Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF STEPHEN KING

Stephen King was born in 1947 in Portland, Maine. His first story, "The Glass Floor," was published in 1967 in the magazine *Startling Mystery Stories*. In 1970 he graduated with a B.A. in English from the University of Maine, where he also met his future wife, novelist Tabitha (Spruce) King. He published his first novel, the horror story *Carrie*, in 1974. In 1976, the director Brian De Palma made a successful film adaptation of *Carrie* starring Sissy Spacek; after the film was released, the novel entered the *New York Times* bestseller list. Stephen King has published more than 60 novels since *Carrie*, including influential horror works such as *The Shining* (1977), *Pet Sematary* (1983), *It* (1986), and *Misery* (1987). From 1977 to 2007, he published seven novels under a pseudonym, Richard Bachman. Though known primarily as a horror writer, King has also written works of fantasy, science fiction, and realism. For example, his novella *Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption* (1982)—adapted by director Frank Darabont into the Oscar-nominated film *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994)—is a realist work. Both a critically acclaimed and a popular writer, Stephen King has received a National Medal of Arts and a Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters as well as multiple Bram Stoker Awards, Horror Guild Awards, Locus Awards, and World Fantasy Awards, among other honors. Stephen King has a daughter and two sons. His two sons, Joseph and Owen King, are novelists; publishing under the pseudonym Joe Hill, Joseph King has also won awards for his horror and fantasy works. In his 70s, Stephen King is still an active writer, having published two separate novels in 2022.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In *Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption*, the Shawshank prison cellblock where incarcerated protagonists Red and Andy live was constructed in the 1930s under the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The WPA was a U.S. federal agency created under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to increase jobs during the Great Depression (1929–1940), a stock market crash and subsequent massive economic recession that left many Americans—and people worldwide—unemployed and struggling. The WPA concrete used to construct the cellblock is relatively weak, which allows Andy to dig a tunnel through the wall over a period of decades. The novella's narrator Red grew up poor and murdered his wife for partly economic motives—her life insurance policy—in 1938, during the Great Depression; thus, real-world historical events partly determined Red's fate. Meanwhile, Andy served in World War II (1939–1945) prior to his incarceration; his war buddy Jim helps arrange the fake identity, Peter Stevens, that Andy uses after his escape. Finally, the counterculture movements of the 1950s and 1960s, often associated with marijuana use, lead to a surge in Shawshank's prison population of men convicted of drug crimes. During this surge, Andy is briefly given a cellmate, Normaden, who complains about the cell's draftiness—foreshadowing the revelation that Andy is hiding a large hole in the wall behind his pin-up poster.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption, which recounts the escape of the innocent Andy Dufresne from prison, may have been inspired by a non-fiction work, Paul Brickhill's *The Great Escape* (1950), about prisoners of war freeing themselves from captivity in Nazi territory during World War II; Andy himself briefly mentions having served in France and Germany during the war. Andy ends up running the Shawshank prison library, where he discovers that his fellow prisoners love the novelists Erle Stanley Gardner (1889–1970) and Louis L'Amour (1908–1988). Erle Stanley Gardner is most famous for inventing the fictional defense attorney Perry Mason, protagonist of more than 80 novels, who often successfully defends clients falsely accused of murder. Louis L'Amour wrote in multiple genres but is most famous for his Westerns, in which his protagonists operate along a wild, free frontier. The prisoners' preferences for these authors reveals both their longings (for acquittal, for freedom) and ironically contrasts these authors' works—in which the good go free—with the events of *Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption*, where the innocent Andy is incarcerated for decades. Another work of Stephen King's that focuses on a wrongly convicted man is the novel *The Green Mile* (1996), in which a Black man named John Coffey is imprisoned and eventually executed for a double murder he didn't commit.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption
- **Where Written:** Maine
- **When Published:** 1982
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Realism, Novella
- **Setting:** Shawshank prison in rural Maine
- **Climax:** Red decides to join Andy in Mexico
- **Antagonist:** Samuel Norton, Shawshank prison

- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Oscars. The 1994 film *The Shawshank Redemption*, based on *Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption*, was nominated for seven Oscars.

Pin-Up Girls. The actress Rita Hayworth, whose pin-up poster Andy Dufresne uses to hide the hole in his cell wall, really was a popular pin-up among U.S. soldiers during World War II, in which the fictional Andy was supposed to have served.

PLOT SUMMARY

The narrator Red explains that he's central to Shawshank prison culture because he knows how to smuggle contraband. In 1938, at age 20, Red was incarcerated for cutting the brakes on his wife's car, killing her and two people hitching a ride. He claims to talk about himself only as background to his real story—the story of Andy Dufresne.

In 1948, 30-year-old banker Andy Dufresne is wrongly convicted of murdering his wife Linda and her lover Glenn Quentin and is sent to Shawshank prison. Soon after entering prison, Andy is targeted by a gang of rapists. When Andy approaches Red in the exercise yard and asks Red to get him a rock-hammer, Red worries Andy may use it as a weapon. Andy explains he wants to use it for his hobby, collecting **rocks**. Though rapists repeatedly target Andy, and though he repeatedly enters solitary confinement as punishment for fighting back, he never uses the rock-hammer as a weapon, earning Red's goodwill. In 1949, Andy—acting secretive and embarrassed—asks Red for a Rita Hayworth **pin-up poster**. Red, amused, gets it for him. Andy continues to buy pin-up posters from Red throughout his incarceration.

In 1950, Andy, Red, and some other prisoners are working outside, tarring a roof, when they overhear a guard named Byron Hadley complaining about having to pay taxes on an inheritance. Andy asks Hadley whether Hadley trusts his wife. When Hadley and another guard threaten to throw Andy off the roof for impertinence, Andy explains: an IRS loophole allows a person to make a one-time, tax-free gift to their spouse. Hadley can give the inheritance to his wife and avoid the taxes. Andy offers to do the gift paperwork for Hadley if Hadley gets beers for the prisoners tarring the roof. Hadley agrees, making Andy a legend among other prisoners. After this, Andy begins helping the prison staff to do their taxes and to launder money from their illicit activities (drug dealing, embezzlement, racketeering, etc.). In return, the guards keep him safe from rapists and the administration makes sure he never has to have a cellmate.

In 1962, Tommy Williams enters Shawshank prison. In 1963, after learning why Andy is in prison, Tommy tells Andy that during a previous incarceration at another prison, Tommy had a cellmate named Elwood Blatch, in for burglary, who bragged about having gotten away with murder. Blatch killed a golf instructor named Glenn Quentin and Glenn's girlfriend during a burglary, but the girlfriend's husband was convicted for it. Tommy's description of Blatch matches Andy's memory of an employee at the country club where his wife met Glenn. Andy goes to the current warden, Samuel Norton, for whom he launders money, and tells him the story. Norton—perhaps afraid Andy will inform on him if Andy is freed—claims not to believe the story and transfers Tommy to a lower-security prison as a bribe to shut him up.

From 1963 to 1967, Andy suffers depressed moods silently. Then, in 1967, his mood improves. One day, in the exercise yard, Andy tells Red that once he's left prison, he plans to open a hotel in Zihuatanejo, Mexico. When Red asks how Andy will buy a hotel, Andy explains that after he was accused of murder, his war buddy Jim helped him transfer his wealth to a fake identity, Peter Stevens. Jim has since died, so Andy can't access the money in prison—but Jim left the key to Peter Stevens's safe deposit box underneath a paperweight in a hayfield in a town near Shawshank. If Andy can access the key, he'll have a new identity and a small fortune. Then Andy says he could use a man like Red to help with the hotel business. Red demurs, claiming he's been in prison too long to survive in the free world. Andy insists Red should think about it.

One morning in 1975, guards discover Andy's missing. Enraged, Norton searches Andy's cell, tears down his pin-up poster, and finds a hidden hole in Andy's cell wall. A guard, searching the hole, discovers that Andy tunneled to a sewer pipe and broke a hole in it using his rock-hammer, which he subsequently abandoned. Andy presumably then escaped the prison through the sewer system. Later in 1975, Red receives a blank postcard from a town on the U.S.-Mexico border, which he believes is a coded message from Andy communicating that Andy is free and chasing his dream. Red reveals he's been writing Andy's story since he received the postcard and now, in 1976, has finished.

In 1977, Red is paroled and resumes his story. After his release, he finds the free world so disorienting that he considers committing another crime to return to prison; instead, to distract himself, he goes searching for the paperweight in the hayfield that Andy told him about. When he finds it, he discovers an envelope containing $1,000 and a letter from Andy suggesting that Red join him in Mexico. Red, scared but full of hope, decides to break parole and join Andy in Mexico.

CHARACTERS

Red/The Narrator – Red, who narrates *Rita Hayworth and the*

Shawshank Redemption, is a funny, self-deprecating man with "carroty red hair." He grew up poor, married a rich girl he impregnated, and became so frustrated with his family situation that he cut the brakes on his wife's car, killing her and her two passengers. In 1938, at age 20, he was convicted of triple homicide and sent to Maine's Shawshank prison. Red regrets the murders but doesn't think Shawshank "rehabilitated" him—a distinction emphasizing how little incarceration does to rehabilitate people who've committed crimes. In prison Red learns to obtain contraband items for other prisoners but refuses to deal in hard drugs, weapons, or contract killing, as he doesn't want to be complicit in more death. In 1948, Andy Dufresne enters Shawshank. After Red obtains several items for Andy, including a **rock**-hammer and a **pin-up poster**, they become friends. Red finds Andy's self-possession and desire for freedom admirable—yet Red believes that, unlike Andy, he has gotten too "institutionalized" by prison to live in the free world again. After Andy escapes Shawshank in 1975, Red receives a blank postcard from the U.S.-Mexico border, a message from Andy letting Red know that Andy is fulfilling his dream of running a hotel under a fake identity in Mexico. Red reveals he's been writing the story of Andy's incarceration and escape since he received the postcard and now, he believes, he's finally finished. Yet after being paroled in 1977, Red resumes writing. At first, freedom so overwhelmed Red that he considered committing another crime to return to prison; instead, inspired by Andy's story, Red visits the place where Andy once told him the key to his fake identity's safe-deposit box would be hidden. There Red finds an envelope containing $1000 and a letter from Andy, inviting Red to join him in Mexico. Rather than return to prison, Red decides to break parole and find Andy—demonstrating that prison did not destroy Red's instinct for freedom and that Andy's story has inspired Red to hope for a better life.

Andy Dufresne – Andy Dufresne, the hero of *Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption*, is a slight, good-looking man who wears glasses and keeps his fingernails "always clean." His calm, ironic demeanor makes some people believe he's cold or snobbish. Before his imprisonment, Andy worked as a banker. In 1948 he's wrongly convicted of murdering his wife Linda and her lover Glenn Quentin. The district attorney who prosecutes the case tells a plausible story about Andy as a calculating killer, while Andy tells the unconvincing truth: he bought a gun prior to the murders because he was contemplating suicide, and he can't remember exactly what happened the night of the murders because he was drunk. Andy's wrongful conviction demonstrates the power of storytelling to shape reality. In Shawshank prison, when rapists assault Andy, he fights every assault, demonstrating his persistence and his desire for agency. Andy, who collects **rocks**, buys a rock-hammer from Red, likely hoping his hobby will make prison more bearable. When he discovers weak concrete in his cell wall, he begins slowly digging a tunnel with his rock hammer. He uses **pin-up posters**—which no one questions, due to the fact that many prisoners have them—to hide the hole. After Andy helps a guard, Byron Hadley, avoid taxes on an inheritance, guards and even wardens seek Andy's financial help. He begins laundering money for prison staff in exchange for protection against rapists and a cell without a roommate, which allows him to tunnel through his wall undetected. In 1975, Andy escapes through a sewer pipe inside the wall he's been tunneling through for decades, illustrating his extreme persistence and desire for freedom. He flees to Mexico, where he plans to run a hotel under a fake identity. Andy's cleverness, self-possession, and escape make him an inspirational legend to other prisoners. After Red is paroled, Andy's example prevents Red from committing another crime to return to prison, though the outside world scares Red. Instead, on Andy's invitation, Red decides to travel to Mexico and join him.

Samuel Norton – Samuel Norton is one of Shawshank prison's wardens while Red and Andy Dufresne are incarcerated there. A devout Baptist who forces a New Testament on every man who enters Shawshank, Norton is also (according to Red) the "foulest hypocrite" among all the prison's corrupt administrators. After he founds an "Inside-Out" extramural prison-labor program at Shawshank, he uses it to embezzle money and extort business owners without access to free prison labor. Andy launders money for Norton in order to protect himself and avoid a cellmate, as he has laundered money for previous wardens. In 1963, a newer prisoner named Tommy Williams tells Andy that his cellmate at a previous prison, Elwood Blatch, claimed to have murdered Glenn Quentin and Linda Collins Dufresne, the crime for which Andy is incarcerated, during a burglary. When Andy brings this story to Norton, Norton refuses to believe it, puts Andy in solitary confinement, and ensures Tommy's silence by bribing him with a transfer to a lower-security prison. This malicious behavior seems motivated partly by fear that Andy, if free, could inform the police of Norton's financial crimes and partly by a desire to break Andy's proud, dignified spirit. Norton exemplifies both the corruption within the prison system and the failures of the U.S. criminal justice and correctional systems more generally to provide justice or rehabilitation. When Andy escapes Shawshank in 1975, Norton breaks down in anger. After Norton realizes that Andy won't be caught, he quits his job.

Tommy Williams – Tommy Williams, a career thief, enters Shawshank prison in 1962 at age 27. He has been incarcerated in multiple other prisons before. He has a young son and a wife, who convinces him to study for the high-school equivalency exams while at Shawshank. Andy Dufresne, who is by that point Shawshank's librarian, helps Tommy study. Tommy grows to like Andy a lot. Having discovered that Andy was incarcerated for murdering his wife Linda and her lover Glenn Quentin, Tommy reveals to Andy that his cellmate during a previous incarceration, Elwood Blatch, bragged about having murdered

Linda and Glenn during a burglary. After Andy tells Warden Samuel Norton Tommy's story, Norton—who wants to keep Andy at Shawshank, laundering his money and under his control—transfers Tommy to another, lower-security prison in exchange for Tommy's silence. This outcome demonstrates that, in the novella's worldview, the U.S. justice system does not produce justice and that the correctional system does not rehabilitate prisoners but instead bends them to the whims of corrupt administrators.

Elwood Blatch – Elwood Blatch, a violent burglar, is a large man, "mostly bald," with "green eyes set way down deep in the sockets." He shared a prison cell with Tommy Williams in Rhode Island, four years before Tommy is incarcerated in Maine's Shawshank prison. After Tommy learns why Andy Dufresne is in Shawshank, he reveals to Andy that Blatch once bragged to him about murdering Glenn Quentin and Andy's wife, Linda Collins Dufresne during a burglary. Andy remembers a man matching Tommy's description of Elwood Blatch working at the Falmouth Hills Country Club, which he and Linda attended and where Glenn Quentin was a golf instructor. When he tells Tommy's story to Warden Samuel Norton, Norton—who wants to keep Andy in prison and laundering his money—claims not to believe it. Norton may even arrange Blatch's early parole so that any lawyer Andy might hire won't be able to find Blatch. That no one ever holds Blatch accountable for Linda and Glenn's murders—while Andy is wrongfully incarcerated for decades—demonstrates the failure of the U.S. criminal justice system to dispense justice.

Bogs Diamond – Bogs Diamond, a "hulking" man, is a member of "the sisters," a group of men in Shawshank prison who rape other inmates. Shortly after Andy Dufresne enters Shawshank, Bogs and some associates grope Andy in the showers; Andy hits Bog in the face and splits his lip. Later, Bogs and two friends gang-rape Andy. Then Bogs menaces Andy with a razor and demands oral sex. Andy successfully refuses, pointing out that if Bogs stabs Andy in the head, Andy will reflexively bite down on anything in his mouth. Though Bogs and his friends beat Andy up, Andy's gutsy refusal gains him some respect and notoriety in Shawshank. Later, Bogs is found "badly beaten" in his cell. Red suspects that Andy, who smuggled money into Shawshank inside his rectum, bribed some guards to perform the beating. After the beating, Bogs leaves Andy alone.

Byron Hadley – Byron Hadley, a guard at Shawshank prison, is tall with "thinning red hair," a loud voice, and a tendency to sunburn. He frequently clubs prisoners who displease him and takes a pessimistic view toward everything, unable to appreciate how much better his life is than those of men incarcerated in Shawshank. In 1950, he receives a $35,000 inheritance from his estranged, recently deceased brother. When Andy Dufresne, while tarring a roof with some other prisoners, overhears Byron complaining about having to pay taxes on the inheritance, Andy explains a legal loophole that Byron can exploit to avoid the taxes. Andy also offers to do the necessary paperwork if Byron will get beers for the prisoners tarring the roof. When Byron agrees, Andy's legend among Shawshank prisoners grows. This event also leads to Andy becoming an unofficial financial advisor and money-launderer for most of Shawshank's staff. In 1957, Byron suffers a nonfatal heart attack and retires from Shawshank.

The District Attorney – The district attorney (DA) serves as prosecutor in Andy Dufresne's trial after Andy is falsely accused of murdering his wife Linda and her lover Glenn Quentin. The DA has ambitions to become a congressman and thinks that successfully convicting Andy will boost his electoral chances. Though only circumstantial evidence connects Andy to the crime, the DA tells a convincing story about Andy as a calculating, emotionless killer, persuading the jury of Andy's guilt and condemning Andy to decades in Shawshank prison. By securing Andy's conviction through persuasive storytelling, the DA demonstrates the power of stories to influence reality. By sacrificing Andy to his political ambitions, meanwhile, the DA betrays the corruption and injustice of the U.S. justice system.

Normaden – Normaden is a Native American (Passamaquoddy) man incarcerated at Shawshank prison who has "a harelip and a cleft palate" that impede his speech. The other men in Shawshank give him the racist nickname they give to all Native American prisoners: "Chief." He shares a cell with Andy Dufresne for approximately eight months between 1959 and 1960, after a warden for whom Andy has been laundering money leaves but before Andy starts laundering money for the next warden, thus regaining the privilege of a cell without a cellmate. At one point, Normaden discusses Andy with Red; Normaden mentions that he likes Andy, who never mocks him, but that their cell was "cold" with a "bad draft." This conversation foreshadows the later revelation that Andy has been digging a hole through his cell wall, a hole he hides behind **pin-up posters**.

Jim – Jim is a "close friend" of Andy Dufresne; they served together in France and Germany during World War II. After Andy is accused of murder, Jim takes his side. He helps Andy sell his stocks and consolidate his wealth. After Andy's conviction, Jim creates a fake identity for Andy, Peter Stevens. He arranges the indefinite rental of a safe deposit box under Peter Stevens's name and hides Andy's wealth and Peter Steven's forged identity documents there. Then he places the safe deposit box key under an old paperweight of Andy's in a hayfield in Buxton, Maine, and lets Andy know how to find it. Jim dies around 1961. After Andy's escape from Shawshank in 1975, however, Andy is able to use Jim's diligent preparations to enter Mexico and start a new life there.

Linda Collins Dufresne – Linda Collins Dufresne is Andy Dufresne's wife. In 1947, she begins taking golf lessons at the Falmouth Hills Country Club from a golf pro named Glenn Quentin. Linda and Glenn begin an adulterous relationship.

After Andy discovers the affair, Linda tells him she wants a divorce. When Andy refuses, Linda goes to Glenn's place for the night—where she and Glenn are murdered by burglar Elwood Blatch. Andy is wrongfully convicted of Linda and Glenn's murders.

Glenn Quentin – Glenn Quentin is a golf professional and an instructor at the Falmouth Hills Country Club, where he meets Linda Collins Dufresne, Andy Dufresne's wife. After Glenn starts teaching Linda to golf, they begin an affair. Glenn's wealth tempts Elwood Blatch, a burglar and employee at the Falmouth Hills Country Club, to break into Glenn's house—where Blatch ends up murdering Glenn and Linda. Andy is wrongfully convicted of the murders.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION VS. FREEDOM

Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption shows how the prison environment can steal two kinds of freedom: it can steal prisoners' external freedom by controlling every aspect of their environment, and it can steal their internal freedom by teaching them to tolerate or even desire being controlled. Indeed, it suggests that only by protecting their internal freedom can prisoners keep their dignity and thrive after leaving prison. The novella's narrator, Red, is nominally telling the story of Andy Dufresne, a wrongly convicted man whose strong instinct toward freedom and self-determination Red admires. Andy displays this instinct from the beginning of his incarceration. Soon after he enters Shawshank prison, a group of rapists targets him. Andy cannot fight the group off by himself, so they violate his *external* freedom by repeatedly gang-raping him. Yet Andy demonstrates his *internal* freedom by resisting every assault—communicating that he does not consent and is not resigned to the situation. After decades in prison, Andy escapes through a hole in his cell wall he has been digging for years and hiding behind various **pin-up posters**. Andy's escape represents how his internal freedom—his desire for self-determination and refusal to submit to control—eventually secures his external freedom.

Though Red admires Andy, he claims to be Andy's opposite, an "institutional man" acclimated to prison. For example, after decades of working a prison job where he's only allowed to use the restroom at 25 minutes past the hour, Red only feels the *need* to use the restroom at that exact time. Though at one point, before Andy's escape, Andy suggests to Red that they should go into business together after prison, Red says he could never survive in the outside world. Indeed, when Red is paroled after 38 years in Shawshank, he considers committing a petty crime so he can go back. Yet ultimately, Andy's example inspires Red to protect both his external and his internal freedom: rather than going back to prison, Red decides to break parole and go find Andy, who by then is living under a fake identity in Mexico. By ending with "institutional man" Red seizing his freedom, the novella suggests that institutionalization is a powerful force, but that the human instinct for freedom, even if it can be repressed, cannot be entirely destroyed.

STORIES, MEMORY, AND HOPE

In *Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption*, stories produce reality. Memories are stories people tell about the past, hopes are stories people tell about the future, and people act based on their memories and hopes—so stories have great power. The novella itself is a story the narrator, Red, tells about a man he met in prison, Andy Dufresne. Andy was convicted for two murders he didn't commit because the prosecution was able to tell a more convincing story than Andy himself. Due to Andy's self-contained demeanor, the prosecution spins a compelling yarn that portrays Andy as a cold-blooded, premeditated murderer. Andy testifies he bought a gun prior to the murders because he was suicidal and can't account for all his actions the night of the murders because he was drinking; though Andy is likely telling the truth, the jurors don't believe him because he hasn't told a plausible story. Moreover, a clerk testifies that Andy bought dishtowels from him, which were later found at the crime scene. Andy believes that the clerk genuinely believes this recollection is the truth, given that memory is, per Andy, "such a *goddam* subjective thing" and the prosecution's story about Andy is so compelling.

Once in prison, however, Andy becomes a "legend" that inspires hope in other prisoners due to his desire for self-determination and freedom. Prisoners tell and retell stories about Andy refusing to perform oral sex on a prison rapist, convincing a correctional officer to buy beers for a gang of prisoners tarring a roof, and—eventually—escaping through a hidden hole in his cell wall. Though Red fears he won't survive in the outside world after parole and considers committing another crime just to be re-incarcerated, the story he's told about Andy inspires him to seize his freedom and seek out Andy in Mexico. Thus, the novella illustrates that stories not only entertain people but shape their memories, hopes, and behavior—and, thus, their reality.

GENDER STEREOTYPES, SEX, AND VIOLENCE

Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption portrays a culture where people believe men are violent and sexual, while women are natural targets of men's violent and sexual impulses. One protagonist, Andy Dufresne, at first suffers due to these gender stereotypes but eventually manipulates them to escape from prison. Andy is convicted of murdering his wife Linda and her lover Glenn Quentin. The prosecution argues the murders "could be understood, if not condoned" supposing Andy had killed Linda and Glenn in a jealous rage; by claiming a husband murdering his unfaithful wife is understandable, the prosecution suggests men's violent impulses toward women, based in the desire for exclusive sexual access to women, are natural and widespread. Yet because the ironic, self-controlled Andy does not display stereotypical, violent masculine emotions on the witness stand—no rages, no outbursts—the prosecution convinces the jury that Andy is an *unnatural*, cold-blooded, premeditated killer. Once in Shawshank prison, Andy suffers from gender stereotypes again. Homosexual sex in Shawshank is heavily gendered: while stereotypically masculine, violent prisoners assault other men, actual gay men are expected to "play the female" and male rape victims bleeding through their underwear suffer jokes about their "menstrual flow." Prison rapists target Andy due to his slightness and "fair good looks"—implicitly feminine qualities that make Andy a target for masculine sexual violence.

Though Andy suffers wrongful conviction and sexual assault for defying gender stereotypes, he eventually manipulates stereotypes to secure his freedom. When he starts hanging contraband **pin-up posters** in his cell, everyone—even his friend and fellow prisoner Red—assumes he wants them for stereotypically masculine, sexual reasons: as visual aids for his fantasies. Thus no one thinks to look behind the posters—behind which Andy successfully hides the hole he is digging in his cell wall. Andy's initial victimization and subsequent escape from prison show how gender stereotypes distort the truth—and how those who recognize the distortions can manipulate stereotypes to their own ends.

CORRUPTION, PURITY, AND ACCOMMODATION

Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption represents the world as a corrupt place, where people can become entirely corrupt, protect their purity but remain ineffectual, or accommodate some corruption to achieve good ends without becoming entirely corrupt themselves. The novella's ending suggests the third path, accommodation, is best. In the novella, corruption is everywhere. One protagonist, a banker named Andy Dufresne, is wrongfully imprisoned for murder on circumstantial evidence—in part because the district attorney who prosecutes Andy's case wants to run for higher office and thinks a high-profile conviction will improve his election chances. In his trial, Andy testifies honestly—retaining his moral purity but condemning himself to prison, since the jury doesn't find his true story believable. Once in prison, Andy encounters corruption everywhere. Guards sell drugs and take bribes, while wardens run illicit businesses, embezzle money, and use the threat of prisoners' free labor to extort local businessmen who don't want to be underbid on contracts. Andy wants to secure protection from prison rapists and avoid getting a cellmate who might discover the hole he's digging in the prison wall—so he uses his banking expertise to help guards and wardens do their taxes and launder the money they've earned illicitly. When the novella's narrator, Andy's friend Red, expresses discomfort with Andy laundering the guards' drug-dealing money, Andy argues that "grown-ups" can make morally gray decisions for good reasons instead of descending into ineffectual moralizing or total corruption. He compares his money-laundering to Red's contraband business, where Red secures various prohibited items for other prisoners but refuses to deal in guns, drugs, or contract killings. Since Andy's decision to launder money puts an end to the rapes he's been suffering, and the contraband **pin-up poster** Red procures for Andy aids Andy in his escape from unjust imprisonment, the novella seems to suggest that the "grown-up" approach to accommodating corruption that Andy takes in prison may be a more effective approach than either the prison staff's total corruption or Andy's own moral purity during his trial.

JUSTICE AND REHABILITATION

In *Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption*, the U.S. criminal justice and correctional systems neither dispense justice nor provide rehabilitation—the novella shows how these high-minded ideals have nothing to do with how the systems work in practice. The novella's plot turns on an initial injustice: Andy Dufresne is wrongly convicted of double homicide on circumstantial evidence because the prosecuting district attorney wants to use the high-profile case to further his political career. Once inside prison, Andy suffers further injustices. For example, prison rapists repeatedly assault him, and when he resists, prison staff punish him with solitary confinement for fighting. Even prisoners who actually committed crimes should not be punished with repeated sexual assaults, yet the novella implies that this happens regularly in the Shawshank prison—the narrator, Red, casually admits he's speaking from experience when he describes how prisoners like Andy stanch their bleeding after they've been raped. Moreover, the novella suggests that prison doesn't rehabilitate anyone, for two reasons. First, prison culture actually pushes

both Red and Andy to commit crimes: Red gets a reputation for smuggling contraband, while Andy starts laundering money for prison staff. It's implied in Red's case and explicit in Andy's that they undertake these crimes in part to secure protection from further sexual assaults. Second, because so many prisoners are paroled at such an advanced age, they are too institutionalized, sick, or senile upon release to prove that they can act as rehabilitated, contributing members of society. Thus, in the novella, both the criminal justice and correctional systems fail in their stated purposes.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

PIN-UP POSTERS

In *Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption*, pin-up posters represent Andy Dufresne's desire for freedom—and his ability to hide that desire using gender stereotypes. The novella first mentions the pin-up posters early, when the narrator Red explains that in Shawshank prison, he's the prisoner able to smuggle in contraband. He notes that in 1949, he smuggles in the actress Rita Hayworth for Andy Dufresne. At this point, Red doesn't make clear he means a Rita Hayworth *poster*, leaving readers to assume that Red somehow convinces the actress to visit the prison. Later, when Red tells the whole story, readers realize that they've been misled: Andy asks Red for a Hayworth poster, not the woman herself. Thus, early in the story, the pin-up posters are associated with misdirection.

Yet Red, like the reader, is misled. When Andy asks for the poster, he seems nervous, excited, and embarrassed—and Red, amused, assumes that's because the self-possessed Andy is betraying a stereotypical masculine sex drive and wanting to use the poster as a fantasy aid. He doesn't think Andy might want the poster for other reasons. After Andy puts up different pin-up posters in his cell for years—of Marilyn Monroe and Raquel Welch, among others—Red eventually thinks to ask Andy what makes him so attached to the posters. Andy explicitly tells Red the posters represent freedom; Andy likes the Welch poster best because it shows a beach and he can imagine "step[ping] right through" the poster to coastal freedom. Yet Red still doesn't understand until Andy escapes—and prison staff, searching Andy's cell, discover a hole dug in his cell wall that the posters have hidden for decades. Only then does Red realize that Andy never wanted the posters for sexual reasons: Andy used stereotypes about men's overactive sexual desires and fondness for visual aids to keep anyone from investigating the posters, which figuratively hide Andy's never-quenched desire for freedom and literally hide Andy's escape route.

ROCKS, CRYSTALS, AND CONCRETE

In *Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption*, rocks, crystals, and concrete represent Andy Dufresne's persistence, which he uses to dominate the prison environment and to inspire others. Early in the novella, convict and contraband-smuggler Red compares the process of a prisoner getting parole after repeated hearings to "a river eroding a rock;" thus, the novella associates freedom with both persistence and rock-shaping. Later, Andy uses a similar comparison to describe the endless letters he writes to the Maine state legislature trying to secure funding for the prison library: the letters are water droplets falling "once every year for a million years" and the legislature is "a block of concrete"—though the water seems to have no power, eventually the concrete will erode.

Andy first approaches Red in Shawshank prison's exercise yard because Andy wants a rock-hammer, which he plans to use to collect beautiful rocks in the prison environs. To prove to Red he's serious, Andy sifts through the exercise-yard dirt and uncovers a quartz with a "milky glow." The quartz touches Red emotionally, because he associates it with unfenced outdoor areas, and he agrees to get Andy the rock-hammer. Thus the reader sees how Andy refuses to let prison destroy his humane appreciation for beauty, and how that refusal touches other prisoners. Later, in thanks, Andy sends Red two pieces of polished quartz. Given the labor Andy must have expended finding and polishing the quartz, Red feels "awe for the man's brute persistence"—so that the novella explicitly connects Andy's shaping of rocks and crystals to his indomitable personality.

Eventually, Andy escapes from prison through a hole he's dug in his concrete cell wall over decades using two rock-hammers Red has procured for him. Andy's escape makes literal the connection between his interest in rock, crystals, and concrete; his persistence; and his ability to dominate his environment. Since Andy gives some of his rocks to Red—and since, after being paroled, Red eventually decides to join Andy in Mexico rather than commit another crime and return to prison—the rocks also symbolize how Andy's persistence inspires others to persist as well.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Scribner edition of *Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption* published in 2020.

Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption Quotes

❝ There's a guy like me in every state and federal prison in America, I guess—I'm the guy who can get it for you.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy Dufresne

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation, which opens *Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption*, introduces readers to the novella's narrator while posing questions about corruption and rehabilitation within the U.S. prison system.

Curiously, while explaining who he is, the narrator never mentions his own name; readers only learn his nickname, Red, much later, because his friend Andy Dufresne refers to him that way in dialogue. Instead, the narrator explains who he is in the context of prison culture: he's "the guy who can get it for you." By introducing himself as a prison type who exists in every facility, not as an individual person, the narrator implies that prison has suppressed his identity and sense of himself as a unique, valuable human being. By having Andy later reveal the narrator's nickname—Red—to readers, meanwhile, the novella implies that Red's friendship with Andy helps Red regain his sense of humanity and individuality.

Indirectly, the narrator's introduction suggests that U.S. prisons are corrupt places that don't succeed in rehabilitating people. It's implied that the narrator is a prisoner, and a prisoner would need guards' help—or at least, their willingness to turn a blind eye—to "get" things for other prisoners. This fact suggests that at least some guards "in every state and federal prison in America" are willing to help prisoners smuggle contraband, suggesting corruption among prison staff. Moreover, if prisoners are smuggling contraband, they are still breaking correctional rules—in the very correctional institutions that are supposed to rehabilitate them after they've broken the law. Thus, the narrator implies, prisons are both corrupt and ineffective at one of their major stated purposes.

❝ Have I rehabilitated myself, you ask? I don't even know what that word means, at least as far as prisons and corrections go. I think it's a politician's word. It may have some other meaning, and it may be that I will have a chance to find out, but that is the future . . . something cons teach themselves not to think about.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator Red has just explained that he was imprisoned at age 20 for cutting the brakes on his wife's car, killing her—and two other people he hadn't realized she was going to pick up. He recognizes that he did something truly terrible, but he also points out it happened a long, long time ago. Then he considers the question of his rehabilitation.

Red's statement that he doesn't "even know what that word means, at least as far as prisons and corrections go" suggests the prison has made no active attempts to rehabilitate him. In fact, it may have encouraged him to break *more* laws, as he became a contraband smuggler for other prisoners after incarceration. When he describes rehabilitation as a "politician's word," he seems to mean that politicians use the concept of rehabilitation to justify correctional funding and hide the ugly truth about prisons like Shawshank, where Red is incarcerated. The truth, Red implies throughout the novella, is that they're just cages where many prisoners are brutalized, raped by other prisoners, and beaten indiscriminately by guards.

Red believes that if his rehabilitation exists, it exists in "the future," which is "something cons teach themselves not to think about." That people in prison try not to think about the future suggests that prison robs them of their hope—the emotion that makes contemplating the future pleasurable. Yet because rehabilitation is a future-oriented activity—you are trying to make yourself better in preparation for eventual freedom—prison's hope-crushing quality likely hampers rehabilitation from occurring.

It was that last fact that militated more against Andy than any of the others. The DA with the political aspirations made a great deal of it in his opening statement and his closing summation. Andrew Dufresne, he said, was not a wronged husband seeking a hot-blooded revenge against his cheating wife; that, the DA said, could be understood, if not condoned. But this revenge had been of a much colder type. Consider! the DA thundered at the jury. Four and four! Not six shots, but eight! *He had fired the gun empty . . . and then stopped to reload so he could shoot each of them again!*

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy Dufresne, The District Attorney, Linda Collins Dufresne, Glenn Quentin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

Red is explaining how Andy Dufresne, whom he believes to be innocent, was convicted of double homicide and sent to Shawshank prison. Andy's conviction turns on two phenomena: gender stereotypes and the power of storytelling.

The DA (district attorney) prosecuting Andy's case claims that Andy murdering his wife Linda "could be understood, if not condoned" if Andy had murdered her in the manner of "a wronged husband seeking a hot-blooded revenge." This disturbing sentiment suggests the DA believes—or at least, thinks the jury believes—that it's natural and understandable for a man to murder his wife out of rage if she's had an affair. In other words, the DA is arguing women are natural targets of impulsive male violence—but that Andy is somehow unnatural, "colder" than other men, and so deserving of greater punishment. Andy is convicted, at least in part, because the district attorney exploits the jury's dislike of Andy's self-possessed demeanor, which defies gender stereotypes about how men in Andy's situation behave and so—the novella implies—makes the jury uncomfortable and suspicious.

The DA also tells a convincing story about Andy. The repeated exclamation marks, the italics, and the word "thundered" to describe the DA's speech to the jury all suggest that he is speaking in an attention-grabbing, emotional style. From the fact that Linda and her lover Glenn Quentin were each shot four times, the DA extrapolates a creepy story about why and in what frame of mind Andy shot them. In fact, the DA has no way of knowing what the shooter was thinking—and Andy wasn't the shooter in any case. Yet the dramatic delivery convinces the jury, which illustrates that in the novella's world, storytellers have great power to shape what people believe and, in turn, to shape what they do.

"I think it's at least possible that he convinced himself. It was the limelight. Reporters asking him questions, his picture in the papers . . . all topped, of course, by his star turn in court. I'm not saying that he deliberately falsified his story, or perjured himself. I think it's possible that he could have passed a lie detector test with flying colors, or sworn on his mother's sacred name that I bought those dishtowels. But still . . . memory is such a *goddam* subjective thing."

Related Characters: Andy Dufresne (speaker), Red/The Narrator, Linda Collins Dufresne, Glenn Quentin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

Early in the novella, the narrator Red interrupts his retelling of Andy's trial to relate a conversation about the trial he had with Andy much later, after they'd become friends in prison. At the trial, a store clerk testified that Andy had purchased alcohol, cigarettes, and dishtowels from him. Police later discovered dishtowels in the house where Andy's wife Linda and her lover Glenn Quentin were murdered. Andy, who has no memory of buying dishtowels, is explaining to Red why he thinks the clerk said he did.

Andy is arguing that one's beliefs and context can alter one's memory of events—that the stories people tell themselves can affect not only what they do in the future, but how they remember the past. His repeated invocations of the clerk's sincerity, saying the clerk might have "passed a lie detector test" and "sworn on his mother's sacred name," emphasize that he means the clerk could genuinely remember Andy buying dishtowels and still be wrong about what happened. This phenomenon, Andy thinks, occurred due to influence from "reporters," "the papers," and the clerk's "star turn in court"—in other words, media narratives about the murders and public scrutiny so shaped the clerk's sense of reality that it created a false memory.

The novella's narrator, Red, is telling Andy Dufresne's story retrospectively, based on his own memories. This moment—in which Andy questions the reliability of memory—thus encourages readers to judge the consistency and reliability of the story Red is telling them before

believing everything he says about Andy.

I don't have to listen to rumors about a man when I can judge him for myself.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy Dufresne

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator Red is explaining how he and Andy first met in Shawshank prison. Red had already heard negative "rumors" about Andy's standoffishness, but he decided not to come to any conclusions until they'd interacted. This short passage reveals both Red's mental independence and the importance of stories in shaping people's lives.

Red claims several times he's an "institutional man," someone so used to prison rules and restrictions that he could never return to the outside world and exercise his freedom again. Yet despite Red's negative self-image, he demonstrates mental independence—internal freedom, one might say—when he refuses to believe "rumors" about Andy, preferring to exercise his own judgment. This passage thus hints that Red thinks he's more of an "institutional man" than he really is. It also reassures the reader of Red's reliability as a narrator: if he heard about some piece of the story second-hand, he would try to check whether it's true, not accept it as gospel straight away.

The passage also illustrates the importance of stories. "Rumors" are a kind of negative story people tell about each other, and those stories have a potential to shape how people are treated. If Red—the prison's premier contraband smuggler—had believed the rumors about Andy, he might not have been willing to smuggle items for him, items that eventually enable Andy's escape from prison. Whether or not people believe negative stories about a person, the novella is thus suggesting, can absolutely alter the trajectory of that person's life.

It was a silly idea, and yet . . . seeing that little piece of quartz had given my heart a funny tweak. I don't know exactly why; just an association with the outside world, I suppose. You didn't think of such things in terms of the yard. Quartz was something you picked out of a small, quick-running stream.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy Dufresne

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator Red is describing his and Andy's first meeting in Shawshank prison, when Andy asks Red to smuggle him a rock-hammer. When Red hesitates (he's suspicious Andy might use the hammer as a murder weapon), Andy explains that he collects rocks, finds a quartz crystal in the exercise yard dirt, and shows it to Red.

Andy's attempt, shortly after entering prison, to get equipment that will help him persist in a pre-prison hobby shows that he doesn't intend to let prison change him: he will retain his interests, his personality, and his internal freedom even though the prison guards are keeping him locked up. Andy's rock-shaping will represent his persistence—in particular, his persistent quest for freedom—throughout the novella.

This passage subtly shows how Andy's persistent desire for freedom inspires similar desires in other prisoners, Red in particular. Though Red tries to dismiss rock-collecting in prison as "silly," Andy's quartz gives Red's "heart a funny tweak," a phrase suggesting an unexpected emotional reaction, and makes Red picture "a small, quick-running stream," a landscape outside of the prison environs. These little details imply that on their first meeting, Andy's insistence on seeing the prison his own way and continuing his hobby has inspired Red to think about freedom.

And then there are the sisters.

They are to prison society what the rapist is to the society outside the walls. They're usually long-timers, doing hard bullets for brutal crimes. Their prey is the young, the weak, and the inexperienced . . . or, as in the case of Andy Dufresne, the weak-looking. [...] Most often what the sisters take by force they could have had for free, if they wanted it that way; those who have been turned always seem to have "crushes" on one sister or another, like teenage girls with their Sinatras, Presleys, or Redfords. But for the sisters, the joy has always been in taking it by force . . . and I guess it always will be.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy

Dufresne

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22 - 23

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator Red, having mentioned that Andy was in trouble with "the sisters," explains who "the sisters" are: Shawshank prisoners who rape other prisoners. Red's explanation reveals that in the novella, characters associate male homosexuality with femininity and sexual violence with masculinity.

The language of the passage suggests Red and other prisoners associate having gay (male) sex with being a feminized man. Shawshank prisoners nickname men who rape men in prison "the sisters," as if they were a girl gang. Red calls men who realized they were gay in prison "those who have been turned," as if homosexuality turns men into something else—"teenage girls," for example, which is what he compares them to. This association between male homosexuality and male femininity is both sexist and homophobic: it suggests that women are inferior to men, so being a feminine man is a bad thing, and that homosexuality is to be feared because it makes men feminine.

Yet Red also seems to suggest there's something manly about being a rapist when he compares the supposed "'crushes'" gay men in Shawshank have on the sisters to those teenage girls have on "their Sinatras, Presleys, and Redfords." These names are allusions to the singer/actor Frank Sinatra (1915 – 1998), the singer Elvis Presley (1935 – 1977), and the actor Robert Redford (1936 – present), all of whom are famous masculine sex symbols supposed to be very attractive to women. Red seems to be implying that feminine people (whether biological men or women) are sexually attracted to violence, which is somehow inherently masculine. This disturbing attitude suggests that Red—like the DA who thought Andy murdering his wife would have been natural if he'd done it in a blind rage—believes on some level that stereotypical masculinity includes violence toward women and feminine men.

> Because of his small size and fair good looks (and maybe also because of that very quality of self-possession I had admired), the sisters were after Andy from the day he walked in. If this was some kind of fairy story, I'd tell you that Andy fought the good fight until they left him alone. I wish I could say that, but I can't. Prison is no fairy-tale world.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy Dufresne

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

Red is explaining Andy's difficulty with "the sisters," Shawshank prisoners who rape other prisoners. The explanation Red gives for why the sisters "were after Andy" underscores that, in the cultural world of the novella, men see women as natural targets of sexual violence and assault feminine-seeming men when women aren't available. Andy is "small," "fair" (i.e. blond), attractive, and exhibiting "self-possession" rather than grabbing attention for himself—attributes more associated with refined women than with stereotypical men. In prison, Red suggests, stereotypically feminine attributes make Andy a target for rape.

This passage again suggests to readers that Red is a reliable narrator, someone who tries to use stories to communicate the truth rather than shape reality according to his own desires. He "wish[es]" that the sisters had never raped Andy, but he's trying to relate the truth, not "some kind of fairy story" where the protagonist always wins, so he admits that they did. His insistence that "prison is no fairy-tale world" at the end of the passage—repeating the contrast he's already drawn between fantasy tales and his own truthful narrative—emphasizes that he's trying to relate events in Shawshank prison as he believes they occurred.

> It rips you up some, but not bad—am I speaking from personal experience, you ask?—I only wish I weren't. You bleed for awhile. If you don't want some clown asking you if you just started your period, you wad up a bunch of toilet paper and keep it down the back of your underwear until it stops. The bleeding really is like a menstrual flow; it keeps up for two, maybe three days, a slow trickle. Then it stops. No harm done, unless they've done something even more unnatural to you. No *physical* harm done—but rape is rape, and eventually you have to look at your face in the mirror again and decide what to make of yourself.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy Dufresne

Related Themes:

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

Red has just told readers about the first time the sisters gang-rape Andy. Now he is explaining the physical aftermath of having been raped. This passage highlights how gender stereotypes influence sexual violence in the novella and how inhumane Shawshank prison is. It also provides more evidence that Red is a reliable narrator.

First, Shawshank's male prisoners treat rape as something that feminizes men. Red alludes to "clown[ish]" prisoners asking bleeding rape victims whether they "just started" their "period"—hinting that other prisoners will treat a rape victim with cruelty and contempt because they see being raped as an experience that makes a man equivalent to a woman. He makes it clear that this is something that no man in a sexist society wants to be, as this type of society values masculinity and devalues femininity.

Second, prison is nominally supposed to rehabilitate as well as punish prisoners, yet Red's discussion of rape in this passage suggests prison is merely inhumane, not rehabilitative. He admits in an aside that he's "speaking from personal experience" when he describes the aftermath of rape. Since both the novella's main characters have been raped, it seems to indicate rape is a common experience for men in prison—which is horrific, as rape is not a legitimate punishment for any crime. Moreover, when Red claims that while rape may not cause lasting "*physical* harm," it makes a person wonder "what to make of yourself," he's indirectly describing intense psychic harm that prison rape does to incarcerated men. The ubiquity of rape in Shawshank likely makes readers question whether the prison can ever help or rehabilitate—as opposed to merely torture—the men inside.

Finally, Red's brief admission that he himself has been raped again implies that he's a reliable narrator, willing to share those details he "wish[es]" weren't true and that he might find painful, humiliating, or traumatic.

I glanced into his cell and saw Rita over his bunk in all her swimsuited glory, one hand behind her head, her eyes half-closed, those soft, satiny lips parted. It was over his bunk where he could look at her nights, after lights-out, in the glow of the arc sodiums in the exercise yard.

But in the bright morning sunlight, there were dark slashes across her face—the shadow of the bars on his single slit window.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy Dufresne

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Red has just smuggled Andy a pin-up poster of the actress and sex symbol Rita Hayworth (1918 – 1987). In the morning, walking to breakfast, he sees the poster hung in Andy's cell.

Here, the pin-up poster seems to emphasize Andy's lack of freedom. Red describes the poster in highly sexual terms, talking about Hayworth's "swimsuited glory" and "soft, satiny lips." He notes that Andy can look at her during the "nights, after lights-out"—hinting he believes Andy has placed the poster where it can work best as an aid to nighttime sexual fantasies. Yet "in the bright morning sunlight"—that is, in the cold light of day, in reality—Red sees that Andy is incarcerated in a men's prison, without access to women, a situation represented by the "shadow of the bars" on sex-symbol Hayworth's face.

Yet Red's depressing interpretation of the pin-up poster turns out to be mistaken. Andy isn't using the poster as a sad substitute for real women he can't access, and he didn't hang the poster where he did to aid nighttime fantasies. Instead, he's hung the poster to hide the hole he's digging in his cell wall. In retrospect, then, the pin-up poster represents not frustrated sexual desire but Andy's desire for freedom and intent to escape, which he cleverly hides in plain sight by manipulating people's stereotypical assumptions about men's sexual preoccupations.

You may also have gotten the idea that I'm describing someone who's more legend than man, and I would have to agree that there's some truth to that. To us long-timers who knew Andy over a space of years, there was an element of fantasy to him, a sense, almost, of myth-magic, if you get what I mean. That story I passed on about Andy refusing to give Bogs Diamond a head-job is part of that myth, and how he kept on fighting the sisters is part of it, and how he got the library job is part of it, too.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy Dufresne, Bogs Diamond, Byron Hadley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29 - 30

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Red prefaces an anecdote about how Andy got the sisters to stop sexually assaulting him by talking about his own narrative of Andy, whom Red describes in terms of "legend," "fantasy," and "myth-magic." This discussion serves two purposes in the novella, emphasizing the power of stories while also bolstering Red's credibility as a narrator.

The stories that make Andy a legend among Shawshank's "long-timers" all have to do with him exercising free will and agency: he refuses to give Bogs Diamond, one of the rapists in the prison, "a head-job" (i.e. oral sex) despite Bogs threatening him with physical harm. He consistently fights rapists even though he knows he can't win. He gets the library job after using his banking experience to suggest a legal method of tax evasion to a prison guard named Byron Hadley. These incidents demonstrate Andy's strong will, persistence, and intelligence. The attachment the "long-timers" have to these stories suggest Andy's desire to exercise freedom inspires them, keeping the dream of freedom alive in them—and demonstrating the power of stories, given how difficult it is to remain attached to the ideal of freedom after decades in prison.

This passage also bolsters Red's credibility as a narrator because he acknowledges how unbelievable Andy is and seems aware of his own emotional investment in Andy's "legend." Red isn't just gullibly repeating Shawshank myths; he's thinking critically about who Andy is and how Andy affected both him and other prisoners.

> How much work went into creating those two pieces? Hours and hours after lights-out, I knew that. First the chipping and shaping, and then the almost endless polishing and finishing with those rock-blankets. Looking at them, I felt the warmth that any man or woman feels when he or she is looking at something pretty, something that has been *worked* and *made*—that's the thing that really separates us from the animals, I think—and I felt something else, too. A sense of awe for the man's brute persistence.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy Dufresne

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 30 - 31

Explanation and Analysis

The year after Andy enters Shawshank, as he and Red are becoming friends, Andy gives Red two quartz crystals he's carved. Red's reaction highlights the symbolic connection between rocks and Andy's "brute persistence"; it also illustrates the inspirational effect Andy's persistence has on other prisoners, especially Red.

Red seems stunned by the amount of slow, steady work Andy must have expended to create these gifts. He not only mentions that Andy likely labored for "hours and hours" in the dark but also lists the various kinds of labor: "chipping," "shaping," "polishing," and "finishing." Red's attention to the kind and amount of work Andy has done to turn raw crystals into art drives home Red's perception of Andy's "brute persistence." It also foreshadows the much later revelation that Andy has been digging an escape route through the concrete wall of his cell in the dark—a feat that will require even more persistence. Thus, this scene establishes rocks and crystals as symbols of Andy's persistence.

The scene is notable not only for what it says about Andy himself but also what it shows about Andy's effect on Red. When Red talks about "the thing that really separates us from the animals," it isn't clear whether he's referring to Andy's craftsmanship or the "warmth" he himself feels looking at a "pretty," finely crafted thing. The ambiguity suggests that Andy insists on his own humanity in the dehumanizing prison context by making artistic objects—but also inspires Red to recognize his own humanity by evoking aesthetic and emotional reactions in him. The scene implies that Andy's agency, sense of internal freedom, and human dignity have the capacity to help other prisoners recognize those qualities in themselves.

> I have seen some screws that I thought were almost saintly, and I think I know why that happens—they are able to see the difference between their own lives, poor and struggling as they might be, and the lives of the men they are paid by the State to watch over. These guards are able to formulate a comparison concerning pain. Others can't, or won't.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Byron Hadley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the narrator Red interrupts his description of the brutal, pessimistic prison guard Byron Hadley to discuss two different kinds of prison guards. There are those who can "formulate a comparison concerning pain" and those who can't. The passage shows how powerful storytelling can be by suggesting that understanding other people's life stories leads to increased empathy and moral depth.

Red mentions that some guards at Shawshank ("screws" is a slang term for prison guards) become "saintly" by observing and understanding "the lives of the men they are paid by the State to watch over." In other words, these guards reconstruct what it is like to be a prisoner, empathetically imagining the brutality of incarceration. This act of imagination is essentially storytelling: "saintly" guards tell themselves the story of what it is like to be a prisoner and, in so doing, become grateful for their own "poor and struggling" lives and develop morally.

By contrast, those guards who do not imagine and empathize—who don't tell themselves stories about other people's lives—remain morally stunted and cruel. Thus the novella suggests yet another way in which storytelling can be powerful. If deployed empathetically, it can make the person telling or listening to the story a morally better person.

❝ So yeah—if you asked me to give you a flat-out answer to the question of whether I'm trying to tell you about a man or a legend that got made up around the man, like a pearl around a little piece of grit—I'd have to say that the answer lies somewhere in between. All I know for sure is that Andy Dufresne wasn't much like me or anyone else I ever knew since I came inside.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy Dufresne, Byron Hadley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40 - 41

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator Red has just recounted how Andy convinced prison guard Byron Hadley a bunch of prisoners beer in exchange for helping him exploit a tax loophole. After Hadley buys the prisoners beer, many more prisoners claim to have been present when Andy convinced him than actually were. The prisoners' admiring lies about Andy prompt Red to consider, once again, whether he's telling a story "about a man or a legend."

When Red compares Andy's legend to "a pearl," the comparison suggests the legend springs from a real source—the "little piece of grit" that is the real, indomitable Andy Dufresne—but that the legend has become more beautiful than the original reality in its retellings. It may also have become more valuable, as a pearl is more valuable than grit, because Andy's legend can inspire more people than just those who knew the real man. That's why Red's story is "in between" truth and legend: it's based on a true story, but the effects of the story on listeners are as important as the facts of the story itself.

Yet when Red claim that Andy isn't "like [him] or anyone else" in prison, he implies that Andy's grit, persistence, and desire for freedom are unique among Shawshank prisoners—that prisoners may enjoy Andy's story, but it doesn't really inspire them to feel or act like Andy. This claim shows that Red, in the middle of narrating Andy's story, hasn't understood why he's so motivated to tell this particular story; he only later recognizes that he's telling it because Andy represents his own desire for freedom.

❝ He discovered a hunger for information on such small hobbies as soap-carving, woodworking, sleight of hand, and card solitaire. He got all the books he could on such subjects. And those two jailhouse staples, Erie [sic] Stanley Gardner and Louis L'Amour. Cons never seem to get enough of the courtroom or the open range.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy Dufresne

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 42 - 43

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator Red is explaining how Andy increased the prison library's catalogue after he became prison librarian. This quotation illustrates another way in which Andy inspires other prisoners. The novella has already used Andy's own hobby, collecting and shaping rocks, to

symbolize Andy's persistence—in particular, his persistent desire for freedom within the repressive prison environment. By encouraging other prisoners' "small hobbies" with the books he chooses, Andy is directly supporting other prisoners' preferred activities and thus their expressions of individuality, which may in turn support their sense of dignity and internal freedom.

Andy also cultivates prisoners' desire for freedom by getting them novels by Erle Stanley Gardner (1889–1970) and Louis L'Amour (1908–1988). Erle Stanley Gardner wrote more than 80 novels starring Perry Mason, a criminal defense attorney who saves many innocent clients accused of crimes from prison. Louis L'Amour, meanwhile, wrote in a whole variety of genres, including science fiction, but specialized in Westerns—stories of the free, open frontier. When Red says that "cons never seem to get enough of the courtroom or the open range," he's suggesting that they look to stories of legal exoneration and free-roaming cowboys to express their own desires for legal and physical freedom. Thus, this passage shows that Andy inspires other prisoners' desire for freedom not only passively, through his example, but actively, by feeding their appetite for stories about freedom.

> "Because guys like us, Red, we know there's a third choice. An alternative to staying simon-pure or bathing in the filth and the slime. It's the alternative that grown-ups all over the world pick. You balance off your walk through the hog-wallow against what it gains you. You choose the lesser of two evils and try to keep your good intentions in front of you."

Related Characters: Andy Dufresne (speaker), Red/The Narrator

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Andy and Red have been discussing the moral complexity of Andy laundering money for corrupt prison staff. When Red questions Andy's decision to launder money for prison guards who deal dangerous drugs, Andy compares himself to Red, who smuggles a variety of contraband items but won't arrange contract killings.

Andy's morally pragmatic argument in this passage shows his character development. The phrase "simon-pure" derives from the character Simon Pure in the 1718 play *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* by Susanna Centlivre. Interestingly, the phrase can mean either totally pure or falsely, hypocritically pure. It's impossible to be certain from context which meaning Andy intends, which suggests he may mean both: as no one can be totally pure in the filthy "hog-wallow" of the world, anyone who tries or claims to be ends up a hypocrite. This perspective of Andy's contrasts with his behavior during his trial, when he told the complete truth even when it made him look guilty and failed to provide him with an alibi for murder. Thus, the novella seems to suggest that Andy's conviction changed him, making him less rigidly principled and more pragmatic. That is, he won't "bath[e]" in corruption, but he's recognized it's partly unavoidable and has decided to use it to fulfill his own "good intentions."

The passage is also notable because it illustrates how Andy views himself and Red as moral agents possessing the capacity for making "choice[s]" and selecting among "alternative" courses of action. Even in prison, Andy retains a sense of his own agency, responsibility, and human dignity—and he communicates this sense to other prisoners too, Red especially.

> He said it was as if Tommy had produced a key which fit a cage in the back of his mind, a cage like his own cell. Only instead of holding a man, that cage held a tiger, and that tiger's name was Hope. Williams had produced the key that unlocked the cage and the tiger was out, willy-nilly, to roam his brain.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy Dufresne, Samuel Norton, Tommy Williams

Related Themes:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs just after Red narrates how in 1963, a recently arrived Shawshank prisoner named Tommy Williams divulges a mysterious piece of important information to Andy. Red then interrupts his own story to mention that Andy would later tell him how Tommy's information made him feel: like the tiger of hope had been uncaged in his brain.

Whereas much of the novella represents hope as a good thing, this passage is more ambivalent. On the one hand, a tiger is a beautiful and powerful animal, suggesting that hope is a force to be reckoned with. Additionally, the passage associates hope with images of mental freedom: a

thought or emotion that has been kept in a cage "like [Andy's] own cell" is suddenly released. Yet on the other hand, tigers are dangerous predators; if hope is metaphorically a tiger, then Andy's hope may be threatening to him. Moreover, Andy talks about the tiger of hope "roam[ing] his brain" in a "willy-nilly" fashion, a description hinting that hope has disorganized his thoughts and weakened his mental self-control.

The passage thus sheds light on Red's earlier comment that prisoners don't like to think about the future. Those who have no hope likely find the future too depressing, while those who do find contemplating it nerve-wracking, a dangerous emotional experience that may be setting them up for terrible disappointment. Indeed, Andy is eventually disappointed in this case; Tommy has told Andy information that could get Andy's conviction overturned, but Shawshank's warden Samuel Norton prevents Andy from ever using the information.

I've still got them, and I take them down every so often and think about what a man can do, if he has time enough and the will to use it, a drop at a time.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy Dufresne, Samuel Norton

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

Red is explaining how Andy reacts to prison warden Samuel Norton destroying Andy's chance to get a retrial. Despite Andy's years-long depression, he continues his hobby of collecting rocks and sculpting them prettily; because he has so many rocks, he gives some away, including to Red. Red then interrupts his narration of Andy's story to mention that he's kept all the rocks Andy gave him.

This passage makes clear not only Andy's persistence in the face of setbacks and disappointments, symbolized by water shaping rock "a drop at a time," but also how Andy's persistence inspires Red. Andy gives away some of the rocks symbolizing his persistence to other prisoners, including Red, suggesting that he is trying to share his emotional resilience with them. Red has a strong emotional reaction to this attempt: he not only keeps the rocks but uses them as prompts to think about what a person can accomplish with sufficient "time" and "will." Despite Red's claims that Andy's strong will and desire for freedom set him apart from other prisoners, this moment suggests Andy's example may be awakening similar qualities in Red.

"You know what the Mexicans say about the Pacific?"

I told him I didn't.

"They say it has no memory. And that's where I want to finish out my life, Red. In a warm place that has no memory."

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator, Andy Dufresne (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

Andy is telling Red what he plans to do when he leaves Shawshank prison: move to a coastal town in Mexico and run a small hotel. Andy has been planning his escape for a long time; he's about to hint as much to Red. This passage reveals Andy's state of mind as he contemplates the rest of his life. Earlier in the novella, Red claimed that prisoners don't like to think about the future, implying either that prisoners have no hope or that they find their residual hope too painful to dwell on. By contrast, Andy clearly wants to think about the future: it's enough on his mind that he's decided to tell his friend about it.

What Andy doesn't want to think about is the *past*. His desire to live "in a warm place that has no memory" suggests that after his escape, he doesn't want to think about his wrongful conviction or his decades of unjust incarceration ever again, because the memories are too painful. There are obvious reasons why this might be true—the rapes by other prisoners and solitary confinement by guards that Andy has suffered. But Andy's phrase "finish out my life" suggests an additional one: Andy feels such a huge amount of his life has been wasted in prison that now he's just "finish[ing]" it. That's an agonizing thought, one he might not want to face. Thus, in this scene, Andy's fear of memory shows that despite his almost superhuman persistence and resilience, he's still on some level an ordinary, traumatized human being.

Yet ultimately, after Andy escapes, he still remembers Red and takes steps to help him—leaving a letter and $1000 for him in a place he knows Red might search. Despite Andy's

trauma, then, he keeps some memories of prison and remains a good friend to Red.

"I couldn't get along on the outside. I'm what they call an institutional man now. In here I'm the man who can get it for you, yeah. But out there, anyone can get it for you. Out there, if you want posters or rock-hammers or one particular record or a boat-in-a-bottle model kit, you can use the fucking Yellow Pages. In here, *I'm* the fucking Yellow Pages. I wouldn't know how to begin. Or where."

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy Dufresne

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

After Andy tells Red about his plans to open a small hotel in Mexico and hints he plans to escape Shawshank, he suggests that he'd like Red as a business partner at the hotel. Red responds by denying he could "get along on the outside."

On one level, Red's response shows how badly prison has damaged his self-esteem and sense of agency. He believes that "anyone" in the free world could do what he does in prison, whereas he "wouldn't know how" to live like a normal person in the free world. He defines himself as "an institutional man," someone who can't survive outside the institution of the prison and its strict external controls on prisoners' behavior.

Yet Red's response to Andy's offer suggests that, on another level, he wants to be free. Red doesn't swear all that often in the novella, but here he twice uses the words "fucking" as an intensifier, showing he's in an emotional state when he thinks about freedom. He also keeps repeating the phrase "on the outside," suggesting the concept of "outside" has a hold on his imagination even as he denies he could live there. Red's conflicted response in this scene—his disbelief in his own agency, contrasted with his desire for freedom—foreshadows the difficulty he will have after he is paroled and his ultimate decision to seek out Andy in Mexico.

Well, friends and neighbors, I was the one who went. Straight down to solitary, and there I stayed for fifteen days. A long shot. But every now and then I'd think about poor old not-too-bright Rory Tremont bellowing *oh shit it's shit*, and then I'd think about Andy Dufresne heading south in his own car, dressed in a nice suit, and I'd just have to laugh. I did that fifteen days in solitary practically standing on my head. Maybe because half of me was with Andy Dufresne, Andy Dufresne who had waded in shit and came out clean on the other side, Andy Dufresne, headed for the Pacific.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy Dufresne, Samuel Norton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

After Andy escapes Shawshank prison through a sewer pipe he tunneled through his cell wall to reach, warden Samuel Norton sends a young correctional officer named Rory Tremont to investigate the tunnel. Rory Tremont, discovering feces in the pipe, starts shouting and vomiting. Red, overhearing, begins to laugh uncontrollably and is punished with fifteen days of solitary confinement.

When Red says that Andy "waded in shit and came out clean on the other side," he's literally describing how Andy crawled through a filthy, feces-smeared sewer pipe to reach a creek outside the prison—yet he likely also means how Andy dealt with the "shit" of prison life, including rape, violence, solitary confinement, and corruption, and "came out clean" in that he left with his sense of freedom, agency, and dignity intact. The phrase emphasizes the difficulty of Andy's literal and figurative journeys; therefore, it also emphasizes how strong Andy's desire for freedom must have been to keep him going.

Red's uncontrollable laughter at the thought of Andy's freedom shows how Andy inspires a sense of internal freedom in Red despite Red's incarceration. Even in solitary confinement, a horrible experience, Red is "practically standing on [his] head" with happiness due to Andy's escape; he feels that "half of [him] was with Andy," implying that Andy is both Red's friend and—in a sense—his role model. Red's absolute joy at Andy's freedom foreshadows a later moment in the novella, when Red (terrified by the free world) considers committing a petty crime to return to Shawshank but decides not to because it would dishonor Andy's persistent pursuit of freedom.

> *Well, you weren't writing about yourself*, I hear someone in the peanut-gallery saying. *You were writing about Andy Dufresne. You're nothing but a minor character in your own story*. But you know, that's just not so. It's *all* about me, every damned word of it. Andy was the part of me they could never lock up, the part of me that will rejoice when the gates finally open for me and I walk out in my cheap suit with my twenty dollars of mad-money in my pocket. That part of me will rejoice no matter how old and broken and scared the rest of me is. I guess it's just that Andy had more of that part than me, and used it better.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy Dufresne

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator Red has just revealed that he's been writing Andy's story since he received a post-escape postcard from Andy and now, in the subsequent year, he believes he's finished. In writing Andy's story, he's discovered the story was really about him too.

This passage marks a turning point in Red's character development. Earlier in the novella, he claims the story really is about Andy, not him—that he is "a minor character"—and that Andy is unique among prisoners in his dignity, persistence, and desire for freedom. This passage shows that in writing down Andy's story, Red realized his previous claims weren't true. In fact, the story is "all about" him as well as Andy, because Andy, far from being unique and fundamentally different from Red, represents both Red's internal freedom, "the part of [him] they could never lock up," and his desire for external freedom, "the part of [him] that will rejoice when the gates finally open."

Yet while Red has come to recognize his similarity to Andy, he still imagines himself mostly "old and broken and scared." He still thinks Andy has "more" internal freedom than he does and "use[s] it better." When he compares himself negatively to Andy, Red shows that he still believes he's been irrevocably institutionalized, not fit for the free world. Red only fully overcomes this belief at the end of the novel, when he decides to break parole and find Andy in Mexico.

> Wondering what I should do.

But there's really no question. It always comes down to just two choices. Get busy living or get busy dying.

Related Characters: Red/The Narrator (speaker), Andy Dufresne

Related Themes:

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after Red has been paroled. While struggling with life in the free world, Red discovers an envelope the escaped Andy has left for him, containing $1000 and a letter inviting Red to join him in Mexico. Red has to decide whether to break parole and accept Andy's offer. In short order, he decides "there's really no question." He's going to join Andy in Mexico.

This passage marks the climax of Red's character development. Earlier in the novella, he claimed that he was an "institutional man" who could never survive in the free world and treated Andy's persistent desire for freedom as heroic but unique, not a desire Red himself shared. A little later, Red recognized that Andy caught his imagination precisely because he *did* share Andy's desire for freedom—yet he seemed to think Andy would have to live freely for the both of them, because prison had broken Red's spirit too much.

Now, in this passage, Red decides to live freely with Andy, because he can only "get busy living or get busy dying." This stark dichotomy suggests that for Red, freedom is life and another incarceration would be death. With this dichotomy, Red admits how important freedom not only is but always has been to him—a fact about himself that Andy helped him see.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

RITA HAYWORTH AND THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION

The narrator introduces himself as a prison stereotype, the man "who can get it for you," i.e. obtain contraband. Unlike most prisoners in Shawshank, he admits he committed the crime he's in prison for: he cut the brakes on his wife's car after buying a life insurance policy for her. His wife happened to give a neighbor and her young son a ride that day, and all three died. At 20, the narrator was convicted of a triple homicide and given three consecutive life sentences.

The narrator, introducing himself, does not tell readers his name, only his role in prison society. This omission suggests the narrator identifies with the prison environment rather than considering himself an individual who will one day be free. He also gives no hints about why *he's telling a story, creating mystery and suspense about his motives. With matter-of-fact brevity, he reveals he murdered his wife –and accidentally killed two other people in the process. This backstory hints that male violence against women may be common in the culture the novella describes. It also makes the reader wonder what kind of person the narrator is. On the one hand, the narrator admits the crime he committed and clearly did not intend two of the three deaths he caused, which may imply his three consecutive life sentences are an unjust punishment. On the other hand, the narrator freely admits to smuggling contraband—"it," whatever it is—which suggests that prison, rather than rehabilitating him, has perhaps made him more likely to commit additional crimes.*

The narrator acknowledges he committed a horrible act but contends it's history, like "the news of Hitler and Mussolini and FDR's alphabet soup agencies." As to whether prison has "rehabilitated" him, he professes not to know the word's meaning. While he may figure it out, "that is the future . . . something cons teach themselves not to think about." He grew up poor, married a rich girl because she got pregnant, and discovered his father-in-law intended to control him and treat him like an animal. The miserable situation eventually led him to murder. In hindsight, he wishes he hadn't committed the murder, but he doesn't equate that wish with his rehabilitation.

"FDR's alphabet soup agencies" refers to U.S. government agencies created under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal (1933 – 1939), projects and reforms intended to help struggling Americans during the Great Depression, which began in 1929. This reference, as well as the allusions to Adolf Hitler (who became Nazi Germany's fascist dictator in 1933) and Benito Mussolini (Italy's fascist prime minister from 1922 to 1943), suggest the narrator murdered his wife in the 1930s. The narrator's refusal to believe that prison has rehabilitated him, despite his regret at having committed murder, suggests two things: first, the narrator is genuinely guilty and self-critical, and second, prison doesn't help the imprisoned become better people. The narrator's offhand comment that the future is "something cons teach themselves not to think about," meanwhile, suggests that prison destroys or erodes prisoners' capacity for hope.

The narrator wants to tell a story not about himself, but about a man named Andy Dufresne—the narrator is simply providing context first. He reiterates he's been obtaining contraband for other prisoners for almost 40 years. He smuggles more to build up his reputation than for money, and he won't smuggle firearms or serious drugs because he's been involved in enough murder. In 1949, Andy Dufresne asks him to smuggle Rita Hayworth, and he agrees.

Now the narrator reveals why he's telling this story: he has something to communicate about Andy Dufresne. Presumably, Andy must be special in some way—but the narrator doesn't yet tell readers how, creating more suspense. The narrator's offhand revelation that he refuses to smuggle anything deadly suggests, again, that he genuinely repents having committed murder—and that 40 years in prison may be an excessive punishment. That he claims to have smuggled Rita Hayworth is bizarre—Rita Hayworth (1918 – 1987) was an actress especially famous in the 1940s, and it's not clear how an incarcerated man could smuggle her into a prison. Hayworth's sex symbol status, however, implies Andy may have had romantic motives for asking about her.

Entering prison, Andy Dufresne is a small, fair-haired, 30-year-old man with glasses and "always clean" fingernails. Before prison, he had a high-ranking job in a Portland bank. He was convicted of murdering his wife (Linda) and the man she was having an affair with (Glenn Quentin). The narrator says that in his decades of incarceration, he's only trusted 10 prisoners' claims of innocence. He now believes Andy's innocent, but he wouldn't have believed it if he'd been a juror at Andy's trial.

Andy's appearance—physically unintimidating and fastidious about "clean" hands—makes him seem an unlikely murderer. That he, like the narrator, was convicted of murdering his wife implies that when a woman is murdered, it's reasonable to suspect the husband. The narrator's belief in Andy's innocence suggests the criminal justice system failed to apprehend the true murderer while incarcerating an innocent man—a disturbing possibility. Yet since the narrator admits he would've thought Andy was guilty if he'd attended the trial, readers may suppose the story the prosecution told about Andy was convincing.

The district attorney prosecuting Andy wanted to run for higher office. He used the "juicy" trial to raise his profile. Andy agreed with the prosecutor's account in some respects: in 1947 his wife Linda started taking golf lessons at a country club and began an affair with her instructor, Glenn Quentin. Andy found out, and on September 10, 1947, he and Linda fought. When she told him she wanted a divorce, he replied "he would see her in hell" first. Linda went to Glenn's, where they were found shot to death the next morning.

The prosecuting attorney has an ulterior motive to convict Andy: political ambition. This detail hints the attorney is a bad actor, corrupting a legal system intended to make impersonal judgments and produce justice. Andy's admission that he told Linda "he would see her in hell" rather than divorce her is interesting. It does suggest Andy is telling the truth—otherwise, why would he confirm a detail that makes him sound hostile and violent? Yet it also suggests he really did have hostile, jealous, possessive feelings toward his unfaithful wife.

Glenn and Linda were each shot four times, which the district attorney claimed showed Andy was an emotionless, premeditated murderer. On the stand, a pawnshop worker said that two days before the murders, Andy had bought a .38 from him. A bartender said Andy had three whiskeys in the country club on September 10, announced he was going to Glenn's, and said the bartender "could 'read about the rest of it in the papers.'" A clerk at a store near Glenn's said that later the same night, Andy bought cigarettes, beer, and dishtowels. A detective said that they found beer cans, cigarette butts, and tire tracks matching Andy's car near Glenn's house. Inside the house, they found dishtowels with bullet holes in them, which the detective believes were used as makeshift silencers.

This sequence of witnesses, testifying to suspicious things Andy did, makes clear why the jury would vote to convict him: the district attorney has assembled alarming details and woven them into a scary narrative about Andy. Particularly damning is the bartender's claim that Andy said he was going to Glenn's and that others "could 'read about the rest of it in the papers'"—suggesting that, whether he murdered Linda and Glenn or not, he intended to commit an act of newsworthy violence.

Andy testified that after he began to hear rumors about Linda and Glenn, he followed Linda when she'd said she'd be shopping and saw her go to Glenn's house. Emotionlessly, he claimed he bought the .38 because he was thinking of killing himself. The narrator believes that because Andy was so emotionally controlled, the jurors disbelieved him.

Andy testified to suicidal thoughts without displaying emotion, illustrating his self-contained and self-controlled personality. That the jurors refused to believe an emotionless man telling an emotional truth suggests that it isn't enough to tell the truth to be believed. Rather, a person has to tell a convincing *story about the truth.*

Andy also testified he'd been drinking continuously between his discovery of the affair and Linda's murder. The narrator thinks the jurors didn't believe Andy due to his emotional cool. But in prison, Andy asked the narrator to procure him only four drinks a year: two on his birthday, one on Christmas, and one on New Year's Eve. The narrator believes Andy drank rarely because he'd had bad experiences drinking. In court, Andy testified he was so drunk the night Linda and Glenn were murdered that he couldn't remember much. He remembered going to the country club bar but not talking to the bartender; he remembered buying beer but not dishtowels.

The narrator believes Andy was telling the truth because he's had more opportunities to observe Andy that the jurors did; when 12 strangers judge a defendant, they may make snap decisions based on superficial impressions—potentially a bad way to arrive at a just outcome. Again, Andy gives tonally cold and self-incriminating testimony, admitting he can't remember everything he did the night of the murder. These admissions make it more likely Andy is telling the truth—surely he could invent better lies—and yet, because he refuses to craft a good story, the jury doubts him. Readers may wonder whether Andy might be wise to be less scrupulous about telling the truth and try to sell the jury on his innocence.

In prison, Andy and the narrator discuss the dishtowels. Andy speculates that the police, who have discovered dishtowels in Glenn's house, may have planted a false memory of selling dishtowels in the man who sold Andy beer—or that the man fabricated the memory because the attention the notorious case gave him turned his head. After all, Andy notes, "memory is such a *goddam* subjective thing." Despite his own memory gaps, Andy's sure he didn't buy the dishtowels: he was too drunk to have considered silencing his gun.

When Andy insists that memory is "subjective," he seems to be claiming that the stories people tell themselves about past events influence—and even change—how people remember them. In other words, stories shape a person's perception of reality. Thus, stories are extremely powerful—powerful enough to put an innocent man in prison.

In court, Andy testified he'd staked out Glenn's house while smoking and drinking beer but then driven home. In cross examination, the district attorney pushed back against Andy's claim that he bought the .38 to kill himself, claiming he didn't seem "the suicidal type." The district attorney also heaped scorn on Andy's claim that he'd thrown his .38 in the river the day before the murders, as the police dragged the river and couldn't find the gun. When the DA called this "convenient," Andy said it was "decidedly inconvenient"—the gun could prove his innocence. When the DA asked how Andy would explain the murders, since Glenn and Linda weren't robbed (and so there was no alternative motive), Andy couldn't. The jury voted to convict him after two and a half hours of deliberation, including lunch.

When the district attorney claims Andy isn't "the suicidal type" and the loss of Andy's gun is "convenient," he's telling a plausible, compelling story about the person Andy supposedly is and what he actually did during the murders. By contrast, Andy merely points out, with dry irony, that losing the gun was "decidedly inconvenient" (forensic analysis could have proved it didn't shoot Glenn and Linda). Andy refuses to debase himself by performing his innocence and spinning tales; he won't even speculate about who did commit the murders. In the corrupt world of the novella, this refusal may be admirable, but it also seems unwise, given that it lands Andy in prison.

In 1955, Andy and the narrator discuss what may have happened the night of the murders. Andy thinks a "burglar" or a "psychopath" killed Linda and Glenn; he blames his conviction on a coincidence, which "condemned [him] to spend the rest of his life in Shawshank—or the part of it that mattered." Though later he begins to get parole hearings, the narrator hears that the parole board keeps voting unanimously or near unanimously to deny parole, and Andy stays in prison until 1975. Jokingly, the narrator speculates they might finally have paroled Andy in 1983.

The story of a jealous husband murdering his wife has far more cultural cachet and plausibility than the story of a random coincidence. In other words, Andy was condemned because the district attorney told a better story than he did—and because people make gendered, stereotyped assumptions about men reacting violently to female infidelity. Andy's comment that he'll spend "the part of [his life] that mattered" in Shawshank demonstrates not only the injustice of his conviction, but possibly also the injustice of a correctional system that promises rehabilitation yet keeps people locked up until they're old and infirm.

Then the narrator tells a story about a prisoner who kept a pet pigeon named Jake. After the prisoner was paroled, he let the pigeon go—but the next week, another prisoner saw the pigeon, "look[ing] starved," dead in the exercise yard.

The story of the tame pigeon that "starved" after being freed illustrates how captivity can render captives unable to deal with freedom when they finally have it again—possibly foreshadowing problems for imprisoned characters who eventually leave Shawshank.

In 1948, the first time Andy approaches the narrator for something, it occurs in the Shawshank exercise yard. The narrator has already heard about Andy's reputation for standoffishness but prefers not "to listen to rumors" if he has the chance to form his own opinions. Andy asks the narrator to get him a **rock**-hammer. When the narrator asks why Andy wants it, Andy asks whether he usually asks customers that. The narrator says he does if customers are asking for something that could be used as a murder weapon.

The narrator's disdain for "rumors" about Andy is peculiar, since he himself is now telling a story about Andy. His disdain hints that he's an independent thinker—he likes exercising his freedom to make up his own mind—and he believes his version of events to be truer than mere rumor, even if memory is as subjective as Andy claims. Andy's request for a "rock-hammer"—a very specific item—implies he may have an interest in rock-collecting. The narrator's response reminds readers of his personal rule about not smuggling murder weapons and again raises the question: is it just to keep this man in prison for 40 years, when he regrets his murder and wants to avoid committing violence?

As the narrator and Andy are talking, a baseball comes hurtling at them. Andy catches it casually and throws it right back. Given the narrator's reputation and influence around the prison, he's impressed that Andy isn't "sucking up" to him.

The narrator's sense that Andy isn't "sucking up" suggests Andy throws the baseball competently but not showily. Together with the early descriptions of Andy as slight, neat, and good-looking, the novella paints a picture of Andy as physically competent, but not someone who overtly or aggressively performs his masculinity.

Andy explains to the narrator that he used to collect **rocks**. He sifts through dirt from the exercise yard, finds a piece of quartz, and shows it to the narrator. The narrator finds the quartz oddly touching, because it reminds him of free settings, for example "a small, quick-running stream." Yet he insists Andy could use the rock-hammer to kill someone or try to escape. Andy denies he has enemies and laughs at the idea you could use a rock-hammer to tunnel out.

Andy's ability to find quartz, a beautiful crystal, within a prison yard demonstrates his internal freedom: prison can inhibit his movements, but it can't destroy his humane appreciation of beauty. That the quartz touches the narrator and reminds him of a "quick-running stream"—of the natural world outside the prison—shows how Andy's internal freedom inspires the desire for freedom in others.

The narrator and Andy settle on a price for the **rock**-hammer, 10 dollars. When the narrator asks Andy whether he has the money, Andy says he does. The narrator will later learn Andy smuggled more than 500 dollars into the prison by hiding it in his rectum.

The revelation that Andy smuggled 500 dollars into prison inside his own rectum illustrates both his resourcefulness and his intense desire to exercise agency, taking some control over his environment even when in prison.

The narrator tells Andy that if the correctional officers catch Andy with the hammer, they'll take it away, put Andy in solitary confinement for several weeks, and record the infraction on Andy's record. He warns Andy that if Andy tells them who procured the hammer, he'll never get anything for Andy again—and he'll get some other prisoners to beat Andy up. Andy agrees to the narrator's terms.

The narrator threatens Andy with violence if he tattles to the guards about the hammer—demonstrating that while the narrator regrets committing murder and won't deal dangerous drugs, he feels some violence is necessary to operate in prison. This sense of necessity in turn suggests that prison doesn't rehabilitate incarcerated people but, as is the case here, pressures them to engage in more corrupt and violent behavior.


Andy sneaks 10 dollars to the narrator a few days later. The narrator procures the hammer and passes it to Andy through an intermediary, though he knows the hammer could kill someone and worries Andy might use it as a weapon, since Andy has "begun having trouble with the sisters." The next weekend, Andy—covered in bruises—thanks the narrator in the exercise yard. As Andy walks away, the narrator sees him palm a **rock** and hide it in his sleeve. The narrator thinks well of Andy's sleight-of-hand and his resilience. He doesn't see Andy much over the next stretch of time, since Andy is frequently punished with solitary confinement.

At this point, the narrator does not explain who "the sisters" are. Readers may be confused, since "sisters" implies female people and Shawshank is a men's prison. Whoever "the sisters" are, the "trouble" they cause Andy seems to involve violence, since the narrator sees him covered in bruises. Despite his pain, Andy engages in clever sleight-of-hand with a rock, which the narrator admires—illustrating Andy's persistent spirit in the face of adversity and that spirit's emotional effect on others.


The narrator explains what "the sisters" means in Shawshank. He distinguishes between three types of prisoners who have sex with other men: otherwise straight men whose libidos demand sex of some kind, even when women aren't available; men who realize they are gay during incarceration and "play the female"; and "the sisters." Though some gay prisoners "have 'crushes'" on the sisters and would have consensual sex with them, the sisters are men who prefer to rape other prisoners.

Here the narrator provides a taxonomy of gay prison sex that implicitly endorses certain stereotypes about men in general and gay men in particular, i.e. that many men's libidos simply demand sex, regardless of the available partners, and that gay men are somehow "female" or feminine in their sexual behaviors. The nickname "the sisters" suggests a homophobic and sexist conflation of gay men with women. At the same time, the existence of a rapist gang in prison suggests that for some men, inflicting violence on physically weaker parties—male or female—is sexually gratifying.

The sisters begin attacking Andy soon after his incarceration—attacks the narrator attributes to Andy's slightness, attractiveness, and "that very quality of self-possession" the narrator finds likable. Andy's first week at Shawshank, the sisters grope him in the showers—and he hits one, Bogs Diamond, in the face. A correctional officer breaks up the fight. Later, four of Bogs's friends rape Andy in the laundry. The narrator, who's been raped before, says that afterwards, a man usually bleeds for several days; he uses toilet paper to stanch the bleeding to avoid other prisoners' joking about his "period." Though the rapes don't cause lasting bodily trauma, the narrator admits they can damage a man's sense of identity.

The narrator believes Andy's arguably feminine qualities—his small stature, prettiness, and reserved "self-possession"—make him a target for prison rapists, a belief suggesting that in the absence of women, sexually violent men target men who remind *them of women. Both Andy and the narrator are raped in prison, implying sexual assault is common there—another detail illustrating the injustice of the criminal justice system, as no one, regardless of what crimes they have committed, should be punished with rape.*

The narrator speculates that after the first rape, Andy realizes what all the sisters' victims realize: he'll be raped no matter what, but he can choose whether to resist. When Bogs comes after Andy with two of his friends, Andy breaks one friend's nose. All three rape Andy, and then Bogs menaces Andy with a razor and demands oral sex. Andy replies, "Anything of yours that you stick in my mouth, you're going to lose it." When Bogs says he'll stab Andy in the head if he bites, Andy explains that head trauma causes people to "bite down" on reflex. Instead of continuing to assault Andy, Bogs and his friends pummel him. Andy and his assailants end up in solitary confinement for fighting, though Andy and the man whose nose he broke go to the infirmary first.

Andy manages to assert his free will by resisting the sisters' assaults even though he knows he can't win the fights. By fighting, he is declaring that no matter what the rapists do, he will not consent. On one occasion, Andy avoids further violation not through physical strength but through cleverness: he convinces Bogs that causing Andy head trauma will cause a bite reflex and thereby avoids forced oral sex. This anecdote shows Andy's eschewal of violent masculinity in favor of cleverness. That Andy is punished with solitary confinement for fighting his rapists, meanwhile, shows the cruelty of the prison system.

The summer after Andy enters Shawshank, Bogs is very violently beaten one night. The narrator speculates that Andy, who smuggled money into prison, "bribed" some poorly paid correctional officers to attack Bogs. After his beating, Bogs stops trying to rape Andy or anyone else. Other sisters keep attacking Andy, but because he violently resists, they target him less. Correctional officers punish Andy with solitary confinement for fighting, but the narrator speculates Andy "g[ets] along with himself" and so minds solitary less. The narrator notes that the sisters stop attacking Andy "almost completely" in 1950, "a part of the story I'll get to in due time."

If Andy in fact bribed a guard to beat up Bogs, it shows the prison system is corrupt. It also shows how Andy uses not physical strength but intelligent foresight, e.g. smuggling money into prison, to exercise agency in an unfree environment. Disturbingly, it seems no guards would protect Andy from rape without a bribe, and guards still punish him for fighting to protect himself—signs the prison doesn't care about Andy's safety, let alone his rehabilitation. The narrator's casual claim that he'll explain "in due time" why the sisters stopped attacking Andy draws attention to the fact that he is self-consciously crafting the story. This may also make readers wonder whether he's a reliable narrator.

In autumn 1948, the narrator sells Andy six rock-blankets, tools for polishing **rocks**. Almost half a year later, during the prison's monthly film screening, Andy—acting furtive—asks the narrator for a **pin-up poster** of Rita Hayworth. The narrator, amused by Andy's demeanor, asks whether Andy wants a small or a four-foot poster. Andy asks for the four-foot one. The narrator offers to sell it to him at "wholesale price," because Andy's bought from him in the past and never used the hammer to attack the sisters.

Andy's purchase of rock-blankets suggests he's polishing the rocks he finds, exercising his agency to create beautiful things in the miserable Shawshank environment. At this point, readers realize the narrator has misled them—though perhaps not directly—when he said he smuggled Rita Shawshank into prison. In fact, he smuggled a poster of her. Thus, from the moment the pin-up posters are introduced, they are associated with misdirection. The narrator seems to be amused by Andy's furtive demeanor because he thinks Andy's embarrassed about using the poster as a visual aid to sexual fantasies—but Andy never explains his motives, leaving readers to wonder whether the narrator has misinterpreted Andy. That the narrator sells to Andy "wholesale," meanwhile, betrays the narrator's fondness for Andy and their growing friendship.

The narrator sells a lot of **pin-up posters**. The people running the prison are aware the prisoners sell contraband, but when the contraband is harmless, like posters, administrators pretend to believe prisoners' relatives sent it. When the prisoners let off steam harmlessly, it's easier for administrators. After the narrator gets Andy the Rita Hayworth poster, he sees it hung up in Andy's cell while he's walking to breakfast, Rita's face striped by shadows from the bars on the cell window.

Prison staff don't enforce rules against harmless contraband. From this, readers can infer either that staff think the rules are excessively harsh, or that they don't care much what prisoners do unless it affects staff, the prison's claim to be an institution of rehabilitation notwithstanding. The shadows barring Rita's face remind readers of the characters' confinement; since Rita is a sex symbol, they additionally remind readers that prison deprives men of female companionship and sex with women when it deprives them of freedom. Readers may wonder, then, whether women come to symbolize freedom to male prisoners—and, if so, whether the prisoners buy pin-up posters out of sexual desire or a yearning to be free.

The narrator announces he's going to explain how Andy got the sisters to leave him alone, once and for all, in 1950—an event that also leads to Andy switching prison jobs, from the laundry to the library, where he worked until he exited Shawshank "earlier this year." The narrator admits that much of what he's recounted about Andy is prison "hearsay" and that Andy is almost "more legend than man" in Shawshank, but that he witnessed the particular event he's about to recount.

Again, the narrator draws attention to the fact that he is self-consciously crafting this story. His admission that he uses "hearsay" to reconstruct some events and that Andy is a "legend" might make the reader question his story's reliability—yet by admitting the gaps in his knowledge, he establishes himself as a relatively truthful narrator. Interestingly, he casually mentions that Andy left prison "earlier this year"—without letting readers know under what circumstances Andy left or what year he means, thus increasing suspense.

By the time the event occurs, Andy and the narrator are decent friends. This is in part because, several weeks after the narrator got Andy the Rita Hayworth **pin-up poster**, Andy sent the narrator (through an intermediary) two beautifully polished quartz **crystals**, which filled the narrator with "awe for the man's brute persistence."

This passage explicitly connects Andy's rock collecting to his "brute persistence," hinting that rock-shaping will symbolize Andy's resilience and indomitable spirit throughout the novella. That the gift fills the narrator with "awe" shows how Andy's spirit is capable of inspiring grand emotions in others.

The event occurs in May 1950, when the narrator, Andy, and several other prisoners are chosen to tar the roof of the prison's license-plate factory. Six correctional officers guard the prison workers, including one named Byron Hadley. Hadley is friends with Greg Stammas, who becomes warden in 1953 after the previous warden is fired for making money off of the prison garage.

The narrator mentions, casually, that one Shawshank warden was fired for illegally profiting off the prison garage. Both the anecdote and the narrator's casual recounting of it suggest corruption is commonplace among the prison's staff.

While watching the prisoners tar the roof, Hadley is whining about a piece of good luck. The narrator notes that some correctional officers become "saintly" because they recognize how lucky they are in comparison to prisoners—but Hadley is not one of the saints. Hadley always sees the worst in any situation. He's complaining loudly to another correctional officer, Mert Entwhistle, that his estranged older brother, whom he disliked, has died and left him $35,000—and he's going to have to pay taxes on it.

The narrator, himself an observant storyteller, notices that observing and understanding prisoners' unlucky situations makes some prison guards "saintly." This detail suggests that empathetic storytelling has the power to change people's worldviews. Notably, this change has not occurred in Byron Hadley, whose complaints about having to pay legal taxes suggest he would corruptly evade them if he could.

Andy stops working, walks over to Hadley, and asks whether Hadley's wife is trustworthy. Hadley threatens to throw Andy off the roof if he doesn't get back to work. The narrator believes that no matter how Andy reacts, he'll get beaten—but he can avoid worsening his punishment. He wants to warn Andy but keeps working in silence, because he takes care of himself. Andy rephrases the question to Hadley: it's not so much about "trust" as about whether Hadley's wife "would ever go behind [his] back." Hadley tells Mert they'll throw Andy off the roof.

When Andy exercises the slightest freedom—in this case, stopping work and asking a guard a question—the guard threatens him with violence, a response that shows the prison staff don't care about rehabilitating the prisoners, only controlling them. The narrator's praiseworthy desire to help Andy—and his immediate repression of that desire—shows how the prison environment tends to make people worse, not 'rehabilitate' them. That Andy is asking questions about whether Hadley can trust his wife, meanwhile, reminds readers that Andy's in prison because his wife was murdered after cheating on him. Readers may, therefore, worry how Hadley—who's already expressed violent tendencies—would react if his wife did "go behind [his] back."

The two correctional officers grab him. Andy, coolly, tells Hadley that if he can control his wife, he can keep all $35,000. After Hadley tells Mert to stop dragging Andy toward the roof's edge, Andy explains that by law, spouses can make a gift of as much as $60,000 to each other without the IRS levying taxes on it. Hadley says he thinks Andy must be lying, but the narrator can tell Hadley's suddenly hopeful.

Though unable to fight off the two men dragging him toward the roof's edge, Andy once again exercises agency in a dangerous situation through his knowledge and intelligence, using his background in banking to give Hadley a useful tip.

As a former banker, Andy offers to do the paperwork arranging Hadley's gift in exchange for three beers for each prisoner working on the roof. The narrator and the other prisoners suddenly sense that even though Hadley could still throw Andy off the roof and get some other banker to arrange the gift, Andy has bested Hadley. Hadley agrees to get the beers, and Andy tells him he'll list the forms Hadley needs and complete them so Hadley can sign them. Hadley threatens violence against Andy if Andy's somehow cheating him, and Andy affirms he's heard.

Though Hadley has all the institutional power in this scene—he's a guard, while Andy is a prisoner—Andy's intelligence and self-possession allow him to take control of their interactions, demonstrating how empowering it can be for a person to have a sense of their own agency and worth even when their situation is constraining or oppressive.

Hadley gets the beer on the prisoners' penultimate day tarring the roof. Everyone drinks except Andy, who just sits and smiles. The narrator notes that while fewer than a dozen prisoners are working on the roof, hundreds of prisoners later claim to have been there. Returning to the question of whether the Andy he remembers is a person or a myth, the narrator suggests he's "somewhere in between." He notes Andy had an unusual quality for a prisoner: self-esteem, or hope for a good outcome, or "a sense of freedom"—an "inner light" the narrator sees him "lose" just one time.

Andy doesn't drink with the other prisoners, supporting the narrator's earlier speculation that Andy drinks rarely because he's had problems with abusing alcohol. This detail makes Andy's claim, while on trial, that he was abusing alcohol during the breakup of his marriage more plausible. The narrator's belief that Andy is "somewhere in between" a real person and a legend for Shawshank's prisoners means that while Andy really did some of the things for which the prisoners admire him, his "sense of freedom" has made him a larger-than-life figure. When the narrator says Andy will "lose" this sense of freedom at some point, it foreshadows dire events to come.

After the roofing job, Hadley and Stammas warn the sisters not to assault Andy—and they don't. Two years later, the man who ran the prison library gets paroled at age 68. Unable to adjust to free life, he dies a year later in a nursing home for impoverished elderly people. Andy becomes the librarian for the next 23 years, slowly making improvements. He creates a suggestion box for books prisoners would like to read, sends letters to book clubs and getting discounted "major selections"; and buys how-to manuals related to prisoners' hobbies and novels by "Erie Stanley Gardner and Louis L'Amour."

Once Andy makes himself useful to the prison staff, they protect him from rape—which suggests they could have protected him before but chose not to. That the staff aren't trying very hard to prevent rapes in the prison betrays their corruption and the prison's failure as an institution of rehabilitation. The anecdote about the old prison librarian dying soon after parole illustrates how the prison often hold prisoners too long for them to make anything of their lives after release. The novelist Erle Stanley Gardner (1889 – 1970) is famous for creating the character Perry Mason, a criminal defense lawyer, while Louis L'Amour (1908 – 1988) is most famous for writing westerns. That the prisoners love these novelists shows their desire for stories about legal acquittal and open spaces; by procuring these novels, Andy cultivates prisoners' desire for freedom.

Two years after becoming the librarian, Andy starts sending letters to Maine's State Senate. Stammas—now the warden—tells Andy in a condescending, fake-friendly way that state legislators won't fund a prison library, only "more bars" and "more guards." Andy asks Stammas to think about a tiny drip of water eroding **concrete** over a long period. Stammas laughs and volunteers to send the letters for Andy, provided Andy pays postage. Eight years later, the legislature sends Andy $200. Though the narrator suspects they sent the money to stop the letters, Andy writes even more—and gets money for the library every year.

The warden's believes politicians will only fund "more bars" and "more guards" for Shawshank, not books that could cultivate the inmates' minds—again betraying that, rhetoric aside, prison is about control rather than rehabilitation. In response, Andy compares himself to a drip of water eroding concrete. This comparison repeats a metaphor the novella has previously used, where Andy's interest in shaping rocks, crystals, and concrete represents his persistence. This allows him to exercise agency in prison despite his lack of institutional power.

After Andy helps Hadley avoid taxes on his inheritance, guards start asking him for financial advice. He ends up helping almost all the staff. When Stammas becomes warden, Andy helps Stammas more materially. The narrator doesn't know the details, but he does know that sometimes free people who care about certain prisoners bribe prison staff so the prisoners get better treatment, the companies that sold equipment for prison industries likely bribe prison administrators, and in the 1960s administrators are involved in drug smuggling. All this "illicit income" needs laundering—and Andy launders it.

According to the narrator, all the prison workers from the guards to the warden are accepting bribes, embezzling money, or engaging in some other "illicit" money-making activity—in other words, greed and corruption are everywhere in Shawshank.

Around 1960, Andy and the narrator—whom Andy calls "Red"—discuss the money-laundering. Andy claims not to feel guilty and suggests, humorously, it isn't that different from the work he did before prison. When Red expresses uneasiness about the drugs, Andy points out the guards sell the drugs, not him.

At the novella's beginning, the narrator identifies himself only by his role in prison culture, not giving his name. Here readers finally learn the narrator's name or nickname, "Red," because Andy uses it. This hints that Red's friendship with the free-willed Andy may be helping Red take back his spirit and individuality from Shawshank's crushing control. Red's worry about Andy's involvement in the dangerous drug trade reinforces that he's a man with moral scruples, who's likely not a danger to society and would be paroled under a more just correctional system. Andy's observation that the guards are the one selling drugs highlights the corruption and absurdity of Shawshank, where the ones guarding the prisoners are themselves committing crimes.

Andy says some ineffectual people never do anything wrong, while other people will do any horrible thing for money. He asks whether anyone has ever suggested a "contract" to Red. When Red says yes, Andy says he knows Red didn't take it, because he and Red see a "third choice" between ineffectual goodness and evil: "You balance off your walk through the hog-wallow against what it gains you." Andy launders money; in exchange, the administrators let him do what he wants with the library, where more than 20 prisoners have read books and studied to "pass their high school equivalency exams."

By "contract," Andy means a contract killing; he's asking whether anyone has requested Red arrange a murder for them. When Andy talks about traveling "through the hog-wallow"—a stereotypically dirty place—to "gain[]" something good, he's arguing that rather than refuse to ever participate in corruption, people should calculate how much good they can do and "balance" that against how much corruption they're participating in. Andy himself seems to believe that educating other prisoners is a good that balances out the crime he commits when he launders money for prison staff. This belief shows Andy's moral pragmatism. This pragmatism was not in evidence at his trial, where he seemed to tell the truth even when it would hurt his case—which suggests Andy's wrongful conviction changed him, making him less rigidly principled and more practical.

Red says Andy also gets his own cell. Andy agrees he prefers it that way. Red notes that though the prison population rose dramatically with the war on drugs in the 60s—which Red calls "ridiculous penalties for the use of a little reefer"—Andy only ever had one cellmate, a Native American man named Normaden.

Red and Andy's exchange hints that Andy is laundering money not only to protect the prison library but to secure the privilege of a cell without a roommate—foreshadowing that Andy may have a special reason to want privacy in his cell. Red's allusion to "ridiculous penalties" for minor drug crimes reminds readers that the U.S. criminal justice system often metes out unjust punishments.

In 1958, Red looks in the mirror, realizes he's 40 and has lived in prison since 1938, notices gray in his red hair, and feels afraid. In 1959, a journalist goes undercover at Shawshank to investigate corruption, and Stammas flees, becoming a fugitive—but Andy isn't punished. Later that year, a new warden arrives. For eight months, Andy receives no special treatment, and during this time his cellmate Normaden moves in. Then Andy begins working for the new administrators, and Normaden moves out again.

Since Red entered prison at age 20, by 1958 he has lived half his years in prison—indicating what a shaping force prison has been in his life. Red's fear reminds readers that many prisoners convicted of serious crimes aren't paroled until advanced old age—an arguably unjust practice that undercuts the stated goal of rehabilitating prisoners so they can reenter society as productive members. Here readers learn that Red has red hair—which suggests "Red" is a friendly nickname, not his given name. That a journal investigates Shawshank for corruption suggests the prison may be particularly, notoriously corrupt—yet the investigation seems to accomplish nothing, as Andy continues his money-laundering arrangement with the next warden as if nothing has happened.

At one point, Normaden—who has a speech impediment due to "a harelip and a cleft palate"—tells Red he liked Andy, who never mocked him, but that Andy didn't want him there. Further, he wanted to leave because the cell was freezing with a "big draft."

Normaden's perception that Andy didn't want a cellmate and that his cell was oddly cold and drafty foreshadows possible revelations about something secret afoot in Andy's cell.

In 1955, Andy starts replacing the **pin-up poster** of Rita Hayworth with various other pin-ups, eventually including Raquel Welch—whom Andy keeps up longest, for six years—and finally Linda Ronstadt. When Red asks Andy about his attachment to the pin-ups, Andy says they represent "freedom." He liked the Welch poster because she was on a beach, which made him feel like he could "step right through" the poster. When Red says he's never taken that perspective on pin-ups, Andy says Red will understand later. Red concludes that later he does understand—and it reminds him of Normaden complaining about the big draft.

Actress Raquel Welch (born 1940) became a famous sex symbol after posters of her wearing a fur bikini were used to promote her 1966 film One Million Years B.C. *Singer Linda Ronstadt (born 1946) released her first studio album in 1969 but became widely famous in the 1970s. The various pin-ups Andy hangs in his cell illustrate how long he's been incarcerated, as both Welch and Ronstadt would have been young children when he was convicted in 1948. Interestingly, Andy associates the pin-ups not with sexual desire but with "freedom" and likes the Welch poster not because of Welch herself but because of the beach background. This confuses Red, who seems to think of the posters primarily as visual aids to men's sexual desire. This passage reveals that the posters have something to do with the draft in Andy's cell but not what—foreshadowing some revelation coming later in the novella.*

In 1963, Andy temporarily loses the special quality of self-control or hope Red attributes to him. The new warden, a devout Baptist named Samuel Norton who gives every new prisoner a Bible, is the "foulest hypocrite" Red's seen in administration. He takes up the prior wardens' illegal businesses. In addition, he establishes an out-of-prison work program, "Inside-Out," that he uses to embezzle money and extort bribes from businesses that want to avoid being underbid by the prison, which has access to prisoners' unpaid labor. Andy helped Norton launder money throughout. Red suspects "what happened happened" due to Norton's fear that Andy could inform on him if Andy were free.

That Norton is a religious hypocrite as well as an embezzler and racketeer emphasizes how corrupt Shawshank and its administrators are. In particular, Norton exploits prisoners' unpaid labor—again suggesting that the correctional system doesn't care about rehabilitating prisoners, only controlling or using them. Red's ambiguous reference to "what happened" hints that Norton does something to keep Andy in prison unjustly.

In 1962, a 27-year-old career thief named Tommy Williams enters Shawshank. His wife convinces him to study for his high school equivalency while in Shawshank, so Tommy goes to Andy for books and help. Tommy, who likes Andy, can't figure out how Andy ended up in prison—and Andy won't tell him. Early in 1963, Tommy asks his partner on work detail about Andy's crime. When his partner mentions that Andy was convicted of killing his wife and a golf instructor named Glenn Quentin, Tommy stops working, goes pale and says, "Glenn Quentin, oh my God." Then a correctional officer clubs Tommy in the head and sends him to solitary for stopping work.

That Tommy likes Andy, who helps him study, illustrates the inspirational effect Andy's mental freedom has on other prisoners at Shawshank. Tommy clearly recognizes Glenn Quentin's name, implying that he knows something about the murder. The guard's casual violence toward Tommy at the end of the passage once again makes clear that the prison staff don't care about helping or rehabilitating the prisoners and will casually abuse them.

Once Tommy's out of solitary, he asks several prisoners, including Red, about Andy's crime. Sometime later, Tommy goes to talk to Andy. Andy, gobsmacked and hopeful, makes an appointment with Warden Norton for the next day. In the appointment, Andy tells Norton what Tommy told him: on a previous prison sentence, Tommy had a cellmate named Elwood Blatch, an extremely jumpy burglar, a "big tall guy," "bald," with "green eyes set way down deep in the sockets." Blatch told Tommy he'd committed several murders. When Tommy asked who Blatch had killed, Blatch bragged that some lawyer was convicted and incarcerated in Shawshank prison because Blatch killed the lawyer's wife and another man, a rich golfer named Glenn Quentin who Blatch thought might keep lots of money in the house.

Tommy's story supports what the reader likely already believed—Andy, innocent of the crimes for which he was convicted, is only in Shawshank because the district attorney told a more convincing story in court than Andy could. Unfortunately, that means the U.S. criminal justice system has unjustly convicted Andy and inflicted on him, by this point, 15 years of wrongful confinement that have included multiple rapes.

Red knows why Andy wants to see Norton immediately: Blatch may still be incarcerated and thus easy to locate, or he may have been released already. Moreover, while Tommy's account doesn't match all the facts—Andy is a banker, not a lawyer; Blatch claimed to have stolen money from Glenn Quentin, while the police claimed no signs of robbery—Andy remembers an employee at the country club where Glenn Quentin was an instructor who matched Tommy's description of Blatch. The employee would have known, as Blatch did, that Glenn Quentin was a golf professional and a rich man.

Now that Andy finally has a story to tell the justice system about who murdered his wife Linda and Glenn Quentin, he's clearly hopeful that Norton will help get his conviction overturned. Given Red's earlier, ominous allusion to "what happened," readers may reasonably wonder whether Andy's hope is misplaced.

Red hears about Andy and Norton's meeting from a prisoner who eavesdrops while cleaning an office adjoining Norton's. Andy, in a strange voice, recounts what Tommy told him. Norton expresses skepticism and suggests Tommy, who likes Andy, invented the story to please him. When Andy says he never told Tommy about the country-club employee matching Blatch's description, Norton accuses Andy of "selective perception" and claims that even if they found Blatch, he'd never confess. Andy calls Norton "obtuse." Shouting excitedly, he explains the club will have documents with Blatch's name on them and other employees can testify he was there. If Tommy testifies too, Andy can get a retrial. Norton shouts for a guard and has Andy dragged to solitary, while Andy shouts, "*don't you understand it's my life?*"

Red hears about the meeting from another prisoner, not Andy, though Andy and Red are friends—which suggests Andy was so upset in the aftermath of the meeting he didn't want to talk about it. Red's scrupulous explanation of how he knows the things he knows, meanwhile, increases his credibility as a narrator. When Norton accuses Andy of "selective perception," he's using Andy's awareness that memory is subjective against him, trying to convince him his memory is faulty. (In modern terminology, Norton is gaslighting Andy.) That the usually cool-headed Andy insults Norton (calling him "obtuse") and shouts at him shows how desperate Andy is to be free. His question, "don't you understand it's my life?", hints that he doesn't see his existence in prison as his real life—that in regaining his freedom, he would be regaining his authentic existence.

Andy spends 20 days in solitary. Red explains that solitary confinement has a long history in Maine. In the 18th century, people were executed for serious crimes; for minor crimes, they were forced to dig a deep hole and live inside it for months, while a jailor occasionally brought them rotten food and poured water into the same bucket they used for urination. Shawshank's solitary, meanwhile, has a single light, which turns off at 8 p.m., a bunk, and a seatless toilet. Though it's better than living in a hole, "in situations like that, subdivisions of terrible tend to get lost."

Red's brief historical digression illustrates how inhumane the U.S. justice system has often been. When he says that "subdivisions of terrible seem to get lost," he's implicitly arguing that while prison conditions have improved over time, the improvement doesn't really matter when the conditions are still so awful.

After getting out of solitary, Andy requests another meeting with Norton. Though Norton says no, Andy keeps requesting a meeting until, months later, Norton agrees. Andy tells Red about the conversation years later, but what happens is this: when Andy tries to reassure Norton he wouldn't tell anyone about the money laundering if released, Norton cuts him off, threatens to close Shawshank's library, and says he can't pay attention to "crazy stories" like Andy's.

Norton calling Andy's account of Linda and Glenn's murders "crazy" is another attempt to undermine Andy's sense of reality (i.e. to gaslight him). That Norton interrupts Andy when Andy tries to reassure him about the money-laundering suggests Norton really is concerned his corruption will be exposed.

Andy says he'll be getting a lawyer, because with Tommy's testimony, he can make a case. Norton says Tommy's been transferred to Cashman, a lower-security prison that lets prisoners on furlough to visit their families. Andy, suspecting Norton transferred Tommy to pay for his silence about Blatch, asks why Norton would do that. Norton claims he's helped Andy out: there was an Elwood Blatch in the prison Tommy named, but he's been paroled and can't be located. When Andy asks whether Norton knows that prison's warden, Norton, smirking coolly, admits he does. When Andy again asks why Norton would transfer Tommy, Norton says he hates Andy's superior look and likes seeing it wiped off his face.

This passage implies Norton asked the warden of Blatch's prison to parole Blatch—to prevent Andy from locating Blatch and getting a retrial. Presumably one of Norton's motives is to keep Andy in Shawshank laundering money for him, which shows how corruption among the prison staff can cause miscarriages of justice. Yet Norton's desire to crush Andy's pride suggests that he has another motive: he can sense Andy's self-respect and internal freedom, and he sadistically wants to destroy those things.

Andy says in that case, he'll stop giving Norton free financial help. Norton replies that he's sending Andy for solitary for 30 days and that, unless Andy keeps working for him, he'll shut down the library, give Andy a cellmate, take his **rock** collection, and tell the guards to let other prisoners rape him. Andy keeps working for Norton.

Since rocks have represented Andy's persistence throughout the novella, Norton's ability to take Andy's rock collection hints Norton is on the verge of breaking Andy's spirit. Norton's threat to let other prisoners rape Andy again is horrifying—vividly illustrating how corrupt Norton is and how unconcerned he is with any prisoner's wellbeing. Andy's decision to keep working for Norton shows that despite his self-possession and desire for freedom, he understands too well the power Norton has over him to defy Norton and risk more sexual assault—or a cellmate, which he definitely doesn't want for important yet mysterious reasons.

Andy continues his routines, working in the library, finding and polishing **rocks**, and buying a new rock-hammer from Red in 1967. Sometimes he gives away the rocks he polishes and sculpts. Red has five, and when he looks at them, he considers "what a man can do, if he has time enough and the will to use it, a drop at a time." Yet though Andy keeps up his routines, he talks less and suffers darker moods for four years after his confrontation with Norton.

Norton's cruelty—which amounts to a second unjust imprisonment of Andy—hurts Andy but does not actually break his spirit. As rocks have represented Andy's persistence throughout the novella, Andy's decision to keep collecting rocks shows his resilience, while his gift of them to others represents how that resilience inspires his fellow prisoners. Red makes this inspirational quality of Andy's explicit when he says that the rocks make him think about "what a man can do [...] a drop at a time." The reference to "a drop" alludes to previous mentions in the novel of water eroding rock, a metaphor for persistence getting results.

Red notices Andy beginning to feel better during the 1967 World Series, when the Boston Red Sox are playing and the prisoners track the games feverishly. Though the other prisoners become depressed after the Red Sox lose the Series, Andy keeps his improved mood. A few weeks after the Red Sox's loss, Red sees Andy sitting in the sun holding a couple **rocks**. Andy invites Red to sit and gives him the rocks as gifts. They discuss that in the coming year, Red will have served 30 years. When Andy asks Red whether he believes he (Red himself) will ever be paroled, Red says it won't happen till he's ancient and senile.

Like many New Englanders, the prisoners in Maine's Shawshank prison root for the Major League Baseball team the Boston Red Sox. Though Andy begins to feel better while the Red Sox are playing in the 1967 World Series, he continues feeling better after they lose—which suggests his better mood merely coincided with the Series, while some other, unknown event caused it. In this scene, Andy is handling rocks; since rocks are symbols of his persistence, this detail suggests he hasn't given up on freedom despite Norton cruelly thwarting his plan to get a retrial. Red's belief that he, Red, won't be paroled until he's ancient underscores the novella's repeated claim that people are often released from prison too late to allow them to contribute to society again.

Andy tells Red that after prison, he'll move to a Mexican town on the Pacific called Zihuatanejo. He claims Mexican people say the Pacific remembers nothing: "And that's where I want to finish out my life, Red. In a warm place that has no memory." He tells Red his plans to open a hotel there for newlyweds.

Andy wants to live somewhere with "no memory," suggesting that—counter to Red's earlier claim that most prisoners don't want to think about the future--Andy is happy thinking about his future, because he has hope; he just doesn't want to think about his past, which is full of suffering.

When Red asks where Andy will get money to start this business, Andy says there are two kinds of men: men who, when a hurricane heads toward them, assume it'll spare their house, and men who assume it'll tear their house down and act accordingly. When Red asks whether Andy acted accordingly, Andy says yes: after his wife Linda's murder, a friend named Jim, who died in 1961, helped him sell his stocks. After Andy's conviction, Jim also created a new identity for Andy—Peter Stevens—with fake documents. Red points out that creating a fake identity is a crime, so Jim must've been an excellent friend. Andy explains he and Jim "were in the war together, France, Germany, the occupation." While Andy was in prison, Jim invested Andy's savings for Peter Stevens, so that Peter Stevens is now worth approximately $370,000.

This passage reveals that Andy's desire for freedom was so strong, he made contingency plans during his trial in case he was incarcerated. When he mentions serving with Jim "in the war," France, Germany, and "the occupation," the novella is referring to World War II (1939 – 1945), during which Nazi Germany invaded France. After Germany was defeated, Allied forces—including the U.S., the UK, and the USSR—occupied Germany between 1945 and 1949. Shared military service explains the strong bond of loyalty between Andy and Jim.

Red asks why Andy, with all that money, didn't get a great lawyer like "Clarence Darrow, or whoever's passing for him these days" to make Tommy testify. Andy explains that, with him in prison and Jim dead, he can't access Peter Stevens's money. He tells Red that in a town called Buxton, against a **rock** wall in a hayfield, Jim left a paperweight Andy once owned. Beneath the paperweight is the key to a safe deposit box rented in Peter Stevens's name and paid out of his money by lawyers Jim hired. Inside the box are Peter Stevens's identity documents, stock certifications, and so forth. Andy admits he worries new construction will at some point cover the field and key in concrete. When Red asks how the situation doesn't drive Andy insane, Andy replies, "So far, all quiet on the Western front."

Clarence Darrow (1857 – 1938) was a U.S. attorney who in 1925 famously defended a schoolteacher, John T. Scopes, accused of breaking a Tennessee law against teaching evolution in the so-called "Scopes Monkey Trial." Red's somewhat dated reference to Darrow illustrates that incarceration has put him out of touch with the changing culture. That the safe deposit box key is hidden near a rock wall associates the key with Andy's hopeful persistence, symbolized by rocks throughout the novella. Andy's comment, "all quiet on the Western front" is a colloquial phrase meaning "nothing new" or "no developments," which derives from the title of the English translation of Erich Maria Remarque's 1928 German novel, All Quiet on the Western Front.

When Red points out that Andy may not leave prison for a long time, Andy says he may not be in for as long as Norton believes—and, given his innocence, his Mexican hotel dream isn't unreasonable. Then, casually, he says his hotel will need "a man who knows how to get things." Red replies he wouldn't survive outside of prison; Shawshank has made him "an institutional man." When Andy claims Red's selling himself short, Red retorts he never graduated high school. Andy replies that high school and prison don't by themselves determine a person's worth. When Red again protests he couldn't survive outside prison, Andy asks him just to consider the offer.

Andy's cryptic comment about leaving Shawshank earlier than Norton thinks is a hint Andy has a plan—whether to get a retrial or to escape somehow, readers don't yet know. When Andy says he'll need "a man who knows how to get things," he's offering Red a job, since "a man who knows who to get things" is how Red defines himself in Shawshank. By protesting he wouldn't survive the outside world, Red reveals he suffers from self-doubt and low self-esteem due to prison's long-term control over him.

As Andy walks off, Red marvels at how Andy's sense of freedom makes Red "*feel* free." Yet Red loses that free feeling once he's back in his cell. That night he dreams he's in a hayfield, trying to retrieve a key beneath a huge **rock** but not strong enough to move the stone, while bloodhounds bark nearby.

Andy can make Red "feel free," demonstrating again that Andy's desire for freedom inspires other prisoners. Since the novella associates moving, collecting, and shaping rocks with persistence, Red's inability in his dream to move a huge rock pinning a key means that he fears he lacks the necessary persistence to leave Shawshank and survive in the free world.

This conversation gets Red on "the subject of jailbreaks." Prisoners who escape over the wall never succeed; they're caught in the act by searchlights or apprehended soon after because their uniforms make them conspicuous in Shawshank's rustic environs. Once a man escaped in a laundry delivery, but the guards have gotten wise to that trick. Several men escaped while working for Norton's Inside-Out Program: three slipped away from their correctional officer, who liked hunting, while a stag distracted him. One man, Sid Nedeau, managed to walk out unnoticed during a correctional officer shift change. Andy and Red like to joke about Nedeau; after they hear about D.B. Cooper's airplane hijacking, Andy claims Cooper must have really been Nedeau.

D.B. Cooper is the name news outlets gave to a never-identified man who hijacked a plane flying over the U.S. in 1971. The number of escape attempts Red can name demonstrates the prisoners' strong desire for freedom, while Red's interest in these stories subtly suggest that the escapees' desire for freedom resonates with him too.

Though escapes do happen, a prisoner must be extraordinarily fortunate to succeed. Red guesses 10 prisoners escaped Shawshank from the time he entered to his conversation with Andy about Zihuatanejo. He also suspects many escapees end up in other prisons, because prisoners "get institutionalized" and secretly want to stay in prison where the environment is familiar. Red believes he's institutionalized, though Andy isn't.

When Red says that people "get institutionalized" by prison, he seems to mean that the rigidity of prison life makes people so unused to—and ultimately afraid of—freedom that they come to desire being controlled by others. Red, a self-critical man, believes prison has made him—but not Andy—afraid of freedom.

Red thinks Andy may have a shot at escaping, but escape will be difficult for Andy in particular, because Norton is surveilling him especially and would never let him into the Inside-Out Program. Red tries to convince Andy to get a retrial, because he thinks that's a more likely path to freedom. Yet in 1975, Andy escapes, and as of 1976, he's still free. Red believes Andy, under the name Peter Stevens, now owns a hotel in Zihuatanejo.

Norton's punitive surveillance of Andy emphasizes Norton's corruption and the failure of prison as a rehabilitative institution. Yet readers learn in this passage that Andy has escaped—meaning that Andy's overwhelming, instinctive desire for freedom eventually overcame the prison's attempts to control him both physically and psychologically.

At 6:30 in the morning on March 12, 1975, the guards count the prisoners from Cellblock 5 on their way to breakfast and, after some confusion, realize Andy is missing. The guards contact Norton, search Shawshank, and alert the local police. No one thinks to search Andy's cell until the evening, when Norton looks behind Andy's **pin-up poster** of Linda Ronstadt and gets "one hell of a shock."

That Norton gets "one hell of a shock" from looking behind Andy's poster implies Andy has been hiding something important behind his posters for decades—and that no one thought to look behind them before, because everyone assumed they knew what a male prisoner was using a poster of a woman for. The pin-up posters thus represent how Andy manipulates gender stereotypes about men, concealing his real desire for freedom behind a false desire for sex.

Red hears from a prisoner who eavesdropped that, earlier that day, Norton berated the Captain of the Guards for losing Andy. Though the Captain claimed Andy wasn't still in Shawshank, Norton shouted that no one knew exactly when Andy escaped, but he was accounted for at 9 p.m. roll call the previous night, and it was "impossible" he'd gotten clean away. He demanded the Captain bring Andy back that afternoon—but by the afternoon, Andy's still gone. Though the guards question the prisoners, including Red, no one knows what happened. Eventually Norton storms into Andy's cell, swipes the depleted **rock** collection off the windowsill (Andy took some rocks with him), and tears down the Linda Rondstadt **pin-up poster** in fury—revealing a big hole in the cell wall.

When Norton claims it's "impossible" for Andy to escape, it emphasizes how difficult the escape must have been—and how cunning and persistent Andy must have been to succeed. This cunning persistence is represented by Andy's rock-shaping hobby, which Norton ineffectually attacks when he invades Andy's empty cell. Tearing down the pin-up poster, Norton discovers that Andy's posters have hidden a hole in the wall—suggesting that Andy has been, with extreme persistence, digging through the wall since he first bought a poster in 1949 and using people's assumptions about male sex drive to keep them from asking any questions about the sexy posters.

Norton, out of his mind with anger, demands the Captain climb into the hole. The Captain refuses. When Norton threatens to fire him, the Captain offers Norton his gun—and Red imagines he can "hear Andy Dufresne laughing." Eventually, though, Norton and the Captain find a young, thin guard to climb into the hole. From inside, the guard calls out that it smells terrible. Norton orders him to keep going. The guard starts yelling that "it's *shit*" and vomits loudly. Red, unable to stay quiet, bursts into guffaws. Norton sends Red to solitary for 15 days, bur in solitary, Red keeps laughing and thinking about Andy, free and traveling toward his dream.

When Red imagines Andy "laughing" at the Captain who won't go in the hole—and when Red himself laughs at the guard disgusted by the "shit" inside it—the novella makes clear Andy's escape must have been revolting. The revoltingness emphasizes how much Andy wanted to be free: he was willing to crawl through "shit" for it. When, despite solitary confinement, Red keeps laughing as he imagined Andy doing, it shows how Andy inspires positive, free feelings in other prisoners despite their physical unfreedom.

After leaving solitary, Red hears from other prisoners what happened. The guard in the hole found a porcelain sewer pipe with a hole knocked into it and a **rock**-hammer abandoned nearby. Andy had entered the pipe and crawled through it into the creek where it "emptied." He'd likely found out about the pipe and the creek by sneaking a look at Shawshank's blueprints. Later, searchers found his Shawshank uniform about two miles from the creek. Despite major news coverage, no one came forward to say they'd seen him fleeing across the surrounding land. Red speculates Andy headed to Buxton.

Up to this point, the novella has linked Andy's rock-collecting hobby to his desire for freedom only in that he pursues both consistently. When readers learn that he abandoned his rock-hammer in the wall near a sewer pipe, however, it suggests Andy has been using the rock-hammer to dig to freedom—making the connection between the symbol of his persistence (rocks, rock-collecting) and his desire for freedom literal and practical.

Much to Red's delight, a defeated Norton quits three months after Andy escapes, leaving Shawshank trudging "like an old con shuffling down to the infirmary for codeine pills." The Captain of the Guards takes over as warden. Red imagines Norton going regularly to church but wondering how Andy bested him. Red internally replies: "Some have got it, Sam. And some don't, and never will."

In a major role reversal, Andy is now free, while Norton is walking "like an old con" in pain. This reversal suggests that freedom relies not only on external circumstances, but in a person's internal sense of freedom—their recognition of their own agency and desire to exercise it. Red may be referring to this recognition and desire when he talks about the "it" that Andy has and Norton doesn't.

Red speculates about how, exactly, Andy went about escaping. Again he remembers Andy's old cellmate Normaden, who complained about the cell's draftiness. Red thinks having a cellmate must have slowed Andy's progress; otherwise, Andy might have escaped "before Nixon resigned." He guesses Andy began tunneling in 1949, after he asked for the Rita Hayworth **pin-up poster**—Andy's strange demeanor, which Red took for sexual "embarrassment," was actually nervous pleasure at the thought of escape.

U.S. president Richard Nixon served from 1969 to 1974; when Red suggests Andy could have escaped "before Nixon resigned" if not for Normaden, he's suggesting Andy could have escaped between one and six years earlier. Reflecting, Red realizes how he misinterpreted Andy due to stereotypical, gendered assumptions, mistaking Andy's excitement at the thought of freedom for sexual "embarrassment." Of course, Andy himself weaponized these stereotypes to hide his true goal; the pin-up posters thus symbolize both Andy's desire for freedom and his ability to conceal that desire when necessary, just as the posters hid the hole in his wall.

Curious about Andy's escape, Red writes to a University of Maine historian and learns Andy's cellblock was constructed as a WPA project from 1934 to 1937, when concrete was comparatively primitive. Red guesses Andy's interest in **rocks**—which suited his "patient, meticulous nature" and likely intensified in prison, to pass the years—led him to study the prison walls. Red imagines Andy etching words onto his wall, realizing it was "interestingly weak," and buying the pin-up poster to hide his explorations. When Red procured the rock-hammer for Andy, he'd supposed a man would need centuries to burrow through a wall with it—but Andy only needed to reach the sewer pipe, and it still took him 27 years, working only at night.

Red believes himself an "institutional man" unable to live in freedom; yet his intense interest in Andy's escape hints Andy has awakened Red's dormant desire to be free. WPA is an acronym for Works Progress Administration, a U.S. federal agency created during the Great Depression, which began in 1929 and continued throughout the 1930s; the novella is suggesting that a historical peculiarity, "interestingly weak" concrete used by the WPA, enabled Andy's escape. Once again, the novella emphasizes Andy's persistence, symbolized by rocks and concrete, both through his choice of a hobby requiring a "patient, meticulous nature" and through stating explicitly that he worked at night for 27 years for a chance at freedom.

Wondering how Andy disposed of the concrete he dug from the wall, Red recalls seeing Andy in the exercise yard with sand swirling around his feet. He speculates Andy filled his pant cuffs with crushed **concrete** and dumped them out "cupful by cupful." While various wardens thought Andy was helping them to protect his library, he was really doing it because he wanted to avoid a cellmate. Prior to 1950, when he started helping guards with their finances and tax-laundering for crooked wardens, he probably bribed a few guards not to search his cell too thoroughly.

The image of Andy disposing of concrete "cupful by cupful" Illustrates how slowly he worked and—once again—how persistent he was in his pursuit of freedom. Red's speculation that Andy likely bribed the guards, meanwhile, emphasizes yet again the corruption everywhere in Shawshank.

Red guesses that Andy discovered the shaft inside the prison wall in 1967, around the time he first mentioned Zihuatanejo to Red. This discovery would have made escape much more viable, but it would also have raised the stakes for Andy. Red imagines what "ghastly irony" would have occurred if Andy had actually gotten paroled—guards would have cleaned out Andy's cell and discovered the hole, and Andy would have been thrown right back in prison.

Andy continued digging despite the "ghastly irony" that would have occurred if he'd been paroled, which suggests he didn't believe he would be paroled in time to make any kind of life out of his remaining years—so he escaped rather than wait. This choice reveals Andy's desire to exercise agency. It also emphasizes, yet again, that prison frequently fails to parole 'rehabilitated' prisoners until they are so old or sick that they can no longer contribute to society as they are nominally supposed to do.

Pondering why Andy only escaped in 1975 if he found the shaft in 1967, Red guesses Andy proceeded carefully to avoid detection—but also, prison institutionalizes people until they "love" the restraints imposed on them. On Red's prison work detail, he was only allowed to use the bathroom at 25 minutes past the hour—and after a while, that was the only time he *wanted* to use the bathroom. Andy may have delayed escape due to "that institutional syndrome." Also, he was likely terrified of trying and failing to get free, whether because the pipe was blocked or because the key to the safe deposit box was no longer under the paperweight in Buxton—because a kid or a bird had taken it. Yet at last, Andy escaped.

Red's story about only needing to use the bathroom at certain times, as well as using the word "love" to describe prisoners' relationship to prison rules, illustrates how badly prison can damage people's instinct for freedom—how strong "that institutional syndrome" can be. Red has admitted a couple times that Andy is a larger-than-life legend, yet Red's speculation that Andy suffered from a little of that "syndrome" suggests that Red also sees Andy as a real human being, capable of weakness, and thus increases Red's credibility as a narrator of Andy's story.

Red doesn't know exactly what happened to Andy after his escape, but in 1975, he receives a blank postcard from McNary, Texas, a town on the border with Mexico. Red is convinced Andy passed through McNary into Mexico.

Andy's decision to communicate with Red after escaping, despite potential risks, shows the depth of their friendship—and may hint Andy is actively trying to encourage Red's own stifled desire for freedom.

Red says the postcard concludes his story—which he began writing when he received the postcard and is finishing in January 1976. Musing that "writing about yourself" brings up endless memories, he claims Andy's story is his own story, because Andy is "the part of [Red] they could never lock up." He notes some other prisoners remember Andy the way he does; they all feel glad Andy's free yet sad he's gone from their lives. Thinking his story's over, Red notes he's "glad" to have "told it" and—addressing Andy directly—asks Andy to "feel free" for him.

At the novella's beginning, Red claimed he was writing about Andy and speaking about himself only incidentally. Now he admits he's "writing about [him]self," which shows that writing Andy's story has helped Red understand his own thoughts and desires. Despite being a supposed "institutional man," Red too has some of the internal freedom Andy possesses in spades, "the part […] they could never lock up." Yet Red still doesn't seem to believe he can have external freedom directly; he casts Andy as a kind of mascot who can "feel free" on Red's behalf while Red remains incarcerated.

In 1977, Red—to his own surprise—resumes writing the story in a hotel in Portland after his parole at age 58. He considered destroying the manuscript before his release, because parolees are searched and the manuscript mentions Zihuatanejo, where he believes Andy to be hiding. Instead, he switched out the name Zihuatanejo for a coastal town in Peru and brought the manuscript out hidden in his rectum, the way Andy once smuggled money in.

Red chose to hide his manuscript of Andy's story in his rectum rather than destroy it. This is an extreme action, which suggests the story is very important and inspirational to Red. Red copied this smuggling method from Andy, showing that Red has learned some methods for exercising agency from retelling Andy's legend.

For two months after his release, Red works bagging groceries at a supermarket, disoriented by the noise and pace of life outside prison, unwillingly aroused by the presence of women, and wishing he didn't feel the urge to ask his supervisor's permission before using the bathroom. Red senses his "servile" demeanor revolts his young supervisor; Red wants to explain that prison turns a man into a "*dog*," but he knows his supervisor won't grasp what he means. Red feels tempted to commit some petty crime so he can go back to prison. But he remembers all the effort Andy expended to get free, and he thinks returning to prison "would be like spitting in the face of everything [Andy] had worked so hard to win back."

As a former prisoner in the free world, Red clearly feels a lot of self-loathing, calling himself "servile" and a "dog." Prison is still controlling him on some level, because it influences the narrative Red tells about himself. Yet Andy's legendary example—how he "worked so hard" to be free—inspires Red to persevere, illustrating that stories can influence reality by giving people models for the behaviors and ideals they want to imitate.

Instead, Red starts hitchhiking to Buxton, searching for a paperweight in a hayfield. On April 23rd, he finds the rock, picks it up, and discovers an envelope with his name written on it in Andy's handwriting. Red takes the envelope back to his room and reads it. In the letter, Andy invites Red to come help with his "project" and tells him: "Remember that hope is a good thing, Red, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies." Andy has also left Red $1000 in 50-dollar bills.

Andy is vague enough about his "project" that if someone other than Red discovered the letter, they wouldn't be able to track Andy down—yet Red knows Andy is referring to the hotel in Zihuatanejo. Andy's praise of hope as "the best of things" suggests that in order to freely choose the future you want, you have to first imagine a positive future for yourself—and imagining a positive future for yourself is essentially what hope is.

In the hotel in Portland—where Red is technically violating parole—he itemizes his belongings: the manuscript, some luggage, and all the money Andy sent minus the little Red spent buying writing paper and some cigarettes. Though Red deliberates for a moment about his course of action, he ultimately decides he has "two choices. Get busy living or get busy dying." He writes down his intention to pack his manuscript, check out of the hotel, go to a bar, take two shots (one for himself, one for Andy), and then buy bus tickets all the way to McNary, Texas. From McNary, he plans to enter Mexico. He feels "excitement only a free man can feel," hoping that Andy's in Zihuatanejo, Red can reach him, and they'll be reunited. He concludes: "I *hope*."

Until this point, Red has described himself as an "institutional man" who could never survive in the free world. Yet now he compares his half-life as a parolee to "get[ting] busy dying," whereas total freedom with Andy would be "living." To Red, freedom is life. By choosing freedom, Red turns himself into a "free man," someone who exercises agency to bring about the future he wants and thus someone capable of "hope." By having "institutional man" Red break parole to join Andy in total freedom, the novella suggests that institutions like prison can suppress the human instinct for freedom but ultimately never destroy it.

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