

Weekend

Fay Weldon

Pre-reading

1. The parents and their three children are preparing to drive from London to their cottage in the country for the weekend. Read this passage from near the beginning of the story and see what you can learn about the relationship between the parents – Martin and Martha. Notice how there is a deliberate confusion between Martin describing the car and Martha wondering if he is really talking about her.

Martin had a little sports car for London and work: it could nip in and out of the traffic nicely: Martha's was an old estate car, with room for the children, picnic baskets, bedding, food, games, plants, drink, portable television and all the things required by the middle classes for weekends in the country. It lumbered rather than zipped and made Martin angry. He seldom spoke a harsh word, but Martha, after the fashion of wives, could detect his mood from what he did not say rather than what he did, and from the tilt of his head, and the way his crinkly, merry eyes seemed crinklier and merrier still - and of course from the way he addressed Martha's car.

'Come along, you old banger you! Can't you do better than that? You're too old, that's your trouble. Stop complaining. Always complaining, it's only a hill. You're too wide about the hips. You'll never get through there.'

Martha worried about her age, her tendency to complain, and the width of her hips. She took the remarks personally. Was she right to do so? The children noticed nothing: it was just funny lively laughing Daddy being witty about Mummy's car. Mummy, done for drunken driving. Mummy, with the roots of melancholy somewhere deep beneath the bustling, busy, everyday self. Busy: ah so busy!

Martin would only laugh if she said anything about the way he spoke to her car and warn her against paranoia. 'Don't get like your mother, darling.' Martha's mother had, towards the end, thought that people were plotting against her. Martha's mother had led a secluded, suspicious life, and made Martha's childhood a chilly and a lonely time. Life now, by comparison, was wonderful for Martha. People, children, houses, conversations, food, drink, theatres - even, now, a career. Martin standing between her and the hostility of the world popular, easy, funny Martin, beckoning the rest of the world into earshot.

There seems to be a comparison between the cars and the personalities of the owners and the author uses the descriptions to examine what Martha thinks about herself. Using this information, match the adjectives you think are appropriate to Martin and Martha (you don't need to use all the adjectives)



- Clever*
- Complaining*
- Dull*
- Extrovert*
- Friendly*
- Funny*
- Interesting*
- Introvert*
- Lonely*
- Paranoid*
- Popular*
- Quick*
- Slow*
- Witty*
- Worried*



2. They are about to arrive at the cottage:

Nearly there, children. Nearly in paradise, nearly at the cottage. Have another biscuit.

Real roses round the door. Roses. Prune, weed, spray, feed, pick. Avoid thorns. One of Martin's few harsh words.

'Martha, you can't not want roses! What kind of person am I married to? An anti-rose personality?'



Green grass. Oh, God, grass. Grass must be mowed. Restful lawns, daisies bobbing, buttercups glowing. Roses and grass and books. Books.

'Please, Martin, do we have to have the two hundred books, mostly twenties' first-editions, bought at Christie's book sale on one of your afternoons off? Books need dusting.

Roars of laughter from Martin, Jasper, Jenny and Jolyon. Mummy says we shouldn't have the books: books need dusting!

Roses, green grass, books and peace.

Martha woke up with a start when they got to the cottage, and gave a little shriek which made them all laugh. Mummy's waking shriek, they called it.

Then there was the ear to unpack and the beds to make up; and the electricity to connect, and the supper to make, and the cobwebs to remove, while Martin made the fire. Then supper - pork chops in sweet and sour sauce ('Pork is such a *dull* meat if you don't cook it properly': Martin), green salad from the garden, or such green salad as the rabbits had left ('Martha, did you really net them properly? Be honest now!': Martin) and sauté potatoes. Mash is so stodgy and ordinary, and instant mash unthinkable. The children studied the night sky with the aid of their star map. Wonderful, rewarding children!

Then clear up the supper; set the dough to prove for the bread; Martin already in bed, exhausted by the drive and lighting the fire.

What evidence is there for Martin wanting an idyllic kind of home?

Why does Martha have a problem with some of this? What do the rest of the family think about Martha for objecting?

3. Look at the following list of jobs that might have to be done around the house. Which jobs do you think should be done by men and which by women, and which should be done by both, or either?

Job	Men	Women	Both /Either	Neither
Washing up				
Washing clothes				
Making beds				
Checking car tyres, fluid levels etc				
Cleaning bathroom				
Vacuuming and sweeping				
Cleaning windows				
Cleaning out the drains				
Cooking				
Ironing				
Gardening				
Dusting				
Laying the table				
Repairing holes in the roof				
Preparing vegetables				
Cleaning the car				
Painting the wall				
Fixing a broken cupboard etc				
Changing a light bulb				
Taking out the rubbish				
Shopping for food				
Changing an electric plug				

Discussion

The running of the house was Martha's concern. If Martha chose to go out to work - as was her perfect right, Martin allowed, even though it wasn't the best thing for the children, but that must be Martha's moral responsibility - Martha must surely pay her domestic stand-in. An evident truth, heard loud and clear and frequent in Martin's mouth and Martha's heart.

The implication is that women shouldn't go out to work if they have children. Do you agree? Why? Why not?

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Pre-Reading Activities

Prediction

Now you know a little bit about Martin and Martha. You are going to predict what happens to them when they go away for a weekend to their cottage in the country. Remember they have three children, all of school age (their names all begin with 'J'). Now answer the following questions, even though you haven't yet read the story. (*Hint: read all the questions before you start to answer*)

1. How did they travel to their country cottage? (*Train; Car; Bus; Donkey; Helicopter?*)
2. What did they carry with them apart from themselves?
3. Describe the cottage.
4. Who turned up unexpectedly for the weekend?
5. Why did this cause a problem for Martha?
6. Why did this not cause a problem for Martin?
7. What happened on Saturday?
8. Who else turned up for Sunday lunch?
9. How did Martin and Martha each feel at the end of the weekend?

Make notes, but don't write the story. Instead tell it to others in your class.

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While Reading

1. Read from line 001 – 438

'Let me make lunch,' Katie said to Martha. 'You do so much, poor thing!'

Will Martha let Katie make lunch? If Katie makes lunch, what kind of job will she make of it? Support your answers with reference to the story so far.

What do you think is Martha's unspoken opinion of Katie? What is Martin's?

2. Read from line 439 – 534

It didn't really make any difference: it was their joint money, after all. Amazing how Martha's wages were creeping up almost to the level of Martin's. One day they would overtake. Then what? . . .

Work, honestly, was a piece of cake.

What do you think will happen if/when Martha's wages overtake Martin's? Will it change the balance of power between them? Do you think that Martin thinks that 'work is a piece of cake'?

3. Read from line 535 – end

'Oh don't *do* that,' said Katie, 'do just sit *down*, Martha, you make us all feel bad,' and Martin glared at Martha who sat down and Jenny called out for her and Martha went upstairs and Jenny had started her first period Martha cried and cried and knew she must stop because this must be a joyous occasion for Jenny or her whole future would be blighted, but for once, Martha couldn't.

Her daughter Jenny: wife, mother, friend.

Why couldn't Martha stop crying? Make a connection between Martha, her mother and her daughter. Who is 'wife, mother, friend' referring to?

Imagine the conversation in the car as they drive back to London that weekend. What will Martin say about the weekend? What will Martha reply?

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After Reading

Are You Sexist?

Are men and women equal in all things? Are men better at some things and women at others? Men are different from women but does that mean they are better? Take this quiz to see if you have sexist tendencies.

1. Your connection to the internet is hopeless! You call the broad-band internet service providers to send a technician. The technician who arrives turns out to be female. You:

- tell her the problem is solved, then when she's gone call for another technician.
- think she'll need help but you'll give her a chance.
- invite her in and show her the problem.

2. A female friend of yours says she hates it when men open doors for her. You think she:

- should let men open doors for her and thank them for their politeness.
- is dead right
- is making too much over nothing

3. You see a lady in a fur coat in an expensive car. Your first thought is:

- she must have a rich husband or boyfriend
- she must have a highly paid job
- some innocent animal died for her coat.

4. You go to visit a female friend. At her house, her brother is busy sewing a button onto his shirt. You:

- tell your friend she should be sewing the button for him.
- Laugh and ask where he learned how to sew.
- Ask him if he could mend a tear in your trousers.

5. You are in the car. The car in front of you goes through a red light. You say:

- "That driver must be colour blind"
- "I'll bet that was a woman driver."
- "That driver is very irresponsible."

6. There is a girl in your class who has sexy pictures of male actors and pop stars all over her notebooks. You think:

- it is dreadful the way that she is treating men.
- she has a terrible taste in men.
- It's one thing for men to have pin-ups of women but it's in bad taste for her to have pictures of men.

7. You are eating in an expensive restaurant. The food is excellent and you would like to tell the cook. You go into the kitchen and see a lady in a uniform. You ask her:

- "Could you tell me where the cook is?"
- "Are you the cook?"
- "Do you work here?"

8. You are working in a restaurant. A man and woman have just finished their meal and asked for the bill. You:

- present the bill to the man.
- present the bill to the woman.
- place the bill on the table between the two of them.

9. You are about to buy a book about European philosophy when you turn the book over and see the author's photo. She has long wavy blonde hair, and is dressed in a tight blouse and a mini skirt and has a lot of make up. You:

- decide you want a book that looks more academic
- look inside for a details about the author's credentials.
- buy the book.

10. You have a little brother. For his birthday he says he wants a girl doll more than anything. You:

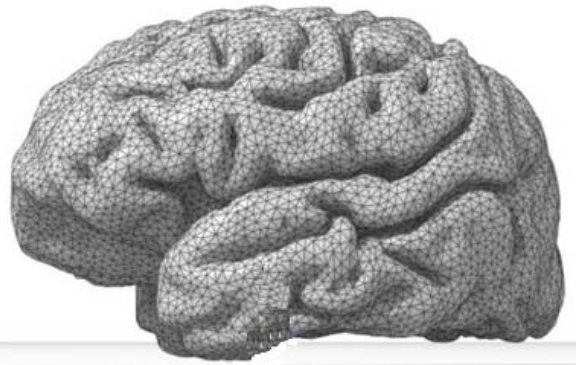
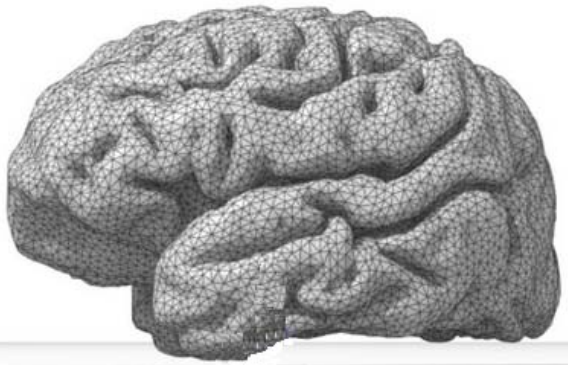
- get him the exact doll he wants.
- tell him boys don't play with dolls and get him a football instead.
- get him a boy doll.

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After Reading
Sexism: It's all in the mind!

You should allocate at least five 'interests or obsessions' to the two 'brains' below. Decide which part of which brain (male or female) you think you would find each of these 'interests', and show by drawing an arrow. (Add others if you think they are missing). Decide how much of the brain is occupied by each 'interest' and divide the brain up accordingly.



- cars
- competition
- computers
- dancing
- ego
- fashion
- football
- friends
- gossiping
- risk taking
- road routes
- sex
- shopping



Complete the following sentences in a way that you believe to be true.

1. In my experience men are much than women.
2. Women, on the other hand, tend to be morethan men.
3. Men are often obsessed with
4. Women are inclined to be more aware of than men.
5. Unlike men, women
6. The most irritating thing about men/women* is that they
7. Compared with men/women*, women/men
8. One thing that men and women both have in common is

**if you're male, delete 'men'; if you're female, delete 'women'.*

Now answer the following questions:

'Why do women live longer than men?'

'Why are many men physically stronger than women?'

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Consolidation

The questions and exercises that follow will help you to consolidate the characters and events in 'Weekend'. You should try to do them shortly after reading the complete story.

1. The place

What is the best description of the cottage?

1. It is
a) luxurious b) comfortable c) basic
2. It is situated
a) in London b) near London c) some distance from London
3. It has
a) everything that is needed b) to be restocked every weekend c) only essential items
4. It is
a) old b) picturesque c) functional
5. It has at least
a) 2 bedrooms b) 3 bedrooms c) 4 bedrooms
6. It has
a) a big garden b) a small terrace c) a field next door
7. It has
a) a TV b) a computer c) many books



2. The Characters

1. Martin.



Which of these descriptions of Martin do you agree with? (You can choose more than one). Write one more description of your own.

1. He is a kind and loving father and husband who treats his wife with thoughtful respect.
2. He is self-assured and confident but also self-centred and thoughtless about other people's feelings.
3. His friends find him witty and amusing, and he is often the centre of a party.
4. He constantly looks for ways to help around the house.
5. He likes to criticise the way that Martha does things and then show her how it should be done properly.
6. He frequently makes suggestions but doesn't think about the consequences.

2. Martha

Which of the following statements about Martha are true and which are false?

1. She is the dominant figure in the family
2. She is central to the well-running of the cottage
3. She is the principal decision maker in the family.
4. She is the principal problem solver in the family.
5. She is both amusing and witty.



3. The Children. Choose the best answers a, b, c or d

1. There are a) 2 b) 3 c) 4 d) 5 children.
2. What are the children's names?
3. The children are a) babies b) all under 10 years old c) of school age d) aged between 10 and 13
4. Which adjective best describes the way that they are brought up: a) radical b) overprotected c) traditional d) controlled?
5. How do the children view their mother: as a) a tower of strength b) a joke c) an irritation d) reliable

4. The Friends

Which sentence best describes the relationship between Martin and Martha and their friends?

1. Martin and Martha both liked Colin and Katie equally, though Martha would rather Janet had stayed with Colin.
2. Martin is good friends with Colin but, like Martha, wishes he had stayed with Janet who they think of as more reliable than Katie.



3. Martha gets on well with Katie even though she knows Martin is attracted to her, and tolerates Colin because he is an old friend of Martin's.
4. Martin is enlivened by the company of both Colin and Katie while Martha tolerates them, and she regrets Janet's absence.
5. Martha is attracted to Colin and is jealous of Katie who she also resents because she replaced her old friend Janet.