“The Jilting of Granny Weatherall”

Notes on the story
“I shall try to tell the truth, but the result will be fiction.”
KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

**Born:** May 15, 1890  
Indian Creek, Texas

**Died:** Sept. 18, 1980  
Silver Spring, Maryland
Porter’s mother died when Porter was only 2.
The family moved to Kyle, Texas, to live with her grandparents.
From early childhood, Porter wrote stories, an activity she described as the passion of her life.
At age 16 she married John Henry Koontz, the first of four husbands.

Throughout her life she would continue to have passionate affairs marked by dramatic and vicious break-ups.
During the 1920s she traveled often to **Mexico**, wrote articles about the country, and studied art.
KATHERINE ANNE PORTER


She wrote and published many short stories and one novel during her life.
Porter’s only full-length novel, *Ship of Fools*, was eventually made into an Oscar-winning film starring Vivian Leigh.
In the late 1940's and early 1950's, Porter taught at Stanford and the University of Michigan.
Porter had very little formal education and never attended high school.

Later in life, Porter received an honorary degree from the University of Maryland.
Porter donated her writings to the University of Maryland, which currently houses a collection of Porter’s writings and belongings.
Porter died in 1980 after several strokes, and was buried beside her mother's grave in the Indian Creek Cemetery in Texas.
“The Jilting of Granny Weatherall”

NOTES ON THE STORY
Note the title…

Although the story describes Granny’s death, but the title is not “the dying of GW” but “the jilting of GW.”
The **jilting** is the **most significant** event in GW’s life (and the **focus** of the story)
The title describes the enormous hurt and humiliation that has **secretly festered in her mind** and heart for sixty years.
“Granny”

• Readers meet the protagonist in the title as “Granny Weatherall.”

• Then readers discover that “Granny’s” first name is Ellen.
“Granny” is her role→ she is the matriarch of her family. Granny is a non-sexual role/name.
“Weathering All”

She has “weathered all”…

– being jilted at the altar
– becoming a young widow
– the death of Hapsy
– maintaining the farm
– illness
– raising children
Weathering All

She “weathers” adversity by maintaining order in her physical surroundings.
Setting

• The physical setting = the bedroom where Granny Weatherall is dying

• Most of the action occurs in Granny's mind
Stream-of-Consciousness Narration
Stream-of-Consciousness

Unusual narrative perspective:
Story is written in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} person POV, but seems more like a 1\textsuperscript{st} person narrative.
First came to be widely used in the early 20th century.
Used as a means to share a character’s thoughts **without using 1\text{st} person narration**
Appears to be random and free-flowing, but is actually **carefully planned** to make an impression.
uninterrupted flow of a character's thoughts, impressions, and feelings…

...without the conventional devices of dialogue and description
Granny's thoughts are presented in a **spontaneous fashion**, as if readers had access to her thoughts at the moment each one occurs to her.
Porter skillfully conveys Granny’s wandering thoughts and confusion.
Granny's awareness slips between present reality and her past. Events in the story are presented as they occur to Granny rather than chronologically.
Since Granny sometimes mistakes one daughter for another, for example, the **characters in the story sometimes dissolve** and become other characters.
In Granny Weatherall's semi-conscious state, the past mingles with the present.
After the doctor leaves her alone, Granny Weatherall takes stock of her life, thinking:

“...a person could spread out the plan of life and tuck the edges in orderly.”
But it is not long before she finds "death in her mind" and "it felt clammy and unfamiliar."
Then...the memory of the day she was jilted interrupts Granny Weatherall's reflections.
What Granny Remembers…

MAJOR LIFE EVENTS
Granny’s life: 3 major events

Event:

At age 60, she prepares to die and visits her relatives to say goodbye. She “made her will and came down with a long fever,” but does not die for another 20 years.
Age 60: Farewell Tour

Early in the story, the suggestion is made that Granny considers herself to be already at peace with her mortality.
Age 60: Farewell Tour

At 60, she had made "farewell trips" to see all her loved ones:

“She had spent so much time preparing for death there was no need for bringing it up again.”
Age 60: Farewell Tour

Granny’s need to maintain control is evident in her tidy planning of the end of her life
Granny’s life: 3 major events

Event:

At age 40, she gives birth to her youngest child, Hapsy.

She also suffers from major illness (thrombosis and pneumonia) following the birth.
Age 40: Hapsy’s Birth

Hapsy is the youngest and apparently the favorite of Granny Weatherall's daughters—“the one she had truly wanted.”
Age 40: Hapsy’s Birth

Granny asks for Hapsy five times during the story, but Hapsy never comes to her mother's deathbed.

Most likely, Hapsy has already died, possibly in childbirth.
Age 40: Hapsy’s Birth

At one point, Granny seems to confuse even herself with Hapsy, as a memory of Hapsy holding a baby comes back to her.
Age 40: Hapsy’s Birth

Granny "seemed to herself to be Hapsy also, and the baby on Hapsy's arm was Hapsy and himself and herself, all at once, and there was no surprise in the meeting."
Age 40: Hapsy’s Birth

Some critics have interpreted this memory of Hapsy as the sign of salvation that Granny seems to be looking for throughout the story.
Granny’s life: 3 major events

Event:

At age 20, she is jilted by George at the altar.
Age 20: The Jilting

As she rests against her pillow she is transported back to the day when "she has put on the white veil and set out the white cake for a man" who never arrived.
Age 20: The Jilting

The memory of that day "when the cake was not cut, but thrown out and wasted" is so powerful that sixty years later she relives the moment.
Age 20: The Jilting

Although “for sixty years she had prayed against remembering him,” she decides now as her children hover around her that she wants to settle things with George, the truant bridegroom.
The Jilting

What she wants is to even their accounts, to tell him "I got my husband just the same and my children and my house just like any other woman."
The Jilting

Her memory recalls when "the whole bottom dropped out of the world, and there she was blind and sweating with nothing under her feet and the walls falling away."

(Sounds a bit like death...)
Granny equates the jilting with hell: “that was hell” and “losing her soul in the deep pit of hell”.

She describes the “whirl of dark smoke that rose and covered” her life.
The jilting caused Granny to turn off her emotions; to focus upon living a life that appeared orderly to mask her bitterness and broken heart.
Losing the **ability to forgive** and open her heart to love is not living the life that God wants for her.
After the jilting, John steps in and marries Granny. John says, “I’ll kill him” in response to what George does to her.

Granny marries a man (John) she settles for after being jilted.
The Jilting

On her deathbed, she revisits the jilting, not her marriage to John or John’s death.
The Jilting

Granny separates from her emotional self, choosing a life of hard work and exemplary appearance to the outside world.
Her lack of closeness with her daughters could be a result of her inability to open her heart.
The Jilting

Granny saved George’s letters, but doesn’t want anyone to know—she refers to her feelings for George as **silly and foolish**
Deep in Granny’s heart, there is the evergreen memory of George's rejection.
Not sharing this deep hurt with her loved ones has cut off a central and tender part of herself from all others.

Emotions are sacred, and, once violated, the scars may remain for a lifetime.
What happens when Granny dies?

GRANNY’S DEATH
Granny’s Death

What is meant by “Again no bridegroom and the priest in the house”? 
Is she “jilted” by God, who is not there for her when she dies?
Could her inability to forgive have condemned her?

Does her attempt to control her own death leave her with nothing?
RESOLUTION
The final sentence describes her death: “She stretched herself with a deep breath and blew out the light.”
Yet, there is no sense of closure to Granny's life, no sense that the conflicts raised in her memories have been resolved.
The final realization in the story is that "there was no bottom to death, she couldn't come to the end of it."
“Because I could not stop for death
He kindly stopped for me…”
--Emily Dickinson

End of Presentation.