

## 2. THE COLD WITHIN

### About the poet:

James Patrick Kinney (1923 – 1974) was an American poet best known for his inspiring poem 'The Cold Within'. His son Timothy Kinney, who is the copyright owner of the poem has given an insight to the story behind his father's poem. James Kinney lived in Cheviot, Ohio, a township on the west side of Cincinnati, Ohio, where there was a law that a black person was not allowed on the streets after dark. This was at the time of the Civil Rights Movement. The poem 'The Cold Within' is a parable which illustrated how the evil of discrimination had penetrated its tentacles deep inside man and would ruin humanity if not unitedly fought against. It was written in the 1960s and has appeared in many church bulletins, websites, teaching seminars, magazines and newspapers.

### Summary:

The poem speaks of six people who happen to be trapped together at a place. It is extremely cold and the only source of warmth is a 'dying fire'. Each one of them possesses a log of wood. The only chance of survival for all of them is by giving up their log of wood to keep the fire going. The first person, a lady, refuses to give up her log as there is a black man in the group. The second person realizes that one of the men did not belong to his church and thus did not give his log. Then there was a poor man in tattered clothes. In spite of feeling extremely cold, he refused to put his log into the fire only because there was a rich man in the group. He believed that the rich were idle and had gained wealth at the cost of the poor. On the other hand, the rich man thought about the wealth he had amassed and kept thinking how to keep it away from the lazy poor people who did nothing to improve their lot. The black man too was overwhelmed with contempt for the white and wanted to seek revenge so he refused to give up his log. Finally, the sixth one, seeing that none of the others was giving his share of wood decided not to do so either as he was of the types who will only reciprocate what others do. Thus, each one held the log of wood tightly in their hands. Even at the eventuality of death they did not give up their prejudice and finally all perished in the cold outside as a result of the deathly cold within their hearts.

### Glossary:

happenstance	–	coincidental, an event which happens accidentally and is unplanned
bleak	–	unpleasant, hopeless
bitter	–	unpleasant, (here) biting cold
log	–	a thick piece of wood
birch	–	a slender, fast-growing tree that has thin bark
tattered	–	old and torn, in poor condition
hitch	–	move with a jerk
idle	–	inactive, unoccupied
shiftless	–	lazy, lacking ambition

bespoke	–	showed
revenge	–	to inflict punishment in return for (injury or insult)
spite	–	malice, a desire to hurt
forlorn	–	unhappy, miserable
nought	–	nothing
sin	–	an immoral act, a wrongdoing

**Questions and Answers:**

**1. What does 'happenstance' mean? What is the significance of the word in the poem?(3)**

**Ans:** The word 'happenstance' means coincidence or by chance. The word here conveys the fact that the meeting of the six-people mentioned was coincidental and had in no way been planned. Later on, we see that each one is prejudiced against some other in the group. Thus they were not together willingly.

**2. What does the word 'trapped' signify in the first line? (3)**

**Ans:** The word 'trapped' means to be caught in a difficult situation from which one cannot escape. Here the six people did not want to be together as each one hates some other in the group. They seem to be together coincidentally and so seem to be 'trapped'.

**3. Why has the poet used the words 'bleak' and 'bitter'? Which figure of speech is used in the line 'in bleak and bitter cold'? (4)**

**Ans:** The word 'bleak' means unpleasant and hopeless and 'bitter' meaning 'resentful'. The poet says that the cold is bleak and bitter as it could even kill the people. Here the line is 'Alliteration' as the sound 'b' is repeated. It is also an example of 'Tautology' as the words 'bleak' and 'bitter' have similar meaning.

**4. Who are people referred to in the first stanza? Why do they need logs? What do the logs denote? (4)**

**Ans:** The people referred to are six different 'humans' and not 'people'. This indicates that these are people who are different individuals and are in no way connected to each other. In fact, they just happen to come together due to an accidental situation and have no warmth in their hearts. They needed the logs to keep the fire burning in the biting cold which was their only chance of survival. The logs denote the 'sins' or 'prejudices' of these individuals who are not ready to give them up.

**5. Bring out the meaning of the line 'Their dying fire in need of logs' according to the story of the poem. What does 'dying fire' symbolize? (4)**

**Ans:** According to the story, six people were trapped in a biting cold and a fire was their only chance of survival. After some time, the fire was about to die for lack of fuel. They had a log each which they could put in the fire and keep it going and thus save themselves.

But each one was prejudiced against some other in the group and refused to give up his log. Eventually all of them die as the fire dies out. The 'dying fire' symbolizes the warmth and love in their heart which is slowly dying due to the sins of prejudice and discrimination.

**6. What did the first person notice? What did she do? Why did she do so? (2)**

**Ans:** The first person noticed that there was a black among the people around her. She held on to her log as she did not want to help a black person. Her racist attitude stopped her from contributing to keep the fire burning.

**7. Why did the second person refuse to give his log? What kind of a person does he seem to be? (3)**

**Ans:** The second person refuses to give his log as he sees that in the group there is a person who does not belong to his community and so he does not want to help him. This person seems to be a fanatic who is intolerant of other religions or communities.

**8. What were the thoughts of the poor and the rich man? As a result, what did they do? (4)**

**Ans:** The poor man saw a rich man in the group. He hated the rich as he thought they were idle and had earned all the wealth only by exploiting the poor. On the other hand, the rich man was only thinking of the wealth in his store and wanted to protect it from the poor who, he thought, were lazy and lacked ambition. As a result, both of them held on to the logs each possessed instead of using them to save the fire.

**9. Why does the third man give his coat a hitch? What does this action signify? (4)**

**Ans:** The third man is a poor man with old torn clothes. He is the most affected as his tattered clothes do not give him any warmth at all as compared to the others. He then sees the rich man whom he hates. He pulls his coat together giving it a hitch to get some warmth at least. This action also signifies that he huddled himself trying to cut himself away from the rich man.

**10. Did the black man give his stick of wood to the fire ? Why? (4)**

**Ans:** No, the black man did not give his stick of wood to the fire. There was a white lady in the group and he was full of hatred and vengeance towards the white. He thought that his stick of wood was the only way to take revenge. Thus, he refused to give it to save the fire.

**11. What happened to the six people trapped together? What does this convey? (4)**

**Ans:** The six people were trapped together coincidentally in an unpleasant biting cold and a dying fire was the only source of warmth and their only hope to survival. Each had a log

which they could put in the fire and save themselves but none of them did. They were filled with feelings of revenge, greed, hatred, selfishness, racism, intolerance and arrogance.

- 12. What are the different types of discriminations highlighted in the poem? What can such discriminations or prejudices do to mankind? (4)**

**Ans:** The poet has thrown light on the different ways in which people discriminate against each other. He gives the example of racial discrimination through the white lady and the black man. The poet also talks about the religious intolerance and class discrimination between the rich and the poor man. Such differences lead to envy, hatred, arrogance and revenge eventually destroying the very fiber of humanity.

- 13. What was the physical cause of the death of all the six people? Was it the real cause? What actually killed them? (4)**

**Ans:** The six men were accidentally trapped on one cold dark night. There was a fire but it was slowly dying for lack of fuel. Though each of them had a piece of log which could have kept the fire burning and would have saved them, they refused to give it up due to their prejudices against each other. Eventually all of them died. It appears that the cold outside had killed them but in reality, it is the cold and the hatred within each one of them that had caused their doom.

- 14. What is meant by the 'cold within'? How does it affect humanity? (4)**

**Ans:** The cold within refers to the lack of warmth in the hearts of the people mentioned in the poem. This hatred within each one of them was a result of selfishness, greed, intolerance, discrimination and arrogance. The cold within caused the death of all the people. Similarly, such hatred and cold attitude of people towards each other, if not curbed, will lead to destruction of humanity at large.

- 15. Bring out the significance of the title of the poem. (4)**

**Ans:** The poet has cleverly woven a story of six strangers trapped in biting cold. They had the opportunity to save themselves, if they had given their logs to the dying fire, the only chance of their survival. They refused to do so due to their irrational prejudices. Finally, it was the cold within their hearts and not without that spelt their doom. The poet has aptly titled his poem 'The Cold Within'.

- 16. What message does the poet want to convey? (4)**

**Ans:** The poet wants to strongly convey the message that prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of race, religion or colour is a sin. He is trying to tell us that we must rise above these petty thoughts and help each other and eventually save humanity. The poem is a

warning to us that if in due time we do not destroy the cold within it will surely destroy the entire race of mankind.

**17. What was each man in the group unaware of? (3)**

**Ans:** Each man was so full of hatred and contempt towards the other that he refused to give up his log to the fire that was dying. Each one thought that by doing so he was avenging the person whom he condemned. None was aware of the fact that eventually even he would die in that situation.

**18. How could the people have saved themselves? (3)**

**Ans:** If each of them would have given their log to the dying fire, they would have survived the bleak and bitter cold. Symbolically if they had given up their sins of hatred and differences, they could have kept alive the fire of love and saved themselves from destruction.

**19. What is the figure of speech in the line 'The logs held tight in death's still hands'? (2)**

**Ans:** This line is a Personification. Here the non – human thing or the idea of 'death' is assigned the human characteristic of possessing 'hands'.

**20. What symbolizes human sin in the poem? What is the sin mentioned here? (3)**

**Ans:** The logs, in the hands of each of the six persons mentioned in the poem, symbolizes human sin. The sin refers to the negative qualities of prejudice, hatred, malice, discrimination and revenge in the hearts of the people trapped in a cold night. These traits are called 'sin' as they spell doom and destruction of humanity.

**21. Explain the symbolism in the line 'Their logs held tight in death's still hands, was proof of human sin.' (2)**

**Ans:** Jesus sacrificed himself on the wooden logs to wash away human sins. On the contrary, here the humans are sinning by holding on to the logs and not saving each other.

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