

PET SEMATARY

by Stephen King

Here are some people who have written books, telling what they did and why they did those things:

John Dean. Henry Kissinger. Adolph Hitler. Caryl Chessman. Jeb Magruder. Napoleon. Talleyrand. Disraeli. Robert Zimmerman, also known as Bob Dylan. Locke. Charlton Heston. Errol Flynn. The Ayatollah Khomeini. Gandhi. Charles Olson. Charles Colson. A Victorian Gentleman. Dr. X.

Most people also believe that God has written a Book, or Books, telling what He did and why—at least to a degree—He did those things, and since most of these people also believe that humans were made in the image of God, then He also may be regarded as a person ... or, more properly, as a Person.

Here are some people who have not written books, telling what they did ... and what they saw:

The man who buried Hitler. The man who performed the autopsy on John Wilkes Booth. The man who embalmed Elvis Presley. The man who embalmed—badly, most undertakers say—Pope John XXIII. The twoscore undertakers who cleaned up Jonestown, carrying body bags, spearing paper cups with those spikes custodians carry in city parks, waving away the flies. The man who cremated William Holden. The man who encased the body of Alexander the Great in gold so it would not rot. The men who mummified the Pharaohs.

Death is a mystery, and burial is a secret.

PART ONE
THE PET SEMATARY

Jesus said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go, that I may awake him out of his sleep."

Then the disciples looked at each other, and some smiled because they did not know Jesus had spoken in a figure. "Lord, if he sleeps, he shall do well."

So then Jesus spoke to them more plainly, "Lazarus is dead, yes ... nevertheless let us go to him."

—JOHN'S GOSPEL (paraphrase)

Chapter One

Louis Creed, who had lost his father at three and who had never known a grandfather, never expected to find a father as he entered his middle age, but that was exactly what happened ... although he called this man a friend, as a grown man must do when he finds the man who should have been his father relatively late in life. He met this man on the evening he and his wife and his two children moved into the big white frame house in Ludlow. Winston Churchill moved in with them. Church was his daughter Eileen's cat.

The search committee at the university had moved slowly, the hunt for a house within commuting distance of the university had been hair-raising, and by the time they neared the place where he believed the house to be—*all the landmarks are right ... like the astrological signs the night before Caesar was assassinated*, Louis thought morbidly—they were all tired and tense and on edge.

Gage was cutting teeth and fussed almost ceaselessly. He would not sleep, no matter how much Rachel sang

to him. She offered him the breast even though it was off his schedule. Gage knew his dining schedule as well as she—better, maybe—and he promptly bit her with his new teeth. Rachel, still not entirely sure about this move to Maine from Chicago, where she had lived her whole life, burst into tears. Eileen promptly joined her. In the back of the station wagon, Church continued to pace restlessly as he had done for the last three days it had taken them to drive here from Chicago. His yowling from the cat kennel had been bad, but his restless pacing after they finally gave up and set him free in the car had been almost as unnerving.

Louis himself felt a little like crying. A wild but not unattractive idea suddenly came to him: he would suggest that they go back to Bangor for something to eat while they waited for the moving van, and when his three hostages to fortune got out, he would floor the accelerator and drive away without so much as a look back, foot to the mat, the wagon's huge four-barrel carburetor gobbling expensive gasoline.

He would drive south, all the way to Orlando, Florida, where he would get a job at Disney World as a medic, under a new name. But before he hit the turnpike—big old 95 southbound—he would stop by the side of the road and put the fucking cat out too.

Then they rounded a final curve, and there was the house that only he had seen up until now. He had flown out and looked at each of the seven possibles they had picked from photos once the position at the University

of Maine was solidly his, and this was the one he had chosen: a big old New England colonial (but newly sided and insulated; the heating costs, while horrible enough, were not out of line in terms of consumption), three big rooms downstairs, four more up, a long shed that might be converted to more rooms later on—all of it surrounded by a luxuriant sprawl of lawn, lushly green even in this August heat.

Beyond the house was a large field for the children to play in, and beyond the field were woods that went on damn near forever. The property abutted state lands, the realtor had explained, and there would be no development in the foreseeable future. The remains of the Micmac Indian tribe had laid claim to nearly eight thousand acres in Ludlow and in the towns east of Ludlow, and the complicated litigation, involving the federal government as well as that of the state, might stretch into the next century.

Rachel stopped crying abruptly. She sat up. “Is that—”

“That’s it,” Louis said. He felt apprehensive—no, he felt scared. In fact he felt *terrified*. He had mortgaged twelve years of their lives for this; it wouldn’t be paid off until Eileen was seventeen.

He swallowed.

“What do you think?”

“I think it’s *beautiful*,” Rachel said, and that was a huge weight off his chest—and off his mind. She wasn’t kidding, he saw; it was in the way she was looking at it

as they turned in the asphalted driveway that curved around to the shed in back, her eyes sweeping the blank windows, her mind already ticking away at such matters as curtains and oilcloth for the cupboards, and God knew what else.

“Daddy?” Ellie said from the back seat. She had stopped crying as well. Even Gage had stopped fussing. Louis savored the silence.

“What, love?”

Her eyes, brown under darkish blond hair in the rearview mirror, also surveyed the house, the lawn, the roof of another house off to the left in the distance, and the big field stretching up to the woods.

“Is this home?”

“It’s going to be, honey,” he said.

“*Hooray!*” she shouted, almost taking his ear off. And Louis, who could sometimes become very irritated with Ellie, decided he didn’t care if he ever clapped an eye on Disney World in Orlando.

He parked in front of the shed and turned off the wagon’s motor.

The engine ticked. In the silence, which seemed very big after Chicago and the bustle of State Street and the Loop, a bird sang sweetly in the late afternoon.

“Home,” Rachel said softly, still looking at the house.

“Home,” Gage said complacently on her lap.

Louis and Rachel stared at each other. In the rearview mirror, Eileen’s eyes widened.

“Did you—”

“Did he—”

“Was that—”

They all spoke together, then all laughed together. Gage took no notice; he only continued to suck his thumb. He had been saying “Ma” for almost a month now and had taken a stab or two at something that might have been “Daaa” or only wishful thinking on Louis’s part.

But this, either by accident of imitation, had been a real word. *Home*.

Louis plucked Gage from his wife’s lap and hugged him.

That was how they came to Ludlow.

Chapter Two

In Louis Creed's memory that one moment always held a magical quality—partly, perhaps, because it really was magical, but mostly because the rest of the evening was so wild. In the next three hours, neither peace nor magic made an appearance.

Louis had stored the house keys away neatly (he was a neat and methodical man, was Louis Creed) in a small manila envelope which he had labeled "Ludlow House—keys received June 29." He had put the keys away in the Fairlane's glove compartment. He was absolutely sure of that. Now they weren't there.

While he hunted for them, growing increasingly irritated, Rachel hoisted Gage onto her hip and followed Eileen over to the tree in the field. He was checking under the seats for the third time when his daughter screamed and then began to cry.

"Louis!" Rachel called. "She's cut herself!"

Eileen had fallen from the tire swing and hit a rock with her knee. The cut was shallow, but she was scream-

ing like someone who had just lost a leg, Louis thought (a bit ungenerously). He glanced at the house across the road, where a light burned in the living room.

“All right, Ellie,” he said. “That’s enough. Those people over there will think someone’s being murdered.”

“But it hurrrrts!”

Louis struggled with his temper and went silently back to the wagon. The keys were gone, but the first-aid kit was still in the glove compartment. He got it and came back. When Ellie saw it, she began to scream louder than ever.

“No! Not the stingy stuff! I don’t want the stingy stuff, Daddy! No—”

“Eileen, it’s just Mercurochrome, and it doesn’t sting—”

“Be a big girl,” Rachel said. “It’s just—”

“No-no-no-no-no—”

“You want to stop that or your ass will sting,” Louis said.

“She’s tired, Lou,” Rachel said quietly.

“Yeah, I know the feeling. Hold her leg out.”

Rachel put Gage down and held Eileen’s leg, which Louis painted with Mercurochrome in spite of her increasingly hysterical wails.

“Someone just came out on the porch of that house across the street,” Rachel said. She picked Gage up. He had started to crawl away through the grass. “Wonderful,” Louis muttered.

“Lou, she’s—”

“Tired, I know.” He capped the Mercurochrome and looked grimly at his daughter.

“There. And it really didn’t hurt a bit. Fess up, Ellie.”

“It does! It does hurt! It hurr—”

His hand itched to slap her and he grabbed his leg hard.

“Did you find the keys?” Rachel asked.

“Not yet,” Louis said, snapping the first-aid kit closed and getting up. “I’ll—”

Gage began to scream. He was not fussing or crying but really screaming, writhing in Rachel’s arms.

“What’s wrong with him?” Rachel cried, thrusting him almost blindly at Louis. It was, he supposed, one of the advantages of having married a doctor—you could shove the kid at your husband whenever the kid seemed to be dying. “Louis! What’s—”

The baby was grabbing frantically at his neck, screaming wildly. Louis flipped him over and saw an angry white knob rising on the side of Gage’s neck. And there was also something on the strap of his jumper, something fuzzy, squirming weakly.

Eileen, who had become quieter, began to scream again, “*Bee! Bee! BEEEEEE!*” She jumped back, tripped over the same protruding rock on which she had already come a cropper, sat down hard, and began to cry again in mingled pain, surprise, and fear.

I’m going crazy, Louis thought wonderingly. *Whewww!*

“Do something, Louis! Can’t you do something?”

“Got to get the stinger out,” a voice behind them drawled. “That’s the ticket. Get the stinger out and put some baking soda on it. Bump’ll go down.” But the voice was so thick with Down East accent that for a moment Louis’s tired, confused mind refused to translate the dialect: *Got t’get the stinga out ‘n put some bakin soda on’t. ‘T’ll go daown.*

He turned and saw an old man of perhaps seventy—a hale and healthy seventy—standing there on the grass. He wore a biballs over a blue chambray shirt that showed his thickly folded and wrinkled neck. His face was sunburned, and he was smoking an unfiltered cigarette. As Louis looked at him, the old man pinched the cigarette out between his thumb and forefinger and pocketed it neatly. He held out his hands and smiled crookedly ... a smile Louis liked at once—and he was not a man who “took” to people.

“Not to tell you y’business, Doc,” he said. And that was how Louis met Judson Crandall, the man who should have been his father.

Chapter Three

He had watched them arrive from across the street and had come across to see if he could help when it seemed they were “in a bit of a tight,” as he put it.

While Louis held the baby on his shoulder, Crandall stepped near, looked at the swelling on Gage’s neck, and reached out with one blocky, twisted hand. Rachel opened her mouth to protest—his hand looked terribly clumsy and almost as big as Gage’s head—but before she could say a word, the old man’s fingers had made a single decisive movement, as apt and deft as the fingers of a man walking cards across his knuckles or sending coins into conjurer’s limbo. And the stinger lay in his palm.

“Big ‘un,” he remarked. “No prize-winner, but it’d do for a ribbon, I guess.” Louis burst out laughing.

Crandall regarded him with that crooked smile and said, “Ayuh, corker, ain’t she?”

“What did he say, Mommy?” Eileen asked, and then Rachel burst out laughing too. Of course it was terribly impolite, but somehow it was okay. Crandall pulled out

a deck of Chesterfield Kings, poked one into the seamed corner of his mouth, nodded at them pleasantly as they laughed— even Gage was chortling now, in spite of the swelling of the bee sting—and popped a wooden match alight with his thumbnail. *The old have their tricks, Louis thought. Small ones, but some of them are good ones.*

He stopped laughing and held out the hand that wasn't supporting Gage's bottom—Gage's decidedly damp bottom. "I'm pleased to meet you, Mr.—"

"Jud Crandall," he said and shook. "You're the doc, I guess."

"Yes. Louis Creed. This is my wife Rachel, my daughter Ellie, and the kid with the bee sting is Gage."

"Nice to know all of you."

"I didn't mean to laugh ... that is, *we* didn't mean to laugh ... it's just that we're ... a little tired."

That—the understatement of it—caused him to giggle again. He felt totally exhausted.

Crandall nodded. "Course you are," he said, which came out: *Coss you aaa*. He glanced at Rachel. "Why don't you take your little boy and your daughter over to the house for a minute, Missus Creed? We can put some bakin soda on a washrag and cool that off some. My wife would like to say hello too. She don't get out too much. Arthritis got bad the last two or three years."

Rachel glanced at Louis, who nodded.

"That would be very kind of you, Mr. Crandall."

"Oh, I just answer to Jud," he said.