

# Cool Room 3

## Pre Reading Activities

Here are some brief extracts from Regi Claire's short story.

### *An introduction to Max Gruber*

Max Gruber first heard of the London bombings from his head gardener, who burst into the potting shed where he was putting together a batch of seedlings for the graves in the eastern corner of Oberkirch cemetery. The news had shocked him, of course - but living in Switzerland and working with the dead on a daily basis, he didn't feel particularly affected, or threatened. Not personally.

*Q: What is Max's job? Where does he work? Where does he live?*

### *Max Gruber is feeling annoyed.*

His son and daughter stood waiting in the shade of the gingko tree up the ramp, rucksacks at their feet, sticky ice cream cornets in even stickier fingers. Max stopped the Mercedes-Benz with a screech.

'Dammit!' he exclaimed as they slid into the polished leather seats, 'Who gave you these?' Neither of them bothered to reply and he glared at Rita for a second, then put on his sunglasses to hide the watery hurt in his eyes. And just so their ice cream wouldn't go into total meltdown, he set the air-conditioning at maximum. Rita hugged herself with both arms, ostentatiously. He stamped on the accelerator. The car lurched forward, still in gear.

*Q: Why is Max annoyed? How does he feel about Rita, his wife?*

### *Who is whispering in a velvety voice?*

..... she'd whisper in that velvety voice of hers which only the highest setting on his hearing aid could capture: 'You're an asshole, Max. If you don't get your act together, I'll leave you and take the kids.'

### *Is Peter an only child?*

Why couldn't at least Peter, his son and eldest, respect his wishes? He didn't ask for much, did he? No ice cream or chocolate, he'd told them, not in *this* car. Peter was nearly fourteen, for pity's sake, yet he aped his mother, talking back at him or, even worse, ignoring him. Today, wearing those knee-hugging jeans, he looked like he was still in potty-training.

*Q: In what way does Max liken his son to a baby?*

OK. You get the picture. Not, perhaps, an atypical picture of a family. This story is about the family on one particular day. Perhaps there are many stories that could have happened on that one day. Before you read Regi Claire's story, you're going to tell us your own version of events. You're going to do this by answering the following questions. The answers are in your imaginations. Work in small groups, make notes but don't try to write down the story. You will be expected to tell your story, though.

1. Where were they going in the car?
2. What was the atmosphere like in the car as they were driving along?
3. Why did Max have to stop the car suddenly on the autobahn?
4. Why did Rita and the others get out of the car when it stopped?
5. Max then did something that made him feel alive. What was it?
6. What did Max intend to do next?
7. What did he actually do?
8. What about the rest of the family?
9. How was Max feeling at the end of the trip?