

# A plot of the notebook novel

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In *The Notebook*, by Agota Kristof, a pair of twin boys interact with many people during their journey from the Big Town to the Little Town. The Little Town is out in the country, where they lived with their grandmother in order to seek safety from the bombings due to WWII occurring in the Big Town. The boys are used to a comfortable life before the war, but learn to live in harsher environments through their journeys. The first interaction the boys have is obviously with their mother. Not much can be said about the mother until the end of the story. What we do learn at the beginning is that she cares about her children. During a time of war, famine, and destruction she brings her children to live with her mother in the country, or the “ Little Town”.

At first, the twins’ grandmother is reluctant to take them, as she is angry with their mother for not contacting her in ten years. However, she unenthusiastically agrees to help the boys and tells them “ I’ll teach you what life is about” (Kristof 5). The second interaction the boys have on their journey is with their grandmother, who is known by most people in the Little Town as “ The Witch”. She and the boys have an interesting relationship initially, not letting them eat or sleep inside until they finished their chores, and often ignoring them.

The boys finally do begin to help with the chores, but because they are ashamed of not helping their elderly grandmother, not because they understand that they must earn food and shelter. Grandmother always tries to take care the boys, teaching them to do their chores, and warning them not to go far into the forest or they will get shot or lost.

However, she often physically and verbally abuses her grandsons. To cope with this, the boys abuse each other in order to gain mental and physical toughness. It is said, “ We put our hands over a flame. We cut our thighs, our arms, our chests with a knife and pour alcohol on our wounds. Each time we say ‘ It doesn’t hurt’” (Kristof 17). While the boys do often suffer abuse, their attempts to numb themselves are what seems to make them even more distant. The next character that the boys meet in the novel is the orderly. He is a foreign soldier who shows up at the grandmother’s house to clean. He is friendly with the boys and can also speak their language. He is kind, giving them two army blankets, seeing that they did not have any for the cold nights. He also jokingly offers to kill Grandmother if she “ is too mean”.

Next the twins meet a deserter in the woods, who is starving a cold, trying to find his way home. The twins bring him food and a blanket, saying “ We weren’t trying to be kind. We’ve brought you these because you absolutely need them. That’s all.” (Kristof 43).

Although the boys seem to be emotionless and say they only helped because it is necessary, I believe this act of compassion shows that the twins may not be as buffered as we perceive. The twins then encounter a group of three boys who are abusing Harelip as she tries to fill up her bucket of water. The twins end up beating up one of the boys, and the other two do not go after the twins. While the three boys definitely did not intend to help the twins, this event did help the twins to better learn to defend themselves. The twins also encounter the Postman, who does not end up being that relevant of a character. The twins push him to the ground and demand he gives them the

money that their mother has sent. When the Postman agrees and gives the twins the money, he is unintentionally helping them as they then use that money to buy themselves rain boots.

The priest also helps the twins, however he does so intentionally. He tries to give the twins money to give to Harelip, however they inform him that they taught her to grow her garden on her own, and also how to work and do other chores. While the priest wanted to help Harelip, he also managed to help the twins by showing them how to help others. Furthermore, the priest offers to hear their confession, to which they refuse, but they do agree to let the priest bless them before they leave. While all of these characters in the story do help the twins, their greatest supporters are one another. From the time that their mother leaves them to live with their grandmother, they are inseparable. The twins seem to be two parts of one person, always by each other's side.

Even in the beginning of the novel the twins mentally and physically abuse each other in order to make themselves tougher and more prepared to survive in their new environment. Whether it be intentionally or not, characters throughout *The Notebook*, by Agota Kristof, help the twins in one way or another.