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Opening Extract from...

The Bazaar of Bad Dreams

Written by Stephen King

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An extract from Stephen King's introduction to THE BAZAAR OF BAD DREAMS:

I've made some things for you, Constant Reader; you see them laid out before you in the moonlight. But before you look at the little handcrafted treasures I have for sale . . . Come a little closer. I don't bite . . . Except . . . I suspect you know that's not entirely true.

Is it?

When my stories are collected, I always feel like a street vendor, one who sells only at midnight. I spread my assortment out on the pavement, inviting the reader – that's you – to come and take your pick. But I always add the proper caveat: be careful, my dear, because some of these items are dangerous. They are the ones with bad dreams hidden inside, the ones you can't stop thinking about when sleep is slow to come and you wonder why the closet door is open, when you know perfectly well that you shut it . . .

An extract from the introduction to

MILE 81

When I was nineteen years old and attending the University of Maine, I'd drive from Orono to the little town of Durham, which is usually represented as Harlow in my books. I made this trip every three weekends or so, to see my girlfriend . . . and, coincidentally, my mother. I drove a '61 Ford station wagon: six in a row for more go and three on the tree (if you don't know, ask your dad). The car was a hand-me-down from my brother David.

I-95 was less traveled in those days, and nearly deserted for long stretches once Labor Day passed and the summer people went back to their workaday lives. No cell phones, either, of course. If you broke down, your choices were two: fix it yourself or wait for some good Samaritan to stop and give you a lift to the nearest garage.

During those 150-mile drives, I conceived a special horror of Mile 85, which was in the absolute nowhere between Gardiner and Lewiston. I became convinced that if my old wagon *did* shit the bed, it would do so there. I could visualize it hunkered in the breakdown lane, lonely and abandoned. Would someone stop to make sure the driver was okay? That he was not, perchance, stretched out on the front seat, dying of a heart attack? Of course they would. Good Samaritans are everywhere, especially in the boondocks. People who live in the boonies take care of their own.

MILE 81

1

PETE SIMMONS ('07 Huffy).

'You can't come,' his older brother said.

George spoke in a low voice, even though the rest of his friends – a neighborhood group of twelve- and thirteen-year-olds who styled themselves the Rip-Ass Raiders – were up at the end of the block, waiting for him. Not very patiently. 'It's too dangerous.'

Pete said, 'I'm not afraid.' He spoke stoutly enough, although he was afraid, a little. George and his friends were headed up to the sandpit behind the bowling alley. There they'd play a game Normie Therriault had invented. Normie was the leader of the Rip-Ass Raiders, and the game was called Paratroops From Hell. There was a rutted track leading up to the edge of the gravel pit, and the game was to ride your bike along it at full speed, yelling '*Raiders rule*!' at the top of your lungs and bailing from the seat of your bike as you went over. The usual drop was ten feet or so, and the approved landing area was soft, but sooner or later someone would land on gravel instead of sand and probably break an arm or an ankle. Even Pete knew that (although he sort of understood why it added to the attraction). Then the parents would find out and that would be the end of Paratroops From Hell. For now, however, the game – played without helmets, of course – continued.

George knew better than to allow his brother to play, however; he was supposed to be taking care of Pete while their parents were at work. If Pete wrecked his Huffy at the gravel pit, George would likely be grounded for a week. If his little brother broke an arm, it would be for a month. And if - God forbid! - it was his neck, George guessed he might be whiling away the hours in his bedroom until he went to college.

Besides, he loved the little cock-knocker.

'Just hang out here,' George said. 'We'll be back in a couple of hours.' 'Hang out with *who*?' Pete asked morosely. It was spring vacation, and

all of *his* friends, the ones his mother would have called 'age appropriate,' seemed to be somewhere else. A couple of them had gone to Disney World in Orlando, and when Pete thought of this, his heart filled with envy and jealousy -a vile brew, but strangely tasty.

'Just hang out,' George said. 'Go to the store, or something.' He scrounged in his pocket and came out with two crumpled Washingtons. 'Here's some dough.'

Pete looked at them. 'Jeez, I'll buy a Corvette. Maybe two.'

'Hurry up, Simmons, or we'll go withoutcha!' Normie yelled.

'Coming!' George shouted back. Then, low, to Pete: 'Take the money and don't be a boogersnot.'

Pete took the money. 'I even brought my magnifying glass,' he said. 'I was gonna show em--'

'They've all seen that baby trick a thousand times,' George said, but when he saw the corners of Pete's mouth tuck down, he tried to soften the blow. 'Besides, look at the sky, numbo. You can't start fires with a magnifying glass on a cloudy day. Hang out. We'll play computer Battleship or something when I come back.'

'Okay, chickenshit!' Normie yelled. 'Seeya later, masturbator!'

'I gotta go,' George said. 'Do me a favor and don't get in trouble. Stay in the neighborhood.'

'You'll probably break your spine and be fuckin' paralyzed for life,' Pete said . . . then hastily spat between his forked fingers to take the curse off. '*Good luck*!' he shouted after his brother. '*Jump the farthest*!'

George waved one hand in acknowledgment, but didn't look back. He stood on the pedals of his own bike, a big old Schwinn that Pete admired but couldn't ride (he'd tried once and wiped out halfway down the driveway). Pete watched him put on speed as he raced up this block of suburban houses in Auburn, catching up with his homies.

Then Pete was alone.

He took his magnifying glass out of his saddlebag and held it over his fore-arm, but there was no spot of light and no heat. He looked glumly up at the low-hanging clouds and put the glass back. It was a good one, a Richforth. He'd gotten it last Christmas, to help with his ant-farm science project.

'It'll wind up in the garage, gathering dust,' his father had said, but although the ant-farm project had concluded in February (Pete and his partner, Tammy Witham, had gotten an A), Pete hadn't tired of the magnifying glass yet. He particularly enjoyed charring holes in pieces of paper in the backyard.

But not today. Today, the afternoon stretched ahead like a desert. He could go home and watch TV, but his father had put a block on all the interesting channels when he discovered George had been DVR-ing *Boardwalk Empire*, which was full of gangsters and bare titties. There was a similar block on Pete's computer, and he hadn't figured a workaround yet, although he would; it was only a matter of time.

So?

'So what,' he said in a low voice, and began to pedal slowly toward the end of Murphy Street. 'So ... fucking ... what.'

Too little to play Paratroops From Hell, because it was too dangerous. How sucky. He wished he could think of something that would show George and Normie and all of the Raiders that even little kids could face dan—

The idea came to him just like that. He could explore the abandoned rest area. Pete didn't think the big kids knew about it, because it was a kid Pete's own age, Craig Gagnon, who had told him about it. He said he'd been up there with a couple of other kids, ten-year-olds, last fall. Of course the whole thing might have been a lie, but Pete didn't think so. Craig had given too many details, and he wasn't the kind of kid who was good at making things up. Sort of a dimbulb, actually.

With a destination in mind, Pete began to pedal faster. At the end of Murphy Street he banked left onto Hyacinth. There was no one on the sidewalk, and no cars. He heard the whine of a vacuum cleaner from the Rossignols', but otherwise everyone might have been sleeping or dead. Pete supposed they were actually at work, like his own parents.

He swept right onto Rosewood Terrace, passing the yellow sign reading DEAD END. There were only a dozen or so houses on Rosewood. At the end of the street was a chainlink fence. Beyond it was a thick tangle of shrubbery and scraggly second-growth trees. As Pete drew closer to the chainlink (and the totally unnecessary sign mounted on it reading NOT A THROUGH STREET), he stopped pedaling and coasted.

He understood – vaguely – that although he thought of George and his Raider pals as Big Kids (and certainly that was how the Raiders thought of themselves), they weren't *really* Big Kids. The true Big Kids were badass teenagers who had driver's licenses and girlfriends. True Big Kids went to high school. They liked to drink, smoke pot, listen to heavy metal or hip-hop, and suck major face with their girlfriends.

Hence, the abandoned rest area.

Pete got off his Huffy and looked around to see if he was being observed. There was nobody. Even the annoying Crosskill twins, who liked to jump rope (in tandem) all over the neighborhood when there was no school, were not in evidence. A miracle, in Pete's opinion.

Not too far away, Pete could hear the steady *whoosh-whoosh-whoosh* of cars on I-95, headed south to Portland or north to Augusta.

Even if Craig was telling the truth, they probably fixed the fence, Pete thought. That's the way today's going.

But when he bent close, he could see that although the fence *looked* whole, it really wasn't. Someone (probably a Big Kid who had long since joined the ranks of Young Adults) had clipped the links in a straight line from top to bottom. Pete took another look around, then laced his hands in the metal diamonds and pushed. He expected resistance, but there was none. The cut piece of chainlink swung open like a farmyard gate. The Really Big Kids had been using it, all right. Booya.

It stood to reason, when you thought about it. Maybe they had drivers' licenses, but the entrance and exit to the Mile 81 rest area were now blocked off by those big orange barrels the highway crews used. Grass was growing up through the crumbling pavement in the deserted parking lot. Pete had seen this for himself thousands of times, because the school bus used I-95 to go the three exits from Laurelwood, where he got picked up, to Sabattus Street, home to Auburn Elementary School No. 3.

He could remember when the rest area had still been open. There had been a gas station, a Burger King, a TCBY, and a Sbarro's. Then it got closed down. Pete's dad said there were too many of those rest areas on the turnpike, and the state couldn't afford to keep them all open.

Pete rolled his bike through the gap in the chainlink, then carefully pushed the makeshift gate back until the diamond shapes matched up and the fence looked whole again. He walked toward the wall of bushes, being careful not to run the Huffy's tires over any broken glass (there was a lot of it on this side of the fence). He began looking for what he knew must be here; the cut fence said it had to be.

And there it was, marked by stamped cigarette butts and a few discarded beer and soda bottles: a path leading deeper into the undergrowth. Still pushing his bike, Pete followed it. The high bushes swallowed him up. Behind him, Rosewood Terrace dreamed through another overcast spring day.

It was as if Pete Simmons had never been there at all.

The path between the chainlink fence and the Mile 81 rest area was,

STEPHEN KING

by Pete's estimation, about half a mile long, and there were Big Kid signposts all along the way: half a dozen small brown bottles (two with snot-caked coke spoons still attached), empty snack bags, a pair of lace-trimmed panties hanging from a thornbush (it looked to Pete like they'd been there for a while, like maybe fifty years), and – jackpot! – a half-full bottle of Popov vodka with the screw cap still on. After some interior debate, Pete put this into his saddlebag along with his magnifying glass, the latest issue of *Locke & Key*, and a few Double Stuf Oreos in a Baggie.

He pushed his bike across a sluggish little stream, and bingo-boingo, here he was at the back of the rest area. There was another chainlink fence, but this one was also cut, and Pete slipped right through. The path continued through high grass to the back parking lot. Where, he supposed, the delivery trucks used to pull up. Close to the building he could see darker rectangles on the pavement where the Dumpsters had been. Pete lowered the kickstand of his Huffy and parked it on one of these.

His heart was thumping as he thought about what came next. *Breaking and entering, sugarbear. You could go to jail for that.* But was it breaking and entering if he found an open door, or a loose board over one of the windows? He supposed it would still be entering, but was entering all by itself a crime?

In his heart he knew it was, but he guessed that without the breaking part, it wouldn't mean jail time. And after all, hadn't he come here to take a risk? Something he could brag about later to Normie and George and the other Rip-Ass Raiders?

And okay, he was scared, but at least he wasn't bored anymore.

He tried the door with the fading EMPLOYEES ONLY sign on it, and found it not only locked but *seriously* locked – no give at all. There were two windows beside it, but he could tell just by looking that they were boarded down tight. Then he remembered the chainlink fence that looked whole but wasn't, and tested the boards anyway. No good. In a way, it was a relief. He could be off the hook if he wanted to be.

Only . . . the Really Big Kids *did* go in there. He was sure of it. So how did they do it? From the front? In full view of the turnpike? Maybe so, if they came at night, but Pete had no intention of checking it out in broad daylight. Not when any passing motorist with a cell phone could dial 911 and say, 'Just thought you might like to know that there's a little kid playing Freddy Fuckaround at the Mile 81 rest area. You know, where the Burger King used to be?'

I'd rather break my arm playing Paratroops From Hell than have to call my

folks from the Gray State Police Barracks. In fact, I'd rather break both arms and get my dick caught in the zipper of my jeans.

Well, maybe not that.

He wandered toward the loading dock, and there, once again: jackpot. There were dozens of stamped-out cigarette butts at the foot of the concrete island, plus a few more of those tiny brown bottles surrounding their king: a dark green NyQuil bottle. The surface of the dock, where the big semis backed up to unload, was eye-high to Pete, but the cement was crumbling and there were plenty of footholds for an agile kid in Chuck Taylor High Tops. Pete raised his arms over his head, snagged fingerholds in the dock's pitted surface ... and the rest, as they say, is history.

On the dock, in faded red, someone had sprayed EDWARD LITTLE ROCKS, RED EDDIES RULE. *Not true*, Pete thought. *Rip-Ass Raiders rule*. Then he looked around from his current high perch, grinned, and said, 'Actually, *I* rule.' And standing up here above the empty back lot of the rest area, he felt that he did. For the time being, anyway.

He climbed back down – just to make sure it was no problem – and then remembered the stuff in his saddlebag. Supplies, in case he decided to spend the afternoon here, exploring and shit. He debated what to bring, then decided to unstrap the saddlebag and take everything. Even the magnifying glass might come in handy. A vague fantasy began to form in his brain: boy detective discovers a murder victim in a deserted rest area, and solves the crime before the police even know a crime has been committed. He could see himself explaining to the drop-jawed Raiders that it had actually been pretty easy. Elementary, my dear fucksticks.

Bullshit, of course, but it would be fun to pretend.

He lifted his bag onto the loading dock (being especially careful on account of the half-full vodka bottle), then climbed back up. The corrugated metal door leading inside was at least twelve feet high and secured at the bottom with not one but two humongous padlocks, but there was a human-sized door set into it. Pete tried the knob. It wouldn't turn, nor would the human-sized door open when he pushed and pulled, but there was some give. Quite a lot, actually. He looked down and saw that a wooden wedge had been pushed under the bottom of the door; a totally dope precaution if he'd ever seen one. On the other hand, what more could you expect from kids who were stoned on coke and cough syrup?

Pete pulled the wedge, and this time when he tried the inset door, it creaked open.

The big front windows of what had been the Burger King were covered with chickenwire instead of boards, so Pete had no trouble seeing what there was to see. All the eating tables and booths were gone from the restaurant part, and the kitchen part was just a dim hole with some wires sticking out of the walls and some of the ceiling tiles hanging down, but the place was not exactly unfurnished.

In the center, surrounded by folding chairs, two old card tables had been pushed together. On this double-wide surface were half a dozen filthy tin ashtrays, several decks of greasy Bicycle cards, and a caddy of poker chips. The walls were decorated with twenty or thirty magazine gatefolds. Pete inspected these with great interest. He knew about pussies, had glimpsed more than a few on HBO and CinemaSpank (before his folks got wise and blocked the premium cable channels), but these were *shaved* pussies. Pete wasn't sure what the big deal was – to him they looked sort of oogy – but he supposed he might get with the program when he was older. Besides, the bare titties made up for it. Bare titties were fuckin awesome.

In the corner three filthy mattresses had been pushed together like the card tables, but Pete was old enough to know it wasn't poker that was played here.

'Let me see your pussy!' he commanded one of the *Hustler* girls on the wall, and giggled. Then he said, 'Let me see your *shaved* pussy!' and giggled harder. He sort of wished Craig Gagnon was here, even though Craig was a dweeb. They could have laughed about the shaved pussies together.

He began to wander around, still snorting small carbonated bubbles of laughter. It was dank in the rest area, but not actually cold. The smell was the worst part, a combination of cigarette smoke, pot smoke, old booze, and creeping rot in the walls. Pete thought he could also smell rotting meat. Probably from sandwiches purchased at Rosselli's or Subway.

Mounted on the wall beside the counter where people once ordered Whoppers and Whalers, Pete discovered another poster. This one was Justin Bieber when the Beeb had been maybe sixteen. The Beeb's teeth had been blacked out, and someone had added a Notzi swat-sticker tattoo to one cheek. Red-ink devil horns sprouted from the Beeb's moptop. There were darts sticking out of his face. Magic Markered on the wall above the poster was MOUTH 15 PTS, NOSE 25 PTS, EYES 30 PTS ITCH. Pete pulled out the darts and backed across the big empty room until he came to a black mark on the floor. Printed here was BEEBER LINE. Pete stood behind it and shot the six darts ten or twelve times. On his last try, he got 125 points. He thought that was pretty good. He imagined George and Normie Therriault applauding.

He went over to one of the mesh-covered windows, staring out at the empty concrete islands where the gas pumps used to be, and the traffic beyond. Light traffic. He supposed that when summer came it would once more be bumper-to-bumper with tourists and summer people, unless his dad was right and the price of gas went to seven bucks a gallon and everybody stayed home.

Now what? He'd played darts, he'd looked at enough shaved pussies to last him . . . well, maybe not a lifetime but at least a few months, there were no murders to solve, so now what?

Vodka, he decided. That was what came next. He'd try a few sips just to prove he could, and so future brags would have that vital ring of truth. Then, he supposed, he would pack up his shit and go back to Murphy Street. He would do his best to make his adventure sound interesting – thrilling, even – but in truth, this place wasn't such of a much. Just a place where the Really Big Kids could come to play cards and make out with girls and not get wet when it rained.

But booze . . . that was something.

He took his saddlebag over to the mattresses and sat down (being careful to avoid the stains, of which there were many). He took out the vodka bottle and studied it with a certain grim fascination. At ten-goingon-eleven, he had no particular longing to sample adult pleasures. The year before he had hawked one of his grandfather's cigarettes and smoked it behind the 7-Eleven. Smoked half of it, anyway. Then he had leaned over and spewed his lunch between his sneakers. He had obtained an interesting but not very valuable piece of information that day: beans and franks didn't look great when they went into your mouth, but at least they tasted good. When they came back out, they looked fucking horrible and tasted worse.

His body's instant and emphatic rejection of that American Spirit suggested to him that booze would be no better, and probably worse. But if he didn't drink at least some, any brag would be a lie. And his brother George had lie-radar, at least when it came to Pete.

I'll probably puke again, he thought, then said: 'Good news is I won't be the first in *this* dump.'

That made him laugh again. He was still smiling when he unscrewed the cap and held the mouth of the bottle to his nose. Some smell, but not much. Maybe it was water instead of vodka, and the smell was just a leftover. He raised the mouth of the bottle to his mouth, sort of hoping that was true and sort of hoping it wasn't. He didn't expect much, and he certainly didn't want to get drunk and maybe break his neck trying to climb back down from the loading dock, but he was curious. His parents *loved* this stuff.

'Dares go first,' he said for no reason at all, and took a small sip.

It wasn't water, that was for sure. It tasted like hot, light oil. He swallowed mostly in surprise. The vodka trailed heat down his throat, then exploded in his stomach.

'Holy Jeezum!' Pete yelled.

Tears sprang into his eyes. He held the bottle out at arm's length, as if it had bitten him. But the heat in his stomach was already subsiding, and he felt pretty much okay. Not drunk, and not like he was going to puke, either. He tried another little sip, now that he knew what to expect. Heat in the mouth . . . heat in the throat . . . and then, boom in the stomach.

Now he felt a tingling in his arms and hands. Maybe his neck, too. Not the pins-and-needles sensation you got when a limb went to sleep, but more like something was waking up.

Pete raised the bottle to his lips again, then lowered it. There was more to worry about than falling off the loading dock or crashing his bike on the way home (he wondered briefly if you could get arrested for drunk biking and guessed you could). Having a few swigs of vodka so you could brag on it was one thing, but if he drank enough to get loaded, his mother and father would know when they came home. It would only take one look. Trying to act sober wouldn't help. They drank, their friends drank, and sometimes they drank too much. They would know the signs.

Also, there was the dreaded HANGOVER to consider. Pete and George had seen their mom and dad dragging around the house with red eyes and pale faces on a good many Saturday and Sunday mornings. They took vitamin pills, they told you to turn the TV down, and music was absolutely *verboten*. The HANGOVER looked like the absolute opposite of fun.

Still, maybe one more sip might not hurt.

Pete took a slightly larger swallow and shouted, 'Zoom, we have liftoff!' This made him laugh. He felt a little light-headed, but it was a totally pleasant feeling. Smoking he didn't get. Drinking, he did. He got up, staggered a little, caught his balance, and laughed some more. 'Jump into that fucking sandpit all you want, sugarbears,' he told the empty restaurant. 'I'm fuckin stinko, and fuckin stinko is better.' This was *very* funny, and he laughed hard.

Am I really stinko? On just three sips?

He didn't think so, but he was definitely high. No more. Enough was enough. 'Drink responsibly,' he told the empty restaurant, and laughed.

He'd hang out here for a while and wait for it to wear off. An hour should do it, maybe two. Until three o'clock, say. He didn't have a wristwatch, but he'd be able to tell three o'clock from the chimes of St. Joseph's, which was only a mile or so away. Then he'd leave, first hiding the vodka (for possible further research) and putting the wedge back under the door. His first stop when he got back to the neighborhood was going to be the 7-Eleven, where he'd buy some of that really strong Teaberry gum to take the smell of the booze off his breath. He'd heard kids say vodka was the thing to steal out of your parents' liquor cabinet because it *had* no smell, but Pete was now a wiser child than he'd been an hour ago.

'Besides,' he told the hollowed-out restaurant in a lecturely tone, 'I bet my eyes are red, just like Dad's when he has too marny mantinis.' He paused. That wasn't quite right, but what the fuck.

He gathered up the darts, went back to the Beeber Line, and shot them. He missed Justin with all but one, and this struck Pete as the most hilarious thing of all. He wondered if the Beeb could have a hit with a song called 'My Baby Shaves Her Pussy,' and this struck him so funny that he laughed until he had to bend over with his hands on his knees.

When the laughter passed, he wiped double snot-hangers from his nose, flicked them onto the floor (*there goes your Good Restaurant rating*, he thought, *sorry, Burger King*), and then trudged back to the Beeber Line. He had even worse luck the second time. He wasn't seeing double or anything, he just couldn't nail the Beeb.

Also, he felt a little sick, after all. Not much, but he was glad he hadn't tried a fourth sip. 'I would have popped my Popov,' he said. He laughed, then uttered a ringing belch that burned coming up. Blick. He left the darts where they were and went back to the mattresses. He thought of using his magnifying glass to see if anything really small was crawling there, and decided he didn't want to know. He thought about eating some of his Oreos, but was afraid of what they might do to his stomach. It felt, let's face it, a little tender. He lay down and laced his hands behind his head. He had heard that when you got really drunk, everything started spinning around. Nothing like that was happening to him, so he guessed he was only a little high, but he wouldn't mind a little nap.

'But not too long.'

No, not too long. That would be bad. If he wasn't home when his folks came home, and if they couldn't find him, he would be in trouble. Probably George would be, too, for going off without him. The question was, could he wake himself up when the St. Joseph's chimes struck?

Pete realized, in those last few seconds of consciousness, that he'd just have to hope so. Because he was going.

He closed his eyes.

And slept in the deserted restaurant.

Outside, in the southbound travel lane of I-95, a station wagon of indeterminate make and vintage appeared. It was traveling well below the posted minimum turnpike speed. A fast-moving semi came up behind it and veered into the passing lane, blatting its air horn.

The station wagon, almost coasting now, veered into the entrance lane of the rest area, ignoring the big sign reading CLOSED NO SERVICES NEXT GAS AND FOOD 27 MI. It struck four of the orange barrels blocking the lane, sent them rolling, and came to a stop about seventy yards from the abandoned restaurant building. The driver's side door opened, but nobody got out. There were no hey-stupid-yourdoor's-open chimes. It just hung silently ajar.

If Pete Simmons had been watching instead of snoozing, he wouldn't have been able to see the driver. The station wagon was splattered with mud, and the windshield was smeared with it. Which was strange, because there had been no rain in northern New England for over a week, and the turnpike was perfectly dry.

The car sat there a little distance up the entrance ramp, under a cloudy April sky. The barrels it had knocked over came to a stop. The driver's door hung open.

To find out more about Stephen King please visit www.hodder.co.uk, www.stephenkingbooks.co.uk and www.facebookcom/stephenkingbooks