

## **“Hunters in the Snow” by Tobias Wolff**

from *In the Garden of the North American Martyrs*, 1981

*Leader’s notes are shown in italic bold face*

### *Summarize the story...*

1. Describe the development of Frank and Tub’s relationship after Kenny is shot. What factors are at play here?

Do you find it believable that they leave Kenny in the back of the truck while enjoying the warmth of a roadhouse—twice? Why or why not?

2. Lying is a common theme in Wolff’s stories (and his life!). Identify places in the story where there’s a disconnect between what the characters think/feel/assert, and the reality of their situations. Are the characters actually lying? Deluding themselves?

*Kenny thinks he’s going to a hospital, but isn’t; Frank’s remark about the bullet missing the appendix seems like flat-out misinformation; Tub thinks Kenny’s going to shoot him; almost a split between affect and reality when Frank and Tub seem not to get it that Kenny is going to die! All of their misbeliefs/lies set us up not to trust any conclusions they reach. They’re groping in the dark.*

3. In what ways are Kenny, Frank, and Tub products of our society?

*positive thinking; helping oneself; right to the pursuit of happiness...*

4. When asked to list his favorite books, writer David Sedaris had this to say about *In the Garden of the North American Martyrs*: “[Wolff’s] stories are like parables, and after reading one I always vow to become a better person.” Assuming that Sedaris subscribes to the dictionary definition of parable, how is “Hunters...” like a parable?

*parable* (n): a usually short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle

*Cheap grace/self-absorption has deadly consequences.*

Which, if any, of the following characteristics of biblical parables apply to “Hunters”?

- Brief and symmetrical, often using balanced structures of two or three movements
- Taken from everyday life but not necessarily realistic *—this applies!*
- Often start with a question to elicit thought
- Require a reversal in one’s thinking *—the “unconditional” love that develops between Frank and Tub may at first glance appear to be a good thing, yet is clearly going to kill Kenny...*
- Crux of the parable comes at the end—*just because you think you’re going to be saved doesn’t mean you are*

*“Parabole” (greek) can mean proverb, riddle, comparison, contrast, simple story, complex story... “Masal” (hebrew) can mean taunt, prophetic oracle, byword...*

5. From Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship*:

...Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjack’s wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religions are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the church’s inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost!

The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing. Since the cost was infinite, the possibilities of using and spending it are infinite. What would grace be, if it were not cheap?...

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate...

Discuss the story as a parable about cheap grace.

In what areas are you most likely to show yourself, or others, cheap grace?

***Romans 6:1-2: <sup>1</sup> What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that **grace** may increase? <sup>2</sup> By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?***