



ESL Podcast 63 – Missing Persons (3)

GLOSSARY

in one fell swoop – all at one time; completely at once

* Jorge took all of the used furniture we offered him in one fell swoop without having to make a second trip.

shower curtain – the plastic material hung from a bar above a shower to prevent water from getting outside of the shower area while one washes

* Melinda forgot to pull the shower curtain closed before she turned on the water and got the entire bathroom floor wet.

bathtub – a wide, deep container found in a bathroom used to hold water while one sits in it to wash oneself

* Can you try to keep the dog in the bathtub while I wash him?

to scurry – to run quickly with short steps; for an animal to get away by running quickly

* The angry neighbor came out of his house to yell at the children for stepping on his flowers, but the children scurried away.

to poke around – to look around, usually in a place where one shouldn't be, to find something of interest

* Don't poke around your sister's room. You know she'll be angry!

answering machine – a electronic device used to record voice messages of callers when no one answers a telephone call

* I called Chris last night and he wasn't home, so I left a message on his answering machine.

burglary – entering a building legally or without permission to commit a crime, such as theft

* The burglary occurred at 3:00 a.m. when the family was asleep.

break-in – forcing one's way into a place, such as a car or home, to steal something

* There have been several car break-ins in recent weeks, and the police are warning people not to leave any valuables in their cars.

master bedroom – the largest bedroom in a home, usually used by the owner of the home to sleep in

* Our parents sleep in the master bedroom and we each have smaller bedrooms down the hall.



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to mess up – to cause injury; to cause damage

* Michaela really messed up her back when she tried to learn some new dance steps.

brother-in-law – a man married to one's brother or sister

* Does your brother-in-law get along with your mother?

to disappear into thin air – to be impossible to find, with no traces or evidence of where someone or something could be

* The generous man gave each of the homeless people a \$100 bill and then disappeared into thin air.

to fill out forms – to complete documents by writing or typing in requested information, such as one's name, driver's license number, and date of birth

* When seeing a doctor for the first time, patients usually have to fill out forms about their medical history.

poor kid – a term used for a young person for whom one feels pity or sadness because he or she is in a bad situation or is suffering

* Toshi, poor kid, has to stay after school because he didn't finish his homework last night and the teacher is giving him extra work to do as punishment.

in such pain – feeling a lot of physical or emotional discomfort, often caused by injury or illness

* When Jenny was giving birth to her daughter, she was in such pain that she said she would never have another child.



CULTURE NOTE

Spoiler Alerts: Do People Like Them?

A “spoiler alert” is a warning that you are about to find out an important piece of information about a novel, movie, play, or TV program that you haven’t read or seen yet. “To spoil (something)” means to ruin it, so the idea behind the term “spoiler alert” is that getting information about how a story ends will “decrease” (lessen; lower) your enjoyment of it. But a 2011 “study” (piece of research) by two California researchers indicates that just the opposite is true: Spoilers make you like a story even more.

In the study, people were given one of three different versions of a story that had a surprise ending, such as a mystery story by the famous authors Agatha Christie or Raymond Chandler. One group was told how the story ended before they had even begun reading it, one group was given spoilers in the middle of the story, and one group read the story without any spoilers. By a small but “significant” (worthy of attention) amount, people who read the spoiler before reading the actual story enjoyed the story more than those who didn’t get a spoiler. (Getting a spoiler in the middle of the story didn’t make any difference, however.)

There are many possible reasons for these results. One is that people who know the “plot” (events) of the story can focus on the other parts of the drama, such as the “characters” (people) and their “motivations” (why people do what they do), the style of the writing, and more. Reading a story can be difficult, so knowing how it ends eliminates the “burden” (difficulty) of having “to figure it out” (to find the solution), giving you more energy and time to focus on a deeper understanding of the novel.



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 63 – Missing Person, Part 3: “A Woman in Pain.”

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 63. I’m your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

This episode is the third of our 12-part special series: Missing Person, a murder mystery. In the previous episodes of Missing Person, we learned that our narrator – the person telling the story, Dr. Reeves – is a university professor and an amateur detective. One of his students asked him for his help to find her missing sister, Sarah.

Dr. Reeves and the woman go over to the sister’s apartment, and they find that there is nothing there – no evidence to tell them what happened. They then hear, at the very end of the episode, a noise coming from the other side of the apartment: someone is in the bathroom. That’s where we stopped our story in the second episode.

Now, we continue with episode 3 of Missing Person: “A Woman in Pain.”

[start of story]

I put my hand on my gun and slowly opened the door wider. I saw nothing. I carefully picked up a towel from the floor. Nothing. There must be someone in the bathroom, I thought.

In one fell swoop, I kicked the shower curtain back. “Don’t move!” I shouted.

Suddenly, a little white cat jumped out of the bathtub and scurried between my legs. A cat. I should have known.

“Oh, Jasmine! I forgot about you!” Anne said. The cat looked happy to see her. She took her into the kitchen. I poked around the rest of the bedroom and then followed Anne into the kitchen.

“Does the cat have any food left in her dish?” I asked.

“It’s almost gone. Poor Jasmine! You must be hungry.”



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“Well, Bill and Sarah haven’t been gone long, we know that.” I walked over to the telephone answering machine and checked their messages. No one had called.

We continued looking through the three-bedroom apartment. There was no sign of any violence, no burglary, no break-in. I checked the master bedroom, and I saw nothing unusual – a beer bottle, photos of Bill and Sarah’s wedding, some dirty clothes, an old Time magazine.

Next to the bed, on the night table, there was a bottle of pills. “Anne, what are these pills for?”

“I think they’re for Bill’s leg. He messed up his leg playing football in college at USC,” Anne replied.

I put the bottle back on the table and sat down on the bed to think. I had no idea what happened to Anne’s sister and her brother-in-law. They seem to have just disappeared into thin air. They didn’t call anyone. There was no sign of any crime in their apartment. No one at their jobs had seen them for two days. Where could they be?

“Well, Anne, I don’t see anything here to help us. I think we should talk to the police again.”

“But I’ve tried the police, Dr. Reeves! They told me to fill out some forms and wait. They won’t do anything. That’s why I went to you for help!” She began to cry a little.

I stopped and looked at her for a second. God, I thought, this poor kid. Twenty-two and in such pain.

“Okay, well, we won’t find anything else here. Let’s go,” I said to her.

Just then I heard a telephone ringing. I turned to the phone on the table, but there was no sound. Then I saw Anne reach into her purse: it was her cellular telephone!

“That’s my cell phone, Dr. Reeves.” Anne said. “Hello?”

I watched Anne’s face as she answered the phone. First it was happy, then worried, then very sad.



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“Right . . . 10 minutes . . . yes . . . see you there . . . bye!” Anne hung up and looked at me in fear.

“That was Bill. Something terrible has happened!”

[end of story]

Our episode begins with Dr. Reeves slowly opening the door to the bathroom with his gun in his hand. He says that “in one fell swoop, I kicked the shower curtain back.” The expression “in one fell (fell) swoop (swoop)” means all in one action – when you do something quickly, all at the same time. We often use this expression when more than one thing happens because of a single action. In this case, Dr. Reeves kicks the shower curtain back. You have a shower curtain in a shower – the place where you bathe or clean yourself standing up – to prevent the water from going out onto the floor.

Dr. Reeves shouted into the bathroom, “Don’t move!” Suddenly, “a little white cat jumped out of the bathtub.” The “bathtub” – all one word – is a place where you can sit and take a bath. Sometimes we just call it “the tub” (tub). The cat “scurried” between Dr. Reeves’s legs. “To scurry” (scurry) means to run quickly. Usually we describe an animal with short legs that runs quickly, like a cat, as an animal that scurries. If they move suddenly, we may say they scurried. Often, “scurried” means that they’re trying to get away from you or get away from something.

Dr. Reeves says, “I should have known.” This is a very common expression in English, “I should have known,” which means “I should have known better.” For example, I can say, “I should have known what was going to happen,” which means I had the knowledge or intelligence to know what was going to happen, but I didn’t use my brain enough to figure it out, to understand it. The cat’s name is Jasmine. Anne recognizes her, and the cat goes to Anne. Anne, remember, is the student of Dr. Reeves whose sister has gone missing.

Dr. Reeves says that he “poked around the rest of the bedroom” and then went into the kitchen. “To poke around” (poke) – in this case the past tense, “I poked around” – means to look around. Usually when you are looking for something specific, or you are just trying to see what is there, we use this expression. You could say, for example, “I poked around in my desk drawer, trying to find the scissors,” meaning I looked around, not necessarily in an organized way.



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Dr. Reeves asked Anne if the cat had any food left in her dish. Notice the expression, “Is there any food left (left)?” That means “Is there any food remaining?” When you say, “Is there any left?” you are asking or implying that there was some before and that it ran out, meaning there is no longer any left. The cat dish is, in fact, empty, so “Jasmine must be hungry,” Anne says. Dr. Reeves concludes that Bill and Sarah haven’t been gone long since, of course, the cat is still alive, even though there is no food left in her dish.

Dr. Reeves walks over to the “answering machine” or the “telephone answering machine.” That is, of course, a little machine you have connected to your phone to take messages; when people call you, they leave a message. But no one had called. He looked around more in “the three-bedroom apartment.” We often use the number of bedrooms to describe an apartment, not the square footage. In some countries they say, “Well, it’s 500 square meters,” but in the United States, we usually talk about the number of bedrooms and bathrooms. “It’s a two-bedroom apartment,” or we might say, “It’s a two-bedroom, two-bath apartment.” This is a three-bedroom apartment.

Dr. Reeves says that there was “no burglary, no break-in.” A “burglary” (burglary) is when someone steals something from you. The person who steals something from you is sometimes called a “burglar” (burglar) – that’s the person who commits or does a burglary. A “break-in” is when someone enters your house without you knowing it and without you obviously wanting it. So, a burglar will often break in to a house. A break-in is just for a house or an apartment – when a robber or someone trying to steal things goes into your apartment or house.

Dr. Reeves checks the master bedroom. “The master bedroom” is the name we give the main bedroom, the largest bedroom. If you’re in a house with, say, two parents and three children, the parents would sleep in the master bedroom – it’s the biggest bedroom. Next to the master bathroom is often a master bath. That’s the bathroom that is usually inside or near a master bedroom. The things that Dr. Reeves saw – “a beer bottle,” “some dirty clothes” – didn’t seem unusual. He mentions “an old Time magazine.” “Time” is the name of a famous magazine in English that has been around – I don’t know how long – for several decades (a decade being, of course, ten years).

Dr. Reeves says that there are some pills on the table, and he asks Anne, “What are these pills for?” When you ask someone, “What is this for (for)?” you mean “What is its purpose? Why is it here?” She says to Dr. Reeves that they were for Bill’s leg, because “he messed up his leg playing football.” “To mess (mess) something up” means here that he hurt it. But you can also use the term “to mess up” when you make a mistake. You can say, “I messed up. I made a mistake. I



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did something wrong.” So, it can have both of those meanings. The college where Bill played football was USC, which in this story means the University of Southwestern California.

Dr. Reeves can’t figure out what happened to Anne’s sister and Anne’s brother-in-law. “A brother-in-law” is the person who is married to your sister, and your “sister-in-law” is someone who is married to your brother. The two missing people “seem to have just disappeared into thin air.” The expression “to disappear into thin (thin) air” means that there’s no clue as to what happened. You disappear so completely that no one knows what happened. Sometimes we use this expression when something disappears quickly.

Dr. Reeves suggests to Anne that they go to the police and talk to them. But Anne doesn’t want to. She says that she had gone to the police already. They told her “to fill out some forms and wait.” “To fill out a form” means to put some information on a piece of paper. Dr. Reeves then stops and looks at Anne and says to himself, “This poor kid.” He doesn’t mean here that she doesn’t have any money. When we say “this poor person,” we mean “this unfortunate person,” when something bad has happened to them.

He describes her as “twenty-two” – meaning 22 years old – “and in such pain.” “In such pain” here means “in a lot of pain.” Then a telephone rings. It is Anne’s cell phone, or mobile phone. She answers it, and her face suddenly becomes very sad. She hangs up and says to Dr. Reeves, “That was Bill. Something terrible has happened!”

On the next episode of [Missing Person](#), we’ll find out what terrible thing happened.

Now let’s listen to the story, this time at a normal speed.

[start of story]

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[end of story]

In episode 4 of Missing Person, “Meeting at the Café,” we’ll learn more about this terrible thing that happened.

For now, from Los Angeles, California, I’m Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. Come back and listen to us again here on ESL Podcast.

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