

# Death in the Freezer

Tim Vicary

## Introduction

*This ungraded summary is for the teacher's use only and should not be given to students.*

### The story

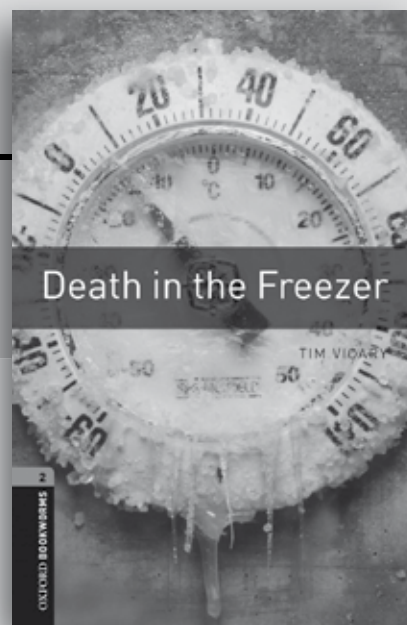
As a child, Ellen is jealous of her brother, who gets far more love from their parents. Later, when both parents are dead, she and her brother grow closer. Ellen by this time is living unhappily with John and their three children, and Al is in a rock group. The group finds fame and Ellen spends a lot of her time looking after Al and his large house. When Al becomes addicted to drugs, Ellen tries to help by stealing medicine from the hospital where she works as a nurse. However, relations worsen when Al doesn't invite her on his world tour. Ellen had hoped to escape from her own poverty by being part of his life. Now, she realizes that there is only one way to get hold of Al's wealth!

When Al comes back from his tour, he not only looks ill but has some new friends, Dan and Linda Future. They look like business people, but act strangely. Dan talks about how nobody need ever die. Ellen thinks he is crazy and wonders why Al likes him so much. Then, on the night of his birthday, she finds the Futures alone with his frozen body.

Dan explains that Al was dying of AIDS and that he wanted to be frozen so that he could be brought back to life when there is a cure. Until that time, the Futures' Cryonics Company will look after Al's property and finances. Ellen is furious and accuses Dan and Linda of killing Al and stealing his money. She cannot afford to take them to court, so she decides the only solution is to switch off the freezer that contains Al's body. The Futures will have nothing to take care of and she will inherit Al's money.

When the Futures finally discover Al's thawed body they go to the police and Ellen is charged with murder.

At the trial, her lawyers argue that Ellen couldn't have killed Al because he was already dead – freezing him had killed him – and accuse the Futures of murder. Public opinion is on her side. Ellen is delighted because she thinks she will soon be free and Al's money will be hers. She is so arrogant that she tells the court how jealous she was of her brother. The police lawyer cleverly lets her talk before showing the court three syringes. All of them contain deadly



bacteria and Ellen's fingerprints. Ellen was trying to kill Al before she turned off the freezer by giving him infected syringes. The court is stunned and Ellen is sent to prison unloved, and lonely once again.

### Background to the story

In the story Al is deep frozen in liquid nitrogen with the aim of bringing him back to life when a cure is found for AIDS. There are several organizations in America and Canada which offer the same kind of service as Dan and Linda's Cryonics Company and about seventy people currently lie deep frozen in vats of liquid nitrogen. Clients must be legally dead before they are frozen. Only recently there was a scandal in which it was suspected that someone had been beheaded and frozen before she was certified dead. Although at present donor organs and embryos are preserved at low temperatures successfully, a similar process for the whole body has yet to be proven as safe. Another problem with low temperature preservation is the role of the cryonics companies: they have to remain in existence for hundreds of years and ensure that nitrogen is regularly replaced, otherwise the bodies will simply thaw out like Al's.

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## Pre-reading activity

### Match the words with the pictures



- a 'I can't win, because I don't have any money.'
- b I tell the court the story of our family.
- c Then John came. He was wonderful!
- d The freezer was full of gas, like a cloud.
- e They held their hands and faces up to the moon.
- f Inside the glass case there was a body.
- g I put water in the syringe and pushed it into the dolls.
- h 'The money and the house don't belong to us, or to you.'
- i When you die, all this is going to belong to me.
- j 'Meet my new friends – Dan Future and his wife Linda.'

### To the teacher

**Aim:** To familiarize students with the setting

**Time:** 10–20 minutes

**Organization:** Give one copy of the worksheet to each student or to each pair of students. When they have matched the pictures and the captions, ask the students to look again at the pictures and re-order

them as they think they occur in the story. Then ask students to tell the story from the pictures. There is no right or wrong answer to this activity. The stories need only be plausible.

**Key:** 1b, 2i, 3a, 4d, 5f, 6c, 7e, 8j, 9h, 10g

**Picture order key:** 10, 6, 2, 8, 7, 5, 9, 3, 4, 1

# Death in the Freezer

## *While reading activity*

### **Get it right**

Ellen <sup>*hates*</sup> loves her brother when he is born and is very happy. Her parents give her a lot of affection and take lots of photos of her and Al playing together. Their favourite game is playing with dolls and syringes. When she is eight years old, her mother dies and her father remarries. Life is more difficult now. Her brother doesn't like any of her boyfriends. He has a fight with one of them, John, so she leaves home. Ellen and John marry and have three children. John gets a good job as a nurse. Ellen sees a lot more of Al before their father dies. Al is in a rock band called Wild Things and becomes rich and famous. He buys her a house and expensive presents. The only problem is he drinks too much and asks Ellen to help him. She works in a chemist's and can get him medicine. After a few months, he is better. He invites her to go on tour with him. She is happy to go. He asks her to steal drugs for him to use on the tour and Ellen says no.

*At the end of Chapter 5 write your own summary with mistakes here.*

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### **To the teacher**

**Aim:** To help students understand the story so far

**Where:** At the end of Chapter 3

**Time:** 15 minutes

**Organization:** Give students the worksheets and ask them to correct the mistakes in the summary. At the end of Chapter 5 students can write their own summaries containing mistakes for each other to correct.

**Key:** loves: *hates*; very happy: *very unhappy*. give her: *don't give her*; photos of her: *take lots of photos*

*of Al*; Their favourite game: *Her favourite game*; eight years old: *ten years old*; father remarries: *doesn't remarry*; Her brother doesn't like: *Her father doesn't like*; marry: *live together*; John gets a job: *Ellen gets a job*; before their father dies: *after their father dies*; Wild Things: *Wild Boys*; He buys her a house: *He gives her their parents' house*; expensive presents: *no presents*; drinks too much: *takes drugs*; He invites: *doesn't invite*; happy to go: *unhappy not to go*; says no: *says yes*

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## After reading activity

### Who said what?

Complete the table.

QUOTATION	WHO'S SPEAKING?	WHO TO?	WHEN?
1 'Now I'm going to play lots of good music. I'll be OK now.'	<i>Al</i>	<i>Ellen</i>	<i>After Ellen steals medicine from the hospital for Al.</i>
2 'That's a good game for a little girl.'			
3 'Then one day he drank half a bottle of whisky, went for a run, came home, and fell down dead on the floor!'			
4 'Who do you think you are, Ellen?'			
5 'My father died last year. He was sixty-five. That's not much, is it? Sixty-five years of life?'			
6 'Al? What are you doing?'			
7 'Don't be afraid, it's all right.'			
8 'The money and the house don't belong to us, or to you.'			
9 'Well, we can ask scientists to say that cryonics doesn't work.'			
10 'When she switched off the freezer, he was already dead. How can anybody kill a dead man?'			
11 'So you gave him syringes with dangerous bacteria in them, because you wanted to kill him!'			

### To the teacher

**Aim:** To help understand the plot and develop a sense of character

**Time:** 10–15 minutes

**Organization:** Give out the worksheet. Students can work alone or in pairs. Ask them to identify who said these words, who to, and when. The quotations are in the same order as in the book. Check the answers together as a class.

**Key:** 2 Ellen's mother to Ellen, after Al's born; 3 Al to Ellen, after their father's death; 4 Al to Ellen, after he started taking drugs; 5 Dan Future to Ellen, after Al's back from tour; 6 Ellen to Dan and Linda, before she finds Al frozen; 7 Linda to Ellen, after Al's been frozen; 8 Dan to Ellen, after Ellen has discovered Al frozen; 9 Ellen's lawyer to Ellen, before she turns off the freezer; 10 Defence lawyers to courtroom, during trial; 11 Police lawyer to Ellen, during trial