

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Last Copy

A horror short story by C.R. Lang

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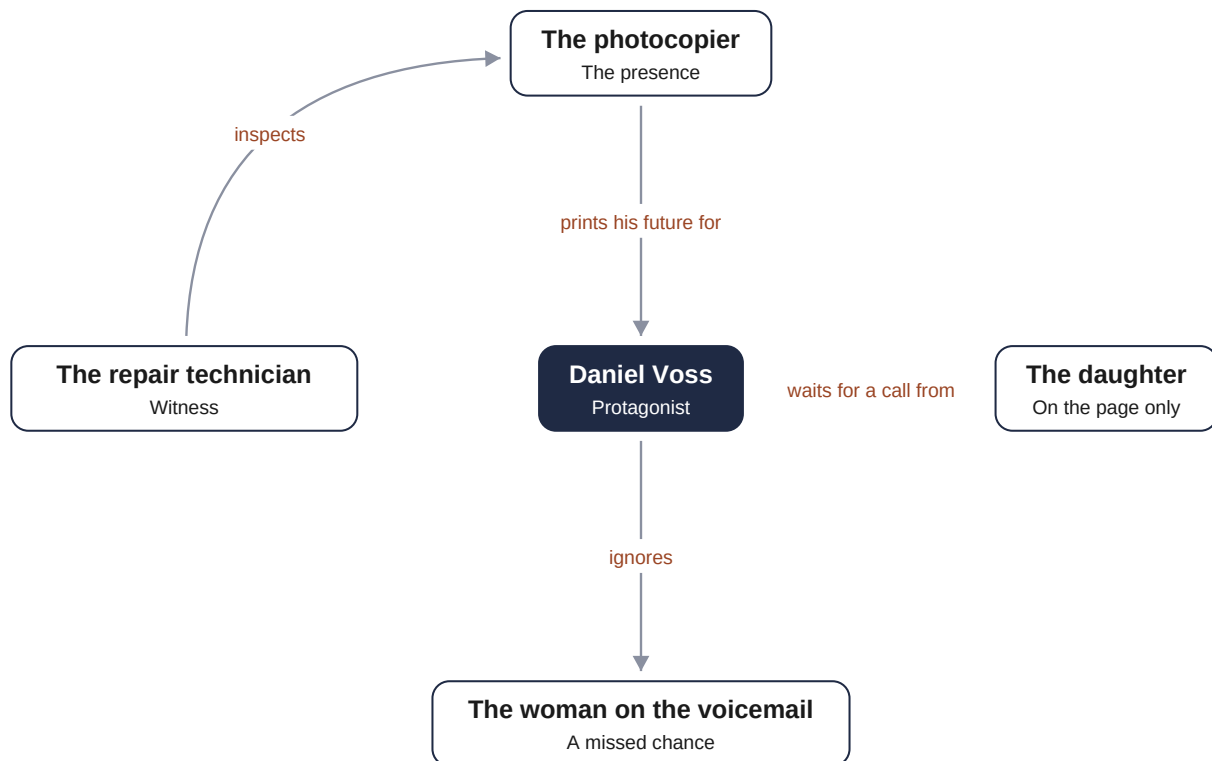
About the story

An accountant's old office photocopier starts printing pages from a life he hasn't lived yet: a wedding, a daughter, a diagnosis, and finally his own funeral.

This guide assumes everyone has finished the story, so it discusses the ending.

Character map

The main character is in the dark box. Arrows show who acts on whom.



Who's who

Daniel Voss (Protagonist). A careful, solitary accountant of forty-eight who is ‘always about to start living.’

The photocopier (The presence). Came with the lease. Has no working parts, yet prints pages about Daniel's future.

The daughter (On the page only). A daughter Daniel doesn't have, who can't forgive a call he never returned.

The woman on the voicemail (A missed chance). Someone Daniel used to know. He has never played her message.

The repair technician (Witness). Finds the machine is ‘just a box’ and leaves without being paid.

Themes to look for

The unlived life. Daniel is always ‘about to start living.’ The pages show what that costs.

Fate or warning. Daniel wonders if the pages are instructions rather than memories. Are they?

Copies and originals. A copier ‘only ever copied what already was.’ What is the original being copied here?

Regret and small kindnesses. The eulogy praises kindness ‘in the small ways nobody keeps a record of.’

Discussion questions

- 1 The pages describe a wedding, a daughter and a diagnosis that haven’t happened. Why do you think the copier shows Daniel his future out of order?
- 2 Daniel arranges the pages on his floor and feels ‘the shape of the thing.’ Why does the shape go down?
- 3 The technician says there is nothing inside the machine. What, then, is producing the pages?
- 4 Daniel asks, ‘What if they are instructions?’ Does he act on that idea? Why or why not?
- 5 What does the copier mean when it says, ‘This is the last copy I needed’?
- 6 Why does the story return to the time 4:40, first in Mara’s kitchen and finally on the clock?
- 7 The daughter cannot forgive that her father ‘had meant to’ call. How does this connect to Daniel’s unplayed voicemail?
- 8 Is Daniel’s ending a punishment, an accident, or something he chose by not choosing?
- 9 If a machine printed one page of your future, would you want to read it?

Craft corner

For writers in the group: two ways to look at how the story is built.

Foreshadowing. Notice the time 4:40 in the very first page. How early does the ending begin?

Story within a story. The printed pages are short stories inside the story. How does their tone differ from the main narration?

Try this together

Write one ‘page from the copier’ about yourself, a small ordinary scene from ten years in the future. Then talk about whether you’d treat it as a prophecy or a warning.

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