

**Boost Your English!**  
**An ESL Practical Course**



**SILVIA OSMAN**

**ROXANA MAREȘ**

**Boost Your English!**  
**An ESL Practical Course**



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## Introduction and Overview

*Boost Your English! An ESL Practical Course* este un manual de curs practic care se adresează în mod special studenților care studiază la un nivel avansat limba engleză ca limba a doua și reprezintă un instrument de lucru care aduce un important plus al **varietății** în abordarea noului, în timp ce structura unitară a acestuia urmărește cultivarea aptitudinilor multiple, dezvoltarea unui model de studiu individual, stimularea procesului de învățare continuă, fără de care achiziția unei limbi străine este - din păcate - imposibilă.

Profesorul de limbi străine este mereu interesat de răspunsul la întrebări aparent simple: care sunt metodele și tehnicile didactice cele mai eficiente pentru asimilarea activă a unei limbi străine, a structurilor ei gramaticale, pentru menținerea și perfecționarea abilităților de comunicare acumulate de-a lungul timpului, pentru diversificarea și înnoirea permanentă a bagajului de cunoștințe sedimentate anterior. Prezentul demers optează pentru o variantă a acestor răspunsuri fără pretenția de a le considera definitive și complete, dar cu certitudine, complexe.

*Boost Your English! An ESL Practical Course* se dorește a fi un instrument de studiu util în aprofundarea cunoștințelor de vocabular, pe mai multe paliere de cunoaștere, care încurajează dezvoltarea, învățarea și aplicarea principiilor de baza ale comunicării orale și scrise în limba engleză. Indiferent de limba în care vorbim sau scriem, trebuie să urmăm aceleași principii ale exprimării eficiente, precum claritatea, coerența, corectitudinea limbajului și creativitatea. Stilul personal, propriu fiecărui student, se formează, se șlefuieste și se cizelează în timp, dacă scrisul este privit mai degrabă ca o aventură sau ca experiență personală, care se prelungește în timp, decât ca o aptitudine care necesită mult efort și ani buni de studiu în perfecționare.

Textele pe care manualul le aduce în atenția studenților și le propune pentru studiu la cursul practic sunt semnate de scriitori profesioniști, jurnaliști și esești tineri și talentați, pentru care limba engleză este limba maternă, fiecare dintre ei bucurându-se de prestigiu în domeniul în care își exercită profesia. Articolele, povestirile și fragmentele de text au fost atent selectate, nu numai pentru valoarea și bogăția lor lexicală, ci și pentru iscusința condeiului autorilor

lor, reprezentând deopotrivă exemplele cele mai potrivite de care studenții pot beneficia în procesul educativ și sursă vie de inspirație în formarea unui stil propriu.

Diversitatea textelor de studiu, selectate din domenii de interes general, are în vedere atât perfecționarea proficienței lingvistice, cât și îmbogățirea bagajului de cultură generală, din domenii precum arta, literatura, sociologia, politica, cultura etc.

Dobândirea unei bogății de vocabular din domenii cât mai diverse de activitate asigură o bază solidă a comunicării de orice tip. Nu putem să dăm frâu liber imaginației, gândurilor și ideilor noastre, în conversație sau în scris, deopotrivă, dacă nu stăpânim îndeajuns limba în care dorim să ne exprimăm. De aceea, cursul propune, pe lângă lecturi variate, din diferite domenii de interes și diverse exerciții de sinonimie, ca sursă de studiu și cunoaștere suplimentară a lexicului limbii engleze, studiată ca limba a doua.

Activitățile propuse pentru temele de portofoliu săptămânale sunt complexe, urmărind dezvoltarea unor aptitudini și tehnici specifice în abordarea exprimării în scris a unei varietăți de topici, iar indicațiile teoretice, tiparele, discuțiile și modelele oferite la curs ajută la clarificarea acestora. Indicațiile oferite sunt clare și concise și aduc un plus de practicalitate studenților, pe care îi ajută să învețe scriind. Claritatea exprimării, coerența, gândirea logică și creativitatea sunt aptitudini și atitudini în același timp stimulate și apreciate. Se pune un accent deosebit pe scrierea creativă, pe creația personală și dezvoltarea unei atitudini de respingere a oricărui demers asociat plagiatului, un flagel atât de răspândit, dar și deopotrivă blamat, în mediul academic al zilelor noastre.

Aș vrea să mulțumesc studenților mei care, în decursul timpului, au contribuit la selecționarea textelor și materialelor de lucru, prin exprimarea clară și justificată obiectiv a opiniei, interesului și receptivității față de unele sau altele dintre instrumentele de lucru oferite la curs. Gratițudinea mea se îndreaptă și către cei care s-au implicat mult mai mult, oferindu-se să editeze texte, cu multă migală și atenție, sau să se implice în munca de cercetare și documentare, pe care un astfel de demers le necesită, fără măcar să accepte, ca o recunoaștere a muncii, efortului și timpului dedicat de către ei colaborării la elaborarea acestui curs practic, menționarea publică a numelui lor în cuvântul înainte. Ar trebui totuși să se știe că studenții Facultății de Limbi și Literaturi Străine constituie o categorie cu totul aparte, sunt speciali. Pe lângă cele două sau trei limbi străine pe care le studiază, ei aprofundează noțiuni de lingvistică generală și specifică, gramatică generativă, istoria culturii și civilizației creștine, psihologie generală, psihologie a educației și pedagogie, tehnica și teoria traducerii, limbaje de specialitate etc. și... lista poate continua. Se adaugă

cursurile și seminariile de Istoria Literaturii și cele de Cultură și Civilizație în limba străină, specifice vorbitorilor acesteia. Studenții facultății pentru care limba română nu este nativă, dar studiază prin intermediul acesteia alte limbi străine, stârnesc o reală considerație printre profesori și colegi deopotrivă, pentru efortul de voință și acumulare pe care învață să și-l formeze, zi de zi, an de an. Pentru toți aceștia, dar și pentru dascălii lor, facultatea nu este “facultativă”, ci constituie o adevărată provocare!

*Boost Your English! An ESL Practical Course* este dedicat acestor oameni neobișnuiți, către care admirația mea se îndreaptă în mod obișnuit. Sperând că utilizarea acestui instrument de învățare să stimuleze dorința de cunoaștere prin muncă temeinică și statornică, doresc mult succes tuturor!

Silvia Osman



# Unit 1

*“Poets possess a mechanism of sensibility which can devour any kind of experience... An ordinary man falls in love or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes...”*

– T. S. Eliot

## 1.1 Reading Skills

- **Previewing:** Research shows that it is easier to understand what you are reading if you begin with a general idea of what the passage is about. Previewing helps you form a general idea of the topic in your mind.
- To preview, read the title (if there is one), then the first sentence of each paragraph and the last sentence of the passage. You should do this as quickly as possible: remember that you are not reading for specific information, but for an impression of the topic.

### *A VINTAGE THUNDERBIRD*

by Ann Beattie<sup>1</sup>

Nick and Karen had driven from Virginia to New York in a little under six hours. They had made good time, keeping ahead of the rain all the way, and it was only now, while they were in the restaurant, that the rain began. It had been a nice summer weekend in the country with their friends Stephanie and Sammy, but all the time he was there Nick had worried that Karen had consented to go with him only out of pity; she had been dating another man, and when Nick suggested the weekend she had been reluctant. When she said she would go, he decided that she had given in for old times' sake.

The car they drove was hers—a white Thunderbird convertible. Every time he drove the car, he admired it more. She owned many things that he admired:

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<sup>1</sup> see Addendum for biographical details

a squirrel coat with black taffeta lining, a pair of carved soapstone bookends that held some books of poetry on her night table, her collection of Louis Armstrong 78s. He loved to go to her apartment and look at her things. He was excited by them, the way he had been spellbound, as a child, exploring the playrooms of schoolmates.

He had met Karen several years before, soon after he came to New York. Her brother had lived in the same building he lived in then, and the three of them met on the volleyball courts adjacent to the building. Her brother moved across town within a few months, but by then Nick knew Karen's telephone number. At her suggestion, they had started running in Central Park on Sundays. It was something he looked forward to all week. When they left the park, his elation was always mixed with a little embarrassment over his panting and his being sweaty on the street, but she had no self-consciousness. She didn't care if her shirt stuck on her body, or if she looked unattractive with her wet, matted hair. Or perhaps she knew that she never looked really unattractive; men always looked at her. One time, on Forty-second Street, during a light rain, Nick stopped to read a movie marquee, and when he turned back to Karen she was laughing and protesting that she couldn't take the umbrella that a man was offering her. It was only when Nick came to her side that the man stopped insisting – a nicely dressed man who was only offering her his big black umbrella, and not trying to pick her up. Things like this were hard for Nick to accept, but Karen was not flirtatious, and he could see that it was not her fault that men looked at her and made gestures.

It became a routine that on Sundays they jogged or went to a basketball court. One time, when she got frustrated because she hadn't been able to do a simple hook shot – hadn't made a basket that way all morning – he lifted her to his shoulders and charged the backboard so fast that she almost missed the basket from there too. After playing basketball, they would go to her apartment and she would make dinner. He would collapse, but she was full of energy and she would poke fun at him while she studied a cookbook, staring at it until she knew enough of a recipe to begin preparing the food. His two cookbooks were dog-eared and sauce-stained, but Karen's were perfectly clean. She looked at recipes, but never followed them exactly. He admired this – her creativity, her energy. It took him a long while to accept that she thought he was special, and later, when she began to date other men, it took him a long while to realize that she did not mean to shut him out of her life. The first time she went away with a man for the weekend – about a year after he first met her – she stopped by his apartment on her way to Pennsylvania and gave him the keys to her Thunderbird. She left so quickly – the man was downstairs in his car, waiting – that as he watched her go he could feel the warmth of the keys from her hand.

Just recently Nick had met the man she was dating now: a gaunt psychology professor, with a black-and-white tweed cap and a thick moustache that made him look like a sad-mouthed clown. Nick had gone to her apartment not knowing for certain that the man would be there – actually, it was Friday night, the beginning of the weekend, and he had gone on the hunch that he finally would meet him – and had drunk a vodka Collins that the man mixed for him. He remembered that the man had complained tediously that Paul McCartney ad stolen words from Thomas Dekker for a song on the *Abbey Road* album, and that he man said he got hives from eating shellfish.

In the restaurant now, Nick looked across the table at Karen and said, “That man you’re dating is a real bore. What is he – a scholar?”

He fumbled for a cigarette and then remembered that he no longer smoked. He had given it up a year before, when he went to visit an old girlfriend in New Haven. Things had gone badly, they had quarrelled, and he had left her to go to a bar. Coming out, he was approached by a tall black round-faced teenager and told to hand over his wallet, and he had mutely reached inside his coat and pulled it out and given it to the boy. A couple of people came out of the bar, took in the situation and walked away quickly, pretending not to notice. The boy had a small penknife in his hand. “And your cigarettes,” the boy said. Nick had reached inside his jacket pocket and handed over the cigarettes. The boy pocketed them. Then the boy smiled and cocked his head and held up the wallet, like a hypnotist dangling a pocket watch. Nick stared dumbly at his own wallet. Then, before he knew what was happening, the boy turned into a blur of motion: he grabbed his arm and yanked hard, like a judo wrestler, and threw him across the sidewalk. Nick fell against a car that was parked at the curb. He was so frightened that his legs buckled and he went down. The boy watched him fall. Then he nodded and walked down the sidewalk past the bar. When the boy was out of sight, Nick got up and went into the bar to tell his story. He let the bartender give him a beer and call the police. He declined the bartender’s offer of a cigarette, and had never smoked since.

His thoughts were drifting, and Karen still had not answered his question. He knew that he had already angered her once that day, and that it had been a mistake to speak of the man again. Just an hour or so earlier, when they got back to the city, he had been abrupt with her friend Kirby. She kept her car in Kirby’s garage, whenever he went out of town and took care of his six de-clawed chocolate-point cats. Actually, Kirby’s psychiatrist, a Dr. Kellogg, lived in the same house, but the doctor had made it clear he did not live there to take care of cats.

From his seat Nick could see the sign of the restaurant hanging outside the front window. “Star Thrower Café,” it said, in lavender neon. He got

depressed thinking that if she became more serious about the professor – he had lasted longer than any of the others – he would only be able to see her by pretending to run into her at places like the Star Thrower. He had also begun to think that he had driven the Thunderbird for the last time. She had almost refused to let him drive it again after the time, two weeks earlier, when he tapped a car in front of them on Sixth Avenue, making a dent above their left headlight. Long ago she had stopped letting him use her squirrel coat as a kind of blanket. He used to like to lie naked on the tiny balcony outside her apartment in the autumn, with the *Sunday Times* arranged under him for padding and the coat spread on top of him. Now he counted back and came up with the figure: he had known Karen for seven years.

“What are you thinking?” he said to her.

“That I’m glad I’m not thirty-eight years old, with a man putting pressure on me to have a baby.” She was talking about Stephanie and Sammy.

Her hand was on the table. He cupped his hand over it just as the waiter came with the plates.

“What are *you* thinking?” she said, withdrawing her hand.

“At least Stephanie has the sense not to do it,” he said. He picked up his fork and put it down. “Do you really love that man?”

“If I loved him, I suppose I’d be at my apartment, where he’s been waiting for over an hour. If he waited.”

When they finished she ordered espresso. He ordered it also. He had half expected her to say at some point that the trip with him was the end, and he still thought she might say that. Part of the problem was that she had money and he didn’t. She had had money since she was twenty-one, when she got control of a 50,000-dollar trust fund her grandfather had left her. He remembered the day she had bought the Thunderbird. It was the day after her birthday, five years ago. That night, laughing, they had driven the car through the Lincoln Tunnel and then down the back roads in Jersey, with a stream of orange crepe paper blowing from the radio antenna, until the wind ripped it off.

“Am I still going to see you?” Nick said.

“I suppose,” Karen said. “Although things have changed between us.”

“I’ve known you for seven years. You’re my oldest friend.”

She did not react to what he said, but much later, around midnight, she called him at his apartment. “Was what you said at the Star Thrower calculated to make me feel bad?” she said. “When you said that I was your oldest friend?”

“No,” he said. “You are my oldest friend.”

“You must know somebody longer that you’ve known me.”

“You’re the only person I’ve seen regularly for seven years.”

She sighed.

“Professor go home?” he said.

“No. He’s here.”

“You’re saying all this in front of him?”

“I don’t see why there has to be any secret about this.”

“You could put an announcement in the paper,” Nick said. “Run a little picture of me with it.”

“Why are you so sarcastic?”

“It’s embarrassing. It’s embarrassing that you’d say this in front of that man.”

He was sitting in the dark, in a chair by the phone. He had wanted to call her ever since he got back from the restaurant. The long day of driving had finally caught up with him, and his shoulders ached. He felt the black man’s hands on his shoulders, felt his own body folding up, felt himself flying backward. He had lost 65 dollars that night. The day she bought the Thunderbird, he had driven it through the tunnel into New Jersey. He had driven, then she had driven, and then he had driven again. Once he had pulled into the parking lot of a shopping center and told her to wait, and had come back with the orange crepe paper. Years later he had looked for the road they had been on that night, but he could never find it.

The next time Nick heard from her was almost three weeks after the trip to Virginia. Since he didn’t have the courage to call her, and since he expected not to hear from her at all, he was surprised to pick up the phone and hear her voice. Petra had been in his apartment – a woman at his office whom he had always wanted to date and who had just broken off an unhappy engagement. As he held the phone camped between his ear and shoulder, he looked admiringly at Petra’s profile.

“What’s up?” he said to Karen, trying to sound very casual for Petra.

“Get ready,” Karen said. “Stephanie called and said that she was going to have a baby.”

“What do you mean? I thought she told you in Virginia that she thought Sammy was crazy to want a kid.”

“It happened by accident. She missed her period just after we left.”

Petra shifted on the couch and began leafing through *Newsweek*.

“Can I call you back?” he said.

“Throw whatever woman is there out of your apartment and talk to me now,” Karen said. “I’m about to go out.”

He looked at Petra, who was sipping her drink. “I can’t do that,” he said.

“Then call me when you can. But call back tonight.”

When he hung up, he took Petra’s glass but found that he had run out of Scotch. He suggested that they go to a bar on West Tenth Street.

When they got to the bar, he excused himself almost immediately. Karen had sounded depressed, and he could not enjoy his evening with Petra until he made sure everything was all right. Once he heard her voice, he knew he was going to come to her apartment when he had finished having a drink, and she said that he should come over immediately or not at all, because she was about to go to the professor's. She was so abrupt that he wondered if she could be jealous.

He went back to the bar and sat on the stool next to Petra and picked up his Scotch and water and took a big drink. It was so cold that it made his teeth ache. Petra had on blue slacks and a white blouse. He rubbed his hand up and down her back, just below the shoulders. She was not wearing a brassiere.

"I have to leave," he said.

"You have to leave? Are you coming back?"

He started to speak, but she put up her hand. "Never mind," she said. "I don't want you to come back." She sipped margarita. "Whoever the woman is you just called, I hope the two of you have a splendid evening."

Petra gave him a hard look, and he knew that she really wanted him to go. He stared at her – at the little crust of salt on her bottom lip – and then she turned away from him.

He hesitated for just a second before he left the bar. He went outside and walked about ten steps, and then he was jumped. They got him from behind, and in his shock and confusion he thought that he had been hit by a car. He lost sense of where he was, and although it was a dull blow, he thought that somehow a car had hit him. Looking up from the sidewalk, he saw them – two men, younger than he was, picking at him like vultures, pushing him, rummaging through his jacket and his pockets. The crazy thing was he was on West Tenth Street; there should have been other people on the street, but there were not. His clothes were tearing. His right hand was wet with blood. They had cut his arm, the shirt was bloodstained, he saw his own blood spreading out into a little puddle. He stared at it and was afraid to move his hand out of it. Then the men were gone and he was left half sitting, propped up against a building where they had dragged him. He was able to push himself up, but the man he began telling the story to, a passerby, kept coming into focus and fading out again. The man had on a sombrero, and he was pulling him up but pulling too hard. His legs didn't have the power to support him – something had happened to his legs – so that when the man loosened his grip he went down on his knees. He kept blinking to stay conscious. He blacked out before he could stand again.

Back in his apartment, later that night with his arm in a cast, he felt confused and ashamed – ashamed for the way he had treated Petra, and ashamed

for having been mugged. He wanted to call Karen, but he was too embarrassed. He sat in the chair by the phone, willing her to call him. At midnight the phone rang, and he picked it up at once, sure that his telepathic message had worked. The phone call was from Stephanie, at La Guardia. She had been trying to reach Karen and couldn't. She wanted to know if she could come to his apartment.

"I'm not going through with it," Stephanie said, her voice wavering. "I'm thirty-eight years old, and this was a goddamn accident."

"Calm down," he said. "We can get you an abortion."

"I don't know if I could take a human life," she said, and she began to cry.

"Stephanie?" he said. "You okay? Are you going to get a cab?"

More crying, no answer.

"Because it would be silly for me to get a cab just to come get you. You can make it here okay, can't you, Steph?"

The cabdriver who took him to La Guardia was named Arthur Shales. A small pink baby show was glued to the dashboard of the cap. Arthur Shales chain-smoked Picayunes. "Woman I took to Bendel's today, I'm still trying to get over it," he said. "I picked her up at Madison and Seventy-fifth. Took her to Bendel's and pulled up in front and she said, 'Oh, screw Bendel's.' I took her back to Madison and Seventy-fifth."

Going across the bridge, Nick said to Arthur Shales that the woman he was going to pick up was going to be very upset.

"Upset? What do I care? Neither of you are gonna hold a gun to my head, I can take anything. You're my last fares of the night. Take you back where you came from, then I'm heading home myself."

When they were almost at the airport exit, Arthur Shales snorted and said, "Home is a room over an Italian grocery. Guy who runs it woke me up at six this morning, yelling so loud at his supplier. 'You call these tomatoes?' he was saying. 'I could take these out and bat them on the tennis court.' Guy is always griping about tomatoes being so unripe."

Stephanie was standing on the walkway, right where she had said she would be. She looked haggard, and Nick was not sure that he could cope with her. He raised his hand to his shirt pocket for cigarettes, forgetting once again that he had given up smoking. He also forgot that he couldn't grab anything with his right hand because it was in a cast.

"You know who I had in my cab the other day?" Arthur Shales said, coasting to a stop in front of the terminal. "You're not going to believe it. Al Pacino."

For more than a week, Nick and Stephanie tried to reach Karen. Stephanie began to think that Karen was dead. And although Nick chided her for calling Karen's number so often, he began to worry too. Once he went to her apartment on his lunch hour and listened at the door. He heard nothing, but he put his mouth close to the door and asked her to please open the door, if she was there, because there was trouble with Stephanie. As he left the building he had to laugh at what it would have looked like if someone had seen him – a nicely dressed man, with his hands on either side of his mouth, leaning into a door and talking to it. And one of the hands in a cast.

For a week he came straight home from work, to keep Stephanie company. Then he asked Petra if she would have dinner with him. She said no. As he was leaving the office, he passed by her desk without looking at her. She got up and followed him down the hall and said, "I'm having a drink with somebody after work, but I could meet you for a drink around seven o'clock."

He went home to see if Stephanie was all right. She said that she had been sick in the morning, but after the card came in the mail – she held out a postcard to him – she felt much better. The card was addressed to him; it was from Karen, in Bermuda. She said she had spent the afternoon in a sailboat. No explanation. He read the message several times. He felt very relieved. He asked Stephanie if she wanted to go out for a drink with him and Petra. She said no, as he had known she would.

At seven he sat alone at a table in the Blue Bar, with the postcard in his inside pocket. There was a folded newspaper on the little round table where he sat, and his broken right wrist rested on it. He sipped a beer. At 7:30 he opened the paper and looked through the theater section. At quarter to eight he got up and left. He walked over to Fifth Avenue and began to walk downtown. In one of the store windows there was a poster for Bermuda tourism. A woman in a turquoise-blue bathing suit was rising out of blue waves, her mouth in an unnaturally wide smile. She seemed oblivious of the little boy next to her who was tossing a ball into the sky. Standing there, looking at the poster, Nick began a mental game that he had sometimes played in college. He invented a cartoon about Bermuda. It was a split-frame drawing. Half of it showed a beautiful girl, in the arms of her lover, on the pink sandy beach of Bermuda, with the caption: "It's glorious to be here in Bermuda." The other half of the frame showed a tall tired man looking into the window of a travel agency at a picture of the lady and her lover. He would have no lines, but in a balloon above his head he would be wondering if, when he went home, it was the right time to urge an abortion to the friend who had moved into his apartment.

When he got home, Stephanie was not there. She had said that if she felt better, she would go out to eat. He sat down and took off his shoes and socks

and hung forward, with his head almost touching his knees, like a droopy doll. Then he went into the bedroom, carrying the shoes and socks, and took off his clothes and put on jeans. The phone rang and he picked it up just as he heard Stephanie's key in the door.

"I'm sorry," Petra said, "I've never stood anybody up before in my life."

"Never mind," he said. "I'm not mad."

"I'm very sorry," she said.

"I drank a beer and read the paper. After what I did to you the other night, I don't blame you."

"I like you," she said. "That was why I didn't come. Because I knew I wouldn't say what I wanted to say. I got as far as Forty-eighth Street and turned around."

"What did you want to say?"

"That I like you. That I like you and that it's a mistake, because I'm always letting myself in for it, agreeing to see men who treat me badly. I wasn't very flattered the other night."

"I know. I apologize. Look, why don't you meet me at that bar now and let me not walk out on you. Okay?"

"No," she said, her voice changing. "That wasn't why I called. I called to say I was sorry, but I know I did the right thing. I have to hang up now."

He put the phone back and continued to look at the floor. He knew that Stephanie was not even pretending not to have heard. He took a step forward and ripped the phone out of the wall. It was not a very successful dramatic gesture. The phone just popped out of the jack, and he stood there, holding it in his good hand.

"Would you think it was awful if I offered to go to bed with you?" Stephanie asked.

"No," he said. "I think it would be very nice."

Two days later he left work early in the afternoon and went to Kirby's. Dr. Kellogg opened the door and then pointed toward the back of the house and said, "The man you're looking for is reading." He was wearing baggy white pants and a Japanese kimono.

Nick almost had to push through the half-open door because the psychiatrist was so intent on holding the cats back with one foot. In the kitchen Kirby was indeed reading – he was looking at a Bermuda travel brochure and listening to Karen.

She looked sheepish when she saw him. Her face was tan, and her eyes, which were always beautiful, looked startlingly blue now that her face was so dark. She had lavender-tinted sunglasses pushed on top of her head. She and Kirby seemed happy and comfortable in the elegant, air-conditioned house.

“When did you get back?” Nick said.

“A couple of days ago,” she said. “The night I last talked to you, I went over to the professor’s apartment, and in the morning we went to Bermuda.”

Nick had come to Kirby’s to get the car keys and borrow the Thunderbird – to go for a ride and be by himself for a while – and for a moment now he thought of asking her for the keys anyway. He sat down at the table.

“Stephanie is in town,” he said. “I think we ought to get a cup o coffee and talk about it.”

Her key ring was on the table. If he had the keys, he could be heading for the Lincoln Tunnel. Years ago, they would be walking to the car hand by hand, in love. It would be her birthday. The car’s odometer would have 5 miles on it.

One of Kirby’s cats jumped up on the table and began to sniff at the butter dish there.

“Would you like to walk over to the Star Thrower and get a cup of coffee?” Nick said.

She got up slowly.

“Don’t mind me,” Kirby said.

“Would you like to come, Kirby?” she asked.

“Not me. No, no.”

She patted Kirby’s shoulder, and they went out.

“What happened?” she said, pointing to his hand.

“It’s broken.”

“How did you break it?”

“Never mind,” he said. “I’ll tell you when we get there.”

When they got there it was not yet four o’clock, and the Star Thrower was closed.

“Well, just tell me what’s happening with Stephanie,” Karen said impatiently. “I don’t really feel like sitting around talking because I haven’t even unpacked yet.”

“She’s at my apartment, and she’s pregnant, and she doesn’t even talk about Sammy.”

She shook her head sadly. “How did you break your hand?” she said.

“I was mugged. After our last pleasant conversation on the phone – the time you told me to come over immediately or not at all. I didn’t make it because I was in the emergency room.”

“Oh, Christ,” she said. “Why didn’t you call me?”

“I was embarrassed to call you.”

“Why? Why didn’t you call?”

“You wouldn’t have been there anyway.” He took her arm. “Let’s find some place to go,” he said.

Two young men came up to the door of the Star Thrower. “Isn’t this where David had that great Armenian dinner?” one of them said.

“I *told* you it wasn’t,” the other said, looking at the menu posted to the right of the door.

“I didn’t really think this was the place. *You* said it was on this street.”

They continued to quarrel as Nick and Karen walked away.

“Why do you think Stephanie came here to the city?” Karen said.

“Because we’re her friends,” Nick said.

“But she has lots of friends.”

“Maybe she thought we were more dependable.”

“Why do you say that in that tone of voice? I don’t have to tell you every move I’m making. Things went very well in Bermuda. He almost lured me to London.”

“Look,” he said. “Can’t we go somewhere where you can call her?”

He looked at her, shocked because she didn’t understand that Stephanie had come to see her, not him. He had seen for a long time that it didn’t matter to her how much she meant for him, but he had never realized that she didn’t know how much she meant to Stephanie. She didn’t understand people. When he found out she had another man, he should have dropped out of her life. She did not deserve her good looks and her fine car and all her money. He turned to face her on the street, ready to tell her what he thought.

“You know what happened there?” she said. “I got sunburned and had a terrible time. He went on to London without me.”

He took her arm again and they stood side by side and looked at some sweaters hanging in the window of Countdown.

“So going to Virginia wasn’t the answer for them,” she said. “Remember when Sammy and Stephanie left town, and we told each other what a stupid idea it was – that it would never work out? Do you think we jinxed them?”

They walked down the street again, saying nothing.

“It would kill me if I had to be a good conversationalist with you,” she said at last. “You’re the only person I can rattle on with.” She stopped and leaned into him. “I had a rotten time in Bermuda,” she said. “Nobody should go to a beach but a sand flea.”

“You don’t have to make clever conversation with me,” he said.

“I know,” she said. “It just happened.”

Late in the afternoon of the day that Stephanie had her abortion, Nick called Sammy from a street phone near his apartment. Karen and Stephanie