Estelle Horan has lived in the neat San Diego suburb of Parrish for twelve years, and outwardly she is typical Ms. California: She wears bright print shifts and smoked amber sunglasses; her hair is black-streaked blonde; she drives a neat maroon Volkswagen Formula Vee with a smile decal on the gas
cap and a green-flag ecology sticker on the back window. Her husband is an executive at the Parrish branch of the Bank of America; her son and daughter are certified members of the Southern California Sun 'n Fun Crowd, burnished-brown beach creatures. There is a hibachi in the small, beautifully kept back yard, and the door chimes play a tinkly phrase from the refrain of “Hey, Jude.” But Ms. Horan still carries the thin, difficult soil of New England somewhere inside her, and when she talks of Carrie White her face takes on an odd, pinched look that is more like Lovecraft out of Arkham than Kerouac out of Southern Cal.

“Of course she was strange,” Estelle Horan tells me, lighting a second Virginia Slim a moment after stubbing out her first. “The whole family was strange. Ralph was a construction worker, and people on the street said he carried a Bible and a .38 revolver to work with him every day. The Bible was for his coffee break and lunch. The .38 was in case he met Antichrist on the job. I can remember the Bible myself. The revolver . . . who knows? He was a big olive-skinned man with his hair always shaved into a flattop crewcut. He always looked mean. And you didn't meet his eyes, not ever. They were so intense they actually seemed to glow. When you saw him coming you

 crossed the street and you never stuck out your tongue at his back, not ever. That's how spooky he was.” She pauses, puffing clouds of cigarette smoke toward the pseudo-redwood beams that cross the ceiling. Stella Horan lived on Carlin Street until she was twenty, commuting to day classes at Lewin Business College in Motton. But she remembers the incident of the stones very clearly.

“There are times,” she says, “when I wonder if I might have caused it. Their back yard was next to ours, and Mrs. White had put in a hedge but it hadn't grown out yet. She'd called my mother dozens of times about ‘the show’ I was putting on in my back yard. Well, my bathing suit was perfectly decent— prudish by today's standards— nothing but a plain old one-piece Jantzen. Mrs. White used to go on and on about what a scandal it was for ‘her baby.’ My mother . . . well, she tries to be polite, but her temper is so quick. I don't know what Margaret White said to finally push her over the edge— called me the Whore of Babylon, I suppose— but my mother told her our yard was our yard and I'd go out and dance the hootchie-kootchie buck naked if that was her pleasure and mine. She also told her that she was a dirty old woman with a can of worms for a mind. There was a lot more shouting, but that was

 the upshot of it.

“I wanted to stop sunbathing right then. I hate trouble. It upsets my stomach. But Mom— when she gets a case, she's a terror. She came home from Jordan Marsh with a little white bikini. Told me I might as well get all the sun I could. ‘After all,’ she said, ‘the privacy of our own back yard and all.’” Stella Horan smiles a little at the memory and crushes out her cigarette. “I tried to argue with her, tell her I didn't want any more trouble, didn't want to be a pawn in their back-fence war. Didn't do a bit of good. Trying to stop my mom when she gets a bee in her hat is like trying to stop a Mack truck going downhill with no brakes. Actually, there was more to it. I was scared of the Whites. Real religious nuts are nothing to fool with. Sure, Ralph White was dead, but what if Margaret still had that .38 around? “But there I was on Saturday afternoon, spread out on a blanket in the back yard, covered with suntan lotion and listening to Top Forty on the radio. Mom hated that stuff and usually she'd yell out at least twice for me to turn it down before she went nuts. But that day she turned it up twice herself. I started to feel like the Whore of Babylon myself.

“But nobody came out of the Whites' place. Not even the old lady to hang her wash. That's something else— she never hung any undies on the back line. Not even Carrie's, and she was only three back then. Always in the house. “I started to relax. I guess I was thinking Margaret must have taken Carrie to the park to worship God in the raw or something. Anyway, after a little while I rolled on my back, put one arm over my eyes, and dozed off.

“When I woke up, Carrie was standing next to me and looking down at my body.” She breaks off, frowning into space. Outside, the cars are whizzing by endlessly. I can hear the steady little whine my tape recorder makes. But it all seems a little too brittle, too glossy, just a cheap patina over a darker world— a real world where nightmares happen. “She was such a pretty girl,” Stella Horan resumes, lighting another cigarette. “I've seen some high school pictures of her, and that horrible fuzzy black-and-white photo on the cover of Newsweek. I look at them and all I can think is, Dear God, where did she go? What did that woman do to her? Then I feel sick and sorry. She was so pretty, with pink cheeks and bright brown eyes, and her hair the shade of blonde you know will

 darken and get mousy. Sweet is the only word that fits. Sweet and bright and innocent. Her mother's sickness hadn't touched her very deeply, not then.

King, Stephen (2008-06-24). Carrie (pp. 36-37). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.