

Name: _____ Class: _____

Morning in the Burned House

By Margaret Atwood
1995

Margaret Atwood (born 1939) is an award-winning Canadian poet, novelist and literary critic. While she is most famous for her novels, including The Handmaid's Tale, Atwood also published fifteen books of poetry. As you read, take notes on the poet's use of figurative language and symbolism.

[1] In the burned house I am eating breakfast.
You understand: there is no house, there is no
breakfast,
yet here I am.

The spoon which was melted scrapes against
[5] the bowl which was melted also.
No one else is around.

Where have they gone to, brother and sister,
mother and father? Off along the shore,
perhaps. Their clothes are still on the hangers,

[10] their dishes piled beside the sink,
which is beside the woodstove
with its grate and sooty kettle,

every detail clear,
tin cup and rippled mirror.

[15] The day is bright and songless,

the lake is blue, the forest watchful.
In the east a bank of cloud
rises up silently like dark bread.

I can see the swirls in the oilcloth,

[20] I can see the flaws in the glass,
those flares where the sun hits them.

I can't see my own arms and legs
or know if this is a trap or blessing,
finding myself back here, where everything

[25] in this house has long been over,
kettle and mirror, spoon and bowl,
including my own body,



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including the body I had then,
including the body I have now
[30] as I sit at this morning table, alone and happy,

bare child's feet on the scorched floorboards
(I can almost see)
in my burning clothes, the thin green shorts

and grubby yellow T-shirt
[35] holding my cindery,¹ non-existent,
radiant flesh. Incandescent.²

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1. charred and ashy
2. **Incandescent** (*adjective*): fiery or emitting light as a result of being heated; intense