Second Battle Of Shiloh Essay, Research Paper

John Gilbert

Paper One

Dr. Mosser

English 1102

6 February 2000

The Second Battle of Shiloh

The switch to college life can definitely change people. In high school, one makes

friends that will hopefully last a lifetime. Then comes senior year, and after all the college

admissions letters have been received, one must face the realization that his/her best

friends will not be by their side 24 hours a day / 7 days a week any longer. Still ecstatic by

what this new life, college, holds for them, students enter into their chosen institute of

higher learning. Do you remember that first break, or long weekend, that brings everyone

back to the place where they grew up? Its a chance to look back and catch up on old

times, even though you?ve only been separated for a month or two. Whether coming

home from UGA, Tech, or even some out-of-state college, that drive home gives one time

to reflect. Will my friends who I graduated with be the same friends who I know and

love? Like I said, college alters people, and the first time you see old friends, you might

realize that your best friends are not who they once were. Although painful, this is a

process that is natural. Friends change, and friends move on with their lives, regardless of

your presence. On a larger scale, this is the dilemma brought to the readers attention by

Bobbie Ann Mason, author of ?Shiloh?.

In Mason?s ?Shiloh?, Leroy and Norma Jean Moffitt are a married couple living in

Paducah, Kentucky. Leroy has spent the past 15 years driving a tractor-trailer across the

country. Four months ago, Leroy was involved in a highway accident that required steel

pins to be placed in his hip. He returned home to rest and rehabilitate his leg. He is

confined to his house, something that he hasn?t seen for an extended period since he?s

been on the road. Like a college student, this is Leroy?s long weekend. Leroy comes

home to his wife, Norma Jean, hoping that she will be the same person he left many years

before. Unfortunately for Leroy, Norma Jean has moved on with her life, much like

friends who move on after high school graduation. Leroy would like for things to be the

way they were, but Norma Jean has chosen a different course in her life that doesn?t

involve Leroy. She works at the Rexall Drug Store, loves to play music, and is taking

classes in composition at Paducah Community College. Bobbie Ann Mason uses literary

devices in her story to tell of the impending divorce of Leroy and Norma Jean. The use of

symbolism and foreshadowing are both used to clue the reader into the eventual fate of the

Moffitt?s marriage:

Sitting in his Paducah, Kentucky home, Leroy stares towards the backyard where

his rig is parked. He says it looks ?like a gigantic bird that has flown home to roost?

(Mason 46). This quote symbolizes that the leader of the home has returned, but sadly,

Leroy is misinformed. In fact, he is scared of what the future holds. To pass the time he

builds models from kits, including log cabins, hardly a productive activity. Sitting on the

couch he realizes that ?in all the years he as on the road he never took time to examine

anything? (Mason 46). He?s speaking about the scenery on the road but I can deduct that

in addition to scenery, Leroy neglected to examine his marriage. At this point, Leroy?s

marriage is in a irreconcilable state. The only connection Leroy can forge with his wife is

when she starts talking about cosmetics (creams, toners, moisturizers). He also thinks

about petroleum products – axle grease and diesel fuel. Don?t get me wrong, Leroy feels

guilty about his long absences, but now that he?s home, he wishes that his wife would

celebrate his permanent homecoming more happily. This foreshadows her relative

disappointment with the marriage and its impending end. Leroy even observes that they

?sometimes feel awkward around each other? (Mason 47). This shouldn?t be the case for

a married couple of 16 years, again foreshadowing an imminent end to the marriage.

Norma Jean, in the meantime, learns to play the organ. At first she learns Christmas

songs, and then all the songs in the ?Sixties Songbook?. The only thing Leroy does in

smoke joints on the couch. He wasted one of his days buying marijuana from a kid,

further displaying is stationary and pathetic life. Norma Jean is tired of his lounging

around. One day, after watching Leroy sew a Star Trek pillow cover, she says, ?You

don?t know what to do with yourself?. This symbolizes Norma Jean?s direction in life and

Leroy?s lack of motivation to do anything productive, like try to save his marriage. There

seems to be a role reversal in this marriage, with Norma Jean occupying the masculine

role. Norma Jean has to tell Leroy to find work. She says, ?You have to find a job first?

(Mason 49), referring to Leroy?s desire to build her a log cabin. She even names off jobs

for Leroy: ?You could get a job as a guard at Union Carbide, where they?d let you set on

a stool…You could do a little carpenter work, if you want to build so bad? (Mason 49).

Leroy just says that he can?t do anything where he would have to stand up all day. In bed

that night Norma Jean closes her eyes and requests that the lights be turned out, just like

she wants the lights turned out in this marriage. Leroy still has a preoccupation with

building Norma Jean a log cabin, yet the notion of receiving a truckload of notched,

numbered logs scares him. Once again this symbolizes his fear of the future, just the

opposite of Norma Jean. Although Norma Jean is the ?king of the castle?, Leroy still

yearns for insistence that he is the man of the house. He asks Norma Jean, ?Am I still king

around here?? (Mason 53). When Norma Jean flexes her biceps she is showing Leroy that

she is the leader of the house. Leroy knows that something has to be done to save his

marriage. Mabel, Leroy?s mother-in-law, suggests they take a trip to Shiloh, a Civil War

battleground. This is ready-made symbolism. A battling couple takes a trip to a famous

battleground. Looking for a place to picnic, they sit down next to a cemetery for Union

Soldiers, which symbolizes the death of their life together as husband and wife. She tells

Leroy that she is leaving him and when she walks toward the bluff overlooking the

Tennessee River, Leroy tries to follow. His good leg, however is asleep, and his bad leg

still hurts him. This symbolizes that he will never catch her. She has her own life and he is

stuck in the same place.

In conclusion, I have personally experienced the loss of a friend after we both

embarked on different paths. Although we were the best of friends in high school, when

the time came on that long weekend to hang out, we didn?t even pick up the phone to see

what the other was doing. Although its natural to move in different directions, it still hurts

to no longer have that friend in your life any longer, just like it hurts Leroy not to have

Norma Jean

Bibliography

shiloh