Reading and Listening – LET'S PRACTICE PRONUNCIATION

It was a cold night in September. The rain was drumming on the car roof as George and Marie Winston drove through the empty country roads towards the house of their friends, the Harrisons, where they were going to attend a party to celebrate the engagement of the Harrisons' daughter, Lisa. As they drove, they listened to the local radio station, which was playing classical music.

They were about five miles from their destination when the music on the radio was interrupted by a news announcement:

"The Cheshire police have issued a serious warning after a man escaped from Colford Mental Hospital earlier this evening. The man, John Downey, is a murderer who killed six people before he was captured two years ago. He is described as large, very strong, and extremely dangerous. People in the Cheshire area are warned to keep their doors and windows locked and to call the police immediately if they see anyone acting strangely."

Marie shivered. *"A crazy killer. And he's out there somewhere. That's scary."*

"Don't worry about it," said her husband. *"We're nearly there now. Anyway, we have more important things to worry about. This car is losing power for some reason—it must be that old problem with the carburetor. If it gets any worse, we'll have to stay at the Harrisons' tonight and get it fixed before we travel back tomorrow."*

As he spoke, the car began to slow down. George pressed the accelerator, but the engine only coughed. Finally, they rolled to a halt, as the engine died completely. Just as they stopped, George pulled the car off the road, and it came to rest under a large tree.

"Blast!" said George angrily. *"Now we'll have to walk in the rain."*

"But that'll take us an hour at least," said Marie. *"And I have my high-heeled shoes and my nice clothes on. They'll be ruined!"*

"Well, you'll have to wait while I run to the nearest house and call the Harrisons. Someone can come out and pick us up," said George.

"But George! Have you forgotten what the radio said? There's a homicidal maniac out there! You can't leave me here alone!"

"You'll have to hide in the back of the car. Lock all the doors and lie on the floor in the back, under this blanket. No one will see you. When I come back, I'll knock three times on the door. Then you can get up and open it. Don't open it unless you hear three knocks."

George opened the door and slipped out into the rain. He quickly disappeared into the blackness. Marie quickly locked the doors and settled down under the blanket in the back for a long wait. She was frightened and worried, but she was a strong-minded woman. She had not been waiting long, however, when she heard a strange scratching noise. It seemed to be coming from the roof of the car.

Marie was terrified. She listened, holding her breath. Then she heard three slow knocks, one after the other, also on the roof of the car. Was it her husband? Should she open the door? Then she heard another knock, and another. This was not her husband. It was somebody—or something—else. She was shaking with fear, but she forced herself to lie still. The knocking continued—bump, bump, bump, bump.

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Many hours later, as the sun rose, she was still lying there. She had not slept for a moment. The knocking had never stopped, all night long. She did not know what to do. Where was George? Why had he not come for her?

Suddenly, she heard the sound of three or four vehicles racing quickly down the road. All of them pulled up around her, their tires screeching on the road. At last! Someone had come!

Marie sat up quickly and looked out of the window.

The three vehicles were all police cars, and two still had their lights flashing. Several policemen leaped out. One of them rushed towards the car as Marie opened the door. He took her by the hand.

"Get out of the car and walk with me to the police vehicle, Miss. You're safe now. Look straight ahead. Keep looking at the police car. Don't look back. Just don't look back."

Something in the way he spoke filled Marie with cold horror. She could not help herself. About ten yards from the police car, she stopped, turned, and looked back at the empty vehicle.

George was hanging from the tree above the car, a rope tied around his neck. As the wind blew his body back and forth, his feet were bumping gently on the roof of the car—bump, bump, bump, bump.

Comprehension Questions (Choose the correct answer)

1. **Where were the Winstons going when this incident happened?**
   - Home
   - To Colford Mental Hospital
   - To a party
   - To the police station
2. **What was the reason for the news announcement on the radio?**
   - Six people, including John Downey, had been murdered.
   - A dangerous prisoner had escaped.
   - The police were warning of accidents on the roads in the bad weather.
   - Some people had been seen acting strangely in the Cheshire area.
3. **What did George think was causing the trouble with the car?**
   - The carburetor
   - The rain drumming on the roof
   - The accelerator
   - He had no idea
4. **Why did he pull the car off the road?**
   - To have a rest
   - To go for a walk
   - To walk to the nearest house
   - It broke down

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5. **Why did Marie stay in the car when George left?**
    - She was afraid to go out in the dark.
    - So no one would steal the car.
    - Her clothes weren't suitable for the rain.
    - She wanted to get some sleep.
6. **Where did George set off to walk to?**
    - The Mental Hospital
    - The nearest house
    - The Harrisons' house
    - The police station
7. **What made Marie so frightened as she waited in the car?**
    - There was a strange sound coming from the roof.
    - She could see a man acting strangely outside the car.
    - Some police cars came racing down the road.
    - She was afraid of the rain and the dark.
8. **Why did the policeman tell her not to look back when he brought her out of the car?**
    - He didn't want her to see the body of her husband.
    - The killer was waiting behind her.
    - He wanted her to forget everything that had happened during the night.
    - He didn't want her to see the damage done to the car.

Vocabulary Exercise

Explain the following words:

- **Prisoner**
- **Blanket**
- **Maniac**
- **Policeman**
- **Weather**
- **Killer**

Drawing Activity

What's the most famous urban legend you know? Explain it with a drawing.

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