

Uneasy Homecoming

by Will F. Jenkins

Connie was glad to be going home. She and her husband, Tom, had enjoyed their trip. They had a wonderful time. The weather had been great. They had to return a day early, but she was glad to be back.

The taxi stopped in front of her house. It was easy to find. It was the only one on that side of the lake.

Connie paid the driver. He took out her suitcases and put them inside the door. Then he left. She heard the sound of the car as it moved away.

Connie walked across the room. She looked out the window. The sun was beginning to go down. She could see the houses on the other side of the lake. She had friends who lived over there. She would call some of them later to find out if anything was new.

The house looked neat, and it was good to be home. Tom would be back around midnight. He had stayed to take care of some last minute business.

Connie opened the front door to let in some fresh air. It was quiet outside the house. Birds usually sang during the day. But now it was getting dark. And there were no neighbors to make any sounds.

Connie went outside. She was eager to see her garden. The flowers looked beautiful in the dim light. She loved the smells of summer evenings.

Connie looked across the lake. She saw the lights in the houses there. Suddenly, Connie felt uneasy. She did not know why. But she felt that something was wrong.

Connie walked quickly toward the house. She heard her footsteps on the path. Leaves brushed against her feet. She told herself, "Don't rush. There is no need for you to hurry."

Connie came to the front of her house. She went inside and locked the

door. "Why am I so nervous?" she asked herself. She answered, "The trip was long. You're tired. It's dark. And you're alone."

Connie turned on the light in the hall. She turned on the lights in the other rooms. "Should I look upstairs?" she wondered. "No," she said, angry with herself. "You are being silly. Next you'll be looking under the beds."

Connie went into the living room. She sat in a chair and began to read. Still, she felt strange. She felt that something was wrong. She had the feeling that someone was staring at her. Someone in the darkness outside.

Connie walked over to the telephone. "I'm sure there is nothing wrong," she thought. "But I'll talk to someone for a while. That will make me feel better."

Connie picked up the phone. She called Mrs. Winston. Mrs. Winston lived on the other side of the lake. She was much older than Connie. Connie felt sorry for her. Mrs. Winston's life had been hard. She had many problems. When Connie talked to someone who needed help, her own troubles seemed to go away.

Mrs. Winston's voice was **cheerful** and bright.

"My dear Connie! How nice it is to have you back early!"

Connie felt better **immediately**. She said, "We had a wonderful trip. Tom is still away. He will be coming back later tonight."

Mrs. Winston sounded worried. She said, "I hope your house is all right. Is it, Connie? It's been terrible here. Did you hear?"

"No. Not a word since we left," Connie said. "What happened?"

Connie expected to hear that someone had been unkind to Charles. Charles was Mrs. Winston's only son. Connie didn't like Charles. He always seemed to be getting into trouble. He was caught stealing in school. He was thrown out of college. He kept getting into fights. Mrs. Winston said that he was just having a hard time growing up. But he was already twenty. Connie didn't care for Charles. But she did feel sorry for his mother.

Mrs. Winston's voice went on. She was telling Connie what had happened. Mrs. Winston's words hit Connie hard.

There had been several robberies in the town. The Hamiltons' house had been broken into while they were away. The same thing had happened

to the Blairs and the Craigs. And Saddler's shop had been robbed one night. The robbers took his watches and his cameras.

Connie's throat was dry. She said, "I'm sorry to hear about this. Tom won't be back until about midnight."

"But, my dear," Mrs. Winston said. "You mustn't stay there alone. What if they think that the house is empty? I'll find Charles. I'll have him come for you right away. You can spend the evening here. Then Charles can take you back when Tom gets home. At least there will be two of you in the house then."

Connie said, "Oh, no! That would be silly. I'm quite all right."

Connie hung up the phone. She moved to the stairs and looked at the darkness above. She decided that she had no reason to be afraid. She would not give in to foolish fear.

She took a suitcase. Then she climbed up the stairs. She went into the bedroom and turned on the light. She put down the suitcase. Then she looked around.



Something caught her eye. There was a newspaper on the chair. Connie picked up the newspaper. She stared at it. It had yesterday's date! Someone had been in the room! Someone had sat in that chair! Someone had been there reading that paper!

For a moment Connie could not move. Her body had turned to stone.

Connie looked around the room again. There was no one there. Connie looked at the bed. What was under the bed? Could someone be hiding under the bed?

Connie backed away from the bed. She sat down in the chair. Then she got up. She looked under the bed. There was no one there.

But *something* was there!

It was a large, heavy bag. Connie dragged out the bag. She emptied it onto the floor. There were cameras and watches. There were necklaces, bracelets, and rings. The cameras and watches must have come from Mr. Saddler's shop. The other things must have come from the houses that were robbed.

Connie stood there shocked. Her house had been used as a hiding place! The robbers had put those things there. But if they found out that she was back—

The lights in the house were on! The lights could be seen across the lake! They would know she was home!

Connie turned off the bedroom light. She turned off the light in the hall. She went downstairs. She made sure the front door was locked. She turned off the light in the living room. She went into the kitchen and found some matches. She might need them in the dark. Then she turned off the kitchen light. As it went off, she noticed the back door. It was not fully closed!

She stood there in darkness. She must get to the phone! She must call the police!

Connie made her way slowly across the room. There was a sound at the back door! Then she heard footsteps.

She was at the telephone now. But she could not speak. Her voice would tell where she was.

Then she saw a soft **glow**. The man at the back door was holding a

flashlight. He knew that she was in the house! He knew that she was hiding somewhere!

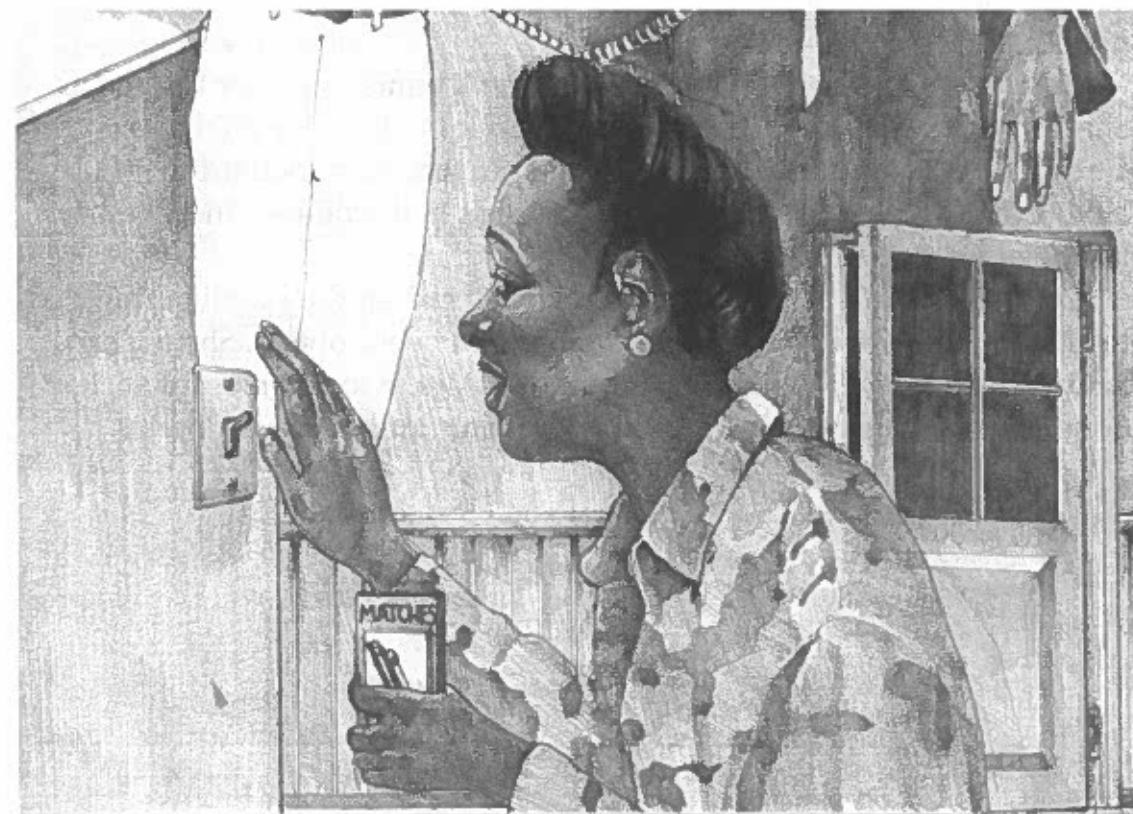
He went into the living room. She saw the glow of the light. He came back into the kitchen. He came toward the door. He came through the door. He was only three feet away! But she slipped quietly behind him. He did not think to turn around.

As he moved, she saw his face. She recognized him! She knew who he was!

He went into the dining room. He went into the kitchen and stood there listening. Then he went up the stairs.

Connie could not get out the front door. She would have to unlock it. But he had not closed the back door. She made her way toward it.

Then she was outside. There were stars above. She stepped onto the



grass and began to run.

She saw a motorcycle near the garage. It was his. She looked at the motorcycle. Then she had an idea. She found the gasoline cap and took it off. Then, with all her **strength**, she pushed the motorcycle and knocked it over. Gasoline ran out. It flowed onto the grass.

Connie reached into her pocket. She took out a match. She lit it. Then she dropped the match and quickly ran.

Connie hid in the shadows and watched. The flames from the gasoline leaped up. The fire would be seen across the lake. They would know that the fire was at Connie's house. Help would come soon. There would be many people and fire engines.

The flames grew higher and higher. Then a man came running out of the house. He ran toward the fire. He tried to put it out. But that was not possible.

Now cars were moving toward the house. Connie saw their headlights. She heard fire engines. Connie looked back at the fire. The man was gone.

But it did not matter. They would find out that he owned the motorcycle. They would find the stolen goods in the house. And Connie had seen his face. She knew who he was!

Connie was safe. Still, she felt sad. She felt sad for the Hamiltons and for the Blairs and for the Craigs. Their homes had been robbed. She felt sad for Mr. Saddler too. But Connie felt sorry for Mrs. Winston most of all. For Connie had seen the robber's face. And Connie knew he was Charles.



LOOKING FOR FACTS IN THE STORY.
How well can you find facts in a story? Put an x in the box next to the right answer.

1. Connie's house was
 a. on top of a hill.
 b. very noisy.
 c. alone on one side of a lake.
2. Some homes in the neighborhood had been
 a. sold.
 b. robbed.
 c. burned in a fire.
3. How old was Charles?
 a. sixteen
 b. eighteen
 c. twenty
4. What did Connie find under the bed?
 a. a body
 b. a bag
 c. nothing

x 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

EXAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS.
Here are four vocabulary questions. Put an x in the box next to the right answer. The vocabulary words are printed in **boldface** in the story. You may look back at the words before you answer the questions.

1. Her voice was cheerful and bright. The word **cheerful** means
 a. soft.
 b. sad.
 c. happy.
2. She heard Mrs. Winston's voice and immediately felt better. The word **immediately** means
 a. at once.
 b. later.
 c. never.
3. Connie saw the flashlight glow. The word **glow** means
 a. handle.
 b. light.
 c. colors.
4. Connie used her strength to push over the motorcycle. The word **strength** means
 a. mind.
 b. power.
 c. fingers.

x 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

ADDING WORDS TO A PARAGRAPH.
Complete the paragraph below. Fill in each blank with one of the words in the box. Each word appears in the story. There are five words and four blanks, so one word in the box will not be used.

The largest _____¹
in North America is Lake Superior.
Part of this lake is in the United
States, while the _____²
part is in Canada. All together, Lake
Superior covers _____³
31,750 square miles. At its deepest
point, Lake Superior is 1,330
_____⁴ deep.

about other worried
lake feet

x 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

READING BETWEEN THE LINES.
These questions will help you think critically. You will have to think about what happened in the story, and then figure out the answers. Put an *x* in the box next to the right answer.

- Connie started the fire to
 - a. get Charles out of the house.
 - b. bring help quickly.
 - c. frighten Mrs. Winston.
- Which sentence is true?
 - a. Mrs. Winston didn't care about her son.
 - b. Connie didn't enjoy her trip.
 - c. Connie didn't want to give in to "foolish fear."
- The stolen things were probably still in the house because
 - a. Connie came home a day early.
 - b. Charles forgot about them.
 - c. Charles didn't want them.
- The story shows that Connie
 - a. was very weak.
 - b. was very unfriendly.
 - c. could take care of herself.

x 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

NOTING STORY ELEMENTS.
Some story elements are **plot**, **character**, **setting**, and **mood**. Put an *x* in the box next to the right answer.

- What happened last in the *plot*?
 - a. Connie set the gasoline on fire.
 - b. Connie called Mrs. Winston.
 - c. The robber began to search for Connie.
- Who is the *main character* in the story?
 - a. Connie
 - b. Mrs. Winston
 - c. Charles
- Which sentence best *characterizes* Charles?
 - a. He was friendly and well liked.
 - b. He kept getting into trouble.
 - c. He always did well in school.
- What is the *setting* of the story?
 - a. a garage
 - b. a beautiful garden
 - c. a house near a lake

x 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

THINKING MORE ABOUT THE STORY.
Your teacher might want you to write your answers.

- ◆ After Connie heard about the robberies, do you think she should have left the house? Give reasons for your answer.
- ◆ How do you think Charles decided which places to rob?
- ◆ Why did Connie feel so sorry for Mrs. Winston? Did you feel the same way? Why?

Use the boxes below to total your scores for the exercises. Then write your score on pages 138 and 139.

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