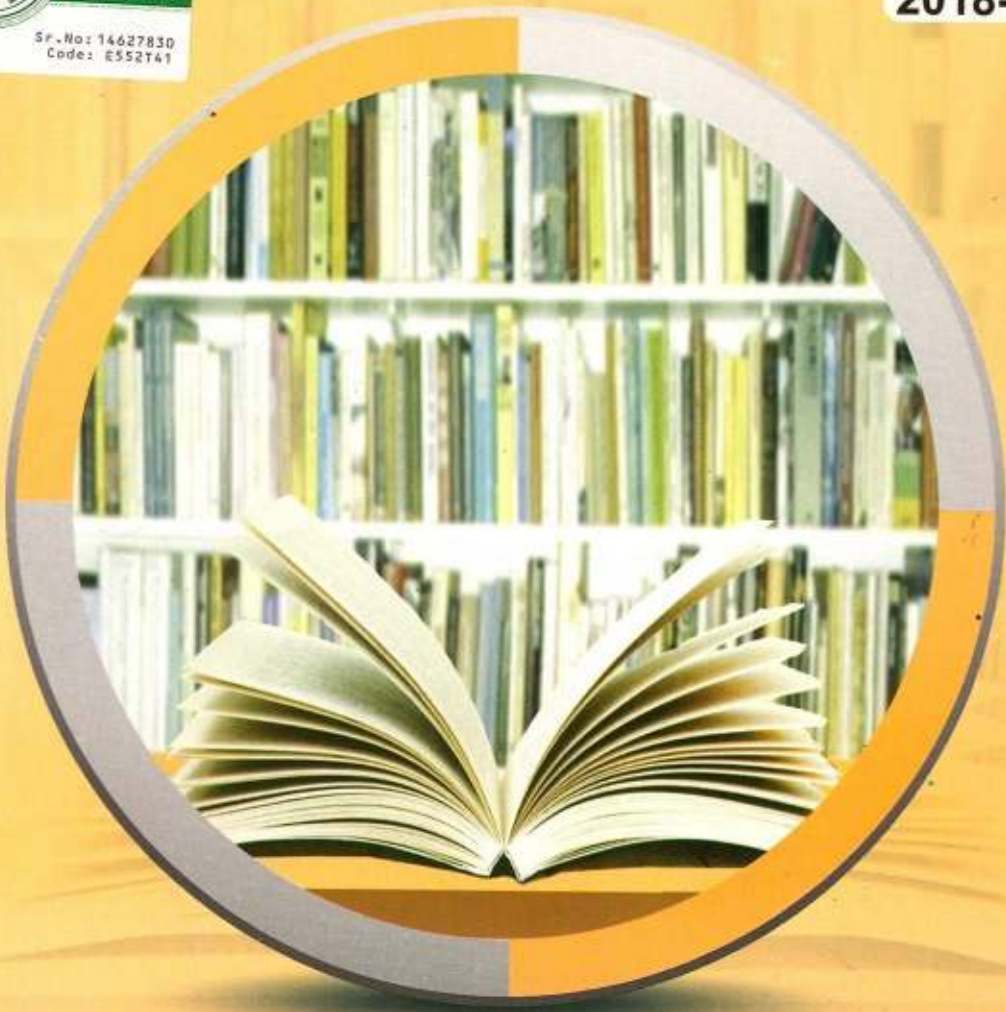


ENGLISH

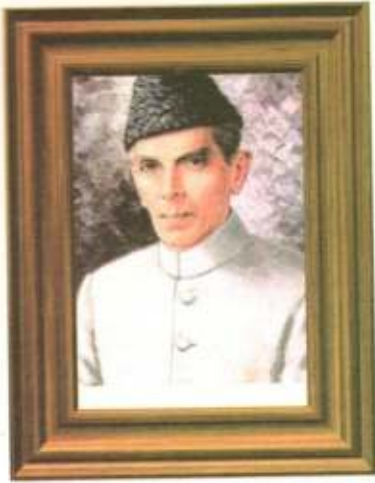
BOOK I

11

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(September 26, 1947, Karachi)

Quaid-e-Azam
Muhammad Ali Jinnah
Founder of Pakistan



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ٹونشانِ عزمِ عالی شان ارضِ پاکستان
مرکزِ یقین شاد باد
پاک سرزمین کا نظام قوتِ اخوتِ عوام
قوم، ملک، سلطنت پایندہ تابندہ باد
شاد باد منزلِ مُراد
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ENGLISH BOOK – I

FOR

INTERMEDIATE CLASSES

(Short Stories)



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Button, Button

(Richard Matheson)

The package was lying by the front door – a cube-shaped carton sealed with tape, their name and address printed by hand: “Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Lewis, 217-E, Thirty-seventh Street, New York, New York 10016.” Norma picked it up, unlocked the door, and went into the apartment. It was just getting dark.

After she had put the lamb chops in the broiler, she sat down to open the package.

Inside the carton was a push-button unit fastened to a small wooden box. A glass dome covered the button. Norma tried to lift it off, but it was locked in place. She turned the unit over and saw a folded piece of paper scotch-taped to the bottom of the box. She pulled it off: “Mr. Steward will call on you at 8.00 P.M.”

Norma put the button unit beside her on the couch. She reread the typed note, smiling.

A few moments later, she went back into the kitchen to make the salad.

The doorbell rang at eight o'clock. “I'll get it,” Norma called from the kitchen. Arthur was in the living room, reading.

There was a small man in the hallway. He removed his hat as Norma opened the door. “Mrs. Lewis?” he inquired politely.

“Yes?”

“I'm Mr. Steward.”

“Oh, Yes.” Norma repressed a smile. She was sure now it was a sales pitch.

“May I come in?” asked Mr. Steward.

“I'm rather busy,” Norma said.

“Don't you want to know what it is?”

Norma turned back. Mr. Steward's tone had been offensive. “No. I don't think so,” she replied.

“It could prove very valuable,” he told her.

“Monetarily?” she challenged.

Mr. Steward nodded, “Monetarily,” he said.

Norma frowned. She didn't like his attitude. “What are you trying to sell?” she asked.

“I'm not selling anything,” he answered.

Arthur came out of the living room. “Something wrong?”

Mr. Steward introduced himself.

“Oh, the—” Arthur pointed toward the living room and smiled.

“What is that gadget, anyway?”

"It won't take long to explain," replied Mr. Steward. "May I come in?"

"If you're selling something—," Arthur said.

Mr. Steward shook his head. "I'm not."

Arthur looked at Norma. "Up to you," she said.

He hesitated. "Well, why not?" he said.

They went into the living room and Mr. Steward sat in Norma's chair. He reached into an inside coat pocket and withdrew a small sealed envelope. "Inside here is a key to the bell-unit dome," he said. He set the envelope on the chair side-table. "The bell is connected to our office."

"What's it for?" asked Arthur.

"If you push the button," Mr. Steward told him, "somewhere in the world someone you don't know will die. In return for which you will receive a payment of \$50,000."

Norma stared at the small man. He was smiling.

"What are you talking about?" Arthur asked him.

Mr. Steward looked surprised. "But I've just explained," he said.

"Is this a practical joke?" asked Arthur.

"Not at all. The offer is completely genuine."

"You aren't making sense," Arthur said. "You expect us to believe —"

"Who do you represent?" demanded Norma.

Mr. Steward looked embarrassed. "I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to tell you that," he said. "However, I assure you, the organization is of international scope."

"I think you'd better leave," Arthur said, standing.

Mr. Steward rose. "Of course."

"And take your button unit with you."

"Are you sure you wouldn't care to think about it for a day or so?"

Arthur picked up the button unit and the envelope and thrust them into Mr. Steward's hands. He walked into the hall and pulled open the door.

"I'll leave my card," said Mr. Steward. He placed it on the table by the door.

When he was gone, Arthur tore it in half and tossed the pieces onto the table.

Norma was still sitting on the sofa. "What do you think it was?" she asked.

"I don't care to know," he answered.

She tried to smile but couldn't. "Aren't you curious at all?"

"No." He shook his head.

After Arthur had returned to his book, Norma went back to the kitchen and finished washing the dishes.

"Why won't you talk about it?" Norma asked.

Arthur's eyes shifted as he brushed his teeth. He looked at her reflection in the

bathroom mirror.

“Doesn't it intrigue you?”

“It offends me,” Arthur said.

“I know, but” — Norma rolled another curler in her hair — “doesn't it intrigue you, too?”

“You think it's a practical joke?” she asked as they went into the room.

“If it is, it's a sick one.”

Norma sat on her chair and said after a moment.

“May be it's some kind of psychological research.”

Arthur shrugged. “Could be.”

“Maybe some eccentric millionaire is doing it.”

“Maybe.”

“Wouldn't you like to know?”

Arthur shook his head.

“Why?”

“Because it's immoral,” he told her.

Norma slid beneath the covers. “Well, I think it's intriguing,” she said.

Arthur turned off the lamp. “Good night,” he said.

Norma closed her eyes. “Fifty thousand dollars,” she thought.

In the morning, as she left the apartment, Norma saw the card halves on the table. Impulsively, she dropped them into her purse. She locked the front door and joined Arthur in the elevator.

While she was on her coffee break, she took the card halves from her purse and held the torn edges together. Only Mr. Steward's name and telephone number were printed on the card.

After lunch, she took the card halves from her purse again and scotch-taped the edges together. “Why am I doing this?” she thought.

Just before five, she dialed the number.

“Good afternoon,” said Mr. Steward's voice.

Norma almost hung up but restrained herself. She cleared her throat.

“This is Mrs. Lewis,” she said.

“Yes, Mrs. Lewis,” Mr. Steward sounded pleased.

“I'm curious.”

“That's natural,” Mr. Steward said.

“Not that I believe a word of what you told us.”

“Oh, it's quite authentic,” Mr. Steward answered.

“Well, whatever —” Norma swallowed. “When you said someone in the world

would die, what did you mean?"

"Exactly that," he answered. "It could be anyone. All we guarantee is that you don't know them. And, of course, that you wouldn't have to watch them die."

"For \$50,000," Norma said.

"That is correct."

She made a scoffing sound. "That's crazy."

"Nonetheless, that is the proposition," Mr. Steward said. "Would you like me to return the button unit?"

Norma stiffened. "Certainly not." She hung up angrily.

The package was lying by the front door; Norma saw it as she left the elevator. Well, of all the nerve, she thought. She glared at the carton as she unlocked the door. I just won't take it in, she thought. She went inside and started dinner.

Later, she went into the front hall. Opening the door, she picked up the package and carried it into the kitchen, leaving it on the table.

She sat in the living room, looking out the window. After a while, she went back into the kitchen to turn the cutlets in the broiler. She put the package in a bottom cabinet. She'd throw it out in the morning.

"May be some eccentric millionaire is playing games with people," she said.

Arthur looked up from his dinner. "I don't understand you."

"What does that mean?"

"Let it go," he told her.

Norma ate in silence. Suddenly, she put her fork down. "Suppose it's a genuine offer?" she said.

Arthur stared at her.

"Suppose it's a genuine offer?"

"All right, suppose it is?" He looked incredulous. "What would you like to do? Get the button back and push it? Murder someone?"

Norma looked disgusted. "Murder."

"How would you define it?"

"If you don't even know the person?" Norma said.

Arthur looked astounded, "Are you saying what I think you are?"

"If it's some old Chinese peasant ten thousand miles away? Some diseased native in the Congo?"

"How about some baby boy in Pennsylvania?" Arthur countered. "Some beautiful little girl on the next block?"

"Now you're loading things."

"The point is, Norma," he continued. "What's the difference who you kill? It's still

murder.”

“The point is,” Norma broke in, “if it’s someone you’ve never seen in your life and never will see, someone whose death you don’t even have to know about, you still wouldn’t push the button?”

Arthur stared at her, appalled. “You mean you would?”

“Fifty thousand dollars, Arthur.”

“What has the amount —”

“Fifty thousand dollars, Arthur,” Norma interrupted. “A chance to take that trip to Europe we’ve always talked about.”

“Norma, no.”

“A chance to buy that cottage on the island.”

“Norma, no.” His face was white.

She shuddered. “All right, take it easy,” she said. “Why are you getting so upset? It’s only talk.”

After dinner, Arthur went into the living room. Before he left the table, he said, “I’d rather not discuss it anymore, if you don’t mind.”

Norma shrugged, “Fine with me.”

She got up earlier than usual to make pancakes, eggs, and tea for Arthur’s breakfast.

“What’s the occasion?” he asked with a smile.

“No occasion.” Norma looked offended. “I wanted to do it, that’s all.”

“Good,” he said. “I’m glad you did.”

She refilled his cup. “Wanted to show you I’m not —,” she shrugged.

“Not what?”

“Selfish.”

“Did I say you were?”

“Well” — she gestured vaguely — “last night” . . .

Arthur didn’t speak.

“All that talk about the button,” Norma said. “I think you — well, misunderstood me.”

“In what way?” His voice was guarded.

“I think you felt” — she gestured again — “that I was only thinking of myself.”

“Oh.”

“I wasn’t.”

“Norma —”

“Well, I wasn’t. When I talked about Europe, a cottage on the Island —”

“Norma, why are we getting so involved in this?”

“I’m not involved at all.” She drew in a shaking breath. “I’m simply trying to indicate that —.”

“What?”

“That I’d like for us to go to Europe. Like for us to have a cottage on the island. Like for us to have a nicer apartment, nicer furniture, nicer clothes, a car.”

“Norma, we will,” he said.

“When?”

He stared at her in dismay.

“Norma—”

“When?”

“Are you” —he seemed to draw back slightly — “are you really saying —”

“I’m saying that they’re probably doing it for some research project!” she cut him off. “That they want to know what average people would do under such a circumstance! That they’re just saying someone would die, in order to study reactions, see if there would be guilt, anxiety, whatever! You don’t really think they’d kill somebody, do you?”

Arthur didn’t answer. She saw his hands trembling. After a while, he got up and left.

When he’d gone to work, Norma remained at the table, staring into her coffee. I’m going to be late, she thought. She shrugged. What difference did it make?

While she was stacking dishes, she turned abruptly, dried her hands, and took the package from the bottom cabinet. Opening it, she set the button unit on the table. She stared at it for a long time before taking the key from its envelope and removing the glass dome. She stared at the button. How ridiculous, she thought. All this furore over a meaningless button.

Reaching out, she pressed it down. For us, she thought angrily.

She shuddered. Was it happening? A chill of horror swept across her.

In a moment, it had passed. She made a contemptuous noise. Ridiculous, she thought. To get so worked up over nothing.

She threw the button unit, dome, and key into the wastebasket and hurried to dress for work.

She had just turned over the supper steaks when the telephone rang. She picked up the receiver. “Hello?”

“Mrs. Lewis?”

“Yes?”

“This is the Lenox Hill Hospital.”

She felt unreal as the voice informed her of the subway accident — the shoving crowd, Arthur pushed from the platform in front of the train. She was conscious of shaking her head but couldn’t stop.

As she hung up, she remembered Arthur’s life-insurance policy for \$25,000, with double indemnity for —

“No.” She couldn’t seem to breathe. She struggled to her feet and walked into the kitchen numbly. Something cold pressed at her skull as she removed the button unit from the

wastebasket. There were no nails or screws visible. She couldn't see how it was put together.

Abruptly, she began to smash it on the sink edge, pounding it harder and harder, until the wood split. She pulled the sides apart, cutting her fingers without noticing. There were no transistors in the box, no wires or tubes.

The box was empty.

She whirled with a gasp as the telephone rang. Stumbling into the living room, she picked up the receiver.

"Mrs. Lewis?" Mr. Steward asked.

It wasn't her voice shrieking so; it couldn't be. "You said I wouldn't know the one that died!"

"My dear lady," Mr. Steward said. "Do you really think you knew your husband?"

Theme

Mr. Steward an agent of an international organization gave Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Lewis a temptation of \$50,000 if they pushed the button of a mechanism that would kill some unknown person anywhere in the world. Arthur opposed the idea and considered it a murder. But his wife Norma found it beneficial for improving the lifestyle by purchasing a cottage on the island and having a chance to take a trip to Europe. Norma, overcome by the temptation, pushed the button in the absence of her husband and got him killed in an accident.

Reading Notes

frowned	an expression of displeasure
gadget	small fitting in machinery
curious	eager to learn, inquisitive
intrigue	carry on underhand plot
shrugged	raised shoulders to express helplessness
eccentric	odd
impulsively	spontaneously
swallowed	took in
scoffing	taunting
glared	gazed, looked at it without blinking
appalled	terrified, dismayed
stacking	piling up in frame for drying
furor	excitement

- x. Why didn't Norma take the consent of her husband to comply with the instructions of Mr. Steward?
- He couldn't understand the idea.
 - He would share the offer.
 - He considered it a murder.
 - He considered it immoral to kill some unknown person for the sake of money.

2. Mark the statements true or false.

- Norma found the carton in front of her door as she arrived home.
- Norma believed that Mr. Steward was a guest.
- Mr. Steward took out a key and opened the box for Arthur.
- Arthur and Norma have the same reaction to Mr. Steward's proposition.
- Norma could not resist calling Mr. Steward back.
- Norma did not agree with Mr. Steward to have the button unit brought back.
- Arthur said he believed that Mr. Steward's offer was a genuine one.
- Norma wants Arthur to understand that she is interested in the proposition because the money would help the two of them.
- Arthur could accept participating along with Norma if they were part of a research project.
- Norma called Mr. Steward after she learned of Arthur's death.

3. Answer the following questions.

- Why did Norma consider the tone and attitude of Mr. Steward offensive?
- Why did Arthur disagree with his wife?
- Why did Norma try to persuade her husband to agree with her?
- What were the reasons Norma gave to her husband to accept the offer?
- Why did Mr. Steward continue persuading Norma?
- What was the message Norma received on pushing the button?
- What is the significance of Arthur's life-insurance policy?
- Did Norma remain normal on hearing the news of the accident of her husband?

4. Write down the answers to the following questions in 100 – 150 words.

- Write a note on the character of Arthur.
- Why didn't Norma remain true to her husband?
- Do you agree with Norma's assertion that the death of someone you have never seen is not important?
- Write the story in your own words.

v. What moral lesson does the story teach?

5. **Connect a sentence of Column I with the relevant sentence in Column II.**

Column I	Column II
She sat down to open	genuine.
She saw a folded piece of paper	the package.
Arthur came out of	by the door.
It won't take long	in the bathroom mirror.
The offer is completely	the living room.
The organization is of	scotch-taped to the bottom of the box.
Are you sure you wouldn't	care to think about it for a day or so?
He placed it on the table	to explain.
He looked at her reflection	from her purse.
She took the card halves	international scope.

6. **Use the correct forms of the verbs given in brackets.**

- i. Norma (unlock) the door, and (go) into the apartment.
- ii. She (turn) the unit over.
- iii. She (reread) the typed note smilingly.
- iv. He (remove) his hat as Norma (open) the door.
- v. Mr. Steward (look) surprised.

7. **Punctuate the following lines.**

mr steward looked embarrassed i m afraid i m not at liberty to tell you that he said however i assure you the organization is of international scope

8. **Write down the following lines in indirect narration.**

- i. "Don't you want to know about it?" the salesman asked the customer.
- ii. "I hope everything goes well with you," said Asif to his friend.
- iii. "Where shall we meet tomorrow, at my home or at yours?" the lawyer asked his client.
- iv. "All is well that ends well!" said the father when he had finished the story.