you start "choo-chooing"!'

She told me the tale.

'I went to work last Monday,' she explained, 'and my boss, Mrs Kelly, asked to see me in her office. She was always quite friendly before. She used to show me photos of her teenage sons, and was always asking me if I had met a "nice boy". But when I stepped into her office that day, I knew everything had changed.

' "You're . . . in trouble," she said in an unfriendly voice.

' "Yes," I said. "Some people call it that."

' "Don't be clever with me, young woman," she said. "When I look at your stomach, I can see you've been too clever already! Have you no shame about the way you've tricked me?"

' "I haven't tricked you," I told her. "You didn't ask me if I was pregnant. How can you say that I tricked you?"

' "I took you home!" Mrs Kelly said to me. "You had dinner . . . with my *sons."*

'This was when I began to get angry. Angrier than I've ever been in my life. "Are you suggesting that I was thinking of tricking your sons into making love to me? If you are, that's the dirtiest thing I've ever heard in my life!"

'Her head fell back as if I'd hit her. Her face went white. Then she pulled a cheque book out of her desk. "With hundreds of nice girls looking for jobs in this city, I don't think we need a girl like you working for us — dear!" It was the final "dear" that made me so angry that I wanted to scream and throw things around the room. I didn't just *think* about throwing things, I *saw* myself doing it. I was going to do it. Nothing was going to stop me. But then I remembered the Breathing Method, and began to "choo-choo". It was all I was able to think of doing. Slowly, I became calm again, and I was able to take that cheque. I couldn't thank her, of course. I was too busy "choo-chooing"!'

Miss Stansfield finished telling her tale, and we laughed about it together.

'I don't feel angry now,' she said. 'In fact, I feel quite sorry for Mrs Kelly.' Her smile disappeared and she opened her bag. 'Can I show you something which I've bought, Dr McCarron?'

'Yes, if you want to,' I said.

She took a small, flat box from her bag. 'I bought it for two dollars. It's the only time I've felt ashamed and dirty. Isn't that strange?'

She opened the box and put it on my desk. Inside was a plain gold wedding ring. I wasn't surprised.

'I'll do what is necessary,' she said. 'I have a room in a house, and the lady who owns the house has been very kind and friendly. But I think she'll ask me to leave, soon.'

'Where will you go?'

'There's a place down in the Village. A room on the third

floor. It's clean, and it's five dollars a month cheaper than the room I have now.' She took the ring out of the box. 'I wore this when the owner of the building showed me the room.' She put it on the third finger of her left hand. 'There. Now I'm *Mrs* Stansfield. My husband is a lorry driver who was killed driving from Pittsburgh to New York. Very sad. But I'm not an unmarried pregnant woman any more, with no father's name to give to my child. A cheap little ring has changed that. Like magic. Cheap magic.'

She looked up at me and there were tears in her eyes. As I watched, one of them fell slowly down her cheek.

'Please,' I said, and reached across the desk to take hold of her hand. 'If you need help, if there's anything I can do —'

Slowly, she took her hand away. I did not love her, gentlemen, but in that moment I *could* have loved her.

'You're a good, kind man, and you've done a lot for me and my baby,' she said. 'And your Breathing Method is a much better sort of magic than this awful ring.'

She left soon after that, and I went to the window to watch her walk down the street towards Madison Avenue. She looked so small, so young, but so proud of being pregnant.

I turned back to my desk. There was a photograph on the wall and, without thinking, I looked at it . . . *and suddenly began to shake.* My skin became ice-cold, and the most terrible feeling of fear filled my whole body. I did not seem to be able to breathe!

What happened?

I saw into the future, gentlemen, that's what happened.

I won't argue about whether or not this is possible, I *know* it is, because it happened to me that hot September afternoon when I looked at that photograph.

The photograph was taken by my mother, on the first day I was able to call myself a doctor. It showed me standing

opposite the hospital. I was smiling and looking pleased with myself. To my left stood the Harriet White statue, with the same cold, unfeeling look on the woman's face that is there today.

Not quite four months later, at the foot of that statue of my grandfather's first wife . . . Sandra Stansfield died. She died in an accident that happened just as she arrived at the hospital to deliver her child.

•

She was a little worried during that autumn. She was afraid that I was going away for the Christmas holidays and might not be there when her baby arrived. She was afraid that her baby was going to be delivered by some doctor who would not let her use the Breathing Method.

I tried to tell her that I had no family to visit, that I was not leaving the city.

'Are you ever lonely?' she asked.

'Sometimes. Usually I keep too busy. Now, take this.' I wrote down my home telephone number on some paper and gave it to her. 'You can always phone me here -'

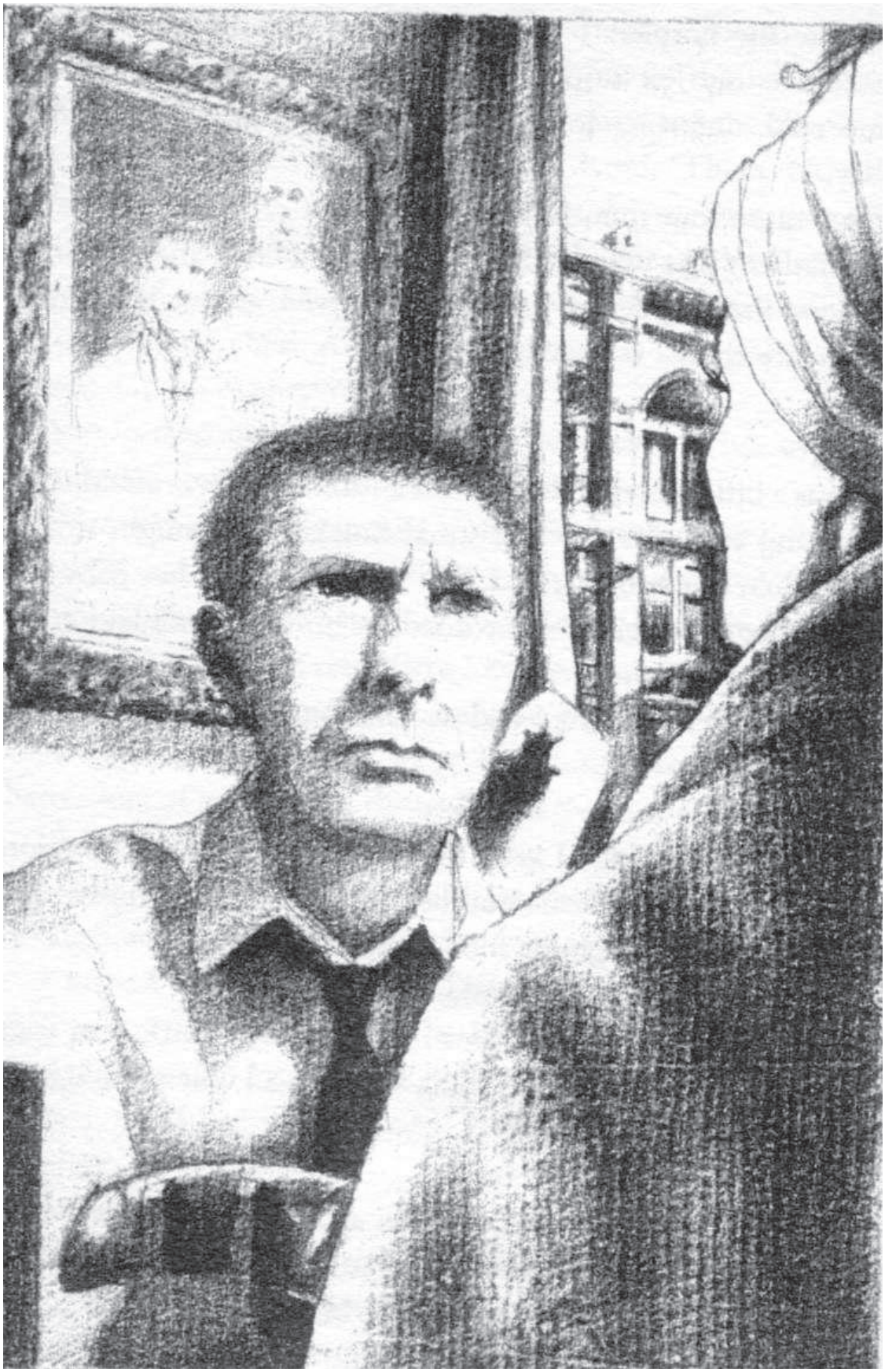
'Oh, no, I couldn't -'

'Do you want to use the Breathing Method? Or do you want to get some doctor who will think you're mad when you start to "choo-choo"?'

She smiled a little. 'All right.'

The autumn passed, and she was asked to move out of her room. She moved to the one she had seen in the Village. And she got work for two days each week. A blind woman paid her to clean her house, and then to read to her.

But I knew something was worrying her. She looked healthy, but there was a shadow on her face. Sometimes, she was slow to answer my questions, and once she didn't answer at all.



I looked up to see her staring at the photograph on my wall with a strange, dreamy look on her face.

I looked up to see her staring at the photograph on my wall with a strange, dreamy look on her face. That ice-cold feeling came over my skin again . . . and her next words did nothing to warm me.

'I have a feeling, Dr McCarron, sometimes quite a strong feeling, that something terrible is going to happen to me.'

Yes, I feel that, too. Those were the words which came to my lips. But instead of saying them, I told her that she was not the first pregnant woman to feel that way.

She was looking at the photograph again. 'Who is that?' she asked.

'Emlyn McCarron,' I said, trying to make a joke of it. 'When he was quite young.'

'No, I recognized you, of course,' she said. 'The woman. Who is the woman?'

'Her name is Harriet White,' I said, and thought: *And her stone face will be the first face you will see when you arrive to deliver your child.*

The ice-cold feeling came back again.

•

That night, I had the worst dream of my life.

In the dream, I opened my office door and saw Sandra Stansfield standing there. She was wearing the brown shoes, the white dress, and the small hat that was no longer in fashion. But the hat was between her breasts . . . because she was carrying her head in her arms. The white dress had blood on it. More blood burst out of her neck and on to the ceiling.

And then her eyes opened - those wonderful brown eyes - and she stared at me.

'Something terrible,' the speaking head told me. 'It's cheap magic, but it's all we have.'

That's when I woke up screaming.

•

I examined her on 17 December.

'The baby will almost certainly come before the end of the year,' I told her, 'but probably after Christmas.'

She did not seem as worried as she had been during the autumn. Mrs Gibbs, the blind woman, was telling her friends about this young woman whose husband had died in an accident and who was going to have a baby. 'She is a brave young woman,' the blind woman told her friends. And several of them were talking about giving 'Mrs' Stansfield some work after the birth of her baby.

'I'll take the work, too,' she told me. 'For the baby. But only until I can find something better. The worst part of everything that's happened is that I look at people differently. Sometimes I think to myself, "How can you sleep at night when you know that you've tricked that dear old lady?" And then I think, "If she knew my true story, would she let me work for her?" And the answer is, no.'

Before she left that day, she took a small box from her handbag. It was covered with Christmas paper. I watched the shy way that she pushed it across the desk to me.

'Merry Christmas, Dr McCarron,' she said.

'There was no need to buy me anything,' I said. But I opened a drawer of my desk and took out a box of my own. 'But I did, too—'

She was surprised, and looked at me for a moment. Then we laughed together. Her present for me was a tie-pin. My present for her was a book to put photographs of her baby in. I still have the tie-pin. What happened to the photograph book? I don't know.

I walked with her to the door. As we reached it, she turned to me, put her hands on my shoulders, and kissed me on the mouth.

Her lips were cool and firm. It was not a lover's kiss, gentlemen, but neither was it a kiss you might receive from a sister or an aunt.

'Thank you again, Dr McCarron,' she said. There was colour in her cheeks and her brown eyes were shining. 'Thank you for everything.'

I laughed - a little worriedly. 'You speak as if we'll never meet again, Sandra,' I said.

It was the second and last time I ever used her first name.

'Oh, we'll meet again,' she said. 'I don't doubt that.'

And she was right. Although neither of us knew the terrible things that were going to happen at that meeting.

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At 6 p.m., on the evening before Christmas Day, Miss Stansfield's contractions began. Snow had fallen all that day, but now the snow had changed to icy rain. During the next two hours, the city streets slowly became dangerous with ice.

At 6.30 p.m., Miss Stansfield went carefully downstairs to the blind woman's apartment and knocked at the door.

'Can I use your phone?' she asked, when the woman opened the door.

'Is it the baby, dear?' Mrs Gibbs asked.

'Yes. The contractions have only just begun, but the weather is bad. It will take a taxi a long time to get to the hospital.'

Miss Stansfield made the telephone call, and then phoned me. At that time, 6.40, the pains were coming every twenty-five minutes. She repeated to me that she was leaving for the hospital early because of the weather.

'I don't want to have my child in the back of a taxi,' she said.

She sounded very calm.

'Be careful, lady,' he said, as he helped her down the snow-covered steps.

The taxi was late, and Miss Stansfield's contractions were coining quicker than I thought they would.

The taxi driver saw that she was going to have a baby. 'Be careful, lady,' he said, as he helped her down the snow-covered steps.

Miss Stansfield just nodded. She was busy with her deep breathing, as a fresh contraction came. Later on Mrs Gibbs told me that the taxi driver was more nervous than 'poor, dear Sandra', and that probably helped to cause the accident.

The other thing that helped to cause it was almost certainly the Breathing Method itself.

The driver drove carefully through the icy streets. His taxi joined lines of other slow-moving traffic as it made its way through several crossroads that were partly covered with deep snow. Slowly, the taxi got closer to the hospital.

The driver was not badly hurt in the accident, and I talked to him afterwards in the hospital. He said that the sound of Miss Stansfield's deep breathing, coming from the back seat, made him nervous. Many times, he looked in his mirror to see if she was 'dying, or something'. He said that he wished she had shouted or screamed, the way a woman having a baby was supposed to do. He asked her if she was feeling all right and she only nodded, continuing to breathe deeply, the way she had practised.

Two or three streets from the hospital, the contractions started to come more quickly. An hour had passed since she had entered the taxi, because of the slow-moving traffic. The driver noticed the change in the way she was breathing. She had started to 'choo-choo', and it made him even more nervous.

At that moment, the driver saw a hole open up in the traffic that was crossing in front of him as he waited. He immediately went through it, like a bullet from a gun. The way to the hospital was now clear.

'I could see the statue of that woman,' he told me afterwards.

He wanted to hurry to the hospital. He wanted to get rid of his 'choo-chooing', pregnant passenger. He made the taxi go faster . . . but the tyres could not hold on the ice on the road.

I had walked to the hospital and was climbing the steps to the front door when the taxi arrived. I did not know that the roads were so dangerous, and that the taxi had taken all that time to get there. I believed that I was going to find Miss Stansfield inside, in a bed, waiting for me.

I turned just in time to see the accident happen.

An ambulance was coming from the side of the hospital as Miss Stansfield's taxi came across the Square towards the hospital building. The taxi was going too fast to stop. The driver tried to stop it, but the wheels began to do their own crazy dance on the ice. The red light on the top of the ambulance threw a blood-coloured light over the taxi, and I saw the face of Sandra Stansfield. For that one moment, it was the face in my dream. The same bloody, open-eyed face that I had seen on the head in her arms.

I shouted her name, took two steps down . . . and fell. I hit my elbow on the ground but managed to hold on to my black doctor's bag. I saw the rest of the accident from where I was lying on the ground.

The ambulance tried to stop. Its wheels, too, were not able to hold a straight line on the ice. It turned round in a half- circle, and the back of the ambulance hit the bottom of Harriet White's statue. A young woman who was near screamed and tried to run as the ambulance and taxi came towards each other. She fell on her stomach, and her handbag flew out of her hand.

The taxi turned all the way round and was now travelling

The red light on the top of the ambulance threw a blood-coloured light over the taxi, and I saw the face of Sandra Stansfield.

backwards. I could see the driver clearly. He was trying to control the car but was not succeeding. The ambulance came off the statue and crashed into the taxi. The car turned round once in a small circle, and hit the bottom of the statue — hard. One of its lights was broken and went off like a bomb. The left side of the taxi was pushed into itself as if it was old newspaper. A moment later, I saw that the taxi had hit the statue hard enough to tear it in two. Pieces of glass fell on to the ice like diamonds.

Miss Stansfield was thrown through the back, right-side window of the taxi. I was on my feet again and I ran down the icy steps. She was lying in the shadow of Harriet White's statue, twenty feet from the ambulance and its blood-red roof light. The ambulance was on its side.

There was something wrong with Miss Stansfield's body. What was it? I am being honest, gentlemen, when I say that I did not know until my foot hit something and I nearly fell over again. I had kicked the thing several feet away. It was marked with blood, and there was glass in it.

But it was the fair hair which I recognized.

The thing I had kicked into the side of the road was her head.

It was cut off in the accident.

Moving as if I was in some horrible dream, I reached her body and turned it over. I think I tried to scream then. If I did, no sound came out. I could not make a sound. You see, gentlemen, *the woman was still breathing.* Her chest was moving up and down in quick, shallow breaths. I could hear the little screams of air being pulled into her body, then pushed out again.

I wanted to run, but I couldn't. I fell on my knees next to her on the ice, one hand at my mouth. A moment later, I saw fresh blood coming through the bottom part of her dress. *And I saw*

something moving there. Suddenly, I became sure there was a chance of saving the baby.

'Cheap magic!' I shouted into the night. And I believe that as I pulled up her dress to her waist, I began laughing. I believe I was mad. Her body was warm, I remember that. I remember the way it moved with her breathing.

The ambulance driver walked over, like a man who was drunk. He had one hand on the side of his head, and blood came through his fingers.

'Cheap magic!' I screamed again, still laughing. My hands were on her stomach.

The ambulance driver stared down at Sandra Stansfield's body. A body without a head. His eyes opened wide. I don't know if he realized that the body was still breathing.

'Stop staring at her and get me a blanket!' I shouted at him.

He walked away, but not back towards the ambulance. He just walked off into the snowy night and I never saw him again. I turned back to the dead woman — who was not yet dead — and then took off my overcoat. I lifted her up and put the coat under her. I could hear the 'choo-choo' breathing from that body without a head. I still hear it sometimes, gentlemen. In my dreams.

Please understand that all of this happened in a very short time. It just seemed longer to me. People were beginning to run out of the hospital. Behind me, a woman screamed as she saw the head at the side of the street.

I pulled open my black bag, and took out a short knife. I opened it, cut through the clothes on the lower part of her body, and pulled them off.

A voice behind me said, 'What can I do, Doctor?'

It was a nurse. Her face was as white as milk.

'You can get me a blanket,' I told her. 'There is still a chance of saving the baby.'

Behind her, I saw about twenty people from the hospital standing on the steps. They did not want to come any closer. How much did they see? I don't know. But people kept away from me for days afterwards (and some for ever), and no one ever spoke to me about it.

The nurse was hurrying back towards the hospital.

'Nurse!' I said. 'There's no time for that. Get one from the ambulance. This baby is coming *now.*'

I turned back to Miss Stansfield. Her choo-choo breathing was faster . . . faster . . . And then I saw the baby's head. And then it came! It almost *flew* into my hands.

It was a boy.

'Nurse! Where are you?' I shouted.

The baby cried a thin cry, and its hands waved weakly in the cold air. Steam came off its body. But then it stopped breathing. I pressed my mouth against its face and breathed into its mouth, until the child began to breathe on its own again.

The nurse was there with the blanket. I held out my hand for it. She started to give it to me, then stopped.

'Doctor, what. . . what if it's not. . .*not quite human?'*

'Give me that blanket,' I said. 'Give it to me now, nurse, before I kick you up those hospital steps!'

'Yes, doctor,' she said calmly, and gave me the blanket. I put it round the child and gave it to her.

'If you drop him, nurse, I'll make sure you have no job tomorrow.'

'Yes, doctor.'

'It's cheap magic, nurse, but it's all that God left us with.'

'Yes, doctor.'

I watched her half-walk, half-run back to the hospital with the child. Then I stood up and moved away from the body. Its breathing stopped . . . started again . . . stopped . . .

The baby cried a thin cry, and its hands waved weakly in the cold air.

I moved back away from it, and my foot hit something. I turned round. It was her head. I bent down and turned the head over. The eyes were open — those brown eyes which had always been so full of life.

Gentlemen, *she was seeing me.*

Her teeth were biting together, her lips were part-open. Her eyes moved to the left so that she could see me better. Her lips opened wider. She said four words: *Thank you, Dr McCarron.* I *heard* them, gentlemen.

'It's a boy, Miss Stansfield,' I said.

Her Hps moved again. Then came the thin, ghostly sound: *hoyyyy.*

Her eyes were looking beyond me now, perhaps into that black, snowy sky. Then they closed.

It was over.

I looked up at the statue of Harriet White, and there she stood. Her stone face stared out as if nothing important had happened. I stayed there, on my knees next to the head, and began to cry. I was still crying when two nurses and a young hospital doctor helped me on to my feet and inside.

Chapter 3 The Club

McCarron finished his story and we sat silently for several minutes. Outside, the wind made ghostly noises as it blew around the building.

'That's all,' McCarron said. 'That's the end.'

'What happened to the baby?' I heard myself asking.

McCarron didn't answer, so I asked again.

'What happened to the baby?'

'There was a young man and his wife — their name is

not Harrison, but it's close enough. They lived in Maine. They could not have children of their own. They took Miss Stansfield's child and called him . . . well, John is good enough, isn't it?'

Stevens was somewhere behind me, and I knew that our coats were ready and waiting for us to put them on. As McCarron said, the tales were over for another year.

'The child I delivered that night is not yet forty-five,' said McCarron. 'He's handsome and intelligent. And he has his mother's brown eyes.'

•

Stevens watched us go out of the door. He wished us all a 'Happy Christmas' and he thanked us for our presents of money. I made sure that I was the last person to leave.

Stevens did not seem surprised when I said, 'I have a question I want to ask.'

He smiled. 'Christmas is a good time for questions.'

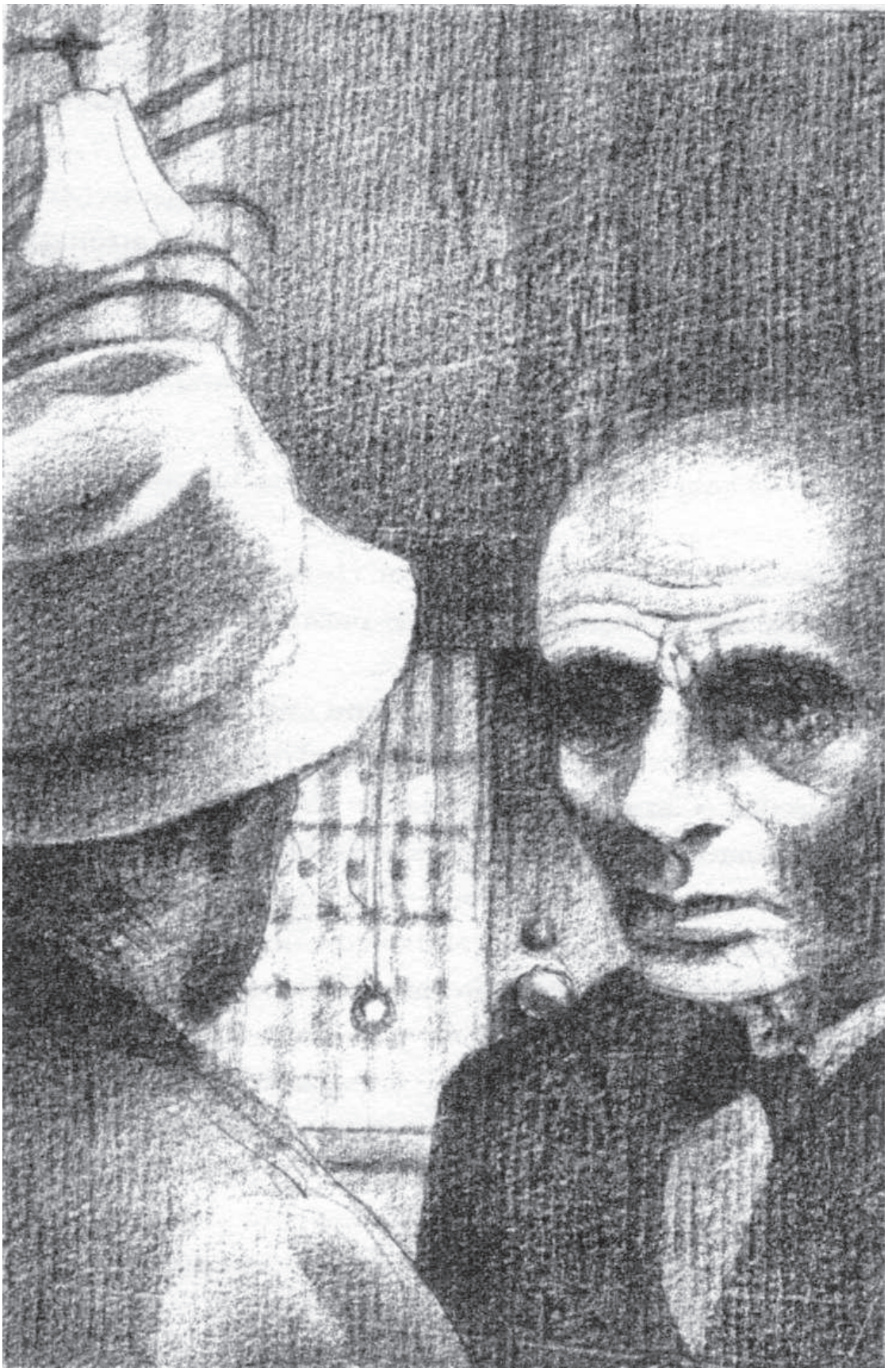
Somewhere, in another room, I could hear the TICK-TOCK sound of a large clock. The sound of time passing away. I could smell old leather and oiled wood.

'But I must warn you,' Stevens went on, 'that it's better not to ask too much. Not if you want to keep coming here.'

'People have been closed out for asking too much?' *Closed out* were not really the words I wanted, but they were as close as I could get.

'No,' Stevens said. His voice was low and polite, as usual. 'They just choose to stay away.'

I looked at his eyes . . . and felt as if someone had placed a large, cold hand on my back. I found myself remembering that strange snake-through-the-mud sound which I had heard one night. How many rooms *were* there here?



Stevens's voice was as polite and calm as it always was, but there was something terrible . . .in his eyes? . . . no, not just in his eyes but all around me.

'If you still have a question, Mr Adley, perhaps you should ask it. The evening is almost over —

'And you have a long train ride home?' I asked, but Stevens only looked at me without answering. 'All right,' I said. 'There are books in this library that I can't find in any other place - not in the New York Library, not in any of the old bookshops in the city. The billiard table in the Small Room is made by a company called Nord. But I've discovered that there is no company called Nord which makes billiard tables.'

'What is your question, Mr Adley?'

His voice was as polite and calm as it always was, but there was suddenly something terrible . . . in his eyes? . . . no, not just in his eyes but all around *me.* And the TICK-TOCK from that other room was not the sound of a clock any more. It was the sound of a hangman's impatient foot as he waits for the criminal to come to his death.

Oh, Stevens knew my question. I could see that. I could see it in his grey eyes.

Where do all these things come from? I wanted to ask. *Oh, I know where you come from, Stevens. That accent is pure Brooklyn, New York. But where do you go? What has put that timeless look in your eyes and on your face. And, Stevens — where are we AT THIS SECOND?*

But he was waiting for my question.

I opened my mouth.

And the question that came out was: 'Are there many more rooms upstairs?'

His eyes did not leave mine. 'Oh, yes, sir,' he said. 'A great many. A man can get lost. In fact, men *have* got lost. Sometimes, it seems to me, they go on for miles. Rooms and rooms and more rooms.'

'And entrances and exits?'

His eyebrows went up a little. 'Oh, yes. Entrances and exits.'

He waited, but I had asked enough, I decided. I had come to the very edge of something that might, perhaps, drive me mad.

'Thank you, Stevens.'

'Of course, sir.' He held out my overcoat and I put it on.

'There will be more tales?' I said.

'Here, sir, there are *always* more tales.'

•

That evening was some time ago now, and my memory is no better than it was then. But I remember very clearly the fear I felt — like a knife pushed into me — when Stevens opened the door wide. I was certain I was going to see some other world out there. Some terrible, horrible, *hell-like* world. I cannot explain it, but I tell you that there is a world like that. I am as sure of that as McCarron was sure that Sandra Stansfield's head went on breathing. For one moment, I thought that the door would open and Stevens would push me into that world, and then I would hear that door shut firmly behind me. For ever.

But I saw 35th Street and a taxi standing by the side of the road.

'Yes, always more tales,' Stevens repeated. 'Good night, sir.'

Always more tales.

And there have been.

And, one day soon, perhaps I'll tell you another.

ACTIVITIES

Chapter 1

Before you read

1 The people in this book enjoy telling and listening to mysterious and frightening stories. Do you enjoy these kinds of stories? Why, or why not?

2 Find these words in your dictionary.

author *billiards* *drown* *Martini*
overcoat *publisher* *suspect* *tale*

Which of them are connected with

a water? **b** parties? **c** winter? **d** books? **e** games?

Write a sentence using the word you haven't used.

3 Who would you most like to meet at a party, a *poet* or a *general?* Why?

After you read

4 Match the descriptions on the right with the people on the left.

a	Stevens	dies before hearing *The Breathing Method.*
b	George Waterhouse	is an author.
c	Emlyn McCarron	is married to Ellen.
d	David Adley	looks after the bar.
e	Edward Seville	tells the story *The Breathing Method.*
f	Harry Stein	is the boss of a law company.

5 Are these sentences true or false? Correct the false one.

a David is over seventy years old.
b Stevens speaks with an English accent.
c The Club is open once a week.
d Ellen thinks the Club is a good idea.
e David becomes a member of the Club.

6 On page 8, David talks about 'strange feelings' that he has had. Find examples of these strange thoughts and feelings.

7 Choose the correct ending to these sentences.

a David feels afraid because
(i) people are watching him from the windows.
(ii) nobody has heard of Stedham and Son.
(iii) he hears a strange noise at the Club,

b Stevens is unusual because
(i) he never smiles.
(ii) he never changes.
(iii) he never talks.

c Ellen is surprised because
(i) her husband becomes a partner at the law company.
(ii) someone she knows gets a lot of money.
(iii) her husband lies to her.

8 What makes David feel
a embarrassed? **b** happy? **c** excited? **d** frightened?
e confused?

9 What lies does David tell his wife? Why doesn't he tell her the truth, do you think?

Chapter 2

10 Find these words in your dictionary.
delivery room *pregnant* *roar* *statue* *vitamin* *womb*
Which of them are connected with
a giving birth? **b** famous people? **c** wild animals?
d keeping healthy?

11 How does a woman feel when she has *contractions?* Why?

12 McCarron's story is about an unmarried mother in the 1930s. What problems did unmarried mothers have in those days, do you think? Do they have the same problems now?

13 What does the title *The Breathing Method* mean, do you think? Can you think of *three* types of job or activity for which you need to breathe in a special way?

After you read

14 What do McCarron and his nurse think of Sandra Stansfield when they first meet her, and why? How do their opinions change later?

15 What four things does Dr McCarron tell Sandra to do to keep healthy?

16 According to Doctor McCarron, in what ways are attitudes towards having babies different today from 1935?

17 What do the underlined words mean?

a It's like the roar of a wild animal. (page 20)

b … when we remember <u>that other birth</u> … (page 21)

c '… <u>they</u> don't care who knows.' (page 21)

d I would be sorry if that happened, (page 23)

e … young people today would find <u>that</u> sort of thinking quite stupid, (page 24)

f I'm sure <u>that's</u> not true.' (page 25)

g That was strange. (page 25)

18 Work in pairs. Act out this conversation between Dr McCarron and another doctor. It is 1935, and you are talking about the best advice to give pregnant women.

Student A: You are McCarron. Talk about the importance of vitamins and exercise. Say why you think the other doctor's advice is bad.

Student B: You are the other doctor. You think that McCarron's ideas are crazy. You agree with all the other doctors who think that resting and smoking are the best things for pregnant women. Tell McCarron why he is wrong and you are right.

19 Which of these sentences about the Breathing Method are true? Correct the false ones.

a It was called the Lamaze Method in the 1930s.

b It was completely unknown in the 1930s.

c It sometimes doesn't work.

d A woman breathes deeply when the birth is very close.

20 How does Sandra's life change when people see that she is pregnant?

21 Put these things in the order they appear in the story, and say how they are important.

a dream / a photograph / a kiss / a blind woman / a ring

22 Why does Sandra say her ring is 'awful'?

23 What is described as being like these, and why?

a a bullet from a gun
b blood
c a bomb
d an old newspaper
e diamonds
f a man who is drunk
g milk

Chapter 3

Before you read

24 When McCarron has finished speaking, Adley wants to know more about one of the characters in the story. What question does Adley ask McCarron, do you think?

25 What does Adley describe as being like these, and why?

a a large, cold hand
b the sound of a hangman's foot

26 Why doesn't Adley ask Stevens the questions he wants to ask, do you think?

27 Work in pairs. Act out this imaginary conversation between Adley and a young friend.

Student A: You are Adley. The Club needs some new, young people. Tell your friend about the Club, and invite him to come with you one Thursday night.

Student B: You are Adley's young friend. You don't think the Club sounds very interesting. Tell Adley why you prefer to stay at home and watch television.

28 If you were Adley, would you go back to the Club again? Why, or why not?

Writing

29 You are Sandra Stansfield. It's two days before Christmas. Write your thoughts and feelings about Dr McCarron in your diary. Describe how he has helped you, and explain why you think something terrible is going to happen to you.

30 You are one of the witnesses of the accident in which Sandra

Stansfield dies. Write a report describing how the accident happens and what you see immediately after it.

31 You are Norman Stett. Write his story about the man who drowns in a telephone box.

32 You are Ellen Adley. Write a letter to your sister describing your husband's strange behaviour after his first two visits to the Club. Tell her what you think really goes on there.

33 Write a story about something strange and mysterious that happened to you which other people found hard to believe.

34 You are Stevens. Write about what you do every Thursday night after the last person has left the Club, and what you do during the day. What do like most about your life, and what do you enjoy least?

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