

Summary of "Young Goodman Brown"

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Young Goodman Brown is leaving his home when Faith, his wife, asks him to delay his journey until the morning. She doesn't want to sleep alone. However, Brown demurs. This journey must be done before sunrise. He asks if she doubts him already after being married just for three months. She gives him her blessings and he leaves.

He does not go far, but sees her still staring at him, as he is about to turn a corner. She has a melancholy way about her and he feels sorry for her, noting how lovely she looks in her cute pink bonnet. However, Goodman Brown was not happy about his journey or about leaving his angelic wife. No doubt he was on an evil mission. The path he took along a dark and gloomy forest matched his mood. It was lonely and dreary and there could be danger lurking behind the trees and branches.

As he walked, he kept glancing around, peering through the forest. What if there were an Indian or the devil himself besides him? He would never know until it was too late. Finally, he came upon the man he sought in the dark forest. It was an older man, perhaps fifty or so- and similar to him in his features. He chastised him for being fifteen minutes late. Brown gave his wife as his lame excuse. As they walked, every bit appearing like father and son, the young man simple and direct, the older man with an air of worldliness about him. And as the elder walked with the younger man, his strange, snake staff seemed to come alive in the dim light. It was a strange illusion.

Brown wanted to turn back but his companion said they should walk together and he should hear out his proposition. Young Goodman protests that never in the life of his family has one ever, since the days of the Martyrs, participated in such an errand in the dark forest.

His companion begs to differ. Did he not help Brown's grandfather when "he lashed the Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem?" Did he not bring Brown's own father the bit of wood to burn down the Indian village during King Philip's war? They were most certain his friends. Would not Goodman be his friend, too?

Young Goodman was shocked to hear that- and more, as his older companion now recounted his associations with deacons, selectmen and persons of the Court. Perhaps even the Governor- Of this, the stranger would no more speak.

However, now Young Goodman brought up his dear wife and how she would be affected by their association. However, the stranger demurred, saying he would not wish to harm his wife even for twenty of Goody Cloyse, an old woman who was now before them, making her way through the forest. She was Young Goodman's spiritual advisor, along with his minister and Deacon Gookin. Indeed, she had taught him the catechism. Young Goodman leaves the path but watches his companion as she approaches her.

She recognizes him as the Devil, in the form of Young Goodman's grandfather. The pious woman is upset because she feels an "unhanged witch" has stolen her broomstick and that, when she was anointed with wolf's bane and other herbs. She asks for his arm on the long journey, but he says he cannot but that he will give her his staff. She disappears, obviously aided by his implement, which had been used with distinction before with the Egyptian Magi.

Now, his staff has been given away, his companion now begins to form a new one, whittling it from a maple branch. Mysteriously, as stripped the branch, it began to dry up and wither as if it had been in the sunshine. When Young Goodman further questions his choice, his companion throws him the new staff in case he wants to move quickly and then disappears himself. Suddenly, Young Goodman hears horses. Amazingly, he recognizes the voices of his minister and Deacon Gookin. They are talking about a strange meeting they are about to go to, along with travelers from Connecticut and Rhode Island- and, indeed, from the Indian Powwows who know about devilry? Devilry? Young Goodman hears how they will be taking a young lady into their communion that very night.

Young Goodman realizes how alone he is, in this dark and evil place, and vows that he will take a stand against the devil. As he did this, a black cloud formed in the sky, blotting out the sky and carrying with it the voices of his townspeople, both those he deemed good and those he deemed not. The cloud then receded, but then again the voices started up- the voice of his wife, Faith, entreating those around him for a favor. Those about her, both bad and pious, seemed to encourage her. Then, there was a scream and a pink ribbon, off her cap, floated down from the sky onto a nearby branch, which he now held in his hand.

Furious beyond recognition, Young Goodman Brown takes now the maple staff and charges through the dark forest. Despite the cries of strange creatures and the noises of the trees and wind, it is Goodman Brown that is the "horror" of this night's show as he races towards the Devil and his minions.

There he comes to a setting in the forest, emblazoned with the light of flaming trees, a ghostly congregation that fades in and out of darkness. They are enjoined by a dark figure to see how many are there who have been revered in the naiveté of youth. He

recounts the lust of the very old for the very young; the murderous intent of wives against their husband; how young men have hastened their father's death to partake of their wealth.

He stands beside his wife besides a cursed altar, ready to take communion from the Devil himself. They are told that evil is inherent in the human condition. That is to evil they must now devote themselves, as is the fate of their entire race.

At the last moment, he turns to Faith and asks her to "resist the wicked one." Whether she does or not is not clear for suddenly he is yanked from this terrible tableau to the quiet of the forest besides a still rock, listening to the wind in the distant forest.

He returned to Salem where he encountered Goody Cloyse, the minister and good Deacon Gookin going forth in the town following their normal Christian predilections, living the life he had known them to live before his strange encounter. Goody Gloyse is catechizing a young girl. The minister sees him and blesses him, as is his habit. He hears the Deacon praying, through a window. He passes by his wife, filled with life and love for him, so thrilled to see him that she nearly kisses him in public. However, he only looks at her.

However,, for whatever reason, after his vision of the forest, after his so-called bad dream, Young Goodman Brown was never the same and went to his death without a good note on his tombstone. There had been, for Young Goodman Brown, a life spent in the terror of omnipresent sin.