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'One of the great storytellers of our time' *Guardian*

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PRAISE FOR STEPHEN KING

'An incredibly gifted writer' – *Guardian*

'A writer of excellence . . . King is one of the most fertile storytellers of the modern novel . . . brilliantly done'

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‘King cannot be faulted as a yarn-spinner’ – *The Times*

‘Stephen King is one of America’s finest writers’ – *Scotsman*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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 Stand*, *Misery*, *Bag of Bones*, *Hearts in Atlantis*, *On Writing* (A Memoir of the Craft) and *Dreamcatcher*.

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

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This book is gratefully dedicated to my children.
My mother and my wife taught me how to be a
man. My children taught me how to be free.

NAOMI RACHEL KING, at fourteen;
JOSEPH HILLSTROM KING, at twelve;
OWEN PHILIP KING, at seven.

Kids, fiction is the truth inside the lie, and the
truth of this fiction is simple enough: *the magic
exists.*

S.K.

‘This old town been home long as I remember
This town gonna be here long after I’m gone.
East side west side take a close look ’round her
You been down but you’re still in my bones.’

– The Michael Stanley Band

‘Old friend, what are you looking for?
After those many years abroad you come
With images you tended
Under foreign skies
Far away from your own land.’

– George Seferis

‘Out of the blue and into the black.’

– Neil Young

CONTENTS

PART 1: THE SHADOW BEFORE

- 1 After the Flood (1957) 15
- 2 After the Festival (1984) 29
- 3 Six Phone Calls (1985) 51

- Derry: The First Interlude* 151

PART 2: JUNE OF 1958

- 4 Ben Hanscom Takes a Fall 171
- 5 Bill Denbrough Beats the Devil – I 224
- 6 One of the Missing: A Tale from the Summer of '58 253
- 7 The Dam in the Barrens 291
- 8 Georgie's Room and the House on Neibolt Street 322
- 9 Cleaning Up 386

- Derry: The Second Interlude* 435

PART 3: GROWNUPS

- 10 The Reunion 473
- 11 Walking Tours 530
- 12 Three Uninvited Guests 604

- Derry: The Third Interlude* 631

PART 4: JULY OF 1958

- 13 The Apocalyptic Rockfight 649
 - 14 The Album 690
 - 15 The Smoke-Hole 722
 - 16 Eddie's Bad Break 751
 - 17 Another One of the Missing:
The Death of Patrick Hockstetter 793
 - 18 The Bullseye 827
- Derry: The Fourth Interlude* 865

PART 2: THE RITUAL OF CHÜD

- 19 In the Watches of the Night 883
 - 20 The Circle Closes 967
 - 21 Under the City 989
 - 22 The Ritual of Chüd 1031
 - 23 Out 1068
- Derry: The Last Interlude* 1093

EPILOGUE:

- BILL DENBROUGH BEATS
THE DEVIL – II 1105**

PART I



THE SHADOW BEFORE

‘They begin!
The perfections are sharpened
The flower spreads its colored petals
wide in the sun
But the tongue of the bee
misses them
They sink back into the loam
crying out
– you may call it a cry
that creeps over them, a shiver
as they wilt and disappear. . . .’

– William Carlos Williams,
Paterson

“Born down in a dead man’s town”
– Bruce Springsteen

CHAPTER 1

After the Flood (1957)

1

The terror, which would not end for another twenty-eight years – if it ever did end – began, so far as I know or can tell, with a boat made from a sheet of newspaper floating down a gutter swollen with rain.

The boat bobbed, listed, righted itself again, dived bravely through treacherous whirlpools, and continued on its way down Witcham Street toward the traffic light which marked the intersection of Witcham and Jackson. The three vertical lenses on all sides of the traffic light were dark this afternoon in the fall of 1957, and the houses were all dark, too. There had been steady rain for a week now, and two days ago the winds had come as well. Most sections of Derry had lost their power then, and it was not back on yet.

A small boy in a yellow slicker and red galoshes ran cheerfully along beside the newspaper boat. The rain had not stopped, but it was finally slackening. It tapped on the yellow hood of the boy's slicker, sounding to his ears like rain on a shed roof . . . a comfortable, almost cozy sound. The boy in the yellow slicker was George Denbrough. He was six. His brother, William, known to most of the kids at Derry Elementary School (and even to the teachers, who would never have used the nickname to his face) as Stuttering Bill, was at home, hacking out the last of a nasty case of influenza. In that autumn of 1957, eight months before the real horrors began and twenty-eight years before the final showdown, Stuttering Bill was ten years old.

Bill had made the boat beside which George now ran. He had made it sitting up in bed, his back propped against a pile of pillows,

while their mother played *Für Elise* on the piano in the parlor and rain swept restlessly against his bedroom window.

About three-quarters of the way down the block as one headed toward the intersection and the dead traffic light, Witcham Street was blocked to motor traffic by smudgepots and four orange sawhorses. Stencilled across each of the horses was DERRY DEPT. OF PUBLIC WORKS. Beyond them, the rain had spilled out of gutters clogged with branches and rocks and big sticky piles of autumn leaves. The water had first pried fingerholds in the paving and then snatched whole greedy handfuls – all of this by the third day of the rains. By noon of the fourth day, big chunks of the street's surface were boating through the intersection of Jackson and Witcham like miniature white-water rafts. By that time, many people in Derry had begun to make nervous jokes about arks. The Public Works Department had managed to keep Jackson Street open, but Witcham was impassable from the sawhorses all the way to the center of town.

But, everyone agreed, the worst was over. The Kenduskeag Stream had crested just below its banks in the Barrens and bare inches below the concrete sides of the Canal which channelled it tightly as it passed through downtown. Right now a gang of men – Zack Denbrough, George's and Bill's father, among them – were removing the sandbags they had thrown up the day before with such panicky haste. Yesterday overflow and expensive flood damage had seemed almost inevitable. God knew it had happened before – the flooding in 1931 had been a disaster which had cost millions of dollars and almost two dozen lives. That was a long time ago, but there were still enough people around who remembered it to scare the rest. One of the flood victims had been found twenty-five miles east, in Bucksport. The fish had eaten this unfortunate gentleman's eyes, three of his fingers, his penis, and most of his left foot. Clutched in what remained of his hands had been a Ford steering wheel.

Now, though, the river was receding, and when the new Bangor Hydro dam went in upstream, the river would cease to be a threat. Or so said Zack Denbrough, who worked for Bangor Hydroelectric. As for the rest – well, future floods could take care of themselves. The thing was to get through this one, to get the power back on, and then to forget it. In Derry such forgetting of tragedy and disaster was almost an art, as Bill Denbrough would come to discover in the course of time.

George paused just beyond the sawhorses at the edge of a deep