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Sample MonkeyNotes

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For Whom the Bell Tolls

by

Ernest Hemingway

1940



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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The novel is set in Spain in the 1930s. The Spanish Civil War is raging, and the protagonist, Robert Jordan, is an American, fighting behind enemy lines for the Republican cause. He has been sent on an assignment to blow up a bridge in the mountains of the Spanish Sierra. The main action of the book takes place in the hills of the Sierra, where a fascist post has to be demolished. Guerilla bands.....

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Major Characters

Robert Jordan - Robert Jordan, the protagonist of the novel, is an American college instructor of Spanish, who is fighting for the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War. He is sent on a mission to destroy a bridge behind the enemy lines in order to prevent reinforcements from coming up after the offensive has started. In the mountains he meets and falls in love with a Spanish girl, Maria.

Pablo - Pablo is the leader of the guerilla band, which is assisting Robert Jordan in his mission. He sometimes comes across as sullen and uncooperative. It becomes apparent that Pablo is disenchanted with the war and wants to lead a peaceful existence, living in the mountains and raising horses. Since his belief in the Republican cause has been shaken by his personal feelings, he does not have the fervor that he had at the beginning of the movement.

Pilar - Pilar is a part of the guerilla band and is Pablo's "woman". She is completely devoted to the cause and, unlike Pablo and Jordan, has not become cynical. She is superstitious and believes that she can foretell the future.

Maria - Maria is a Spanish girl who has been rescued from the fascist camp by.....

CONFLICT

Protagonist - Robert Jordan is the protagonist of the novel. Fighting for the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War, he accepts a mission to destroy a bridge in the Sierra Mountains. Since the bridge cannot be destroyed until after an attack on the enemy begins, it is a highly risky mission. Initially.....

Antagonist - Robert Jordan must fight both external and internal antagonists. The external conflict, caused by the war in which he is fighting, is the dangerous assignment he has been given, which could cost him his life. He must blow up the bridge only after an attack on the enemy has begun; as a result, it

Climax - When Jordan tries to escape on horseback after he has blown up the bridge, the fascist cavalry starts firing at him from behind. When he falls and breaks his leg, it is the.....

Outcome - The outcome of the novel is a tragedy, with Jordan lying on the ground in the forest, waiting for either the enemy or death, whichever reaches him first. He pleads with Maria to.....

SHORT PLOT/CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

Robert Jordan, an American expert in dynamite, is fighting for the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War. A Russian officer, General Golz, sends him on a dangerous mission to destroy an important bridge in the Sierra Mountains. Anselmo, an old Spaniard, guides Jordan through the enemy lines to see the bridge, which is guarded by fascists at both ends, and to meet a guerilla band, which is to aid him in his mission.

The head of the guerilla band is Pablo, a sullen and uncooperative man, who hides out with his men in a cave. From the beginning, he thinks of Jordan as an alien and fears that he has really come to displace his band from the mountains. He becomes further concerned when he learns from Jordan that Kashkin, Jordan's predecessor who had helped to blow up an enemy train, is not dead.

When the men sit down to eat and drink wine, Maria enters, bringing food. She is a Spanish girl, who was rescued by the guerilla band after the train incident. Jordan is instantly attracted to her. Jordan also meets Pilar, Pablo's woman, who fights with the band. She encourages Jordan to pursue a.....

THEMES

Major Themes

Death and Disillusionment in War - The novel, as many of Hemingway's other works, deals with war. Since death is inevitable in the war effort, many of those fighting for the cause become disillusioned. They realize that the war does not really benefit the common man, even though the leaders insist

Grace Under Pressure - To be a hero, Hemingway believes that a man must display grace under pressure. Most of his characters put themselves into dangerous situations and then act with

Minor Themes

The Power of Superstition - Throughout the novel, there are references to superstitions. In the very beginning, Robert Jordan sets the tone of the novel when he thinks it is a very bad sign.....

MOOD

A gloomy pall hangs over the novel from the first pages. A war rages in the background, and death is all around. Jordan has been sent to blow up a bridge under the most dangerous of circumstances. In the first pages of the book, he admits that he does not have a good feeling about the mission. When he.....

AUTHOR INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Ernest Hemingway was born on July 21, 1899, in Oak Park, Illinois. His father was a doctor, and his mother was musically trained. He inherited his passion for vigorous activities, such as fishing, shooting, bullfighting, and hunting, from his father. From his mother, he acquired a quick, observant eye and a sensitive mind.

Even as a young man, Hemingway believed in living life dangerously. He is supposed to have lied about his age in order to join the army during World War I. He was rejected because he had an injured eye. Concealing his disappointment, he went to Kansas City to work as a cub reporter for The Star. His stint as a journalist gave Hemingway the first guidelines to writing: short sentences, short paragraphs, vigorous language, and a positive attitude. All these qualities went into the making of a simple yet effective style, which was later to win the Nobel Prize for him.

After working for seven restless months on the newspaper, Hemingway left for Italy to become an ambulance driver. During his stay in Italy, he was severely wounded and sent home in 1919. In 1920, Hemingway covered the Greco-Turkish conflict as a reporter on The Toronto Star. His fame as a journalist.....

LITERARY / HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Spanish Civil War began with a military uprising on July 17-18, 1936, and ended with the defeat of the Spanish Republic on March 28, 1939. Besides the military, the Nationalist side included conservatives from many parties and extreme rightists, such as the Carlists and the members of the Falange. On the Republican or Loyalist side were Republicans, Socialists, Communists, members of the CNT (the anarchist Confederation

National del Trabajo), and the revolutionary Marxist POUM (Parti-do Obrero de Unification Marxista), the dissident faction of the Spanish Communist Party.

The Spanish Republic before 1936 had increasing difficulties. From 1931 to 1934, a.....

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES / ANALYSIS

CHAPTERS 1 - 3

Summary

Robert Jordan, an American expert in explosives, is in Spain fighting for the cause of the Loyalists during the Civil War. Jordan is working under the orders of the Russian General Golz. He has been assigned the job of blowing up a bridge; but he has been told that the mission can be accomplished only after the attack commences, which makes the task very dangerous.

When the book opens, Jordan is lying on the forest floor inspecting, for the first time, the bridge that he is to destroy with explosives. His guide is an ancient Spaniard named Anselmo. He has been assigned to take Jordan to meet Pablo and his guerilla band, who are to aid him in exploding the bridge. Anselmo seems anxious about the delay at the bridge and suggests that Jordan hurry up in order to get the sacks of explosives to a safe place.

When they leave the bridge, Anselmo guides Jordan further up into the mountains. When they draw close to Pablo's cave, Anselmo suggests that he should go ahead and warn the members of the guerrilla band of their approach to keep them from firing at them. While waiting for him to return, Jordan recalls his meeting with General Golz in a flashback. Golz had stressed to Jordan the importance of his mission and the perils involved. Golz had also emphasized that the timing for destroying the bridge was of extreme significance. He insisted that the bridge had to be exploded after the commencement of the offensive.

Anselmo returns with Pablo, the leader of the guerilla band. From the very beginning, it is obvious that Pablo does not like Jordan. He feels that Jordan is an alien who has no business being involved in the civil war. He also resents that he will have to take orders from this stranger. Because of his feelings, Pablo appears sullen and is distinctly impolite to Jordan, often ignoring his questions or answering them very slowly. Not surprisingly, Jordan has a very negative reaction to Pablo. He does not like his uncivil manners and feels there is a strange sadness about the man. He immediately fears that Pablo will betray him. It is one of many ill omens that Jordan will have about his mission.

Pablo is openly critical of the entire mission from the beginning. In truth, he is worried about his own well-being, for he fears that he and his band of guerillas will be driven from their home in the Sierra Mountains. Since Pablo owns a herd of fine horses, he does not want to be displaced. Anselmo, who seems staunchly devoted to the cause, calls Pablo selfish and accuses him of having become a capitalist since the acquisition of his horses.

Jordan manages to pacify and cheer Pablo for awhile by appreciating and complimenting his horses; however, when he tells Pablo about Kashkin's death, the man becomes gloomy once again. Jordan does not like the way things have started. He is apprehensive as they set off towards Pablo's cave. On reaching the camp, Jordan finally notices something positive. The location of the cave is hidden, even protected from detection from the air.

To the man sitting outside the cave, Pablo introduces Anselmo as the "old man" and Jordan as the "dynamites." Jordan learns that the man is Rafael, a gypsy and a member of Pablo's band of guerillas. As they wait for dinner, they talk about Kashkin's death. Soon a young woman comes out of the cave with food. Jordan, finding her beautiful, is instantly attracted to her, but tries hard not to stare obviously. The woman, who seems to be

conscious of her cropped hair, introduces herself as Maria. She tells Jordan that she was imprisoned at Valladolid, where the enemy shaved her head. She had been travelling on the train that Kashkin and Pablo's band blew up. They rescued her and brought her with them.

When Maria goes back inside the cave, Rafael tells Jordan that Pilar, Pablo's woman, has taken good care of Maria. After Maria was rescued, it was Pilar who insisted that the girl be carried, for she had difficulty walking due to the accident. While Rafael is talking to Jordan, Pilar joins them outside the cave. She is a woman in her fifties and is robust and largely built. She warns Jordan to be gentle with Maria, for she was traumatized by what has happened to her before and during the accident. Jordan assures her that she can trust Maria with him.

Later, Pilar offers to read Jordan's palm, but she suddenly stops in the middle of the reading. When he asks her what she has seen in his hand, she evades the question by talking about El Sordo. He is the leader of another guerilla band, which also hides in the Sierra Mountains. She informs Jordan that El Sordo can be called upon to help with his mission if necessary. Since he is coming for a visit later the same night, Pilar says that Jordan can talk to him about his help in blowing up the bridge.

Jordan decides he needs to go back to the bridge to study it further. When he leaves, he asks Pilar to keep an eye on his supplies, sensing that she is trustworthy. Jordan then takes Anselmo with him to guide him to the proper location. Upon arriving, he notes that the bridge is of a single span with a sentry box at each end; it would be an easy bridge to destroy under normal circumstance; but he has been ordered to destroy it in an unorthodox manner. As he takes out his note pad and starts sketching the structure, he finds that he resents Golz's strange orders; he hopes, however, that the mission may not be as formidable as it appears to be.

Anselmo is nervous about their proximity to the fascist camp and grows impatient with Jordan's slowness. He points out that there is a man in the sentry box facing them. When the guard emerges, Jordan and Anselmo lie flat on the ground so they will not be spied. When the sentry walks to the other end of the bridge, the men decide it is time to depart. Suddenly, however, they hear the sound of planes overhead. Jordan believes that they are a fascist patrol, but Anselmo thinks that they are Russian planes, called Moscas. The two men cautiously depart and make their way back to the cave. As they walk, Jordan and Anselmo discuss the necessity of killing in war. Anselmo admits that he hates to kill another human being, but he does it for the benefit of the cause, even though he considers it a sin that must be later atoned. It is obvious, however, that Anselmo has become somewhat disillusioned with the war effort.

As Jordan and Anselmo approach the cave, they are challenged by Agustin, the guerilla guard on duty. When he is finally convinced of their identities, he lets them pass; but first he warns Jordan to guard his explosives from Pablo. Anselmo agrees with the warning. He tells Jordan that Pablo has gone "bad," but he claims that El Sordo is as reliable as ever.

Notes

To understand the first three chapters and the rest of the book, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of the Spanish Civil War that serves as the background setting for the novel. General Francisco Franco is the leader of the Spanish fascist party and is fully supported by Mussolini of Italy and Hitler of Germany. In fact, Mussolini has sent about 70,000 ground troops to aid Franco, and Germany has provided planes, pilots, arms, and technicians. In opposition to the fascist forces, Russia has sent weapons and advisors to support the Loyalists or Republicans. In addition, many young men from the United States, such as Robert Jordan, have joined the Loyalists in defense of democratic ideals.

In the first chapter, it becomes obvious that Robert Jordan is in Spain fighting for the Republican cause. He has

taken his orders to blow up the bridge from General Golz, a Russian, who is using the Spanish Civil War as a testing ground for his own leadership.

Since the troops are not his own, he seems willing to take greater risks. He insists to Jordan that he blow up the bridge after a daylight attack has commenced. As a result, the mission is much more dangerous than normal. It is not surprising that Jordan is very uncomfortable with his orders, as evidenced in his flashback to General Golz.

Jordan's mission is made even more dangerous by the fact that the fascist enemy is extremely strong. The disillusioned Pablo tells him, "You do not realize how strong they are. I see them always stronger, always better armed. Always with more material." In addition, Jordan instinctively knows that Pablo cannot be trusted since he is totally disenchanted with the war and fully resentful of Jordan's presence. It is no wonder that Jordan is unnerved by Pablo's challenge: "What right have you, a foreigner, to come to me and tell me what I must do?"

By the end of the first chapter, the reader is familiar with three of the key characters in the novel: Jordan, Anselmo, and Pablo. Each of them is introduced both physically and emotionally. All three suffer from some level of disillusionment about the war. Pablo is obviously the most discontent. He simply would like to be left alone to live in peace and raise his horses; he strongly resents Jordan's intrusion into the war and his life. Anselmo, although verbally devoted to the cause, openly admits that he feels that it is a sin to kill another man because of the war. Even Jordan himself questions the motives and methods of General Golz. Moreover, he has an almost mystical fear about his mission and sees signs foreshadowing a negative outcome.

In the second chapter, the two main female characters are introduced: Maria and Pilar. Their lives are interwoven by the fact that Maria has been rescued from the enemy by the guerilla band, and Pilar, who is Pablo's woman, has watched over Maria's rescue and her subsequent recovery. Protective of the younger woman, Pilar warns Jordan, who is obviously attracted to Maria, that he must treat her gently, for the girl has been traumatized by her experiences. Jordan assures Pilar that Maria will be in good hands with him. He then proceeds to fall in love with Maria, which causes him to change his feelings about the war. Wanting to spend the rest of his life with her, he is no longer so willing to sacrifice his life to the Republican cause.

Chapter three centers on the inhumanity of war. Jordan and Anselmo discuss whether it is morally wrong to kill a man during fighting. Anselmo clearly states that he thinks it is a sin that must later be atoned. His claim is ironic since he indicates that he is an agnostic. He tells Jordan, "If there were God, never would He have permitted what I have seen with my eyes." Up until this conversation, Jordan has convinced himself that this civil war is being fought for the good of the common people. Now he is forced to face the fact that the common people, including himself, are at risk of being killed to satisfy the political and military desires of the leaders.

Besides the theme of disillusionment about war, the theme of superstition is also presented in these first chapters. Jordan thinks that the fact that he has forgotten the name of Anselmo is a bad sign. He also "senses" a sadness in Pablo, which he believes is an indication of his future betrayal. When Pilar reads Jordan's palm, she stops midway, as if she sees something terrible there. When Jordan questions her about it, she refuses to answer him. These negative, superstitious signs add to the gloomy mood of the novel. The only relief from the gloominess comes from Agustin, who is serving as the guerilla guard. When he stops Anselmo and Jordan as they approach Pablo's cave, he is humorous in his conversation. Although a war rages in the background, he ironically states that he is "dying with boredom." His attitude of boredom with the war is similar to that of the other guerillas and foreshadows Jordan's own boredom with the cause.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Robert Jordan - Robert Jordan, the protagonist of the novel, is an experienced and competent explosives expert from the United States. He is currently aiding the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War, working behind enemy lines. Sympathetic to the Spanish people and opposed to Fascism, he is extremely dedicated to the cause. When the book opens, Jordan is operating under the orders of Russian General Golz, who has ordered him to demolish an important bridge. At first Jordan believes in carrying out the orders without questioning or doubting the integrity of the people who have issued them, even though he.....

Pilar - Pilar is a member of Pablo's guerilla band and his "woman." The two of them have been living together for some years. She is devoted to Pablo and loyal towards the Republican cause. Unlike Pablo and Jordan, Pilar does not become disillusioned in the course of the novel. It is only at the very end that she does any questioning of the cause.

Pilar is vital to the plot, for she serves as a mouthpiece for the author. It is through her that the reader gains information on the beginning of the movement, when Pablo had more.....

Pablo - In order to complete his mission, Jordan has to take the help of a band of guerillas, which is camping in the mountains. Pablo is the leader of the guerilla band. From the moment that Jordan meets him, he dislikes and distrusts Pablo. He finds him to be rude, uncouth, sullen, and uncooperative. Jordan also realizes that Pablo no longer has an interest in the war. He really wants to be left alone to live peacefully in the mountains with Pilar and raise his horses.

Although Pablo is depicted as a very negative character who no longer has a.....

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The plot of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is developed in a traditional manner with an introduction, rising action, climax, and falling action. The first three chapters are largely descriptive, introducing the characters, the conflict, the theme, and the setting. Chapters 4 - 9, which are brief, begin the rising action. It becomes obvious that Pablo does not really support Jordan, further endangering his mission. Jordan also falls in love with Maria, which will complicate his life and give him a strong desire to live beyond the destruction of the bridge. Chapters 10 - 13 describe Pablo's past, establish the depth of danger involved in the.....

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

Major Themes

Death and Disillusionment in War - The novel deals with the brutality of war, spotlighting that both sides are losers, for there are always casualties to both. During the story, Hemingway describes the brutal massacre of the fascists in Pablo's hometown, Jordan's killing of the calvaryman and the sentry on the bridge, the brutal murder and beheading of El Sordo's band by the fascists, Anselmo's senseless death, and Jordan's injury, leading to his certain end. It is no wonder that the characters in the novel become disillusioned about the war. In fact, Pablo is disenchanted with it from the time the book opens. Although he had been zealous about.....

Grace Under Pressure - During the novel, Robert Jordan becomes the true Hemingway Code Hero, displaying a penchant for action and grace under pressure. Even though he realizes the dangerous nature of his mission and questions the orders of General Golz to carry it out in daylight after the offensive has.....

Mysticism-Superstition - An aura of mysticism prevails throughout the book. The protagonist, Robert Jordan repeatedly asserts that he does not believe in prophecies and refuses to give in to superstition. In fact he states, "These mysteries tire me very much...I do not believe in

OTHER ELEMENTS

AUTHOR'S STYLE

Hemingway is widely known and acclaimed for his sparse, economical style. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, his simplistic style is very evident. He again implies rather than states and gives hints rather than full descriptions. Since he uses short sentences without many adjectives or adverbs, the book reads

STUDY QUESTIONS - BOOK REPORT TOPICS

1. Describe the character of Robert Jordan and how it changes during the course of the novel.
2. How does Robert Jordan prove he is a typical Hemingway Code Hero?
3. Compare and contrast Jordan and Pablo.....

END OF SAMPLE MONKEYNOTES EXCERPTS

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