

The Flowers

By Alice Walker (from In Love and Trouble)

It seemed to Myop as she skipped lightly from hen house to pigpen to smokehouse that the days had never been as beautiful as these. The air made her nose twitch. The harvesting of the corn and cotton, peanuts and squash, made each day a golden surprise that caused shivers to run up her jaws.

Myop carried a short stick. She struck out at chickens she liked, and worked out the beat of a song on the fence around the pigpen. She felt light and good in the warm sun. She was ten, and nothing existed for her but her song, and the stick in her dark brown hand going tat-de-ta-ta-ta.

Turning her back on her family's sharecropper cabin, Myop walked along the fence till it ran into the stream. Around the stream, where the family got drinking water, ferns and wildflowers grew. Along the shallow banks pigs rooted. Myop watched the tiny white bubbles and the water that rose and slid away down the stream.

She had explored the woods behind the house many times. Often, in late autumn, her mother took her to gather nuts among the fallen leaves. Today she made her own path, bouncing this way and that way, keeping an eye out for snakes. She found pretty ferns and leaves, an armful of strange blue flowers and a sweetsuds bush full of the brown, fragrant buds.

By twelve o'clock, her arms full of sprigs, she was a mile or more from home. She had often been as far before, but the strange land was not as pleasant as usual. It seemed gloomy in the little cover in which she found herself. The air was damp, the silence close and deep.

Myop began to circle back to the house, back to the peacefulness of the morning. It was then she stepped smack into his eyes. Her heel became lodged between his brow and nose. She reached down quickly, unafraid, to free herself. It was only when she saw his naked grin that she gave a little yelp of surprise.

He had been a tall man. From feet to neck covered a long space. His head lay beside him. When she pushed back the leaves and earth, Myop saw that he'd had large white teeth, all of them cracked or broken, long fingers, and very big bones. All of his clothes had rotted away except some threads of blue denim from his overalls. The buckles of the overalls had turned green.

Myop gazed around the spot with interest. Very near where she'd stepped into the head was a wild pink rose. As she picked it to add to her bundle, she noticed a raised mound, a ring, around the rose's root. It was the rotted remains of a noose, a bit of shredding plowline, now blending into the soil. Around an overhanging limb of a great spreading oak clung another piece. Frayed, rotted, bleached, and frazzled—barely there—spinning restlessly in the breeze. Myop laid down her flowers.

And the summer was over.



QUESTIONS: THE FLOWERS by Alice Walker

1. What time of the year is it when the story begins?
2. Who is Myop? Describe her. How old
3. How was Myop thinking and feeling in the beginning of the story?
 - a. Line 1 “she skipped lightly from hen house to pigpen to smokehouse”
 - b. Lines 8-9 “she was 10 and nothing existed for her but her song”
4. After she left the farm, where did she go?
5. What kind of farm does she live on? Is she rich or poor? How does her poor compare to others kinds of poor (e.g., someone who is poor and lives in the city)?
6. What was she watching out for as she walked? How are a snake and a dead body alike?
7. Where did things start to change in the story? How does Alice Walker’s language change the mood of the story? (paragraph 5, lines 2-4)
8. When did you realize what Myop stepped on? How long had the man been there?
9. How did Myop react when she found the man? Why do you think she reacted that way? Do you think she understood what had happened to him? How long ago did the man get there (contrast the body with “a golden surprise”)?
10. Why do you think the title of the story is *The Flowers*? Why do you think Myop “laid down her flowers”?
11. What do you think/feel about this story? Why do you think Alice Walker wrote this story?
12. What does the last sentence of the story mean, “and the summer was over”? (loss of innocence) What causes young people to lose their innocence? What caused you to?
13. What childhood experience have you had that changed you?
14. What do you think the name “Myop” means? (myopia – near-sightedness)