

Volume 6 of  
**THE GREEN MILE**

**STEPHEN  
KING**



**COFFEY ON  
THE MILE**

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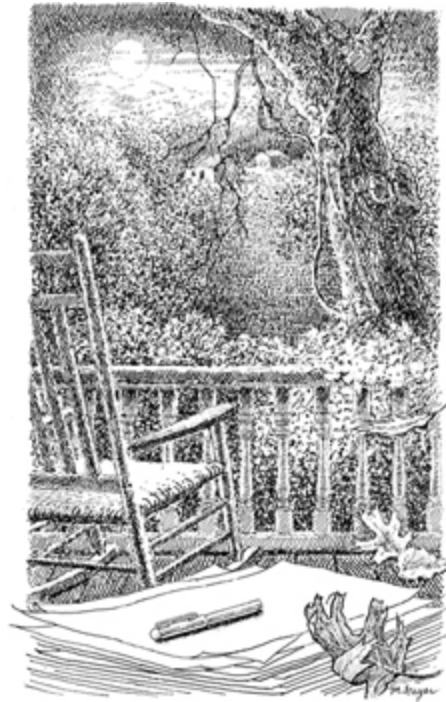
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*About Stephen King*

VOLUME VI

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COFFEY  
ON THE MILE



# 1

I SAT IN THE GEORGIA PINES SUNROOM, my father's fountain pen in my hand, and time was lost to me as I recalled the night Harry and Brutal and I took John Coffey off the Mile and to Melinda Moores, in an effort to save her life. I wrote about the drugging of William Wharton, who fancied himself the second coming of Billy the Kid; I wrote of how we stuck Percy in the straitjacket and jugged him in the restraint room at the end of the Green Mile; I wrote about our strange night journey—both terrifying and exhilarating—and the miracle that befell at the end of it. We saw John Coffey drag a woman back, not just from the edge of her grave, but from what seemed to us to be the very bottom of it.

I wrote and was very faintly aware of the Georgia Pines version of life going on around me. Old folks went down to supper, then trooped off to the Resource Center (yes, you are permitted a chuckle) for their evening dose of network sitcoms. I seem to remember my friend Elaine bringing me a sandwich, and thanking her, and eating it, but I couldn't tell you what time of the evening she brought it, or what was in it. Most of me was back in 1932, when our sandwiches were usually bought off old Toot-Toot's rolling gospel snack-wagon, cold pork a nickel, corned beef a dime.

I remember the place quieting down as the relics who live here made ready for another night of thin and troubled sleep; I heard Mickey—maybe not the best orderly in the place, but certainly the kindest—singing “Red River Valley” in his good tenor as he went around dispensing the evening meds: *“From this valley they say you are going . . . We will miss your bright eyes and sweet smile . . .”* The song made me think of Melinda again, and what she had said to John after

the miracle had happened. *I dreamed of you. I dreamed you were wandering in the dark, and so was I. We found each other.*

Georgia Pines grew quiet, midnight came and passed, and still I wrote. I got to Harry reminding us that, even though we had gotten John back to the prison without being discovered, we still had Percy waiting for us. “The evening ain’t over as long as we got him to contend with” is more or less what Harry said.

That’s where my long day of driving my father’s pen at last caught up with me. I put it down—just for a few seconds, I thought, so I could flex some life back into the fingers—and then I put my forehead down on my arm and closed my eyes to rest them. When I opened them again and raised my head, morning sun glared in at me through the windows. I looked at my watch and saw it was past eight. I had slept, head on arms like an old drunk, for what must have been six hours. I got up, wincing, trying to stretch some life into my back. I thought about going down to the kitchen, getting some toast, and going for my morning walk, then looked down at the sheafs of scribbled pages scattered across the desk. All at once I decided to put off the walk for awhile. I had a chore, yes, but it could keep, and I didn’t feel like playing hide-and-seek with Brad Dolan that morning.

Instead of walking, I’d finish my story. Sometimes it’s better to push on through, no matter how much your mind and body may protest. Sometimes it’s the only way to *get* through. And what I remember most about that morning is how desperately I wanted to get free of John Coffey’s persistent ghost.

“Okay,” I said. “One more mile. But first . . .”

I walked down to the toilet at the end of the second-floor hall. As I stood inside there, urinating, I happened to glance up at the smoke detector on the ceiling. That made me think of Elaine, and how she had distracted Dolan so I could go for my walk and do my little chore the day before. I finished peeing with a grin on my face.

I walked back to the sunroom, feeling better (and a *lot* comfier in my nether regions). Someone—Elaine, I have no doubt—had set down a pot of tea beside my pages. I drank greedily, first one cup, then another, before I even sat down.

Then I resumed my place, uncapped the fountain pen, and once more began to write.

I was just slipping fully into my story when a shadow fell on me. I looked up and felt a sinking in my stomach. It was Dolan, standing between me and the windows. He was grinning.

“Missed you going on your morning walk, Paulie,” he said, “so I thought I’d come and see what you were up to. Make sure you weren’t, you know, sick.”

“You’re all heart and a mile wide,” I said. My voice sounded all right—so far, anyway—but my heart was pounding hard. I was afraid of him, and I don’t think that realization was entirely new. He reminded me of Percy Wetmore, and I’d never been afraid of *him* . . . but when I knew Percy, I had been young.

Brad’s smile widened, but became no less unpleasant.

“Folks tellin me you been in here all night, Paulie, just writing your little report. Now, that’s just no good. Old farts like you need their beauty rest.”

“Percy—” I began, then saw a frown crease his grin and realized my mistake. I took a deep breath and began again. “Brad, what have you got against me?”

He looked puzzled for a moment, maybe a bit unsettled. Then the grin returned. “Old-timer,” he said, “could be I just don’t like your face. What you writin, anyway? Last will n testicles?”

He came forward, craning. I slapped my hand over the page I’d been working on. The rest of them I began to rake together with my free hand, crumpling some in my hurry to get them under my arm and under cover.

“Now,” he said, as if speaking to a baby, “that ain’t going to work, you old sweetheart. If Brad wants to look, Brad is going to look. And you can take that to the everfucking *bank*.”

His hand, young and hideously strong, closed over my wrist, and squeezed. Pain sank into my hand like teeth, and I groaned.

“Let go,” I managed.

“When you let me see,” he replied, and he was no longer smiling. His face was cheerful, though; the kind of good cheer you only see on the faces of folks who enjoy being mean. “Let me see, Paulie. I want to know what you’re writing.” My hand began to move away from the top page. From our trip with

John back through the tunnel under the road. “I want to see if it has anything to do with where you—”

“Let that man alone.”

The voice was like a harsh whipcrack on a dry, hot day . . . and the way Brad Dolan jumped, you would have thought his ass had been the target. He let go of my hand, which thumped back down on my paperwork, and we both looked toward the door.

Elaine Connelly was standing there, looking fresh and stronger than she had in days. She wore jeans that showed off her slim hips and long legs; there was a blue ribbon in her hair. She had a tray in her arthritic hands—juice, a scrambled egg, toast, more tea. And her eyes were blazing.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Brad asked. “He can’t eat up here.”

“He can, and he’s going to,” she said in that same dry tone of command. I had never heard it before, but I welcomed it now. I looked for fear in her eyes and saw not a speck—only rage. “And what you’re going to do is get out of here before you go beyond the cockroach level of nuisance to that of slightly larger vermin—*Rattus Americanus*, let us say.”

He took a step toward her, looking both unsure of himself and absolutely furious. I thought it a dangerous combination, but Elaine didn’t flinch as he approached. “I bet I know who set off that goddam smoke alarm,” Dolan said. “Might could have been a certain old bitch with claws for hands. Now get out of here. Me and Paulie haven’t finished our little talk, yet.”

“His name is *Mr. Edgcombe*,” she said, “and if I ever hear you call him Paulie again, I think I can promise you that your days of employment here at Georgia Pines will end, Mr. Dolan.”

“Just who do you think you are?” he asked her. He was hulking over her, now, trying to laugh and not quite making it.

“I think,” she said calmly, “that I am the grandmother of the man who is currently Speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives. A man who loves his relatives, Mr. Dolan. Especially his *older* relatives.”

The effortful smile dropped off his face the way that writing comes off a blackboard swiped with a wet sponge. I saw uncertainty, the possibility that he was being bluffed, the fear that he was not, and a certain dawning logical

assumption: it would be easy enough to check, she must know that, ergo she was telling the truth.

Suddenly I began to laugh, and although the sound was rusty, it was right. I was remembering how many times Percy Wetmore had threatened us with his connections, back in the bad old days. Now, for the first time in my long, long life, such a threat was being made again . . . but this time it was being made on my behalf.

Brad Dolan looked at me, glaring, then looked back at her.

“I mean it,” Elaine said. “At first I thought I’d just let you be—I’m old, and that seemed easiest. But when my friends are threatened and abused, I *do not* just let be. Now get out of here. And without one more word.”

His lips moved like those of a fish—oh, how badly he wanted to say that one more word (perhaps the one that rhymes with *witch*). He didn’t, though. He gave me a final look, and then strode past her and out into the hall.

I let out my breath in a long, ragged sigh as Elaine set the tray down in front of me and then set herself down across from me. “Is your grandson really Speaker of the House?” I asked.

“He really is.”

“Then what are you doing here?”

“Speaker of the statehouse makes him powerful enough to deal with a roach like Brad Dolan, but it doesn’t make him *rich*,” she said, laughing. “Besides, I like it here. I like the company.”

“I will take that as a compliment,” I said, and I did.

“Paul, are you all right? You look so tired.” She reached across the table and brushed my hair away from my forehead and eyebrows. Her fingers were twisted, but her touch was cool and wonderful. I closed my eyes for a moment. When I opened them again, I had made a decision.

“I’m all right,” I said. “And almost finished. Elaine, would you read something?” I offered her the pages I had clumsily swept together. They were probably no longer in the right order—Dolan really had scared me badly—but they were numbered and she could quickly put them right.

She looked at me consideringly, not taking what I was offering. Yet, anyway. “Are you done?”