Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ #8

*Read and annotate thoroughly*

HE WAS OUT HUNTING for Cortman. It had become a relaxing hobby, hunting for

Cortman; one of the few diversions left to him. On those days when he didn’t care to leave the

neighborhood and there was no demanding work to be done on the house, he would search.

Under cars, behind bushes, under houses, up fireplaces, in closets, under beds, in refrigerators;

any place into which a moderately corpulent male body could conceivably be squeezed.

Ben Cortman could be in any one of those places at one time or another. He changed his

hiding place constantly. Neville felt certain that Cortman knew he was singled out for capture.

He felt, further, that Cortman relished the peril of it. If the phrase were not such an obvious

anachronism, Neville would have said that Ben Cortman had a zest for life. Sometimes he

thought Cortman was happier now than he ever had been before.

Neville ambled slowly up Compton Boulevard toward the next house he meant to search. An

uneventful morning had passed. Cortman was not found, even though Neville knew he was

somewhere in the neighborhood. He had to be, because he was always the first one at the house

at night. The other ones were almost always strangers. Their turnover was great, because they

invariably stayed in the neighborhood and Neville found them and destroyed them. Not

Cortman.

As he strolled, Neville wondered again what he’d do if he found Cortman. True, his plan had

always been the same: immediate disposal. But that was on the surface. He knew it wouldn’t

be that easy. Oh, it wasn’t that he felt anything toward Cortman. It wasn’t even that Cortman

represented a part of the past. The past was dead and he knew it and accepted it.

No, it wasn’t either of those things. What it probably was, Neville decided, was that he didn’t

want to cut off a recreational activity. The rest were such dull, robot-like creatures. Ben, at

least, had some imagination. For some reason, his brain hadn’t weakened like the others. It

could be, Neville often theorized, that Ben Cortman was born to be dead. Undead, that is, he

thought, a wry smile playing on his full lips.

It no longer occurred to him that Cortman was out to kill him. That was a negligible menace.

Neville sank down on the next porch with a slow groan. Then, reaching lethargically into his

pocket, he took out his pipe. With an idle thumb he tamped rough tobacco shreds down into the

pipe bowl. In a few moments smoke swirls were floating lazily, about his head in the warm, still

air.

It was a bigger, more relaxed Neville that gazed out across the wide field on the other side of

the boulevard. An evenly paced hermit life had increased his weight to 230 pounds. His face

was full, his body broad and muscular underneath the loose-fitting denim he wore. He had long

before given up shaving. Only rarely did he crop his thick blond beard, so that it remained two

to three inches from his skin. His hair was thinning and was long and straggly. Set in the deep

tan of his face, his blue eyes were calm and unexcitable.

He leaned back against the brick step, puffing out slow clouds of smoke. Far out across that field he knew there was still a depression in the ground where he had buried Virginia, where she

had unburied herself. But knowing it brought no glimmer of reflective sorrow to his eyes.

Rather than go on suffering, he had learned to stultify himself to introspection. Time had lost its

multidimensional scope. There was only the present for Robert Neville; a present based on day-to-day survival, marked by neither heights of joy nor depths of despair. I am predominantly

vegetable, he often thought to himself. That was the way he wanted it.

Robert Neville sat gazing at the white spot out in the field for several minutes before he

realized that it was moving.

His eyes blinked once and the skin tightened over his face. He made a slight sound in his

throat, a sound of doubting question. Then, standing up, he raised his left hand to shade the sunlight from his eyes.

His teeth bit convulsively into the pipestem.

A woman.

He didn’t even try to catch the pipe when it fell from his mouth as his jaw went slack. For a long, breathless moment, he stood there on the porch step, staring.

He closed his eyes, opened them. She was still there. Robert Neville felt the increasing thud

in his chest as he watched the woman.

She didn’t see him. Her head was down as she walked across the long field. He could see her reddish hair blowing in the breeze, her arms swinging loosely at her sides. His throat moved. It was such an incredible sight after three years that his mind could not assimilate it. He kept blinking and staring as he stood motionless in the shade of the house.

A woman. Alive. In the daylight.

He stood, mouth partly open, gaping at the woman. She was young, he could see now as she

came closer; probably in her twenties. She wore a wrinkled and dirty white dress. She was very

tan, her hair was red. In the dead silence of the afternoon Neville thought he heard the crunch of

her shoes in the long grass.

I’ve gone mad. The words presented themselves abruptly. He felt less shock at that

possibility than he did at the notion that she was real. He had, in fact, been vaguely preparing

himself for just such a delusion. It seemed feasible. The man who died of thirst saw mirages of

lakes. Why shouldn’t a man who thirsted for companionship see a woman walking in the sun?

He started suddenly. No, it wasn’t that. For, unless his delusion had sound as well as sight,

he now heard her walking through the grass. He knew it was real. The movement of her hair, of

her arms. She still looked at the ground. Who was she? Where was she going? Where had she

been?

He didn’t know what welled up in him. It was too quick to analyze, an instinct that broke

through every barrier of time-erected reserve.

His left arm went up.

“Hi!” he cried. He jumped down to the sidewalk. “Hi, there!”

A moment of sudden, complete silence. Her head jerked up and they looked at each other.

Alive, he thought. Alive!

He wanted to shout more, but he felt suddenly choked up. His tongue felt wooden, his brain

refused to function. Alive. The word kept repeating itself in his mind, Alive, alive, alive.

With a sudden twisting motion the young woman turned and began running wildly back

across the field.

THE WOMAN LAY MOTIONLESS on his bed, sleeping. It was past four in the afternoon.

At least twenty times Neville had stolen into the bedroom to look at her and see if she were

awake. Now he sat in the kitchen drinking coffee and worrying.

What if she is infected, though? he argued with himself. The worry had started a few hours

before, while Ruth was sleeping. Now, he couldn’t rid himself of the fear. No matter how he

reasoned, it didn’t help. All right, she was tanned from the sun, she had been walking in the

daylight. The dog had been in the daylight too.

Neville’s fingers tapped restlessly on the table.

Simplicity had departed; the dream had faded into disturbing complexity. There had been no

wondrous embrace, no magic words spoken. Beyond her name he had got nothing from her.

Getting her to the house had been a battle. Getting her to enter had been even worse. She had

cried and begged him not to kill her. No matter what he said to her, she kept crying and begging.

He had visualized something on the order of a Hollywood production; stars in their eyes,

entering the house, arms about each other, fade-out. Instead he had been forced to tug and cajole

and argue and scold while she held back. The entrance had been less than romantic. He had to

drag her in.

Once in the house, she had been no less frightened. He’d tried to act comfortingly, but all she

did was cower in one corner the way the dog had done. She wouldn’t eat or drink anything he

gave her. Finally he’d been compelled to take her in the bedroom and lock her in. Now she was

asleep.

1. Discuss Robert Neville’s process of hunting Ben Cortman, use textual evidence to support your answer.

2. Who is the woman? If you have seen the film, please try to only answer based on the evidence in the text.