

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Things They Carried

By Tim O'Brien  
1990

*Tim O'Brien is an American author and veteran. This short story is based on his experiences as a soldier in the Vietnam War; the characters and details are fictional. For nearly 20 years, from the mid-1950s to 1975, American soldiers fought in South Vietnam against North Vietnam and their communist allies. The following passage includes language and subject matter that some may find offensive or sensitive. As you read, take notes on all the things that the soldiers carry with them during the war.*

[1] First Lieutenant Jimmy Cross carried letters from a girl named Martha, a junior at Mount Sebastian College in New Jersey. They were not love letters, but Lieutenant Cross was hoping, so he kept them folded in plastic at the bottom of his rucksack. In the late afternoon, after a day's march, he would dig his foxhole,<sup>1</sup> wash his hands under a canteen, unwrap the letters, hold them with the tips of his fingers, and spend the last hour of light pretending. He would imagine romantic camping trips into the White Mountains in New Hampshire. He would sometimes taste the envelope flaps, knowing her tongue had been there. More than anything, he wanted Martha to love him as he loved her, but the letters were mostly chatty, elusive on the matter of love. She was an English major at Mount Sebastian, and she wrote beautifully about her professors and roommates and midterm exams, about her respect for Chaucer and her great affection for Virginia Woolf. She often quoted lines of poetry; she never mentioned the war, except to say, Jimmy, take care of yourself. The letters weighed 10 ounces. They were signed Love, Martha, but Lieutenant Cross understood that Love was only a way of signing and did not mean what he sometimes pretended it meant. At dusk, he would carefully return the letters to his rucksack. Slowly, a bit distracted, he would get up and move among his men, checking the perimeter, then at full dark he would return to his hole.



*"PVT Smith (foreground) and PFC Delpome" by Ronald L. Haeberle is in the public domain.*

The things they carried were largely determined by necessity. Among the necessities or near-necessities were P-38 can openers, pocket knives, heat tabs, wristwatches, dog tags, mosquito repellent, chewing gum, candy, cigarettes, salt tablets, packets of Kool-Aid, lighters, matches, sewing kits, Military Payment Certificates, C rations,<sup>2</sup> and two or three canteens of water. Together, these items weighed between 15 and 20 pounds,

1. a hole in the ground used by troops as a shelter against enemy fire or as a firing point
2. prepared food that each soldier carries with him

depending upon a man's habits or rate of metabolism. Henry Dobbins, who was a big man, carried extra rations; he was especially fond of canned peaches in heavy syrup over pound cake. Dave Jensen, who practiced field hygiene, carried a toothbrush, dental floss, and several hotel-sized bars of soap he'd stolen on R&R<sup>3</sup> in Sydney, Australia. Ted Lavender, who was scared, carried tranquilizers<sup>4</sup> until he was shot in the head outside the village of Than Khe in mid-April. By necessity, and because it was SOP,<sup>5</sup> they all carried steel helmets that weighed 5 pounds including the liner and camouflage cover. They carried the standard fatigue jackets and trousers. Very few carried underwear. On their feet they carried jungle boots — 2.1 pounds — and Dave Jensen carried three pairs of socks and a can of Dr. Scholl's foot powder as a precaution against trench foot. Until he was shot, Ted Lavender carried 6 or 7 ounces of premium dope, which for him was a necessity. Norman Bowker carried a diary. Rat Kiley carried comic books. Kiowa, a devout Baptist, carried an illustrated New Testament that had been presented to him by his father, who taught Sunday school in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. As a hedge against bad times, however, Kiowa also carried his grandmother's distrust of the white man, his grandfather's old hunting hatchet. Necessity dictated. Because the land was mined and booby-trapped, it was SOP for each man to carry a steel-centered, nylon-covered flak jacket, which weighed 6.7 pounds, but which on hot days seemed much heavier. Because you could die so quickly, each man carried at least one large compress bandage, usually in the helmet band for easy access. Because the nights were cold, and because the monsoons were wet, each carried a green plastic poncho that could be used as a raincoat or groundsheet or makeshift tent. With its quilted liner, the poncho weighed almost 2 pounds, but it was worth every ounce. In April, for instance, when Ted Lavender was shot, they used his poncho to wrap him up, then to carry him across the paddy, then to lift him into the chopper that took him away.

They were called legs or grunts. What they carried was partly a function of rank,<sup>6</sup> partly of field specialty.

As a first lieutenant and platoon leader, Jimmy Cross carried a compass, maps, code books, binoculars, and a .45-caliber pistol that weighed 2.9 pounds fully loaded. He carried a strobe light and the responsibility for the lives of his men.

[5] As an RTO, Mitchell Sanders carried the PRC-25 radio, a killer, 26 pounds with its battery.

As a medic, Rat Kiley carried a canvas satchel filled with morphine and plasma and malaria tablets and surgical tape and comic books and all the things a medic must carry, including M&M's for especially bad wounds, for a total weight of nearly 20 pounds.

As a big man, therefore a machine gunner, Henry Dobbins carried the M-60, which weighed 23 pounds unloaded, but which was almost always loaded. In addition, Dobbins carried between 10 and 15 pounds of ammunition draped in belts across his chest and shoulders.

As PFCs or Spec 4s,<sup>7</sup> most of them were common grunts and carried the standard M-16 gas-operated assault rifle. The weapon weighed 7.5 pounds unloaded, 8.2 pounds with its full 20-round magazine. Depending on numerous factors, such as topography and psychology, the riflemen carried anywhere from 12 to 20

3. Abbreviation: Rest and Relaxation; a vacation away from the frontlines
4. drugs used to reduce feelings of anxiety and make a person feel calm
5. Abbreviation: Standard Operating Procedure
6. **Rank (noun)** a position in the military power structure; ex: general, captain, lieutenant
7. Private First Class and Specialist-4: junior Army ranks

magazines, usually in cloth bandoliers, adding on another 8.4 pounds at minimum, 14 pounds at maximum. When it was available, they also carried M-16 maintenance gear—rods and steel brushes and swabs and tubes of LSA oil—all of which weighed about a pound. Among the grunts, some carried the M-79 grenade launcher, 5.9 pounds unloaded, a reasonably light weapon except for the ammunition, which was heavy. A single round weighed 10 ounces. The typical load was 25 rounds. But Ted Lavender, who was scared, carried 34 rounds when he was shot and killed outside Than Khe, and he went down under an exceptional burden, more than 20 pounds of ammunition, plus the flak jacket and helmet and rations and water and toilet paper and tranquilizers and all the rest, plus the unweighed fear. He was dead weight. There was no twitching or flopping. Kiowa, who saw it happen, said it was like watching a rock fall, or a big sandbag or something — just boom, then down — not like the movies where the dead guy rolls around and does fancy spins and goes a— over teakettle — not like that, Kiowa said, the poor bastard just fell. Boom. Down. Nothing else. It was a bright morning in mid-April. Lieutenant Cross felt the pain. He blamed himself. They stripped off Lavender's canteens and ammo, all the heavy things, and Rat Kiley said the obvious, the guy's dead, and Mitchell Sanders used his radio to report one U.S. KIA and to request a chopper. Then they wrapped Lavender in his poncho. They carried him out to a dry paddy, established security, and sat smoking the dead man's dope until the chopper came. Lieutenant Cross kept to himself. He pictured Martha's smooth young face, thinking he loved her more than anything, more than his men, and now Ted Lavender was dead because he loved her so much and could not stop thinking about her. When the dustoff arrived, they carried Lavender aboard. Afterward they burned Than Khe. They marched until dusk, then dug their holes, and that night Kiowa kept explaining how you had to be there, how fast it was, how the poor guy just dropped like so much concrete. Boom-down, he said. Like cement.

In addition to the three standard weapons — the M-60, M-16, and M-79 — they carried whatever presented itself, or whatever seemed appropriate as a means of killing or staying alive. They carried catch-as-catch-can. At various times, in various situations, they carried M-14s and CAR-15s and Swedish Ks and grease guns and captured AK-47s and Chi-Coms and RPGs and Simonov carbines and black market Uzis and .38-caliber Smith & Wesson handguns and 66 mm LAWs and shotguns and silencers and blackjacks and bayonets and C-4 plastic explosives. Lee Strunk carried a slingshot; a weapon of last resort, he called it. Mitchell Sanders carried brass knuckles. Kiowa carried his grandfather's feathered hatchet. Every third or fourth man carried a Claymore antipersonnel mine — 3.5 pounds with its firing device. They all carried fragmentation grenades — 14 ounces each. They all carried at least one M-18 colored smoke grenade — 24 ounces. Some carried CS or tear gas grenades. Some carried white phosphorus grenades. They carried all they could bear, and then some, including a silent awe for the terrible power of the things they carried.

- [10] In the first week of April, before Lavender died, Lieutenant Jimmy Cross received a good-luck charm from Martha. It was a simple pebble, an ounce at most. Smooth to the touch, it was a milky white color with flecks of orange and violet, oval-shaped, like a miniature egg. In the accompanying letter, Martha wrote that she had found the pebble on the Jersey shoreline, precisely where the land touched water at high tide, where things came together but also separated. It was this separate-but-together quality, she wrote, that had inspired her to pick up the pebble and to carry it in her breast pocket for several days, where it seemed weightless, and then to send it through the mail, by air, as a token of her truest feelings for him. Lieutenant Cross found this romantic. But he wondered what her truest feelings were, exactly, and what she meant by separate-but-together. He wondered how the tides and waves had come into play on that afternoon along the Jersey shoreline when Martha saw the pebble and bent down to rescue it from geology. He imagined bare feet. Martha was a poet, with the poet's sensibilities, and her feet would be brown and bare, the toenails unpainted, the eyes chilly and somber like the ocean in March, and though it was painful, he wondered who had been with her that afternoon. He imagined a pair of shadows moving along the strip of sand where things came together but also separated. It was phantom jealousy, he knew, but he couldn't help himself. He loved her so much. On the march, through the hot days of early April, he carried the pebble in his mouth, turning it with his tongue, tasting sea salt and moisture. His mind wandered. He had difficulty keeping his attention on the war. On occasion he would yell at

his men to spread out the column, to keep their eyes open, but then he would slip away into daydreams, just pretending, walking barefoot along the Jersey shore, with Martha, carrying nothing. He would feel himself rising. Sun and waves and gentle winds, all love and lightness.

In mid-April, it was their mission to search out and destroy the elaborate tunnel complexes in the Than Khe area south of Chu Lai. To blow the tunnels, they carried one-pound blocks of pentrite high explosives, four blocks to a man, 68 pounds in all. They carried wiring, detonators, and battery-powered clackers. Dave Jensen carried earplugs. Most often, before blowing the tunnels, they were ordered by higher command to search them, which was considered bad news, but by and large they just shrugged and carried out orders. Because he was a big man, Henry Dobbins was excused from tunnel duty. The others would draw numbers. Before Lavender died there were 17 men in the platoon, and whoever drew the number 17 would strip off his gear and crawl in headfirst with a flashlight and Lieutenant Cross's .45-caliber pistol. The rest of them would fan out as security. They would sit down or kneel, not facing the hole, listening to the ground beneath them, imagining cobwebs and ghosts, whatever was down there — the tunnel walls squeezing in — how the flashlight seemed impossibly heavy in the hand and how it was tunnel vision in the very strictest sense, compression in all ways, even time, and how you had to wiggle in — a— and elbows — a swallowed-up feeling — and how you found yourself worrying about odd things: Will your flashlight go dead? Do rats carry rabies? If you screamed, how far would the sound carry? Would your buddies hear it? Would they have the courage to drag you out? In some respects, though not many, the waiting was worse than the tunnel itself. Imagination was a killer.

On April 16, when Lee Strunk drew the number 17, he laughed and muttered something and went down quickly. The morning was hot and very still. Not good, Kiowa said. He looked at the tunnel opening, then out across a dry paddy toward the village of Than Khe. Nothing moved. No clouds or birds or people. As they waited, the men smoked and drank Kool-Aid, not talking much, feeling sympathy for Lee Strunk but also feeling the luck of the draw. You win some, you lose some, said Mitchell Sanders, and sometimes you settle for a rain check. It was a tired line and no one laughed.

Henry Dobbins ate a tropical chocolate bar. Ted Lavender popped a tranquilizer and went off to pee.

After five minutes, Lieutenant Jimmy Cross moved to the tunnel, leaned down, and examined the darkness. Trouble, he thought — a cave-in maybe. And then suddenly, without willing it, he was thinking about Martha. The stresses and fractures, the quick collapse, the two of them buried alive under all that weight. Dense, crushing love. Kneeling, watching the hole, he tried to concentrate on Lee Strunk and the war, all the dangers, but his love was too much for him, he felt paralyzed, he wanted to sleep inside her lungs and breathe her blood and be smothered. He wanted to know her. Intimate secrets: Why poetry? Why so sad? Why that grayness in her eyes? Why so alone? Not lonely, just alone — riding her bike across campus or sitting off by herself in the cafeteria — even dancing, she danced alone — and it was the aloneness that filled him with love. He remembered telling her that one evening. How she nodded and looked away. And how, later, when he kissed her, she received the kiss without returning it, her eyes wide open, not afraid, not a virgin's eyes, just flat and uninvolved.

- [15] Lieutenant Cross gazed at the tunnel. But he was not there. He was buried with Martha under the white sand at the Jersey shore. They were pressed together, and the pebble in his mouth was her tongue. He was smiling. Vaguely, he was aware of how quiet the day was, the sullen paddies, yet he could not bring himself to worry about matters of security. He was beyond that. He was just a kid at war, in love. He was twenty-four years old. He couldn't help it.

A few moments later Lee Strunk crawled out of the tunnel. He came up grinning, filthy but alive. Lieutenant Cross nodded and closed his eyes while the others clapped Strunk on the back and made jokes about rising

from the dead.

Worms, Rat Kiley said. Right out of the grave. Zombie. The men laughed. They all felt great relief. Spook<sup>8</sup> city, said Mitchell Sanders. Lee Strunk made a funny ghost sound, a kind of moaning, yet very happy, and right then, when Strunk made that high happy moaning sound, when he went Ahhooooo, right then Ted Lavender was shot in the head on his way back from peeing. He lay with his mouth open. The teeth were broken. There was a swollen black bruise under his left eye.

The cheekbone was gone. Oh s—, Rat Kiley said, the guy's dead. The guy's dead, he kept saying, which seemed profound — the guy's dead. I mean really.

They carried the land itself — Vietnam, the place, the soil — a powdery orange-red dust that covered their boots and fatigues and faces. They carried the sky. The whole atmosphere, they carried it, the humidity, the monsoons, the stink of fungus and decay, all of it, they carried gravity. They moved like mules. By daylight they took sniper fire, at night they were mortared,<sup>9</sup> but it was not battle, it was just the endless march, village to village, without purpose, nothing won or lost. They marched for the sake of the march. They plodded along slowly, dumbly, leaning forward against the heat, unthinking, all blood and bone, simple grunts, soldiering with their legs, toiling up the hills and down into the paddies and across the rivers and up again and down, just humping,<sup>10</sup> one step and then the next and then another, but no volition, no will, because it was automatic, it was anatomy, and the war was entirely a matter of posture and carriage, the hump was everything, a kind of inertia,<sup>11</sup> a kind of emptiness, a dullness of desire and intellect and conscience and hope and human sensibility. Their principles were in their feet. Their calculations were biological. They had no sense of strategy or mission. After the chopper took Lavender away, Lieutenant Jimmy Cross led his men into the village of Than Khe. They burned everything. They shot chickens and dogs, they trashed the village well, they called in artillery and watched the wreckage, then they marched for several hours through the hot afternoon, and then at dusk, while Kiowa explained how Lavender died, Lieutenant Cross found himself trembling.

[20] He tried not to cry. With his entrenching tool, which weighed 5 pounds, he began digging a hole in the earth.

He felt shame. He hated himself. He had loved Martha more than his men, and as a consequence Lavender was now dead, and this was something he would have to carry like a stone in his stomach for the rest of the war.

All he could do was dig. He used his entrenching tool like an ax, slashing, feeling both love and hate, and then later, when it was full dark, he sat at the bottom of his foxhole and wept. It went on for a long while. In part, he was grieving for Ted Lavender, but mostly it was for Martha, and for himself, because she belonged to another world, which was not quite real, and because she was a junior at Mount Sebastian College in New Jersey, a poet and a virgin and uninvolved, and because he realized she did not love him and never would.

For the most part they carried themselves with poise, a kind of dignity. Now and then, however, there were times of panic, when they squealed or wanted to squeal but couldn't, when they twitched and made moaning sounds and covered their heads and said Dear Jesus and flopped around on the earth and fired their weapons

8. ghost
9. explosive shells fired from a cannon
10. military slang for walking a long distance, especially with a heavy load
11. **Inertia** (*noun*) a tendency to remain unchanged, to continue going on in the same way

blindly and cringed and sobbed and begged for the noise to stop and went wild and made stupid promises to themselves and to God and to their mothers and fathers, hoping not to die. In different ways, it happened to all of them. Afterward, when the firing ended, they would blink and peek up. They would touch their bodies, feeling shame, then quickly hiding it. They would force themselves to stand. As if in slow motion, frame by frame, the world would take on the old logic — absolute silence, then the wind, then sunlight, then voices. It was the burden of being alive. Awkwardly, the men would reassemble themselves, first in private, then in groups, becoming soldiers again. They would repair the leaks in their eyes. They would check for casualties, call in dustoffs, light cigarettes, try to smile, clear their throats and spit and begin cleaning their weapons.

There were numerous such poses. Some carried themselves with a sort of wistful resignation, others with pride or stiff soldierly discipline or good humor or macho zeal. They were afraid of dying but they were even more afraid to show it.

- [25] They made themselves laugh. There it is, they'd say. Over and over — there it is, my friend, there it is — as if the repetition itself were an act of poise, a balance between crazy and almost crazy, knowing without going, there it is, which meant be cool, let it ride, because Oh yeah, man, you can't change what can't be changed, there it is, there it absolutely and positively is.

They were tough. They carried all the emotional baggage of men who might die. Grief, terror, love, longing — these were intangibles, but the intangibles had their own mass and specific gravity, they had tangible weight. They carried shameful memories. They carried the common secret of cowardice barely restrained, the instinct to run or freeze or hide, and in many respects this was the heaviest burden of all, for it could never be put down, it required perfect balance and perfect posture. They carried their reputations. They carried the soldier's greatest fear, which was the fear of blushing. Men killed, and died, because they were embarrassed not to. It was what had brought them to the war in the first place, nothing positive, no dreams of glory or honor, just to avoid the blush of dishonor. They died so as not to die of embarrassment. They crawled into tunnels and walked point and advanced under fire. Each morning, despite the unknowns, they made their legs move. They endured. They kept humping. They did not submit to the obvious alternative, which was simply to close the eyes and fall. So easy, really. Go limp and tumble to the ground and let the muscles unwind and not speak and not budge until your buddies picked you up and lifted you into the chopper that would roar and dip its nose and carry you off to the world. A mere matter of falling, yet no one ever fell. It was not courage, exactly; the object was not valor. Rather, they were too frightened to be cowards.

On the morning after Ted Lavender died, First Lieutenant Jimmy Cross crouched at the bottom of his foxhole and burned Martha's letters. Then he burned the two photographs. There was a steady rain falling, which made it difficult, but he used heat tabs and Sterno to build a small fire, screening it with his body, holding the photographs over the tight blue flame with the tips of his fingers.

He realized it was only a gesture. Stupid, he thought. Sentimental, too, but mostly just stupid.

Lavender was dead. You couldn't burn the blame. Besides, the letters were in his head. And even now, without photographs, Lieutenant Cross could see Martha playing volleyball in her white gym shorts and yellow T-shirt. He could see her moving in the rain. When the fire died out, Lieutenant Cross pulled his poncho over his shoulders and ate breakfast from a can.

- [30] There was no great mystery, he decided. In those burned letters Martha had never mentioned the war, except to say, Jimmy, take care of yourself. She wasn't involved. She signed the letters Love, but it wasn't love, and all the fine lines and technicalities did not matter. He hated her. Yes, he did. He hated her. Love, too, but it was a hard, hating kind of love.

The morning came up wet and blurry. Everything seemed part of everything else, the fog and Martha and the deepening rain.

He was a soldier, after all. Half smiling, Lieutenant Jimmy Cross took out his maps. He shook his head hard, as if to clear it, then bent forward and began planning the day's march. In ten minutes, or maybe twenty, he would rouse the men and they would pack up and head west, where the maps showed the country to be green and inviting. They would do what they had always done. The rain might add some weight, but otherwise it would be one more day layered upon all the other days.

He was realistic about it. There was that new hardness in his stomach. He loved her but he hated her.

No more fantasies, he told himself. Henceforth, when he thought about Martha, it would be only to think that she belonged elsewhere. He would shut down the daydreams. This was not Mount Sebastian, it was another world, where there were no pretty poems or midterm exams, a place where men died because of carelessness and gross stupidity. Kiowa was right. Boom-down, and you were dead, never partly dead.

[35] Briefly, in the rain, Lieutenant Cross saw Martha's gray eyes gazing back at him. He understood.

It was very sad, he thought. The things men carried inside. The things men did or felt they had to do.

He almost nodded at her, but didn't. Instead he went back to his maps. He was now determined to perform his duties firmly and without negligence. It wouldn't help Lavender, he knew that, but from this point on he would comport himself as an officer. He would dispose of his good-luck pebble. Swallow it, maybe, or use Lee Strunk's slingshot, or just drop it along the trail. On the march he would impose strict field discipline. He would be careful to send out flank security, to prevent straggling or bunching up, to keep his troops moving at the proper pace and at the proper interval. He would insist on clean weapons. He would confiscate the remainder of Lavender's dope. Later in the day, perhaps, he would call the men together and speak to them plainly. He would accept the blame for what had happened to Ted Lavender. He would be a man about it. He would look them in the eyes, keeping his chin level, and he would issue the new SOPs in a calm, impersonal tone of voice, a lieutenant's voice, leaving no room for argument or discussion. Commencing immediately, he'd tell them, they would no longer abandon equipment along the route of march. They would police up their acts. They would get it together, and keep it together, and maintain it neatly and in good working order.

He would not tolerate laxity. He would show strength, distancing himself.

Among the men there would be grumbling, of course, and maybe worse, because their days would seem longer and their loads heavier, but Lieutenant Jimmy Cross reminded himself that his obligation was not to be loved but to lead. He would dispense with love; it was not now a factor. And if anyone quarreled or complained, he would simply tighten his lips and arrange his shoulders in the correct command posture. He might give a curt little nod. Or he might not. He might just shrug and say, Carry on, then they would saddle up and form into a column and move out toward the villages west of Than Khe.

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## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which detail from paragraph 1 best establishes the sense of unease in the beginning of the story?
  - A. "Dave Jensen, who practiced field hygiene, carried a toothbrush, dental floss, and several hotel-sized bars of soap he'd stolen on R&R in Sydney, Australia."
  - B. "They carried the standard fatigue jackets and trousers. Very few carried underwear."
  - C. "Because you could die so quickly, each man carried at least one large compress bandage, usually in the helmet band for easy access."
  - D. "With its quilted liner, the poncho weighed almost 2 pounds, but it was worth every ounce."
  
2. In paragraph 8, how does the list of the soldiers' equipment contribute to an understanding of war?
  - A. It shows that the soldiers are willing to help one another.
  - B. It shows that the soldiers are prepared to attack or be attacked.
  - C. It shows that the soldiers are often distracted by thoughts of home.
  - D. It shows that the soldiers' experience of war is not what they imagined.

3. Consider the following excerpt from paragraph 9:

"Every third or fourth man carried a Claymore antipersonnel mine — 3.5 pounds with its firing device. They all carried fragmentation grenades — 14 ounces each. They all carried at least one M-18 colored smoke grenade — 24 ounces."

What does the narrator emphasize by listing the weight of each item the soldiers carry?

- A. the wide variety of equipment the soldiers take with them to war
  - B. the soldiers' need to rely on their leader and each other
  - C. the deadly nature of the soldiers' weapons
  - D. the physical burdens the soldiers endure
  
4. Which detail best demonstrates the change in Lieutenant Cross at the end of the story?
  - A. "Half smiling, Lieutenant Jimmy Cross took out his maps." (Paragraph 32)
  - B. "Kiowa was right. Boom-down, and you were dead, never partly dead." (Paragraph 34)
  - C. "It was very sad, he thought. The things men carried inside. The things men did or felt they had to do." (Paragraph 36)
  - D. "He would dispense with love; it was not now a factor." (Paragraph 39)



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Once Upon a Time

By Nadine Gordimer  
1991

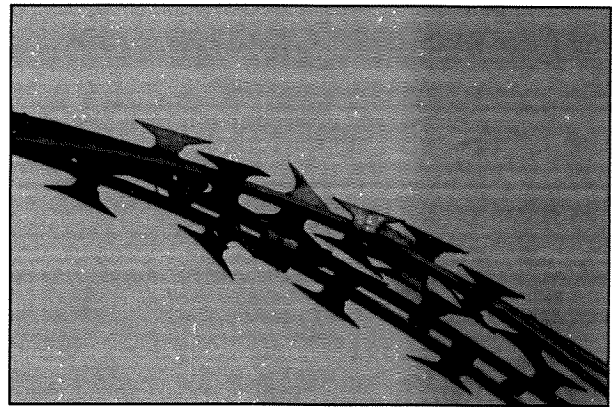
*Nadine Gordimer is a South African writer who received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1991. This story takes place during the end of the apartheid era in South Africa. Apartheid was an official system of racial segregation enforced by the ruling government from 1948 to 1994. Throughout the 1990s, after decades of oppression, many black South Africans protested against apartheid and retaliated against white South Africans who had benefited from it.*

- [1] Someone has written to ask me to contribute to an anthology of stories for children. I reply that I don't write children's stories; and he writes back that at a recent congress/book fair/seminar a certain novelist said every writer ought to write at least one story for children. I think of sending a postcard saying I don't accept that I "ought" to write anything.

And then last night I woke up — or rather was awakened without knowing what had roused me.

A voice in the echo-chamber of the subconscious?<sup>1</sup>

A sound.



*"Barbed wire in Beirut" by Eusebius@Commons is licensed under CC BY 2.0.*

- [5] A creaking of the kind made by the weight carried by one foot after another along a wooden floor. I listened. I felt the apertures<sup>2</sup> of my ears distend<sup>3</sup> with concentration. Again: the creaking. I was waiting for it; waiting to hear if it indicated that feet were moving from room to room, coming up the passage — to my door. I have no burglar bars, no gun under the pillow, but I have the same fears as people who do take these precautions, and my windowpanes are thin as rime,<sup>4</sup> could shatter like a wineglass. A woman was murdered (how do they put it) in broad daylight in a house two blocks away, last year, and the fierce dogs who guarded an old widower and his collection of antique clocks were strangled before he was knifed by a casual laborer he had dismissed without pay.

I was staring at the door, making it out in my mind rather than seeing it, in the dark. I lay quite still — a victim already — the arrhythmia<sup>5</sup> of my heart was fleeing, knocking this way and that against its body-cage. How finely

1. **Subconscious (noun)** a part of the mind we are not aware of but which we can gain access to by redirecting our attention
2. **Aperture (noun)** a circular opening, often in relation to optical devices that deal with vision or photography through light manipulation
3. **Distend (verb)** to expand, swell, or inflate
4. Rime is a frost formed when fog droplets freeze onto solid objects.

tuned the senses are, just out of rest, sleep! I could never listen intently as that in the distractions of the day, I was reading every faintest sound, identifying and classifying its possible threat.

But I learned that I was to be neither threatened nor spared. There was no human weight pressing on the boards, the creaking was a buckling, an epicenter of stress. I was in it. The house that surrounds me while I sleep is built on undermined ground; far beneath my bed, the floor, the house's foundations, the stopes<sup>6</sup> and passages of gold mines have hollowed the rock, and when some face trembles, detaches and falls, three thousand feet below, the whole house shifts slightly, bringing uneasy strain to the balance and counterbalance of brick, cement, wood and glass that hold it as a structure around me. The misbeats of my heart tailed off like the last muffled flourishes on one of the wooden xylophones made by the Chopi and Tsonga<sup>7</sup> migrant miners who might have been down there, under me in the earth at that moment. The stope where the fall was could have been disused, dripping water from its ruptured veins; or men might now be interred<sup>8</sup> there in the most profound of tombs.

I couldn't find a position in which my mind would let go of my body — release me to sleep again. So I began to tell myself a story, a bedtime story.

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In a house, in a suburb, in a city, there were a man and his wife who loved each other very much and were living happily ever after. They had a little boy, and they loved him very much. They had a cat and a dog that the little boy loved very much. They had a car and a caravan trailer for holidays, and a swimming-pool which was fenced so that the little boy and his playmates would not fall in and drown. They had a housemaid who was absolutely trustworthy and an itinerant<sup>9</sup> gardener who was highly recommended by the neighbors. For when they began to live happily ever after they were warned, by that wise old witch, the husband's mother, not to take on anyone off the street. They were inscribed<sup>10</sup> in a medical benefit society, their pet dog was licensed, they were insured against fire, flood damage and theft, and subscribed to the local Neighborhood Watch, which supplied them with a plaque for their gates lettered YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED over the silhouette of a would-be intruder. He was masked; it could not be said if he was black or white, and therefore proved the property owner was no racist.

- [10] It was not possible to insure the house, the swimming pool or the car against riot damage. There were riots, but these were outside the city, where people of another color were quartered. These people were not allowed into the suburb except as reliable housemaids and gardeners, so there was nothing to fear, the husband told the wife. Yet she was afraid that some day such people might come up the street and tear off the plaque YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED and open the gates and stream in... Nonsense, my dear, said the husband, there are police and soldiers and tear-gas and guns to keep them away. But to please her — for he loved her very much and buses were being burned, cars stoned, and schoolchildren shot by the police in those quarters out of sight and hearing of the suburb — he had electronically controlled gates fitted. Anyone who pulled off the sign YOU HAVE

5. **Arrhythmia** (*noun*) any variation from the normal rhythm of the heartbeat
6. A stope is a step-like excavation made in a mine to extract ore or mineral deposits.
7. Chopi and Tsonga are two peoples from Mozambique, a country to the northeast of South Africa.
8. **Inter** (*verb*) to place in a grave or tomb
9. **Itinerant** (*adjective*) working for a short time in various places; a casual laborer
10. **Inscribe** (*verb*) to enroll or list

BEEN WARNED and tried to open the gates would have to announce his intentions by pressing a button and speaking into a receiver relayed to the house. The little boy was fascinated by the device and used it as a walkie-talkie in cops and robbers play with his small friends.

The riots were suppressed, but there were many burglaries in the suburb and somebody's trusted housemaid was tied up and shut in a cupboard by thieves while she was in charge of her employers' house. The trusted housemaid of the man and wife and little boy was so upset by this misfortune befalling a friend left, as she herself often was, with responsibility for the possessions of the man and his wife and the little boy that she implored<sup>11</sup> her employers to have burglar bars attached to the doors and windows of the house, and an alarm system installed. The wife said, She is right, let us take heed of her advice. So from every window and door in the house where they were living happily ever after they now saw the trees and sky through bars, and when the little boy's pet cat tried to climb in by the fanlight to keep him company in his little bed at night, as it customarily had done, it set off the alarm keening<sup>12</sup> through the house.

The alarm was often answered — it seemed — by other burglar alarms, in other houses, that had been triggered by pet cats or nibbling mice. The alarms called to one another across the gardens in shrills and bleats and wails that everyone soon became accustomed to, so that the din roused the inhabitants of the suburb no more than the croak of frogs and musical grating of cicadas' legs. Under cover of the electronic harpies' discourse intruders sawed the iron bars and broke into homes, taking away hi-fi equipment, television sets, cassette players, cameras and radios, jewelry and clothing, and sometimes were hungry enough to devour everything in the refrigerator or paused audaciously<sup>13</sup> to drink the whiskey in the cabinets or patio bars. Insurance companies paid no compensation for single malt,<sup>14</sup> a loss made keener by the property owner's knowledge that the thieves wouldn't even have been able to appreciate what it was they were drinking.

Then the time came when many of the people who were not trusted housemaids and gardeners hung about the suburb because they were unemployed. Some importuned<sup>15</sup> for a job: weeding or painting a roof; anything, baas,<sup>16</sup> madam. But the man and his wife remembered the warning about taking on anyone off the street. Some drank liquor and fouled the street with discarded bottles. Some begged, waiting for the man or his wife to drive the car out of the electronically operated gates. They sat about with their feet in the gutters, under the jacaranda trees that made a green tunnel of the street—for it was a beautiful suburb, spoilt only by their presence — and sometimes they fell asleep lying right before the gates in the midday sun. The wife could never see anyone go hungry. She sent the trusted housemaid out with bread and tea, but the trusted housemaid said these were loafers and tsotsis,<sup>17</sup> who would come and tie her and shut her in a cupboard. The husband said, She's right. Take heed of her advice. You only encourage them with your bread and tea. They are looking for their chance... And he brought the little boy's tricycle from the garden into the house every night, because if the house was surely secure, once locked and with the alarm set, someone might still be able to climb over the wall or the electronically closed gates into the garden.

11. **Implore** (*verb*) to ask earnestly
12. loudly emitting a sharp noise
13. **Audacious** (*adjective*) bold, daring
14. Single malt is an expensive type of liquor.
15. to ask for or do persistently
16. boss
17. "Tsotsi" is a South African word meaning "hooligan" or "troublemaker."

You are right, said the wife, then the wall should be higher. And the wise old witch, the husband's mother, paid for the extra bricks as her Christmas present to her son and his wife — the little boy got a Space Man outfit and a book of fairy tales.

- [15] But every week there were more reports of intrusion: in broad daylight and the dead of night, in the early hours of the morning, and even in the lovely summer twilight — a certain family was at dinner while the bedrooms were being ransacked upstairs. The man and his wife, talking of the latest armed robbery in the suburb, were distracted by the sight of the little boy's pet cat effortlessly arriving over the seven-foot wall, descending first with a rapid bracing of extended forepaws down on the sheer vertical surface, and then a graceful launch, landing with swishing tail within the property. The whitewashed wall was marked with the cat's comings and goings; and on the street side of the wall there were larger red-earth smudges that could have been made by the kind of broken running shoes, seen on the feet of unemployed loiterers, that had no innocent destination.

When the man and wife and little boy took the pet dog for its walk round the neighborhood streets they no longer paused to admire this show of roses or that perfect lawn; these were hidden behind an array of different varieties of security fences, walls and devices. The man, wife, little boy and dog passed a remarkable choice: there was the low-cost option of pieces of broken glass embedded in cement along the top of walls, there were iron grilles ending in lance-points, there were attempts at reconciling the aesthetics<sup>18</sup> of prison architecture with the Spanish Villa style (spikes painted pink) and with the plaster urns of neoclassical<sup>19</sup> facades (twelve-inch pikes<sup>20</sup> finned like zigzags of lightning and painted pure white). Some walls had a small board affixed, giving the name and telephone number of the firm responsible for the installation of the devices. While the little boy and the pet dog raced ahead, the husband and wife found themselves comparing the possible effectiveness of each style against its appearance; and after several weeks when they paused before this barricade or that without needing to speak, both came out with the conclusion that only one was worth considering. It was the ugliest but the most honest in its suggestion of the pure concentration-camp style, no frills, all evident efficacy.<sup>21</sup> Placed the length of walls, it consisted of a continuous coil of stiff and shining metal serrated into jagged blades, so that there would be no way of climbing over it and no way through its tunnel without getting entangled in its fangs. There would be no way out, only a struggle getting bloodier and bloodier, a deeper and sharper hooking and tearing of flesh. The wife shuddered to look at it. You're right, said the husband, anyone would think twice... And they took heed of the advice on a small board fixed to the wall: Consult DRAGON'S TEETH The People For Total Security.

Next day a gang of workmen came and stretched the razor-bladed coils all round the walls of the house where the husband and wife and little boy and pet dog and cat were living happily ever after. The sunlight flashed and slashed, off the serrations, the cornice of razor thorns encircled the home, shining. The husband said, Never mind. It will weather. The wife said, You're wrong. They guarantee it's rust-proof. And she waited until the little boy had run off to play before she said, I hope the cat will take heed... The husband said, Don't worry, my dear, cats always look before they leap. And it was true that from that day on the cat slept in the little boy's bed and kept to the garden, never risking a try at breaching security.

18. **Aesthetic** (*noun*) style particular to a person, group, or culture

19. **Neoclassical** (*adjective*) relating to the late 18th- and early 19th- century style in architecture and art based on imitations of surviving classical (often ancient Hellenic/Greek or Roman) models

20. Pikes are medieval weapons resembling spikes.

21. **Efficacy** (*noun*) the ability to produce a desired or intended result

One evening, the mother read the little boy to sleep with a fairy story from the book the wise old witch had given him at Christmas. Next day he pretended to be the Prince who braves the terrible thicket of thorns to enter the palace and kiss the Sleeping Beauty back to life: he dragged a ladder to the wall, the shining coiled tunnel was just wide enough for his little body to creep in, and with the first fixing of its razor-teeth in his knees and hands and head he screamed and struggled deeper into its tangle. The trusted housemaid and the itinerant gardener, whose "day" it was, came running, the first to see and to scream with him, and the itinerant gardener tore his hands trying to get at the little boy. Then the man and his wife burst wildly into the garden and for some reason (the cat, probably) the alarm set up wailing against the screams while the bleeding mass of the little boy was hacked out of the security coil with saws, wire-cutters, choppers, and they carried it — the man, the wife, the hysterical trusted housemaid and the weeping gardener — into the house.

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## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What does the phrase "pure concentration-camp style" suggest about the wall in paragraph 16?
  - A. The wall will lead to a violent and inhumane result.
  - B. No one can get past the wall under any circumstances.
  - C. The South Africans borrowed the idea of the wall from the Germans in WWII.
  - D. The wall is intended to injure and destroy the most innocent and weak individuals.
  
2. PART B: Which phrase best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. "And they took heed of the advice on a small board fixed to the wall: Consult DRAGON'S TEETH The People For Total Security" (Paragraph 16)
  - B. "There would be no way out, only a struggle getting bloodier and bloodier, a deeper and sharper hooking and tearing of flesh" (Paragraph 16)
  - C. "Next day a gang of workmen came and stretched the razor-bladed coils all round the walls of the house." (Paragraph 17)
  - D. "The sunlight flashed and slashed, off the serrations, the cornice of razor thorns encircled the home, shining." (Paragraph 17)
  
3. Which statement best identifies a theme of the story?
  - A. Fear and paranoia can only be useful if contained to safe levels, otherwise they can lead to hurting other people.
  - B. Though families act with best intentions, fear can drive individuals to hurt the people they intend to protect.
  - C. Families can remain loyal to each other despite all of the adversity that they face in the outside world.
  - D. Families can never truly protect the people that they love from the cruelty of the world.
  
4. PART A: How is the narrator's introduction in paragraphs 1-8 important to the passage as a whole?
  - A. The narrator's introduction introduces the setting and contrasts the innocence of children's books and bedtime stories with the tragedy that can result from fear.
  - B. The narrator's introduction normalizes fear, but foreshadows that individuals can overreact to fear through the metaphor of bedtime stories.
  - C. The narrator's introduction reveals the narrator's role in the story and describes the character's motivations for the rest of the story.
  - D. The narrator's introduction explains the theme of children's stories and how it will influence the rest of the plot.

5. PART B: Which TWO sentences from the story's introduction best support your answer to Part A?
- A. "I reply that I don't write children's stories" (Paragraph 1)
  - B. "And then last night I woke up — or rather was awakened without knowing what had roused me." (Paragraph 2)
  - C. "A voice in the echo-chamber of the subconscious?" (Paragraph 3)
  - D. "I have no burglar bars, no gun under the pillow, but I have the same fears as people who do take these precautions" (Paragraph 5)
  - E. "I learned that I was to be neither threatened nor spared." (Paragraph 7)
  - F. "I couldn't find a position in which my mind would let go of my body — release me to sleep again. So I began to tell myself a story, a bedtime story." (Paragraph 8)



6. Provide evidence from the text that shows that the family is white. What is the effect of the author never explicitly stating the family's race?

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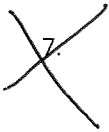
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7. How is the vivid imagery in the last scene of the story important to the development of the story's themes?

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

# Young Goodman Brown

By Nathaniel Hawthorne  
1835

*Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) was an American novelist and short story writer. He was born in Salem, Massachusetts, and his ancestors include one of the judges involved in the Salem witch trials. This story is set in Salem during its infamous witch trials, a time of suspicion and accusation. Goodman Brown takes a journey into the woods and finds his faith tested by those that he meets along the way. As you read, take notes on how Hawthorne structures the story to help build mystery.*

[1] Young Goodman<sup>1</sup> Brown came forth at sunset, into the street of Salem village, but put his head back, after crossing the threshold, to exchange a parting kiss with his young wife. And Faith, as the wife was aptly<sup>2</sup> named, thrust her own pretty head into the street, letting the wind play with the pink ribbons of her cap, while she called to Goodman Brown.

“Dearest heart,” whispered she, softly and rather sadly, when her lips were close to his ear, “pr’y thee,<sup>3</sup> put off your journey until sunrise, and sleep in your own bed to-night. A lone woman is troubled with such dreams and such thoughts, that she’s afraid of herself, sometimes. Pray, tarry<sup>4</sup> with me this night, dear husband, of all nights in the year!”

“My love and my Faith,” replied young Goodman Brown, “of all nights in the year, this one night must I tarry away from thee. My journey, as thou callest it, forth and back again, must needs be done ‘twixt now and sunrise. What, my sweet, pretty wife, dost thou doubt me already, and we but three months married!”

“Then God bless you!” said Faith, with the pink ribbons, “and may you find all well, when you come back.”

[5] “Amen!” cried Goodman Brown. “Say thy prayers, dear Faith, and go to bed at dusk, and no harm will come to thee.”



*“Jan and The Spessart Forest” by Andreas Øverland is licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0.*

1. “Goodman” and “Goody” were Puritan titles meaning “Mr.” and “Mrs.”
2. suitably, appropriately
3. an old phrase meaning “please”
4. stay

So they parted; and the young man pursued his way, until, being about to turn the corner by the meeting-house, he looked back and saw the head of Faith still peeping after him, with a melancholy<sup>5</sup> air, in spite of her pink ribbons.

“Poor little Faith!” thought he, for his heart smote<sup>6</sup> him. “What a wretch am I, to leave her on such an errand! She talks of dreams, too. Methought, as she spoke, there was trouble in her face, as if a dream had warned her what work is to be done to-night. But, no, no! ’twould kill her to think it. Well; she’s a blessed angel on earth; and after this one night, I’ll cling to her skirts and follow her to Heaven.”

With this excellent resolve for the future, Goodman Brown felt himself justified in making more haste on his present evil purpose. He had taken a dreary road, darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest, which barely stood aside to let the narrow path creep through, and closed immediately behind. It was all as lonely as could be; and there is this peculiarity in such a solitude, that the traveller knows not who may be concealed by the innumerable trunks and the thick boughs overhead; so that, with lonely footsteps, he may yet be passing through an unseen multitude.

“There may be a devilish Indian behind every tree,” said Goodman Brown to himself; and he glanced fearfully behind him, as he added, “What if the devil himself should be at my very elbow!”

[10] His head being turned back, he passed a crook of the road, and looking forward again, beheld the figure of a man, in grave and decent attire, seated at the foot of an old tree. He arose, at Goodman Brown’s approach, and walked onward, side by side with him.

“You are late, Goodman Brown,” said he. “The clock of the Old South was striking, as I came through Boston; and that is full fifteen minutes ago.”

“Faith kept me back awhile,” replied the young man, with a tremor in his voice, caused by the sudden appearance of his companion, though not wholly unexpected.

It was now deep dusk in the forest, and deepest in that part of it where these two were journeying. As nearly as could be discerned, the second traveller was about fifty years old, apparently in the same rank of life as Goodman Brown, and bearing a considerable resemblance to him, though perhaps more in expression than features. Still, they might have been taken for father and son. And yet, though the elder person was as simply clad as the younger, and as simple in manner too, he had an indescribable air of one who knew the world, and would not have felt abashed<sup>7</sup> at the governor’s dinner-table, or in King William’s court, were it possible that his affairs should call him thither. But the only thing about him, that could be fixed upon as remarkable, was his staff, which bore the likeness of a great black snake, so curiously wrought,<sup>8</sup> that it might almost be seen to twist and wriggle itself like a living serpent. This, of course, must have been an ocular<sup>9</sup> deception, assisted by the uncertain light.

5. **Melancholy** (*noun*) a feeling of pensive sadness

6. to strike with a firm blow

7. **Abashed** (*adjective*) embarrassed and ashamed

8. fashioned

9. **Ocular** (*adjective*) related to the eye

"Come, Goodman Brown!" cried his fellow-traveller, "this is a dull pace for the beginning of a journey. Take my staff, if you are so soon weary."

- [15] "Friend," said the other, exchanging his slow pace for a full stop, "having kept covenant<sup>10</sup> by meeting thee here, it is my purpose now to return whence I came. I have scruples,<sup>11</sup> touching the matter thou wot'st<sup>12</sup> of."

"Sayest thou so?" replied he of the serpent, smiling apart. "Let us walk on, nevertheless, reasoning as we go, and if I convince thee not, thou shalt turn back. We are but a little way in the forest, yet."

"Too far, too far!" exclaimed the goodman, unconsciously resuming his walk. "My father never went into the woods on such an errand, nor his father before him. We have been a race of honest men and good Christians, since the days of the martyrs.<sup>13</sup> And shall I be the first of the name of Brown, that ever took this path and kept —"

"Such company, thou wouldst say," observed the elder person, interrupting his pause. "Well said, Goodman Brown! I have been as well acquainted with your family as with ever a one among the Puritans; and that's no trifle<sup>14</sup> to say. I helped your grandfather, the constable,<sup>15</sup> when he lashed the Quaker<sup>16</sup> woman so smartly through the streets of Salem. And it was I that brought your father a pitch-pine knot, kindled at my own hearth, to set fire to an Indian village, in King Philip's War.<sup>17</sup> They were my good friends, both; and many a pleasant walk have we had along this path, and returned merrily after midnight. I would fain<sup>18</sup> be friends with you, for their sake."

"If it be as thou sayest," replied Goodman Brown, "I marvel they never spoke of these matters. Or, verily,<sup>19</sup> I marvel not, seeing that the least rumor of the sort would have driven them from New England. We are a people of prayer, and good works to boot, and abide<sup>20</sup> no such wickedness."

- [20] "Wickedness or not," said the traveller with the twisted staff, "I have a very general acquaintance here in New England. The deacons<sup>21</sup> of many a church have drunk the communion wine with me; the selectmen, of divers towns, make me their chairman; and a majority of the Great and General Court are firm supporters of my interest. The governor and I, too — but these are state-secrets."

"Can this be so!" cried Goodman Brown, with a stare of amazement at his undisturbed companion. "Howbeit, I

10. a promise
11. doubts, hesitations, or moral problems
12. know
13. A "martyr" is someone who is killed because of their beliefs.
14. **Trifle (noun)** a thing of little value or importance
15. an officer of the peace, having police and minor judicial functions
16. a member of a Christian movement that is devoted to peaceful principles
17. King Philip's War (1675-78) was an armed conflict between English colonists and American Indian inhabitants of present-day New England led by Chief Metacomet, whose English name was King Philip.
18. gladly
19. in truth
20. **Abide (verb)** tolerate, suffer, put up with
21. an ordained minister that is ranked below a priest

have nothing to do with the governor and council; they have their own ways, and are no rule for a simple husbandman<sup>22</sup> like me. But, were I to go on with thee, how should I meet the eye of that good old man, our minister, at Salem village? Oh, his voice would make me tremble, both Sabbath-day<sup>23</sup> and lecture-day!<sup>24</sup>

Thus far, the elder traveller had listened with due gravity, but now burst into a fit of irrepressible mirth,<sup>25</sup> shaking himself so violently that his snake-like staff actually seemed to wriggle in sympathy.

“Ha! ha! ha!” shouted he, again and again; then composing himself, “Well, go on, Goodman Brown, go on; but, pry thee, don’t kill me with laughing!”

“Well, then, to end the matter at once,” said Goodman Brown, considerably nettled,<sup>26</sup> “there is my wife, Faith. It would break her dear little heart; and I’d rather break my own!”

[25] “Nay, if that be the case,” answered the other, “e’en go thy ways, Goodman Brown. I would not, for twenty old women like the one hobbling before us, that Faith should come to any harm.”

As he spoke, he pointed his staff at a female figure on the path, in whom Goodman Brown recognized a very pious<sup>27</sup> and exemplary dame, who had taught him his catechism<sup>28</sup> in youth, and was still his moral and spiritual adviser, jointly with the minister and Deacon Gookin.

“A marvel, truly, that Goody Cloyse should be so far in the wilderness, at night-fall!” said he.

“But, with your leave, friend, I shall take a cut through the woods, until we have left this Christian woman behind. Being a stranger to you, she might ask whom I was consorting with, and whither I was going.”

“Be it so,” said his fellow-traveller. “Betake you to the woods, and let me keep the path.”

[30] Accordingly, the young man turned aside, but took care to watch his companion, who advanced softly along the road, until he had come within a staff’s length of the old dame. She, meanwhile, was making the best of her way, with singular speed for so aged a woman, and mumbling some indistinct words, a prayer, doubtless, as she went. The traveller put forth his staff, and touched her withered neck with what seemed the serpent’s tail.

“The devil!” screamed the pious old lady.

“Then Goody Cloyse knows her old friend?” observed the traveller, confronting her, and leaning on his writhing stick.

22. a farmer

23. a day set aside for worship

24. the appointed day for the periodical lecture given by the local government

25. amusement, especially as expressed in laughter

26. **Nettled** (*adjective*) annoyed or offended

27. devoutly religious

28. A catechism is a series of questions and answers used to teach religious beliefs and principles.

"Ah, forsooth,<sup>29</sup> and is it your worship, indeed?" cried the good dame. "Yea, truly is it, and in the very image of my old gossip, Goodman Brown, the grandfather of the silly fellow that now is. But — would your worship believe it? — my broomstick hath strangely disappeared, stolen, as I suspect, by that unchaged witch, Goody Cory, and that, too, when I was all anointed<sup>30</sup> with the juice of smallage<sup>31</sup> and cinque-foil<sup>32</sup> and wolf's-bane<sup>33</sup> —"

"Mingled with fine wheat and the fat of a new-born babe," said the shape of old Goodman Brown.

- [35] "Ah, your worship knows the recipe," cried the old lady, cackling aloud. "So, as I was saying, being all ready for the meeting, and no horse to ride on, I made up my mind to foot it; for they tell me, there is a nice young man to be taken into communion to-night. But now your good worship will lend me your arm, and we shall be there in a twinkling."

"That can hardly be," answered her friend. "I may not spare you my arm, Goody Cloyse, but here is my staff, if you will."

So saying, he threw it down at her feet, where, perhaps, it assumed life, being one of the rods which its owner had formerly lent to Egyptian Magi.<sup>34</sup> Of this fact, however, Goodman Brown could not take cognizance.<sup>35</sup> He had cast up his eyes in astonishment, and looking down again, beheld neither Goody Cloyse nor the serpentine staff, but his fellow-traveller alone, who waited for him as calmly as if nothing had happened.

"That old woman taught me my catechism!" said the young man; and there was a world of meaning in this simple comment.

They continued to walk onward, while the elder traveller exhorted<sup>36</sup> his companion to make good speed and persevere in the path, discoursing so aptly, that his arguments seemed rather to spring up in the bosom of his auditor,<sup>37</sup> than to be suggested by himself. As they went, he plucked a branch of maple, to serve for a walking-stick, and began to strip it of the twigs and little boughs, which were wet with evening dew. The moment his fingers touched them, they became strangely withered and dried up, as with a week's sunshine. Thus the pair proceeded, at a good free pace, until suddenly, in a gloomy hollow of the road, Goodman Brown sat himself down on the stump of a tree, and refused to go any farther.

- [40] "Friend," said he, stubbornly, "my mind is made up. Not another step will I budge on this errand. What if a wretched old woman do choose to go to the devil, when I thought she was going to Heaven! Is that any reason why I should quit my dear Faith, and go after her?"

29. "Forsooth" means "in truth," but is often used ironically

30. to touch with water or oil in a religious ceremony

31. celery

32. flowers in the rose family

33. a kind of poisonous flower

34. Most likely a reference to the Bible story, the Exodus from Egypt, which includes a detail about Egyptian magicians who throw down rods that become snakes.

35. understanding

36. **Exhort (verb)** to strongly encourage or urge someone to do something

37. listener

"You will think better of this by-and-by," said his acquaintance, composedly. "Sit here and rest yourself awhile; and when you feel like moving again, there is my staff to help you along."

Without more words, he threw his companion the maple stick, and was as speedily out of sight, as if he had vanished into the deepening gloom. The young man sat a few moments by the road-side, applauding himself greatly, and thinking with how clear a conscience he should meet the minister, in his morning-walk, nor shrink from the eye of good old Deacon Gookin. And what calm sleep would be his, that very night, which was to have been spent so wickedly, but purely and sweetly now, in the arms of Faith! Amidst these pleasant and praiseworthy meditations, Goodman Brown heard the tramp of horses along the road, and deemed it advisable to conceal himself within the verge of the forest, conscious of the guilty purpose that had brought him thither, though now so happily turned from it.

On came the hoof-tramps and the voices of the riders, two grave old voices, conversing soberly as they drew near. These mingled sounds appeared to pass along the road, within a few yards of the young man's hiding-place; but owing, doubtless, to the depth of the gloom, at that particular spot, neither the travellers nor their steeds were visible. Though their figures brushed the small boughs by the way-side, it could not be seen that they intercepted, even for a moment, the faint gleam from the strip of bright sky, athwart which they must have passed. Goodman Brown alternately crouched and stood on tip-toe, pulling aside the branches, and thrusting forth his head as far as he durst,<sup>38</sup> without discerning so much as a shadow. It vexed<sup>39</sup> him the more, because he could have sworn, were such a thing possible, that he recognized the voices of the minister and Deacon Gookin, jogging along quietly, as they were wont to do, when bound to some ordination<sup>40</sup> or ecclesiastical<sup>41</sup> council. While yet within hearing, one of the riders stopped to pluck a switch.<sup>42</sup>

"Of the two, reverend Sir," said the voice like the deacon's, "I had rather miss an ordination-dinner than tonight's meeting. They tell me that some of our community are to be here from Falmouth and beyond, and others from Connecticut and Rhode-Island; besides several of the Indian powows, who, after their fashion, know almost as much deviltry as the best of us. Moreover, there is a goodly young woman to be taken into communion."

[45] "Mighty well, Deacon Gookin!" replied the solemn old tones of the minister. "Spur up,<sup>43</sup> or we shall be late. Nothing can be done, you know, until I get on the ground."

The hoofs clattered again, and the voices, talking so strangely in the empty air, passed on through the forest, where no church had ever been gathered, nor solitary Christian prayed. Whither, then, could these holy men be journeying, so deep into the heathen<sup>44</sup> wilderness? Young Goodman Brown caught hold of a tree, for support, being ready to sink down on the ground, faint and overburdened with the heavy sickness of his heart. He looked up to the sky, doubting whether there really was a Heaven above him. Yet, there was the blue arch, and the stars brightening in it.

38. dared

39. **Vexed (adjective)** annoyed, frustrated, worried

40. the official act or process of making someone a priest or minister

41. relating to the Christian church

42. a whip cut from a tree branch

43. a phrase meaning "hurry up"

44. a derogatory term for a person who does not belong to a widely-held religion

"With Heaven above, and Faith below, I will yet stand firm against the devil!" cried Goodman Brown.

While he still gazed upward, into the deep arch of the firmament,<sup>45</sup> and had lifted his hands to pray, a cloud, though no wind was stirring, hurried across the zenith,<sup>46</sup> and hid the brightening stars. The blue sky was still visible, except directly overhead, where this black mass of cloud was sweeping swiftly northward. Aloft in the air, as if from the depths of the cloud, came a confused and doubtful sound of voices. Once, the listener fancied that he could distinguish the accent of town's-people of his own, men and women, both pious and ungodly, many of whom he had met at the communion-table, and had seen others rioting at the tavern. The next moment, so indistinct were the sounds, he doubted whether he had heard aught but the murmur of the old forest, whispering without a wind. Then came a stronger swell of those familiar tones, heard daily in the sunshine, at Salem village, but never, until now, from a cloud of night. There was one voice, of a young woman, uttering lamentations, yet with an uncertain sorrow, and entreating for some favor, which, perhaps, it would grieve her to obtain. And all the unseen multitude, both saints and sinners, seemed to encourage her onward.

"Faith!" shouted Goodman Brown, in a voice of agony and desperation; and the echoes of the forest mocked him, crying — "Faith! Faith!" as if bewildered wretches were seeking her, all through the wilderness.

- [50] The cry of grief, rage, and terror, was yet piercing the night, when the unhappy husband held his breath for a response. There was a scream, drowned immediately in a louder murmur of voices, fading into far-off laughter, as the dark cloud swept away, leaving the clear and silent sky above Goodman Brown. But something fluttered lightly down through the air, and caught on the branch of a tree. The young man seized it, and beheld a pink ribbon.

"My Faith is gone!" cried he, after one stupefied<sup>47</sup> moment. "There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name. Come, devil! for to thee is this world given."

And maddened with despair, so that he laughed loud and long, did Goodman Brown grasp his staff and set forth again, at such a rate, that he seemed to fly along the forest-path, rather than to walk or run. The road grew wilder and drearier, and more faintly traced, and vanished at length, leaving him in the heart of the dark wilderness, still rushing onward, with the instinct that guides mortal man to evil. The whole forest was peopled<sup>48</sup> with frightful sounds; the creaking of the trees, the howling of wild beasts, and the yell of Indians; while, sometimes the wind tolled like a distant church-bell, and sometimes gave a broad roar around the traveller, as if all Nature were laughing him to scorn. But he was himself the chief horror of the scene, and shrank not from its other horrors.

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Goodman Brown, when the wind laughed at him. "Let us hear which will laugh loudest! Think not to frighten me with your devilry! Come witch, come wizard, come Indian powow, come devil himself! and here comes Goodman Brown. You may as well fear him as he fear you!"

In truth, all through the haunted forest, there could be nothing more frightful than the figure of Goodman Brown. On he flew, among the black pines, brandishing his staff with frenzied gestures, now giving vent to an

45. the skies

46. the highest point

47. **Stupefy** (*verb*) to put into a state of little or no sensibility

48. to fill or be present in a place

inspiration of horrid blasphemy,<sup>49</sup> and now shouting forth such laughter, as set all the echoes of the forest laughing like demons around him. The fiend in his own shape is less hideous, than when he rages in the breast of man. Thus sped the demoniac on his course, until, quivering among the trees, he saw a red light before him, as when the felled trunks and branches of a clearing have been set on fire, and throw up their lurid<sup>50</sup> blaze against the sky, at the hour of midnight. He paused, in a lull of the tempest<sup>51</sup> that had driven him onward, and heard the swell of what seemed a hymn, rolling solemnly from a distance, with the weight of many voices. He knew the tune; it was a familiar one in the choir of the village meeting-house. The verse died heavily away, and was lengthened by a chorus, not of human voices, but of all the sounds of the benighted<sup>52</sup> wilderness, pealing in awful harmony together. Goodman Brown cried out; and his cry was lost to his own ear, by its unison with the cry of the desert.

[55] In the interval of silence, he stole forward, until the light glared full upon his eyes. At one extremity of an open space, hemmed in by the dark wall of the forest, arose a rock, bearing some rude, natural resemblance either to an altar or a pulpit,<sup>53</sup> and surrounded by four blazing pines, their tops aflame, their stems untouched, like candles at an evening meeting. The mass of foliage,<sup>54</sup> that had overgrown the summit of the rock, was all on fire, blazing high into the night, and fitfully illuminating the whole field. Each pendent twig and leafy festoon<sup>55</sup> was in a blaze. As the red light arose and fell, a numerous congregation alternately shone forth, then disappeared in shadow, and again grew, as it were, out of the darkness, peopling the heart of the solitary woods at once.

“A grave and dark-clad company!” quoth Goodman Brown.

In truth, they were such. Among them, quivering to-and-fro, between gloom and splendor, appeared faces that would be seen, next day, at the council-board of the province, and others which, Sabbath after Sabbath, looked devoutly heavenward, and benignantly<sup>56</sup> over the crowded pews, from the holiest pulpits in the land. Some affirm, that the lady of the governor was there. At least, there were high dames well known to her, and wives of honored husbands, and widows, a great multitude, and ancient maidens, all of excellent repute, and fair young girls, who trembled lest their mothers should espy<sup>57</sup> them. Either the sudden gleams of light, flashing over the obscure field, bedazzled Goodman Brown, or he recognized a score of the church-members of Salem village, famous for their especial sanctity.<sup>58</sup> Good old Deacon Gookin had arrived, and waited at the skirts of that venerable<sup>59</sup> saint, his reverend pastor. But, irreverently consorting with these grave, reputable, and pious people, these elders of the church, these chaste<sup>60</sup> dames and dewy<sup>61</sup> virgins, there were men of dissolute lives and women of spotted fame, wretches given over to all mean and filthy vice, and suspected even of horrid

49. the act of insulting or showing contempt for God

50. **Lurid** (*adjective*) having an unnatural glare

51. a violent storm

52. morally or intellectually ignorant

53. a raised platform in a church or chapel from which the preacher delivers a sermon

54. greenery

55. a chain of flowers or leaves

56. with kindness and goodness

57. to catch sight of

58. **Sanctity** (*noun*) holiness

59. **Venerable** (*adjective*) worthy of a great deal of respect, especially because of age, wisdom, or character

60. morally pure, usually describing someone who doesn't have sexual intercourse outside of marriage

61. innocent



crimes. It was strange to see, that the good shrank not from the wicked, nor were the sinners abashed by the saints. Scattered, also, among their palefaced enemies, were the Indian priests, or powows, who had often scared their native forest with more hideous incantations<sup>62</sup> than any known to English witchcraft.

"But, where is Faith?" thought Goodman Brown; and, as hope came into his heart, he trembled.

Another verse of the hymn arose, a slow and mournful strain, such as the pious love, but joined to words which expressed all that our nature can conceive of sin, and darkly hinted at far more. Unfathomable<sup>63</sup> to mere mortals is the lore of fiends. Verse after verse was sung, and still the chorus of the desert swelled between, like the deepest tone of a mighty organ. And, with the final peal of that dreadful anthem, there came a sound, as if the roaring wind, the rushing streams, the howling beasts, and every other voice of the unconverted wilderness, were mingling and according with the voice of guilty man, in homage<sup>64</sup> to the prince of all. The four blazing pines threw up a loftier flame, and obscurely discovered shapes and visages<sup>65</sup> of horror on the smoke-wreaths, above the impious assembly. At the same moment, the fire on the rock shot redly forth, and formed a glowing arch above its base, where now appeared a figure. With reverence be it spoken, the figure bore no slight similitude, both in garb and manner, to some grave divine of the New-England churches.

[60] "Bring forth the converts!" cried a voice, that echoed through the field and rolled into the forest.

At the word, Goodman Brown stepped forth from the shadow of the trees, and approached the congregation, with whom he felt a loathful<sup>66</sup> brotherhood, by the sympathy of all that was wicked in his heart. He could have well nigh sworn, that the shape of his own dead father beckoned him to advance, looking downward from a smoke-wreath, while a woman, with dim features of despair, threw out her hand to warn him back. Was it his mother? But he had no power to retreat one step, nor to resist, even in thought, when the minister and good old Deacon Gookin seized his arms, and led him to the blazing rock. Thither<sup>67</sup> came also the slender form of a veiled female, led between Goody Cloyse, that pious teacher of the catechism, and Martha Carrier, who had received the devil's promise to be queen of hell. A rampant hag was she! And there stood the proselytes,<sup>68</sup> beneath the canopy of fire.

"Welcome, my children," said the dark figure, "to the communion of your race! Ye have found, thus young, your nature and your destiny. My children, look behind you!"

They turned; and flashing forth, as it were, in a sheet of flame, the fiend-worshippers were seen; the smile of welcome gleamed darkly on every visage.

"There," resumed the sable<sup>69</sup> form, "are all whom ye have revered from youth. Ye deemed them holier than yourselves, and shrank from your own sin, contrasting it with their lives of righteousness, and prayerful

62. spells

63. **Unfathomable** (*adjective*) incapable of being fully explored or understood

64. **Homage** (*noun*) respect or honor

65. **Visage** (*noun*) a person's face or facial expression

66. unwilling

67. to or toward that place

68. A "proselyte" is a person who has converted from one religion to another.

69. dark

aspirations heavenward. Yet, here are they all, in my worshipping assembly! This night it shall be granted you to know their secret deeds; how hoary-bearded<sup>70</sup> elders of the church have whispered wanton words to the young maids of their households; how many a woman, eager for widow's weeds, has given her husband a drink at bed-time, and let him sleep his last sleep in her bosom; how beardless youth have made haste to inherit their father's wealth; and how fair damsels — blush not, sweet ones — have dug little graves in the garden, and bidden me, the sole guest, to an infant's funeral. By the sympathy of your human hearts for sin, ye shall scent out all the places — whether in church, bed-chamber, street, field, or forest — where crime has been committed, and shall exult to behold the whole earth one stain of guilt, one mighty blood-spot. Far more than this! It shall be yours to penetrate, in every bosom, the deep mystery of sin, the fountain of all wicked arts, and which inexhaustibly supplies more evil impulses than human power — than my power at its utmost! — can make manifest in deeds. And now, my children, look upon each other."

- [65] They did so; and, by the blaze of the hell-kindled torches, the wretched man beheld his Faith, and the wife her husband, trembling before that unhallowed<sup>71</sup> altar.

"Lo! there ye stand, my children," said the figure, in a deep and solemn tone, almost sad, with its despairing awfulness, as if his once angelic nature could yet mourn for our miserable race. "Depending upon one another's hearts, ye had still hoped that virtue were not all a dream! Now are ye undeceived! Evil is the nature of mankind. Evil must be your only happiness. Welcome, again, my children, to the communion of your race!"

"Welcome!" repeated the fiend-worshippers, in one cry of despair and triumph.

And there they stood, the only pair, as it seemed, who were yet hesitating on the verge of wickedness, in this dark world. A basin was hollowed, naturally, in the rock. Did it contain water, reddened by the lurid light? or was it blood? or, perchance, a liquid flame? Herein did the Shape of Evil dip his hand, and prepare to lay the mark of baptism<sup>72</sup> upon their foreheads, that they might be partakers of the mystery of sin, more conscious of the secret guilt of others, both in deed and thought, than they could now be of their own. The husband cast one look at his pale wife, and Faith at him. What polluted wretches would the next glance show them to each other, shuddering alike at what they disclosed and what they saw!

"Faith! Faith!" cried the husband. "Look up to Heaven, and resist the Wicked One!"

- [70] Whether Faith obeyed, he knew not. Hardly had he spoken, when he found himself amid calm night and solitude, listening to a roar of the wind, which died heavily away through the forest. He staggered against the rock, and felt it chill and damp, while a hanging twig, that had been all on fire, besprinkled his cheek with the coldest dew.

The next morning, young Goodman Brown came slowly into the street of Salem village, staring around him like a bewildered man. The good old minister was taking a walk along the graveyard, to get an appetite for breakfast and meditate his sermon, and bestowed a blessing, as he passed, on Goodman Brown. He shrank from the venerable saint, as if to avoid an anathema.<sup>73</sup> Old Deacon Gookin was at domestic worship, and the holy words

70. "Hoary" means grayish white.

71. unholy; wicked

72. In the Christian Church, "baptism" is the religious ceremony of sprinkling water onto a person's forehead to symbolize purification and admission to the Christian Church.

of his prayer were heard through the open window. "What God doth the wizard pray to?" quoth Goodman Brown. Goody Cloyse, that excellent old Christian, stood in the early sunshine, at her own lattice,<sup>74</sup> catechising a little girl, who had brought her a pint of morning's milk. Goodman Brown snatched away the child, as from the grasp of the fiend himself. Turning the corner by the meeting-house, he spied the head of Faith, with the pink ribbons, gazing anxiously forth, and bursting into such joy at sight of him, that she skipt along the street, and almost kissed her husband before the whole village. But Goodman Brown looked sternly and sadly into her face, and passed on without a greeting.

Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest, and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch-meeting?

Be it so, if you will. But, alas! it was a dream of evil omen<sup>75</sup> for young Goodman Brown. A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man, did he become, from the night of that fearful dream. When the minister spoke from the pulpit, with power and fervid<sup>76</sup> eloquence,<sup>77</sup> and with his hand on the open Bible, of the sacred truths of our religion, and of saint-like lives and triumphant deaths, and of future bliss or misery unutterable, then did Goodman Brown turn pale, dreading lest the roof should thunder down upon the gray blasphemer<sup>78</sup> and his hearers. Often, awaking suddenly at midnight, he shrank from the bosom of Faith, and at morning or eventide,<sup>79</sup> when the family knelt down at prayer, he scowled, and muttered to himself, and gazed sternly at his wife, and turned away. And when he had lived long, and was borne to his grave, a hoary corpse, followed by Faith, an aged woman, and children and grand-children, a goodly procession, besides neighbors, not a few, they carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone; for his dying hour was gloom.

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73. a curse or something hated

74. gate

75. **Omen** (*noun*) a sign that predicts good or bad fortune in the future

76. **Fervid** (*adjective*) intensely enthusiastic or passionate

77. **Eloquence** (*noun*) the ability to speak effectively with ease

78. someone who is blasphemous, who disrespects God or sacred things

79. evening

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following identifies the central theme of the text?
  - A. None of us are pure and perfect people, because sin is in our nature.
  - B. We can overcome any kind of evil, with the strength of love.
  - C. Once a person can identify a source of evil, they can overcome it.
  - D. You should put your faith in the strength of the human spirit.
  
2. PART B: Which section from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. "'Poor little Faith!' thought he, for his heart smote him. 'What a wretch am I, to leave her on such an errand! She talks of dreams, too.'" (Paragraph 7)
  - B. "'With Heaven above, and Faith below, I will yet stand firm against the devil!' cried Goodman Brown." (Paragraph 47)
  - C. "'Ha! ha! ha!' roared Goodman Brown, when the wind laughed at him. 'Let us hear which will laugh loudest! Think not to frighten me with your devilry!'" (Paragraph 53)
  - D. "By the sympathy of your human hearts for sin, ye shall scent out all the places — whether in church, bed-chamber, street, field, or forest — where crime has been committed, and shall exult to behold the whole earth one stain of guilt," (Paragraph 64)
  
3. PART A: How is the dark figure's address to the people gathered in the forest, in paragraph 64, important to the story as a whole?
  - A. It helps illustrate that the fight against evil must be a collective effort amongst the townspeople.
  - B. It demonstrates that Young Goodman Brown is the only good person amongst the townspeople.
  - C. It helps show that even the most righteous elders amongst the townspeople are inclined to evil.
  - D. It allows readers to better understand how badly the Native Americans are treated by the townspeople.
  
4. PART B: Which detail from paragraph 73 best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. "Be it so, if you will. But, alas! it was a dream of evil omen for young Goodman Brown. A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man, did he become, from the night of that fearful dream."
  - B. "When the minister spoke from the pulpit, with power and fervid eloquence, and with his hand on the open Bible, of the sacred truths of our religion, and of saint-like lives and triumphant deaths, and of future bliss or misery unutterable, then did Goodman Brown turn pale"
  - C. "Often, awaking suddenly at midnight, he shrank from the bosom of Faith, and at morning or eventide, when the family knelt down at prayer, he scowled, and muttered to himself, and gazed sternly at his wife, and turned away."
  - D. "And when he had lived long, and was borne to his grave, a hoary corpse, followed by Faith, an aged woman, and children and grand-children, a goodly procession, besides neighbors"

5. PART A: How does Goodman Brown's experience affect his perception of the world?
- A. He becomes more committed to his religion.
  - B. He grows skeptical of the power of God.
  - C. He falls ill from the stress of his dream.
  - D. He becomes more suspicious of human nature.
6. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
- A. "Goody Cloyse, that excellent old Christian, stood in the early sunshine, at her own lattice, catechising a little girl, who had brought her a pint of morning's milk." (Paragraph 71)
  - B. "But Goodman Brown looked sternly and sadly into her face, and passed on without a greeting." (Paragraph 71)
  - C. "But, alas! it was a dream of evil omen for young Goodman Brown. A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man, did he become, from the night of that fearful dream." (Paragraph 73)
  - D. "when the family knelt down at prayer, he scowled, and muttered to himself, and gazed sternly at his wife, and turned away." (Paragraph 73)
7. PART A: How are the details of the traveler's staff important to the development of the text's theme?
- A. It resembles a snake which is associated with sin and evil.
  - B. It takes on different appearances, showing how deceptive evil is.
  - C. It is intricately decorated, proving the traveler's wealth and power.
  - D. It can be used as a weapon and hints at the danger of the traveler.
8. PART B: Which detail from the quote best supports the answer to Part A?
- A. "'Come, Goodman Brown!' cried his fellow-traveller, 'this is a dull pace for the beginning of a journey. Take my staff, if you are so soon weary.'" (Paragraph 14)
  - B. "'Wickedness or not,' said the traveller with the twisted staff, 'I have a very general acquaintance here in New England. The deacons of many a church have drunk the communion wine with me;'" (Paragraph 20)
  - C. "As he spoke, he pointed his staff at a female figure on the path, in whom Goodman Brown recognized a very pious and exemplary dame, who had taught him his catechism in youth, and was still his moral and spiritual adviser;" (Paragraph 26)
  - D. "The traveller put forth his staff, and touched her withered neck with what seemed the serpent's tail." (Paragraph 30)



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

# Excerpt from "You Don't Have to Say You Love Me"

By Sherman Alexie  
2017

*The Indian Removal Act of 1830 was the U.S. government's federal policy that forcibly removed all Native Americans from their land and relocated them to reservations. On these reservations, among other hardships, they faced poverty, alcoholism, unemployment and poor farming land. In this excerpt, Sherman Alexie discusses his choice to leave his "rez" school to make a better life for himself. As you read, make note of the details that support the narrator's thought process about leaving the reservation.*

[1] In early September 1980, my father drove my big brother, Arnold, and me from our home on the Spokane Indian Reservation twenty miles south for my first day of eighth grade and my big brother's first day of eleventh grade in Reardan, Washington. My brother and I became the only Spokane Indians in the Reardan school district, which was 99 percent white. We were brown kids in a sea of white kids inside an ocean of wheat fields. I'd made the decision on my own to leave Wellpinit. But I don't remember why my big brother had followed my lead. He was a great basketball player, and Reardan had a legendary sports program, so I can only assume he transferred for athletic reasons. He and I were brothers, but I think he'd always been emotionally closer to his reservation Indian friends and cousins than he'd ever been to me, which explains why he dropped out of Reardan before Thanksgiving and returned to the rez school. I love my brother. And I didn't want to be alone in a white town. I didn't want to be the only one. So I almost followed him back to the rez. But then I didn't. Because the thing you learn as a hugely ambitious Indian is that you're often going to be the only Indian in the room, so you'd better get used to it.



*"Green Walking Path" by Ren Wang (@r1g) is licensed under CC0.*

A couple of weeks before school started, my mother's brother, Leonard Cox, had died of cirrhosis.<sup>1</sup> He was a gregarious<sup>2</sup> alcoholic and gave me one dollar bills whenever he saw me. At the end, his belly was so distended<sup>3</sup> and black that my mother said, "He looked like an orca."

So I walked into that new school with multiple griefs. As I lost my uncle, I had also untethered<sup>4</sup> myself from my

1. a condition in which the liver does not function properly due to long-term damage, typically caused by alcohol-abuse
2. **Gregarious** (*adjective*) sociable
3. swollen due to pressure from inside; bloated
4. **Untether** (*adjective*) to release or free

tribe. I was terrified. And then it got worse.

On October 22, 1980, only a few weeks into school, my mother's mother, Etta Adams, Big Mom, died of cancer.

- [5] Big Mom's funeral was so crowded with Indian family, friends, and strangers that I was able to sneak out and walk home to mourn alone. Before she'd died, Big Mom had given me a battery-powered wall clock that didn't work even with batteries. Yes, my dying grandmother had gifted me a hell of a metaphor. But I wasn't thinking about metaphors on that day. I lay on my bed, held that stopped clock against my chest, and mourned.

Like my mother, I would often turn sleep into a weapon of self-defense. Or, if unable to sleep, I would throw the blankets over my face, turn toward the nearest wall, and pretend to sleep. Like my mother, I would turn my insomnia—my inability to sleep—into a weapon.

After her mother's funeral, my mother stayed in bed for two days.

Then, early in January 1981, less than three months after Big Mom's death, we learned that my big sister, Mary McCoy, and her husband, Steve McCoy, had died in a trailer-house fire in St. Ignatius, Montana. The fire started during a party. My sister and my brother-in-law were drunkenly passed out in the back bedroom and had no chance to escape. Mary was my half sister. We shared our mother, Lillian. Mary was only twenty-seven years old when she died.

In six months, my mother had lost her mother, daughter, and brother. I was not a superstitious kid but I worried that I had jinxed our family when I'd left the rez school. But then I reasoned, "Hey, I still live on the rez. I just go to a different school. There's no reason for our family to be cursed."

- [10] Today, as a non superstitious adult, I still worry that I'm at fault. It's a ridiculous narcissistic<sup>5</sup> worry, but real nonetheless.

At my sister's funeral, my mother tried to climb into her coffin. My mother screamed in the tribal language. She wailed in English.

My mother screamed, "Mother!"

My mother screamed, "Brother!"

My mother screamed, "Daughter!"

- [15] My mother collapsed and said my sister's name.

She said, "Mary. O Mary, Mary, O my daughter, O Mary."

Of course, it was a prayer. That prayer sounded so powerful that I wondered if my mother might bring my sister back to life.

5. **Narcissistic** (*adjective*) having an excessive interest in oneself and appearance



But she didn't.

Nobody has that kind of power.

[20] Even God has brought back only a fistful of people.

And my mother was not God.

Then my mother wailed so loudly that I thought she'd snapped her ribs. I think something broke inside her. But not something anatomical.<sup>6</sup> I believe that she broke her capacity to fully love the rest of her children. Or maybe to fully love me. Or maybe to fully love herself. That audible snap I heard—that crack of bone—was maybe her soul snapping in half.

That night, I traveled back to Reardan to play in a basketball game. I scored seventeen first-quarter points in a frenzied, irrational burst as I dribbled end to end without sense, fired up impossible shots that went in, and shoved my opponents and teammates into walls and to the floor. At the end of the quarter, I was enraged and exhausted. And I screamed at my teammates. My coach benched me after my outburst and I became a spectator for the rest of the game.

Afterward, in the locker room, my coach said, "I'm sorry I sat you. But you were playing too hard. You were going to hurt yourself. Or somebody else."

[25] "It's okay, Coach," I said. "You were right."

"You didn't have to play tonight," he said.

"Yes, I did," I said. "This is my team now. These are my teammates."

I was talking in sports metaphors. But I was also talking about my tribal allegiances.<sup>7</sup> My brilliant sister had died drunk in a fire. I feared—I knew—that I would die violently like that if I ever returned to my rez. I would die in a fire. In a car wreck. In a brawl. By my own hand. At that moment, sitting in that white-school locker room with my white coach and white teammates, I knew I would never again fully be a part of my reservation. I knew I was going to be a nomad.<sup>8</sup>

I decided to live.

[30] Later, after the game, when I returned home to the rez, my mother was sedated<sup>9</sup> and asleep in the back bedroom.

I stood in the doorway and listened to her breathe.

6. **Anatomical** (*adjective*) relating to body structure

7. **Allegiance** (*noun*) loyalty or commitment to a group or cause

8. a person who does not stay long in the same place; a wanderer; a person with no permanent home

9. **Sedate** (*verb*) to make someone calm or sleep with the assistance of a prescription drug

I mourned with her and for her. She'd lost her mother, brother, and daughter to the next world.

And I understood that she'd also lost me.

She didn't cry out my name. She didn't whisper it.

[35] I was now a ghost in her world. She was already haunted by who I might have become. Awake, I wept. My mother, still asleep, reached her hand toward somebody only she could see.

I whispered, "I love you," and walked, grief-drunk and afraid, into the rest of my life.

*From You Don't Have to Say You Love Me by Sherman Alexie. Copyright © 2017. Reprinted by permission of Little, Brown, & Company, an imprint of Hachette Book Group, Inc.*

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## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. Which statement best expresses a theme of the text?
  - A. Younger siblings tend to follow older siblings, even when they have different friends and interests.
  - B. Life-changing decisions are not often difficult to make but could lead to feelings of guilt later in life.
  - C. The decision to make a life change is difficult and people may feel guilty for leaving a life or community behind.
  - D. The loss of an immediate family member causes intense grief, leading to some people making life-changing decisions.
  
2. What impact does the word "nomad," in paragraph 28, have on the overall meaning of the text?
  - A. It proves that the narrator is no longer welcome on the reservation.
  - B. It emphasizes that the narrator does not want to leave home but has no other choice.
  - C. It stresses that the narrator must choose between the reservation school and his new school.
  - D. It demonstrates that the narrator no longer feels a sense of belonging, or at home, on the reservation.
  
3. How does Mary's death most affect the narrator?
  - A. It changes the relationship between the narrator and his brother.
  - B. It leads to the narrator having a stronger relationship with his mother.
  - C. It causes the narrator to consider what could happen to him if he doesn't leave the reservation.
  - D. It prevents the narrator from making friends on the reservation, forcing him to befriend his teammates.
  
4. Which detail from the story provides the best clue that the narrator's relationship with his mother changed after his sister's death?
  - A. "Today, as a non superstitious adult, I still worry that I'm at fault. It's a ridiculous narcissistic worry" (Paragraph 10)
  - B. "I believe that she broke her capacity to fully love the rest of her children. Or maybe to fully love me." (Paragraph 22)
  - C. "I mourned with her and for her." (Paragraph 32)
  - D. "She didn't cry out my name. She didn't whisper it." (Paragraph 34)

