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FROM A BUICK 8

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# KING

FROM A BUICK 8

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Hodder & Stoughton

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First published in Great Britain in 2002 by Hodder and Stoughton  
A division of Hodder Headline

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A CIP catalogue record for this title is  
available from the British Library

ISBN 0 340 77070 8

Typeset in Bembo by Palimpsest Book Production Limited,  
Polmont, Stirlingshire  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

Hodder and Stoughton  
A division of Hodder Headline  
338 Euston Road  
London NW1 3BH

## FROM A BUICK 8

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‘Excellent on police lore and procedure . . . enriched by a double plot that shows men ageing, changing and disappearing over two decades . . . Impressive in its handling of narrative voice and structure as well as character’ – *The Sunday Times*

‘A voice as distinctive as it is compelling’ – *Scotsman*

‘One of his freshest and most original books . . . a beautifully balanced book. What really elevates this novel is its clever construction . . . *From a Buick 8* is a beautiful excursion into new narrative territory showing an accomplished storyteller making unusual choices and resisting the obvious at every turn. This book shrugs off interpretation and is as alien and bewitching as the Buick 8 itself, a portal into King’s incredible imagination’ – Matt Thorne, *Independent on Sunday*

## EVERYTHING'S EVENTUAL

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‘Stephen King is blessed with an apparently inexhaustible imagination and a talent for storytelling that shows little sign of waning. In his hands, at least, the art is far from being lost’ – *Daily Mail*

‘Still on top of his game . . . An unusual and disturbing mix that no other modern writer could pull off’ – *The Times*

‘He is a great teller of tales’ – *Irish Times*

*By Stephen King and available from New English Library*

FICTION:

Carrie  
'Salem's Lot  
The Shining  
Night Shift  
The Stand  
Christine  
The Talisman (with Peter Straub)  
Pet Sematary  
It  
Misery  
The Tommyknockers  
The Dark Half  
Four Past Midnight  
Needful Things  
Gerald's Game  
Dolores Claiborne  
Nightmares and Dreamscapes  
Insomnia  
Rose Madder  
Desperation  
The Dark Tower I: The Gunslinger  
The Dark Tower II: The Drawing of the Three  
The Dark Tower III: The Waste Lands  
The Dark Tower IV: Wizard and Glass  
Bag of Bones  
The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon  
Hearts in Atlantis  
Dreamcatcher  
Everything's Eventual

*By Stephen King as Richard Bachman*

Thinner  
The Bachman Books  
The Regulators

NON-FICTION:

On Writing (A Memoir of the Craft)

## DREAMCATCHER

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'King retains his crown' – *Guardian*

'Nobody does it better' – *Daily Telegraph*

'Yet another masterpiece from Stephen King . . . a narrative that never loosens its grip' – *Evening Standard*

'King has inspired a whole generation to read. He's made them read good, witty prose . . . a fabulous teller of stories who can create an entire new world and make the reader live in it . . . *Dreamcatcher* must be one of his best' – *Express*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Stephen King was born in Portland, Maine, in 1947. He won a scholarship award to the University of Maine and later taught English, while his wife, Tabitha, got her degree.

It was the publication of his first novel *Carrie* and its subsequent film adaptation that set him on his way to his present position as perhaps the bestselling author in the world.

*Carrie* was followed by a string of bestsellers including *The Shining*, *It*, *Misery*, *Bag of Bones*, *On Writing* (A Memoir of the Craft) and *Dreamcatcher*.

He lives in Bangor, Maine, with his wife, novelist, Tabitha King.



NOW:

*Sandy*

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Curt Wilcox's boy came around the barracks a lot the year after his father died, I mean a lot, but nobody ever told him get out the way or asked him what in *hail* he was doing there again. We understood what he was doing: trying to hold on to the memory of his father. Cops know a lot about the psychology of grief; most of us know more about it than we want to.

That was Ned Wilcox's senior year at Statler High. He must have quit the football team; when it came time for choosing, he picked D Troop instead. Hard to imagine a kid doing that, choosing unpaid choring over all those Friday night games and Saturday night parties, but that's what he did. I don't think any of us talked to him about that choice, but we respected him for it. He had decided the time had come to put the games away, that's all. Grown men are frequently incapable of making such decisions; Ned made his at an age when he still couldn't buy a legal drink. Or a legal pack of smokes, for that matter. I think his dad would have been proud. Know it, actually.

Given how much the boy was around, I suppose it was inevitable he'd see what was out in Shed B, and ask someone what it was and what it was doing there. I was the one he was

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most likely to ask, because I'd been his father's closest friend. Closest one that was still a Trooper, at least. I think maybe I wanted it to happen. Kill or cure, the oldtimers used to say. Give that curious cat a serious dose of satisfaction.

What happened to Curtis Wilcox was simple. A veteran county drunk, one Curt himself knew well and had arrested six or eight times, took his life. The drunk, Bradley Roach, didn't mean to hurt anyone; drunks so rarely do. That doesn't keep you from wanting to kick their numb asses all the way to Rocksburg, of course.

Toward the end of a hot July afternoon in the year oh-one, Curtis pulled over one of those big sixteen-wheelers, an interstate landcruiser that had left the fourlane because its driver was hoping for a home-cooked meal instead of just another dose of I-87 Burger King or Taco Bell. Curt was parked on the tarmac of the abandoned Jenny station at the intersection of Pennsylvania State Road 32 and the Humboldt Road – the very place, in other words, where that damned old Buick Roadmaster showed up in our part of the known universe all those years ago. You can call that a coincidence if you want to, but I'm a cop and don't believe in coincidences, only chains of event which grow longer and ever more fragile until either bad luck or plain old human mean-heartedness breaks them.

Ned's father took out after that semi because it had a flapper. When it went by he saw rubber spinning out from one of the rear tires like a big black pinwheel. A lot of independents run on recaps, with the price of diesel so high they just about have to, and sometimes the tread peels loose. You see curls and hunks of it on the interstate all the time,

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lying on the highway or pushed off into the breakdown lane like the shed skins of giant blacksnakes. It's dangerous to be behind a flapper, especially on a twolane like SR 32, a pretty but neglected stretch of state highway running between Rocksburg and Statler. A big enough chunk might break some unlucky follow-driver's windshield. Even if it didn't, it could startle the operator into the ditch, or a tree, or over the embankment and into Redfern Stream, which matches 32 twist for twist over a distance of nearly six miles.

Curt lit his bar lights, and the trucker pulled over like a good boy. Curt pulled over right behind him, first calling in his 20 and the nature of his stop and waiting for Shirley to acknowledge. With that done, he got out and walked toward the truck.

If he'd gone directly to where the driver was leaning out and looking back at him, he might still be on Planet Earth today. But he stopped to examine the flapper on the rear outside tire, even gave it a good yank to see if he could pull it off. The trucker saw all of it, and testified to it in court. Curt stopping to do that was the last link save one in the chain that brought his boy to Troop D and eventually made him a part of what we are. The very last link, I'd say, was Bradley Roach leaning over to get another brewski out of the six-pack sitting on the floor in the passenger footwell of his old Buick Regal (not *the* Buick, but *another* Buick, yes – it's funny how, when you look back on disasters and love affairs, things seem to line up like planets on an astrologer's chart). Less than a minute later, Ned Wilcox and his sisters were short a daddy and Michelle Wilcox was short a husband.

★ ★ ★

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Not very long after the funeral, Curt's boy started showing up at the Troop D House. I'd come in for the three-to-eleven that fall (or maybe just to check on things; when you're the wheeldog, it's hard to stay away) and see the boy before I saw anyone else, like as not. While his friends were over at Floyd B. Clouse Field behind the high school, running plays and hitting the tackling dummies and giving each other high-fives, Ned would be out on the front lawn of the barracks by himself, bundled up in his green and gold high school jacket, making big piles of fallen leaves. He'd give me a wave and I'd return it: right back atcha, kid. Sometimes after I parked, I'd come out front and shoot the shit with him. He'd tell me about the foolishness his sisters were up to just lately, maybe, and laugh, but you could see his love for them even when he was laughing at them. Sometimes I'd just go in the back way and ask Shirley what was up. Law enforcement in western Pennsylvania would fall apart without Shirley Pasternak, and you can take that to the bank.

Come winter, Ned was apt to be around back in the parking lot, where the Troopers keep their personal vehicles, running the snowblower. The Dadier brothers, two local wide boys, are responsible for our lot, but Troop D sits in the Amish country on the edge of the Short Hills, and when there's a big storm the wind blows drifts across the lot again almost as soon as the plow leaves. Those drifts look to me like an enormous white ribcage. Ned was a match for them, though. There he'd be, even if it was only eight degrees and the wind still blowing a gale across the hills, dressed in a snowmobile suit with his green and gold jacket pulled over the top of it, leather-lined police-issue gloves on his

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hands and a ski-mask pulled down over his face. I'd wave. He'd give me a little right-back-atcha, then go on gobbling up the drifts with the snowblower. Later he might come in for coffee, or maybe a cup of hot chocolate. Folks would drift over and talk to him, ask him about school, ask him if he was keeping the twins in line (the girls were ten in the winter of oh-one, I think). They'd ask if his Mom needed anything. Sometimes that would include me, if no one was hollering too loud or if the paperwork wasn't too heavy. None of the talk was about his father; all of the talk was about his father. You understand.

Raking leaves and making sure the drifts didn't take hold out there in the parking lot was really Arky Arkanian's responsibility. Arky was the custodian. He was one of us as well, though, and he never got shirty or went territorial about his job. Hell, when it came to snowblowing the drifts, I'll bet Arky just about got down on his knees and thanked God for the kid. Arky was sixty by then, had to have been, and his own football-playing days were long behind him. So were the ones when he could spend an hour and a half outside in ten-degree temperatures (twenty-five below, if you factored in the wind chill) and hardly feel it.

And then the kid started in with Shirley, technically Police Communications Officer Pasternak. By the time spring rolled around, Ned was spending more and more time with her in her little dispatch cubicle with the phones, the TDD (telephonic device for the deaf), the Trooper Location Board (also known as the D-map), and the computer console that's the hot center of that high-pressure little world. She showed him the bank of phones (the most important is the red one, which is our end of 911). She

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explained about how the traceback equipment had to be tested once a week, and how it was done, and how you had to confirm the duty-roster daily, so you'd know who was out patrolling the roads of Statler, Lassburg, and Pogus City, and who was due in court or off-duty.

'My nightmare is losing an officer without knowing he's lost,' I overheard her telling Ned one day.

'Has that ever happened?' Ned asked. 'Just . . . losing a guy?'

'Once,' she said. 'Before my time. Look here, Ned, I made you a copy of the call-codes. We don't have to use them anymore, but all the Troopers still do. If you want to run dispatch, you have to know these.'

Then she went back to the four basics of the job, running them past him yet again: know the location, know the nature of the incident, know what the injuries are, if any, and know the closest available unit. Location, incident, injuries, CAU, that was her mantra.

*I thought: He'll be running it next. She means to have him running it. Never mind that if Colonel Teague or someone from Scranton comes in and sees him doing it she'd lose her job, she means to have him running it.*

And by the good goddam, there he was a week later, sitting at PCO Pasternak's desk in the dispatch cubicle, at first only while she ran to the bathroom but then for longer and longer periods while she went across the room for coffee or even out back for a smoke.

The first time the boy saw me seeing him in there all alone, he jumped and then gave a great big guilty smile, like a kid who is surprised in the rumpus room by his mother while he's still got his hand on his girlfriend's tit. I gave him

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a nod and went right on about my beeswax. Never thought twice about it, either. Shirley had turned over the dispatch operation of Statler Troop D to a kid who still only needed to shave three times a week, almost a dozen Troopers were out there at the other end of the gear in that cubicle, but I didn't even slow my stride. We were still talking about his father, you see. Shirley and Arky as well as me and the other uniforms Curtis Wilcox had served with for over twenty years. You don't always talk with your mouth. Sometimes what you say with your mouth hardly matters at all. You have to *signify*.

When I was out of his sightline, though, I stopped. Stood there. Listened. Across the room, in front of the highway-side windows, Shirley Pasternak stood looking back at me with a Styrofoam cup of coffee in her hand. Next to her was Phil Candleton, who had just clocked off and was once more dressed in his civvies; he was also staring in my direction.

In the dispatch cubicle, the radio crackled. 'Statler, this is 12,' a voice said. Radio distorts, but I still knew all of my men. That was Eddie Jacobois.

'This is Statler, go ahead,' Ned replied. Perfectly calm. If he was afraid of fucking up, he was keeping it out of his voice.

'Statler, I have a Volkswagen Jetta, tag is 14-0-7-3-9 Foxtrot, that's P-A, stopped County Road 99. I need a 10-28, come back?'

Shirley started across the floor, moving fast. A little coffee sloshed over the rim of the Styrofoam cup in her hand. I took her by the elbow, stopping her. Eddie Jacobois was out there on a county road, he'd just stopped a Jetta for

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some violation – speeding was the logical assumption – and he wanted to know if there were any red flags on the plate or the plateholder. He wanted to know because he was going to get out of his cruiser and approach the Jetta. He wanted to know because he was going to put his ass out on the line, same today as every day. Was the Jetta maybe stolen? Had it been involved in an accident at any time during the last six months? Had its owner been in court on charges of spousal abuse? Had he shot anyone? Robbed or raped anyone? Were there even outstanding parking tickets?

Eddie had a right to know these things, if they were in the database. But Eddie also had a right to know why it was a high school kid who had just told him *This is Statler, go ahead*. I thought it was Eddie's call. If he came back with *Where the hell is Shirley*, I'd let go of her arm. And if Eddie rolled with it, I wanted to see what the kid would do. *How* the kid would do.

'Unit 12, hold for reply.' If Ned was popping a sweat, it still didn't show in his voice. He turned to the computer monitor and keyed in Uniscope, the search engine used by the Pennsylvania State Police. He hit the keys rapidly but cleanly, then punched ENTER.

There followed a moment of silence in which Shirley and I stood side by side, saying nothing and hoping in perfect unison. Hoping that the kid wouldn't freeze, hoping that he wouldn't suddenly push back the chair and bolt for the door, hoping most of all that he had sent the right code to the right place. It seemed like a long moment. I remember I heard a bird calling outside and, very distant, the drone of a plane. There was time to think about those chains of event some people insist on calling coincidence. One of those



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chains had broken when Ned's father died on Route 32; here was another, just beginning to form. Eddie Jacubois – never the sharpest knife in the drawer, I'm afraid – was now joined to Ned Wilcox. Beyond him, one link farther down the new chain, was a Volkswagen Jetta. And whoever was driving it.

Then: '12, this is Statler.'

'12.'

'Jetta is registered to William Kirk Frady of Pittsburgh. He is previous . . . uh . . . wait . . .'

It was his only pause, and I could hear the hurried riffle of paper as he looked for the card Shirley had given him, the one with the call-codes on it. He found it, looked at it, tossed it aside with an impatient little grunt. Through all this, Eddie waited patiently in his cruiser twelve miles west. He would be looking at Amish buggies, maybe, or a farmhouse with the curtain in one of the front windows pulled aslant, indicating that the Amish family living inside included a daughter of marriageable age, or over the hazy hills to Ohio. Only he wouldn't really be seeing any of those things. The only thing Eddie was seeing at that moment – seeing clearly – was the Jetta parked on the shoulder in front of him, the driver nothing but a silhouette behind the wheel. And what was he, that driver? Rich man? Poor man? Beggarman? Thief?

Finally Ned just said it, which was exactly the right choice. '12, Frady is DUI times three, do you copy?'

Drunk man, that's what the Jetta's driver was. Maybe not right now, but if he had been speeding, the likelihood was high.