Soldier's Home

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Hemingway was born just outside of Chicago in the town of Oak Park. After high school, he reported for the *Kansas City Star*, then went to work in World War I as a Red Cross Ambulance driver. There, on the Italian Front, he got injured, and stayed in a hospital in Milan, where he fell in love with a nurse, Agnes von Kurowsky Stanfield, who is said to have inspired the character Catherine Barkley in *A Farewell to Arms*. This nurse broke Hemingway's heart when he finally returned home at twenty years old. At home, he received a Silver Medal of Bravery. He worked at the *Toronto Star*, moved to Chicago, and married Hadley Richardson in September 1921. With Richardson, Hemingway moved back to Paris to work as a foreign correspondent for the *Toronto Star*. In Paris, he became part of the elite expatriate literary community, called the "Lost Generation," spending time with Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. During this time in Paris, Hemingway wrote and published *Soldier's Home* in the anthology "Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers." He divorced Richardson, married Pauline Pfeiffer, and moved to Key West, Florida in 1928. In 1937, after spending a decade traveling and writing, he became a correspondent in the Spanish Civil War. He eventually met the journalist Gellhorn, whom he married and lived with in Cuba, though he later divorced her for a different journalist, Mary Welsh, his final wife whom he married in 1946. His injuries on two plane crashes in Africa, along with his alcoholism, led his health to continue deteriorating. In 1954, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. In 1961, in his home in Ketchum, Idaho, Hemingway shot himself in the head.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Hemingway is part of both the Lost Generation—a group of expatriate writers living in Paris—and the Modernist tradition. His particular breed of Modernism revolves around the "Iceberg Theory," which he coined, inspired by imagism, a twentieth-century poetry movement that favored imagery, precision and sharp language. Ezra Pound was one of the inaugural poets that preached imagistic techniques. Hemingway's "Iceberg Theory" favors language that is unemotional, stark, and focused on immediate, concrete details. It is characterized further by dialogue, silence, and action. He does not elaborate upon feelings and desires, but suppresses them under the surface of his language. Hemingway was also writing at the time of two major wars, both World War I, which inspired *Soldier's Home*, and World War II. He was involved in both, as an ambulance driver and war reporter, as well as being involved in the Spanish Civil War. The combined experience of being in war and being in the midst of these literary movements led Hemingway to believe in truth as the most important element in writing. He was committed to telling the facts as they were.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

"Soldier's Home" was published first in "Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers," an anthology that included works by Joyce, Stein and Pound—other famous Modernist writers that participated in the expatriate community of which Hemingway was part in Paris. The other stories Hemingway wrote at this time were included in his first short story collection, *In Our Time*, published in 1924. Though Krebs appears only once in this collection, Hemingway's most famous recurring character, Nick Adams, appears in a story about returning home from war, *Big Two-Hearted River*. Hemingway's 1926 novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, follows Jake Barnes, who, like Krebs, suffers an inability to express his traumatic and painful experience in the war, with the war haunting the backdrop of this story just as it does *Soldier's Home*. The sense of post-war depression and fracture is also abundant in T.S. Eliot's poetry, especially in *The Waste Land*, which captures the feelings of disintegration and nihilism that infected the world after the watershed event that was World War I. Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein hugely influenced Hemingway's development of an understated, stark, monosyllabic style—their works allowed him to really hone the discipline of his craft. Hemingway's famous "Iceberg Theory," a term coined for his minimalist style that omits emotional or florid language and focuses instead on immediate details, went on to inspire many other writers, such as Joan Didion and Raymond Carver.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Soldier's Home
- **When Written:** 1924
- **Where Written:** Paris, France
- **When Published:** 1925
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Short story, Modernist fiction
- **Setting:** Krebs' hometown in Oklahoma
- **Climax:** In the kitchen, when Krebs' mother asks him if he loves her and he says no
- **Antagonist:** The tormenting aftereffects of war, the struggle to adjust to home, depression

- **Point of View:** Third person, though a very limited third person. The narrator often seems completely inside Krebs' head, in moments that are typically called free indirect discourse.

EXTRA CREDIT

Short film. The short story was adapted into an American short film in 1977, broadcast on PBS. It stars Richard Backus as Krebs and was directed by Robert Young.

The Kansas City Star. Krebs reads the *Kansas City Star* newspaper in his kitchen in the morning—the same paper that Hemingway wrote for after high school. The mention of it imbues the story with an autobiographical connection between Krebs and Hemingway.

PLOT SUMMARY

In the summer of 1919, Krebs returns to his hometown in Oklahoma after having fought in World War I. He is one of the last soldiers to come back, as he stayed on the Rhine until the second division left for home. Though the other soldiers had been greeted with a celebratory welcome upon their return, by the time Krebs arrives home, the hysteria has settled.

Initially, Krebs does not want to talk about his experiences in the war. When he finally does want to talk, nobody in town is interested in listening, as they have already heard graphic tales from the other soldiers. In order to attract an audience for his stories, Krebs feels he must lie about the war, adopting on the experiences of other men and exaggerating his own. However minor, these lies make him feel nauseated and distasteful toward his own memories.

Krebs listlessly passes the time by sleeping late, wandering around his town, eating, reading, playing clarinet, and going to the pool room. His mother seems to want to understand her son's experience in the war, but when she comes into his room to ask about it, her attention wanders. His father, a businessman, is "non-committal."

Most things in the town have not changed: the **family motor car** that Krebs was not allowed to drive before the war is "still the same car." The only noticeable change that Krebs observes is in the local **girls**, who have grown up. He watches them from his front **porch** as they walk past. Though Krebs "vaguely" wants a girl, he believes getting to know one—and having to talk to her—is not worth it, and would only lead to telling more lies.

Along with watching the girls, Krebs also reads a history book about the war. He especially enjoys looking at the maps. By reading about the war, he starts to get a better sense of what happened and feels he had been "a good soldier."

One morning Krebs's mother enters his bedroom and tells him that she and his father have decided to let him take out the family car. Krebs then goes down to the kitchen for breakfast, where his favorite younger sister, Helen, teases him about sleeping late. When she asks Krebs if he loves her, he says, "Sure." She asks if he will come over to the schoolyard that afternoon and watch her play baseball, teasing him that if he doesn't come over to watch her play, he doesn't really love her.

After Helen leaves, Krebs's mother, appearing worried, starts asking Krebs if he knows what he is going to do. She encourages him to start working and says that she's been praying for him. She then mentions that Krebs should go see his father in the office after they're done talking. When she asks Krebs if he loves her, Krebs responds, "No." His mother starts crying, prompting Krebs to say that he doesn't love anybody, and then that he didn't mean it. His mother's emotions make Krebs feel sick. His mother then makes him pray with her, though he says he cannot.

Krebs feels sorry for his mother and reflects that she made him lie. He thinks that he will go to Kansas City and find a job but won't visit his father; he wants his life to "go smoothly." Before leaving, he will go over to the schoolyard and watch his sister play baseball.

CHARACTERS

Harold Krebs – The story's protagonist, Krebs is a young soldier struggling to readjust to life at home following World War I. At first, Krebs feels as though he cannot discuss his experience in the war, and then, when he finally does want to talk about it, he finds that no one wants to listen to him. In an attempt to be heard, he resorts to lying about his experiences, but this just makes him feel increasingly empty, apathetic, and numb, unable to relate to others in his town or his family. Krebs suffers a distinct lack of ambition and motivation, instead busying himself with watching the **girls** in his town walk by his house, sleeping, reading, practicing the clarinet, and eating. Through Krebs, Hemingway paints of picture of the way many soldiers struggle to adjust to home after experiencing war. Ironically, what Krebs struggles most with in the story is clarifying his individual experiences. The idea that he represents not just himself, but many, then, ironically robs him of his individuality further still.

Helen – Helen is one of Krebs's two sisters, though he admits that she is the one he likes best. She is the only character in the story to whom Krebs responds with some positivity. When Helen asks whether he will always love her, for example, Krebs says, "Sure." She also teases him and calls him by a nickname, and, in this way, represents a certain joyfulness and youth—qualities that seem to appeal to Krebs. Indeed, at one point Helen tells him, "If you loved me, you'd want to come over and watch me play indoor [baseball]," and at the end of the story Krebs decides to do just that. This reaffirms his love for

and loyalty to Helen, and also restores some hope in Krebs's somewhat bleak emotional situation. At the same time, however, the gesture is small, and associated with Helen's own naiveté about what love is. By playing baseball, Helen also represents a certain intersection of female and male gender expectations. That Helen plays baseball and pitches better than the boys blurs the line between masculinity and femininity. Though Hemingway's characters often reflect rigid, sexist ideas, the author also, at times, gestures towards the transcendence of these boundaries through female characters like Helen.

Krebs's Mother – Though Krebs's mother seems to try to understand her son's experience in the war, in Krebs's point of view, she fails to the point of almost making things worse. Throughout the story, she is a woman of faith, invoking God and praying frequently—a characteristic that starkly contrasts with Krebs's own inability to pray. Krebs's mother is also the most talkative character in the story, as is evident in the final scene in which she goes on about the other boys in the town who are already working and moving on with their lives; she wants Krebs to do the same. Krebs's mother is in many ways a foil to Krebs. Where she is very emotional, crying when Krebs says he does not love her, for instance, Krebs is stoic and indifferent. Where she is devout, Krebs feels no connection to God. Where she is talkative, Krebs is monosyllabic. By showing Krebs's mother coming into Krebs's room at the end of the story, Hemingway gestures towards the idea that she is trying desperately to access her son's inner, private space; her methods fail, however, as she simply cannot relate to Krebs. Krebs feels embarrassed for his mother and, by the end of the story, resolves that he will find a job just to appease her.

Krebs's Father – Though Krebs's father never appears in the story, he is mentioned several times. When Krebs's mother implores Krebs to get a job, for instance, she is relaying something that his father had asked her to say to him. She then tells her son to stop by his father's office, which he does not do. His resistance implies a resentment of and aversion to the traditionally male working sphere that his father represents. Where Krebs seems to fail at what is expected of men—he can neither talk to **girls** nor get a job—His father, who seems quite conventionally and stereotypically male in the story, represents the opposite. His working at his office poses an especially stark juxtaposition to Krebs' being at home; his father's absence calls attention to the fact that, based on traditional gender roles, the home is not where a man should be.

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.

WAR AND TRAUMA

Hemingway's "Soldier's Home" tells the story of a young soldier named Krebs returning home after World War I. Though Hemingway does not explicitly narrate Krebs' emotions, the story's hard-boiled prose style represents Krebs' suppressed psyche: after the war, Krebs sleeps late, can hardly muster the energy to talk to anyone, and wanders aimlessly around his home town. This disconnect between Krebs and the people around him—his family, other soldiers, and the **girls** he watches from his porch—offers a critical lens into how soldiers adjust, or fail to adjust, to life after the traumatic experiences of war. In describing Krebs and his difficulties, the story further suggests that those struggles are themselves a source of trauma as deep as any caused by the war. In so doing, Hemingway paints a grim picture of how war continues to effect young soldiers even after the battles have ceased.

After the war, Krebs' life in his home town is characterized by lethargy, apathy, and alienation. He enjoys watching local girls, for instance, but has little interest in courtship and does not want to work to "get a girl." Rather, the story describes him as liking the "patterns" that the girls make. In other words, he sees the girls as pleasant art or decoration, but is unable to see them as people.

This lack of desire for connection extends to all other aspects of his life as well. When Krebs' mother asks him if he loves her, he responds, "I don't love anybody." Just a few moments later, he tells his mother that he cannot pray—he has also lost the ability to connect with God. Though he apologizes shortly after, in the final passage of the story he admits that he had lied, that "none of it had touched him." Krebs' total inability to connect with others—man or God—shows just how completely he is crippled by apathy and emptiness.

The story also makes clear that Krebs was not always this way. For instance, the narrator notes that before Krebs went to war, "he had never been allowed to drive the **family motor car**." The clear implication is that, before the war, Krebs wanted to drive the car, and that this desire was connected to the social life that having access to a car would provide. But when, after the war, his mother comes into his bedroom one morning to tell Krebs that his father has decided to allow him to drive the car—even suggesting that Krebs take "some of the nice girls out"—Krebs responds only with cynicism, shooting back "I'll bet you made him." Krebs understands that his mother is trying to coax him out of his apathetic inner world, but he wants no part of what de describes as those "complications."

Notably, Hemingway rarely uses the verb "feel" to describe Krebs in the story. When "feel" *is* invoked, it's in reference to negative emotions: Krebs feels "embarrassed and resentful" of

his mother's praying, he feels "sick and vaguely nauseated" after his mother reminds him of how she held him as a baby, and, finally, he admits that he feels "sorry for his mother." Krebs' embarrassment and nausea seem to be byproducts of an *aversion* to feeling, rather than true feelings themselves. Krebs seems severed not only from his town and his family, then, but also from his own self; his feelings are merely sour shadows of the feelings of others.

The most obvious cause of Krebs' trauma is, of course, the war. Though it never depicts scenes from the war, the story hints at the way that it has altered Krebs—how the army taught him that one does not actually "need a girl," for instance, and how Krebs now wants to live without "any consequences ever again." There is a sense that Krebs has been more emotionally traumatized by the war than perhaps even he understands. Yet, at the same time, the story also suggests that there were moments in the war of true nobility and bravery, when Krebs "had done the one thing, the only thing for a man to do" and that memories of these actions could make him feel "cool and clear inside himself." The war was traumatic, but even as it devastated Krebs, his actions during it also gave him a sense of himself.

The story locates a second source of Krebs' trauma as arising not from the war itself, but from the actual experience of going home. Because he was part of the second division in the army, Krebs returns home after the first group of soldiers. As a result, he finds himself in a town that both can't comprehend what he's been through and is not much interested in talking about the war anyway; they've already heard enough exciting and gruesome stories from the other soldiers. Even Krebs' mother's attention wanders when he tries to tell her about his experiences. Krebs ends up appropriating stories of other soldiers to hold the interest of his audience, but by exaggerating in this way, the narrator says, Krebs "lost everything." By telling lies, however unimportant, about the war, he loses access to those things that could "make him feel cool and clear inside himself."

Krebs' happiest moment in the story comes as he reads a **book** of history about the war and the battles in which he took part. The book reconnects him to his past—and the self—he has lost. That he wishes the books had more maps, however, suggests that the book can never give him the direction or sense of self that, through the double trauma of being in the war and then returning from it, now evades him.

The story ends with Krebs agreeing to follow up with his mother's wish that he get a job. It's clear that his mother hopes this will be the first step in Krebs' re-entrance into society. But the last paragraph of the story notes, "He had felt sorry for his mother and she had made him lie. He would go to Kansas City and get a job and she would feel all right about it." Once again, the love and emotions of others feel to Krebs like complications that just force him to lie; going to Kansas City is not a way for him to rejoin society, but rather a way to try to continue to escape. The story then ends with Krebs wandering off to watch his sister play baseball, and it's unclear if he even will gather the energy to go to Kansas City at all. The only thing that is clear is that Krebs, in the aftermath of the war and his return from it, has been utterly cut off from the world around him.

LANGUAGE OF SUPPRESSION

As is characteristic of Hemingway, the language of "Soldier's Home" is unadorned and minimalist, filled with simple, declarative sentences that emulate Krebs' state of mind. Instead of using expressive language to reveal the painful experience of war, Hemingway's style suppresses that pain under the surface of the story; his prose implies the immense trauma of the past by reflecting Krebs' inability to describe it. In fact, one could argue that Hemingway uses language not only to mimic his character's experience of suppression, but also to demonstrate how language shapes that suppression itself. The story's prose both reflects Krebs' arid inner world *and* constrains it; it ultimately reveals how lacking the language to articulate trauma means that Krebs has no option *but* to suppress his pain, as he has no words to express his feelings or experiences—even to himself.

One way in which Hemingway's language reflects a suppressed state of mind is through its repetitions. Repetition can also generate a sense of dullness, which, in this case, relates to Krebs' feelings of apathy and emptiness after the war. For instance, the phrase "He liked" repeats several times as Krebs thinks about **the girls** he sees in town: "He liked the round Dutch collars [...] He liked their silk stockings [...] He liked their bobbed hair." The word "like" is, in itself, rather bland, offering little specific insight into how Krebs actually feels about the girls. Nevertheless, the simplicity of such linguistic repetition helps illustrate a key aspect of Krebs's self-suppression. Repetition is a pattern, and patterns are simple, stable, and easy to interpret. Patterns prevent the threat of complexity. For someone like Krebs, finding patterns would be a comfort following the chaos of war. Hemingway's stylistic repetition, then, reflects Krebs' desire for patterns and simplicity, to stay away from anything that might lie deeper in his subconscious or past.

The story's prose further reflects the notion of suppression through its vague wording. Hemingway often includes sentences that rely on unspecific pronouns like "it" and "that." He appears to deliberately use such ambiguous language to mimic Krebs' desire to suppress the specifics of the war. For example, Krebs does not want to get a girl because he "did not want to tell any more lies. It wasn't worth it." Although the reader can understand some of what "It wasn't worth it" may be referring to, the short sentence is so vague as to make it difficult to fully grasp what "it" means. At the same time, the line gives the reader the sense that Krebs is hiding from the

immensity of whatever "it" is. In the final passage of the story, the language grows even more ambiguous with sentences like, "Still, none of it had touched him," and, later, "It had just gotten going that way. Well, that was all over now, anyway." Although the reader can surmise what some of these words may be referring to from context, Hemingway still refuses to grant specifics. His language both reflects and contributes to Krebs' strained and hollowed state, in which the soldier seems at once empty of and incapable of expressing emotion.

The reader is similarly never provided specifics about Krebs' experiences during the war—one can understand *vaguely* what has happened to Krebs by leaning on general knowledge about the context of World War I, but the story itself does not fill in any of these details. This seems the most obvious indicator of language being an act of suppression itself. Of course, the war happened, and Krebs was, indeed, there. But the language of the story does not permit the details of the war to surface, just as Krebs himself seems to have locked the war away behind a protective layer of apathy and emptiness.

The short and declarative sentences of the novel further embody and shape Krebs' mental state. Think of the periods as stoppers of emotion; before a sentence in the story can get too long and rambling—before it can wander off to places that might be painful to visit—it is pinned down by a period. Hemingway keeps his prose unemotional by making his sentences tight and straightforward. In fact, Krebs' mother's dialogue in the final scene makes up the only passages that ramble. She speaks to Krebs in a burst of emotion and desperation, expressing her wish that he get started with his life. This moment starkly contrasts in style to the story's overall constrained prose, as Krebs' mother's character in general contrasts with Krebs'. She is open with her wishes, whereas Krebs is tightlipped and short with her in his responses. She represents a desperate expression of feelings, assigning words to her emotions, whereas Krebs represents either a pained suppression of feeling, or a lack of feeling altogether.

Throughout the story, the reader may wonder whether war has indeed rendered Krebs unable to communicate, or truly numb. Because Hemingway's sentences mimic the act of suppression itself, Hemingway invites the reader to consider whether the language represents the way the war has hollowed Krebs' emotional state, or whether the locked-down language is a barrier against a stream of emotions in Krebs that are simply, purposefully unexpressed.

MEN AND WOMEN

In much of his work, Hemingway's characterization of men and women tends to conform to what a modern reader might describe as rigid, sexist gender expectations. "Soldier's Home" is no exception. While Krebs' inability to express his feelings can be chalked up to the trauma of war, it also represents a traditionally stoic masculinity that holds emotional vulnerability to be a weakness. In contrast, the women in the story conform to traditional ideas of feminine emotionality. They also lack a sense of fleshed out humanity—the town **girls** are, to Krebs, nothing more than a "pattern," and the dialogue of Krebs' sister and mother do little to distinguish them as individuals. It is important to understand the stereotypical ways that Krebs perceives of women, as well as to recognize the extent to which the story does not question and, in fact, seems to agree with Krebs' views.

After returning from the war, Krebs spends a lot of time watching the young women of his town, whom he refers to as "girls." Though "he would have liked to have a girl," the narrator notes, "he did not want to have to spend a long time getting her." He imagines looking at the girls in the same way he might enjoy looking at a nice decoration. In fact, he thinks of the girls as eye-pleasing "patterns"—he sees them as being, almost literally, two-dimensional. The story treats Krebs' hesitance about engaging with the girls as a window into his loss of feeling as a result of the war, and his resulting desire to live without consequences—that is, to live without getting stuck in the complexities of a society of which he no longer feels a part. To get to know a girl, as Krebs sees it, would force him to live a social life full of unbearable "complications."

Krebs's ideas about women notably fall into traditional notions of male and female roles: women may talk and express themselves, while men either do not know how, or do not allow themselves, to do so for fear of seeming weak; women also "trap" men into a complex life of family and emotions to which men are unsuited. Krebs' preference to just simply "have" a girl also aligns with his presumptions of masculinity; he is more interested in possessing the girl as an object than in getting to know her as an individual who has independent thoughts and experiences.

It is possible to argue that there is an implicit recognition in the story that the girls are, in fact, more three-dimensional than they appear, and that part of Krebs's tragedy is his failure to see this. However, such an argument ignores the fact that Hemingway never offers any of the "girls" a moment to prove that she is more than how Krebs views her—Hemingway gives the girls no dialogue and never distinguishes one individual girl from another. Instead, the story presents them in the plural—"girls"—the entire time. As a result, the story aligns itself with Krebs' perception of the girls and does nothing to undercut their sexist representation.

Krebs even sees his own mother as entrapping and manipulating him with her emotions. Near the end of the story, when Krebs' mother asks if he loves her, Krebs responds that he doesn't love anybody. When she is hurt and begins to cry, he deduces that she can't possibly understand what he is trying to say and comforts her by claiming that he didn't actually mean it. All the while, the love his mother expresses makes him feel "sick

and vaguely nauseated," and he resentfully thinks to himself that "he had felt sorry for his mother and she had made him lie." He sees the lie as *her* fault rather than his own, a product of her inability to understand him and her overwrought emotions. Krebs' mother not only cries dramatically when he says he doesn't love her, but also seems to vocalize every worry to him, talking more than anyone else in the story. Her talking physically pains the quiet Krebs, and she is depicted as overly-sensitive and desperate. The story never questions Krebs' sense that his mother's feelings and lack of understanding—that is, in the view of the story, her femininity—only serve to exacerbate his struggles.

The only woman whom Krebs actually seems to like is his younger sister. When *she* asks if he loves her, he says, "sure." It is notable, however, that his sister is young and innocent, asking him "Couldn't your brother really be your beau just because he's your brother?" This naiveté seems to appeal to Krebs because there is no actual threat of complication with his sister—it's just banter. At the same time, despite Krebs' more positive response to his sister, she too conforms to traditional notions of femininity. She is flirtatious, talkative, and wears her heart on her sleeve, a marked contrast to Krebs' tightlipped, stoic composure throughout the story.

Even as Krebs thinks of the world in traditional gender norms—largely at the expense of the women in his life—he is subject to such terms himself. Krebs' father never appears in the story because he works at an office and is therefore not in the home, where the story primarily takes place. The dynamic of women in the home and men at work is, once again, a traditional representation of gender roles. Of course, this means that Krebs spends his time in a stereotypically feminine space. When she implores Krebs to find a job, then, Krebs' mother is also imploring him to join the male working world. The very title of the story—"Soldier's Home"—functions as a kind of ironic oxymoron. Though Krebs is returning to his home, as a man he isn't meant to stay there. Rather, the expectations of masculinity specifically require him to be out of the home. Hemingway thus further illustrates the restrictive nature of masculinity, which compounds Krebs' sense of societal alienation.

Even as it fails to interrogate their merit, the story ultimately portrays gender roles as creating a state of estrangement and isolation in men; men's inability to be emotive and domestic keeps them always at a distance from their families and homes. Furthermore, the story shows how, for soldiers, masculine expectations require a certain grit against adversity, which prevents them from admitting to—let alone working through—trauma and grief. Nevertheless, the story takes for granted that its conventional conception of masculinity and femininity is simply the way the world works. The tale's pessimistic ending can thus be read as a tragedy not only in the sense that Krebs is stuck in an impossible, bleak situation, but also in the sense that the story itself fails to conceive even of the possibility of questioning the gender norms that cause Krebs such grief in the first place.

LIES AND SOCIETY

The idea of lying recurs several times throughout "Soldier's Home," and holds a central place in the story. While there are many hints that the trauma of war has profoundly impacted Krebs and that his apathy, disaffection, and loss of a sense of self upon returning home stems from PTSD, the story more explicitly locates Krebs' issues as stemming from the fact that, upon returning home, "to be listened to at all [about his experiences in the war] he had to lie and after he had done this twice he, too, had a reaction against the war and against talking about it." While it might seem extreme to attribute such a loss of self to some essentially white lies, that provides all the more reason to investigate how lies function in the mind of Krebs and within the story.

The concept of lying first appears near the beginning of the story, when the narrator comments that, after returning home from the war, Krebs twice exaggerated his stories by saying that minor things that had happened to other soldiers had in fact happened to him. Afterward, the narrator says, "A distaste for everything that had happened to him in the war set in because of the lies he had told. All of the times that had been able to make him feel cool and clear inside himself when he thought of them; the times so long back when he had done the one thing, the only thing for a man to do, easily and naturally, when he might have done something else, now lost their cool, valuable quality and then were lost themselves." In other words, the narrator is saying that, by lying about his past, Krebs has essentially poisoned his connection to the times in his life when he acted nobly, honorably, and like a man. And in poisoning that connection, he has lost that aspect of his self, which was the only aspect that mattered. The implication here is that lying is a dire, dreadful act that is so unbecoming of a man that it, in fact, destroys one's ability to continue to *be* a man.

The second, third, and fourth time that lying appears in the story also relate to gender, but rather than dealing solely with men, they deal with men in relation to women. First, the narrator notes that while Krebs wouldn't mind "having a girl," he is uninterested in actually courting a girl because "he did not want to tell any more lies." That thought leads to Krebs's revelation in the army that both men who pretended that "girls mean nothing to them" and men who claimed that they "had to have them all the time" were lying, and that in fact "he did not really need a girl." The fourth time occurs at the very end of the story, when Krebs' mother asks him if he loves her. Though Krebs first responds that he doesn't love anyone, when his mother begins to cry he says that he didn't mean it and that he does in fact love her. He later thinks, resentfully, "He had felt sorry for his mother and she had made him lie."

In each of these three instances, a man lies *because* of a woman. First, Krebs believes that the only way to "court" a girl is to lie to her. This doesn't necessarily mean a big lie, but rather that courting involves some kind of misrepresentation of one's thoughts or feelings in order to keep a woman happy and interested. Second, Krebs believes that men lie to each other about women in order to display their own power and manhood—that they are at once independent enough to not need women, and so virile that they must have women. Third, Krebs believes that the obligations of family compel a man to lie to protect the feelings of the women around them, in this specific case the woman being his mother.

That Krebs seems to see women as usually motivating men's lies offers some additional insight into his character because, throughout the story, Krebs also seems to see women—both his mother and the **girls** of the town—as forces dragging him back into a social world he no longer feel a part of—the world of getting a job, having a family, and so on. Krebs' lies in his war stories were similarly influenced by society, in the sense that what motivated his lies was a desire to describe and connect with other people through his war stories, and he needed the lies in order to hold people's attention. When seen in this light, it begins to seem clear that Krebs sees all social interactions—indeed all of society—as functioning only through the telling of lies, even if small ones, and he desperately desires not to be a part of it. As the narrator puts it: "He did not want to tell any more lies. It wasn't worth it."

The question then becomes, if telling these sorts of lies isn't "worth it," then what is it that Krebs perceives as the cost? The story doesn't explicitly answer, but it gives a hint in Krebs' thoughts immediately after he thinks lying isn't worth it: "He did not want any consequences. He did not want any consequences ever again. He wanted to live along without consequences." The triple repetition puts a special emphasis on "consequences," such that the consequences to which Krebs is referring seem much more dire than merely, say, someone getting angry about a white lie. Instead, in a story about a soldier coming home from World War I—a war that was understood to have introduced a new level of brutality to warfare—the "consequences" seem likely to be the terrible death of the war. Further, the brutality of World War I was often seen as having destroyed the illusion of the ideals of a previous age—ideals of civility, chivalry, and even, to a degree, national pride that led so many young men to enlist in the war in the first place. The brutal nature of the war revealed those ideals to be lies that led to horrific death. In this way, Krebs' desire to avoid lies, and his seeming suspicion that all society involves lies, can be seen as an outgrowth of his war-trauma, and a refusal to ever be complicit in or caught up by such deadly lies again.

SYMBOLS

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

THE CAR

The family motor car in "Soldier's Home" symbolizes ambition and direction. At the time of the story's setting, automobiles were major symbols of status and wealth. In fact, Krebs's father uses the car to take out his clients, and parks it in front of the National Bank Building in which his office is located—both actions that underscore the car's association with social status. The fact that before going to war, Krebs was not allowed to take the car out further establishes driving as a desirable privilege. This also suggests that, at one point in his life, Krebs *had* desires—notably ones tied to a distinct symbol of American success and self-directed freedom.

Following Krebs's return, his mother tells Krebs that his father and she have agreed to let him drive the car, so that he can go out and take "the nice girls out riding with" him. The reference to the car here serves to highlight the dramatic shift in Krebs's apathy following the war. Where Krebs once actively sought to take charge of such a powerful marker of status, his mother now must desperately coax Krebs to use the car—that is, to get out of the house, to take direction of his own life and start working, to enter back into the American system. Though the narrator notes that the car had not changed—"it was still the same car"—the idea of the car importantly has. Instead of representing a promise of mobility, now it exposes Krebs's sense of paralysis.

PICTURES

Pictures symbolize both the attempt and ultimate failure to represent or contain the past. At the beginning of the story, Hemingway mentions two important pictures of Krebs. The first shows him with his fraternity brothers, "all of them wearing the exact same height and style collar." The second is described as being of Krebs "on the Rhine," an important battle area of World War I, where he stands with another corporal and two German girls. Importantly, however, "the Rhine does not show" in the picture.

These two pictures appear at the beginning the story, as if to provide all the background necessary to understand Krebs, and yet they both fail in providing a full portrait of the soldier. After all, the picture of Krebs in the fraternity shows him looking like everybody else, making it difficult to distinguish any of his specific characteristics. Though the narrator specifically notes that the second picture was taken "on the Rhine," it fails to show this seemingly defining characteristic at all. This is important, as

the photograph is supposedly an empirical representation of experience—in other words, a photograph stands as proof that an experience happened. But this photograph, in its indistinctness, has as much a lost sense of location and place as Krebs himself does later in the story.

The pictures are items that supposedly neatly contain, within their four corners, discrete parts of Krebs's past. Yet their failure to reflect meaningful or recognizable markers of the soldier's experiences suggest that the past is far more slippery and uncontainable than the photographs imply it to be. Indeed, despite Krebs's attempt to suppress it, the past seeps into his present life throughout the story.

THE GIRLS

Upon returning home, Krebs spends a significant amount of time sitting on his front **porch** and watching the local girls walk by. Lacking any individual character of their own, the girls broadly represent the "normal" life and society of which Krebs is no longer a part. Krebs has no desire to actually talk with the girls, and his insistence on staying at a distance reflects his inability—or refusal—to engage with the world he left behind, as well as the ways in which the trauma of war has distanced him from the potential for a typical life. In their talkative behavior, the girls further highlight Krebs's own stoic emptiness and resultant failure at intimacy and connection. He does not want to connect with them precisely because he does not want to *talk* to them—he sees the girls as complicated, emotional, and chatty. In contrast, he is quiet, stoic, and numb.

When his mother encourages Krebs to take a girl out in the **family car**, she is pressuring him to participate in this normal life, but again, Krebs wants to remain at a distance. He doesn't want to face the complications or consequences that he believes arise from this normal, societal sphere. Thus, the girls at once represent what Krebs sees as typical life and expose Krebs's own situation of alienation after the war.

THE PORCH

Krebs's front porch symbolizes passivity and stagnancy. From the porch, he watches and observes people walk by, such as **the girls**, and yet he remains on the periphery. Being on the edge of the street, the porch represents a sense of separation and idleness—sitting there, Krebs feels no desire to take part in the goings-on of his town and the "real world." Instead, he is content to be a passive observer. The porch itself is also a stationary and private space. It has clear borders that set it apart from the public sphere, and thus protect Krebs within his own stagnant existence. Krebs can take refuge by sitting on the porch, where he can watch the public world pass by without feeling any pressure to participate in it.

Furthermore, Krebs reads a book about the war while sitting on the porch. This is fitting, as the activity of reading is also a way of seeing another world without actually being inside it. Of course, the fact that the book that Krebs reads is about the war—a space that he *did* occupy—suggests his desire to look upon his time in battle from the outside in. That is, he wants not only to remove himself from the outside world, but to distance himself from his personal, internal experiences. Similarly, though Krebs feels removed from society and at peace when sitting on the porch, he is of course still squarely within his hometown, in his own house, and suffers due to the expectations his mother and father still have of him. The porch can only do so much to provide the comfort of distance, to pose as something that keeps him peacefully on the periphery of American society. Krebs feels a distinct sense of dislocation because the worlds he reads about or observes from the safety porch—both the girls' world and that of the war—are still very much his own.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Scribner edition of *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* published in 1998.

Soldier's Home Quotes

"At first Krebs, who had been at Belleau Wood, Soissons, the Champagne, St. Mihiel and in the Argonne did not want to talk about the war at all. Later he felt the need to talk but no one wanted to hear about it. His town had heard too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities."

Related Characters: Harold Krebs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

Towards the beginning of the story Hemingway lists specific battles in which Krebs fought, but does not give any more detail about the battles besides their names. Though readers must lean on their background knowledge to glean the specifics, these battles were indeed violent, gruesome episodes of war. They thus reveal that Krebs did undergo significant trauma while he fought, since he was present at many major battlegrounds.

The idea that Krebs does not want to talk at first about the

war makes sense, as he does not want to relive such painful experiences. However, the pain only gets exacerbated as he finds that when he finally wants to talk, no one wants to listen—as a result, he gets trapped in an inability to express himself. This situation ends up leading into his lies about the war, which ends up making him feel even more lost, distraught, and empty inside.

"All of the times that had been able to make him feel cool and clear inside himself when he thought of them; the times so long back when he had done the one thing, the only thing for a man to do, easily and naturally, when he might have done something else, now lost their cool, valuable quality and then were lost themselves."

Related Characters: Harold Krebs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is the only one in the whole story that explains a moment of authentic, genuine feeling in Krebs during the war. It occurs in the story right after Krebs starts lying about his experience in the war in order to attract the attention of his town. The consequence of lying is that it destroys his memory of these moments from the war—in which Krebs feels an instinctual and natural impulse to fight, an impulse connected to his manhood. This quote also skates the specificity of the thing it is to which Krebs is referring. What is "the only thing for a man to do"? Hemingway does not fill in the ambiguity of "thing," and yet it seems to be implied, in the idea that he "might have done something else," that this quote is talking about fight or flight—these moments when Krebs reacted instinctually in the war, "easily and naturally," are the moments when he killed, or committed some sort of violent act, an act that could easily be contributing now to his feelings of postwar trauma. However, in the moment, during the war, he did what was natural. When he's back home, however, Krebs' lies erode this sense of clarity. This quote thus depicts the first clear consequence in Krebs' pattern of lying, the consequence that ends up making him feel increasingly apathetic, numb and lost.

"Krebs acquired the nausea in regard to experience that is the result of untruth or exaggeration…"

Related Characters: Harold Krebs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 112

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs right after Krebs lies twice about his experience in the war. The result of these lies, even though they are unimportant lies in it of themselves, is nausea. The nausea is an important consequence of lying, a consequence that leads to Krebs not wanting to talk at all. To keep from feeling nauseous, Krebs would rather not say anything, as he feels he cannot tell the truth of his experience because no one wants to hear him—but, even his lies fail in attracting an audience, and just make him feel sick instead. This nausea is important, as it returns later in the story when Krebs lies to his mother that he loves her. Thus, this initial mention of the nausea in this quote is an important marker of Krebs' experience upon returning home—it is the first time that this feeling of nausea builds up. The nausea itself also represents Krebs' prevailing feeling of disorientation, as he cannot seem to find himself upon returning home. Part of that arises out of his inability to express his past experiences accurately—after all, you must know where you've been to know where you're going.

"He did not want to do any courting. He did not want to tell any more lies. It wasn't worth it. He did not want any consequences. He did not want any consequences ever again. He wanted to live without consequences."

Related Characters: Harold Krebs

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

This quote happens as Krebs is watching the town girls from his front porch. Krebs stays on his porch to observe them, as he does not want to get involved with talking to them. For Krebs, the girls are connected to the consequences he has felt before from lying. He seems to think that talking to the girls will make him lie more, and he wants to avoid this at all costs, to avoid the consequence of nausea that arises from being untruthful. The fact that "consequences" are repeated

three times here also shows Krebs' fear of being an active participant in the world. He wants to protect himself from the risk of communicating and connecting with others and, because of this fear of consequence, he ends up just hovering on the periphery of society—sitting on his porch, passively observing—as opposed to being involved with the outside world. He does not want to feel the effects of his actions. Because the quote relates that Krebs "did not want any consequences ever again," it implies that he has already suffered the consequences of previous actions, such as the consequences of violent acts he may have committed during the war. Thus, for Krebs, to act in any way that could result in any kind of consequence is not "worth it." He would rather just not do *anything* of consequence. The result of this resolution is that he does not participate at all in society. He does not connect with others at all. He just exists in his own private world.

"He sat on the porch reading a book about the war...He wished there were more maps. He looked forward with a good feeling to reading all the really good histories when they would come out with good detail maps. Now he was really learning about the war. He had been a good soldier. That made a difference."

Related Characters: Harold Krebs

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

As Krebs spends his days sitting on the porch, he also reads a book about the war. An important feature of the book are the maps. One of the only "good feeling[s]" that Krebs feels in this entire story comes from looking at the maps. The maps are able to situate Krebs in the war, something that is extra important to Krebs as he is already feeling displaced and disoriented in his life upon returning home. By having maps give him a sense of direction and place, a certain order seems to be restored upon him and he is able to make sense of his experience. Of course, these ideas are not expressed directly in the quote, but the mention of the good feeling that arises from the maps implies the importance of maps to Krebs in this way. Also, because of the book giving him an ability to organize a logic to his own experience, he is able to assign a value to his own participation in the war— "he had been a good soldier." Because of that, there is "a difference" in how he thinks about the war—it seems to make him slightly more at peace with his experience.

"Aw, Hare, you don't love me. If you loved me, you'd want to come over and watch me play indoor."

Related Characters: Helen, Harold Krebs

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

Helen says this to her brother Krebs in the final scene when Krebs comes down to breakfast. She first teases him about being her "beau," then asks if he loves her. He says "sure," but then when he only says "maybe," to whether he'll come watch her play, Helen responds with this quote. Much about this quote is naïve, but in a playful and tender way. Helen calls her brother by his nickname, "Hare" which is short for Harold, and expresses a juvenile idea of love—that love is equal to the effort of coming over and watching her play indoor. She poses then an equation for Krebs of very simple terms—if he does this, then he loves her. Though it is indeed playful and doesn't have a tone of seriousness, Krebs does end up following through at the end of the story, thinking that he will go over and watch her play. This is the sole moment of the story when Krebs acts in a way that expresses love, precisely because Helen made her idea of love explicitly clear to Krebs, by saying this quote.

"Your father does not want to hamper your freedom. He thinks you should be allowed to drive the car. If you want to take some of the nice girls out riding with you, we are only too pleased."

Related Characters: Harold Krebs, Krebs's Father

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

When Krebs' mother speaks to Krebs privately in the

kitchen, in the final scene after breakfast, she relays to him the wishes of her and his father's that he start behaving in a way that has some direction and ambition. What she communicates as Krebs' father's suggestion is that Krebs start taking out some of the town girls in their family car—this would be the first step towards becoming an active participant again in the typical life, the life that society expects of a young man. Importantly, Krebs' father himself does not enter the story, but is only given a voice through the voice of Krebs' mother. Because he does not say the quote, but is quoted by Krebs' mother, further attention is given to the fact that Krebs' father is not in the household, but in his office, fulfilling his own duty as a man to greater society. Krebs, however, does not want to start work, or start doing what is expected of him, because he does not want to be a part of this world at all—he still feels at a distance, fearful of consequences.

"His mother looked at him across the table. Her eyes were shiny. She started crying."

Related Characters: Harold Krebs, Krebs's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

Krebs' mother starts crying after Krebs tells her that he does not love her. He only says this, however, in response to her asking him—so the act itself of telling her he does not love her is, in fact, a passive act—a response to a question as opposed to a statement of his own. However, his stark and truthful response, that he does not love her, that he does not love anyone, causes her to cry. The crying is dramatic in the context of the story, as Krebs has been so emotionless, numb, apathetic, stoic. The mother here poses a stark juxtaposition to Krebs' own emotionless state. Though Krebs comforts her after she starts crying, by putting his arm around her and kissing her hair, the actions themselves feel disingenuous for Krebs, and simply out of duty because of the acute situation of his mother crying. After all, later Krebs says that "none of it had touched him."

"So his mother prayed for him and then they stood up and Krebs kissed his mother and went out of the house. He had tried so to keep his life from being complicated. Still, none of it had touched him...He wanted his life to go smoothly. It had just gotten going that way. Well, that was over now, anyway. He would go to the schoolyard and watch Helen play indoor baseball."

Related Characters: Krebs's Father, Helen, Harold Krebs, Krebs's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

This quote makes up the final passage of the story. The fact that the entire emotional scene with his mother hadn't touched him highlights the depth of Krebs' apathy and emptiness. He still wants to live without consequence. He wants things to be as uncomplicated as possible. However, he makes some resolutions going forward, the final one being the most important—that he will "go to the schoolyard and watch Helen play indoor baseball." This relates to Helen's quote before, that Krebs can't really love her if he doesn't go watch her play. By finishing the story with this idea that he will indeed go over to the schoolyard, in some ways restores some hope in the story—that Krebs does feel love and emotion and connection. On the contrary, the story does not end with a fulfillment of this action, but just the thought that "he would go to the schoolyard..." Thus, to read this passage as hopeful or hopeless is up to the reader. Is Krebs taking steps in the right direction? Or is he still feeling as empty as before?

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.

SOLDIER'S HOME

Krebs enlists in World War I after attending a Methodist college in Kansas. There are **two photographs** of Krebs; one shows him alongside his fraternity brothers, and the other shows him on the Rhine with a corporal and two German girls, though the Rhine itself doesn't appear in the photo. Krebs dies not come home from the war until the summer of 1919, after most of the other soldiers have already returned.

The only information that the reader gets regarding Krebs's background is quite sparse. Right away, the story suppresses the details of the war, reflecting Krebs's own impulse towards suppressing his traumatic memories. The fact that Krebs comes home after the other soldiers will only serve to exacerbate his feelings of alienation.

When Krebs comes home, he does not receive the same elaborate, celebratory welcome as the other soldiers. People don't seem to understand why Krebs has come back so late, in fact finding it "ridiculous."

Hemingway reveals that Krebs is one of many, underscoring that his experience is not unique while also suggesting that the townspeople fail to appreciate the trauma of war.

Krebs had been in battles at Belleau Wood, Soissons, the Champagne, St. Mihiel, and Argonne. At first, he does not want to talk about the war, and then when he does, no one wants to listen; they have heard their fill of atrocities and are bored by "actualities."

By mentioning these major battles, Hemingway avoids giving details about the war and instead relies on the reader's outside knowledge to fill in the gaps. The fact that no one is interested in Krebs's stories suggests a certain shallowness on the part of the townspeople and will further heighten Krebs's sense of alienation.

In order to get people to listen to him talk about the war, Krebs lies twice about his experiences. Because Krebs lies, he develops a "distaste for everything that had happened to him in the war." Such distaste extends to the times when Krebs felt "cool and clear inside himself [...] the times so long back when had done the one thing, the only thing for a man to do." Because of the lying, Krebs's memories of these times lose that very "cool, valuable quality."

Not only does the story given no real details about the war, but it also elides details about Krebs's lies. In this way, lies and truth equally obscured, as if the war is such a watershed event that language itself fails to capture it. The reader can assume that "cool and clear" times refers to moments when Krebs performed particular acts of duty or violence; by lying, Krebs sullies such memories. Of course, the text provides no further details, again creating a sense of linguistic oppression.

The lies Krebs tells are "quite unimportant," and therefore unimpressive. The effect of the lying makes Krebs feel nauseous. Even in the pool room, the other men are not interested in his stories, having already heard thrilling tales, such as ones about German women being chained to machine guns. Because of his lies, Krebs feels as though he has "lost everything."

Hemingway again suggests the townspeople's distinct lack of appreciation of the horrors of war, which contributes to Krebs's isolation. For Krebs to have "lost everything" means that, in lying, he has compromised the clear grasp he had on his memories and experience; in many ways, these are all he has upon returning home, and by losing them, he is losing a part of himself.

Since his return, Krebs spends his time sleeping late, going to the library, eating, reading, and playing in the pool room. He also practices clarinet and wanders around down town. His sisters still look up to him, and his mother tries to listen to his stories but doesn't have the attention span. His father is "non-committal."

Krebs's routine has a depressed and numb quality to it. He seems to be going through the motions of his life, without a sense or purpose or direction. Even his family fails to appreciate what he's been through, exacerbating his sense of alienation.

Krebs's father, who works in real estate, has a motor **car** that Krebs was not allowed to drive before the war. His father uses the car to chauffer important clients, and it stays always parked outside his father's office building. The car is still the same car, and, in fact, after the war most things in the town are the same.

The car would be a symbol of wealth and status at the time of the story, and thus underscores Krebs's father's success as a businessman. Later, Krebs's mother will say he is now allowed to drive the car—an effort to get him out of the house. The idea that the car, like most things in the town, has not changed suggests that Krebs's perception of his life and town has changed the most.

The only thing that has changed in town is that the **girls** have grown up. Krebs lacks the energy to "break into" their world, but appreciates the way they look—their short hair, round Dutch collars, sweaters, and silk stockings. He likes to watch the way they walk, though he says that they are too complicated to actually get to know. He does not want to talk to them or spend time with them as he fears the "consequences" that come along with building relationships. Thus, he prefers watching them from a distance.

The girls become a central symbol in the story of the world to which Krebs feels he no longer has access. The girls present an opportunity to form relationships, and that Krebs wants to avoid such "consequences" reveals his aversion to reentering society. Krebs would rather be on the sidelines, passively observing, than exert the effort to reintegrate and, by his view, re-complicate his life.

As Krebs watches the **girls**, he thinks about the soldiers he knew in the war who talked about girls. One said that girls meant nothing to him and another said that he couldn't live without them. Now Krebs sees both claims as lies. He thinks that if you do not think about a girl, you do not need one.

The fact that Krebs disregards both ideas about women shows his deep cynicism. Krebs also demonstrates suppressive instincts, a stereotypically masculine trait: he does not want to admit vulnerability, and thinks that if one suppresses desire, the desire goes away. Of course, the result of this suppression seems to be a lack of feeling, and meaning, altogether.

Though Krebs would like a girl, he thinks that the prospect of having a relationship with one is too complicated. He remembers the French and German girls who didn't talk as much—relationships with them were simpler than he imagines they would be with the **girls** back home. He then thinks about how he liked Germany better than France, and that he didn't want to come home from Germany but did anyway.

Krebs admits that what really keeps him from wanting a girl is the idea of talking to her. Krebs fears the complications that come from sharing one's life and one's self in a relationship. By being with girls who don't speak his language, he does not need to express himself with words. Krebs's resistance to going home further illustrates his anxiety about readjusting.

As Krebs continues to sit on the **porch**, he thinks how he would like the **girls** who are walking by more if they were French or German. He thinks about how the world they are in is not his world. Again, he prefers looking at them to talking with them.

That Krebs believes that he and the girls occupy different worlds reflects his sense of alienation. He regards himself as outside of society and all its complications. He would rather observe society than be a part of it, as he feels he cannot relate to the world since the war.

Still sitting on the **porch**, Krebs reads a book about the war, learning about the battles he was in. He likes the maps in the book. As he learns about the war from the book, he determines that he really was a "good soldier."

Krebs struggles to assign logic to his experiences of the war and must use a book—an outside source—to understand what he did and why. In this way, Krebs exposes his sense of disorientation.

One morning at home, Krebs's mother comes into his bedroom and tells him that she talked with his father. They've decided to let Krebs take the family **car** out in the evenings. Krebs tells his mother that he bets she made his father decide this.

Krebs's mother reveals her desperation to motivate her son to work and meet people. By thinking his father is behind the attempt, Krebs exposes a resentment towards his father, who represents an expectation of masculinity that is associated with a society of which Krebs feels no longer a part.

Krebs goes downstairs for breakfast and his sister Helen teases him about sleeping a lot. She uses a nickname "Hare." She hands him the paper, *The Kansas City Star*, and he opens it. His mother tells him not to "muss it" because his father likes reading it.

Krebs's younger sister speaks with a tenderness and naiveté towards her older brother. The use of the nickname is jarring in a story that has had little dialogue and no emotionality. Again, the shadow of Krebs's father appears as his mother tells him not to ruin the paper—though the father is not physically present in the story, he still hovers over the family.

Helen tells Krebs that she is playing indoor baseball that afternoon, and she brags about being a better pitcher than the boys. She says that she's good because Krebs taught her. Helen says that she tells the other children that Krebs is her "beau," and then she asks Krebs if he really is her beau. Krebs responds, "you bet." Then Helen asks Krebs if he loves her, to which Krebs responds, "Sure." When Helen asks if he will come over and watch her play, Krebs says, "Maybe." Helen says then he must not really love her.

The dialogue between Krebs and his sister is rather playful, as Helen calls him "beau" and tries to get him to watch her play baseball. The fact that Helen equates love with the small effort of coming to watch her play is naïve and youthful, and Krebs responds to it, however monosyllabically, with some positivity.

Krebs's mother ushers Helen out of the kitchen, as she wants to speak with Krebs alone. She sits down at the table and asks Krebs about what he is going to do next, urging that it's time to find a job and a direction. She says that God has work for everyone to do. Krebs responds that he is not in God's kingdom.

Krebs' mother's faith stands out in a story that is stripped of emotions. Krebs believes himself neither a part of society nor a part of religion. However, his mother, by urging him to get a job and by invoking God, is pushing him towards reentering the world that she occupies.

Krebs's mother continues, explaining that she knows how war must affect young men, as her father and grandfather both fought in the the Civil War. Then she talks about Charley Simmons, a boy like Krebs who has now found a job and a girl and is finally settling down. She wants Krebs to drive his father's **car**, take **girls** out in the evenings, and find a job. She then says that Krebs should stop by his father's office later to see him.

By bringing up her father and grandfather, Krebs's mother suggests that she can understand the effects of war peripherally—that the way war affects one soldier is the way it affects everyone. Indeed, she wants Krebs to be like everyone else—to find a job and settle down. However, she demonstrates a misunderstanding of the situation, as Krebs's lack of motivation and sense of alienation arises out of an inability to express his individual *experiences of pain and trauma.*

Krebs's mother asks Krebs if he loves her. He responds no, and she starts crying, putting her head in her hands. He then tries to comfort her by saying he doesn't love anyone, and then that he didn't mean it, but seeing his mother's display of emotion makes Krebs feel sick. Krebs's mother asks him to pray with her, but Krebs says he cannot pray; she then prays for him.

That Krebs's mother expresses her emotions physically and dramatically serves to highlight Krebs's own extreme lack of emotion, or at least his utter inability to express emotion. Such a display embarrasses Krebs, whose stoic masculinity suppresses any feeling and tenderness. Krebs's refusal to pray further underscores that he feels alienated not simply from the world of man, but that of God.

Krebs then kisses his mother and leaves the house, reflecting that his mother made him lie and that his efforts to keep his life from becoming complicated have failed. Even so, he thinks, "none of it had touched him." He will find a job in Kansas City to appease his mother, as he feels sorry for her. He will not go to his father's office, however, because he wants his life "to go smoothly." He "would" go over to the schoolyard to watch Helen play baseball.

This final passage further reveals Krebs's resentment of the complications inherent to being part of society; already alienated from the world, he believes that engaging with others only forces him to lie, which, in turn, further distances Krebs from his memories and experiences—that is, from his sense of self. By not going to his father's office, Krebs again demonstrates an aversion to the stereotypically masculine lifestyle that is expected of him. Krebs final decision to watch his sister play baseball in some ways ends the story on a hopeful, tender note—as doing this is what Helen said would mean he loves her. However, this is offset by the use of a conditional tense—he "would go over to the schoolyard"—as opposed to saying that he does indeed go. Thus, the story lingers in an unresolved space, where the fulfillment of these thoughts is still left in the open.

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