

**IMAGINED LIFE
THE REJECT (STEPHEN KING)**

By Ed Leibowitz

COLD OPEN

<SFX: Howling wind, rustling of dead leaves>

There's something horrible going on up that hill.

What the hell is it?

From here, the most you can make out is this yellow smudge, moving back and forth like a pendulum on an old grandfather clock.

The sky's this sick puky green.

The clouds are black as soot.

You climb the hill on your chubby legs, following the path as it dodges around dead trees.

Your lungs burn, your calves throb.

You squint so tight you can barely see two feet ahead.

And still the wind grinds dust into the whites of your eyes.

<SFX: Scuffing of footsteps on loose dirt, high-pitched hard-breathing of a little boy.>

OK, you've made it.

There it is. It's -- Ah--ah!

<SFX: Creaking of corpse on rope, howling wind; cawing of crows>

It's a dead body on a hangman's noose, creaking in the wind.

It's got its back to you.

There's a couple of crows perched on its shoulders.

They turn around to take a look at you -- their black eyes burning through your skull.

Their beaks are bloody.

There's a wood sign just below the corpse's dangling feet with his name on it.

"Robert Burns."

<SFX: Louder wind, louder cawing.>

You wonder what this guy did.

He must have murdered somebody.

Maybe he shot a couple of cops.

Could be he drowned his kids.

Wait – maybe he didn't do anything.

Maybe *he* was the victim.

Maybe a bunch of psychos dragged him up here, strung him up, got drunk and threw beer cans at him while he died.

A stiff gust blows across the mountaintop.

It twists the corpse around.

The skin on the cheeks hangs down in strips.

The birds -- they've also gouged an eye out, torn off both earlobes, poked holes into the forehead.

But you'd know that face anywhere.

It's yours.

YOU, screaming: Ah--ah!

ACT I

NARRATION

You're eight years old, and that was your first bad dream.

Next night, you don't dream at all.

But then there's another nightmare -- and another.

Soon you're having them all the time.

A lot of awful stuff's been happening when you're awake too.

Your ears are bad – always bad, bursting and throbbing.

Your throat feels like a cat snuck down there down there and clawed the crap out of your tonsils.

Two days into second grade, your mom pulls you out of class, and you spend the rest of the school year pretty much on a sickbed.

Nothing -- nobody can cheer you up, except your brother Dave.

SCENE:

<SFX: Click and accelerated whirring of film on an old projector>

The motion picture bursts upon the wall of your room.

It jumps and jiggles.

YOU: Hey Dave. It's working. You got it to work.

DAVE: Naturally, Little Brother. Naturally.

Actually, you never thought for a second Dave wouldn't pull this off – even though you've got 50 cents between the two of you, even though the clothes you both wear is patched and saggy, and mom doesn't make enough to put meat on the dinner table.

Probably Dave talked some old neighbor into letting him use his projector for free.

This movie's a dud though.

It's making you nauseous – everything swirling and swaying in a big heaving blur.

DAVE: Guess Dad wasn't too good at holding a camera.

YOU: Guess not.

So a couple of weeks ago Dave found this box of your dad's in your aunt's attic.

It was a shock.

Nobody thought he'd left any trace of himself behind.

Inside the box, there were some old gross-out monster comics, sci-fi novels, and a couple of stories your dad wrote, typed out on yellowing paper.

There was also a small stack of letters from sci-fi and fantasy magazines, made out to your dad -- all of them basically saying "thanks for showing us your work, but no thanks."

But then there was also this reel of skinny film.

You had high hopes for it.

But so far?

Totally useless.

<SFX: Whirring, faster and steadier now>

Wait.

That's more like it.

Now you can actually see stuff.

Big boats bobbing in the harbor.

A couple of huge sea bass split open on ice.

A windmill with its blades going round and round.

A bunch of navy-men swaying side to side -- arms on each other's shoulders.

And now there's this young guy with a sailor's cap, leaning on the rail of a ship.

He's got these round metal glasses, and he's looking right out at you.

There's a big grin on his face.

DAVE: Hey, there he is. That's our dad!

YOU: You sure?

DAVE: Course I'm sure.

Dave was four that night when your dad said he was stepping out of the house for some cigarettes -- and never came back.

So he's got his memories.

You, being two, got none.

Look now, your father's waving.

He's this total stranger, waving at you, his son.

Waving goodbye.

<SFX: Click/whir of running film; then slap of loose film as reel runs out>

NARRATION/SCENE:

It's December of 1957, a few months after your 10th birthday, and there's a killer on the loose.

Charlie Starkweather, this nut-job from Nebraska, has been terrorizing the Midwest with that button-nosed 14-year-old girlfriend of his, stabbing and blowing people away with his shotgun.

You can't get enough of it.

You're clipping all the newspaper articles about him you can find, and pasting them carefully into a scrapbook.

When your mom's at home, the scrapbook never leaves the corner of your closet.

What would she think if she found out you were a fan?

Well, you're not really a fan.

Of course not.

What Charlie's been doing scares you to death.

Fear -- that's pretty much what you're about now.

At school, the kids pretty much ignore you.

But in your nightmares, you're a superstar -- the guy every demon, space alien and psycho has in their sights.

You can't go to sleep unless the door's cracked open and the light's on in the hall.

You'd like to look beneath the bed before you turn in but you don't dare.

Suppose there really is something down there. It's gonna tear your face off.

So Charlie -- you want the cops to finally nab him.

You want him to get the chair – that’s what he deserves.

Still, when you’re sure you’re alone, you’ll sneak out the scrapbook and stare at snapshots of the killer from before he blew his first head off.

There he is -- looking up from the dinner table.

That’s him cozying up with his girlfriend on a love seat.

And here he is against a brick wall with a big-ass pompadour and a cigarette drooping from his lips, like James Dean.

Always, you’re looking for clues behind those chubby cheeks, the pug nose, that sleepy gaze under the heavy eyelids.

You’re scouring each and every snapshot for even the tiniest signs of a maniac about to snap.

A couple of years back, you dreamed about the dead man dangling on the top of a mountain.

You found, to your horror, that that guy was *you*.

Now, as Charlie Starkweather stares back at you, you’re struck by something that terrifies you maybe even more.

The possibility hits you like a gut punch.

That this face of a mass murderer could also be your own.

SCENE:

<Slamming of a screen door>

MOTHER: Hey, Mr. Font of Creativity, you up there?

Got the mail and there’s a letter for you. Looks official.

<*SFX: Quick pounding of footsteps taking the stairs two at a time.*>

YOU: Oh mom, where is it?

She hands it to you. Yes, It’s from them all right.

Alfred Hitchcock’s Mystery magazine.

You’re only 12 years old, but you’re a serious artist, with a tone of discipline.

Your dad – that A-hole – he’s been a kind of perverse inspiration.

You’ve had plenty of time to look through those manuscripts and that stack of reject letters he left in the cardboard box.

As a writer, he didn’t make the cut – not even close.

But you will.

What’s your subject matter?

Sole survivors on dying planets.

Zombies and ghouls; freaky space creatures reaching out with their tentacles to suck out astronauts' brains.

And plenty of everyday sadists and crazies.

A few months back, you sent Hitchcock's magazine the first short story you thought good enough to sell.

It's a short piece about a counterfeiter who's trapped in his basement, going bonkers and disappearing into a blizzard of phony paper.

Clearly, the piece owes a certain debt to Twilight Zone and EC Comics.

But the concept, the characters, the execution – that's all you.

MOM: Snap out of it -- man! Open it why don't you?

YOU: Gimme a minute.

Your stomach sinks to your ankles.

Mom's got her fingers crossed.

<SFX: Paper tearing, dull fumbling of fingers inside envelope.>

The letterhead's cool.

There's a cartoon of the great director's face – the artist absolutely nailed those puffy jowls.

The generic kiss-off is not so cool.

"Thank you for sending this for us. Unfortunately it's not a good fit for our audience, but we wish you luck selling it elsewhere."

You show mom the thumbs down, and hustle up the stairs fast so she can't start trying to make you feel better.

You bang your door shut and go straight to your old record player.

<SFX: Click of old record player turned on; stacatto scratch of needle on vinyl>

You shut your eyelids and surrender yourself to the twang of guitars.

<SFX: Sloppy electric guitar, sloppy drums, B-grade hiccuppy croon.>

Yes – Hillbilly rock-n-roll.

Dirty, sloppy, desperate, sincere.

Somehow it always calms you down.

OK, you're good to open your eyes again.

Look -- you've still got plenty of time to make it.

And you *are* going to make it.

There's no alternative.

SCENE:

<SFX> *Teenage chatter, laughter, screeching of chair legs.*

You're back from Winter Break -- back at your desk.

Teacher's not here yet.

You watch the snow swirl out the classroom window.

You're listening to the other eighth graders yapping on and on about what an awesome Christmas they all had.

Nobody's asking how *your* Christmas went.

No honey ham for you. No presents -- no nice ones at least.

And no Dad.

How did that a-hole spend his Christmas?

Was he carving up a turkey for a brand new wife and kids he might actually give a crap about?

Your mom told you he was a drunk.

So maybe he spent Our Savior's birthday drooling and frozen in some gutter.

<SFX: *A collective gasp, then silence.*>

You turn away from the window.

What's going on?

There's your answer -- standing in the doorway.

It's Tina -- but not the Tina *you* know -- the sad pudgy girl who's worn the same filthy sleeveless blouse and droopy black skirt to school since fifth grade, who's always being slammed into lockers and getting tripped in the halls.

This new Tina is wearing a lambs-wool sweater, and a gabardine cranberry skirt.

Her black hair -- usually limp as a cow's tongue -- rises up in a bouncy perm.

And under those sheer stockings -- has she really?

Yes! She's finally shaved her legs.

But here's the biggest shocker -- Tina's smiling.

A fragile eggshell smile, but with some real hope in it.

Tina takes her seat.

A lump rises in your throat. Why are you getting so damn emotional?

<SFX (*slowly increasing in volume*)> *Murmuring, jeering, pig snorts*>

Shit. Here it comes. You should have known.

GIRL #1: Hey guys. When did JCPenney start making sweaters for pigs?

GIRL #2: Oh, they've been on the racks for months. All the filthy sows are wearing 'em.

BOY #1: Hey Tina -- you're looking so hot.

BOY #2: Smokin' hot.

<SFX: Laughs, whistles, oink-oinks>

Eff-ers. Goddamn sadists.

They couldn't didn't even pick the right ef-ing animal.

Tina's not a pig. Not at all.

She's more like a caterpillar -- a harmless hairy caterpillar just begging to be stomped on.

Today, she came to class with butterfly wings.

She probably thought that that would be enough.

That she'd finally be accepted, or at least be left the hell alone.

But right now, they're ripping those wings right off.

BOYS AND GIRLS: Pig Pig Pig Pig!

You want to stand up to these barbarians.

You want to kick their ass.

But you do nothing.

Sure, you're tall for a 14-year-old, but you're also awkward, geeky, weak-eyed and soft around the middle.

You're used to being ignored, but if you stepped in now, maybe you'd start getting noticed the way Tina gets noticed.

Shit, they'd probably start calling you her boyfriend.

Tina looks numb.

Confused.

And then--majorly pissed.

Furious.

Like she wants to kill everyone.

You kind of know how she feels. There's been so much anger boiling inside you.

Sometimes you imagine yourself lashing back not just at your dad, but at the whole shit show -- all this moving around from one fleabag apartment to the next, the crap jobs that've hollowed out your mom's soul.

You've kept the rage bottled up.

What happens when that cork pops – worst-case scenario?

Charlie Starkweather.

A trail of corpses

That's what happens.

Fire's gone from Tina's face now.

Doused by tears.

<SFX: Banging on desks. Feet stomping.>

KIDS: "PIG! PIG! PIG!"

NARRATION:

The rejection letters keep still piling up, but that's OK.

Maybe none of the fantasy magazines and pulp journals have bitten yet, you're your art's been getting some major raves in high school.

The guys love your twisted portraits of esteemed local educators.

Like that hick farmer who bears an uncanny resemblance to Mr. Ricker, your English teacher.

There he is at the state fair, in a pair of overalls and a straw hat, posing proudly beside his Jersey cow, who's just won first prize at the animal farting competition.

Then there's that mad scientist who's a dead ringer for your biology teacher, showing off the fetal pig eyeballs he's shoved up his nostrils.

It used to be that a lot of bad stuff just got stuck inside your cranium.

Now you're pouring your nightmares, your frustrations, your fantasies and darkest thoughts out of your head and into compelling characters, conflicts, stories and scenes and situations.

You're using them as building blocks to create alternative worlds, where all the rules are written by you.

SCENE:

<SFX> Creak of door hinges, thud of a knob hitting the wall. Another creak and then the bang of door slamming shut.

YOU: Gentlemen. I've arrived.

Mike and Jeff -- co-editors of college paper -- get up from their desks.

Your big hairy hands are stuffed in the back pockets of your Levis.

You watch that growing look of panic in their eyes as they realize you've brought nothing.

MIKE (stumblingly): Well, um, when we talked about the deadline, you know we said noon on Tuesday. And today's Tuesday.

You glance casually at the clock. It reads 11:30.

YOU: So we've still got a little time then, right Mike?

<SFX> Scrape of footsteps across linoleum. Creak of rusty wheels as a chair's pulled out.

YOU: OK if I borrow some paper?

JEFF: Sure.

<SFX: Click of typewriter paper roller>.

You get to work.

<Staccato thudding of metal against pulp. Ping of bell. Zip of return handle>

The creativity doesn't just flow out of you.

It rages like a river -- flooding the banks, capsizing all boats, carrying everything wildly forward as you sharpen every detail, and nail every nuance.

<SFX> Phone ringing.

JEFF, in a hushed voice: Yes, it's Jeff. Yeah, he just got here. Tell the printer we'll need another couple of hours.

YOU: Jeff. Everything's fine. No delays. You tell him.

You smile to yourself. Oh ye of little faith.

Alright, just a couple more flourishes here.

Aa-nn-dd, done!

YOU: Gentlemen. Come take a look.

<SFX> Creak of wheels, shuffling of feet, slight rustle of a piece of paper.

MIKE: It's.... It's....

JEFF: It's frigging incredible.

MIKE: Goddamn perfect.

YOU: Glad you like.

They're following your eyes as you slowly raise them up to check the clock. It reads 11:45.

NARRATION:

Every week now, you're treating your fellow students to big hot bowl of sly twisted psyches and in-your-face provocation, and they can't get enough of it.

Between your coursework and your newspaper obligations, you're super-busy, but you're pursuing your artistic vision more seriously than ever.

Every morning you're up at 5 am and go at it full bore.

Which is saying something, because most nights you go to bed totally hammered and well past midnight, and most mornings you're nursing a 20-ton hangover.

Your prominence in the school paper has upped your street cred on campus.

You're no longer ignored like you were growing up.

You're actually getting a little cocky.

You've even got a girlfriend – a poet no less.

You like to say she smote you with her rhymes.

That black dress and those sheer nylon stockings – they played their part as well.

One night, tossing down a cold one on the library steps, you tell Jeff how it'll all play out.

YOU: Yo Jeff, when I get rich and famous, first thing I'm doing is buy a nice new Cadillac.

JEFF: Whatcha thinking? Pink?

YOU: Naw. Pink's a bit too Elvis. I'm going with purple.

JEFF: So -- here's to purple!

<SFX> Clink of bottles>

Jeff clinks his bottle with yours, and can tell he's as sure about your future as you are.

ACT II**SCENE:**

<SFX: Country tune through a broken speaker. Chatter, drunken laughter. Clack of pool balls.>

You've got a pool cue in one hand.

And a can of Moosehead lager in the other.

Your fifth straight.

<SFX> *Crack and buzz of a beer can opening.*

You take a long gulp and squint across the table as your opponent lines up his shot and...

<SFX> *Clink of ball against ball, soft plunk of ball falling into pocket.*

...puts the last nail in your coffin.

YOU: Shit.

You hand the guy a crumpled five-dollar bill, to go with the five you coughed up after losing the last game.

Money that should be going to buy diapers for your baby.

Six weeks after college graduation, your daughter dropped into the world.

Of course, you married her mom, the poet.

You love that woman, and would have married her anyway, eventually.

There was no honeymoon, of course.

And no foreseeable way out of this life of poverty, frustration, petty bickering and massive stress.

You must have applied for at least a hundred teaching jobs.

But every school turned you down.

So you're stuck working your ass off at an industrial laundry.

Ten infernal hours every day knee deep in maggots, rotten lobster meat, shit stains and dried blood.

Wife works the night shift at Dunkin Donuts.

She says you're making things worse.

Tells you you're drinking too much.

Saturday mornings, she buttonholes you.

She gets in your face – demands to know why ten or twenty bucks from your weekly pay is missing from the pile of cash you dumped on the breakfast table the night before.

She knows you lost it playing pool or poker. So why ask?

Creatively, you're still plugging away. No idea of how many gazillion rejection letters you've opened by now.

True, you have managed to sell a few little pieces here and there – mostly to low-rent men's magazines with names like Adam, Swank and Dude.

But they didn't pay shit.

You need money.

That money you lost just now -- you need to win it back.

YOU: OK, let's go another more round. Ten bucks this time?

OPPONENT: Sure thing.

<SFX: Clink of balls being racked up.>

You rack, he breaks.

<SFX> Crash of pool balls. Clink, thud. Clink thud. Clink thud. Clink thud.>

Shit. He's cleared the whole goddamn table.

He didn't let you make even one shot.

<SFX: Heavy breathing, thud of footsteps moving forward; staccato scrape of feet moving backward.>

You charge up to him.

He's backing up like you're gonna hit him.

But all you do is shove a ten-dollar bill into the front pocket of his jean jacket, turn around and stumble to the bar.

YOU (way too loud): Can I get a Moosehead here?

You catch a glimpse of yourself in the smudged mirror behind the bar.

Everyone's staring at you.

Suddenly, your head clears.

You know this is going to hurt, but in your mind's eye, you begin sketching this crap scene you're in right now.

You're still an artist, after all.

OK, first, let's get the bartop right.

Put in the fine details -- crushed cans, cigarette butts, deviled egg shells, pools of stale beer.

Alright -- now how about we get some bodies on those stools?

One ex-con, a bone-thin drug addict, a shell-shocked vet.

Couple of jilted housewives with low-cut blouses.

You?

In this character sketch, you're dead center.

Now, how you gonna to bring this guy to life?

Well, he's a big oaf -- over six feet of him stuffed into the grimy jump-suit of a menial laborer.

He's still only in his early 20s.

But from that slump in his shoulders, it's clear he's hit bottom and ain't getting up.

His eyes, blurry behind thick horned-rimmed glasses, look out with the bewildered, agonized gaze of an elk just struck by a pick-up.

Don't start with the crying now. You have to finish.

Let's say we put gold crown on the guy's head -- adding insult to injury.

Now, what are you going to call this masterpiece of yours?

Oh, you've got it. It's perfect.

"King of the Rejects."

<SFX: Uptempo country song on broken speaker, yells, laughs, chattering fade to silence.>

SCENE:

<SFX> Wails of a baby, creak of floorboards.

Three in the morning.

You're pacing back and forth with your new son.

This mobile home's built like crap.

The plywood beneath the cheap carpet is soft in places.

<SFX> Shushing, baby bawling.

You've been trying to calm your boy for over an hour now.

No dice.

Fact is -- it's getting harder and harder to calm yourself down.

It's even become hard to write.

Sure you're a teacher now -- finally.

But early on, you found out that teaching, if you're serious about it, is lot like having a pair of battery cables clamped to your brain.

It drains the energy right out of you.

You're always so stressed -- always on edge.

It used to be that all the bad stuff in your head had a place to go.

Now, your creative flow's so constricted, all these nasty emotions have just been pushing up against the inside of your skull.

There's anger in there.

A ton of resentment.

Murderous impulses, which thank God, you've managed to repress.

You're seeing yourself 30 years from now.

Still teaching at the same school at age 54.

Hair turned grey, covered with dandruff.

Huge beer belly, tiny veins bursting along the length of your nose.

When you're inspired enough -- meaning, when you're drunk enough -- you'll fish out one of the manuscripts you started years ago, and never finished.

You'll futz around -- get nowhere.

And dump the pages back into your desk.

And of course, you'll keep whispering to yourself that you still have time, that there were a lot of artists who didn't have their big breakthrough until they were 50 or 60.

But you'll never be able to fool yourself -- you're just not that dumb.

You cradle your son, rock him in your hairy forearms.

Ha -- he's nodding off -- finally.

<SFX> *Creak of broken springs.*

You lower yourself on the ratty sofa, careful not to wake him.

You study the little eyelids, the delicate, flared nostrils, the chin you'd call stubborn if it wasn't about the size of a dime.

You smile at your boy -- this mind-blowing tiny jewel box of human potential.

Then you turn away.

What kind of a future are you gonna make for him – for him and your daughter?
Is it going to be for them like it was for you -- hand-me-down clothes, bouncing around from one crap living situation to the next, growing up with this gaping hole in the middle of everything?

And all of this courtesy of Dear Old Dad?

SCENE:

<SFX: Clatter of typewriter keys. Bell and then crank of manual return handle>

It's way past midnight, everyone's asleep.

You've shut yourself inside the cramped laundry room of your trailer that does double duty as your office.

Squeezed behind a tiny card table, you're at the keys of your wife's dented portable typewriter, banging out a story like you're life depends on it.

You've got your inspiration taped to the formica, an article that floored you when you first saw it a couple months back.

You still can't stop reading it.

New Mom Commits Suicide

"The body of Tina Smythe was found at her home last night by her husband Douglas Smythe. Cause of death was a self-inflicted gunshot wound from a .22 calibre rifle recovered at the scene. Mr. Smythe told police that his wife had shown signs of depression after giving birth to their second child last Monday.

For the thousandth time, you stare at the photo of the victim, instantly familiar, lifted from her driver's license.

Tina – the hairy caterpillar from middle school.

The one who got her wings yanked off.

Just now you're trying to recapture that split-second flash of fury you saw in her eyes that morning.

At that moment, if someone had managed to slip a machete, a kitchen knife, even a butter knife into Tina's hands, everyone in that classroom would be dead.

Now you're putting more than a knife or a machete in her hands -- even more than a machine gun.

You're giving her telekinetic powers so powerful she can overturn cars and blow up gas stations just by thinking about doing it.

You're supplying her with enough psychic ammunition to turn her whole town into a slaughterhouse.

No one's going to survive this girl's eruption of violence. Not even her.

After six hours of outlining and sketching, you take a look at what you've got.

It feels contrived -- fraudulent.

What's the use.

You're never going to be able to walk authentically in the narrow little shoes of a tormented teenage girl -- not with those size 12-EEE monster male feet of yours.

You crumple up the pages, toss them in the trash.

ACT III

SCENE:

<SFX> Clunk and sputter of a blown car engine.

You made it to your driveway. That's a blooming miracle.

Still, you'd be surprised if your piece-of-crap Buick gets you to school tomorrow before the entire goddamn transmission falls out.

<SFX> Engine hiccupping and groaning as it cycles off>

The door of your trailer's open.

Your wife's standing there, shivering in the winter chill, holding a couple of crumpled sheets of paper.

God, is it an eviction notice?

No, even from here you can see she's got a little grin on her face.

You climb up the steps, and see she's salvaged last night's aborted masterpiece from the garbage bin.

WIFE: Hey ninny, why'd you throw this away?

YOU: Well, it's pretty much a big fat mess.

WIFE: No argument there.

And some of those details you put in -- like the coin-operated tampon machine in the girls locker room?

I mean -- what were you thinking?

Like if we don't have a quarter, the school's going to let us bleed all the way to math class?

YOU: That's my point. The demons and the space aliens and the loser guys that go batshit -- I've got a handle on them.

But I've got no business branching out into the world of teenage girls.

WIFE: Well, that's a world I happen to be very familiar with.

I can help you with all that.

Besides, this is way, way better than your usual testosterone stuff.

Some months back, you did -- miracle of miracles -- manage to make one good connection, with this book agent Bill Thompson.

Bill's with Doubleday, a big-deal publishing house in New York.

Polar opposite of the good folks you've dealt with at Dude and Swank.

So far he's rejected everything you've shown him.

But he's promised to take a serious look at any further stuff you send his way.

When you're done with this story your wife's so keen on, you mail it to Bill.

Months go by. You hear nothing.

One afternoon, spring semester of 1973, you're in the teacher's lounge, grading papers when the school secretary pops her head in.

SECRETARY: It's your wife. She's calling from the neighbors' house.

Your landline's been disconnected for months, so you know there's only two reasons she's phoning you -- either one of the kids broke a bone, or you actually managed to sell something.

WIFE: Hey you. We just got a telegram from Bill. Hope you don't mind I opened it.

YOU: A telegram? What century is he living in?

WIFE: A century where starving writers can't keep up with their phone bills and Ma Bell cuts them off.

Look, the guy had only two options -- Western Union, or Pony Express.

Now, can you just shut up a second so I can read?

YOU: Alright. I'm mum.

WIFE: (sounding official): "Congratulations. *Carrie Officially A Doubleday Book*. Is \$2500 Advance OK? The Future Lies Ahead. Love, Bill.

It's more money than you've ever had at one time.

When the check clears you move out of your crappy trailer to a slightly less crappy apartment in town.

You settle things with the phone company and again you've got dial tone.

You buy yourself a new Pinto. Of course, it's no purple Cadillac, but it's got a warranty, and its transmission doesn't groan like a dying animal.

A couple of months after your windfall, Bill calls you up on a Sunday.

The wife and kids are visiting your mother-in-law's house.

Leaving you alone to putter around your apartment in your socks.

SCENE:

<SFX Telephone ringing>

YOU: Yes?

BILL: It's Bill from Doubleday. Hey. Are you sitting down?

YOU: No, should I?

BILL: Might be a good idea. We sold the paperback rights to *Carrie*. They went for \$400,000.

You heard wrong. Maybe he said it wrong.

BILL(laughing a little): You there?

YOU: Yeah. So it went for \$40,000?

BILL: No, I said -- four *hundred* thousand dollars.

Your wife quits Dunkin' Donuts.

You quit teaching.

And get down to some serious writing.

The following spring, *Carrie* your novel comes out in hardback and sells 33,000 copies.

But the paperback sells a million in its first year.

In November of 1976, the movie version has its world premiere. Starring Cissy Spacek, and directed by Brian DePalma, the film rakes in \$38.8 million at the box office.

In your novel -- and at the end of the movie as well -- the outcast girl is killed by that tremendous, twisted, blood-curdling power that bursts out of her.

But you keep on tapping that wellspring of terror inside your mind decade after decade, racking up dozens of number one best sellers, and it never comes even close to running dry.

You become one of the most successful American novelists who ever lived.

You sell over 350 million copies of your books, translated into at least 52 languages worldwide.

There have been 50 feature films adapted from your novels and short stories, and dozens of TV shows.

Your current net worth is estimated around \$400 million.

Your struggle with alcohol doesn't get any easier with success.

In 1985, you add cocaine to your roster of addictions.

Your wife organizes an intervention, gives you an ultimatum.

It's hell but you get clean.

You wonder if you'll be able to keep writing novels once you're sober, but they flow out of you more forcefully than ever.

The same doubts creep up many years later when you're hit by a minivan driver and suffer massive injuries.

But again your muse roars back.

In the fall of 2015, at a White House ceremony, President Barack Obama drapes the National Medal of the Arts and Humanities around your neck

He honors you as

OBAMA (*Audio from induction ceremony*): "one of the most popular and prolific storytellers of our time, whose brilliant works of horror, fantasy, science fiction and suspense continue to horrify and delight millions around the world."

You are... Stephen King.