

A Day's Wait

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

He came into the room to shut the windows while we were still in bed and I saw he looked ill. He was shivering, his face was white, and he walked slowly as though it ached to move.

"What's the matter, Schatz?"¹

"I've got a headache."

"You better go back to bed."

"No. I'm all right."

"You go to bed. I'll see you when I'm dressed."

But when I came downstairs he was dressed, sitting by the fire, looking a very sick and miserable boy of nine years. When I put my hand on his forehead I knew he had a fever.

"You go up to bed," I said, "you're sick."

"I'm all right," he said.

When the doctor came he took the boy's temperature.

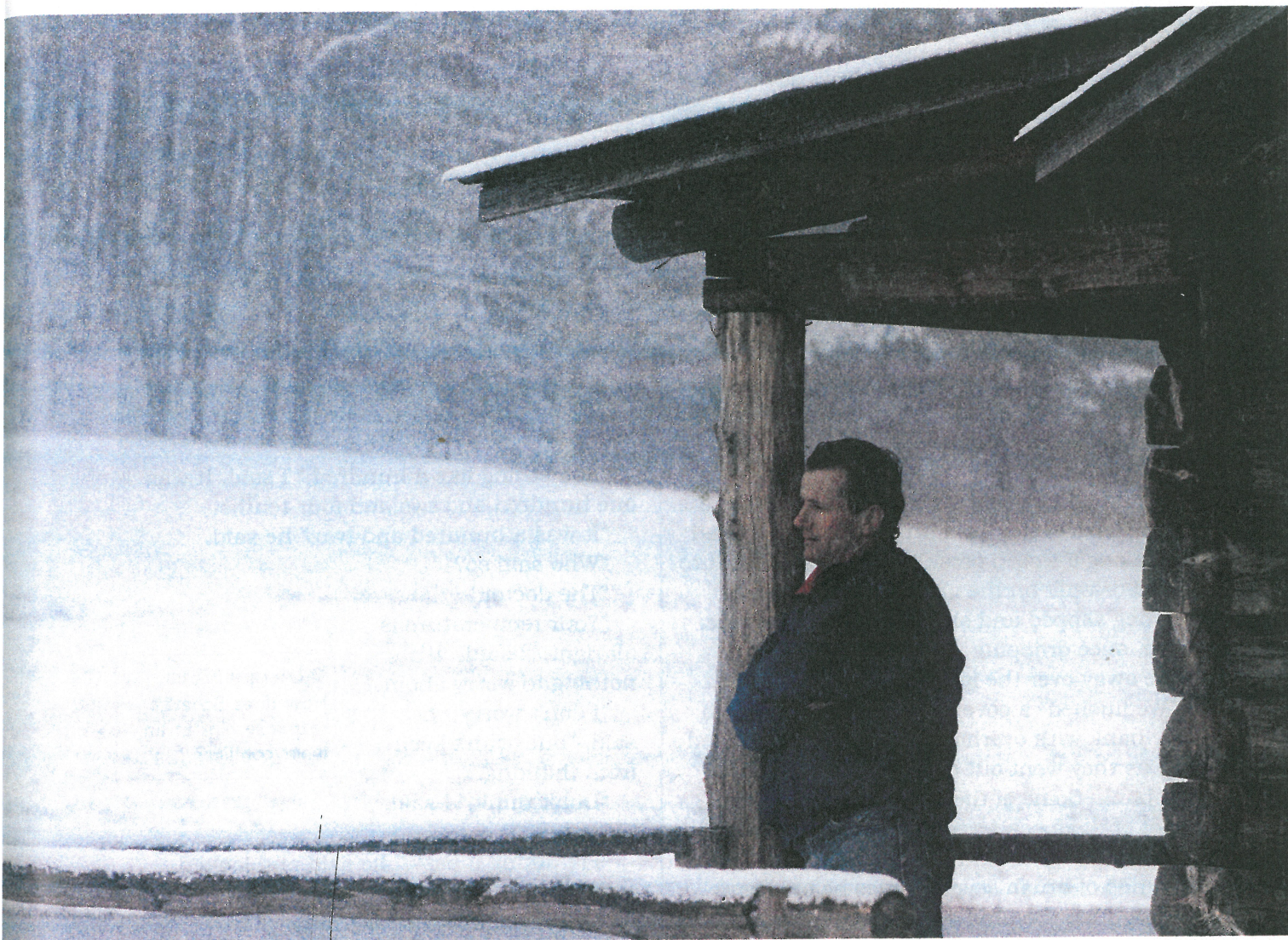
"What is it?" I asked him.

"One hundred and two."

Downstairs, the doctor left three different medicines in different colored capsules with instructions for giving them. One was to bring down the fever, another a purgative, the third to overcome an acid condition. The germs of influenza can only exist in an acid condition, he explained. He seemed to know all about influenza and said there was nothing to worry about if the fever did not go above one hundred and four degrees. This was a light epidemic of flu and there was no danger if you avoided pneumonia.

Back in the room I wrote the boy's temperature down and made a note of the time to give the various capsules.

1. **Schatz** (shäts): German term of affection, used here as a loving nickname.



▲ **Critical Viewing** In this story, a father and son spend time apart. How might time in a natural setting like this one help the father to stay calm? [Speculate]

"Do you want me to read to you?"

"All right. If you want to," said the boy. His face was very white and there were dark areas under his eyes. He lay still in the bed and seemed very detached from what was going on.

I read aloud from Howard Pyle's *Book of Pirates*; but I could see he was not following what I was reading.

"How do you feel, Schatz?" I asked him.

"Just the same, so far," he said.

I sat at the foot of the bed and read to

myself while I waited for it to be time to give another capsule. It would have been natural for him to go to sleep, but when I looked up he was looking at the foot of the bed, looking very strangely.

"Why don't you try to go to sleep? I'll wake you up for the medicine."

"I'd rather stay awake."

After a while he said to me, "You don't have to stay in here with me, Papa, if it bothers you."

"It doesn't bother me."

"No. I mean you don't have to stay if it's going to bother you."

I thought perhaps he was a little lightheaded

◆ Build Vocabulary

epidemic (ep' ə dem' ik) *n.*: Outbreak of a contagious disease

► **Critical Viewing** What details in this picture suggest that the boy in the picture is as sick as the boy in the story? [Connect]

and after giving him the prescribed capsules at eleven o'clock I went out for a while. It was a bright, cold day, the ground covered with a sleet that had frozen so that it seemed as if all the bare trees, the bushes, the cut brush and all the grass and the bare ground had been varnished with ice. I took the young Irish setter for a little walk up the road and along a frozen creek, but it was difficult to stand or walk on the glassy surface and the red dog slipped and slithered and I fell twice, hard, once dropping my gun and having it slide away over the ice.

We flushed² a covey³ of quail under a high clay bank with overhanging brush and I killed two as they went out of sight over the top of the bank. Some of the covey lit in trees but most of them scattered into brush piles and it was necessary to jump on the ice-coated mounds of brush several times before they would flush. Coming out while you were poised unsteadily on the icy, springy brush they made difficult shooting, and I killed two, missed five, and started back pleased to have found a covey close to the house and happy there were so many left to find on another day.

At the house they said the boy had refused to let anyone come into the room.

"You can't come in," he said. "You mustn't get what I have."

I went up to him and found him in exactly the position I had left him, white-faced, but with the tops of his cheeks flushed by the fever, staring still, as he had stared at the foot of the bed.

I took his temperature.
"What is it?"



"Something like a hundred," I said. It was one hundred and two and four tenths.

"It was a hundred and two," he said.

"Who said so?"

"The doctor."

"Your temperature is all right," I said. "It's nothing to worry about."

"I don't worry," he said, "but I can't keep from thinking."

"Don't think," I said.

"Just take it easy."

"I'm taking it easy," he said and looked straight ahead. He was evidently holding tight on to himself about something.

"Take this with water."

"Do you think it will do any good?"

"Of course it will."

I sat down and opened the *Pirate* book and commenced to read, but I could see he was not following, so I stopped.

"About what time do you think I'm going to die?" he asked.

"What?"

"About how long will it be before I die?"

"You aren't going to die. What's the matter with you?"

"Oh, yes, I am. I heard him say a hundred and two."

"People don't die with a fever of one hundred

◆ **Literary Focus**
How does Schatz's response hint at an inner conflict?

◆ Build Vocabulary

evidently (ev' ə dent' lē) *adv.*: Clearly; obviously

2. **flushed** (flusht) *v.*: Drove from hiding.

3. **covey** (kuv' ē) *n.*: Small flock of birds.

and two. That's a silly way to talk."

"I know they do. At school in France the boys told me you can't live with forty-four degrees. I've got a hundred and two."

◆ Reading Strategy

Reread the first two pages of the story to see why Schatz thought he was going to die.

He had been waiting to die all day, ever since nine o'clock in the morning.

"You poor Schatz," I said. "Poor old Schatz. It's like miles and kilo-

meters.⁴ You aren't going to die. That's a

4. **kilometers** (ki lăm' ə tərz) *n.*: A kilometer is 1,000 meters or about 5/8 of a mile.

different thermometer. On that thermometer thirty-seven is normal. On this kind it's ninety-eight."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely," I said. "It's like miles and kilometers. You know, like how many kilometers we make when we do seventy miles in the car?"

"Oh," he said.

But his gaze at the foot of the bed relaxed slowly. The hold over himself relaxed too, finally, and the next day it was very slack and he cried very easily at little things that were of no importance.

Guide for Responding

◆ LITERATURE AND YOUR LIFE

Reader's Response Do you find the boy's actions courageous, touching, or silly? Explain.

Thematic Focus How does the boy's illness cause him to test his image of himself? What does he discover?

Journal Entry What do people learn from their experiences with anxiety? Write about a time when you worried about something that turned out to be less of a problem than you originally imagined. What lesson did you take away from the experience?

☒ Check Your Comprehension

1. What starts the boy's concern over dying?
2. How does the boy spend his day of illness?
3. What does the boy's father do while the boy is ill?
4. Why does the boy think he will die?
5. How does the father explain the mistake to his son?

◆ Critical Thinking

INTERPRET

1. What is the meaning of the story's title? **[Interpret]**
2. Describe two ways in which the boy shows courage or concern for others. **[Connect]**
3. Why does the boy cry easily the next day? **[Analyze Cause and Effect]**
4. How do you think the confusion over the boy's illness will change the relationship between the boy and his father? **[Speculate]**
5. What long-term effect might this "day's wait" have on the boy? **[Analyze Cause and Effect; Speculate]**

APPLY

6. In his novels, Hemingway often celebrated bravery. How does the boy's behavior in "A Day's Wait" illustrate Hemingway's ideal of courage? **[Draw Conclusions]**

EXTEND

7. Name two jobs in which the boy's quiet bravery would be valuable. Explain how this quality would be useful in each job. **[Career Link]**