

Written boy' fifty cents
during his borrowing
escapades.



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Written by James Baldwin, *Sonny's Blues* is a short story found in the novel *Going to Meet the Man*. The main character is Sonny's brother; the narrator. The narrator expresses his brother's suffering as a drug addict.

Although the narrator is alienated from his family and neighborhood, he does understand it. Talking of alienation, the narrator has poor family ties especially with his only sibling Sonny; the younger brother. The narrator discovers from the daily newspaper that his brother, Sonny, is in jail. Sonny is a drug-addict and during one of the police crackdowns, he ends up in jail. When the narrator realizes the trouble his brother is in, he feels guilty and fears for his life and future. He feels as though a cloud of darkness is hovering around his life. While at school, he is unable to concentrate in class and feels as though his life is tumbling down.

He is unable to come to terms with the tragic lifestyle his brother engages in. Although the narrator has a younger brother, he only knows about his fate through the newspaper. Conventionally, one would expect the family members to be the first to know that Sonny has been arrested; unfortunately, the big chasm that stands between Sonny and the narrator bars any communication and sadly the narrator can only learn of his brother's fate via the media. What a way of communication! The two live in separate worlds and they care less about the other and this underscores how alienated the narrator is from his brother. The narrator is also less friendly to his students and in most cases he dismissed them as drug addicts.

As the lesson ends, the narrator feels relieved; however, he starts thinking about his life of Sonny's life only to realize the two live as aliens and there is

need to reunite. This realization underlines the fact that the narrator understands the bearing alienation that follows him like a shadow. As the story unfolds, alienation also unfolds at the same rate; the narrator sees all his students as drug addicts as if he were better than them oblivious of the fact that if one is not 'infected' s/he is 'affected' and in this case the narrator is affected because his brother is 'infected'; unfortunately, the narrator is so alienated that he turns apathetic. He watches children play but does not understand why people associate with children for he is alienated in the first place so he cannot appreciate this kind of an association.

Although the children are happy and shout while on the playground, he does not see the reason for their happiness. Alienation continues to surface as one of Sonny's friends comes to the school compound to tell the narrator about his brother's imprisonment. From the conversation that ensues, it is evident that the narrator hates Sonny's friend. For instance, although the boy lives in the narrator's neighborhood, he never associates with him.

He describes him as 'cunning boy', and regrets why he always gave the 'cunning boy' fifty cents during his borrowing escapades. However, the boy seems friendly and tells him about Sonny but the narrator already knows. He offers the boy a cigarette hence proves that despite condemning the drug addicts he is also a smoker. Sonny's friend asks the narrator why the police did not get him, which he sarcastically answers, "I wasn't there. I stay away from people" (Baldwin 553). Furthermore, the boy asks the narrator what is his next step about his brother's condition; but he rudely says nothing; if anything the narrator has not seen Sonny for more than a year.

The narrator does not even know his brother's residence before imprisonment. Two forms of alienation come out at this point; first, the narrator is alienated from himself; he does not understand himself. He smokes yet he condemns addicts as if there were 'good' and 'bad' addicts. Secondly, he confesses that he 'stays away from people' and this remark is enough to suffice how deep the narrator is alienated from his surroundings; he does not even know Sonny's friend by name yet they live in the same neighborhood. Therefore as expected, he does not plan to visit his brother in prison.

On their way to home, the narrator and the boy enter a bar where the narrator sees a little girl as a barmaid and feels pity for her. However, he dislikes the way of life of people in the bar, their houses, and music. He does not want to associate with them yet they are his neighbors and fellow black men. The lifestyle of his neighbors seems malevolent to him. On the other hand, he is eager to know about his brother's fate in the prison but Sonny's friend reassures him of his release after rehabilitation. The narrator is happy about his brother's freedom in the future. The two reach at the railway station and part ways.

However, the boy has no fare and the narrator gives him some to board the train. At the end of their interaction, a friendship bond culminates between them and the narrator regrets hating the boy before. Furthermore, he promises to write Sonny as soon as possible. Although the narrator hates his neighbors, he tries hard to connect with them, as it is the case with Sonny's friend. Therefore, at last the narrator starts to break the chains of alienation that have bound him for ages; at least he starts connecting with people as <https://assignbuster.com/written-boy-fifty-cents-during-his-borrowing-escapades/>

the journey of cracking alienation starts. As the chains of alienations falls one by one, the narrator manages to scribble a letter to his brother after losing his younger daughter to polio.

Luckily, Sonny replies the letter but he rues his brother's negligence and rudeness. The letter becomes the turning point for the two brothers and they reconnect once again. The letter brings back the lost unity between the two brothers; in fact, the narrator sends his brother some basic things to use while in prison. After accepting that he has been alienated not only from people, but also to himself, the narrator embarks on a journey to heal those he hurt during his dark past.

Sonny is out of prison and the narrator goes to New York to fetch him. He is so happy to see his younger brother but he is bothered about his seemingly bleak future that lurks ahead. During the encounter, their childhood friendship blossoms again. The narrator reflects his brother's life when he was a toddler, which attracts him even more. On their way home, they pass through their childhood streets. He describes the ramshackle houses with poor lighting they lived in, their sex escapades and the stores in which they looted as pats of their escapades. Although it is fifteen years later, the street remains the same save for a few new buildings. The narrator does not want to live in such street.

He is proud that he is a schoolteacher and pity's those who live their; it is important to mention during his past years the narrator was apathetic but now he can afford to sympathize with the poor in society. That is a plus! At

home, there is a family reunion and Sonny gives the narrator's kids some gifts. The narrator reflects on his family before the death of his parents.

He remembers his father's drunkenness, which was the cause of his death. Additionally, Sonny had a strong relationship with his late father for alcoholism was a common denominator in their lives. The narrator's mother was always protective and during their last meeting, he had no time for her hence they did not chat at all. Unfortunately, his mother died when he had gone to war. The narrator had a poor parent to child relationship hence the poor bondage between them. However, the narrator now feels the void that his mother left as she passed on.

Finally, the narrator allows his brother to venture into music as a pianist; his passion. During their reunion he meets one of Sonny's friend whom he works with, he watches as he plays the piano and even buys him a cup of milk, which bonds them again as a family. In conclusion, the narrator is alienated from his family, friends, neighbors and self. He understands his alienation and it is easy for him to overcome it. After spending a considerable time in self infatuation and self righteousness, he finally starts to appreciate the people around him starting with Sonny's friend, through the little girl in the bar to Sonny himself.

As the story closes, the narrator develops strong relationship with those around him and therefore he manages to overcome his alienation.

Works cited

Baldwin, James. *Going to Meet the Man*. United States: Dial press, 1965.

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