

THE CROSS OF SNOW

By Henry W. Longfellow

1. The phrase “martyrdom of fire” in line 6 might confuse readers who did not know that Longfellow’s wife had died in a fire. What is Longfellow suggesting about his wife’s character when he uses such a powerful word to describe her death?

2. The phrase “watches of the night” usually refers to the rounds made by a watchman as he guards a house or a neighborhood. What does Longfellow imply when he refers to his “watches of the night”?

3. Explain how the phrase “sun-defying” (line 10) suggests conditions of weather and geology that might actually produce a permanent cross of snow on the side of a mountain. How does the poet relate the idea of a “sun-defying” formation of snow to his own feelings?

4. Discuss and explain your thoughts on what Longfellow’s “cross of snow” may represent.