

Questions to help you understand *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry*

Chapter 1 pages 3-12

1. Who is Queenie? What do you learn about her?
2. Why is Queenie writing to Harold?
3. Who is David (page 6)?
4. Why is it difficult for Harold to write a letter back to Queenie?
5. Why doesn't Harold mail the letter to Queenie when he gets to the post office?

Chapter 2, pages 13-19

1. What does the girl at the gas station tell Harold about her aunt?
2. What does Harold decide to do to keep Queenie alive?

Chapter 3, pages 20-24

1. What is Maureen's reaction to Harold not returning from the post office?
2. What happens when she calls Harold's cell phone?
3. Does Maureen ever hear from Harold? What is her reaction to this?

Chapter 4, pages 25-38

1. What do you learn about Harold in the first page or two of this chapter?
2. What things would you want to take with you on a journey like this? Does Harold take these things with him?
3. Harold calls Maureen again – what is her response to his call?
4. At a hotel, two women ask Harold about his journey. What is their reaction, how does Harold feel talking about his plans?
5. As Harold prepares to leave the hotel, what gives him (more) confidence about his journey?

Chapter 5 pages 39-56

6. Why does H take care to drive home with the windows open? (page 41)
7. What is H's expectation when he gets to Queenie's hospice? (page 41)
8. What does H remember about Maureen when she was young? (page 41)
9. Describe H's relationship with his father? (page 42-43)
10. What do you learn about H's boss, Mr. Napier?
11. Picture the scene at the beach when David goes too far into the water (pages 46-47) and also David and H's conversation about it several years later.
12. Compare H's view of himself as a father and his view of M as a mother (page 51)
13. Read about Queenie and Mr. Napier on pages 53-54.

Chapter 6, pages 57-61

3. What does M tell Rex about H's disappearance (the fact that he's not taking out the trash). Does Rex believe M's story about Harold?
4. What does M find in H's bedside drawer (page 60-61)

Chapter 7, pages 62-80

4. How did Mr. Napier and others at the brewery make fun of Queenie?
5. What was Queenie's experience at the brewery like? How did H stand out from the rest of the men who worked there? (pages 65-67)
6. Read H's memory of David's first day of school (pages 69-70). How does H handle David's fear?
7. What does H observe about the couple in their fifties who were at the inn to hike? What does it bring to mind (pages 74-75)?
8. Read about H and M's early married life (pages 75-76) and compare it with what their marriage is like now.
9. What is M's attitude toward H in their phone call (page 77)?
10. How did H entertain his mom when he was a child? (pages 78-79)

Chapter 8 pages 81-90

14. Why is H confused about how to act when David does an embarrassing dance in public? (pages 82-83)?
15. What excuses does M make for David's lack of friends? (page 83)
16. Consider what happens to H (and to us) when we are confronted with too many choices. (page 85)
17. Why does H think "He should never have let her go like that" (bottom of page 86)?
18. What does the man in the café reveal to H? Why is this in the story? (pages 87-90)

Chapter 9 pages 91-95

5. What is M's state of mind at the beginning of the chapter?
6. Why do you think Rex comes over to M's house so often? (page 92)
7. Why does H "sometimes think he's doing this for David?" (page 92)
8. What is the result of M's conversation with David? (pages 94-95)

Chapter 10 pages 96-108

11. Is H's memory of his mother a happy one? (page 97)
12. What's going on with H physically at this point in his walk? (pages 100-101)
13. How does H's mom's leaving affect his life with his father (pages 101-104)
14. Why is H's mom's spelling "the worst part" about her leaving? (page 104)

Chapter 11 pages 109-115

1. Why is it so difficult for M to go to the doctor (surgery)? (page 109-110)
2. Is M seeing the doctor because she thinks she is sick?
3. What is the doctor's advice to M?
4. What is M's revelation on page 115?

Chapter 12 pages 116-129

1. Why does Mr. Napier put H and Queenie together? (page 116)
2. What is Mr. Napier very protective about? (page 117)
3. How does H and Queenie's first trip together go? (pages 118-119)
4. What is M's attitude on this phone call from H? What does she say that especially hurts H? (pages 120-121)
5. How does H and M's marriage begin to fall apart? What factors play a part in their struggles? (pages 122-123)
6. H meets the bicycle ladies (pages 125-126) and we learn something about H's character. What does he learn about the bicyclist he talks to?
7. What happens to H at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 13 pages 130-145

19. Note H's current physical state, especially his feet.
20. At what age, and under what circumstances, did H leave home? (pages 137-138)
21. When H says "I failed my son very badly twenty years ago" on page 139, is he talking about not giving David a dog?
22. Why is "the thrill of landing [Maureen's] attention" so powerful for H? (page 141)
23. Why does Martina keep waiting for her partner to return, even though she says she's "waiting for something that will never happen." (pages 143-144)

Chapter 14 pages 146-154

1. Why does Maureen decide to tell Rex the truth about H?
2. What was Rex's response when Maureen confessed the truth to him? (page 148)
3. How has Maureen's attitude toward H's walk and toward their marriage changed since H first left home?
4. What did Queenie bring to H & M's house twenty years ago? (page 152)
5. How does M's first impression of H at the dance compare to his first impression of her? (page 153)

Chapter 15 pages 155-166

1. Describe H's mental attitude at this point in his journey. (pages 156-158)
2. What change has M made at their home? (page 158)
3. How would you describe H's relationship to M when they were first wed?

4. What does H attribute his fall from grace in M's eyes to? (page 161)
5. How does H know his and Queenie's relationship has changed? (page 163)
6. What secrets does H keep from M about David? (page 164)
7. Why does Queenie get fired? (page 165)

Chapter 16 pages 167-182

24. When the actor tries to talk H out of walking, H thinks, "you could be ordinary and attempt something extraordinary" (page 172). Do you agree with H? Does this thought apply to H?
25. How did H's working life change after Queenie left the brewery? (page 175)
26. What does the oncologist (doctor) say that shakes H's confidence? (page 177)
27. H and M talk on the phone. Why does H lie to M, telling her that he's having a great time and that someone else is waiting for the phone? (page 181)
28. What do you think David really did in the Lake District? (pages 175, 181)
29. What is worse than not seeing David for twenty years? (page 181)
30. What does H's discouragement cause him to do? (last page)

Chapter 17 pages 183-193

1. How has M's relationship to David changed since H left? (page 183-184)
2. What is M's new challenge to herself? (page 184)
3. What has Rex made for Maureen? (page 186)
4. How does M remember her and H's early years of their marriage? (page 187)
5. What happens on David's graduation day? Why do H and M miss the graduation ceremony? Who does M blame? (page 189-90)
6. Why does M think David can't get a job? (page 190, bottom)
7. What other things does M remember about David? (page 191)
8. What does it mean that M puts all of her and H's clothes together into pairs? Why does she do this?

Chapter 18 pages 194-203

1. How has H's attitude about his walk changed now? (beginning of chapter)
2. How has H's decision to walk to Berwick-Upon-Tweed affected Queenie? (pages 195-196)
3. What does H do to save money?
4. How would you describe M's reaction to H's letter and debit card (end of chapter)?

Chapter 19 pages 204-208

1. How does H manage without any money?
2. Why do the two hikers stare at H? Why does the cab driver give H a thumbs' up? (page 207)

Chapter 20 pages 209-215

1. How is H's walk now affecting M's life? (beginning)
2. What is Rex's regret about his wife's illness? (page 213)
3. What does M discover about the photographs of David? (page 213-214)
4. Why does M cry at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 21 pages 216-228

1. How is H's fame getting out of control?
2. Why does H like (or tolerate) Wilf?
3. Note the deep questions H asks himself about David on page 225.
4. How would you describe Wilf?

Chapter 22 pages 229-239

1. What is Kate's reason for walking (page 229)? Richard's (page 230)? The Gorilla man (page 231)?
2. Why does Wilf tremble and why does he stumble when he walks?
3. Why is H so patient with his followers?
4. Why is H ashamed to have M see him in the newspapers (page 238)?
5. Should H have kept going when he slipped away from the bonfire? (page 238-39)

Chapter 23 pages 240-250

1. M says that "H had at last become the man he should have been all along" (page 241) Do you agree? What does she mean by these words?
2. What is M's frame of mind when she goes to see H?
3. What is the significance of Harold changing from Maureen to Maw back to Maureen again (page 249)?
4. Why does M decide to take down the curtains and let light into the house? (last page)

Chapter 24 pages 251-263

1. What is Rich suggesting the group do? Why?
2. H recalls painful memories of his childhood (page 257). Why does he wish he had saved his mother's letter?
3. Why does the group finally separate?
4. Why is M angry at Rich when Rich arrives at Queenie's hospice?

Chapter 25 pages 264-276

1. Contrast the way H felt at the beginning of the chapter (first page) and after the rain starts (pages 265-267)
2. Why does H call M? (pages 270-271)
3. How does M react to H's wish to come home?

4. What regrets does M have about how she handled H's wish to come home? (page 275)

Chapter 26 pages 277-283

5. How long had H been walking when he reached the hospice (page 279)?
6. Does H get the fanfare (cheering crowds) he was hoping for when he arrives at the hospice?
7. What does H want most of all at this time (when he arrives at the hospice)?

Chapter 27 pages 284-286

1. Do you learn anything new about H in this letter? About M? About Queenie or David?

Chapter 28 pages 287-293

1. What is the garage girl's secret, that brings her shame?
2. What is M's secret? Why didn't she give Queenie's message to H? What really happened at the brewery?
3. Do you agree with M, "he was right to walk out on me" (page 293) or with the garage girl, "I don't think it's true that he walked out on you" (page 293)? Why do their opinions differ on this?

Chapter 29 pages 294-305

1. Make sure you read carefully the description of Queenie (page 299) and try to understand H's many emotions upon meeting her.
2. Why didn't H say goodbye to David?
3. What changes in H so that he is able to go over to Queenie and hold her hand?

Chapter 30 pages 306-311

1. Why isn't H surprised to see M when she joins him on the bench by the water?
2. Why doesn't M want to continue with this conversation (page 309, bottom)?
3. Why does M say "That is what you did" on the last page of this chapter?

Chapter 31 pages 312-313

1. Do you find this description of Queenie's death comforting?

Chapter 32 pages 314-320

1. Do you agree with M on page 317, "if we can't accept what we don't know, there really is no hope."
2. At the bottom of page 317, H makes peace with life. What brings on this change? This acceptance of life's ups and downs?
3. What do you think M said all those years ago when H first approached her at the dance?