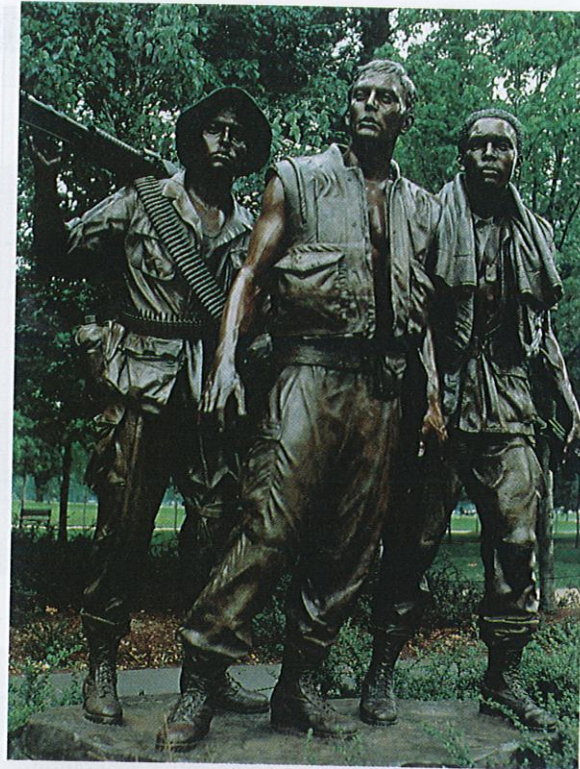


The runaway

Tim, 21, has left home. In Minnesota, an old man, Elroy, puts him up for a week. On the sixth day, Elroy takes Tim out fishing on the Rainy River, which marks the border between the U.S.A. and Canada.



1 THE little aluminium boat rocked softly beneath me. There was the wind and the sky.
 I tried to will myself overboard.
 I gripped the edge of the boat and leaned forward and thought, *Now*.
 5 I did try. It just wasn't possible.
 All those eyes on me — the town, the whole universe — and I couldn't risk the embarrassment. It was as if there were an audience to my life, that swirl¹ of faces along the river, and in my head I could hear people screaming at me. Traitor! they yelled. Turncoat! Pussy²! I felt myself blush. I couldn't tolerate it. I couldn't endure the mockery, or the disgrace, or the patriotic ridicule. Even in my imagination, the shore just twenty yards away, I couldn't make myself be brave. It had nothing to do with morality. Embarrassment, that's all it was.
 15 And right then I submitted.
 I would go to the war — I would kill and maybe die — because I was embarrassed not to.
 That was the sad thing. And so I sat in the bow³ of the boat and cried. It was loud now. Loud, hard crying.
 Elroy Berdahl remained quiet. He kept fishing. He worked his line with the tips of his fingers, patiently, squinting out at his red and white bobber⁴ on the Rainy River. His eyes were flat and impassive. He didn't speak. He was simply there, like the river and the late-summer sun. And yet by his presence, his mute watchfulness, he made it real. He was the true audience. He was a witness, like God, or like the gods, who look on in absolute silence
 20 as we live our lives, as we make our choices or fail to make them.
 "Ain't biting," he said.
 Then after a time the old man pulled in his line and turned the boat back toward Minnesota.
 I don't remember saying goodbye. That last night we had dinner together, and I went to bed early, and in the morning Elroy fixed breakfast for me. When I told him I'd be leaving, the old man nodded as if he already knew. He looked down at the table and smiled.
 At some point later in the morning it's possible that we shook hands — I just don't remember — but I do know that by the time I'd finished packing the old man had disappeared. In a way, I thought, it was appropriate. I left his two hundred dollars on the kitchen counter, got into the car, and drove south toward home.
 40 The day was cloudy. I passed through towns with familiar names, through the pine forests and down to the prairie, and then to Vietnam, where I was a soldier, and then home again. I survived, but it's not a happy ending. I was a coward. I went to the war.

1. swirl : *tourbillon*
2. pussy : *femmelette, trouillard*
3. bow : *proue*
4. bobber : *flotteur*

Tim O'BRIEN, *The Things They Carried Away* (1990)
 © Flamingo, Harper Collins

WORDS AND MEANING

MAIN FACTS

Answer the following questions. (Justify.)

1. Fill in the blanks with your own words and with the help of the text (one blank = one word).
 The scene takes place in the Tim, ..., is ...-ing to ... the border between and He wants to ... being sent to the ... in But he ... in his attempt to reach the ... just twenty yards away.

2. What can you guess about the narrator's hometown? Is it in California? New England? the Middle-West?

3. This text has been divided into three main parts. Find a title which sums up the main facts and ideas.

Part 1: from the beginning to l. 23: "... hard crying."
 Part 2: from l. 24: "Elroy Berdahl..." to l. 33: "... Minnesota."
 Part 3: from l. 34: "I don't remember..." to the end.

WORDS

4. Match each word with its equivalent.

- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| beneath (l. 1) | bear / put up with |
| grip (l. 4) | shame |
| audience (l. 9) | silent |
| blush (l. 13) | prepare |
| endure (l. 14) | become red |
| disgrace (l. 14) | seize firmly |
| mute (l. 28) | under |
| fix (l. 35) | public |

5. I tried to will myself overboard. (l. 3)

- a) Is "will" a noun, a verb or an adjective?
- b) Translate the sentence.

6. Find the translation of the following words in the text: *bord* (l. 1 to 19) - *hurler* (2 words) (l. 1 to 19) - *plisser les yeux* (l. 20 to 30).

7. Use the context to find the meaning of the words in bold letters. What clues helped you?

- a) I gripped the edge of the boat and **leaned forward**... (l. 4)
- b) ... the **shore** just twenty yards away... (l. 15)
- c) He worked his line with the **tips** of his **fingers**... (l. 24)

MEANING

8. Pick out all the groups of words revealing the narrator summons up all his courage.

9. True or false? Tim was scared of being slandered (*calomnié*).

10. ... I submitted (l. 19). Who or what did Tim submit to?

11. Pick out all the phrases revealing Elroy is silent, expressionless and absorbed.

12. In your opinion, is Elroy's attitude genuine (*vraie*) or fake (*fausse*)? Why?

13. Why did the old man take Tim on the fishing-trip? Imagine Elroy's thoughts and feelings throughout the incident. Is Elroy a likeable character? Why? Why not?

14. True or false?

- a) Tim took leave (*prendre congé*) of Elroy.
- b) Elroy saw the narrator off.
- c) Tim appreciated the old man's attitude.

15. What accounts for both Tim's and Elroy's attitude after the incident?

16. What image does the narrator give of himself? Positive or negative? Why?

Help yourself !

nouns: dodger (*tire-au-flanc*), draft (*conscription*) • attempt = effort, inner battle (*bataille intérieure*), inner turmoil (*agitation*), failure = flop (*échec*) • out of cowardice (*par lâcheté*).
adj.: decisive (step), crucial (dilemma), paralysed • cowardly (*lâche*), weak ≠ strong, irresolute (*indécis*), degrading = debasing = humiliating • despondent (*abattu*) • considerate (*prévenant*), kind, lenient (*indulgent*), perceptive (*perspicace*), unruffled (*calme*), discreet = unobtrusive.

verbs: recall (*se souvenir de*), dodge (*échapper à*) • pluck up = muster courage (*prendre son courage à deux mains*) • call sb names = abuse sb = insult sb • lack sth (*manquer de*), require = involve (*nécessiter*), seize (a chance / an opportunity), shrink from sth (*reculer devant quelque chose*), backtrack (*faire machine arrière*), dread V-ing (*redouter de*) • cry / weep / sob / burst into tears • confess, admit • resign oneself to V-ing.