

The ambitious guest: plot

[Life](#), [Death](#)



A young traveler stops for the night with a family that lives in a "notch" next to a mountain. They make friendly conversation, interrupted once by the sound of a wagon carrying other travelers who pause but do not go inside, continuing on with their journey and then by the sound of rocks falling from the slope. The father reassures the visitor that rockfalls happen regularly without causing harm, but that the family has a "safe place" to go in the event of a serious collapse. The group carries on with their friendly conversation. The visitor acknowledges that he is young and has no accomplishments of note, but hopes he will have "achieved my destiny" before he dies and then "I shall have built my monument!" The father expresses the wish for a more humble legacy, and the aged grandmother makes a request for her dying day. Suddenly, they are alarmed by the sound of a much larger avalanche. They scream in fear of "The Slide!" and bolt outside for their safe place. But they are all caught up in the rockslide and killed, while the house is completely undamaged. Their bodies are swept away and never found. The narrator notes that some who see the house later think there is evidence of a visitor that night, but others disagree - the young man has in fact died without leaving any trace of his life. The basis of the story is the Willey tragedy of Crawford Notch, New Hampshire. It is about the virtue of tranquility with a family of cozily gathered around the hearth