

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

# Home

By Gwendolyn Brooks  
1953

*Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000) was an American poet, author, and teacher. In 1950, she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, which made her the first African-American woman to receive the honor. Her writing often explores the experiences of ordinary people and their communities. In this short story, a family contemplates losing their house. As you read, take notes on each character's perspective on losing the house.*

- [1] What had been wanted was this always, this always to last, the talking softly on this porch, with the snake plant in the jardinière<sup>1</sup> in the southwest corner, and the obstinate<sup>2</sup> slip from Aunt Eppie's magnificent Michigan fern at the left side of the friendly door. Mama, Maud Martha, and Helen rocked slowly in their rocking chairs, and looked at the late afternoon light on the lawn and at the emphatic<sup>3</sup> iron of the fence and at the poplar tree.<sup>4</sup> These things might soon be theirs no longer. Those shafts and pools of light, the tree, the graceful iron, might soon be viewed passively by different eyes.



*"#rocking #chairs #front #porch #springlake" by Matt Sudol is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.*

Papa was to have gone that noon, during his lunch hour, to the office of the Home Owners' Loan. If he had not succeeded in getting another extension, they would be leaving this house in which they had lived for more than fourteen years. There was little hope. The Home Owners' Loan was hard. They sat, making their plans.

"We'll be moving into a nice flat somewhere," said Mama. "Somewhere on South Park, or Michigan, or in Washington Park Court." Those flats, as the girls and Mama knew well, were burdens on wages twice the size of Papa's. This was not mentioned now.

"They're much prettier than this old house," said Helen. "I have friends I'd just as soon not bring here. And I have other friends that wouldn't come down this far for anything, unless they were in a taxi."

- [5] Yesterday, Maud Martha would have attacked her. Tomorrow she might. Today she said nothing. She merely gazed at a little hopping robin in the tree, her tree, and tried to keep the fronts of her eyes dry.

1. French for "planter"
2. **Obstinate (adjective):** stubbornly refusing to change
3. **Emphatic (adjective):** attracting special attention
4. a type of quick-growing tree

"Well, I do know," said Mama, turning her hands over and over, "that I've been getting tireder and tireder of doing that firing. From October to April, there's firing to be done."

"But lately we've been helping, Harry and I," said Maud Martha. "And sometimes in March and April and in October, and even in November, we could build a little fire in the fireplace. Sometimes the weather was just right for that."

She knew, from the way they looked at her, that this had been a mistake. They did not want to cry.

But she felt that the little line of white, sometimes ridged with smoked purple, and all that cream-shot saffron<sup>5</sup> would never drift across any western sky except that in back of this house. The rain would drum with as sweet a dullness nowhere but here. The birds on South Park were mechanical birds, no better than the poor caught canaries in those "rich" women's sun parlors.

[10] "It's just going to kill Papa!" burst out Maud Martha. "He loves this house! He lives for this house!"

"He lives for us," said Helen. "It's us he loves. He wouldn't want the house, except for us."

"And he'll have us," added Mama, "wherever."

"You know," Helen sighed, "if you want to know the truth, this is a relief. If this hadn't come up, we would have gone on, just dragged on, hanging out here forever."

"It might," allowed Mama, "be an act of God. God may just have reached down and picked up the reins."

[15] "Yes," Maud Martha cracked in, "that's what you always say — that God knows best."

Her mother looked at her quickly, decided the statement was not suspect, looked away.

Helen saw Papa coming. "There's Papa," said Helen.

They could not tell a thing from the way Papa was walking. It was that same dear little staccato<sup>6</sup> walk, one shoulder down, then the other, then repeat, and repeat. They watched his progress. He passed the Kennedys', he passed the vacant<sup>7</sup> lot, he passed Mrs. Blakemore's. They wanted to hurl themselves over the fence, into the street, and shake the truth out of his collar. He opened his gate — the gate — and still his stride and face told them nothing.

"Hello," he said.

[20] Mama got up and followed him through the front door. The girls knew better than to go in too.

Presently Mama's head emerged. Her eyes were lamps turned on.

"It's all right," she exclaimed. "He got it. It's all over. Everything is all right."

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5. an orange to orange-yellow

6. short, quick, and separate

7. **Vacant (adjective):** not filled, used, or lived in

The door slammed shut. Mama's footsteps hurried away.

"I think," said Helen, rocking rapidly, "I think I'll give a party. I haven't given a party since I was 11. I'd like some of my friends to just casually see that we're homeowners."

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## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following identifies a theme of the text? [RL.2]
  - A. Homes provide physical and emotional security for families.
  - B. While change can be frightening, it also creates a chance for growth.
  - C. The stress of waiting for bad news can be worse than the bad news itself.
  - D. Families are stronger when everyone shares their true feelings.
  
2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
  - A. "They're much prettier than this old house," said Helen. "I have friends I'd just as soon not bring here." (Paragraph 4)
  - B. "It's just going to kill Papa!" burst out Maud Martha. "He loves this house! He lives for this house!" (Paragraph 10)
  - C. "If you want to know the truth, this is a relief. If this hadn't come up, we would have gone on, just dragged on, hanging out here forever." (Paragraph 13)
  - D. "I think I'll give a party. I haven't given a party since I was 11. I'd like some of my friends to just casually see that we're homeowners." (Paragraph 24)
  
3. PART A: What does the possibility of losing their home reveal about Maud Martha and Helen's points of view? [RL.6]
  - A. Helen focuses on the benefits of finding a new home, while Maud Martha can't help but think of everything they'll lose.
  - B. Helen is excited to leave their home for a new and better one, while Maud Martha is convinced they will never find something that compares.
  - C. Helen is reluctant to leave their home, while Maud Martha is somewhat embarrassed by the current state of their home.
  - D. Helen wants to leave their home because she is not attached to it, while Maud Martha is solely concerned about the effect it will have on their father.
  
4. PART B: Which TWO quotes from the text best support the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
  - A. "And sometimes in March and April and in October, and even in November, we could build a little fire in the fireplace. Sometimes the weather was just right for that." (Paragraph 7)
  - B. "She knew, from the way they looked at her, that this had been a mistake. They did not want to cry." (Paragraph 8)
  - C. "It's just going to kill Papa!" burst out Maud Martha. "He loves this house! He lives for this house!" (Paragraph 10)
  - D. "He lives for us," said Helen. "It's us he loves. He wouldn't want the house, except for us." (Paragraph 11)
  - E. "If you want to know the truth, this is a relief. If this hadn't come up, we would have gone on, just dragged on, hanging out here forever." (Paragraph 13)
  - F. "I think I'll give a party. I haven't given a party since I was 11. I'd like some of my friends to just casually see that we're homeowners." (Paragraph 24)

5. How does the author's language in paragraph 9 contribute to the description of the family's house? [RL.4]

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