The Three Day Blow

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Ernest Hemingway was raised in a suburb of Chicago. In high school, he developed an affinity for writing and edited his school's newspaper and yearbook. Upon graduation, he began his life as a journalist, taking a job as a reporter for the *Kansas City Star*. He enlisted in World War I and served as an ambulance driver on the Italian front, though he was discharged in 1918 after being seriously wounded. He published his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, in 1926, followed by seven more novels as well as short stories and non-fiction works. He is known for his distinctively lean, sparse prose, which had a profound influence on 20th-century fiction. He is also known for his adventurous life, in which he lived in Paris, New York, Cuba, Africa, Key West, and the Caribbean, and got married four times, all while writing fiction and reporting as a journalist on the Spanish Civil War and World War II. Many of his life experiences were captured in his novels. He was dubbed a member of the Lost Generation while living in Paris among expatriate artists and writers including Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Pablo Picasso. He died in 1961 in Key West by a self-inflicted gunshot. Hemingway's novels are considered classics of American literature, and he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In "The Three-Day Blow," Nick and Bill discuss baseball facts from the early 1900s, including the trade of infielder Heinie Zimmerman (also known as "The Great Zim") to the New York Giants in August of 1916 under the team's manager John McGraw, who is also mentioned in the story. Nick and Bill's conversation about Heinie Zimmerman place the story in or around 1916. During this period, baseball was fast becoming established as a popular sport in the social culture of the Northeast United States. The boys also mention wanting to attend the World Series, an annual championship series of Major League Baseball. The first World Series took place in October 1903, a little over a decade before "The Three-Day Blow" takes place. Nick and Bill also discuss a number of novels published between 1898 and 1916, including Hugh Walpole's *Fortitude* and *The Dark Forest*, as well as G. K. Chesterton's *The Flying Inn*. These historical details situate the story as a World War I narrative about young men in the United States, consequently reinforcing the association of its characters with the youths of the Lost Generation.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Writing between World War I and World War II, Hemingway was part of what is known as the Lost Generation. These writers are known as having become disillusioned with traditional American values (like work, savings, marriage, and domestic life) after experiencing war and feeling aimless, or "lost." Their writing often featured themes relating to this worldview, such as loss, love, death, travel, angst, and decadence. Other examples of literature from the Lost Generation include Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1928) and Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). "The Three-Day Blow" is one of several short stories featuring Hemingway's semi-autobiographical alter ego, Nick Adams, that were published between 1925 and 1933, loosely based on Hemingway's personal life experiences. "The Three-Day Blow" was originally published in *In Our Time*, Hemingway's first collection of short stories. "The Three-Day Blow" follows on from another short story called "The End of Something," which depicts Nick's breakup with Marjorie (which he dwells on after the fact in "The Three-Day Blow"). Additional vignettes featuring the character of Nick were compiled and published posthumously in *The Nick Adams Stories*. "The Three-Day Blow" also bears some thematic resemblance to Hemingway's "Indian Camp" (another story following Nick Adams), which defines masculinity narrowly in terms of a man's ability to mask his emotions, which is similar to how Nick and Bill conceive of it in "The Three-Day Blow."

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Three-Day Blow
- **When Written:** Early 1920s
- **Where Written:** Paris, France
- **When Published:** 1925
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Short Story
- **Setting:** A cabin in rural Michigan around 1916.
- **Climax:** Nick and Bill, both drunk, head out of the cabin to go shooting. Nick is hopeful, having secretly resolved to seek a reconciliation Marjorie, but decides to put the issue out of his mind for now.
- **Antagonist:** Bill
- **Point of View:** Third-Person Omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Lost Generation. Gertrude Stein first used the term "lost generation" when describing Hemingway and other writers (including F. Scott Fitzgerald) in her artistic circle in Paris in the 1920s.

Teenage Love. The character of Marjorie is based on Hemingway's childhood friend Marjorie Bump, whom he had a relationship with during his teenage years.

PLOT SUMMARY

The story's protagonist, Nick, arrives at his friend Bill's cabin. It's the beginning of fall, and an early fall **storm** is starting to blow in. Nick picks a Wagner apple and puts it in the pocket of his Mackinaw coat. The pair sit down by the fire and drink whisky. Bill notices that Nick isn't wearing socks, and he fetches some, warning Nick not to dent the fire grate with his big feet.

The boys talk first about baseball, discussing the current season, including the trade of Heine Zim to the Giants. Soon the conversation switches to focus on activities that both boys love: reading, fishing, and drinking. They talk about new books they are reading as they refill their glasses several times. They toast to their favorite writers, including Chesterton and Walpole, and agree that if the writers were here they would take them fishing.

The boys discuss their fathers. Bill thinks his father, who is a painter has had a bit of a tough time in life. Nick thinks that his father, who is a doctor that doesn't drink, has missed out on a lot in life.

Both boys are keen to show they can handle their liquor, so they perform practical tasks. Nick fetches a log for the fire, and when he knocks some apricots on the floor he picks them up. He's proud of himself for being practical. Bill weighs in on which logs Nick should bring, also proud of himself that he's being practical. Despite their bravado about drinking, both characters are becoming more intoxicated—so intoxicated, in fact, that when Nick walks by a mirror he cannot recognize his own reflection.

Bill switches topics to Nick's recent breakup with a girl named Marjorie, saying that Nick was wise to call off the relationship. Nick halfheartedly agrees, but sits quietly as Bill goes on to explain that commitments like marriage undermine a man's freedom. Once a man is married, Bill argues, he has to work all day to support his family, and he has to socialize with his in-laws all the time.

While Bill is talking, the viewpoint of the story shifts to Nick's internal perspective. Though he hasn't said anything to Bill, Nick is secretly distraught about losing Marjorie. He dwells on how hard it is to face this loss, comparing the pain of the relationship being over to the violence of the storm outside.

Nick explains to Bill that the breakup felt very sudden, and he's sorry about it but he felt like he had no choice because of Marjorie's overbearing mother. Bill agrees and warns Nick not to get involved with Marjorie again.

Suddenly, Nick feels hopeful. He had not thought about this before, and the possibility makes him feel better. He thinks about going into town on Saturday, but says nothing about this to Bill.

Bill is confident that he has advised Nick well to stay away from Marjorie, while Nick's mood is elevated by the prospect of getting her back. The pair head outside for some shooting, and Nick decides to put off thinking about what he will do for the moment, feeling that the wind blew his worries out of his head.

CHARACTERS

Nick – Nick is the story's protagonist and Bill's close friend. He is a young man who is visiting Bill at Bill's father's cottage in Michigan, around 1916, just as an early fall **storm** is blowing in. Like Bill, Nick is fond of literature, baseball, and fishing. As they drink whisky, Bill and Nick toast to their favorite writers and talk about the virtues of being free and independent men who are untethered by worries like marriage, saving money, and the shallow chatter of domestic life. As the young men get increasingly drunk, Nick becomes eager to show Bill that he can hold his liquor like a "real" man and tries to prove this by doing "practical" tasks like fetching logs for the fire. Although he tries to appear traditionally masculine, masking his emotions and trumpeting the value of independence, Nick's inner monologue reveals that he is heartbroken over his breakup with a girl named Marjorie. Although Nick was the one who broke up with her—he was hesitant about committing to married life and its social demands—he feels like he made a mistake. Bill, however, is convinced that Nick dodged a bullet by avoiding a commitment to Marjorie. Nick agrees with Bill outwardly, but internally, he is distraught about losing Marjorie, comparing the brutality of his loss to the fierceness of the storm outside. He wistfully thinks of the plans they had made to travel together in Europe. As the story unfolds, Nick wrestles with his love for Marjorie and his desire to appease Bill, a conflict that is reflected in the difference between his internal monologue and his external dialogue. As Bill continues to denigrate marriage and warns Nick to not get back into a relationship with Marge, Nick is suddenly heartened, realizing that no end is final and no break is irreparable. With this realization, Nick secretly vows to go into town—presumably to visit Marjorie and make amends—the following week. He says nothing about this to Bill, perhaps not wanting to seem vulnerable and thus unmanly in front of his friend.

Bill – Bill is Nick's close friend. Like Nick, Bill is passionate about literature, fishing, and drinking—all activities that Bill thinks "real" men enjoy. Like Nick, he is eager to show off how much he knows about these topics, and that he can handle his liquor. Bill is the dominant character in the dialogue, as he bosses Nick around and drives the conversation as the pair drinks whisky. Bill's father is a painter who's also fond of drinking. Nick's father, on the other hand, is a doctor who

doesn't drink. Both agree that Nick's father missed out on a lot in life, though Bill darkly notes that his father can be "wild." This provides insight into the kinds of male role models both young men have in their lives: the temperamental artist and the sensible doctor. The character's fathers seem to represent the two types of lives the boys are weighing up when Bill brings up the topic of Nick's recent breakup with Marjorie. Bill feels strongly that relationships with women are trouble. He thinks that marriage makes men weak and unmanly, and that it pushes them into dull lives focused on the daily grind of work, saving money, and entertaining extended family. Instead, he thinks men should be free and independent to drink, read, write, and fish. Bill expresses his views to Nick, saying it was a good thing that Nick broke up with Marjorie, or Nick would have ended up like that, too. Bill is oblivious to the fact that Nick is secretly heartbroken but is clearly uncomfortable expressing his true feelings to Bill, no doubt because he doesn't want to seem emotionally vulnerable, and therefore unmanly. Hemingway uses the contrast between Nick's internal distress and dismissive outward demeanor to reflect the way young men in this time feel pressured to repress their emotions and embrace a stoic, masculine demeanor. After warning Nick not to get mixed up with Marjorie again, Bill feels satisfied that he has given Nick solid advice, even though internally Nick is planning to do the exact opposite and try and get Marjorie back.

Marjorie ("Marge") – Nick's ex-girlfriend. Although Marjorie is not physically present in the story, Nick and Bill talk about her as they drink, and she consumes Nick's thoughts. Nick called off his relationship with Marge because he was hesitant about committing to the social demands of married life, such as having to see her mother all the time. Bill thinks marriage "ruins" men and is adamant that Nick did the right thing by avoiding an engagement. And although Nick says he agrees, internally he is heartbroken. When Bill cautions Nick against getting mixed up with Marjorie again, Nick suddenly realizes that their breakup perhaps wasn't as final as he thought. Buoyed by this new hope, Nick secretly vows to go into town next week, presumably to visit Marjorie and see if he can make amends.

Bill's Father – Bill's father is painter who drinks heavily and "gets a little wild sometimes." Like Bill, he also enjoys shooting, and he is outside shooting for the duration of the story. He appears to be a fairly lax father, as lets his son drink alcohol freely as long as he only drinks from bottles that are already open. The boys idealize the type of life Bill's father lives as an artist who drinks and engages in outdoorsy activities like shooting, though Bill is aware that his father has had a "rough" time.

Nick's Father – Nick's father is a doctor who claims to have never consumed alcohol in his life. Nick and Bill agree that Nick's father has "missed a lot" from his sensible life choices. These types of life choices are exactly what Nick and especially Bill worry will drain the meaning from their lives. Nick's worry about living a sensible life is what pushes him to break things off with Marjorie, despite being in love with her.

Ida – Ida is a girl who "works for the Strattons" that Bill mentions in passing when cautioning Nick that Marjorie wasn't the sort of girl he should marry. Similarly, Bill thinks Ida would not be a suitable match for himself, noting that "oil and water" don't mix. It's not entirely clear why Bill looks down on these young women, though it's implied that they seem like small-town girls who would tie both young men down to practical, boring lives.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

MASCULINITY, INDEPENDENCE, AND VULNERABILITY

In "The Three-Day Blow," Bill is a young man who idealizes manliness as independence from the commitments of marriage, money, and work. Bill celebrates fishing, writing, and above all, holding his liquor as he drinks whisky with his friend Nick, the story's protagonist. Nick seems to agree on the surface. However, as Nick becomes more intoxicated, he realizes that this picture of manliness feels meaningless, and he is regretful in the face of his grief at ending his relationship with a girl named Marjorie. Nick is hesitant to verbalize these thoughts, though, opting to remain silent when Bill declares that Nick did the right thing by breaking up with Marjorie. Nick's relief at being able hide his true thoughts and desires, along with Bill's emphasis on personal agency, suggest that both characters think emotional stoicism and independence are essential components of a man's ability to feel secure in his masculinity. By exposing the dissonance between Nick's genuine feelings and his desire to appear manly, Hemingway demonstrates that upholding such a narrow image of masculinity often requires young men to mask their vulnerability by devaluing romantic relationships and repressing their emotions.

Nick and Bill idealize manliness as being free to fish, read, write, and drink. Both characters are eager to be seen like this in each other's eyes. They idealize literature and fishing when toasting to writers like Walpole and Chesterton as they drink. Bill wonders if Chesterton likes to fish, and Nick responds, "Sure," before continuing, "He must be about the best guy there is." This implies that the boys see writing and fishing as admirable activities that they associate with manliness. Bill and Nick are

also eager to prove their masculinity to each other by showing that they can handle their liquor. They do so by demonstrating that they are capable of performing "practical" tasks like fetching logs for the fire while drunk. Likewise, Hemingway describes how proud Nick is that he can pick up spilled apricots while drunk. This tongue-in-cheek passage juxtaposes Nick's feelings of pride and bravado with achieving a comically simple task. This reminds the reader that although the boys aspire to be seen as "real" men, they are really still just boys pretending to embody the vision of masculinity they idealize.

Nick and Bill's conversation about married life shows that their idea of masculinity is incompatible with their understanding of marriage. This makes Nick realize that he cannot be seen as ideally masculine while expressing his love for Marjorie. Bill also makes it difficult for Nick to voice his feelings, as he associates the burdens of married life with "ruin." Hemingway uses profanity in Bill's dialogue to emphasize how passionately Bill associates manliness with independence, and marriage with its downfall. Bill declares, "Once a man's married he's absolutely bitched" and "He hasn't got anything more. Nothing. Not a damn thing," suggesting that a man's ability to maintain his individuality is a crucial part of being masculine. Bill's description of married men as taking on a "sort of fat married look" physically reinforces his portrait of the married man as unmanly. Discussing Nick's breakup, Bill points out, "If you'd gone on that way we wouldn't be here now." Nick tacitly agrees, noting in his head (perhaps more with regret than relief) that if they were still together, he would have moved nearer to Marjorie by now. Bill's declaration reinforces the notion that relationships with women limit manly independence. This attitude makes Nick feel that he is betraying his true feelings for Marjorie and stifling his emotions in favor of appearing stoic and masculine.

Nick's inner monologue explicitly reveals the conflict between his feelings for Marjorie and the outward expression of manliness that Nick and Bill have been celebrating. Nick realizes his fear of losing Marjorie as Bill denigrates marriage; however, instead of saying anything, Nick merely becomes quiet. His participation in the conversation recedes from the occasional "sure" to nothing at all. Nick's reaction shows that he is uncomfortable sharing his emotional vulnerability with Bill because he thinks it will make him seem unmanly. Through Nick's tepid responses to Bill's sweeping pronouncements about the dangers of marriage, Hemingway suggests that there is no room for emotional depth in the view of masculinity the boys have been idealizing.

When Bill warns Nick that he should be careful not to slip back into the relationship again, Nick inwardly expresses hope at the prospect, but says nothing to Bill. Nick's ironic phrase "There's always a chance" implies agreement with Bill's worry that it would be a mistake for Nick to get back with Marjorie, whilst simultaneously betraying Nick's inward hope to do so.

Ultimately, Nick hides his feelings, opting to put the "Marge business" out of his mind, at least for now. Here, Hemingway implies that Nick is only appeasing Bill so that he does not appear unmanly, and that his inner conflict will continue as long as he forces himself to conform to this stoic masculine persona rather than be honest about his feelings.

Hemingway thus uses the juxtaposition of Nick's internal monologue and his actual interactions with Bill to portray a conflict between acknowledging emotions and wanting to appear masculine. Hemingway's use of humor and irony underscore this dissonance between narrow perceptions of manhood as dependent on independence and emotional stoicism, and the very real emotions that young men often feel forced to repress.

LOSS AND HOPE

In "The Three-Day Blow," Nick, the protagonist, is drinking with his friend Bill at Bill father's cabin. Their drunken conversation betrays little substance, as they rotate through superficial topics like baseball, alcohol, and the weather. However, Nick's feeling of powerlessness in the face of adulthood are evident beneath the surface of the trivial matters they are discussing. He thinks despondently about his recently ended relationship, implicitly comparing it to the brutal nature of the **storm** outside, but he is pacified by the thought that although the chaotic nature of life brings about abrupt endings, it carries with it the possibility that anything can happen. This idea is echoed throughout the story with descriptions of the cyclical nature of existence, like the "second-growth" logs piled in front of the trees outside the cabin. Thus, the narrative asserts that feelings of futility in the face of loss still give cause for optimism, because no ending is absolute: another storm could blow through and shake everything up again.

Nick despairs about his breakup with Marjorie when comparing its finality to the brutality of the storm. His feelings of futility in the face of his recent breakup are captured in his comparison of the "sudden" nature of the relationship's end and the devastation of storms like the "three-day blow." Nick says, "All of a sudden everything was over," before continuing, "Just like when the three-day blows come now and rip all the leaves off the trees." This comparison shows that Nick feels as powerless about the breakup as he does the storm, despite having chosen to end the relationship. Nick's shock at his relationship with Marjorie being over is captured in the word "gone," which he repeats throughout his internal monologue. The repetition conveys Nick's shock at the finality of his breakup with Marjorie much in the way that tree branches can be full of leaves until a storm blows through: the leaves are suddenly ripped off and cannot be put back in place.

Despite Nick's feelings of loss and hopelessness, Bill inadvertently prompts him to realize that this ending has

triggered the possibility of a new beginning. When Bill warns Nick to avoid slipping back into the relationship, Nick is suddenly comforted by the realization that no ending is final. Nick's realization is captured in his reflection that "Nothing was finished. Nothing was ever lost." The realization is paired with an explicit shift in mood from despair to optimism in Nick's internal monologue. Rather than viewing the breakup as a tragedy, Nick's shift in perspective suggests that an individual's view of their circumstances comes down to choice, and that even situations that seem "lost" can be reframed as a new beginning. Hemingway narrates, "He felt happy now. There was not anything that was irrevocable." This idea is visually reflected in the "second-growth" logs piled in front of the trees outside the cabin. These logs, which signify regrowth after a timber harvest, represent Nick's newfound hope in starting again and having another chance with Marjorie. This is also reflected in the way that Nick and Bill depict the fall storms in a positive light. Nick says, "It's good when the fall storms come, isn't it?" This subtly questions the finality that Nick later associates with the storm. Storms, like seasons, come and go, and things continue to exist and grow despite the initial destructive changes that the storms bring about. By the end of the story, the power of the storm is reframed as a positive, rather than destructive thing: Nick is relieved that the wind has metaphorically blown his worries about Marjorie out of his head. This symbolizes Nick's shift in mood from despair and worry to hope and peace of mind. Hemingway draws a comparison between the "three-day blow" of the storm and Nick's feelings of loss and desolation in order to convey the sense of destruction and powerlessness that can occur in the midst of a breakup. But by extending this association to encompass the regrowth that a storm often facilitates, the story posits that there is always a choice to reframe loss as something positive, as it ultimately opens up new opportunities for an individual.

THE LOST GENERATION

In "The Three-Day Blow," Hemingway's detailed descriptions of the setting connote a palpable sense of time and place. Such details from the narrative reflect Hemingway's characteristic fusing of autobiographic details about his life with fictional characters. In effect, "The Three-Day Blow" (much like Hemingway's other writing) not only serves to tell a specific story about two young men, but it also extends beyond the characters and their particular situations to connote the generational angst of the Lost Generation. This generation of youths, including Hemingway himself, came of age in between World War I and World War II and became disillusioned with traditional American values because these conventions seemed hollow, materialistic, and devoid of meaning after the wartime atrocities they had witnessed. Without such values to ground their life choices, many felt aimless, and therefore "lost," much like Nick, who feels confused and aimless in the story. By including autobiographical details of his own life and portraying common struggles of disillusionment and unfulfillment through Nick and Bill in the narrative, Hemingway uses the story as a small-scale representation of the issues that plagued the Lost Generation.

At the outset of the story, Hemingway sets up the narrative with descriptive details that place the story in the Northeastern United States in approximately 1916, lining up geographically and historically with the youths of the Lost Generation, including Hemingway himself. Geographic signposts include Nick picking a "Wagner" apple on his way to Bill's cottage and putting it in the pocket of his "Mackinaw" coat. The apple and type of coat are typical of the Michigan region. This is reinforced by Nick's reference to "Ten Mile Point," which is on the shores of Lake Michigan. Thus, the story's setting is established as quintessential to the American Northeast, making it familiar and relatable to audiences in the United States. Soon after, the story is also placed in time—approximately in 1916—through Nick and his friend Bill's discussion about major league baseball games from that era, and actual novels (such as Walpole's 1906 *The Dark Forest*). Although published after World War I, setting the story in 1916 establishes it as a World War I narrative, in which Nick and Bill can be inferred to be struggling with the same issues of confusion, discontentment, and alienation that affected youths during this difficult era in history. Similarly, aspects of the narrative—such as Nick's almost denting the fire grate with his big feet—connote memoir-like associations with Hemingway himself, who was known for having large feet, as well as the use of the name Marjorie for the character of Nick's ex-girlfriend. Hemingway also had a relationship with a girl named Marjorie in his youth. The story thus grounds a fictional story in the historical context of the Lost Generation, including Hemingway himself. In this way, Hemingway allows the reader to see the interactions between Nick and Bill as fiction, yet also representative of general experiences that the Lost Generation's young men might have had.

The story deals with two issues commonly associated with the Lost Generation: disillusionment with the conventions of work and married life (represented in Bill's dialogue), and the search for meaning and emotional fulfillment in life (captured in Nick's inner monologue). Thus, the story extends beyond the fictional context of two specific characters to communicate more universal social themes and worries that preoccupied the Lost Generation. Bill considers marriage problematic because it carries with it the burden of working in order to save for marriage, and presumably a house and children. Nick tacitly agrees, reflecting in his internal monologue that if he was still with Marjorie, he would have had to look for a job and stay in Charlevoix, where Marjorie lives. Whereas previous American

generations glorified hard work and upheld the nuclear family structure, Bill and Nick's unenthusiastic attitudes reflect the Lost Generation's struggles to make sense of antiquated traditions in a war-torn, rapidly shifting, and modernizing society.

Bill also implies that the social chatter of domestic life is repetitive and tedious. He says, "Imagine having them around the house all the time and going to Sunday dinners at their house, and having them over to dinner and her telling Marge all the time what to do and how to act." Nick agrees when he says, "I'm sorry as hell about her but what could I do? [...] You know what her mother was like!" Nick exposes his reluctance to embrace the social demands of a marriage with Marjorie as the reason why he ended the relationship (despite being in love with her), further emphasizing the cynicism and lack of commitment present among young men of the Lost Generation. Yet when Nick fantasizes about being with Marjorie, he wistfully imagines them traveling to Italy, having fun, and exploring new places. This juxtaposition implies that Nick wants to acknowledge his feelings for Marjorie but is hesitant to take on the conventions of domestic life that romantic commitment demands. This suggests that members of Lost Generation like Nick desired the emotional fulfilment of romantic relationships, but the trauma they experienced as youths growing up in wartime likely left them feeling that settling down, getting married, and working day jobs to pay the bills would be unmeaningful and unfulfilling.

Hemingway includes personal and characteristically American details in "The Three-Day Blow" in order to establish it as a narrative that broadly tells the story of an entire generation, rather than merely the story of two young men. He leverages Nick's internal distress to capture the conflict between seeking emotional fulfilment in love while being disillusioned with the demands of conventional domestic life. Through the ambivalent voices of Bill and Nick, Hemingway thus communicates the issues that the Lost Generation's young men typically wrestled with when emerging from adolescence into adulthood.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE STORM

The storm, which the characters refer to as the "three-day blow," represents the feelings that the protagonist, Nick, goes through as he grapples with his recent breakup with a girl named Marjorie: namely, shock, despair, and powerlessness. Bill and Nick first refer to the storm at the start of the story, noting that it marks the change in the seasons from summer to fall. When Nick discusses his breakup, he compares the brutal suddenness of the relationship ending—signaling a new "season" of life for him—to the sudden onset of an early autumn storm. Nick says, "All of a sudden everything was over," before continuing, "I don't know why it was. I couldn't help it. Just like when the three-day blows come now and rip all the leaves off the trees." Here, the storm represents Nick's feelings of powerlessness, bewilderment, and shock at this sudden loss in his life. Despite having initiated the breakup, he feels as if his feelings took on a force of their own.

However, near the end of the story, the storm represents Nick's newfound sense of hope and clarity. When Nick realizes he might be able to get Marjorie back, he suddenly feels a palpable sense of relief. Hemingway captures the shift in Nick's mood from despair to relief with a new metaphor using the storm. He reflects, "Outside now the Marge business was no longer so tragic. It was not even very important. The wind blew everything like that away." Here, the storm stands for Nick's ability to clear his head and gain a little perspective.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon and Schuster edition of *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* published in 1987.

The Three-Day Blow Quotes

Nick stopped and picked up a Wagner apple from beside the road, shiny in the brown grass from the rain. He put the apple in the pocket of his Mackinaw coat.

Related Characters: Nick

Related Themes:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes from the beginning of the story, as Nick makes his way to Bill's house. In this passage, Hemingway pointedly references details that situate the story in the Northeastern United States. The Wagner apple is a traditional American apple associated with orchards in the Northeast, and the Mackinaw coat—named after the Mackinaw region in Michigan—is a heavy, water resistant wool coat that was popular in the early 20th century, often designed with a plaid pattern. This informs the reader that the story is set in a specific time and place: the Northeastern United States, possibly in the early twentieth century. Also, "Three-Day Blow" is one of many Hemingway stories about Nick Adams, many of which are set in

Michigan. Given this context, plus the references to the Northeast, readers can assume that this story is set in Michigan as well.

Hemingway takes great care to establish the quintessentially American setting throughout the story because his characters, Nick and Bill, represent the American youth more broadly. The story builds into one about the generational angst of young Americans of the Lost Generation, disillusioned with traditional values and conventional ways of life.

> In back was the garage, the chicken coop and the second-growth timber like a hedge against the woods behind. The big trees swayed far over in the wind is he watched. It was the first of the autumn storms.

Related Characters: Bill, Nick

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

As the protagonist Nick approaches his friend Bill's cottage, Hemingway describes the space around the cottage, pointedly referencing the "second-growth timber" stacked in front of the trees forming the woods. This metaphor references an important motif about the cyclical nature of existence that recurs in different ways throughout the story. The "second-growth timber" represents the trees growing, being cut for logs, growing a second time, and being cut for logs once more (which are now stacked in front of the woods). In this way Hemingway alludes to the fact that no ending is final; the trees grow, are chopped down, and grow again. The cycle that is reflected here is an important metaphor for the Nick, who—the reader later learns—is initially consumed with grief over the sudden finality of his breakup with a girl named Marjorie, but later feels hopeful for the possibility a fresh start with her.

The "autumn storm" is also mentioned for the first time in this passage. The storm is the story's namesake and is a key symbol throughout the story for Nick's feelings in the wake of his breakup. In this quote, the reader learns that the storm signals the end of summer and the beginning of fall, a reference to the seasons that again points to the cyclical nature of life. The storm thus represents the protagonist Nick's transition from being in a relationship to contemplating his future, or facing a new "season" of his life, now that his relationship has ended.

> The wind was blowing straight down the lake. They could see the surf along Ten Mile point.
>
> "She's blowing," Nick said.
>
> "She'll blow like that for three days," Bill said.

Related Characters: Bill, Nick (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

The story's protagonist, Nick, has just greeted his friend Bill on the porch of Bill's father's cottage. Once again, Hemingway mentions geographic signposts that clue the reader in to the setting of the story. Hemingway's mention of the "lake" and "Ten Mile point" indicate that the story is set in Michigan, and the cottage is likely on the shores of Lake Superior. This is an important biographical detail that shows Hemingway is drawing on his own life experiences to ground the story, as he spent many summers of his adolescence in northern Michigan. This reference highlights that even though the story is fictional, it is grounded in a real historical setting. The issues that the characters face as the story unfolds—such as grappling with their emotions, wanting to appear masculine, and contemplating the kind of life that feels meaningful to them—can also be seen as representing the kinds of issues that young American men faced in the time of Hemingway's youth.

Bill comments that the storm will blow for "three days," and the reader learns where the story gets it title from. This detail metaphorically alludes once again to the natural ebb and flow of life. Bill recognizes this sort of storm, and knows that it will likely blow for a few days and pass over. Later in the story, the protagonist Nick will also allude to his feelings blowing "out" of his head, signifying that he is going through a change that feels like an ending, but also a new beginning.

"It's got a swell, smoky taste," Nick said, and looked at the fire through the glass.

"That's the peat," Bill said.

"You can't get peat into liquor," Nick said.

"That doesn't make any difference." Bill said.

"You ever seen any peat?" Nick asked.

"No," said Bill.

"Neither have I," Nick said.

Related Characters: Bill, Nick (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

The story's central characters, Nick and Bill, have just walked into the cottage and decided to have a drink. They continue to drink heavily throughout the story, and, as with many of the topics they discuss, both boys are eager to show off their knowledge. Over the course of the story, it becomes clear that Nick and Bill associate drinking with masculinity, and admire men who can handle their liquor. However, Hemingway's description—of the boys bickering about the taste of the whisky, combined with their admissions that neither of them have ever seen the "peat" that Bill thinks is responsible for the smoky taste—shows that both boys want to appear more knowledgeable about drinking, and thus more grown up, than they really are. In other words, Nick and Bill are acting like grown men who know about such things, but they are still just boys.

Bill came down with a pair of heavy wool socks.

"It's getting too late to go around without socks," he said.

"I hate to start them again," Nick said. He pulled the socks on and slumped back in the chair, putting his feet up on the screen in front of the fire.

"You'll dent in the screen," Bill said. Nick swung his feet over to the side of the fireplace.

Related Characters: Bill, Nick (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

Nick and Bill have been drinking whisky by the fire, and Bill has just fetched socks for Nick, who is not wearing any. As Bill scolds Nick about this, readers get the sense that Bill is the dominant character in the friendship, while Nick passively goes along with whatever Bill says. As the story continues to unfold, Bill drives the topics of conversation and imparts unsolicited advice about Nick's life. Nick's quiet following of Bill's commands here sets up a pattern that will repeat itself throughout the story. Nick often silently complies with Bill outwardly while privately experiencing conflicting thoughts and emotions that he does not communicate to Bill. Nick's desire to appease Bill seems to be one of the reasons he has such difficulty voicing his emotions.

Hemingway's reference to Bill scolding Nick about denting the fire grate with his feet is another autobiographical clue that Hemingway is drawing on his own life: Hemingway was known for have big feet. This once again situates the story as a fictional narrative that nonetheless represents the generation of young American men growing up in the time of Hemingway's youth.

"As long as McGraw can buy every good ball player in the league there's nothing to it."

"He can't buy them all," Nick said.

"He buys all the ones he wants," Bill said. "Or he makes them discontented so they have to trade them to him."

"Like Heinie Zim," Nick agreed.

Related Characters: Bill, Nick (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Nick and Bill's conversation turns from whisky to baseball. Hemingway draws on historical details from actual Major League Baseball games that ground the story in a specific time. The trade of Heine Zimmerman to the Giants under then manager John McGraw took place in 1916, during a season in which the Giants had a 26-game winning streak. With this detail, Hemingway establishes the timeframe of the story as approximately 1916, in the middle of World War I, which took place from 1914 to 1918. This placing is important because the story functions as a representative narrative for the "lost generation," meaning the young Americans who became adults between World

War I and World War II.

Hemingway's reference to events that are happening during a particular season of baseball draws once again on the theme of seasonality. Baseball, like nature, the weather, and—as will later become apparent—Nick's understanding of the changes in his life as he grieves the end of his relationship are all seasonal in a sense: things may seem like they end, but no end is permanent, and new beginnings are always right around the corner.

"It's good when the fall storms come, isn't it?" Nick said.

"It's swell."

"It's the best time of year," Nick said.

Related Characters: Bill, Nick (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bill and Nick discuss the titular storm as they sip whisky by the fire. Echoing the earlier metaphors of the second-growth timber and the current baseball season, Hemingway returns to the metaphor of the storm. Here, his choice of words like "time of year" emphasize the way the storm functions to mark transition, change, and the cyclical nature of existence. The force of the metaphor is underscored by the placement of this passage, right after the boys' discussion of baseball, which also has seasons that end and begin again. Later, Nick, too, will wrestle with the feeling of finality when his relationship ends—followed by his intention to give the relationship another chance—and this passage foreshadows his own attempt to make metaphors out of the storm.

"Did you read the *Forest Lovers*?"

"Yup. That's the one where they go to bed every night with the naked sword between them [...] What I couldn't ever understand was what good the sword would do [...]"

"It's a symbol," Bill said.

"Sure," said Nick, "but it isn't practical."

"Did you ever read *Fortitude*?"

"It's fine," Nick said [...] "Have you got any more by Walpole?"

"*The Dark Forest*," Bill said.

Related Characters: Bill, Nick (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

After discussing whisky and baseball, Nick and Bill talk about books they have been reading. It's clear that the boys have a genuine passion for reading, as they list a series of books and discuss their opinions about them. Once again, a bit of friendly competition is apparent: Bill is keen to show Nick that he knows more about reading when he points out that Nick has missed the symbolic force of the "sword" lying between two lovers in Maurice Hewlett's *Forest Lovers*. Later in the story, the reader will learn that Nick and Bill take authors—and the pursuit of writing—as meaningful activities that are indicative of masculinity, implying that their quips here are intended as subtle displays of masculinity as well.

Hemingway once again references books and authors that were published in the early 20th century, placing the story—as he does with historical facts about baseball—during World War I. Maurice Hewlett's Forest Lovers was published in 1898, Hugh Walpole's novel *Fortitude* was published in 1913, and Walpole's *The Dark Forest* was published in 1916. This last example places the story in at least 1916, underscoring it as a World War I narrative about young American men and their interests and struggles.

"I guess he's a better guy than Walpole."

"Oh, he's a better guy, all right." Bill said.

"But Walpole's a better writer."

"I don't know," Nick said. "Chesterton's a classic."

"Walpole's a classic, too," Bill insisted.

"I wish we had them both here," Nick said. "We'd take them both fishing to the 'Voix tomorrow."

Related Characters: Nick, Bill (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

Continuing their discussion of authors that they admire, Nick and Bill focus in on G. K. Chesterton and Hugh Walpole, imagining both authors were with them as well. The boys make a point to distinguish between being a good writer and being a good "guy." They both agree that Chesterton is a "better guy" but disagree about who is the better writer, with Bill favoring Walpole and Nick favoring Chesterton. Through this dialogue, Hemingway explicitly informs the reader that the boys consider authors to be admirable not only as writers, but also as men. This lays the groundwork for the idea that for the boys, meaningful and masculine life pursuits center around creative activities like writing. The boys conclude that they would take Chesterton and Walpole fishing, implying that fishing is also considered a masculine activity. In imagining themselves among the company of men they admire, Nick and Bill are exposing their desire to be seen as similar men themselves.

Just as with other historical signposts he has dropped into the story, Hemingway adds G. K. Chesterton into the mix, along with Chesterton's novel *The Flying Inn*, which was published in 1914. Since the boys are discussing a baseball season that occurred during 1916, the reader can infer that Nick and Bill are reading and admiring contemporary literature for their time. This implies they are very much focused on the cultural contributions of their present. This is an important detail because later in the story the boys will question the social culture of marriage and sensible work championed by the pre-war generation of their parents.

"He claims he's never taken a drink in his life," Nick said [...].

"Well, he's a doctor. My old man's a painter. That's different."

"He's missed a lot," Nick said sadly.

"You can't tell," Bill said. "Everything's got its compensations."

"He says he's missed a lot himself," Nick confessed.

"Well, dad's had a tough time." Bill said.

"It all evens up," Nick said.

They sat looking into the fire and thinking of this profound truth.

Related Characters: Bill, Nick (speaker), Bill's Father, Nick's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

The boys have just been discussing authors they admire and refilling their glasses, heavy on the whisky, light on the water. As the conversation shifts to the boys' fathers, readers get the sense that Nick feels quite strongly that his own father, who is a doctor, has "missed [out on] a lot" in life by not drinking. Bill is a little more skeptical. He admits to Nick that his own father's drinking, and perhaps even his father's artistic pursuits, have some shortcomings as well. While it often seems like the boys are blindly celebrating pursuits they admire—like drinking, artistic endeavors, and sports—Bill's comment suggests that he does grasp that there are downsides to making unconventional life choices. This adds a little weight and context to the narrative's emphasis on the broader generational angst of the "lost generation." Many of these youths were disillusioned with living conventional domestic lives after witnessing World War I, and felt compelled to travel, write, and be decadent instead, because they felt aimless, or "lost" without conventional values to ground their life choices. Here, Hemingway is alluding—through the voice of Bill—to the idea that such experiences may be meaningful, but they do not necessarily result in easier or happier lives.

Nick [...] wished to show he could hold his liquor and be practical. Even if his father had never touched a drop Bill was not going to get him drunk before he himself was drunk.

"Bring one of the big beech chunks," Bill said. He was also being consciously practical.

Related Characters: Bill (speaker), Nick

Related Themes:

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Nick is restocking the fire, clearly drunk but trying to pretend that the alcohol has had no effect on him. In this passage, Hemingway makes it explicit that the boys have been drinking so much in order to display their masculinity by showing they can handle their liquor. This is evident in two ways. First, Nick is determined not to reveal how intoxicated he is until Bill becomes intoxicated too. Getting drunk first, it seems, means a person has lost the game of being the one who can handle his liquor the most. Second, they make a show of performing "practical" tasks while drunk, trying to prove that they're just as level-headed as when they're sober. Hemingway's use of the phrase "consciously practical" hones in on the fact that both boys are showing off in order to prove something to each other: Nick attempts to prove his practical skills by fetching a log for the fire, while Bill, similarly, weighs in about which log Nick should bring in for the same reason.

Nick came in with the log through the kitchen and in passing knocked a pan off the kitchen table. He laid the log down and picked up the pan. It had contained dried apricots, soaking in water. He carefully picked up all the apricots off the floor […] He felt quite proud of himself. He had been thoroughly practical.

Related Characters: Nick

Related Themes:

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Nick tries to act clearheaded and normal even though he's extremely intoxicated. Nick's feeling of pride when he manages to pick up dried apricots that he knocked on to the floor implies that he is not only attempting to convince Bill that he is "practical," but also attempting to convince himself. The simplicity of this task adds to the comedy of the scene, as it seems absurd for a person to be proud for doing so little. Both boys are trying to prove that they can handle a lot of alcohol, which they both seem to see as a marker of being a grown up and a truly masculine man. However, this compulsion to be "practical" indicates that the boys are merely posing as adults, and are really just boys playing at being men by attempting to embody the character traits they associate with masculinity.

On his way back to the living room he passed a mirror in the dining room and looked in it. His face looked strange. He smiled at the face in the minor and it grinned back at him. He winked at it and went on. It was not his face but it didn't make any difference.

Related Characters: Nick

Related Themes:

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

So far, the reader has been following Nick and Bill's afternoon of drinking and talking. Both characters have been drinking consistently, and have just attempted to show off they can handle their whisky. Here, Hemingway makes it absolutely explicit for the reader that despite his bravado, Nick is so drunk that he cannot recognize his own reflection. This happens right before Bill switches topics to Nick's breakup with a girl named Marjorie. The placement of this passage is important because it implies that Bill thinks they both need to be drunk to tackle talking about something involving feelings. In the subsequent passage, Bill makes sure of it by pouring out more shots, and toasting to the activities they consider masculine (namely, reading and fishing) before proceeding into emotional territory. This implies that the boys are uncomfortable expressing their feelings and showing their vulnerability to each other.

"You were very wise, Wemedge," Bill said.

"What do you mean?" asked Nick.

"To bust off that Marge business," Bill said.

Related Characters: Bill, Nick (speaker), Marjorie ("Marge")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

Until this point in the story, Nick and Bill have been celebrating the activities they associate with masculinity—namely, drinking, fishing, and reading. Here, Bill abruptly changes topics and brings up Nick's breakup, making it clear that he thinks it was good idea that Nick ended the relationship. Bill goes on to explain that he thinks relationships undermine masculinity, while Nick secretly wrestles with his feelings about the breakup.

In this passage, the character of Marjorie is introduced for the first time. The character is based on the real person Marjorie Bump, whom Hemingway had a relationship with in his teens. Once again, Hemingway draws on details from his own life, situating the character of Nick as a semi-autobiographical alter-ego of sorts. This allows Nick's issues (as he wrestles between his heartbreak and his reluctance to marry) to extend beyond the fictional narrative and take on a symbolic force, representing the issues faced by many young men growing up in Hemingway's time.

"Once a man's married he's absolutely bitched [...] He hasn't got anything more. Nothing. Not a damn thing. He's done for. You've seen the guys that get married. [...] They get this sort of fat married look. They're done for."

Related Characters: Bill (speaker), Marjorie ("Marge"), Nick

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Bill articulates one reason for why he thinks relationships and marriage are problematic. Once a man gets married, he has to work in order to earn money to support his wife and household. For Bill, this is tantamount to having "nothing," or, giving up one's independence. Bill's description of the married man as "fat" shows that Bill thinks relinquishing independence undermines masculinity and vitality. The description conflicts with the boys' idealization of real men as physically active people who do things like fish and shoot. As such, Bill thinks the married man is less of a man overall. Hemingway indicates the strength of Bill's conviction through his repetition of the phrase "done for," as well as Bill's use of profanity, which reveals how passionately he feels about this issue.

"If you'd have married her you would have had to marry the whole family. Remember her mother and that guy she married [...] Imagine having them around the house all the time and going to Sunday dinners at their house, and having them over to dinner and her telling Marge all the time what to do and how to act."

Related Characters: Bill (speaker), Marjorie ("Marge"), Nick

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

This passage exposes another reason why Bill thinks marriage is problematic. For Bill, getting married isn't simply being with a partner that one loves; it means taking on a whole set of social conventions that married life carries with it, especially dealing with the in-laws. Bill emphasizes the repetitive nature of this kind of life by describing Nick and Marjorie going back and forth between their house and Marjorie's mother's house "all the time." Bill also sees these social commitments as undermining a man's freedom. His point here is that not only does a married man have to work all day to support his family and pay for a home, but he also has to spend his free time entertaining extended family, leaving him with little or no time for himself.

"You can't mix oil and water and you can't mix that sort of thing any more than if I'd marry Ida that works for Strattons. She'd probably like it, too."

Related Characters: Bill (speaker), Ida, Marjorie ("Marge"), Nick

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 90-91

Explanation and Analysis

Until this point in the story, Bill has been advising Nick that breaking up with Marjorie was a good idea. In this passage, Bill brings up a girl named Ida, implying that he might have also ended a relationship to avoid the pitfalls of marriage. This second example supports the notion that Nick's situation with Marjorie was not a one-off case. Through this aside about Ida, Hemingway subtly implies that hesitation or outright distain regarding conventions like marriage affected many young men growing up in this time. This alludes to the broader angst of the Lost Generation. Many

of these youths (who became adults in between World War I and World War II) were disillusioned with settling into conventional domestic life because it felt devoid of real meaning to them following their experiences of life in wartime.

Nick said nothing. The liquor had all died out of him and left him alone. Bill wasn't there. He wasn't sitting in front of the fire or going fishing tomorrow with Bill and his dad or anything. He wasn't drunk. It was all gone. All he knew was that he had once had Marjorie and that he had lost her. She was gone and he had sent her away. That was all that mattered. He might never see her again. Probably he never would. It was all gone, finished.

Related Characters: Bill's Father, Bill, Marjorie ("Marge"), Nick

Related Themes:

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

Up to this point in the story, Bill has been advising Nick that marriage is a terrible idea because it undermines a man's independence, and ultimately, masculinity. Nick has been sitting quietly without responding. Here, the focus of the narrative explicitly shifts to Nick's internal monologue. It becomes clear that although Nick has not outwardly communicated anything but agreement with Bill's views, internally he is distraught. The shift in perspective—from a long passage of dialogue to Nick's internal voice—is palpably jarring. While Bill is listing off the countless problems with married life, Nick is focused on a singular feeling: a profound sense of loss. This is emphasized through the phrase, "It was all gone," which is repeated throughout the passage. Is also communicated in the sentence: "All he knew was that he had once had Marjorie and that he had lost her." The same thought is articulated again immediately after, using different words: "She was gone and he had sent her away." This gives the impression that Nick's mind is dwelling on this one thought, regardless of what is happening around him.

Nick's failure to communicate his grief to Bill exposes a tangible dissonance between Nick's inward emotions, and his outward behavior. This implies that Nick is uncomfortable voicing his pain and exposing his emotional vulnerability around his friend. Nick likely feels that he will come across as unmanly if he does not maintain a stoic persona over his breakup.

"All of a sudden everything was over [...] I don't know why it was. I couldn't help it. Just like when the three-day blows come now and rip all the leaves off the trees."

Related Characters: Nick (speaker), Bill, Marjorie ("Marge")

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

Nick has been sitting quietly while Bill has been attempting to convince him that Nick's breakup with Marjorie was a good idea. The reader knows that Nick is outwardly stoic, but internally despairing. Here, Nick finally voices something of his internal frame of mind to Bill. Even now, he is not able to directly communicate his feelings to Bill for fear of emasculating himself, but uses the storm as a metaphor instead. Nick compares the sudden heart-wrenching feeling of a breakup to the way the autumn storms blow in and "rip all the leaves off the trees," leaving them suddenly bare. The storm functions as a metaphor for the brutality of coming to terms with something ending. It is clear that Nick is in shock and not quite able to comprehend the sense of finality he is grappling with. This is exposed by Nick's comment "I don't know why it was." Nick feels as if the breakup happened to him, despite having ended the relationship himself, which shows he feels powerless in his experience of loss: as powerless as the leaves on the trees in the face of a "three-day blow."

"I'm sorry as hell about her but what could I do? [...] You know what her mother was like!"

Related Characters: Nick (speaker), Bill, Marjorie ("Marge")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

Although Nick is overcome with his sense of loss at the relationship ending, he has not been able to fully

communicate this to Bill. Nick has just tried to change the subject by suggesting the pair drink more and go swimming, but suddenly bursts out this sentence. His outburst captures the fundamental problem that Nick is grappling with: he is clearly in love with Marjorie (I'm sorry as hell about her"), but unable to accept the social demands of married life ("You know what her mother was like!"). Here, Hemingway makes it explicit that despite his tepid agreement with Bill's negative comments about marriage, Nick, too, feels anxious about whether the day-to-day realities of married life will make him happy. This reinforces the idea that this sort of hesitation to commit to such a life is broader than the story between these two boys. Hemingway, rather, sees it as endemic to youths living and growing up in this time. In this way, the anxiety that Nick feels over his breakup represents the anxiety that his generation—the "lost generation"—feels over living conventional lives.

❝ Nick had not thought about that. It had seemed so absolute. That was a thought. That made him feel better […] He felt happy now. There was not anything that was irrevocable.

Related Characters: Bill, Marjorie ("Marge"), Nick

Related Themes:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

Bill has just warned Nick to be wary of falling back into a relationship with Marjorie, which surprises Nick—it had never occurred to him before that there might be a chance to make amends with her. Until this point in the story, Nick has been unable to come to terms with the sense of loss he feels at the relationship coming to an end, seeing the breakup as "so absolute" and final. Suddenly, Nick realizes that the ending is not necessarily as "absolute" as he as feared, and, consequently, he does not have to endure the pain of facing that finality. This realization causes Nick's mood to shift from despair to hope. As Nick thinks, "There was not anything that was irrevocable," he begins to see that no ending is final, because there is always possibility for a new beginning. This idea ties into the story's metaphorical references to the natural ebb and flow of life, seen through baseball seasons, the seasons of nature, and the second-growth timber stacked in front of the trees.

❝ "There's always a chance."

Related Characters: Nick (speaker), Bill, Marjorie ("Marge")

Related Themes:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Nick responds to Bill's concern that Nick will get back together with Marjorie. This sentence, which is loaded with irony, acutely captures Nick's central tension: he wants to embrace his feelings for Marjorie, but is fearful of appearing unmanly to Bill. Both boys idealize men who are free and independent to be creative, drink, and be physically active, and this conflicts with the way they conceive of marriage and its social responsibilities. However, when Bill warns Nick to be wary of lapsing back into a commitment with Marjorie—citing all that's wrong with relationships and marriage—Nick suddenly becomes hopeful at the prospect of reconnecting with her. Thus, when Nick says "There's always a chance," he appeases Bill outwardly, and reveals his innermost hope at the same time. This shows that the view of masculinity the boys have been idealizing does not make room for emotional vulnerability. Throughout the story, Nick has been on the precipice of two seemingly incompatible choices: being a real man, or being with Marjorie. This dissonance is reflected in the irony of this statement, which allows Nick, for a brief moment, to deceive Bill and appear stoic, while simultaneously voicing his emotional desires.

❝ Outside now the Marge business was no longer so tragic. It was not even very important. The wind blew everything like that away. […] None of it was important now. The wind blew it out of his head.

Related Characters: Bill, Marjorie ("Marge"), Nick

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

The boys have ended their discussion and decided to head outside for some shooting. Nick has been wrestling with facing the loss of his relationship with Marjorie, while wanting to appear as if he is relieved to have narrowly

escaped being tied down. Until this point, Nick's facade of masculine stoicism has been just for show, because internally he has been in emotional turmoil, thinking that the relationship was over forever. Now, Nick is relieved because he's just realized that there's always the option of reconnecting with her and starting anew. This means he can suppress the burden of his pain for the moment, feeling heartened by the possibility of fixing things with Marge soon.

Nick's lighter frame of mind is captured by a final shift in the metaphor of the storm. The storm now represents Nick's ability to push the pain out of his head, and feel lighter and more clearheaded. He hasn't quite decided what to do, but he knows he can figure it out later. For now, he's satisfied to go shooting and put the "Marge business" out of his mind.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THE THREE-DAY BLOW

The rain ceases as Nick makes his way up a road that cuts through an orchard, which is barren now that it's fall. He picks up a Wagner apple on the ground and pockets it in his Mackinaw coat. Following the road out through the orchard and up a hill, Nick finally arrives at a cottage with smoke pouring out of the chimney.

Hemingway's opening offers descriptive details that situate the story in a specific place. The references to "Wagner" apples and Nick's "Mackinaw" coat indicate that the setting of the story is the Northeastern United States. In addition, since many of Hemingway's stories about Nick Adams are set specifically in Michigan, readers can reasonably assume that the same is true for this story. Situating the story in this place allows Hemingway to hint that the story is not just about Nick and Bill, but about American youths in general.

Outside the cottage, Nick can see the "second-growth timber" piled up against the trees that are swaying in the wind of the approaching **storm**. Bill exits the cottage, and he and Nick greet each other. Watching the waves on Ten Mile point, the boys talk about the storm, and Bill predicts that it will blow for three days. Nick asks if Bill's father is around, but Bill says no—"He's out with the gun." He invites Nick inside, where the fireplace is crackling.

The "second-growth timber" that is piled up against the trees behind is a metaphor about the cyclical nature of existence. Second-growth timber is wood from trees that have grown after a forest has been cut down the first time. Thus, the logs represent the idea that no ending is final and new beginnings are always possible, a thought that Nick comes to later in the story.

Bill fetches some Irish whisky and water from the kitchen and the pair sit down by the fire, drinking and discussing the smoky taste of the whisky, which Nick describes as "swell." Bill knowingly attributes the smoky taste to peat in the whisky, which Nick disputes, before both admit they've never "seen any peat" before.

Bill and Nick are eager to show off how much they know about drinking—and, by extension, prove that they are real men. However, Hemingway's mention of the fact that neither has "seen any peat" before shows that they are still just boys pretending to be men.

Bill notices that Nick's feet are wet when Nick's shoes start steaming in front of the fire. Bill fetches some socks from the open loft upstairs, where cots for Nick, Bill, and Bill's father have been pushed aside to avoid the rain. Bill makes Nick take his shoes off, telling him it's too late in the year to go be walking around without socks on. Nick puts on the socks and props his feet up on the fire grate. Noticing this, Bill warns Nick not to dent the fire grate with his big feet, and Nick moves his feet to the side of the grate.

The cots in the roof indicate that Nick and Bill are good friends—it's clear they've spent time at the cottage many times before. Bill's bossy demeanor toward Nick, when he scolds Nick about the socks, shows that Bill is the dominant figure in the friendship. The description of Nick's feet as "big" is a nod to Hemingway himself, who was known to have big feet.


The pair discuss baseball games and players, mentioning the trade of Heine Zim to the Giants, noting that McGraw can buy any player he wants. They wonder if McGraw made the right call to buy Zim for the Giants. Nick thinks it was a good idea, saying that Zim can hit and field well, but Bill is more skeptical, noting that he loses games.

Here, Hemingway draws on details from actual baseball games in history. The trade of Heine Zimmerman to the Giants (under then manager John McGraw) took place in 1916, resulting in a 26-game winning streak for the Giants. This historical detail allows Hemingway to establish that the story, though published in 1925, is set in approximately 1916, around the time when Hemingway himself would have been about 17 years old. Given that Bill and Nick both seem to be on the brink of manhood, it seems that they're around this age, too. The story, thus, functions as a "Lost Generation" narrative, which deals with issues faced by young Americans who came into adulthood between World War I and World War II. As with their conversation about whisky, Nick and Bill are eager to prove their sports knowledge to each other in order to show off their masculinity, as they do throughout the story.

Bill reaches his hand around the whisky bottle and refills Nick's glass. Nick muses that it's a good time when the fall **storms** come around, and Bill agrees that it's "swell." They are happy they are at the cottage instead of in town.

Hemingway's repeated references to drinking and whisky show that the boys are eager to continue drinking as a show of masculinity. The reference to the time of year when fall storms come around alludes to the cyclical nature of existence: like the fluctuating seasons, things come and go, but nothing ever ends.

Bill reaches for a book and leans back, book in one hand, whisky glass in the other. Nick asks Bill what he's reading, and Bill says *Richard Feverel*. Nick says he "couldn't get into [that book]," but Bill disagrees. They talk about Walpole's books *Fortitude* and *The Dark Forest*, playfully bickering about the practicality of various plot points. Bill mentions that *The Dark Forest* is about Russia, and Nick is skeptical that Walpole knows about Russia. Bill disagrees, and suggests that maybe Walpole was there when he was a boy, since he seems to know quite a bit about it.

Hemingway references actual books that were published in the early 20th century. Hugh Walpole's novels Fortitude *and* The Dark Forest *were published in 1913 and 1916, respectively. Like the boys' conversation about baseball, Hemingway uses these references to situate the story historically in approximately 1916, establishing it as a World War I narrative. And, like their discussions about drinking and baseball, the boys are keen to show off their knowledge of reading to each other in order to appear masculine.*

Nick says he'd like to meet Walpole, and Bill counters that he'd like to meet Chesterton. Nick fantasizes about taking Chesterton fishing, and Bill wonders if Chesterton would like enjoy fishing. Nick is confident that he would, mentioning the *Flying Inn*. Without missing a beat, Bill quotes a passage about drinking. They quibble about which of the two writers is a better writer, and which is a "better guy." Nick concludes that he wishes they were both here, so that they could take them both fishing.

Nick and Bill's admiration for Hugh Walpole and G. K. Chesterton, both as writers and as all-around good "guy[s]," shows that they consider writing as the kind of thing that "real," respected men do. Besides drinking, writing, and baseball, the boys also position fishing as a distinctively masculine pastime.

Bill abruptly says, "let's get drunk," and Nick cautiously agrees, wondering if Bill's father will mind. Bill reassures him that "my old man won't care." Nick is already feeling intoxicated, but Bill denies this and empties the rest of the whisky bottle into both of their glasses. Nick asks if Bill has any more whisky, and Bill says, "plenty," but notes that his father only lets him drink from bottles that are already open, so that he doesn't become a "drunkard." Nick is surprised, as he had assumed "solitary drinking that [makes] drunkards," not opening new bottles, but he keeps the thought to himself.

Despite feeling intoxicated, Nick still asks Bill if he has any more whisky, which suggests that Nick is eager to show he can drink a lot. Bill, too, wants to show off his capacity for alcohol and tries to seem grown up and nonchalant by shrugging off the possibility that his father would be mind. The reader learns that Bill's father is perhaps a heavy drinker from Bill's odd comment about people becoming "drunkards" by opening bottles to drink from, suggesting that Bill's father doesn't want his son to follow in his footsteps.

Bill mentions that his father "gets a little wild sometimes," and Nick remarks that Bill's father is a "swell guy." As Nick pours some water into his glass and watches it mix with the whisky, he muses about his own father, who doesn't drink. Bill is unsurprised, noting that Nick's father is a doctor, while his own father is a painter, saying "that's different." Nick still thinks that his father has "missed a lot" in life. Bill agrees, but he also adds that his own dad has "had a tough time," as the two stare contemplatively into the fire.

Bill's father is the epitome of all that the boys deem as masculine—he's a creative type, he drinks heavily, and he partakes in outdoorsy, and stereotypically manly, activities like shooting. Bill's comment that his dad has "had a tough time," though, suggests that the boys should perhaps not romanticize Bill's father or his life quite so much. Nick's father, on the other hand, is a doctor who doesn't drink—he has a conventional profession and seems puritanical and straitlaced compared to Bill's rough-and-tumble father. Nick's father represents the kind of conventional, boring life that both young boys are disillusioned with, made clear by Nick's comment that his father has "missed a lot" in life.


Nick gets up to fetch a log for the fire, eager to prove that he can handle his liquor by performing "practical" tasks while drunk. Bill, who is "also being consciously practical," weighs in on which log Nick should bring. On his way back to the fire, Nick accidentally knocks a bowl of dried apricots onto the floor with the log in his hands. As he picks them up, he is proud of himself for how "practical" he is being. Walking into the living room, Nick boasts about how "swell" the log he has picked out is. Bill swiftly quips that he had been saving it for a night like this.

Nick and Bill's attempts to show off how "practical" they are show that they consider their ability to hold their liquor—that is, to drink a lot but not act drunk—a sign of masculine accomplishment. Hemingway's use of irony in describing how proud the boys are of themselves for performing simple tasks (like picking up spilled apricots and stoking a fire with logs) shows that the boys are playing at being manly, but they are still just boys.

Nick suggests drinking more, and Bill fishes out another open bottle. This time it's Scotch. Nick gets up to fetch more water. On his way, he passes a mirror and he is amused that he can't recognize his own reflection, which is grinning back at him.

Nick's failure to recognize his own face in the mirror shows that their bravado about drinking and holding their liquor is for show, since he is clearly very drunk and detached from reality. This is the first hint that a lot of what the boys verbalize to each other is not quite aligned with how they are feeling inside.

The boys decide that they will toast to fishing—making the sweeping pronouncement that they are toasting to "All fishing, [...] everywhere"—and decide that fishing is far better than baseball. They decide that it "was a mistake" that they ever talked about baseball, which is a sport "for louts." They then drink deeply from their glasses until they're empty and decide to now drink to Chesterton and Walpole. As they refill their glasses, Nick and Bill "[feel] very fine."

Even though the boys clearly know a lot about baseball and are passionate about it, they suddenly—and drunkenly—decide that it's "for louts," meaning clumsy, stupid people. The boys are clearly invested in defining and proving their masculinity, and their sudden decision to abandon baseball (at this point, a still relatively new but wildly popular sport) for fishing and literature shows that they are trying to look cool and cultured in front of one another. The mention of Chesterton and Walpole—writers who were publishing in the 1910s—reminds the reader that this story is set during World War I.

Bill switches topics abruptly, saying that Nick was "wise" to break off his relationship, dismissively calling it "that Marge business." Nick tepidly agrees, responding "I guess so," but he goes quiet and says nothing more, as Bill goes on to explain that had Nick stayed in the relationship, he'd be stuck "working trying to get enough money to get married." Bill passionately continues, claiming that marriage ruins men's lives, leaving them "absolutely bitched," and causes them to have a "fat married look." Nick remains quiet, but eventually replies with a halfhearted "sure."

Bill's cynical description of marriage as something that ruins men captures the disillusionment that many young people in the Lost Generation felt with domestic conventions like marriage or working for money. Growing up in a war-torn, changing society, many young adults felt that these conventions felt stale and meaningless, leaving them feeling "lost." Bill's use of profanity, and his caricature of married men as "fat" also shows that he thinks marriage is an unmanly pursuit that compromises independence and autonomy. Nick's halfhearted replies show that he might have different feelings about his breakup, but is not fully comfortable expressing them to the opinionated Bill.

Bill sympathizes that it must have been tough to break off the relationship, but reminds Nick that he'll probably fall for someone else soon enough, though he warns Nick not to let all this love business "ruin" him. Eager to prove his point, Bill reminds Nick that if he'd married Marjorie, the whole family would be around all the time, interfering with their lives, especially Marjorie's mother. Nick nods in agreement, though he is still quiet. Bill thinks it was a lucky break for Nick, saying that Marjorie will be happier "marrying somebody of her own sort." Bill compares the two to oil and water, saying they don't mix, just like how he and "Ida that works for the Strattons" don't mix either.

Bill's description of relationships again denigrates love as something that "ruin[s]" men. Bill's comments about Marjorie's mother coming around all the time shows that he thinks the social responsibilities of married life undermine masculine independence and autonomy. Bill's mention of "Ida that works for the Strattons" hints that he got out of a similar situation himself. This reinforces the idea that Bill sees domestic responsibilities as fundamentally problematic for all men.

Nick is still quiet. He suddenly feels distanced from the environment he's in. He no longer feels drunk and is instead overcome with a palpable sense of loss. He is heartbroken that he broke up with Marjorie, and that he might never see her again. He repeatedly thinks to himself with despair, "it was all gone." He says nothing about this to Bill, suggesting instead that they have another drink.

The shift to Nick's internal monologue shows that he is distraught about ending his relationship. His failure to voice this to Bill reveals that he is uncomfortable expressing his emotions to his friend, perhaps concerned about appearing weak and unmanly in the face of Bill's fervent disapproval of relationships. The repetition of the phrase "it was all gone" shows that Nick is experiencing shock at the finality of the breakup.

Bill remarks that if Nick had stayed with Marjorie, they wouldn't be hanging out right now. Nick agrees, thinking to himself that he would be in Charlevoix, where Marjorie lives. Now, though, he has no idea what to do. Nick admits to Bill that he feels shocked by the breakup, even though he initiated it, as he reflects "All of a sudden everything was over." He compares this feeling to the way the **storm** outside, saying that it's "just like when the three-day blows come now and rip all the leaves off the trees." Bill, attempting to comfort Nick, says that it doesn't matter who's fault it was, as long as it's over.

Bill's remark that the boys wouldn't be spending this time together if Nick hadn't broken up with Marjorie implies that Bill values brotherly friendship over relationships, another thing he associates with masculinity. Nick's reflection that "all of a sudden everything was over" again emphasizes that he is feeling shocked by the finality of the relationship. Hemingway uses the storm as a metaphor for the brutality and intensity of this sudden loss. Given that Bill and Nick serve as stand-ins for the American youth of this time more generally, Nick's struggles to share what he's truly feeling may suggest that young men growing up in this time have difficulty being vulnerable and expressing their emotions.

Nick's thoughts despondently dwell on all the things he had planned to do with Marjorie, like travel to Italy, and internally he is riddled with grief. Bill admits that he was worried Nick would get sucked in, and he's glad that Nick "played it right," even though Marjorie's mother was already telling people that Nick and Marjorie were engaged. Nick is adamant that they weren't engaged, even though they *were* planning on getting married. Suddenly, Nick exclaims, "Let's get drunk," and the pair agree to get "really drunk" and go swimming.

Nick's insistence than he was not engaged to Marjorie even though they were planning to get married show that he is wrestling with wanting to appear stoic and masculine, despite his evident grief at the relationship ending. Nick's sudden (and ill-conceived) decision to "get drunk" and go swimming also shows that he is attempting to repress his emotions in order to appear masculine.

Nick bursts out that he's "sorry as hell about [Marjorie]" but that he had no choice, adding with frustration, "you know what her mother was like!" Bill agrees that her mother was "terrible." Nick is still shocked about how suddenly it ended, but Bill interrupts, saying they've said what they needed to say, and suggests it's best not to speak about it again, noting that if Nick dwells on it too much he might slip back into the relationship again.

Nick's outburst shows that he is wrestling between acknowledging his emotions and wanting to appear manly. The denigrating way that both boys talk about Marjorie's mother shows that they are unwilling to embrace the social realities of married life. Young men of the Lost Generation, of which Hemingway himself was a part, often felt that domestic life was meaningless, despite searching for emotional depth in their lives. Bill's worry that Nick might slip back into the relationship again implies that he sees marriage as a dangerous trap that ensnares men and robs them of their independence.

Nick is taken by surprise: the thought had never occurred to him before, because the breakup had seemed so "absolute." Suddenly, he starts to feel a bit better. He is more vocal now, and responds "there's always that danger." Internally he feels happy, having realized that nothing is "irrevocable."

Nick's sudden realization that he might be able to slip back into the relationship again changes his mood dramatically, as he shifts from dwelling on the heartbreaking loss he feels to feeling hope that a new beginning might be on the horizon. Nick's palpable relief that nothing is "irrevocable" captures his realization that life is cyclical; like seasons or storms, relationships may come and go, but there is always hope for a new beginning.

Nick starts thinking about when he might go into town in the next few days, but he says nothing of this to Bill. Out loud, he says "there's always a chance." Bill warns Nick to watch himself, and Nick agrees that he will, but internally he feels "lighter," reflecting to himself that "nothing was ever lost." He decides he will go into town on Saturday, but keeps this to himself.

Nick's thoughts about going into town again indicate that he likely wants to reconnect with Marjorie. The ironic phrase "there's always a chance" indicates that Nick is internally happy that there's a chance for a new beginning with Marjorie, but externally, he wants to agree with Bill that relationships should be avoided at all costs.

Nick suggests they take the guns outside for some shooting and to find Bill's father. As he puts his shoes and Mackinaw coat back on, Nick notices that he still feels drunk, but now clearheaded. Bill notes that he feels "swell" and has a "good edge on," but they agree that "it's no use getting drunk" and they should go outdoors.

Nick's shift in mood from despair about the relationship ending to hope for his future is captured by his "clearheaded" feeling. The reference to shooting exposes another facet of behavior that the boys consider as masculine. The boys once again try to prove their capacity for alcohol by claiming "it's no use getting drunk," as if the alcohol has had no effect, even though they've clearly been drunk this whole time.

The wind is blowing fiercely as the boys step outside and head towards the orchard, noting that the birds will be sheltering from the wind, which is blowing too strongly for them to shoot. The wind and fresh air help Nick clear his head. Now that he is outside, the "Marge business" feels a lot less "tragic" to him. In fact, it doesn't even feel that "important" any more. He reflects that the **storm** blew it out of his head.

Nick's comment that the storm blew his worries about the "Marge business" out of his head implies that he feels relieved that he has been able to stifle his feelings of loss. This new metaphor for the storm reflects the pressure on young men growing up in the World War I era to repress their emotions in order to appear manly.

The boys hear a shotgun go off in the wind, and Bill says that must be his dad. It sounds like it's coming from the swamp, so the boys decide to cut across the meadow and head that way, seeing if they can shoot anything on the way. As they head off into the **storm**, Nick is relieved that he has stopped dwelling on his feelings about Marge, thinking, "None of it was important now. The wind blew it out of his head." But in the back of his mind he feels reassured that "he [can] always go into town Saturday," feeling comforted that "it's a good thing to have in reserve."

The metaphor of the storm blowing Nick's feelings "out of his head"—as he now chooses to go shooting instead of think about Marge—represents the pressure on young men of the Lost Generation to hide their vulnerabilities and repress their emotions in order to feel masculine. Nick's secret reassurance that he might go into town—presumably to reconnect with Marjorie—shows that under the surface, his feelings are still there, and he is hopeful for the possibility of a new beginning with her, regardless of what Bill thinks about relationships.

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