

The Whole Town's Sleeping

Ray Bradbury, 1950

In this extract, a woman is walking home alone after watching a film at the cinema with friends. She fears that she is being followed and descends into a state of paranoia and terror. Is someone really following her, or is it just her imagination?

Silence. A summer-night silence which lay for a thousand miles, which covered the earth like a white and shadowy sea. Faster, faster! She went down the steps. Run! Only a little way, she prayed. One hundred eight, nine, one hundred ten steps! The bottom! Now, run! Across the bridge! She told her legs what to do, her arms, her body, her terror; she advised all parts of herself in this white and terrible moment, over the roaring creek waters, on the hollow, thudding, swaying almost alive, resilient bridge planks she ran, followed by the wild footsteps behind, behind.

He's following. Don't turn, don't look! If you see him, you'll not be able to move, you'll be so frightened. Just run, run! She ran across the bridge. Oh, God, God, please, please let me get up the hill! Now up the path, now between the hills, oh God, it's dark, and everything so far away. If I screamed now it wouldn't help; I can't scream anyway. Here's the top of the path, here's the street, oh, God, please let me be safe, if I get home safe I'll never go out alone; I was a fool, let me admit it, I was a fool, I didn't know what terror was, but if you let me get home from this I'll never go without Helen or Francine again! Here's the street. Across the street! She crossed the street and rushed up the sidewalk. Oh God, the porch! My house! Oh God, please give me time to get inside and lock the door and I'll be safe! And there—silly thing to notice—why did she notice, instantly, no time, no time—but there it was anyway, flashing by—there on the porch rail, the half-filled glass of lemonade she had abandoned a long time, a year, half an evening ago! The lemonade glass sitting calmly, imperturbably there on the rail . . . and . . .

She heard her clumsy feet on the porch and listened and felt her hands scrabbling and ripping at the lock with the key. She heard her heart. She heard her inner voice screaming. The key fit. Unlock the door, quick, quick! The door opened. Now - inside! Slam it! She slammed the door. "Now lock it, bar it, lock it!" she gasped wretchedly. "Lock it, tight, tight!" The door was locked and bolted tight. She listened to her heart again and the sound of it diminishing into silence. Home! Oh God, safe at home! Safe, safe and safe at home! She slumped against the door. Safe, safe. Listen. Not a sound. Safe, safe, oh thank God, safe at home. I'll never go out at night again. I'll stay home. I won't go over that ravine again ever. Safe, oh safe, safe home, so good, so good, safe! Safe inside, the door locked. Wait. Look out the window. She looked. Why, there's no one there at all!

Nobody. There was nobody following me at all. Nobody running after me. She got her breath and almost laughed at herself. It stands to reason. If a man had been following me, he'd have caught me! I'm not a fast runner. . . . There's no-one on the porch or in the yard. How silly of me. I wasn't running from anything. That ravine's as safe as anyplace. Just the same, it's nice to be home. Home's the really good warm place, the only place to be.

She put her hand out to the light switch and stopped. "What?" she asked. "What, what?" Behind her in the living room, someone cleared his throat.

Q1a: Read the **first** paragraph. List **two** details given about the **setting**.

- A. _____
- B. _____

Q1b: Now read the **second** paragraph. List **two** things the narrator asks God's help for.

- A. _____
- B. _____ (4 marks)

Q2: Read the **third** paragraph. How does the writer use language to describe the woman's fears?

You could include:

- The writer's choice of words and phrases
- Language features and techniques
- Sentence forms (8 marks)

Q3: You need to think about the **whole extract** now.

How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader? (8 marks)

You could write about:

- What the writer focuses your attention on at the beginning
- How and why the writer changes this focus as the extract develops
- Any other structural features that interest you