

CHRISTMAS
with
HENRY
Bells, Poems & Hope

An Illustrated Reader Companion

Based on the novel by
MICHAEL D. YOUNG

WELCOME to the COMPANION

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

1 ABOUT THE STORY

Charley sits beside his gravely ill wife during Christmas week and meets a mysterious old man named Henry whose stories help him endure grief and uncertainty.

*Sometimes a story
becomes a light.*

2 WHAT THIS COMPANION INCLUDES

Story reflections, literary context, thematic notes, and gentle reader prompts to deepen understanding and inspire meaningful discussion.

3 THEMES TO WATCH

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| * Love | * Difficult Choices |
| * Loss | * Faith |
| * Perseverance | * Christmas Hope |
| * Meaningful Work | * Legacy |

*May these pages walk beside you—until the story
lingers long after the last page is turned.*



The STORY at a GLANCE

Christmas with Henry unfolds across seven parts during a season marked by illness, sorrow, and unexpected companionship. Through bells that call, poems that console, and acts of quiet hope, Henry's journey leads from despair toward faith, purpose, and the promise of new beginnings.

THE SEVEN-PART JOURNEY

- 1  PART I
Bells and first meeting
- 2  PART II
Young Henry and Mary
- 3  PART III
Grief and the barren tree
- 4  PART IV
Meaningful work and the evergreen
- 5  PART V
The road of greatest hope
- 6  PART VI
Christmas bells through despair
- 7  PART VII
Legacy, revelation, and footprints in the snow

READING LENS

As you read, look for these recurring signs of hope and meaning.

 Notice recurring bells.

 Notice recurring poems.

 Notice recurring trees.

 Notice recurring footsteps.

 Notice recurring gifts.



Part I — Bells in the Dark

Love, fear, and the first conversation.



What Happens

Charley waits beside Megan in the hospital, hears church bells across the frosty park, steps outside, and meets Henry on a bench. Henry listens and begins to share his life.



Why It Matters

The bells become a bridge between suffering and comfort; the story begins with companionship rather than solutions.



Questions to Consider

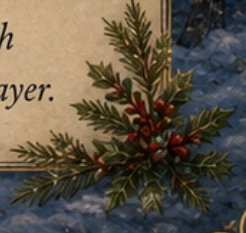
- ✦ Why do small comforts matter during crisis?
- ✦ What does Henry offer before he offers advice?
- ✦ Why do bells matter in this novel?

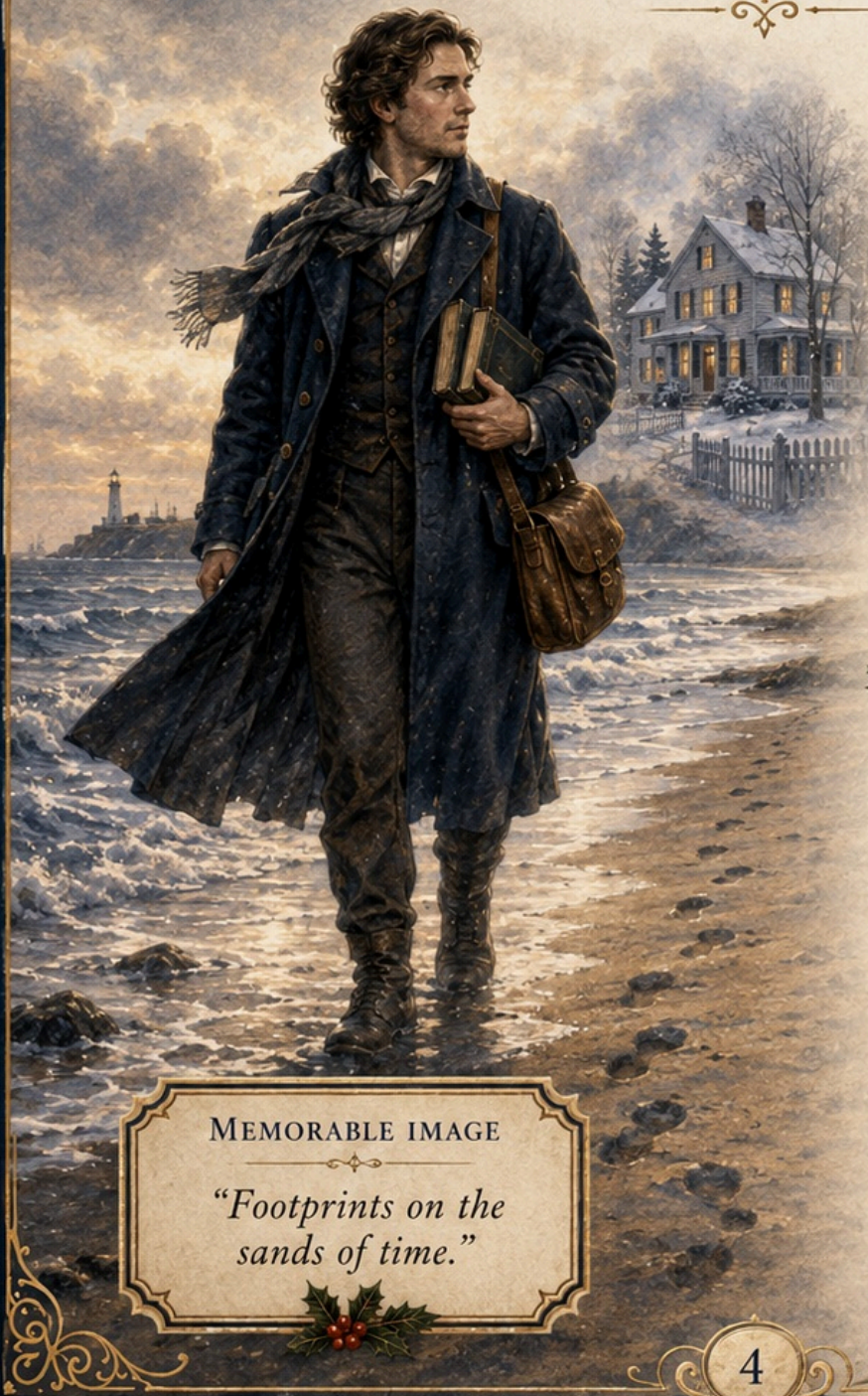


*“Do you have
someone you love
in there right now?”*



*A stranger on a bench
becomes an answer to prayer.*





PART II — FOOTSTEPS TOWARD LOVE

Perseverance, vocation, and Mary.

1. HENRY'S STORY

Henry is a gifted student of languages, curious and restless, with a heart turned toward the world. He travels in Europe, seeking knowledge and purpose, yet often feels uncertain about his path. In time, he comes to a quiet conviction: he wants to leave footsteps for others to follow—words that will encourage and uplift. He returns home with renewed purpose, and in the shelter of home and faith, his deep affection for Mary ripens into enduring love.

2. LONGFELLOW CONNECTION

This story draws on the real Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's early life—his love of languages, his travels and questions, and the famous image he later shared of "footprints on the sands of time."

3. THEME FOCUS

- * **Perseverance:** Henry keeps learning and seeking, even when the path is not yet clear.
- * **Calling:** He discovers that his gifts can serve others and leave a legacy of hope.
- * **Chosen Love:** In faith and patience, Henry chooses a love that grows stronger through time.

MEMORABLE IMAGE

*"Footprints on the
sands of time."*



PART III— WINTER TREES AND GRIEF

Loss, healing, and the barren tree.

1. WHAT HAPPENS

Henry tells Charley of losing Mary and their child, and of the devastating emptiness that follows.

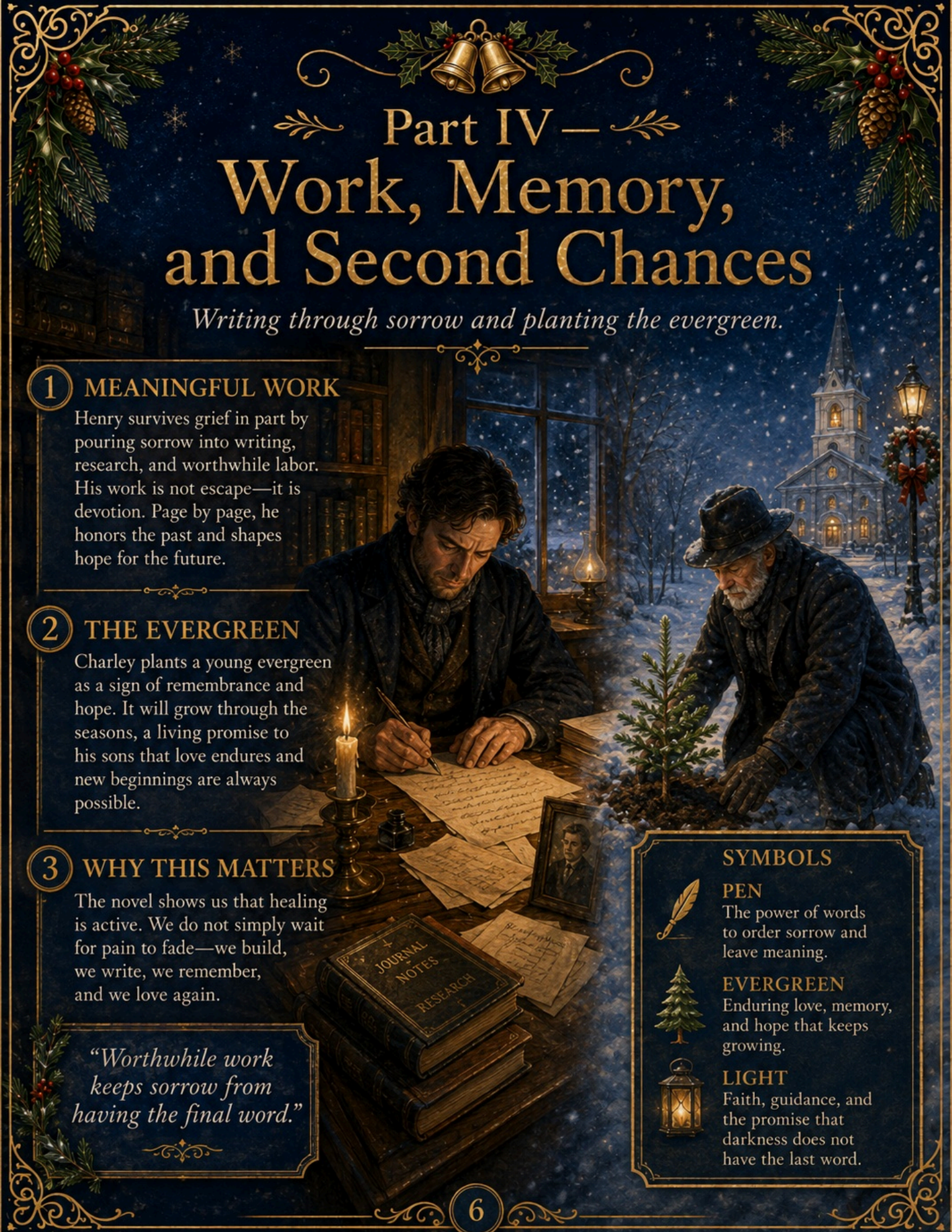
2. A LIVING METAPHOR

Henry compares grief to a winter tree: stripped, quiet, yet still alive and capable of spring.

3. READER REFLECTION

- ∞ What in this scene feels most true to grief?
- ∞ Why is a tree a fitting symbol?
- ∞ What does healing look like here?

*“It is still a tree, alive,
with the potential to spring forth again.”*



Part IV —

Work, Memory, and Second Chances

Writing through sorrow and planting the evergreen.

1 MEANINGFUL WORK

Henry survives grief in part by pouring sorrow into writing, research, and worthwhile labor. His work is not escape—it is devotion. Page by page, he honors the past and shapes hope for the future.

2 THE EVERGREEN

Charley plants a young evergreen as a sign of remembrance and hope. It will grow through the seasons, a living promise to his sons that love endures and new beginnings are always possible.

3 WHY THIS MATTERS

The novel shows us that healing is active. We do not simply wait for pain to fade—we build, we write, we remember, and we love again.

“Worthwhile work keeps sorrow from having the final word.”

SYMBOLS



PEN

The power of words to order sorrow and leave meaning.



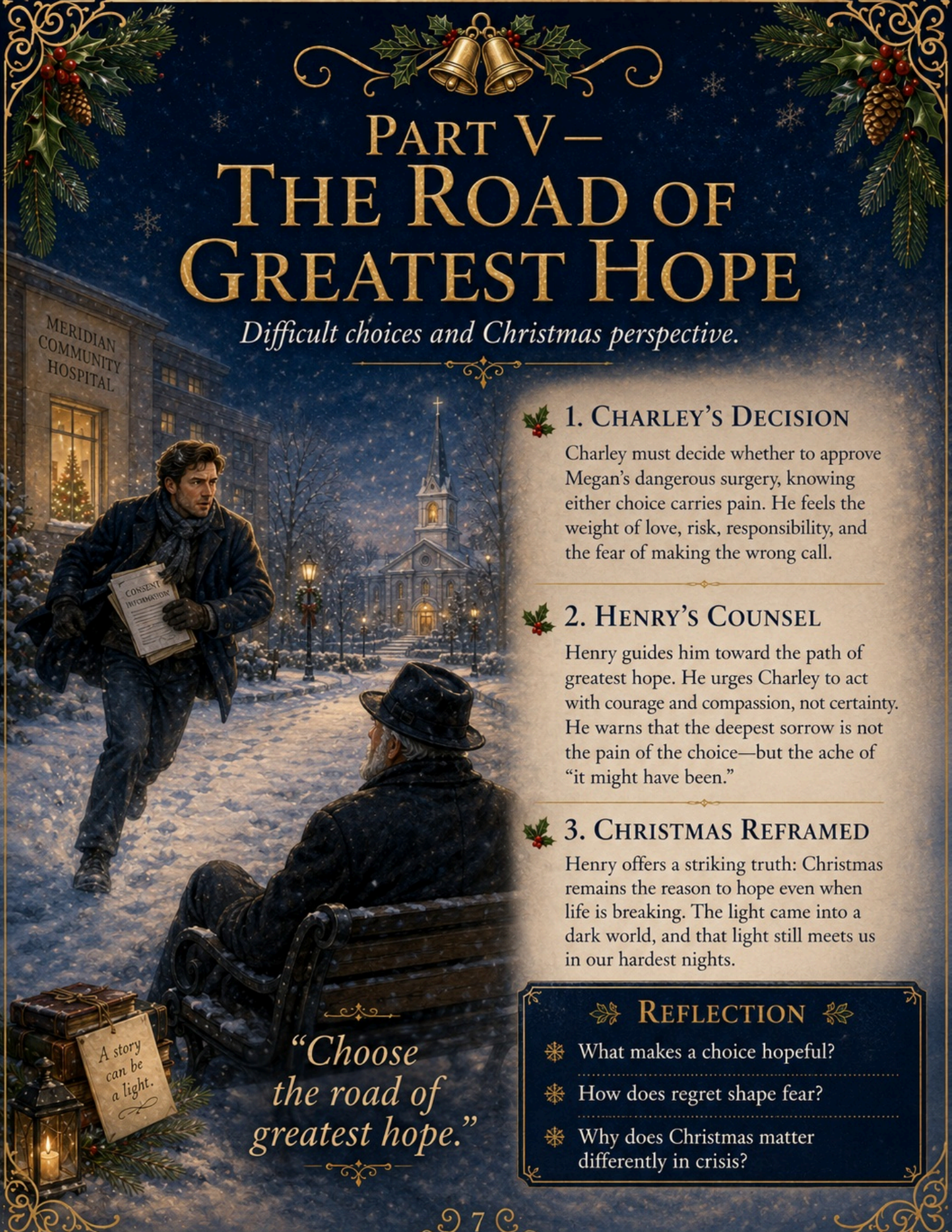
EVERGREEN

Enduring love, memory, and hope that keeps growing.



LIGHT

Faith, guidance, and the promise that darkness does not have the last word.



PART V— THE ROAD OF GREATEST HOPE

Difficult choices and Christmas perspective.

1. CHARLEY'S DECISION

Charley must decide whether to approve Megan's dangerous surgery, knowing either choice carries pain. He feels the weight of love, risk, responsibility, and the fear of making the wrong call.

2. HENRY'S COUNSEL

Henry guides him toward the path of greatest hope. He urges Charley to act with courage and compassion, not certainty. He warns that the deepest sorrow is not the pain of the choice—but the ache of "it might have been."

3. CHRISTMAS REFRAMED

Henry offers a striking truth: Christmas remains the reason to hope even when life is breaking. The light came into a dark world, and that light still meets us in our hardest nights.

REFLECTION

- ❖ What makes a choice hopeful?
- ❖ How does regret shape fear?
- ❖ Why does Christmas matter differently in crisis?

*"Choose
the road of
greatest hope."*

*A story
can be
a light.*

BELLS ON CHRISTMAS MORNING

Faith under pressure and the birth of a carol.

1 LONGFELLOW IN CRISIS

Henry's world had been shattered. His son Charles was wounded in the Civil War, far from home and fighting for his life. Henry's heart was heavy with fear and despair. On Christmas Eve, burdened by uncertainty, he fell to his knees in prayer, pleading for mercy, strength, and the healing of his son.

2 THE BELLS

On Christmas morning, the joyful pealing of church bells rang over the still, snow-covered town. Their sound broke through the darkness of his soul and awakened hope. In that moment came the thought that would shape a hymn: *"God is not dead, nor does He sleep."* From that morning was born the beloved carol, *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*.

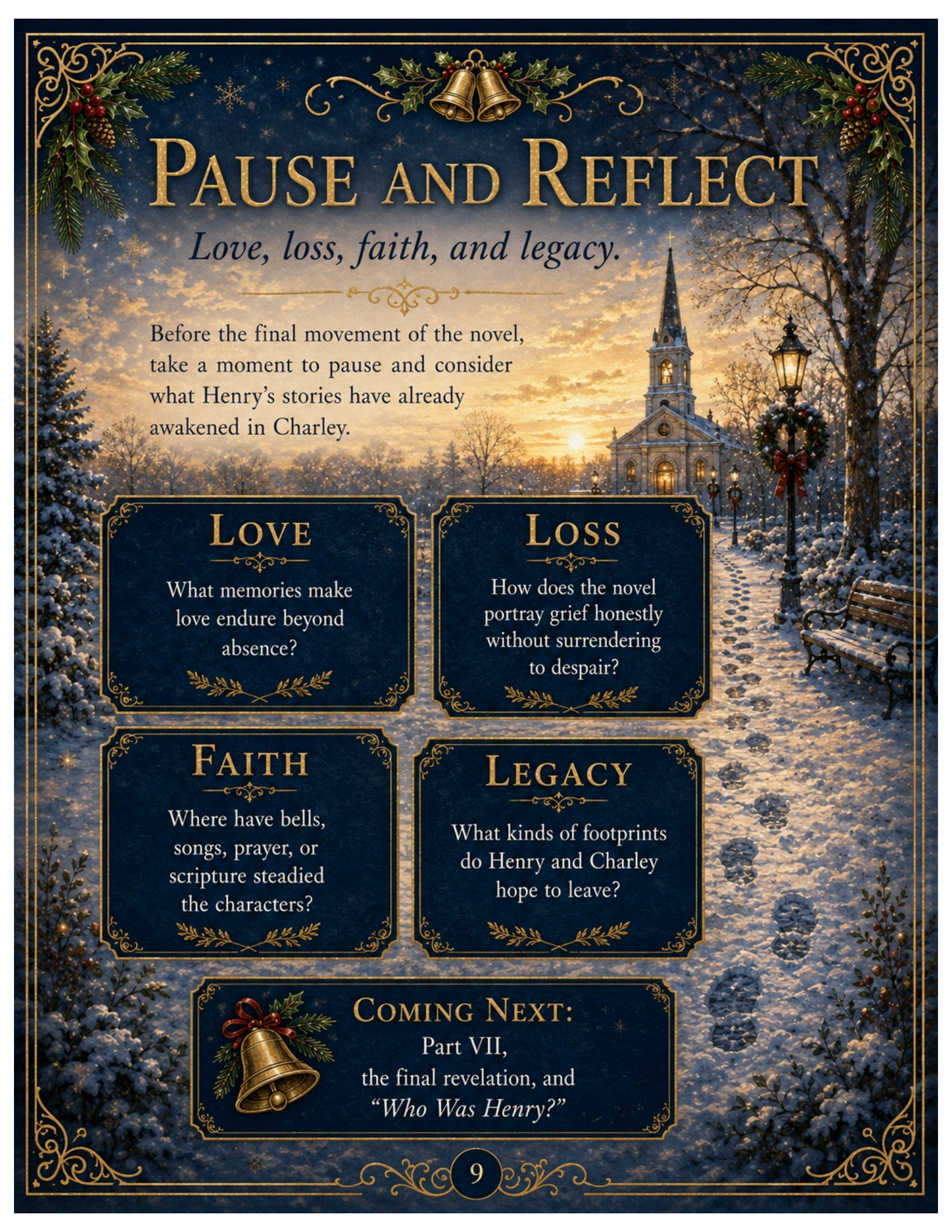
3 CHARLEY'S NIGHT

As his father heard bells and hope, Charley kept vigil in a hospital waiting room while Megan underwent surgery. He, too, prayed—and waited. When the news came, it was the worst a heart can hear. Joy and sorrow, hope and grief—woven together on Christmas Day.



LITERARY ECHO

The bells answer despair.



PAUSE AND REFLECT

Love, loss, faith, and legacy.

Before the final movement of the novel, take a moment to pause and consider what Henry's stories have already awakened in Charley.

LOVE

What memories make love endure beyond absence?

LOSS

How does the novel portray grief honestly without surrendering to despair?

FAITH

Where have bells, songs, prayer, or scripture steadied the characters?

LEGACY

What kinds of footprints do Henry and Charley hope to leave?



COMING NEXT:

Part VII,
the final revelation, and
"Who Was Henry?"