

Penguin



Readers



THE
UNLIKELY
PILGRIMAGE of
HAROLD FRY



RACHEL JOYCE

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RACHEL JOYCE

LEVEL

5

RETOLD BY ANNA TREWIN
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Note about the story

Rachel Joyce is an English writer. She is best known for her novels *The Unlikely Pilgrimage* of Harold Fry*, *The Love Song of Miss Queenie Hennessy* and *Miss Benson's Beetle*. A pilgrimage is a long journey to see a special, or religious, place. In *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry*, Harold Fry goes out to post a letter and decides to keep walking from Kingsbridge in South Devon, which is in the very south of England, to Berwick-upon-Tweed, near Scotland.

Sometimes, Harold travels on A roads that are very busy with traffic, and sometimes on the quieter B roads. English A and B roads are always followed by a number, for example, the B3196. See page 6 for a map of Harold's journey across England.

Before Harold **retired**, he worked as a **sales representative** for a **brewery**. Breweries make beer and Harold's job was to sell the beer to pubs and restaurants.

Harold's friend Queenie is in a **hospice** – a quiet place where very sick people go before they die. Some old people in England (like Harold's father) live in nursing homes if their families are unable to care for them.

*Definitions of words in **bold** can be found in the glossary on pages 93–96.

Before-reading questions

- 1 Have you ever walked a very long way? How far did you walk, and how did it make you feel in your body and mind?
- 2 Look at the map on page 6. How many of the towns and cities have you heard of? What do you know about them?
- 3 In the story, Harold and his wife do not talk about the important things in their lives. Why are some married couples like this, do you think?
- 4 Look at the definition for “pilgrimage” on page 95. Have you ever made a pilgrimage? Is there a pilgrimage that you would like to make in your life?



THE UNLIKELY
PILGRIMAGE OF
HAROLD FRY
627 MILES & 87 DAYS

10 0 20 40 60
MILES



CHAPTER ONE

The letter

The letter that changed everything arrived on a Tuesday. It was an ordinary morning in April and the air smelled of clean washing and cut grass. Harold Fry sat at the breakfast table as his wife, Maureen, put a hand-written envelope in front of him. Maureen was a small woman with short silver hair and a quick walk. When they first met, nothing had mattered to Harold more than making her laugh.

“Post for you,” she said, crossly. “The postmark says Berwick-upon-Tweed.”

She sat down and put some toast on her plate.

Harold stared at the envelope. It was pink, and the handwriting was like a child’s. It read, *Mr H. Fry, 13 Fossebridge Road, Kingsbridge, South Hams, Devon*. He opened it with a knife and pulled out the letter, which had clearly been written by a different hand.

Dear Harold, This may come to you as some surprise.

“Well?” said Maureen.

“**Good Lord**. It’s from Queenie Hennessy.”

Maureen put some butter on her toast. “Queenie who?”

“She worked with me at the **brewery** years ago. Don’t you remember?”

“I don’t see why I should remember her. Could you pass the jam?”

“She worked in **Finance**,” he said. “She was very good.”

“That’s the honey, Harold. Jam is red.”

Harold passed her the jam and returned to the letter. “She remembers you. She says hello.”

Maureen’s mouth closed into a small ball. She started to talk about something else and then stopped as she saw her husband sit straight in his chair. “Harold, what is it?” she said. “Is something wrong?”

“It’s **cancer**. Queenie is writing to say goodbye.” He tried to say more but could not find the words. His eyes were full of **tears**.

“I’m sorry,” said Maureen, after a minute.

Harold nodded, not moving or speaking, while she took the dirty plates to the kitchen. A few minutes later, he heard her start **vacuuming** the sitting room.

After she had finished vacuuming, Maureen went upstairs to David’s room and stared at its **net curtains**. She always kept the room clean because she was waiting for their son to come back, and she did not know when that would be. Men did not understand what it was like to be a mother, or the pain of loving a child even when he was gone. Maureen thought of Harold and his pink letter, and she wanted to talk to their son.

Harold got some paper and a pen from a **drawer**. He did

not know what to write. In the end his reply was very short.

Dear Queenie,

Thank you for your letter. I am very sorry.

Best wishes – Harold (Fry).

Putting the letter into an envelope, he closed it quickly and wrote the address of St Bernadine's **Hospice** on the front. "I'm going to the postbox," he called to Maureen.

It was just past eleven o'clock. He put on his jacket, tie and boating shoes, and opened the front door. Maureen was suddenly beside him. "Will you be long?"

"I'm only going to the end of the road."

She kept looking at him with her green eyes, and he did not know what to tell her. "Bye, Maureen," he said, finally, shutting the door and walking down the hill towards the postbox. He waved to their neighbour, Rex, who was in his front garden. Rex was a short man with a round body. His wife had died six months ago and he liked to talk about her a lot. "You should at least listen," Maureen always told Harold.

"Are you going for a walk?" said Rex.

Harold held up the envelope. "Do you need anything posting?" he said.

"Nobody writes to me, not since Elizabeth died," replied Rex.

Harold stared at the sky, wanting to **avoid** the conversation. "Well, I must get on," he said, turning in the direction of the postbox. He thought of the words that he had written to Queenie and how **weak** they were. He thought of himself returning to the home where he and Maureen had lived for

forty-five years, and life being the same except for Queenie dying. Suddenly, he was fighting tears again. He **paused** at the postbox and could not let the envelope go.

“Well, it’s a nice day,” he thought. “I’ve got nothing else to do so why not walk to the next one?” He turned the corner of Fossebridge Road before he could change his mind.

It was not like Harold to make a quick **decision**. Since he had **retired** from being a **sales representative** at the brewery, days went by and nothing **changed**. He just got fatter and lost more hair. He slept badly at night, and sometimes did not sleep at all.

When he arrived at the next postbox, Harold paused again. He had started something and he did not know what it was. But now that he was doing it, he was not ready to finish. Why not walk to the post office instead?

First, he took out Queenie’s letter and read it again. She remembered him, after all these years. But he had just lived out his ordinary life trying to forget. Why had he let twenty years pass without trying to find her? When she left, he had not tried to stop her. He had not followed her. He had not even said goodbye.

He continued walking, past the newsagent’s and the butcher, and the Old Creek pub. When he finally reached the post office, he walked on without stopping. He walked until the shops finished and the road went between houses that were built of Devon stone.

It was lunchtime now and he was beginning to feel hungry. He saw a petrol station ahead and decided to buy

something to eat. Then, he would find the next postbox.

The girl at the petrol station wore a badge on her shirt that said HAPPY TO HELP.

“Any petrol?” she asked, as he gave her the money for a sandwich.

“No, I’m just passing to post a letter to someone who I used to know. She has cancer.”

The girl nodded. “My aunt had cancer. You have to have **faith** that a person can get better. If you have faith, you can do anything.”

Harold stared at the girl, who suddenly seemed to be standing in a circle of light.



“I don’t mean religious faith,” she went on. “I mean trusting what you don’t understand and believing that you can change things.”

“And did having faith help your aunt get better?” he asked.

“She said that it gave her hope when everything else was gone.”

“Does anyone work here?” said a man, impatiently, behind Harold. Harold quickly paid for his sandwich and went to the door.

You have to have faith. Were they the words that the girl had used? Harold was 65 and his body was beginning to get old. He felt **stiff** in the mornings. Sometimes, he had a bit of chest pain, and ringing in his ears. So what was this sudden wave of **energy**? He turned towards the A381 and promised himself that he would stop at the next postbox.

He was leaving Kingsbridge. The road became narrower and branches covered the sky. The sea lay behind him, and before him, to the north, rose the high ground of Dartmoor. After that came more hills – the Blackdown Hills, the Mendip Hills, the Pennines, the Yorkshire Dales. And at the end, far to the north, close to Scotland, was the town of Berwick-upon-Tweed and the sea.

But there, just across the road, was a phone box, and next to it a postbox. Harold’s journey was at its end.

His feet slowed. He thought of all the things that he had lost. He thought of the son who did not speak to him

During-reading questions

CHAPTER ONE

- 1 What were Harold's and Queenie's jobs?
- 2 Why has Queenie written to Harold?
- 3 What makes Harold decide to walk to Berwick-upon-Tweed?

CHAPTER TWO

- 1 How was Harold's life before the age of 16?
- 2 Who is David and what happened when he was six years old?

CHAPTER THREE

- 1 How does Maureen feel about Harold leaving?
- 2 How did Maureen and Harold's marriage change just before Queenie disappeared? What did Maureen do?
- 3 Why does Maureen decide to call Harold's doctor?

CHAPTER FOUR

- 1 What did the children call Harold at school? Why?
- 2 Why is Harold shocked by the cyclist's arm?
- 3 Where is Martina from? What was her job?

CHAPTER FIVE

- 1 Why doesn't Maureen agree to have Harold put in a hospital?
- 2 What does "to meet someone's eye" mean, do you think?
- 3 Why does Maureen think that Harold has left?

CHAPTER SIX

- 1 What has Harold learned about people?
- 2 What lie did Harold tell Queenie about David?
- 3 Why should Maureen be blamed?

After-reading questions

- 1 What do Harold and Maureen learn from his long walk, do you think? How do he and Maureen change?
 - 2 “But there was no escaping your past. Not even with a tie. Hadn’t David shown that?” What does the author mean, do you think?
 - 3 Do Maureen and David *really* talk to each other, do you think?
 - 4 Why is it important for Harold to walk to Berwick and not go by car, do you think?
 - 5 Look up the words “nervous breakdown” online or in your dictionary. Is Harold having a nervous breakdown, do you think?
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Exercises

CHAPTER ONE

- 1 Match the words with their definitions in your notebook. Example: 1 – c**

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 brewery | a to clean something using a machine |
| 2 cancer | b a person who sells things for a company |
| 3 vacuum | c a company that makes beer |
| 4 hospice | d a place where sick people go to be cared for before they die |
| 5 sales representative | e a serious illness that makes cells grow in a way that is not normal |