

UNKNOWN DESTINATION (1 of 5)

That day was different. My mother had woken me up early and dressed me in unusual clothing. She and my father were clearly in a hurry to go somewhere or take me somewhere, and they acted as though I had misbehaved and were being punished for something. They took a snapshot of me before we all piled into the car and made off to our unknown destination.

WRITING EXERCISES: Juxtaposition of simple and perfect past. Subjective tense and use of passive voice. Phrasal verbs to pile into and to make off.

UNKNOWN DESTINATION (2 of 5)

From the back seat I overheard my parents planning their day without me. What had I done that they no longer wished to spend time with me? I was their only daughter, after all, and I thought they loved me. None of this made any sense to me. I could think of nothing to explain it and began to panic. My palms began to sweat and my lips trembled. Tears began to well in my eyes.

WRITING EXERCISES: To overhear someone talking about something. Verbs using one's palms, lips, and eyes.

UNKNOWN DESTINATION (3 of 5)

Soon we pulled into an enormous lot where there was hardly any room for us. My father circled several times before finding a place to park and then hustled me out of the car as though I were late for an appointment. He kept looking at his watch and mumbling things under his breath. Though I couldn't make out the words, I got the impression they weren't meant for children.

WRITING EXERCISES: The verbs to hustle and to make out. Further subjunctive clauses. Getting the impression and being meant for.

UNKNOWN DESTINATION (4 of 5)

My panic began to ease as I noticed that the other children were dressed in the same kind of clothes that I was wearing. We seemed to be part of a team, or maybe these were prison uniforms. Maybe I wasn't the only child who had misbehaved and been disowned by her parents. At least I wouldn't be alone wherever this was.

WRITING EXERCISES: Use of wherever this was, whoever they were, whenever it happened to be. Dependent clauses using past perfect and passive voice.

UNKNOWN DESTINATION (5 of 5)

Soon the parents were gone and we were left in a room crammed full of desks where nobody dared to sit until the lady in front called out our name and pointed. “Cynthia Little,” she finally read aloud, and I followed her bony finger to the desk that would be mine for I didn’t know how long. I still wasn’t sure where I had ended up or why. When we had all been seated, the lady in front introduced herself as our teacher, and finally I understood what was going on. A new schoolyear was beginning. Maybe this wouldn’t be so bad after all.

WRITING EXERCISES: The verb to cram and to be crammed full, dependent clauses, and compound adverbs. Past perfect passive. To introduce and to introduce as. Maybe plus hypothetical and after all.

A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT (1 of 4)

It was a dark and stormy night. I huddled in a corner trying to stay warm with what was left of my bottle of whisky. The waitress had brought it to me without bothering to take my order. I was a regular customer and, I hoped, one of her favorites since I always tipped well and went out of my way to be nice.

WRITING EXERCISES: Synonyms for the verb to huddle. Compound objects and examples.

Without bother or going out of one's way to do something.

A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT (2 of 4)

The wind howled like a savage beast and the windows sounded like they couldn't take much more. It was one of the oldest pubs in town, having been built centuries ago, and I reminded myself that it must've survived all kinds of weather. There was no reason to assume that tonight would be any different, and I wasn't there to worry about it. I was reading an old book that I'd found in the attic. I'd grown up with it but failed to grasp its importance. It held a deeper secret than I had ever imagined.

WRITING EXERCISES: Being unable to take much more or withstand something, appositive phrases using gerunds. Comparatives using simple and perfect past.

A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT (3 of 4)

An old lady suddenly approached and sat down without asking if she could join me. Anyone else would've told her that she wasn't welcome, but I went out of my way to be nice to everyone, regardless of the inappropriateness of their behavior. She proceeded to pour herself a glass of my whiskey and inform me that she used to write children's books and hadn't seen one of them in decades.

WRITING EXERCISES: Synonyms and paraphrasing (to approach, to sit down, to join someone). To go out of one's way to do something. Regardless as transition or phrase. Compound verbs using simple past, followed by the imperfect and perfect.

A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT (4 of 4)

It turns out she had used a pseudonym. That had been necessary for reasons she kept to herself. I would've pressed the issue but that didn't seem like a good idea. She had other things to tell me, and it wasn't my place to ask questions. I was there to be informed and needed to listen closely. What she had to say would change my life for reasons that couldn't be separated from the book I had found earlier that day.

WRITING EXERCISES: Use and omission of that as a subordinator. Not being one's place to do something. Compound subjects and passive voice.