

The narrator of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is a dreamer. Asleep, he dreams about a man called Christian who lives with his family in a city called Destruction. Besides living in a city with this appalling name, Christian has another problem: on his back he bears an immense burden that he cannot get rid of. It is like a part of himself. And so he decides to leave home and go on a "progress," or journey, to a wonderful place that he has heard of called the Celestial City. On this trip, which takes up most of the book, he has a few pleasant experiences such as his visit to House Beautiful and the Delectable Mountains, but most of his adventures are unpleasant and even dangerous. He falls into the Slough (rhymes with "cow") (or mudhole) of Despond, he has to climb the Hill Difficulty, he has to fight a dragon-like monster called Apollyon, and he is arrested and unjustly punished in a prosperous, busy place called Vanity Fair. But his most insidious encounters are with characters who try to distract him from his progress: Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Talkative, Little-Faith, and Ignorance. Finally, all these obstacles overcome, Christian enters the Celestial City, where he will dwell eternally in bliss, and where he is eventually joined by his wife Christiana and their children. Bunyan describes their journey in the second part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

This excerpt describes how Christian and his companion Hopeful become lost, wander into a giant's domain, fall asleep there, and encounter the giant Despair.

Christian Begins His Pilgrimage

As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a Den,¹ and I laid me down in that place to sleep: and as I slept I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold I saw a man clothed with rags, standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great

1. Den: the jail.

burden upon his back. I looked, and saw him open the book and read therein; and as he read, he wept and trembled; and not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry, saying, "What shall I do?"

In this plight, therefore, he went home and refrained himself as long as he could, that his wife and children should not perceive his distress; but he could not be silent long, because that his trouble increased. Wherefore at length he brake his mind to his wife and children; and thus he began to talk to them. "O my dear wife," said he, "and you the children of my bowels,² I, your dear friend, am in myself undone by reason of a burden that lieth hard upon me; moreover, I am for certain informed that this our city will be burned with fire from heaven, in which fearful overthrow both myself, with thee my wife, and you my sweet babes, shall miserably come to ruin, except (the which yet I see not) some way of escape can be found, whereby we may be delivered." At this his relations were sore amazed; not for that they believed that what he had said to them was true, but because they thought that some frenzy distemper³ had got into his head; therefore, it drawing toward night, and they hoping that sleep might settle his brains, with all haste they got him to bed. But the night was as troublesome to him as the day; wherefore, instead of sleeping, he spent it in sighs and tears. So, when the morning was come, they would know how he did. He told them, "Worse and worse": he also set to talking to them again: but they began to be hardened. They also thought to drive away his distemper by harsh and surly carriages⁴ to him; sometimes they would deride, sometimes they would chide, and sometimes they would quite neglect him. Wherefore he began to retire himself to his chamber, to pray for and pity them, and also to condole his own misery; he would also walk solitarily in the fields, sometimes reading, and sometimes praying: and thus for some days he spent his time.

Now I saw, upon a time when he was walking in the fields, that he was (as he was wont⁵) reading in his book, and greatly distressed in his mind; and as he read, he burst out, as he had done before, crying, "What shall I do to be saved?"

2. bowels: thought to be the seat of tender feelings and family affection.

3. frenzy distemper: insanity.

4. harsh . . . carriages: angry behavior.

5. wont: accustomed.

I saw also that he looked this way and that way, as if he would run; yet he stood still, because (as I perceived) he could not tell which way to go. I looked then, and saw a man named Evangelist coming to him, who asked, "Wherefore dost thou cry?"

He answered, "Sir, I perceive by the book in my hand that I am condemned to die, and after that to come to judgment, and I find that I am not willing to do the first, nor able to do the second."

Then said Evangelist, "Why not willing to die, since this life is attended with so many evils?" The man answered, "Because I fear that this burden that is upon my back will sink me lower than the grave, and I shall fall into Tophet.⁶ And, sir, if I be not fit to go to prison, I am not fit to go to judgment, and from thence to execution; and the thoughts of these things make me cry."

Then said Evangelist, "If this be thy condition, why standest thou still?" He answered, "Because I know not whither to go." Then he gave him a parchment roll, and there was written within, "Fly from the wrath to come."

The man therefore read it, and looking upon Evangelist very carefully, said, "Whither must I fly?" Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over a very wide field, "Do you see yonder wicket-gate?" The man said, "No." Then said the other, "Do you see yonder shining light?" He said, "I think I do." Then said Evangelist, "Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto: so shalt thou see the gate; at which when thou knockest it shall be told thee what thou shalt do." So I saw in my dream that the man began to run. Now, he had not run far from his own door, but his wife and children perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but the man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on, crying, "Life! life! eternal life!" So he looked not behind him, but fled toward the middle of the plain. . . .

Doubting Castle and Giant Despair

At last, lighting under a little shelter, they [Christian and Hopeful] sat down there till the day brake; but being weary, they fell asleep. Now there was, not far from the place where they lay, a castle called Doubting Castle, the owner where-

of was Giant Despair; and it was in his grounds they now were sleeping: wherefore he, getting up in the morning early, and walking up and down in his fields, caught Christian and Hopeful asleep in his grounds. Then with a grim and surly voice he bid them awake, and asked them whence they were and what they did in his grounds. They told him they were pilgrims and that they had lost their way. Then said the Giant, "You have this night trespassed on me by trampling in and lying on my grounds, and therefore you must go along with me." So they were forced to go, because he was stronger than they. They also had but little to say, for they knew themselves in a fault. The Giant therefore drove them before him and put them into his castle, into a very dark dungeon, nasty and stinking to the spirits of these two men. Here then they lay from Wednesday morning till Saturday night, without one bit of bread, or drop of drink, or light, or any to ask how they did; they were therefore here in evil case,⁷ and were far from friends and acquaintance. Now in this place Christian had double sorrow, because 'twas through his unadvised haste that they were brought into this distress.

Now Giant Despair had a wife, and her name was Diffidence. So when he was gone to bed, he told his wife what he had done; to wit, that he had taken a couple of prisoners and cast them into his dungeon for trespassing on his grounds. Then he asked her also what he had best to do further to them. So she asked him what they were, whence they came, and whither they were bound; and he told her. Then she counseled him that when he arose in the morning he should beat them without any mercy. So when he arose, he getteth him a grievous crabtree cudgel, and goes down into the dungeon to them, and there first falls to rating⁸ of them as if they were dogs, although they never gave him a word of distaste. Then he falls upon them and beats them fearfully, in such sort that they were not able to help themselves, or to turn them upon the floor. This done, he withdraws and leaves them there to condole their misery and to mourn under their distress. So all that day they spent the time in nothing but sighs and bitter lamentations. The next night she talking with her husband about them further, and understanding they were yet alive, did advise him to counsel them to

6. Tophet: Hell.

7. case: condition.

8. rating: scolding.

make away⁹ themselves. So when morning was come, he goes to them in a surly manner as before, and perceiving them to be very sore with the stripes¹⁰ that he had given them the day before, he told them that since they were never like to come out of that place, their only way would be forthwith to make an end of themselves, either with knife, halter,¹¹ or poison. "For why," said he, "should you choose life, seeing it is attended with so much bitterness?" But they desired him to let them go. With that he looked ugly upon them, and rushing to them, had doubtless made an end of them himself, but that he fell into one of his fits (for he sometimes in sunshine weather fell into fits), and lost for a time the use of his hand; wherefore he withdrew, and left them as before to consider what to do. Then did the prisoners consult between themselves, whether 'twas best to take his counsel or no; and thus they began to discourse:

Christian: "Brother," said Christian, "what shall we do? The life that we now live is miserable. For my part I know not whether it is best to live thus, or to die out of hand. 'My soul chooseth strangling rather than life,'¹² and the grave is more easy for me than this dungeon. Shall we be ruled by the Giant?"

Hope: "Indeed our present condition is dreadful, and death would be far more welcome to me than thus forever to abide; but yet let us consider, the Lord of the country to which we are going hath said, 'Thou shalt do no murder': no, not to another man's person; much more then are we forbidden to take his counsel to kill ourselves. Besides, he that kills another can but commit murder upon his body; but for one to kill himself is to kill body and soul at once. And moreover, my brother, thou talkest of ease in the grave; but hast thou forgotten the hell whither for certain the murderers go? For 'no murderer hath eternal life,'¹³ etc. And let us consider again that all the law is not in the hand of Giant Despair. Others, so far as I can understand, have been taken by him, as well as we; and yet have escaped out of his hand. Who knows but that God that made the world may cause that Giant Despair may die? Or

that at some time or other he may forget to lock us in? Or but he may in short time have another of his fits before us, and may lose the use of his limbs? And if ever that should come to pass again, for my part, I am resolved to pluck up the heart of a man,¹⁴ and to try my utmost to get from under his hand. I was a fool that I did not try to do it before; but however, my brother, let's be patient, and endure a while. The time may come that may give us a happy release; but let us not be our own murderers." With these words Hopeful at present did moderate the mind of his brother; so they continued together (in the dark) that day, in their sad and doleful condition.

Well, toward evening the Giant goes down into the dungeon again, to see if his prisoners had taken his counsel; but when he came there he found them alive; and truly, alive was all; for now, what for want of bread and water, and by reason of the wounds they received when he beat them, they could do little but breathe. But, I say, he found them alive; at which he fell into a grievous rage, and told them that, seeing they had disobeyed his counsel, it should be worse with them than if they had never been born.

At this they trembled greatly, and I think that Christian fell into a swoon; but coming a little to himself again, they renewed their discourse about the Giant's counsel; and whether yet they had best to take it or no. Now Christian again seemed to be for doing it, but Hopeful made his second reply as followeth:

Hope: "My brother," said he, "rememberest thou not how valiant thou hast been heretofore? Apollyon could not crush thee, nor could all that thou didst hear, or see, or feel, in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. What hardship, terror, and amazement hast thou already gone through, and art thou now nothing but fear? Thou seest that I am in the dungeon with thee, a far weaker man by nature than thou art; also this Giant has wounded me as well as thee, and hath also cut off the bread and water from my mouth; and with thee I mourn without the light. But let us exercise a little more patience; remember how thou playedst the man¹⁵ at Vanity Fair, and wast neither

9. make away: kill.

10. stripes: blows.

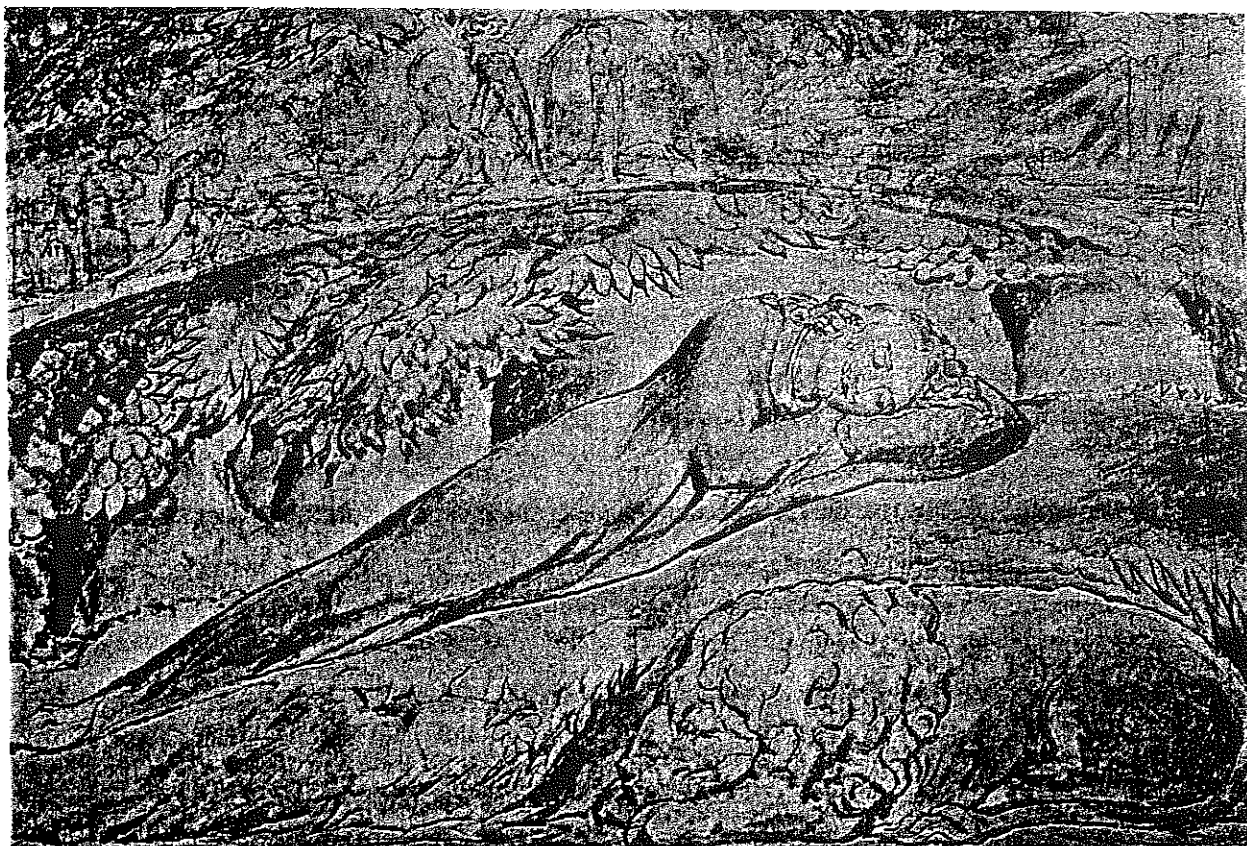
11. halter: noose

12. 'My soul . . . life': quotation from Job 7:15.

13. no murderer . . . life: quotation from John 3:15.

14. pluck . . . man: be brave.

15. playedst the man: was brave.



John Bunyan Dreams a Dream by William Blake. Watercolor.

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afraid of the chain, nor cage, nor yet of bloody death. Wherefore let us (at least to avoid the shame that becomes not a Christian to be found in) bear up with patience as well as we can."

Now night being come again, and the Giant and his wife being in bed, she asked him concerning the prisoners, and if they had taken his counsel. To which he replied, "They are sturdy rogues, they choose rather to bear all hardship than to make away themselves." Then said she, "Take them into the castle yard tomorrow, and show them the bones and skulls of those that thou hast already dispatched, and make them believe, ere a week come to an end, thou also wilt tear them in pieces, as thou hast done their fellows before them."

So when the morning was come, the Giant goes to them again, and takes them into the castle yard, and shows them, as his wife had bidden him. "These," said he, "were pilgrims as you are once, and they trespassed in my grounds, as you have done; and when I thought fit, I tore them in pieces, and so within ten days I will do you. Go, get you down to your den again"; and with that he beat them all the way thither. They lay therefore all day on Saturday in a lamentable case, as before.

Now when night was come, and when Mrs. Diffidence and her husband the Giant were got to bed, they began to renew their discourse of their prisoners; and withal the old Giant wondered that he could neither by his blows nor his counsel bring them to an end. And with that his wife replied, "I fear," said she, "that they live in hope that some will come to relieve them, or that they have picklocks about them, by the means of which they hope to escape." "And sayest thou so, my dear?" said the Giant; "I will therefore search them in the morning."

Well, on Saturday about midnight they began to pray, and continued in prayer till almost break of day.

Now a little before it was day, good Christian, as one half amazed, brake out in this passionate speech: "What a fool (quoth he) am I, thus to lie in a stinking dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty! I have a key in my bosom called Promise, that will (I am persuaded) open any lock in Doubting Castle." Then said Hopeful, "That is good news, good brother; pluck it out of thy bosom and try." Then Christian pulled it out of his bosom, and began to try at the dungeon door, whose bolt (as he turned the key) gave back, and

the door flew open with ease, and Christian and Hopeful both came out. Then he went to the outward door that leads into the castle yard, and with his key opened that door also. After, he went to the iron gate, for that must be opened too; but that lock went *damnable* hard, yet the key did open it. Then they thrust open the gate to make their escape with speed, but that gate, as it

opened, made such a creaking that it waked Giant Despair, who, hastily rising to pursue his prisoners, felt his limbs to fail, for his fits took him again, so that he could by no means go after them. Then they went on and came to the King's highway, and so were safe because they were out of his jurisdiction. . . .

Responding to the Story

Analyzing the Story

Identifying Facts

1. What is Christian's problem? How does he set about resolving it?
2. Why do Christian and Hopeful go with the giant? Why don't they resist?
3. How long are Christian and Hopeful held captive? Why does the giant beat them?
4. How, and on what day, do they escape?

Interpreting Meanings

5. What do you think the book is that so upsets Christian?
6. Most commentators on this story agree that such realistic details as the rags Christian wears are to be interpreted spiritually: the rags signify the desperate condition of Christian's soul, not the desperate condition of his pocketbook. What would be a spiritual interpretation of the heavy burden on Christian's back?
7. In the account of the giant and his wife, which details do *not* seem to have spiritual meaning?
8. Christian abandons his wife and children to go on his pilgrimage. How do you know that Bunyan approved of his values?
9. In thinking about Doubting Castle, remember that doubt is the opposite of faith. How, then, should the place be interpreted **allegorically**? Why are Christian and Hopeful shut up in Doubting Castle? What helps them escape?
10. What do you think of the way Christian and Hopeful escape the giant? Is it psychologically realistic that Christian would have forgotten his "key" for so long? Why or why not?

Writing About the Story

A Creative Response

1. **Changing a Character.** What if Christian's companion had been named Happy or Practical or Ferocious rather than Hopeful? How would the character be different, and how would his personality change the events in the story? Write a new version of one of the nights Christian and his companion spend in Doubting Castle, changing the name, and therefore the personality and actions, of Christian's companion. Write at least two pages, and try to use dialogue, as Bunyan does, to show your new character's personality. How will this new character affect the outcome of the story?
2. **Outlining an Allegory.** Suppose you wanted to write an allegory which presented in story form the account of a person who learned to love. Outline your allegory, including these details:
 - a. The hero or heroine's name
 - b. The allegorical form the hero or heroine's "burden" (or problem) takes
 - c. The pitfalls the traveler meets on the quest to win the ability to love (give names, like the Hill of Difficulty or the Slough of Despond)
 - d. The people the traveler meets (give names)
3. **Recasting the Story.** Suppose Bunyan had wanted to deliver his message in a sermon, instead of in a story. Write out the sermon he might have preached on Despair and how to conquer it.