Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ #9

*Read and annotate thoroughly*

“I DON’T UNDERSTAND IT,” he told her over supper. “Almost three years now, and still there are some of them alive. Food supplies are ‘being used up. As far as I know, they still lie in

a coma during the day.” He shook his head. “But they’re not dead. Three years and they’re not

dead. What keeps them going?”

She was wearing his bathrobe. About five she had relented, taken a bath, and changed. Her

slender body was shapeless in the voluminous terry-cloth folds. She’d borrowed his comb and

drawn her hair back into a pony tail fastened with a piece of twine.

Ruth fingered her coffee cup.

“We used to see them sometimes,” she said. “We were afraid to go near them, though. We

didn’t think we should touch them.”

“Didn’t you know they’d come back after they died?”

She shook her head. “No.”

“Didn’t you wonder about the people who attacked your house at night?”

“It never entered our minds that they were—” She shook he r head slowly. “It’s hard to

believe something like that.”

“I suppose,” he said.

He glanced at her as they sat eating silently. It was hard too to believe that here was a normal

woman. Hard to believe that, after all these years, a companion had come. It was more than just

doubting her. It was doubting that anything so remarkable could happen in such a lost world.

“Tell me more about them,” Ruth said.

He got up and took the coffeepot off the stove. He poured more into her cup, into his, then

replaced the pot and sat down.

“How do you feel now?” he asked her.

“I feel better, thank you.”

He nodded and spooned sugar into his coffee. He felt her eyes on him as he stirred. What’s

she thinking? he wondered. He took a deep breath, wondering why the tightness in him didn’t

break. For a while he’d thought that he trusted her. Now he wasn’t sure.

“You still don’t trust me,” she said, seeming to read his mind.

He looked up quickly, then shrugged.

“It’s—not that,” he said.

“Of course it is,” she said quietly. She sighed. “Oh, very well. If you have to check my

blood, check it.”

He looked at her suspiciously, his mind questioning: Is it a trick? He hid the movement of his

throat in swallowing coffee. It was stupid, he thought, to be so suspicious.

He put down the cup.

“Good,” he said. “Very good.”

He looked at her as she stared into the coffee.

“If you are infected,” he told her, “I’ll do everything I can to cure you.”

Her eyes met his. “And if you can’t?” she said.

Silence a moment.

“Let’s wait and see,” he said then.

They both drank coffee. Then he asked, “Shall we do it now?”

“Please,” she said, “in the morning. I—still feel a little ill.”

“All right,” he said, nodding. “In the morning.”

They finished their meal in silence. Neville felt only a small satisfaction that she was going to

let him check her blood. He was afraid he might discover that she was infected. In the

meantime he had to pass an evening and a night with her, perhaps get to know her and be

attracted to her. When in the morning he might have to—

Later, in the living room, they sat looking at the mural, sipping port, and listening to

Schubert’s Fourth Symphony.

“I wouldn’t have believed it,” she said, seeming to cheer up. “I never thought I’d be listening

to music again. Drinking wine.”

She looked around the room.

“You’ve certainly done a wonderful job,” she said.

“What about your house?’ he asked.

“It was nothing like this,” she said. “We didn’t have a—”

“How did you protect your house?” he interrupted.

“Oh.—” She thought a moment. “We had it boarded up, of course. And we used crosses.”

“They don’t always work,” he said quietly, after a moment of looking at her.

She looked blank. “They don’t?”

“Why should a Jew fear the cross?” he said. “Why should a vampire who had been a Jew fear it? Most people were afraid of becoming vampires. Most of them suffer from hysterical blindness before mirrors. But as far as the cross goes—well, neither a Jew nor a Hindu nor a Mohammedan nor an atheist, for that matter, would fear the cross.”

The note was on the bench next to the overturned microscope. He picked up the paper with

numbed fingers and carried it to the bed. Sinking down with a groan, he held the letter before his

eyes. But the letters blurred and ran. He shook his head and pressed his eyes shut. After a little

while he read:

*Robert:*

*Now you know. Know that I was spying on you, know that almost everything I told*

*you was a lie.*

*I’m writing this note, though, because I want to save you if I can.*

*When I was first given the job of spying on you, I had no feelings about your life.*

*Because I did have a husband, Robert. You killed him.*

*But now it’s different. I know now that you were just as much forced into your*

*situation as we were forced into ours. We are infected. But you already know that.*

*What you don’t understand yet is that we’re going to stay alive. We’ve found a way to*

*do that and we’re going to set up society again slowly but surely. We’re going to do*

*away with all those wretched creatures whom death has cheated. And, even though I*

*pray otherwise, we may decide to kill you and those like you.*

*Those like me? he thought with a start. But he kept reading.*

*I’ll try to save you. I’ll tell them you’re too well armed for us to attack now. Use the*

*time I’m giving you, Robert! Get away from your house, go into the mountains and*

*save yourself. There are only a handful of us now. But sooner or later we’ll be too well*

*organized, and nothing I say will stop the rest from destroying you. For God’s sake,*

*Robert, go now, while you can!*

*I know you may not believe this. You may not believe that we can live in the sun for*

*short periods now. You may not believe that my tan was only make-up. You may not*

*believe that we can live with the germ now.*

*That’s why I’m leaving one of my pills.*

*I took them all the time I was here. I kept them in a belt around my waist. You’ll*

*discover that they’re a combination of defebrinated blood and a drug. I don’t know*

*myself just what it is. The blood feeds the germs, the drug prevents its multiplication.*

*It was the discovery of this pill that saved us from dying, that is helping to set up*

*society again slowly.*

*Believe me, it’s true. And escape!*

*Forgive me, too. I didn’t mean to hit you, it nearly killed me to do it. But I was so*

*terribly frightened of what you’d do when you found out.*

*Forgive me for having to lie to you about so many things. But please believe this:*

*When we were together in the darkness, close to each other, I wasn’t spying on you. I*

*was loving you.*

*Ruth*

He read the letter again. Then his hands fell forward and he sat there staring with empty eyes

at the floor. He couldn’t believe it. He shook his head slowly and tried to understand, but

adjustment eluded him.

He walked unsteadily to the bench. He picked up the small amber pill and held it in his palm,

smelled it, tasted it. He felt as if all the security of mason were ebbing away from him. The

framework of his life was collapsing and it frightened him.

Yet how did he refute the evidence? The pill, the tan coming off her leg, her walking in the

sun, her reaction to garlic.

He sank down on the stool and looked at the mallet lying on the floor. Slowly, ploddingly,

his mind went over the evidence.

When he’d first seen her she’d run from him. Had it been a ruse? No, she’d been genuinely

frightened. She must have been startled by his cry, then, even though she’d been expecting it,

and forgotten all about her job. Then later, when she’d calmed down, she’d talked him into

thinking that her reaction to garlic was the reaction of a sick stomach. And she had lied and

smiled and feigned hopeless acceptance and carefully got all the information she’d been sent

after. And, when she’d wanted to leave, she couldn’t because of Cortman and the others. He

had awakened then. They had embraced, they had—

His white-knuckled fist jolted down on the bench. “I was loving you.” Lie. Lie! His fingers

crumpled up the letter and flung it away bitterly.

1. Choose one sentence or phrase from this section that stands out to you. Copy it in the space below – why does it stand out to you?
2. What is the theme of this story (all that we have read so far)? What overarching message is Richard Matheson (author) trying to convey in this story?