

## Lea Park Chapter 1

It was dusk as Stephen started out on his usual route home.

It took him past the shelter as always, and at this time of day it was always just a little scarier than it would have been earlier. It was only a building, but it cast shadows in formless shapes across the park. Unusually, this evening there was just one light on inside, glowing weakly from an upstairs window.

He quickened his step just slightly. A shadow seemed to move with him. Almost certainly his own.

As he reached the path that took him across its frontage, he noticed a downstairs window starting to open. It was the sound that stopped him first - a cartoonish squeaking of wood scraping on wood. As he glanced over he saw the window, which was the kind that slid open, slowly move upwards. Whoever or whatever was opening it from within was having difficulty. It opened no more than six or seven inches and then got stuck, slightly crooked.

Stephen pulled himself forward a few steps into the shadows of one of the stands of scrubby trees next to the front yard. He dared a glance backwards, and shivered slightly - despite the warmth of the evening.

Probably twenty yards from where he now crouched, a small figure eased itself out of the window, head first, followed by a gray or green shirt and baggy pants. Shoeless feet followed and jumped softly onto the ground. It seemed to pause briefly in the half-light, as if uncertain where to go.

Stephen watched mesmerized as the little figure, skating close to the building as if avoiding a searchlight, shimmered across noiselessly, and then disappeared from view. Stephen stood stock still and shuddered.

The window remained crookedly half-open, a black void beyond it.

Later that night, the shelter burned down.