

Chapter 4. Small Pain in my Chest [Poem]

Passage 1

Question 1.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

The soldier boy was sitting calmly underneath that tree.
As I approached it, I could see him beckoning to me.
The battle had been long and hard and lasted through the night
And scores of figures on the ground lay still by morning's light.

Why was the soldier sitting calmly under the tree?

Answer:

The war had ended by the break of day. This soldier was the only alive one among the hundreds of other who died fighting the war. He was sitting calmly under the tree as there are no more enemies to fight.

Question 2.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

The soldier boy was sitting calmly underneath that tree.
As I approached it, I could see him beckoning to me.
The battle had been long and hard and lasted through the night
And scores of figures on the ground lay still by morning's light.

What does the phrase 'sitting calmly' signify?

Answer:

The phrase 'sitting calmly' indicates the stillness and silence which follows a storm. The soldier has no need to be worried or to be on his guard as there are no enemies left to fight, he is therefore calm. It also stresses on the fact that his fellow soldiers are all lying dead around him and therefore, he has no one to talk to.

Question 3.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

The soldier boy was sitting calmly underneath that tree.
As I approached it, I could see him beckoning to me.

The battle had been long and hard and lasted through the night
And scores of figures on the ground lay still by morning's light.

Why did the soldier call the narrator?

Answer:

The soldier was wounded and too tired to get water for himself. He called the narrator hoping that he would help him with some water so that he could quench his thirst and his wounded body could be relieved of some pain.

Question 4.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

The soldier boy was sitting calmly underneath that tree.
As I approached it, I could see him beckoning to me.
The battle had been long and hard and lasted through the night
And scores of figures on the ground lay still by morning's light.

Explain the line 'And scores of figures on the ground lay still by morning's light'.

Answer:

The given lines explain how the soldiers fought hard all night. In the morning, the wounded soldier boy who sat under a tree saw all of his fellow soldiers lying dead beside him on the battle field.

Passage 2

Question 1.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"I wonder if you'd help me, sir", he smiled as best he could.
"A sip of water on this morn would surely do me good.
We fought all day and fought all night with scarcely any rest –
A sip of water for I have a small pain in my chest."

What help does the soldier need from the narrator?

Answer:

The soldier is wounded and wants the narrator to give him some water.

Question 2.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"I wonder if you'd help me, sir", he smiled as best he could.
"A sip of water on this morn would surely do me good.
We fought all day and fought all night with scarcely any rest –
A sip of water for I have a small pain in my chest."

Why is the soldier smiling?

Answer:

Although the soldier is wounded, like a true fighter he has a smile on his face as he doesn't believe in showing his pain. He is smiling to assure the narrator that he is just tired after the night's fight and there is nothing else wrong with him.

Question 3.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"I wonder if you'd help me, sir", he smiled as best he could.
"A sip of water on this morn would surely do me good.
We fought all day and fought all night with scarcely any rest –
A sip of water for I have a small pain in my chest."

Why doesn't the soldier directly tell the narrator that he has been wounded by a bullet?

Answer:

The soldier has faced and suffered the devastating reality of a war and does not want a civilian to be acquainted with the language of guns and bullets. Therefore, he only tells the narrator that he is tired and feeling a slight pain in his chest instead of telling him how seriously injured he is.

Question 4.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"I wonder if you'd help me, sir", he smiled as best he could.
"A sip of water on this morn would surely do me good.
We fought all day and fought all night with scarcely any rest –
A sip of water for I have a small pain in my chest."

Why do you think the soldier asks for a sip of water?

Answer:

The soldier asks for a sip of water to feel some relief from his pain. He perhaps knows that death is now imminent and wants to drink water for the last time before he falls into an eternal slumber of death.

Passage 3

Question 1.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

As I looked at him I could see the large stain on his shirt
All reddish – brown from his warm blood mixed in with
Asian dirt.
“Not much”, said he. “I count myself more lucky than the rest.
They’re all gone while I just have a small pain in my chest.”

What does the narrator notice on the soldier’s shirt?

Answer:

The narrator notices a large reddish brown stain on the soldier’s shirt.

Question 2.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

As I looked at him I could see the large stain on his shirt
All reddish – brown from his warm blood mixed in with
Asian dirt.
“Not much”, said he. “I count myself more lucky than the rest.
They’re all gone while I just have a small pain in my chest.”

Why is the stain ‘all reddish brown’?

Answer:

The stain is all reddish brown because it is the soldier’s blood mixed with the mud of the Asian land where the Vietnam War was fought.

Question 3.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

As I looked at him I could see the large stain on his shirt
All reddish – brown from his warm blood mixed in with
Asian dirt.
“Not much”, said he. “I count myself more lucky than the rest.
They’re all gone while I just have a small pain in my chest.”

Why does the soldier count himself lucky? Do you think he is really lucky?

Answer:

The soldier counts himself as lucky because he is alive unlike his fellow mates, who have lost their lives while fighting the war. Unfortunately, he is not lucky as he has been hit with a bullet

and will soon die like the other soldiers.

Passage 4

Question 1.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"Must be fatigue", he weakly smiled. "I must be getting old.
I see the sun is shining bright and yet I'm feeling cold.
We climbed the hill, two hundred strong, but as we cleared the crest,
The night exploded and I felt this small pain in my chest."

Who smiled weakly in the extract? Why?

Answer:

The soldier smiles weakly as he is seriously injured but doesn't want to reveal his pain to a civilian (the narrator). His pain is excruciating but by smiling weakly, he tries to hide it.

Question 2.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"Must be fatigue", he weakly smiled. "I must be getting old.
I see the sun is shining bright and yet I'm feeling cold.
We climbed the hill, two hundred strong, but as we cleared the crest,
The night exploded and I felt this small pain in my chest."

Why is the soldier feeling cold?

Answer:

The soldier's injury is causing his bodily functions to deteriorate as a result of which he is feeling cold even on a warm sunny morning.

Question 3.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"Must be fatigue", he weakly smiled. "I must be getting old.
I see the sun is shining bright and yet I'm feeling cold.
We climbed the hill, two hundred strong, but as we cleared the crest,
The night exploded and I felt this small pain in my chest."

Why does the soldier feel that he is getting old? Is the reason that he gives true?

Answer:

The young soldier feels that he is getting old because he is experiencing fatigue and weakness. However, the true reason for his weakness is the bullet in his chest that is pushing him towards death.

Question 4.

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"Must be fatigue", he weakly smiled. "I must be getting old.
I see the sun is shining bright and yet I'm feeling cold.
We climbed the hill, two hundred strong, but as we cleared the crest,
The night exploded and I felt this small pain in my chest."

What does "the night exploded" refer to?

Answer:

The phrase 'the night exploded' refers to the sudden attack on the soldier's army by the enemies which may have included bomb explosions along with the firing of bullets. The soldier along with the other mates had been fighting the entire night. The poet has personified the night to describe how gruesome the war had been.

Passage 5

Question 1.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"I looked around to get some aid – the only things I found
Were big, deep craters in the earth – bodies on the ground.
I kept on firing at them, sir. I tried to do my best,
But finally sat down with this small pain in my chest."

Why is the soldier looking around?

Answer:

The soldier is injured and is looking around in the hope of getting some aid.

Question 2.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"I looked around to get some aid – the only things I found
Were big, deep craters in the earth – bodies on the ground.
I kept on firing at them, sir. I tried to do my best,
But finally sat down with this small pain in my chest."

Does the soldier find help? What does he see around him?

Answer:

The soldier doesn't find help, instead he sees deep craters in the earth and dead bodies of his fellow soldiers around him.

Question 3.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"I looked around to get some aid – the only things I found
Were big, deep craters in the earth – bodies on the ground.
I kept on firing at them, sir. I tried to do my best,
But finally sat down with this small pain in my chest."

Why did the soldier have to stop firing?

Answer:

The soldier fought bravely until finally he was wounded by a shot and had to stop firing. .

Question 4.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"I looked around to get some aid – the only things I found
Were big, deep craters in the earth – bodies on the ground.
I kept on firing at them, sir. I tried to do my best,
But finally sat down with this small pain in my chest."

What does the soldier want to justify when he says "I tried to do my best"?

Answer:

When the soldier tells the narrator that he tried to do his best, he is emphasising on the fact that he fought with all his might to bring down the enemies and keep his fellow mates safe.

Passage 6

Question 1.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"I'm grateful, sir", he whispered, as I handed my canteen
And smiled a smile that was, U think, the brightest that I've seen.
"Seems silly that a man my size so full of vim and zest,
Could find himself defeated by a small pain in his chest."

What according to the soldier is silly?

Answer:

According to him, it is silly for a soldier, who ought to be full of energy and vigour to be defeated by a small pain in the chest.

Question 2.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"I'm grateful, sir", he whispered, as I handed my canteen
And smiled a smile that was, U think, the brightest that I've seen.
"Seems silly that a man my size so full of vim and zest,
Could find himself defeated by a small pain in his chest."

What is the actual condition of the soldier?

Answer:

The soldier has been fatally wounded in the war and is currently in acute pain. However, he portrays exactly the opposite of his true condition. He tries to show that he is fine and that it is just a small pain in his chest. In reality, he is counting the last few minutes of his life.

Question 3.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"I'm grateful, sir", he whispered, as I handed my canteen
And smiled a smile that was, U think, the brightest that I've seen.
"Seems silly that a man my size so full of vim and zest,
Could find himself defeated by a small pain in his chest."

What is the soldier grateful for?

Answer:

The soldier is grateful that the narrator gives him some water to sip in his last moments.

Question 4.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"I'm grateful, sir", he whispered, as I handed my canteen
And smiled a smile that was, U think, the brightest that I've seen.
"Seems silly that a man my size so full of vim and zest,
Could find himself defeated by a small pain in his chest."

Why is the smile of the soldier described as the brightest by the narrator?

Answer:

The narrator understands that in order to hide his pain, the soldier is trying to force a smile on his face. Beneath the smiling face is a worn out body and a heart shredded apart by the death and destruction around him. Therefore, the narrator says that his is the brightest smile he has ever seen.

Passage 7

Question 1.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

“What would my wife be thinking of her man so strong and grown,
If she could see me sitting here, too weak to stand alone?
Could my mother have imagined, as she held me to her breast,
That I’d be sitting HERE one day with this pain in my chest?”

What about his wife and mother is the soldier thinking?

Answer:

The soldier wonders what his wife would think of him if she knew that her husband, a strong soldier, could not even bear a small pain in his chest and stand alone. Then he thinks about his mother, he wondering how his mother will react after knowing that a boy that she held close to her heart is sitting in the battlefield with a fatal wound.

Question 2.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

“What would my wife be thinking of her man so strong and grown,
If she could see me sitting here, too weak to stand alone?
Could my mother have imagined, as she held me to her breast,
That I’d be sitting HERE one day with this pain in my chest?”

Why does the soldier always refer to his pain as small?

Answer:

It is a known fact that the injury caused by explosions or bullet wounds can be very serious, and at most times, fatal. However, the soldier constantly stresses on the fact that the pain in his chest is small or little. Through this he wishes to tell the narrator that the physical and mental trauma that soldiers suffer during the war is much severe than a bullet wound but they are trained to deal with it for the good of their nation.

Question 3.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"What would my wife be thinking of her man so strong and grown,
If she could see me sitting here, too weak to stand alone?
Could my mother have imagined, as she held me to her breast,
That I'd be sitting HERE one day with this pain in my chest?"

Why do you think the soldier is thinking about his family?

Answer:

The soldier is thinking about his family as he realises that he is living the final moments of his life. In these moments, he tries to think about his life in retrospect, without any lament about the war that is taking him to his death. All that he does is talk to the narrator calmly as if wanting to be heard in his final minutes of being alive. He thinks about his family especially his wife and mother who he knows will wonder how a soldier like him couldn't escape the explosion despite being trained to dodge life threatening circumstances like these. As he knows that he will not be able to talk to his family for the last time or listen to them, he ponders over what they might say if they see him in this condition.

Passage 8

Question 1.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"Can it be getting dark so soon?" He winced up at the sun.
"It's growing dim and I thought that the day had just begun.
I think, before I travel on, I'll get a little rest.....
And, quietly, the boy died from that small pain in his chest.

I don't recall what happened then. I think I must have cried;
I put my arms around him and I pulled him to my side
And, as I held him to me, I could feel our wounds were pressed
The large one in my heart against the small one in his chest.

What do the first two lines of the given extract tell about the soldier's condition?

Answer:

The first two lines of the stanza are among the last few lines of the poem where the soldier succumbs to his injuries. In the given lines, the soldier winces up at the sun and tells the narrator that he feels as if it is getting dark soon although the day has just began.

Question 2.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"Can it be getting dark so soon?" He winced up at the sun.
"It's growing dim and I thought that the day had just begun.
I think, before I travel on, I'll get a little rest.....
And, quietly, the boy died from that small pain in his chest.

I don't recall what happened then. I think I must have cried;
I put my arms around him and I pulled him to my side
And, as I held him to me, I could feel our wounds were pressed
The large one in my heart against the small one in his chest.

Explain "before I travel on".

Answer:

In the third line of the given extract, the soldier is finally seen telling the narrator that it is time for him to embrace death and 'travel on' but he must get a little rest before moving on.

Question 3.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"Can it be getting dark so soon?" He winced up at the sun.
"It's growing dim and I thought that the day had just begun.
I think, before I travel on, I'll get a little rest.....
And, quietly, the boy died from that small pain in his chest.

I don't recall what happened then. I think I must have cried;
I put my arms around him and I pulled him to my side
And, as I held him to me, I could feel our wounds were pressed
The large one in my heart against the small one in his chest.

What do you think are the feelings of the narrator in this stanza?

Answer:

The narrator has been a patient listener for the wounded soldier throughout their conversation. The soldier tells him how he fought the war all night along with the others, how his family will think about him after his death, and how he is luckier than his dead soldier friends to have lived till the break of this day.

At the end of this stanza, the narrator tells the readers that the soldier quietly dies from the small pain in his chest. The narrator feels helpless and remorseful to see the young soldier succumb to his injuries. In their short conversation the narrator has learned a lot about the soldier and cannot help but feel overwhelmed by the fact that the soldier, who put up a brave fight against death, has now humbly accepted it.

Question 4.

Read the extract and answer the questions that follow.

"Can it be getting dark so soon?" He winced up at the sun.
"It's growing dim and I thought that the day had just begun.
I think, before I travel on, I'll get a little rest.....
And, quietly, the boy died from that small pain in his chest.

I don't recall what happened then. I think I must have cried;
I put my arms around him and I pulled him to my side

And, as I held him to me, I could feel our wounds were pressed
The large one in my heart against the small one in his chest.

How does the narrator express his feelings for the dead soldier?

Answer:

When the soldier dies, a kind of numbness comes over the narrator; he mentions not being able to remember what happened next. He further says that he must have cried but does not seem to have a clear memory of it. He pulls the soldier to his side and as he holds him close to his chest, he feels a large pain in his own heart. The narrator says both their chests pressed to each other are wounded by this war.; His heart is emotionally wounded by the loss of the soldier's life while the soldier's chest is wounded the physical injury and trauma from the war.