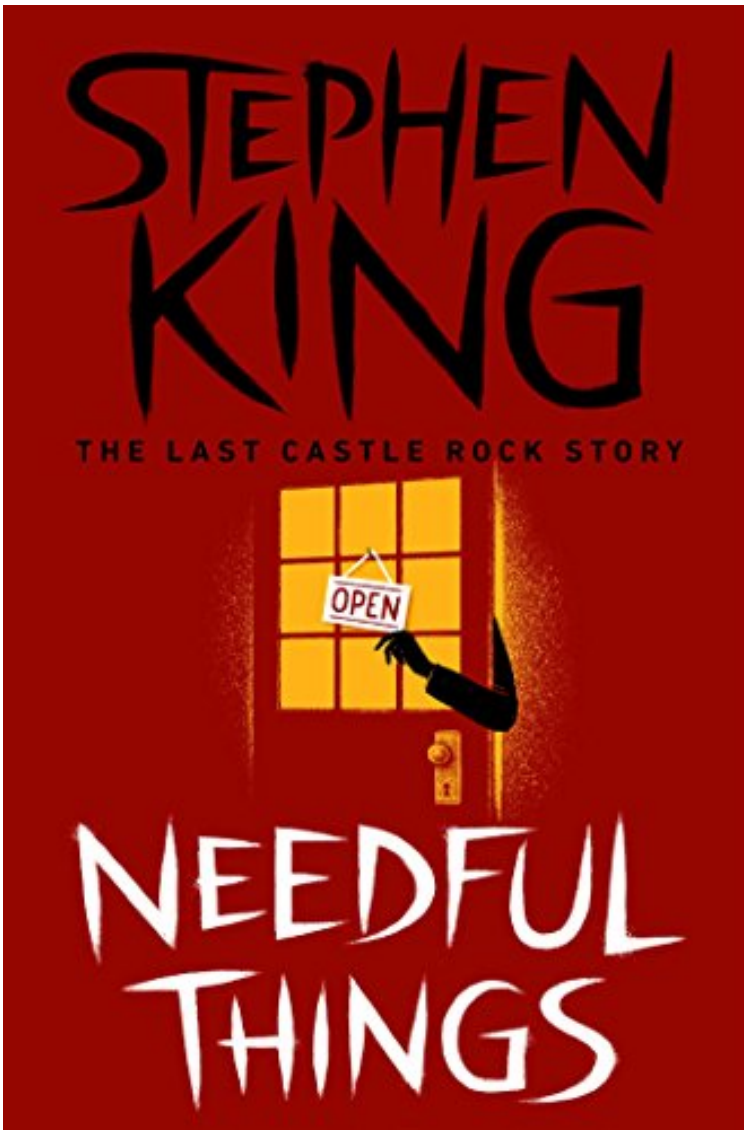


(Download free pdf) File size: 72.Mb

Needful Things (English Edition)



Par Stephen King

*DOC | *audiobook | ebooks | Download
PDF | ePub*

Dtails sur le produit Rang parmi les ventes : #112974 dans eBooksPubli le: 2016-01-01Sorti le: 2016-01-01Format: Ebook KindleNombre d'articles: 1

(Download free pdf) Needful Things (English Edition)

Par Stephen King : Needful Things (English Edition) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Needful Things (English Edition):

Download

Read Online

Description : Description du produitThe #1 bestseller that raises the price of greed... A new store has opened in the little town of Castle Rock. It has just what you want. But you won't discover just how high the price is until it's too late.

Prsentation de l'diteurMaster storyteller Stephen King presents the classic #1 New York Times bestseller about a mysterious store than can sell you whatever you desirebut not without exacting a terrible price in return.There are two prices for this. Halfand half. One half is cash. The other is a deed. Do you understand?" The town of Castle Rock, Maine has seen its fair share of oddities over the years, but nothing is a peculiar as the little curio shop thats just opened for business. Its mysterious proprietor, Leland Gaunt, seems to have something for everyone out on display at Needful Thingsinteresting things that run the gamut from worthless to priceless. Nothing has a price tag in this place, but everything is certainly for sale. The hearts desire for

any resident of Castle Rock can easily be found among the curiosities in exchange for a little money and at the specific request of Leland Gaunta whole lot of menace against their fellow neighbors. Everyone in town seems willing to make a deal at Needful Things, but the devil is in the details. And no one takes heed of the little sign hanging on the wall: Caveat emptor. In other words, let the buyer beware. Extrait Needful Things

CHAPTER ONE 1 In a small town, the opening of a new store is big news. It wasnt as big a deal to Brian Rusk as it was to some; his mother, for instance. He had heard her discussing it (he wasnt supposed to call it gossiping, she had told him, because gossiping was a dirty habit and she didnt do it) at some length on the telephone with her best friend, Myra Evans, over the last month or so. The first workmen had arrived at the old building which had last housed Western Maine Realty and Insurance right around the time school let in again, and they had been busily at work ever since. Not that anyone had much idea what they were up to in there; their first act had been to put in a large display window, and their second had been to soap it opaque. Two weeks ago a sign had appeared in the doorway, hung on a string over a plastic see-through suction-cup. OPENING SOON! the sign read. NEEDFUL THINGS A NEW KIND OF STORE You wont believe your eyes! Itll be just another antique shop, Brians mother said to Myra. Cora Rusk had been reclining on the sofa at the time, holding the telephone with one hand and eating chocolate-covered cherries with the other while she watched Santa Barbara on the TV. Just another antique shop with a lot of phony early American furniture and moldy old crank telephones. You wait and see. That had been shortly after the new display window had been first installed and then soaped over, and his mother spoke with such assurance that Brian should have felt sure the subject was closed. Only with his mother, no subject ever seemed to be completely closed. Her speculations and suppositions seemed as endless as the problems of the characters on Santa Barbara and General Hospital. Last week the first line of the sign hanging in the door was changed to read: GRAND OPENING OCTOBER 9TH BRING YOUR FRIENDS! Brian was not as interested in the new store as his mother (and some of the teachers; he had heard them talking about it in the teachers room at Castle Rock Middle School when it was his turn to be Office Mailman), but he was eleven, and a healthy eleven-year-old boy is interested in anything new. Besides, the name of the place fascinated him. Needful Things: what, exactly, did that mean? He had read the changed first line last Tuesday, on his way home from school. Tuesday afternoons were his late days. Brian had been born with a harelip, and although it had been surgically corrected when he was seven, he still had to go to speech therapy. He maintained stoutly to everyone who asked that he hated this, but he did not. He was deeply and hopelessly in love with Miss Ratcliffe, and he waited all week for his special ed class to come around. The Tuesday schoolday seemed to last a thousand years, and he always spent the last two hours of it with pleasant butterflies in his stomach. There were only four other kids in the class, and none of them came from Brians end of town. He was glad. After an hour in the same room with Miss Ratcliffe, he felt too exalted for company. He liked to make his way home slowly in the late afternoon, usually pushing his bike instead of riding it, dreaming of her as yellow and gold leaves fell around him in the slanting bars of October sunlight. His way took him along the three-block section of Main Street across from the Town Common, and on the day he saw the sign announcing the grand opening, he had pushed his nose up to the glass of the door, hoping to see what had replaced the stodgy desks and industrial yellow walls of the departed Western Maine Realtors and Insurance Agents. His curiosity was defeated. A shade had been installed and was pulled all the way down. Brian saw nothing but his own reflected face and cupped hands. On Friday the 4th, there had been an ad for the new store in Castle Rocks weekly newspaper, the Call. It was surrounded by a ruffled border, and below the printed matter was a drawing of angels standing back to back and blowing long trumpets. The ad really said nothing that could not be read on the sign dangling from the suction cup: the name of the store was Needful Things, it would open for business at ten oclock in the morning on October 9th, and, of course, You wont believe your eyes. There was not the slightest hint of what goods the proprietor or proprietors of Needful Things intended to dispense. This seemed to irritate Cora Rusk a great deal enough, anyway, for her to put in a rare Saturday-morning call to Myra. Ill believe my eyes, all right, she said. When I see those spool beds that are supposed to be two hundred years old but have Rochester, New York, stamped on the frames for anybody who cares to bend down their heads and look under the bedspread flounces to see, Ill believe my eyes just fine. Myra said something. Cora listened, fishing Planters Peanuts out of the can by ones and twos and munching them rapidly. Brian and his little brother, Sean, sat on the living-room floor watching cartoons on TV. Sean was completely immersed in the world of the Smurfs, and Brian was not totally uninvolved with that community of small blue people, but he kept one ear cocked toward the conversation. Ri-iiight! Cora Rusk had exclaimed with even more assurance and emphasis than usual as Myra made some

particularly trenchant point. High prices and moldy antique telephones! Yesterday, Monday, Brian had ridden through downtown right after school with two or three friends. They were across the street from the new shop, and he saw that during the day someone had put up a dark-green awning. Written across the front in white letters were the words NEEDFUL THINGS. Polly Chalmers, the lady who ran the sewing shop, was standing out on the sidewalk, hands on her admirably slim hips, looking at the awning with an expression that seemed to be equally puzzled and admiring. Brian, who knew a bit about awnings, admired it himself. It

was the only real awning on Main Street, and it gave the new store its own special look. The word sophisticated was not a part of his working vocabulary, but he knew at once there was no other shop in Castle Rock which looked like this. The awning made it look like a store you might see in a television show. The Western Auto across the street looked dowdy and countrified by comparison. When he got home, his mother was on the sofa, watching Santa Barbara, eating a Little Debbie Creme Pie, and drinking Diet Coke.

His mother always drank diet soda while she watched the afternoon shows. Brian was not sure why, considering what she was using it to wash down, but thought it would probably be dangerous to ask. It might even get her shouting at him, and when his mother started shouting, it was wise to seek shelter. Hey, Ma! he said, throwing his books on the counter and getting the milk out of the refrigerator. Guess what? There's an awning on the new store. Whos yawning? Her voice drifted out of the living room. He poured his milk and came into the doorway. Awning, he said. On the new store downstreet. She sat up, found the remote control, and pushed the mute button. On the screen, Al and Corinne went on talking over their Santa Barbara problems in their favorite Santa Barbara restaurant, but now only a lip-reader could have told exactly what those problems were. What? she said. That Needful Things place? Uh-huh, he said, and drank some milk.

Dont slurp, she said, tucking the rest of her snack into her mouth. It sounds gruesome. How many times have I told you that? About as many times as you've told me not to talk with my mouth full, Brian thought, but said nothing. He had learned verbal restraint at an early age. Sorry, Mom. What kind of awning? Green one.

Pressed or aluminum? Brian, whose father was a siding salesman for the Dick Perry Siding and Door Company in South Paris, knew exactly what she was talking about, but if it had been that kind of awning, he hardly would have noticed it. Aluminum and pressed-metal awnings were a dime a dozen. Half the homes in The Rock had them sticking out over their windows. Neither one, he said. Its cloth. Canvas, I think. It sticks out, so there's shade right underneath. And its round, like this. He curved his hands (carefully, so as not to spill his milk) in a semi-circle. The name is printed on the end. Its most sincerely awesome. Well, Ill be butched! This was the phrase with which Cora most commonly expressed excitement or exasperation. Brian took a cautious step backward, in case it should be the latter. What do you think it is, Ma? A restaurant,

maybe? I dont know, she said, and reached for the Princess phone on the endtable. She had to move Squeebles the cat, the TV Guide, and a quart of Diet Coke to get it. But it sounds sneaky. Mom, what does Needful Things mean? Is it like Dont bother me now, Brian, Mummies busy. There are Devil Dogs in the breadbox if you want one. Just one, though, or you'll spoil your supper. She was already dialling Myra, and they were soon discussing the green awning with great enthusiasm. Brian, who didnt want a Devil Dog (he loved his Ma a great deal, but sometimes watching her eat took away his appetite), sat down at the kitchen table, opened his math book, and started to do the assigned problemshe was a bright, conscientious boy, and his math was the only homework he hadnt finished at school. As he methodically moved decimal points and then divided, he listened to his mothers end of the conversation. She was again telling Myra that soon they would have another store selling stinky old perfume bottles and pictures of someones dead relatives, and it was really a shame the way these things came and went. There were just too many people out there, Cora said, whose motto in life was take the money and run. When she spoke of the awning, she sounded as if someone had deliberately set out to offend her, and had succeeded splendidly at the task. I think she thinks someone was supposed to tell her, Brian had thought as his pencil moved sturdily along, carrying down and rounding off. Yeah, that was it. She was curious, that was number one. And she was pissed off, that was number two. The combination was just about killing her. Well, she would find out soon enough. When she did, maybe she would let him in on the big secret. And if she was too busy, he could get it just by listening

in on one of her afternoon conversations with Myra. But as it turned out, Brian found out quite a lot about Needful Things before his mother or Myra or anyone else in Castle Rock. 2 He hardly rode his bike at all on his way home from school on the afternoon before Needful Things was scheduled to open; he was lost in a warm daydream (which would not have passed his lips had he been coaxed with hot coals or bristly tarantula spiders) where he asked Miss Ratcliffe to go with him to the Castle County Fair and she agreed. Thank you, Brian, Miss Ratcliffe says, and Brian sees little tears of gratitude in the corners of her blue eyeseyes so dark

in color that they look almost stormy. Ive been... well, very sad lately. You see, Ive lost my love. Ill help you forget him, Brian says, his voice tough and tender at the same time, if youll call me... Bri. Thank you, she whispers, and then, leaning close enough so he can smell her perfume a dreamy scent of wildflowers she says, Thank you... Bri. And since, for tonight at least, we will be girl and boy instead of teacher and student, you may call me... Sally. He takes her hands. Looks into her eyes. Im not just a kid, he says. I can help you forget him... Sally. She seems almost hypnotized by this unexpected understanding, this unexpected manliness; he may only be eleven, she thinks, but he is more of a man than Lester ever was! Her hands tighten on his. Their faces draw closer... closer... No, she murmurs, and now her eyes are so wide and so close that he seems almost to drown in them, you mustnt, Bri... its wrong... Its right, baby, he says, and presses his lips to hers. She draws away after a few moments and whispers tenderly Hey, kid, watch out where the fuck youre goin! Jerked out of his daydream, Brian saw that he had just walked in front of Hugh Priests pick-up truck. Sorry, Mr. Priest, he said, blushing madly. Hugh Priest was nobody to get mad at you.

He worked for the Public Works Department and was reputed to have the worst temper in Castle Rock. Brian watched him narrowly. If he started to get out of his truck, Brian planned to jump on his bike and be gone down Main Street at roughly the speed of light. He had no interest in spending the next month or so in the hospital just because hed been daydreaming about going to the County Fair with Miss Ratcliffe. But Hugh Priest had a bottle of beer in the fork of his legs, Hank Williams, Jr., was on the radio singing High and Pressurized, and it was all just a little too comfy for anything so radical as beating the shit out of a little kid on Tuesday afternoon. You want to keep your eyes open, he said, taking a pull from the neck of his bottle and looking at Brian balefully, because next time I wont bother to stop. Ill just run you down in the road. Make you squeak, little buddy. He put the truck in gear and drove off. Brian felt an insane (and mercifully brief) urge to scream Well Ill be butched! after him. He waited until the orange road-crew truck had turned off onto Linden Street and then went on his way. The daydream about Miss Ratcliffe, alas, was spoiled for the day. Hugh Priest had let in reality again. Miss Ratcliffe hadnt had a fight with her fianc,

Lester Pratt; she was still wearing her small diamond engagement ring and was still driving his blue Mustang while she waited for her own car to come back from the shop. Brian had seen Miss Ratcliffe and Mr. Pratt only last evening, stapling those dice and the devil posters to the telephone poles on Lower Main Street along with a bunch of other people. They had been singing hymns. The only thing was, the Catholics went around as soon as they were done and took them down again. It was pretty funny in a way... but if he had been bigger, Brian would have tried his best to protect any posters Miss Ratcliffe put up with her hallowed hands. Brian thought of her dark blue eyes, her long dancers legs, and felt the same glum amazement he always felt when he realized that, come January, she intended to change Sally Ratcliffe, which was lovely, to Sally Pratt, which sounded to Brian like a fat lady falling down a short hard flight of stairs. Well, he thought, fetching the other curb and starting slowly down Main Street, maybe shell change her mind. Its not impossible. Or maybe Lester Pratt will get in a car accident or come down with a brain tumor or something like that. It might even turn out that hes a dope addict. Miss Ratcliffe would never marry a dope addict. Such thoughts offered Brian a bizarre sort of comfort, but they did not change the fact that Hugh Priest had aborted the daydream just short of its apogee (kissing Miss Ratcliffe and actually touching her right breast while they were in the Tunnel of Love at the fair). It was a pretty wild idea anyway, an eleven-year-old kid taking a teacher to the County Fair. Miss Ratcliffe was pretty, but she was also old. She had told the speech kids once that she would be twenty-four in November. So Brian carefully re-folded his daydream along its creases, as a man will carefully fold a well-read and much-valued document, and tucked it on the shelf at the back of his mind where it belonged. He prepared to mount his bike and pedal the rest of the way home. But he was passing the new shop at just that moment, and the sign in the doorway caught his eye. Something about it had changed. He stopped his bike and looked at it. **GRAND OPENING OCTOBER 9TH BRING YOUR FRIENDS!** at the top was gone. It had been replaced by a small square sign, red letters on a white background. **OPEN** it said, and **OPEN** was all it said. Brian stood with his bike between his legs, looking at this, and his heart began to beat a little faster. Youre not going in there, are you? he asked himself.

I mean, even if it really is opening a day early, youre not going in there, right? Why not? he answered himself. Well... because the windows still soaped over. The shade on the doors still drawn. You go in there, anything could happen to you. Anything. Sure. Like the guy who runs it is Norman Bates or something, he dresses up in his mothers clothes and stabs his customers. Ri-iight. Well, forget it, the timid part of his mind said, although that part sounded as if it already knew it had lost. Theres something funny about it. But then Brian thought of telling his mother. Just saying nonchalantly, By the way, Ma, you know that new store,

Needful Things? Well, it opened a day early. I went in and took a look around. Shed push the mute button on the remote control in a hurry then, you better believe it! Shed want to hear all about it! This thought was too much for Brian. He put down his bikes kickstand and passed slowly into the shade of the awning it felt at least ten degrees cooler beneath its canopy and approached the door of Needful Things. As he put his hand on the big old-fashioned brass doorknob, it occurred to him that the sign must be a mistake. It had probably been sitting there, just inside the door, for tomorrow, and someone had put it up by accident. He couldnt hear a single sound from behind the drawn shade; the place had a deserted feel. But since he had come this far, he tried the knob... and it turned easily under his hand. The latch clicked back and the door of Needful Things swung open. 3 It was dim inside, but not dark. Brian could see that track lighting (a specialty of the Dick Perry Siding and Door Company) had been installed, and a few of the spots mounted on the tracks were lit. They were trained on a number of glass display cases which were arranged around the large room. The cases were, for the most part, empty. The spots highlighted the few objects which were in the cases. The floor, which had been bare wood when this was Western Maine Realty and Insurance, had been covered in a rich wall-to-wall carpet the color of burgundy wine. The walls had been painted eggshell white. A thin light, as white as the walls, filtered in through the soaped display window. Well, its a mistake, just the same, Brian thought. He hasnt even got his stock in yet. Whoever put the OPEN sign in the door by mistake left the door unlocked by mistake, too. The polite thing to do in these circumstances would be to close the door again, get on his bike, and ride away. Yet he was loath to leave. He was, after all, actually seeing the inside of the new store. His mother would talk to him the rest of the afternoon when she heard that. The maddening part was this: he wasnt sure exactly what he was seeing. There were half a dozen (exhibits) items in the display cases, and the spotlights were trained on them a kind of trial run, probably but he couldnt tell what they were. He could, however, tell what they werent: spool beds and moldy crank telephones. Hello? he asked uncertainly, still standing in the doorway. Is anybody here? He was about to grasp the doorknob and pull the door shut again when a voice replied, Im here. A tall figure what at first seemed to be an impossibly tall figure came through a doorway behind one of the display cases. The doorway was masked with a dark velvet curtain. Brian felt a momentary and quite monstrous cramp of fear. Then the glow thrown by one of the spots slanted across the mans face, and Brians fear was allayed. The guy was quite old, and his face was very kind. He looked at Brian with interest and pleasure. Your door was unlocked, Brian began, so I thought Of course its unlocked, the tall man said. I decided to open for a little while this afternoon as a kind of... of preview. And you are my very first customer. Come in, my friend. Enter freely, and leave some of the happiness you bring! He smiled and stuck out his hand. The smile was infectious. Brian felt an instant liking for the proprietor of Needful Things. He had to step over the threshold and into the shop to clasp the tall mans hand, and he did so without a single qualm. The door swung shut behind him and latched of its own accord. Brian did not notice. He was too busy noticing that the tall mans eyes were dark blue exactly the same shade as Miss Sally Ratcliffes eyes. They could have been father and daughter. The tall mans grip was strong and sure, but not painful. All the same, there was something unpleasant about it. Something... smooth. Too hard, somehow. Im pleased to meet you, Brian said, Those dark-blue eyes fastened on his face like hooded railroad lanterns. I am equally pleased to make your acquaintance, the tall man said, and that was how Brian Rusk met the proprietor of Needful Things before anyone else in Castle Rock. 4 My name is Leland Gaunt, the tall man said, and you are? Brian. Brian Rusk. Very good, Mr. Rusk. And since you are my first customer, I think I can offer you a very special price on any item that catches your fancy. Well, thank you, Brian said, but I dont really think I could buy anything in a place like this. I dont get my allowance until Friday, and He looked doubtfully at the glass display cases again. Well, you dont look like youve got all your stock in yet. Gaunt smiled. His teeth were crooked, and they looked rather yellow in the dim light, but Brian found the smile entirely charming just the same. Once more he found himself almost forced to answer it. No, Leland Gaunt said, no, I dont. The majority of my stock, as you put it will arrive later this evening. But I still have a few interesting items. Take a look around, young Mr. Rusk. Id love to have your opinion, if nothing else... and I imagine you have a mother, dont you? Of course you do. A fine young man like yourself is certainly no orphan. Am I right? Brian nodded, still smiling. Sure. Mas home right now. An idea struck him. Would you like me to bring her down? But the moment the proposal was out of his mouth, he was sorry. He didnt want to bring his mother down. Tomorrow, Mr. Leland Gaunt would belong to the whole town. Tomorrow, his Ma and Myra Evans would start pawing him over, along with all the other ladies in Castle Rock. Brian supposed that Mr. Gaunt would have ceased to seem so strange and different by the end of the month, heck, maybe even by the end of the week, but right now he still was, right now he

belonged to Brian Rusk and Brian Rusk alone, and Brian wanted to keep it that way. So he was pleased when Mr. Gaunt raised one hand (the fingers were extremely narrow and extremely long, and Brian noticed that the first and second were of exactly the same length) and shook his head. Not at all, he said. Thats exactly what I dont want. She would undoubtedly want to bring a friend, wouldnt she? Yeah, Brian said, thinking of Myra. Perhaps even two friends, or three. No, this is better, Brian may I call you Brian? Sure, Brian said, amused. Thank you. And you will call me Mr. Gaunt, since I am your elder, if not necessarily your better agreed? Sure. Brian wasnt sure what Mr. Gaunt meant by elders and betters, but he loved to listen to this guy talk. And his eyes were really something Brian could hardly take his own eyes off them. Yes, this is much better. Mr. Gaunt rubbed his long hands together and they made a hissing sound. This was one thing Brian was less than crazy about. Mr. Gaunts hands rubbing together that way sounded like a snake which is upset and thinking of biting. You will tell your mother, perhaps even show her what you bought, should you buy something Brian considered telling Mr. Gaunt that he had a grand total of ninety-one cents in his pocket and decided not to. and she will tell her friends, and they will tell their friends... you see, Brian? You will be a better advertisement than the local paper could ever think of being! I could not do better if I hired you to walk the streets of the town wearing a sandwich board! Well, if you say so, Brian agreed. He had no idea what a sandwich board was, but he was quite sure he would never allow himself to be caught dead wearing one. It would be sort of fun to look around. At what little there is to look at, he was too polite to add. Then start looking! Mr. Gaunt said, gesturing toward the cases. Brian noticed that he was wearing a long red-velvet jacket. He thought it might actually be a smoking jacket, like in the Sherlock Holmes stories he had read. It was neat. Be my guest, Brian! Brian walked slowly over to the case nearest the door. He glanced over his shoulder, sure that Mr. Gaunt would be trailing along right behind him, but Mr. Gaunt was still standing by the door, looking at him with wry amusement. It was as if he had read Brians mind and had discovered how much Brian disliked having the owner of a store trailing around after him while he was looking at stuff. He supposed most storekeepers were afraid that youd break something, or hawk something, or both. Take your time, Mr. Gaunt said. Shopping is a joy when one takes ones time, Brian, and a pain in the nether quarters when one doesnt. Say, are you from overseas somewhere? Brian asked. Mr. Gaunts use of one instead of you interested him. It reminded him of the old stud-muffin who hosted Masterpiece Theatre, which his mother sometimes watched if the TV Guide said it was a love-story. I, Gaunt said, am from Akron. Is that in England? That is in Ohio, Leland Gaunt said gravely, and then revealed his strong, irregular teeth in a sunny grin. It struck Brian as funny, the way lines in TV shows like Cheers often struck him funny. In fact, this whole thing made him feel as if he had wandered into a TV show, one that was a little mysterious but not really threatening. He burst out laughing. He had a moment to worry that Mr. Gaunt might think he was rude (perhaps because his mother was always accusing him of rudeness, and as a result Brian had come to believe he lived in a huge and nearly invisible spiders web of social etiquette), and then the tall man joined him. The two of them laughed together, and all in all, Brian could not remember when he had had such a pleasant afternoon as this one was turning out to be. Go on, look, Mr. Gaunt said, waving his hand. We will exchange histories another time, Brian. So Brian looked. There were only five items in the biggest glass case, which looked as if it might comfortably hold twenty or thirty more. One was a pipe. Another was a picture of Elvis Presley wearing his red scarf and his white jump-suit with the tiger on the back. The King (this was how his mother always referred to him) was holding a microphone to his pouty lips. The third item was a Polaroid camera. The fourth was a piece of polished rock with a hollow full of crystal chips in its center. They caught and flashed gorgeously in the overhead spot. The fifth was a splinter of wood about as long and as thick as one of Brians forefingers. He pointed to the crystal. Thats a geode, isnt it? Youre a well-educated young man, Brian. Thats just what it is. I have little plaques for most of my items, but theyre not unpacked yet like most of the stock. Ill have to work like the very devil if Im going to be ready to open tomorrow. But he didnt sound worried at all, and seemed perfectly content to remain where he was.

Whats that one? Brian asked, pointing at the splinter. He was thinking to himself that this was very odd stock indeed for a small-town store. He had taken a strong and instant liking to Leland Gaunt, but if the rest of his stuff was like this, Brian didnt think hed be doing business in Castle Rock for long. If you wanted to sell stuff like pipes and pictures of The King and splinters of wood, New York was the place where you wanted to set up shop... or so he had come to believe from the movies hed seen, anyway. Ah! Mr. Gaunt said. Thats an interesting item! Let me show it to you! He crossed the room, went around the end of the case, pulled a fat ring of keys from his pocket, and selected one with hardly a glance. He opened the case and took the splinter out carefully. Hold out your hand, Brian. Gee, maybe I better not, Brian said. As a native of a

state where tourism is a major industry, he had been in quite a few gift shops in his time, and he had seen a great many signs with this little poem printed on them: Lovely to look at / delightful to hold, / but if you break it, / then its sold. He could imagine his mothers horrified reaction if he broke the splinter or whatever it was and Mr. Gaunts no longer so friendly, told him that its price was five hundred dollars. Why ever not? Mr. Gaunt asked, raising his eyebrows but there was really only one brow; it was bushy and grew across the top of his nose in an unbroken line. Well, Im pretty clumsy. Nonsense, Mr. Gaunt replied. I know clumsy boys when I see them. Youre not one of that breed. He dropped the splinter into Brians palm. Brian looked at it resting there in some surprise; he hadnt even been aware his palm was open until he saw the splinter resting on it. It certainly didnt feel like a splinter; it felt more like It feels like stone, he said dubiously, and raised his eyes to look at Mr. Gaunt. Both wood and stone, Mr. Gaunt said. Its petrified. Petrified, Brian marvelled. He looked at the splinter closely, then ran one finger along its side. It was smooth and bumpy at the same time. It was somehow not an entirely pleasant feeling. It must be old. Over two thousand years old, Mr. Gaunt agreed gravely. Cripes! Brian said. He jumped and almost dropped the splinter. He closed his hand around it in a fist to keep it from falling to the floor... and at once a feeling of oddness and distortion swept over him. He suddenly felt what? Dizzy? No; not dizzy but far. As if part of him had been lifted out of his body and swept away. He could see Mr. Gaunt looking at him with interest and amusement, and Mr. Gaunts eyes suddenly seemed to grow to the size of tea-saucers. Yet this feeling of disorientation was not frightening; it was rather exciting, and certainly more pleasant than the slick feel of the wood had been to his exploring finger. Close your eyes! Mr. Gaunt invited. Close your eyes, Brian, and tell me what you feel! Brian closed his eyes and stood there for a moment without moving, his right arm held out, the fist at the end of it enclosing the splinter. He did not see Mr. Gaunts upper lip lift, doglike, over his large, crooked teeth for a moment in what might have been a grimace of pleasure or anticipation. He had a vague sensation of movement a corkscrewing kind of movement. A sound, quick and light: thudthud... thudthud... thudthud. He knew that sound. It was A boat! he cried, delighted, without opening his eyes. I feel like Im on a boat! Do you indeed, Mr. Gaunt said, and to Brians ears he sounded impossibly distant. The sensations intensified; now he felt as if he were going up and down across long, slow waves. He could hear the distant cry of birds, and, closer, the sounds of many animals cows lowing, roosters crowing, the low, snarling cry of a very big cat not a sound of rage but an expression of boredom. In that one second he could almost feel wood (the wood of which this splinter had once been a part, he was sure) under his feet, and knew that the feet themselves were not wearing Converse sneakers but some sort of sandals, and Then it was going, dwindling to a tiny bright point, like the light of a TV screen when the power cuts out, and then it was gone. He opened his eyes, shaken and exhilarated. His hand had curled into such a tight fist around the splinter that he actually had to will his fingers to open, and the joints creaked like rusty door-hinges. Hey, boy, he said softly. Neat, isnt it? Mr. Gaunt asked cheerily, and plucked the splinter from Brians palm with the absent skill of a doctor drawing a splinter from flesh. He returned it to its place and re-locked the cabinet with a flourish. Neat, Brian agreed in a long outrush of breath which was almost a sigh. He bent to look at the splinter. His hand still tingled a little where he had held it. Those feelings: the uptilt and downslant of the deck, the thudding of the waves on the hull, the feel of the wood under his feet... those things lingered with him, although he guessed (with a feeling of real sorrow) that they would pass, as dreams pass. Are you familiar with the story of Noah and the Ark? Mr. Gaunt inquired. Brian frowned. He was pretty sure it was a Bible story, but he had a tendency to zone out during Sunday sermons and Thursday night Bible classes. Was that like a boat that went around the world in eighty days? he asked. Mr. Gaunt grinned again. Something like that, Brian. Something very like that. Well, that splinter is supposed to be from Noahs Ark. Of course I cant say it is from Noahs Ark, because people would think I was the most outrageous sort of fake. There must be four thousand people in the world today trying to sell pieces of wood which they claim to be from Noahs Ark and probably four hundred thousand trying to peddle pieces of the One True Cross but I can say its over two thousand years old, because its been carbon-dated, and I can say it came from the Holy Land, although it was found not on Mount Ararat, but on Mount Boram. Most of this was lost on Brian, but the most salient fact was not. Two thousand years, he breathed. Wow! Youre really sure? I am indeed, Mr. Gaunt said. I have a certificate from M.I.T., where it was carbon-dated, and that goes with the item, of course. But, you know, I really believe it might be from the Ark. He looked at the splinter speculatively for a moment, and then raised his dazzling blue eyes to Brians hazel ones. Brian was again transfixed by that gaze. After all, Mount Boram is less than thirty kilometers, as the crow flies, from Mount Ararat, and greater mistakes than the final resting place of a boat, even a big one, have been made in the many histories of the

world, especially when stories are handed down from mouth to ear for generations before they are finally committed to paper. Am I right? Yeah, Brian said. Sounds logical. And, besides it produces an odd sensation when its held. Wouldnt you say so? I guess! Mr. Gaunt smiled and ruffled the boys hair, breaking the spell. I like you, Brian. I wish all my customers could be as full of wonder as you are. Life would be much easier for a humble tradesman such as myself if that were the way of the world. How much... how much would you sell something like that for? Brian asked. He pointed toward the splinter with a finger which was not quite steady. He was only now beginning to realize how deeply the experience had affected him. It had been like holding a conch shell to your ear and hearing the sound of the ocean... only in 3-D and Sensurround. He dearly wished Mr. Gaunt would let him hold it again, perhaps even a little longer, but he didnt know how to ask and Mr. Gaunt did not offer. Oh now, Mr. Gaunt said, steeping his fingers below his chin and looking at Brian roguishly. With an item like that and with most of the good things I sell, the really interesting things that would depend on the buyer. What the buyer would be willing to pay. What would you be willing to pay, Brian? I dont know, Brian said, thinking of the ninety-one cents in his pocket, and then gulped: A lot! Mr. Gaunt threw back his head and laughed heartily. Brian noticed when he did that hed made a mistake about the man. When he first came in, he had thought Mr. Gaunts hair was gray. Now he saw that it was only silver at the temples. He must have been standing in one of the spotlights, Brian thought. Well, this has been terribly interesting, Brian, but I really do have a lot of work ahead of me before ten tomorrow, and so Sure, Brian said, startled back into a consideration of good manners. I have to go, too. Sorry to have kept you so long No, no, no! You misunderstand me! Mr. Gaunt laid one of his long hands on Brians arm. Brian pulled his arm away. He hoped the gesture didnt seem impolite, but he couldnt help it even if it did. Mr. Gaunts hand was hard and dry and somehow unpleasant. It did not feel that different, in fact, from the chunk of petrified wood that was supposed to be from Noas Ark, or whatever it was. But Mr. Gaunt was too much in earnest to notice Brians instinctive shrinking away. He acted as if he, not Brian, had committed a breach of etiquette. I just thought we should get down to business. Theres no sense, really, in your looking at the few other things Ive managed to unpack; there arent very many of them, and youve seen the most interesting of those which are out. Yet I have a pretty good knowledge of my own stock, even without an inventory sheet in my hand, and I might have something that youd fancy, Brian. What would you fancy? Jeepers, Brian said. There were a thousand things he would fancy, and that was part of the problem when the question was put as baldly as that, he couldnt say just which of the thousand he would fancy the most. Its best not to think too deeply about these things, Mr. Gaunt said. He spoke idly, but there was nothing idle about his eyes, which were studying Brians face closely. When I say, Brian Rusk, what do you want more than anything else in the world at this moment? what is your response? Quick! Sandy Koufax, Brian responded promptly. He had not been aware that his palm was open to receive the splinter from Noahs Ark until he had seen it resting there, and he hadnt been aware of what he was going to say in response to Mr. Gaunts question until he heard the words tumbling from his mouth. But the moment he heard them he knew they were exactly and completely right. 5 Sandy Koufax, Mr. Gaunt said thoughtfully. How interesting. Well, not Sandy Koufax himself Brian said, but his baseball card. Topps or Fleers? Mr. Gaunt asked. Brian hadnt believed the afternoon could get any better, but suddenly it had. Mr. Gaunt knew about baseball cards as well as splinters and geodes. It was amazing, really amazing. Topps. I suppose its his rookie card youd be interested in, Mr. Gaunt said regretfully. I dont think I could help you there, but No, Brian said. Not 1954. Thats the one Id like to have. Ive got a collection of 1956 baseball cards. My dad got me going on it. Its fun, and there are only a few of them that are really expensive Al Kaline, Mel Parnell, Roy Campanella, guys like that. Ive got over fifty already. Including Al Kaline. He was thirty-eight bucks. I mowed a lot of lawns to get Al. I bet you did, Mr. Gaunt said with a smile. Well, like I say, most 56 cards arent really expensive they cost five dollars, seven dollars, sometimes ten. But a Sandy Koufax in good condition costs ninety or even a hundred bucks. He wasnt a big star that year, but of course he turned out to be great, and that was when the Dodgers were still in Brooklyn. Everybody called them Da Bums back then. Thats what my dad says, at least. Your dad is two hundred per cent correct, said Mr. Gaunt. I believe I have something thats going to make you very happy, Brian. Wait right here. He brushed back through the curtained doorway and left Brian standing by the case with the splinter and the Polaroid and the picture of The King in it. Brian was almost dancing from one foot to the other in hope and anticipation. He told himself to stop being such a wuss; even if Mr. Gaunt did have a Sandy Koufax card, and even if it was a Topps card from the fifties, it would probably turn out to be a 55 or a 57. And suppose it really was a 56? What good was that going to do him, with less than a buck in his pocket? Well, I can look at it, cant I? Brian thought. It doesnt cost anything to look, does it? This was also

another of his mothers favorite sayings. From the room behind the curtain there came the sounds of boxes being shifted and mild thuds as they were set on the floor. Just a minute, Brian, Mr. Gaunt called. He sounded a little out of breath. Im sure theres a shoebox here someplace... Dont go to any trouble on my account, Mr. Gaunt! Brian called back, hoping like mad that Mr. Gaunt would go to as much trouble as was necessary. Maybe that box is in one of the shipments still en route, Mr. Gaunt said dubiously. Brians heart sank. Then: But I was sure... wait! Here it is! Right here! Brians heart rosedid more than rise. It soared and did a backover flip. Mr. Gaunt came back through the curtain. His hair was a trifle disarrayed, and there was a smudge of dust on one lapel of his smoking jacket. In his hands he held a box which had once contained a pair of Air Jordan sneakers. He set it on the counter and took off the top. Brian stood by his left arm, looking in. The box was full of baseball cards, each inserted in its own plastic envelope, just like the ones Brian sometimes bought at The Baseball Card Shop in North Conway, New Hampshire. I thought there might be an inventory sheet in here, but no such luck, Mr. Gaunt said. Still, I have a pretty good idea of what I have in stock, as I told youits the key to running a business where you sell a little bit of everythingand Im quite sure I saw... He trailed off and began flipping rapidly through the cards. Brian watched the cards flash by, speechless with astonishment. The guy who ran The Baseball Card Shop had what his dad called a pretty country-fair selection of old cards, but the contents of the whole store couldnt hold a candle to the treasures tucked away in this one sneaker box. There were chewing-tobacco cards with pictures of Ty Cobb and Pie Traynor on them. There were cigarette cards with pictures of Babe Ruth and Dom DiMaggio and Big George Keller and even Hiram Dissen, the one-armed pitcher who had chucked for the White Sox during the forties. LUCKY STRIKE HAS GONE TO WAR! many of the cigarette cards proclaimed. And there, just glimpsed, a broad, solemn face above a Pittsburgh uniform shirt My God, wasnt that Honus Wagner? Brian gasped. His heart felt like a very small bird which had blundered into his throat and now fluttered there, trapped. Thats the rarest baseball card in the universe! Yes, yes, Mr. Gaunt said absently. His long fingers shuttled speedily through the cards, faces from another age trapped under transparent plastic coverings, men who had whacked the pill and chucked the apple and covered the anchors, heroes of a grand and bygone golden age, an age of which this boy still harbored cheerful and lively dreams. A little of everything, thats what a successful business is all about, Brian. Diversity, pleasure, amazement, fulfillment... what a successful life is all about, for that matter... I dont give advice, but if I did, you could do worse than to remember that... now let me see... somewhere... somewhere... ah! He pulled a card from the middle of the box like a magician doing a trick and placed it triumphantly in Brians hand. It was Sandy Koufax. It was a 56 Topps card. And it was signed. To my good friend Brian, with best wishes, Sandy Koufax, Brian read in a hoarse whisper. And then found he could say nothing at all. 6 He looked up at Mr. Gaunt, his mouth working. Mr. Gaunt smiled. I didnt plant it or plan it, Brian. Its just a coincidence... but a nice sort of coincidence, dont you think? Brian still couldnt talk, and so settled for a single nod of his head. The plastic envelope with its precious cargo felt weirdly heavy in his hand. Take it out, Mr. Gaunt invited. When Brians voice finally emerged from his mouth again, it was the croak of a very old invalid. I dont dare. Well, I do, Mr. Gaunt said. He took the envelope from Brian, reached inside with the carefully manicured nail of one finger, and slid the card out. He put it in Brians hand. He could see tiny dents in the surfacethey had been made by the point of the pen Sandy Koufax had used to sign his name... their names. Koufaxes signature was almost the same as the printed one, except the printed signature said Sanford Koufax and the autograph said Sandy Koufax. Also, it was a thousand times better because it was real. Sandy Koufax had held this card in his hand and had imposed his mark upon it, the mark of his living hand and magic name. But there was another name on it, as wellBrians own. Some boy with his name had been standing by the Ebbets Field bullpen before the game and Sandy Koufax, the real Sandy Koufax, young and strong, his glory years just ahead of him, had taken the offered card, probably still smelling of sweet pink bubblegum, and had set his mark upon it... and mine, too, Brian thought. Suddenly it came again, the feeling which had swept over him when he held the splinter of petrified wood. Only this time it was much, much stronger. Smell of grass, sweet and fresh-cut. Heavy smack of ash on horsehide. Yells and laughter from the batting cage. Hello, Mr. Koufax, could you sign your card for me? A narrow face. Brown eyes. Darkish hair. The cap comes off briefly, he scratches his head just above the hairline, then puts the cap back on. Sure, kid. He takes the card. Whats your name? Brian, sirBrian Seguin. Scratch, scratch, scratch on the card. The magic: the inscribed fire. You want to be a ballplayer when you grow up, Brian? The question has the feel of rote recital, and he speaks without raising his face from the card he holds in his large right hand so he can write on it with his soon-to-be-magic left hand. Yes, sir. Practice your fundamentals. And hands the card back. Yes, sir! But hes

already walking away, then hes breaking into a lazy run on the fresh-cut grass as he jogs toward the bullpen with his shadow jogging along beside him Brian? Brian? Long fingers were snapping under his noseMr.

Gaunts fingers. Brian came out of his daze and saw Mr. Gaunt looking at him, amused. Are you there, Brian? Sorry, Brian said, and blushed. He knew he should hand the card back, hand it back and get out of here, but he couldnt seem to let it go. Mr. Gaunt was staring into his eyesright into his head, it seemedagain, and once more he found it impossible to look away. So, Mr. Gaunt said softly. Let us say, Brian, that you are the buyer. Let us say that. How much would you pay for that card? Brian felt despair like a rockslide weight his heart. All Ive got is Mr. Gaunts left hand flew up. Shhh! he said sternly. Bite your tongue! The buyer must never tell the seller how much he has! You might as well hand the vendor your wallet, and turn the contents of your pockets out on the floor in the bargain! If you cant tell a lie, then be still! Its the first rule of fair trade, Brian my boy. His eyesso large and dark. Brian felt that he was swimming in them. There are two prices for this card, Brian. Half... and half. One half is cash. The other is a deed. Do you understand? Yes, Brian said. He felt far againfar away from Castle Rock, far away from Needful Things, even far away from himself. The only things which were real in this far place were Mr. Gaunts wide, dark eyes. The cash price for that 1956 autographed Sandy Koufax card is eighty-five cents, Mr. Gaunt said. Does that seem fair? Yes, Brian said. His voice was far and wee. He felt himself dwindling, dwindling away... and approaching the point where any clear memory would cease. Good, Mr. Gaunts caressing voice said. Our trading has progressed well thus far. As for the deed... do you know a woman named Wilma Jerzyck, Brian? Wilma, sure, Brian said out of his growing darkness. She lives on the other side of the block from us. Yes, I believe she does, Mr. Gaunt agreed. Listen carefully, Brian. So he must have gone on speaking, but Brian did not remember what he said. 7 The next thing he was aware of was Mr. Gaunt shoing him gently out onto Main

Street, telling him how much he had enjoyed meeting him, and asking him to tell his mother and all his friends that he had been well treated and fairly dealt with. Sure, Brian said. He felt bewildered... but he also felt very good, as if he had just awakened from a refreshing early-afternoon nap. And come again, Mr. Gaunt said, just before he shut the door. Brian looked at it. The sign hanging there now read CLOSED. 8 It seemed to Brian that he had been in Needful Things for hours, but the clock outside the bank said it was only ten of four. It had been less than twenty minutes. He prepared to mount his bike, then leaned the handlebars against his belly while he reached in his pants pockets. From one he drew six bright copper pennies. From the other he drew the autographed Sandy Koufax card. They apparently had made some sort of deal, although Brian could not for the life of him remember exactly what it had beenonly that Wilma Jerzycks name had been mentioned. To my good friend Brian, with best wishes, Sandy Koufax. Whatever deal they had made, this was worth it. A card like this was worth practically anything. Brian tucked it carefully into his knapsack so it wouldnt get bent, mounted his bike, and began to pedal home fast. He grinned all the way. From Publishers

WeeklyWith the "Last Castle Rock Story" King bids a magnificent farewell to the fictional Maine town where much of his previous work has been set. Of grand proportion, the novel ranks with King's best, in both plot and characterization. A new store, Needful Things, opens in town, and its proprietor, Leland Gaunt, offers seemingly unbeatable (read: Faustian) bargains to Castle Rock's troubled citizens. Among them are Polly Chalmers, lonely seamstress whose arthritis is only one of the physical and psychic pains she must bear; Brian Rusk, the 11-year-old boy whose mother is not precisely attentive; and Alan Pangborn, the new sheriff whose wife and son have recently died. These are only three of the half-dozen or so brilliantly drawn people met in the novel's one-month time span. As the dreams of each strikingly memorable character, major and minor, inexorably turn to nightmare, individuals and soon the community are overwhelmed, while the precise nature of Gaunt's evil thrillingly stays just out of focus. King, like Leland Gaunt, knows just what his customers want. 1.5 million first printing; BOMC main selection. Copyright 1991 Reed Business

Information, Inc.