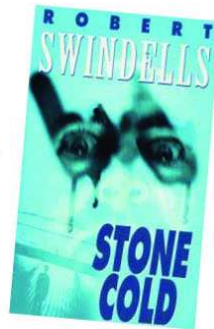


B7 Robert Swindells' novel 'Stone Cold' tells the story of Link, a 17-year-old boy who runs away from home and ends up living on the streets of London. How does the following extract make you feel?



Tip
Read the whole text first to get the gist. Then try understand new words from their context.

If you think sleeping rough's just a matter of finding a dry spot where the fuzz won't move you on and getting your head down, you're wrong. Not your fault of course – if you've never tried it you've no way of knowing what it's like, so what I thought I'd do was sort of talk you through a typical night. [...]

So you pick your spot. Wherever it is (unless you're in a squat or a derelict house or something) it's going to have a floor of stone, tile, concrete or brick. In other words it's going to be hard and cold. It might be a bit cramped, too – shop doorways often are. And

remember, if it's winter you're going to be half-frozen before you start. Anyway you've got your place, and if you're lucky enough to have a sleeping bag you unroll it and get in. Settled for the night? Well maybe, maybe not. Remember my first night? The Scouser? 'Course you do. He kicked me out of my bedroom and pinched my watch. Well, that sort of thing can happen any night, and there are worse things. You could be peed on by a drunk or a dog. Happens all the time – one man's bedroom is another man's lavatory. You might be spotted by a gang of lager louts on the lookout for someone to maim. That happens all the time too, and if they get carried away you can end up dead. There are the guys who like young boys, who think because you're a dosser you'll do anything for dosh, and there's the psycho who'll knife you for your pack.

So, you lie listening. You bet you do. Footsteps. Voices. Breathing, even. Doesn't help you sleep.

Then there's your bruises. What bruises? Try lying on a stone floor for half an hour. Just half an hour. You can choose any position you fancy, and you can change it as often as you like. You won't find it comfy, I can tell you. You won't sleep unless you're dead drunk or zonked on downers. And if you are, and do, you're going to wake up with bruises on hips, shoulders, ankles, and knees – especially if you're a bit thin from not eating properly. And if you do that six hours a night for six nights you'll feel like you fell out of a train. Try sleeping on concrete then.

And don't forget the cold. If you've ever tried dropping off to sleep with cold feet, even in bed, you'll know it's impossible. You've got to warm up those feet, or lie awake. And in January, in a doorway, in wet trainers, it can be quite a struggle. If you can manage it, chances are you'll need to get up for a pee, and then it starts all over again.

And those are only some of the hassles. I haven't mentioned stomach cramps from hunger, headaches from the flu, toothache, fleas and lice. I haven't talked about homesickness, depression or despair. I haven't gone into how it feels to want a girlfriend when your circumstances make it virtually impossible for you to get one – how it feels to know you're a social outcast in fact, a non-person to whom every ordinary everyday activity is closed.

So, you lie on your bruises, listening. Trying to warm your feet. You curl on your side and your hip hurts, so you stretch out on your back so your feet stay cold and concrete hurts your heels. You force yourself to lie still for a bit, thinking that'll help you drop off, but it doesn't. Your pack feels like a rock under your head and your nose is cold. You wonder what time it is. Can you stop listening now, or could someone still come? Distant chimes.

You strain your ears, counting. One o'clock? It can't be only one o'clock, surely? I've been here hours. Did I miss a chime?

What's that? Sounds like breathing. Heavy breathing, as in a maniac. Lie still. Quiet.

Maybe he won't see you. Listen. Is he still there? Silence now. Creeping up, perhaps. No, relax. Jeez, my feet are cold.

A thought out of nowhere – my old room at home. My little bed. What I wouldn't give for – no, mustn't. Mustn't think about that. No sleep that way. Somebody could be asleep in that room right now. Warm and dry. Safe. Lucky sod.

Food. God, don't start on about food! (Remember that time in Whitby – fish and chip caff? Long, sizzling haddock, heap of chips like a mountain. So many you had to leave some.) Wish I had them now.

Mum. Wonder what Mum's doing? Wonder if she wonders where I am? How would she feel if she knew? I miss you, Mum. Do you miss me? Does anybody?

Chimes again. Quarter past. Quarter past one? I don't believe it.

DSS*. Are they considering my claim? (Not now they're not – they're sleeping. Snug as a bug in a rug.) Do they know what it feels like, kipping in a doorway? No.

And so it goes on, hour after hour. Now and then you doze a bit, but only a bit. You're so cold, so frightened and it hurts so much that you end up praying for morning, even though you're dog tired – even though tomorrow is certain to be every bit as grim as yesterday.

And the worst part is knowing you haven't deserved any of it.

*DSS – Department of Social Services: The place where you can apply for financial help if you have no income.

B8 a) Find these slang and colloquial (=informal) expressions in the text and try to guess their meanings from the context.

- | | | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| fuzz
(line 2) | dosser
(line 18) | caff
(line 51) | comfy
(line 24) | downers
(line 25) |
| pinched
(line 13) | squat
(line 6) | dosh
(line 18) | kiping
(line 58) | zonked
(line 25) |

b) What else do you notice about the language and the style of writing?

B9 Collect information about Link and write a short characterization of him. Your analysis of his language will help you to draw some conclusions about him.

B10 a) Scan the text for information on sleeping on the streets. Then make a list of the worst aspects of 'sleeping rough'.

b) Why do you think Robert Swindells named his book 'Stone Cold'? Find three alternative titles.

B11 Write a letter from Link to his mother. Something must have forced him to leave home. Include this in the letter.

B12 Look back at the B-section. Talk to a partner about whether any of the information in this Theme has changed your attitude towards homeless people.



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Tip
Collect 20 words to describe Link before you start writing his characterization.



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