

Mother

By Grace Paley

One day I was listening to the AM radio. I heard a song: "Oh, I Long to See My Mother in the Doorway."

"By God!" I said, "I understand that song." I have often longed to see my mother in the doorway. As a matter of fact, she did stand frequently in various doorways looking at me.

She stood one day, just so, at the front door, the darkness of the hallway behind her. It was New Year's Day. She said sadly, "If you come home at 4 a.m. when you're seventeen, what time will you come home when you're twenty?" She asked this question without humor or meanness. She had begun her worried preparations for death. She would not be present, she thought, when I was twenty. So she wondered.

Another time she stood in the doorway of my room. I had just issued a political manifesto attacking the family's position on the Soviet Union. She said, "Go to sleep for godsakes, you damn fool, you and your Communist ideas. We saw them already, Papa and me, in 1905. We guessed it all."

At the door of the kitchen she said, "You never finish your lunch. You run around senselessly. What will become of you?"

Then she died.

Naturally for the rest of my life I longed to see her, not only in doorways, in a great number of places— in the dining room with my aunts, at the window looking up and down the block, in the country garden among zinnias and marigolds, in the living room with my father.

Continued on back

They sat in comfortable leather chairs. They were listening to Mozart. They looked at one another amazed. It seemed to them that they'd just come over on the boat. They'd just learned the first English words. It seemed to them that he had just proudly handed in a 100 percent correct exam to the American anatomy professor. It seemed as though she'd just quit the shop for the kitchen.

I wish I could see her in the doorway of the living room. She stood there a minute. Then she sat beside him. They owned an expensive record player. They were listening to Bach. She said to him, "Talk to me a little. We don't talk so much anymore."

"I'm tired, he said. Can't you see? I saw maybe thirty people today. All sick, all talk talk talk talk. Listen to the music, he said. I believe you once had perfect pitch. I'm tired," he said.

Then she died.

Think/Pair/Share Close Reading Questions:

1. What point of view is the story told in? Why are there no names?

2. The tone seems to be **detached**. Where in the text is there evidence of detachment?

3. How often is "door" repeated? What might that repetition symbolize?

Continued

4. In the closing paragraphs, what is the difference in tone when the mother uses the word “talk” twice and when the father uses it four times?

5. The interaction between the parents had a lot of parallel structure in sentences...locate repeated phrasing...How often is the word “just” used?

6. Was the mother ever really in one room? Find evidence. Consider what might the doorway be a metaphor for, and cite two or more things we learn about the mother.

7. What is a possible theme for this story? Many messages are in the piece: loneliness, regret, struggle, freedom, loss, acceptance...and then there is connection. What kind of connection is there? Explain with evidence.

8. Lastly, how does Paley structure her story? Be specific.