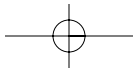
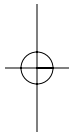
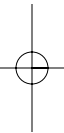
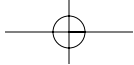


*From a  
Buick 8*



# STEPHEN KING

## *From a Buick 8*

A NOVEL



CEMETERY DANCE PUBLICATIONS

*Baltimore*

2002

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Cemetery Dance Publications Edition 2002  
ISBN 1-58767-061-5

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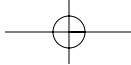
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Interior Illustrations: © 2002 by Bernie Wrightson  
Typesetting and Design: Bill Walker  
Printed in the United States of America by Thomson-Shore, Inc.

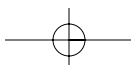
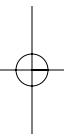
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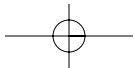
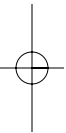
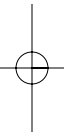
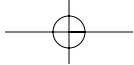
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First Edition



*This is for Surendra and Geeta Patel.*





## *Now: Sandy*

Curt Wilcox's boy came around the barracks a lot the year after his father died, I mean a lot, but nobody ever told him get out the way or asked him what in *hail* he was doing there again. We understood what he was doing: trying to hold onto the memory of his father. Cops know a lot about the psychology of grief; most of us know more about it than we want to.

That was Ned Wilcox's senior year at Statler High. He must have quit off the football team; when it came time for choosing, he picked D Troop instead. Hard to imagine a kid doing that, choosing unpaid choring over all those Friday night games and Saturday night parties, but that's what he did. I don't think any of us talked to him about that choice, but we respected him for it. He had decided the time had come to put the games away, that's all. Grown men are frequently incapable of making such decisions; Ned made his at an age when he still couldn't buy a legal drink. Or a legal pack of smokes, for that matter. I think his Dad would have been proud. Know it, actually.

Given how much the boy was around, I suppose it was inevitable he'd see what was out in Shed B, and ask someone what it was and what it was doing there. I was the one he was most likely to ask, because I'd been his father's closest friend. Closest one that was still a Trooper, at least. I think

## STEPHEN KING

maybe I wanted it to happen. Kill or cure, the oldtimers used to say. Give that curious cat a serious dose of satisfaction.

What happened to Curtis Wilcox was simple. A veteran county drunk, one Curt himself knew well and had arrested six or eight times, took his life. The drunk, Bradley Roach, didn't mean to hurt anyone; drunks so rarely do. That doesn't keep you from wanting to kick their numb asses all the way to Rocksburg, of course.

Toward the end of a hot July afternoon in the year oh-one, Curtis pulled over one of those big sixteen-wheelers, an interstate landcruiser that had left the fourlane because its driver was hoping for a home-cooked meal instead of just another dose of I-87 Burger King or Taco Bell. Curt was parked on the tarmac of the abandoned Jenny station at the intersection of Pennsylvania State Road 32 and the Humboldt Road—the very place, in other words, where that damned old Buick Roadmaster showed up in our part of the known universe all those years ago. You can call that a coincidence if you want to, but I'm a cop and don't believe in coincidences, only chains of event which grow longer and ever more fragile until either bad luck or plain old human mean-heartedness breaks them.

Ned's father took out after that semi because it had a flapper. When it went by he saw rubber spinning out from one of the rear tires like a big black pinwheel. A lot of independents run on recaps, with the price of diesel so high they just about have to, and sometimes the tread peels loose. You see curls and hunks of it on the interstate all the time, lying on the highway or pushed off into the breakdown lane like the shed skins of giant blacksnakes. It's dangerous to be behind a flapper, especially on a twolane like SR 32, a pretty but neglected stretch of state highway running between Rocksburg and Statler. A big enough chunk might break some unlucky follow-driver's windshield. Even if it didn't, it could startle the operator into the ditch, or a tree, or over the embankment and into



## FROM A BUICK 8

Redfern Stream, which matches 32 twist for twist over a distance of nearly six miles.

Curt lit his bar lights, and the trucker pulled over like a good boy. Curt pulled over right behind him, first calling in his 20 and the nature of his stop and waiting for Shirley to acknowledge. With that done, he got out and walked toward the truck.

If he'd gone directly to where the driver was leaning out and looking back at him, he might still be on Planet Earth today. But he stopped to examine the flapper on the rear outside tire, even gave it a good yank to see if he could pull it off. The trucker saw all of it, and testified to it in court. Curt stopping to do that was the last link save one in the chain that brought his boy to Troop D and eventually made him a part of what we are. The very last link, I'd say, was Bradley Roach leaning over to get another brewski out of the six-pack sitting on the floor in the passenger footwell of his old Buick Regal (not *the* Buick, but *another* Buick, yes—it's funny how, when you look back on disasters and love affairs, things seem to line up like planets on an astrologer's chart). Less than a minute later, Ned Wilcox and his sisters were short a daddy and Michelle Wilcox was short a husband.

Not very long after the funeral, Curt's boy started showing up at the Troop D House. I'd come in for the three-to-eleven that fall (or maybe just to check on things; when you're the wheeldog, it's hard to stay away) and see the boy before I saw anyone else, like as not. While his friends were over at Floyd B. Clouse Field behind the high school, running plays and hitting the tackling dummies and giving each other high-fives, Ned would be out on the front lawn of the barracks by himself, bundled up in his green and gold high school jacket, making big piles of fallen leaves. He'd give me a wave and I'd return it: right back atcha, kid. Sometimes after I parked, I'd come out front and shoot the shit with him. He'd tell me about the foolishness his sisters were up to just lately, maybe, and