

A dark mist lay over the Black Hills, and the land was like iron. At the top of the ridge I caught sight of Devil's Tower upthrust against the gray sky as if in the birth of time the core of the earth had broken through its crust and the motion of the world was begun. There are things in nature that engender an awful quiet in the heart of man; Devil's Tower is one of them. Two centuries ago, because they could not do otherwise, the Kiowas made a legend at the base of the rock. My grandmother said:

*Eight children were there at play, seven sisters and their brother. Suddenly the boy was struck dumb; he trembled and began to run upon his hands and feet. His fingers became claws, and his body was covered with fur. Directly there was a bear where the boy had been. The sisters were terrified; they ran, and the bear after them. They came to the stump of great tree, and the tree spoke to them. It bade them climb upon it, and as they did so it began to rise into the air. The bear came to kill them, but they were just beyond its reach. It reared against the tree and scored the bark all around with its claws. The seven sisters were borne into the sky, and they became the stars of the Big Dipper.*

From that moment, and so long as the legend lives, the Kiowas have kinsmen in the night sky. Whatever they were in the mountains, they could be no more. However tenuous their well-being, however much they had suffered and would suffer again, they had found a way out of the wilderness.

My grandmother had a reverence for the sun, a holy regard that now is all but gone out of mankind. There was a wariness in her, and an ancient awe. She was a Christian in her later years, but she had come a long way about, and she never forgot her birthright. As a child she had been to the Sun Dances; she had taken part in those annual rites, and by them she had learned the restoration of her people in the presence of Tai-me. She was about seven when the last Kiowa Sun Dance was held in 1887 on the Washita River above Rainy Mountain Creek. The buffalo were gone. In order to consum-

mate the ancient sacrifice—to impale the head of a buffalo bull upon the medicine tree—a delegation of old



men journeyed into Texas, there to beg and barter for an animal from the Goodnight herd. She was ten when the Kiowas came together for the last time as a living Sun Dance culture. They could find no buffalo; they had to hang an old hide from the sacred tree. Before the dance could begin, a company of soldiers rode out from Fort Sill under orders to disperse the tribe. Forbidden without cause the essential act of their faith, having seen the wild herds slaughtered and left to rot upon the ground, the Kiowas backed away forever from the medicine tree. That was July 20, 1890, at the great bend of the Washita. My grandmother was there. Without bitterness, and for as long as she lived, she bore a vision of deicide.\*

Now that I can have her only in memory, I see my grandmother in the several postures that were peculiar to her: standing at the wood stove on a winter morning and turning meat in a great iron skillet; sitting at the south window, bent above her beadwork, and afterwards, when her vision failed, looking down for a long time into the fold of her hands; going out upon a cane, very slowly as she did when the weight of age came upon her; praying. I remember her most often at prayer. She made long, rambling prayers out of suffering and hope, having seen many things. I was never sure that I had the right to hear, so exclusive were they of all mere custom and company. The last time I saw her she prayed standing by the side of her bed at night, naked to the waist, the light of a kerosene lamp moving upon her dark skin. Her long, black hair, always drawn and braided in the day, lay upon her shoulders and against her breasts like a shawl. I do not speak Kiowa, and I never understood her prayers, but there was something inherently sad in the sound, some merest hesitation upon the syllables of sorrow. She began in a high and descending pitch, exhausting her breath to silence; then again and again—and always the same intensity of effort, of something that is, and is not, like urgency in the human voice. Transported so in the dancing light among the shadows of her room, she seemed beyond the reach of time. But that was illusion; I think I knew then that I should not see her again. (1969)

\*The killing of a god

**You have 8 minutes to answer the 9 multiple choice questions.**

1. The figure of speech used to describe "the land" (lines 1-2) is
  - (A) personification
  - (B) simile
  - (C) apostrophe
  - (D) antithesis
  - (E) symbol
2. The speaker of the passage associates "Devil's Tower" (lines 7-8) with the
  - (A) barrenness of inanimate objects
  - (B) serenity of isolated places
  - (C) emptiness of death
  - (D) awesome power of nature
  - (E) mystery of evil forces
3. The sentence "Two centuries ago...base of the rock" (lines 8-10) implies chiefly that
  - (A) the Kiowas had found proof that their culture originated in the Black Hills
  - (B) the creation of legends was the primary source of entertainment for ancient peoples
  - (C) the Kiowa language arose out of natural phenomena like Devil's Tower
  - (D) Devil's Tower was designated as the memorial for all of the Kiowa tribal dead
  - (E) Devil's Tower was so imposing that the Kiowas felt it had to be explained
4. Which of the following is the subject of the sentence "In order to...the Goodnight herd" (lines 41-45)?
  - (A) "sacrifice" (line 42)
  - (B) "bull" (line 43)
  - (C) "delegation" (line 43)
  - (D) "Texas" (line 44)
  - (E) "animal" (line 45)
5. Paragraph two (lines 31-56) is critical in the development of the passage primarily because it
  - (A) analyzes details of the grandmother's religious beliefs
  - (B) illustrates the grandmother's Christian beliefs
  - (C) emphasizes that the Kiowas were a peace-loving people
  - (D) provides a historical context that illuminates the grandmother's character
  - (E) reveals that the Kiowas were passionate Sun worshippers
6. The characterization of the grandmother's prayers as "so exclusive...of all mere custom and company" (line 68) suggests that
  - (A) they were offered in a profoundly personal manner and intimate style
  - (B) the speaker felt excluded from his grandmother's presence
  - (C) the grandmother had a deep sense of loss of community with the Kiowa nation
  - (D) the prayers were uttered in the Christian and not the Kiowa tribal tradition
  - (E) the speaker sensed his grandmother's pervasive gloom concerning the decline of the Kiowa culture

7. Which of the following most accurately describes the narrative development of the passage?

- (A) All events occur in the recent past.
- (B) The speaker unfolds events as they occur in the present.
- (C) The focus shifts among present, prehistoric, historic, and recent past time.
- (D) The events occur mostly in prehistoric and present time.
- (E) The speaker does not distinguish prehistoric from historic events.

8. The tone of the passage is best characterized as

- (A) resentful
- (B) elegiac
- (C) apathetic
- (D) ironic
- (E) despairing

9. The narrative style of the passage is best described as

- (A) pointed and arch
- (B) ornamental and refined
- (C) blunt and brusque
- (D) complex and enigmatic
- (E) reflective and personal

**These paragraphs follow the passage above in the original passage:**

**1** Houses are like sentinels in the plain, old keepers of the weather watch. There, in a very little while, wood takes on the appearance of great age. All colors wear soon away in the sun and rain, and then the wood is burned gray and the grain appears and the nails turn red with rust. The windowpanes are black and opaque; you imagine there is nothing within, and indeed there are many ghosts, bones given up to the land. They stand here and there against the sky, and you approach them for a longer time than you expect. They belong in the distance; it is their domain.

**2** Once there was a lot of sound in my grandmother's house, a lot of coming and going, feasting and talk. The summers there were full of excitement and reunion. The Kiowas are a summer people; they abide the cold and keep to themselves, but when the season turns and the land becomes warm and vital they cannot hold still; and old love of going returns open them. The aged visitors who came to my grandmother's house when I was a child were made of lean and leather, and they bore themselves upright. They wore great black hats and bright ample shirts that shook in the wind. They rubbed fat upon their hair and wound their braids with strips of colored cloth. Some of them painted their faces and carried the scars of old and cherished enmities. They were an old council of warlords, come to remind and be reminded of who they were. Their wives and daughters served them well. The women might indulge themselves; gossip was at once the mark and compensation of their servitude. They made loud and elaborate talk among themselves, full of jest and gesture, fright and false alarm. They went abroad in fringed and flowered shawls, bright beadwork and German silver. They were at home in the kitchen, and they prepared meals that were banquets.

**3** There were frequent prayer meetings, and great nocturnal feasts. When I was a child I played with my cousins outside, where the lamplight fell upon the ground and the singing of the old people rose up around us and carried away into the darkness. There were a lot of good things to eat, a lot of laughter and surprise. And afterwards, when the quiet returned, I lay down with my grandmother and could hear the frogs away by the river and feel the motion of the air.

**4** Now there is a funeral silence in the rooms, the endless wake of some final word. The walls have closed in upon my grandmother's house. When I returned to it in mourning, I saw for the first time in my life how small it was. It was late at night, and there was a white moon, nearly full. I sat for a long time on the stone steps by the kitchen door. From there I could see out across the land; I could see the long row of trees by the creek, the low light upon the rolling plains, and the stars of the Big Dipper. Once I looked at the moon and caught sight of a strange thing. A cricket had perched upon the handrail, only a few inches away from me. My line of vision was such that the creature filled the moon like a fossil. It had gone there, I thought, to live and die, for there, of all places, was its small definition made whole and eternal. A warm wind rose up and purred like the longing within me.

**5** The next morning I awoke at dawn and went out on the dirt road to Rainy Mountain. It was already hot, and the grasshoppers began to fill the air. Still, it was early in the morning, and the birds sang out of the shadows. The long yellow grass on the mountain shone in the bright light, and a scissortail hied above the land. There, where it ought to be, at the end of a long and legendary way, was my grandmother's grave. Here and there on the dark stones were ancestral names. Looking back once, I saw the mountain and came away.