

# Count The Seconds

Alone in Mr. Lloyd's living room, I watched silent lightning flash across the sky. A television set loomed on the far end of the room, but I wouldn't think of turning it on. I laid on the couch and stared through the sliding glass doors that led to the porch, taking note of the wooden railings, the trees behind them, the sky beyond. The lightshow fascinated me. Where one would expect the boom-crash of a raging thunderstorm, there were only fluttering flashes from a cosmic swarm of fireflies. I had been living in Mr. Lloyd's house for two months now. In a few more weeks, I would be driving back to school. Thoughts of fate and eternity breezed over and around the surface of my imagination, but they were fleeting. I felt numb, stuck between breaths, as if a sock hit the floor with a thud and I was still waiting to hear the other one.

I remembered my state of mind when the school year ended. While I knew that I wanted to stay with my girlfriend all summer, my checking account balance left me no choice. I packed everything I owned into my subcompact, kissed her goodbye, and started the long trip home: four hours without a single stop. It's so easy to fall in love, but so hard to find a good summer job.

I was at home for a week when my mother found me a live-in

job at Mr. Lloyd's house. She circled it for me in the want ads: full-time caregiver for elderly man, weekly paycheck, room and board included. I jumped at the chance to move out. My mother and I could never stand each other. I don't think she'd even talk to me if we weren't related. So I packed my car again and drove across the river to Mr. Lloyd's house.

Telephone! The clanging sound shocked me to attention, and I scrambled to answer it between the first and second ring. Who would be calling at this hour? A short list popped into my head, with my girlfriend right at the top. What a relief that would be! I yanked the receiver from its cradle like I was saving a toddler from oncoming traffic, and my voice cracked halfway through hello.

Mr. Lloyd picked up the phone in his room a moment later, sounding sleepy and grumpy, and I wondered why he bothered. No one would dare to call the old man after ten o'clock for fear of disturbing him. Besides, the phone stopped ringing five seconds before he answered; it was obvious that the call had been taken. Perhaps he had been overcome by a premonition that this phone call would foretell an emergency.

"Goofytooth!"

I recognized the voice as a high school friend named Tim. He went to college in another state, and I hadn't talked to him since I met my girlfriend last fall. Mr. Lloyd let out a grunt of displeasure and hung up.

"It's been a long time," I said. "What's up? And how'd you get this number?"

"Your mom gave it to me," Tim said. "I just spent fifteen minutes talking to her. The way she tells it, you're over there in