

# The Stoat



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN MCGAHERN

John McGahern was an acclaimed Irish novelist and short story writer born in Knockanroe in 1934. His mother raised him on a small farm while also working as a primary school teacher. His mother died from cancer when he was 10, forcing him and his six younger siblings to leave their farm life behind and move to live with their father, a sergeant of the national police force called the Irish Republican Army (IRA). McGahern won scholarships that allowed him to both attend both secondary school and pursue higher education. After studying at St. Patrick's College of Education, he became as a primary school teacher. McGahern was first published in 1961 when a London-based magazine published an excerpt of his unfinished first novel. The publication of his second novel, *The Dark*, sparked controversy regarding what the Irish Censorship Board deemed to be inappropriate content, causing McGahern to lose his job as a teacher. He moved to England, taking on a wide variety of jobs, before moving back to Ireland to once again live and work on a small farm. He died of cancer in 2006.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although "The Stoat" doesn't directly mention any historical events, it takes place in in 1970s Ireland during "The Troubles." The Troubles, which lasted from about 1968 to 1998, were a conflict in mostly Northern Ireland between the unionists (loyalists) who wanted Northern Ireland to remain a part of the UK and the nationalists (republicans) who wanted Northern Ireland to become a part of the Republic of Ireland. While the unionists were predominantly Protestant and the nationalists predominantly Roman Catholic, the focus of this conflict was not religious. Fighting occurred primarily between the unionist paramilitary forces and the nationalist Irish Republican Army (IRA), leading to bombings, shootings, imprisonment without trial, and other aspects of civil war. At least 3,600 people were killed and over 30,000 injured. The conflict was finally resolved by a power-sharing agreement between the Irish and British governments. Strandhill, where the story takes place, is relatively close to the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

McGahern's second novel, *The Dark*, is similar to "The Stoat" in that it focuses on a main character who is aiming to succeed academically while being faced with a strained relationship with his father. McGahern's work went on to influence the next generation of Irish writers, including Colm Tóibín, whose novels

*The Heather Blazing* and *The Blackwater Lightship* mix autobiography and fiction in a manner similar to McGahern was known to do. Tóibín draws on his birthplace and the death of his father in his writing, whereas McGahern drew from his relationship with his father and his relocation as a child. "The Stoat" also relates to Julio Cortázar's "Axolotl" in its use of animal characters that initially appear unrelated to the human characters and narrative but eventually come to be seen as an embodiment of human characters' behavior and emotions. This causes a shift in perspective, as the reader is prompted to look back at the passage about the animal through a human lens.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Stoat
- **Where Written:** Ireland
- **When Published:** 1978
- **Literary Period:** Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Short Story
- **Setting:** Strandhill, Ireland
- **Climax:** The narrator realizes that his father is like the rabbit.
- **Antagonist:** The Narrator's Father
- **Point of View:** First Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Art Imitates Life.** McGahern's writing is often partially autobiographical, drawing from his own personal experiences for inspiration. For example, in "The Stoat," the relationship between the narrator and his father is strained in a similar way to the relationship between McGahern and his father.

**Revisions.** While "The Stoat" was originally published in a 1978 collection of McGahern's short stories, it reappeared with substantial revisions in a 1992 collection. Furthermore, it was then completely excluded from a 2006 collection assembled right before McGahern's death, reflecting what McGahern himself expressed as his inability to find satisfaction in the story.



## PLOT SUMMARY

While golfing, the narrator comes across a **rabbit** that a **stoat** has fatally wounded. The narrator imagines how the rabbit must have desperately fled from the stoat before finally giving up and awaiting its doom. He kills the rabbit to put it out of its misery, before finishing up his game and heading home to the cottage his father rents every August in Strandhill. The narrator

takes the dead rabbit with him, so the stoat follows him along the way.

When the narrator gets back to the cottage, his father is looking for people he knows in the death notices in the newspaper, something he does frequently. His father asked him to come to Strandhill with him and his girlfriend, Miss McCabe, to make their vacation together seem more proper as well as to seek the narrator's approval of her. Miss McCabe and his father plan to get engaged if the vacation goes well. The narrator finds his supervision of his father and Miss McCabe's courtship odd, but he agreed, nevertheless. He was originally planning to spend the summer in Dublin with his uncle, who is a surgeon, doing postgraduate work.

All of this started because last summer, his father decided he wanted to remarry—the narrator's mother having died some time ago—and posted an advertisement in the newspaper to find a new wife. He asked the narrator if he minded before he did this, and the narrator said he didn't. The ad received many replies, and the narrator's father met all of the women in different hotel lounges, finding them overall very disappointing except for one woman he deemed to be a decent person: Miss McCabe. When the narrator met Miss McCabe the first time, he found her nervous and frail, but he told his father that he thought she was nice.

When the narrator last visited his uncle, he'd laughed at the narrator's father's method of finding a wife. His uncle, whom the narrator both admires and finds intimidating, had suggested that the narrator's father bored the narrator's mother to death, but the narrator defended his father. His uncle suggested that at least the narrator's father would leave the narrator alone if he got remarried, but the narrator replied that he was used to his father.

Thus far, the vacation has gone on for a week without a hitch. The narrator and his father have had several casual outings with Miss McCabe, who is staying in a nearby hotel, but tonight she'll visit the cottage for the first time. The narrator's father doesn't know how to cook, so the narrator makes dinner. Miss McCabe dresses up and hangs onto every word the narrator's father says, but she eats and drinks very little. Despite her enthusiasm for his admiration of the sea, the narrator's father finds her comments concerning and once again asks the narrator what he thinks of her after she leaves. The narrator again tells him that he approves of Miss McCabe.

That night, Miss McCabe has a minor heart attack, causing the narrator's father to decide she is not the one for him. He decides to leave Strandhill before having to interact with her again. The narrator realizes his father is like the rabbit, running from something he cannot escape. He is ashamed of his father, and as he watches him drive away, he once again images the rabbit's flight and ultimate demise.



## CHARACTERS

**The Narrator** – The narrator is a medical student who is spending August in Strandhill with his father and Miss McCabe, his father's girlfriend. The narrator claims that he's not upset about his father moving on from his deceased mother and finds it silly that his father has him acting as a chaperone to his courtship with Miss McCabe. The narrator was both amused and horrified by his father's method of looking for a wife by placing an ad in the newspaper, though he didn't openly express this. Indeed, throughout the story, the narrator tells his father what he wants to hear rather than giving his honest opinion. The father and son struggle to genuinely connect, and as a result, the narrator sees his uncle as a sort of stand-in father figure whom he can confide in. The narrator clearly admires his uncle, who is a surgeon, but also finds him intimidating. However, the narrator is defensive of his father when his uncle criticizes him, suggesting that he cares for his father despite their strained relationship and perhaps wants to be closer to him. Nevertheless, when Miss McCabe has a health scare and his father decides to sneak away and leave her and the narrator behind, the narrator is ashamed of him and comes to the conclusion that his father is like the **rabbit** he founded while playing golf. Attracted by its cries, the narrator discovered the rabbit fatally wounded by a **stoat**. After imagining the rabbit's journey to this point, the narrator killed the rabbit out of mercy, and he imagines his father on the same journey of fleeing from the inevitable (death).

**The Narrator's Father** – The narrator's father is a schoolteacher who rents the same cottage in Strandhill every August. He asked the narrator to accompany him and his girlfriend, Miss McCabe, to Strandhill because this makes their courtship seem more proper—and because the next summer the narrator will be a doctor and too busy for the trip. The narrator's father has a habit of reading death notices in the newspaper to see if anyone he knows has died, always reading them twice in case he missed someone the first time. It's implied that this is because his first wife, the narrator's mother, is dead, and he has subsequently become fixated on and afraid of death. He has decided he wants to remarry, though, and after receiving the narrator's permission, he posts a personal ad in the newspaper. He gets a lot of replies and goes on to meet many of these women in hotel lounges. He is greatly disappointed by the women he meets in all aspects, but he finds one woman he considers to be at least a decent person: Miss McCabe. However, when Miss McCabe has a mild heart attack, he decides she is not "rooted enough," though it actually seems that he's afraid she'll die. Despite the narrator's approval of Miss McCabe and their previous plans to be engaged at the end of this trip, his father chooses to flee, complaining that Miss McCabe only thinks of the future. So, he packs quickly, and after instructing the narrator on what to do if he sees Miss

McCabe, he drives home. The narrator realizes that his father is like the **rabbit** he found who tried to flee from the **stoat**, trying in vain to avoid the inevitable.

**Miss McCabe** – Miss McCabe is the narrator’s father’s girlfriend and is a teacher like him. He found her by posting a personal ad in the newspaper; she is the only woman whom he met through this method whom he found to be a decent person. They have been together for many months when they go to Strandhill for the month of August together, and they’re planning to get engaged if the trip goes well. The narrator describes Miss McCabe as a small, frail, and generally nervous woman who seems like a young girl in that she loves being in love. Despite this, he expresses his approval of her to his father. During her first visit to the narrator and his father’s cottage, she praises the food and wine but hardly consumes any. She is completely absorbed in what the narrator’s father says, but the narrator’s father seems concerned that she’s only trying to appease him. After this dinner, she has a mild heart attack at the hotel. After getting checked out by a doctor, she wants to see the narrator’s father, still anticipating their engagement and looking forward to the future. But the narrator’s father, seemingly afraid of illness and death after losing his first wife, abandons Miss McCabe in Strandhill and returns home.

**The Narrator’s Uncle** – The narrator’s uncle is a surgeon who lives in Dublin. He is confident, distinguished, and thus intimidating to the narrator. As well as doing postgraduate work for him, the narrator spends Easter with him and tells him about his father’s method of finding a new wife by putting a personal ad in the newspaper. Upon hearing that he wants to remarry, the narrator’s uncle remarks that one would think boring the narrator’s mother to death was enough, implying a dislike of the narrator’s father and his treatment of the narrator’s mother. He finds the narrator’s father’s method of using the newspaper hilarious and notes that at least the narrator’s father remarrying would mean that he would leave the narrator alone.

**The Narrator’s Mother** – The narrator’s mother is deceased and assumably has been for some time, as the narrator is unsentimental about her death and doesn’t object to his father wanting to remarry. The narrator’s uncle remarks that the narrator’s father bored the narrator’s mother to death, suggesting that their relationship didn’t fulfill her.



## FEAR, FLIGHT, AND FUTILITY

The story opens with the narrator discovering a terrified **rabbit** that has been mortally wounded by a **stoat** (a weasel-like creature). He imagines that the rabbit ran from the stoat all night and then finally gave up, sitting down to allow the predator to kill it. The rabbit’s failed escape suggests the futility of running from what is frightening and implies that to flee is only to prolong one’s fear and suffering. This mirrors the retreat of the narrator’s father at the end of the story, only unlike the rabbit who fears its own demise, the narrator’s father fears losing other people.

When his girlfriend, Miss McCabe, has a mild heart attack, the narrator’s father becomes convinced that he cannot marry her, specifically because she is not “rooted enough” and does not have “her feet around the ground.” Initially, these seem to be concerns about her personality. However, his certainty that she lacks these traits arises specifically in the context of her medical emergency, making these concerns seem more about her literal rootedness on Earth, or how long she might remain alive. Thus, this health scare—which likely reminds the narrator’s father of his late wife’s death—sends him running for the hills. Choosing to flee and leave Miss McCabe behind, the narrator’s father’s flight is just like the rabbit’s, in that it will not ease his fear. He cannot have relationships without risking loss, and no matter how much he fights it, death inevitably arrives for everyone. This is emphasized in the final paragraph, which repeats back to the reader the third paragraph of the story, describing the rabbit’s flight and demise. This goes to show that running truly gets the rabbit nowhere: it is trapped in an inescapable cycle, and the rabbit’s fear will always come true in the end. It is the same cycle the narrator’s father is trapped in: fear, flight, failure, repeat. And because the narrator’s father rents the same cabin every August, one could imagine that every summer from here on out might repeat this sequence of events, and that just like the rabbit, his flight will never save him from what he fears.



## RELATIONSHIPS AND LONELINESS

The narrator of “The Stoat” is notably distant from his family members. He and his father seem to want a close relationship: his father seeks his son’s approval and asks him for advice, and although the narrator seems annoyed by his father, he’s deeply hurt when his father eventually abandons him at their vacation home. The father and son can’t close the emotional distance between them, and as a result, the narrator relies on his uncle to be a kind of surrogate father figure whom he can confide in. In addition, the narrator isn’t particularly sentimental about his late mother, assuring his father that he doesn’t care if his father essentially replaces her by marrying his new girlfriend, Miss McCabe. Together, the narrator’s hollow relationships suggest that having a family doesn’t guarantee that a person will feel



## THEMES

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supported and loved—even among relatives, it’s easy to still be lonely or to fail to connect at all.

Furthermore, the narrator’s father’s dating life implies that this failure to connect isn’t limited to the narrator’s family. He receives an overwhelming number of responses to his personal ad in the newspaper, and the narrator marvels at all of the “unfulfilled longing,” suggesting that the world is full of lonely people looking to connect with someone. This reality is also evident in Miss McCabe’s desperation to impress the narrator and his father, and her and the father’s willingness to initially overlook each other’s flaws to continue their relationship. When Miss McCabe has a minor heart attack, and the narrator’s father flees—seemingly because he’s afraid of losing her like he lost his wife—the narrator is ashamed, suggesting that it’s immoral (but nonetheless common) for people to abandon one another like this. The beginning of the story, when the narrator witnesses a **stoat** catching and killing a **rabbit** that’s tried to flee, can thus be read as an allegory for human relationships. People obsessively seek and flee one another, and the moments in which they do connect are characterized by suffering rather than communion.



### COMMUNICATION AND DISHONESTY

In “The Stoat,” the dialogue between the narrator and his father consists almost entirely of his father asking for his approval. However, because of the emotional distance between them, the narrator chooses to say what his father *wants* to hear rather than what he necessarily thinks. In this way, the narrator’s seeming approval of his father’s choices are actually lies by omission. For example, the narrator notes to himself that his father’s girlfriend, Miss McCabe, is frail and nervous, yet he simply says that she seems like a good person when his father asks. In addition, the narrator is only in Strandhill because his father asked him to be there. Yet he doesn’t put up a fight when his father asks if it is alright for him to go home early, abandoning Miss McCabe after her heart attack and leaving the narrator alone in Strandhill. His father’s decision deeply offends the narrator, and this outcome could arguably have been avoided if the narrator had been honest by discouraging his father’s relationship with Miss McCabe and saying no to coming to Strandhill in the first place. The story thus portrays human communication as something performative rather than genuine, as people tend to seek others’ approval rather than their honest opinions and tell others what they want to hear in lieu of telling the truth.

This tendency is further reflected in the relationship between **the stoat** and **the rabbit** that the narrator observes: the stoat only catches the rabbit when it sits down and waits for the stoat’s arrival. This behavior seems to imply that the rabbit is allowing the stoat to catch it, but actually, the rabbit does not really choose to sit down and wait for the stoat—rather, it’s

exhausted itself trying to flee the stoat and can’t run any further. The narrator seems to feel like the rabbit in relationship with his father, as though being honest isn’t an option and he has no choice but to appease his father and suffer as a result.



## SYMBOLS

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



### THE STOAT

The titular stoat represents the inevitability of death, and the fear that this inevitability inspires.

The stoat chases a **rabbit**, and no matter how fast or far the rabbit runs, the stoat is always right behind it. In this sense, the rabbit’s doomed fate is inescapable and unavoidable. But even after the stoat kills the rabbit, and the narrator is carrying the animal’s body home, the stoat follows closely, continuing to lurk in the shadows. This symbolizes how anxiety surrounding death lingers even after death occurs, as survivors will then fear a future loss.

This anxiety is seen with the narrator’s father—whose wife, the narrator’s mother, has died—in his fixation on death notices in the newspaper. He searches through the names for anyone he may have known, doing so twice just in case he missed someone the first time he read through. This habit is seemingly rooted in his grief over his wife: having lost someone close to him, he now fears recognizing a name on the list. He’s also morbidly aware that everyone he knows will inevitably end up there, himself included. And at the end of the story, the narrator’s father abandons his girlfriend, Miss McCabe, after she has a heart attack, presumably because he’s afraid of losing another loved one. His obsession with and avoidance of death is much like the rabbit fleeing from the stoat, knowing all too well that it is always in pursuit—the only question is how long he can evade it.



### THE RABBIT

The rabbit who tries to flee from the **stoat** embodies the futile human urge to flee from what is beyond our control. While the narrator identifies the rabbit specifically with his father, every character in the story is running from something inescapable. The narrator’s father runs from the inevitability of loss in relationships, abandoning Miss McCabe when her health scare seemingly reminds him of his late wife’s death. The narrator shrinks away from addressing the strain between him and his father, telling his father what he wants to hear because he’s afraid of being honest. And Miss McCabe flees from loneliness into a relationship with the narrator’s father, who is unable to soothe

her loneliness because of his own selfishness and fear of loss. But just as the rabbit finally gave up and waited for the stoat to arrive, the characters cannot avoid eventually facing what they fear. The narrator's father cannot have relationships without the risk of loss, and everyone will inevitably find their way into the death notices that he habitually reads. And despite the narrator's efforts to avoid conflict, he is unable to deny his growing distaste for his father's behavior and comes to be ashamed of him at the end of the story. Finally, Miss McCabe once again ends up alone when the narrator's father abandons her. Like the rabbit running from the stoat, the characters' flight doesn't get them any further from what they feared; it simply creates a false sense of control until the inevitable happens.

bring an end to its fear is the narrator killing the rabbit in an act of mercy. The stoat was only with the rabbit for a brief time, not long enough to kill it but long enough to inflict irreversible damage. This interaction conveys both that the rabbit's death is inescapable and that moments of connection between characters in this story will be defined by suffering—especially those between the narrator and his father, and his father and Miss McCabe.

This moment also conveys the narrator's desire to end these moments of pain, as seen when he immediately stops his golfing to seek out the source of the crying and figure out how to end it, even if it means facing death.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Collected Stories* published in 1994.

### The Stoat Quotes

“I was standing over the rabbit when I saw the grey body of the stoat slithering away like a snake into the long grass. The rabbit still did not move, but its crying ceased...It did not stir when I stooped. Never before did I hold such pure terror in my hands, the body trembling in a rigidity of terror. I stilled it with a single stroke.”

**Related Characters:** The Narrator (speaker), The Narrator's Father, Miss McCabe

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 152

#### Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs toward the beginning of the story, after the narrator abandons his golf game to seek out the source of the crying he can hear. As the narrator stands over a wounded rabbit, the stoat that hunted the rabbit goes from chasing to fleeing, sneaking back into the grass. The stoat's quick movement contrasts with the rabbit's inability to move, emphasizing an urge to run that it can no longer act on.

Upon the narrator's arrival, the rabbit stops crying, but its fear is persistent if not increasing. As the narrator notes, the rabbit embodies “pure terror,” as it is no longer able to run from either the stoat or the narrator. The only thing that can

“Then as I crossed to the next tee I saw the stoat cross the fairway following me still...As I made my way back to the cottage my father rented every August, twice I saw the stoat, following the rabbit still, though it was dead.”

**Related Characters:** The Narrator (speaker), The Narrator's Father, Miss McCabe

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 152

#### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the narrator has returned to finish his game of golf after killing the rabbit, having placed its body at the edge of the course. The narrator glimpses the stoat, which fatally wounded the rabbit, still stalking the rabbit. The stoat seems almost supernatural in this passage, always slithering just outside of view, an ominous presence at the edge of the green. The stoat thus symbolizes the persistence of death and the anxiety it inspires. It chased the rabbit until the rabbit couldn't run from it anymore, representing the inevitability of death and the futility of trying to escape it.



The stoat also captures the idea that the anxiety of death's inevitability does not depart with its victim—rather, it lingers in the minds of all those who witness it in the form of grief. Having seen what the stoat did to the rabbit, the narrator now feels like the stoat is pursuing him too. And though the narrator doesn't see the stoat again, it could be argued that the stoat symbolically pursues the narrator and his family throughout the rest of the story, as fear of death colors the narrator's relationship with his father as well as his father's relationship with Miss McCabe.



☛ All night the rabbit must have raced from warren to warren, the stoat on its trail. Plumper rabbits had crossed the stoat's path but it would not be deflected; it had marked down this one rabbit to kill. No matter how fast the rabbit raced, the stoat was still on its trail, and at last the rabbit sat down in terror and waited for the stoat to slither up and cut the vein behind the ear. I had heard it crying as the stoat was drinking its blood.

**Related Characters:** The Narrator (speaker), The Narrator's Father, Miss McCabe

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 152

### Explanation and Analysis

This is the narrator's imagined version of the rabbit's flight from the stoat. It is a vision defined by inescapability, terror, and the pain caused by forming relationships. No matter how fast the rabbit runs, it cannot shake the stoat that terrifies it. By fleeing, it only prolongs its suffering and delays but does not prevent having to face its fear of death. However, it has no choice but to flee, an urge inspired by a need to survive, and thus does so until it's exhausted. The rabbit is not giving the stoat consent to kill it but simply can no longer deny the stoat its aim. And while their connection is brief, it proves painful for the rabbit.


The narrator infuses these ideas of fearing death, futile flight, and the pain that comes from relationships into the rabbit's story. This goes to show that these are ideas present in his mind and should be considered as he continues to describe his family. He sees his father's fear of death and grief reflected in the rabbit's flight and the suffering that stems from human relationships in the stoat and rabbit's encounter.


Furthermore, the stoat's behavior seems detached and almost clinical, for example "cutting the vein behind the ear" rather than biting into the rabbit's ear. This process is methodical for the stoat. Meanwhile, the rabbit is defined by emotions, such as desperation and terror. In this way, the stoat is aligned with the impartiality of death, while the rabbit embodies humans' (and animals') helplessness in the face of death. The narrator later compares his father to the rabbit, but in many ways his father shares the cold, methodical behavior of the stoat, as seen in the emotional damage he causes to both the narrator and Miss McCabe when he abandons them at the end of the story.

This exact same passage is repeated as the final paragraph of the story. This repetition further emphasizes the cycle within which the rabbit, and all of the characters are trapped. To run from fear is to only flee on a circular path that will lead you right back to where you started. This flight is futile and one will be forced to face that fear eventually.

☛ My father was reading the death notices on the back of the *Independent* on the lawn of the cottage. He always read the death notices first, and then, after he had exhausted the news and studied the ads for teachers, he'd pore over the death notices again.

**Related Characters:** The Narrator (speaker), The Narrator's Father, The Narrator's Mother, Miss McCabe

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 152

### Explanation and Analysis

This is the moment when the narrator returns from the golf course with the rabbit to find his father reading the newspaper outside. The newspaper is a reoccurring object with the narrator's father: he is reading one here, he places his ad for a new wife in the paper, and he brings a newspaper every time he goes to meet one of the women. He relies on the newspaper as a source of clarity and truth. Interestingly, his search through the ads for teachers possibly signals that he is dissatisfied with his work life as well as his romantic life.

As this passage goes to show, however, he is not reading the papers for the news. He has a particular ritual that revolves around the death notices, and by reading them both first and last, they are clearly his priority. His obsession with the death notices signals a clear and persistent fear of him or the people he knows dying. By meticulously combing through the names of the deceased, he is able to feign a sense of control, of knowing who death has touched and gauging how far it is away from him. These fears are understandable considering the narrator's mother assumably died prematurely, and they foreshadow his reaction to Miss McCabe's health scare.

“Another colleague who was in Drumcondra the same year as myself has gone to his reward”

...I held up the rabbit by way of answer.

“Where did you get that?”



“A stoat was killing it on the links.”

“That’s what they do. Why did you bring it back?”

“I just brought it. The crying gave me a fright.”

**Related Characters:** The Narrator’s Father, The Narrator (speaker), Miss McCabe

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 153

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the narrator’s father is telling the narrator about the death of an acquaintance that he spotted in the newspaper. His father’s connection to the man who died seems minimal, but it clearly stands out to him. Notably, the word “another” also signals that this is not the first death among his colleagues, as if he is keeping a running count.

Interestingly, the narrator holds up the dead rabbit he brought back with him in response, as if to use the rabbit’s death to convey that death is unavoidable, that everything dies and that it is simply a part of life. While his father seems unable to accept this fact in his own life, he easily agrees to the narrator’s description, dismissing the stoat’s viciousness as its natural way of life. This inconsistency highlights his father’s irrational attempts to avoid death entirely, specifically in his later abandonment of Miss McCabe after she has a heart attack.

Finally, the narrator seems unable to specify why he brought the dead rabbit home with him. On one hand, it appears he brought the rabbit home for this very purpose, to act as an example to his father that fleeing from the unavoidable will not save one from what they fear. On the other, he reaffirms that the rabbit’s terrified crying scared him. The narrator is once again asserting that he wants to mitigate the suffering that he witnesses, a characteristic that perhaps explains his willingness to approve of everything his father wants. Maybe he hopes that by encouraging his father’s relationship with Miss McCabe, he can save his father from the misery of futile flight.

At their age, or any age, I thought their formality strange, and I an even stranger chaperone.

“Why do you want me to come with you?” I had asked.

“It’d look more decent – proper – and I’d be grateful if you’d come. Next year you’ll be a qualified doctor with a life of your own.”

**Related Characters:** The Narrator, The Narrator’s Father (speaker), Miss McCabe

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 153

### Explanation and Analysis

This quotation captures the narrator’s confusion regarding the formality of his father and Miss McCabe’s courtship and his father’s hesitance, as well as the narrator’s discomfort with being asked to assess their relationship. Once again, the narrator’s role as chaperone of his father signals a switch in their roles as parent and child. The narrator only ever says what his father wants to hear, and his father only listens for what aligns with the action he already plans to take. With this, the story suggests that even communication between family members can be dishonest and self-serving rather than genuine.

Finally, this passage indicates that his father’s request for him joining them in Strandhill is multipurpose. In part, the narrator functions simply as a symbol to those around them that the courtship is “proper,” signaling that his father cares about how he is perceived and what other people think. This also allows for his father to continuously gauge the narrator’s thoughts on how things are going. Finally, his father’s remark that this may be the last year the narrator is available to spend August at the cottage signals a quiet desire to enjoy this tradition one last time. However, because his father delivers all of these interests muddled together, the narrator is only able to decipher one reason he is asked to attend: Miss McCabe.

“Would you take it very much to heart if I decided to marry again?”

“Of course I wouldn’t. Why do you ask?”

“I was afraid you might be affronted by the idea of another woman holding the position your dear mother held.”

“Mother is dead. You should do exactly as you want to.”

“You have no objections, then?”



“None whatever”

“I wouldn’t even think of going ahead if you’d any objections.”

“Well, you can rest assured, then. I have none. Have you someone in mind?”

“No I don’t.”

**Related Characters:** The Narrator’s Father, The Narrator (speaker), The Narrator’s Mother

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 153

### Explanation and Analysis

Here, the narrator’s father expresses his interest in remarrying and is asking his son how he would feel if he pursued that interest. This signals the beginning of the backstory of how they came to know Miss McCabe. The narrator’s dismissal of his father’s concerns of hurting his feelings and regarding his mother’s death could signal that his mother’s death was long enough ago that he doesn’t have any objections. However, when placed in the context of the relationship he has with his father, the narrator’s coldness here seems instead to convey a determined separation between himself and his family. By expressing a lack of feeling regarding his mother’s death or his father’s decision to remarry, he is perhaps able to close himself off from really confronting these things.



However, it is unclear how much insight is allowed into the narrator’s feelings here, for he only agrees to anything his father asks. And the few glimpses into the narrator’s emotional state—the rabbit’s imagined flight, his fear of the rabbit’s cries, and his shame for his father—clearly signal this coldness is a façade that he’s using to protect himself. But keeping this cool front does not mean that the impact of failed relationships is unable to harm him, as he seems genuinely hurt when his father abandons him at the end of the story.

He offered me a sheet of paper on which was written in his clear, careful hand: *Teacher, fifty-two. Seeks companionship. View marriage.* “What do you think of it?” he asked.

“I think it’s fine.” Dismay cancelled a sudden wild impulse to roar with laughter.

“I’ll send it off, then, so.”

**Related Characters:** The Narrator, The Narrator’s Father (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 153-154

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes the narrator’s father returning many months after asking for his son’s permission to pursue another wife, with a proposed advertisement he plans to put in the newspaper to seek out possible candidates. Both his method and his “clear, careful” handwriting convey his father’s meticulous and often clinical nature. He boils himself down to simply his age, occupation, and desire for companionship that will lead to marriage. Companionship is interestingly not necessarily a romantic relationship. While his father aims to find a wife, his wording conveys a general desire to simply not be alone, to sooth a loneliness that plagues him.

Once again, he asks for his son’s approval, and the narrator gives it in spite of his real thoughts. His urge to laugh indicates that he finds his father’s method to be ridiculous, but what is funny is “cancelled” by what appalls him. His feeling of “dismay” signals that this course of action hurts the narrator much deeper than he is letting on, though it’s unclear whether he’s embarrassed of his father’s desperation or disgusted by his father’s manner of navigating human connection. All that can be certain is the narrator lies, and despite everything he feels, he allows his father to send the ad off anyways. The only possible reason for this seems to be for the sake of his father’s happiness, even if it comes at the cost of his own.

After about a month he showed me the response. A huge pile of envelopes lay on his desk. I was amazed. I had no idea that so much unfulfilled longing wandered around in the world. Replies came from...childless widows, widows with small children, house owners, car owners...and a woman who had left at twenty years of age to work at Fords of Dagenham who wanted to come home.



**Related Characters:** The Narrator (speaker), The Narrator's Father

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 154

### Explanation and Analysis

Despite the narrator's doubts regarding his father's method of finding a new wife using a newspaper ad, his advertisement brings many letters from a wide range of women. Most of all, the narrator is shocked by the pervasive loneliness in society for so many women to see his father's plain description and deem it worth reaching out. Furthermore, the list of the types of women who replied conveys that loneliness does not discriminate: whether they have children or not, own houses or cars, or are simply looking for a way home, loneliness is a condition they all share.



Unfortunately, the narrator believes this "unfulfilled longing wander[s] around the world." "Unfulfilled," "longing," and "to wander" all signal a persistent failure to sooth this loneliness, meaning that these women have been unable to fill this hole thus far and are unlikely to do so successfully in the future. This frames the narrator's father's search to find companionship as one destined for failure as well.


●● "My God, if you hang round long enough you see everything."

My uncle combed his fingers through his long greying hair. He was a distinguished man and his confidence and energy could be intimidating. "At least, if he does get married, it'll get him off your back."

"He's all right," I replied defensively. "I'm well used to him by now."

**Related Characters:** The Narrator's Uncle, The Narrator (speaker), The Narrator's Father, Miss McCabe

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 155

### Explanation and Analysis

In this quotation, the narrator's uncle is responding to the news that the narrator's father was able to find possible

candidates for his next wife using the newspaper. He judges this method as strange and desperate ("if you hang round long enough you see everything"), distancing himself from the narrator's father and the women's need to form a connection. Significantly, the narrator never mentions an aunt, making it unclear if this uncle has a spouse of his own. Either way, he lives outside the vicious cycle of loneliness followed by brief relationships that result in suffering, which the narrator, his father, and Miss McCabe are subject to.

His uncle stands out in other manners too. Here, the narrator describes him in more detail than any other character in the story, and the description characterizes him as the clear object of the narrator's admiration: he is confident and certain and satisfied, the opposite of "unfulfilled longing" and fishing for approval. The narrator wants to be a doctor like his uncle, not a teacher like his father.

However, when his uncle implies that a new wife would mean an escape for the narrator, he can't help but respond negatively and defensively. Despite all his judgements and discomforts with his father, at this point in the story, the narrator is not looking to get rid of him. He may have chosen to spend Easter with his uncle, but he does not seem to regret the extra time he got with his father that winter as he met these women. This view contrasts deeply with the end of the story, when the narrator encourages his father to leave Strandhill because he's ashamed of him and wants to distance himself from him.

●● I met Miss McCabe in the lobby of the Ormond Hotel...They sat in front of me, very stiffly and properly, like two well-dressed, well-behaved children seeking adult approval. She was small and frail and nervous...Though old, she was like a girl, in love with being in love...

"Well, what was your impression?" he asked me when we were alone.

"I think Miss McCabe is a decent, good person," I said uncomfortably.

**Related Characters:** The Narrator, The Narrator's Father (speaker), Miss McCabe

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 155

### Explanation and Analysis

This is the first time the narrator meets Miss McCabe, and

his description of her is marred with criticism. However, when his father asks his judgement of her, he voices none of these concerns, but only repeats back what his father had told him earlier: she is a decent person. The narrator is uncomfortable with the position his father is putting him in. They have switched roles, and the narrator finds himself playing to parent for his father and his new girlfriend, describing them as “children” and Miss McCabe specifically as being “like a girl.” This goes to make not only this first meeting but their relationship as a whole seem childish and artificial. As his father persistently requests the narrator’s approval at their every meeting of her, and they both act overly proper and formal, the relationship seems more for show than for any real emotional connection between them. It is about being perceived as having a connection rather than really having it.

☝ “Do you think she has her feet on the ground?”

“I think you are very lucky to have found her,” I said. The way he looked at me told me he was far from convinced that he had been lucky.

The next morning he looked at me in a more dissatisfied manner still when a girl came from the Seaview to report that Miss McCabe had a mild turn during the night... The look on his face told me that he was more than certain now that she was not rooted enough.

“Will you come with me?”

“It is yourself she wants to see.”

**Related Characters:** The Narrator’s Father, The Narrator (speaker), Miss McCabe

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 156

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs right after Miss McCabe’s first visit to the cottage. Before this event, everything in their relationship seemed to be going smoothly. But now, the narrator’s father is plagued with doubts, specifically as to whether Miss McCabe is “rooted” enough. This question relates directly to her connection to the Earth, her stability as a healthy, living person. The narrator’s father is concerned that Miss McCabe is not someone he can rely on to be around for a long time, to remain in good health and alive. He is fixated on the persistent approach of death, as seen in his habitual reading of the death notices in the

newspaper. And having already lost one wife, he is unwilling to risk losing another. Thus, Miss McCabe’s health scare (she has a mild “turn,” or heart attack) confirms in his mind that she is not suitable.

Despite his father’s shift in opinion, the narrator continues to encourage his connection to Miss McCabe as he watches his father pull away from it. Twice in this passage, the narrator determines his father’s feelings by seeing what “the look on his face” or “the way he looked at me” told him. This need to interpret perfectly captures the inability for these two characters to directly communicate with each other, always dancing around their real thoughts with open questions and hollow, repetitive statements.

But the narrator’s interpretation appears to be correct, as his father suddenly loses desire to interact with Miss McCabe. This is when the narrator, too, shows a shift in behavior, for the first time telling his father no and refusing to go with him to see Miss McCabe. He instead reminds his father that this is about Miss McCabe and him, not about the narrator. The narrator’s father must be able to find meaning in their relationship on his own, but he is unable to do so.

☝ “What are you going to do?”

“Clear out,” he said. “There is no other way.”

As if all the irons were suddenly being truly struck and were flowing from all directions to the heart of the green, I saw that my father had started to run like the poor rabbit. He would have been better off if he could have tried to understand something, even though it would get him off nothing...Because I was ashamed of him I carried everything he wanted to the car.

**Related Characters:** The Narrator, The Narrator’s Father (speaker), Miss McCabe

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 156-157

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes directly after the narrator’s father visits Miss McCabe following her minor heart attack and returns convinced that their relationship will not work. Significantly, the narrator does not ask his father what he is “thinking of doing” but what he is “going to do.” This signals that he knows his father is already set on a plan. and that unlike all the other instances where his father asked for his approval,

in this moment he has no say in the matter. It goes to show that when getting permission really matters, when it would be most beneficial to actually check in with his son, his father fails to do so.

His father is also unable to directly address his desire to end the relationship with Miss McCabe or to offer her any sort of explanation. This is because his reasoning stems from his irrational fear of losing another person he loves, a fear that will have no effect on the inevitability of death. Thus, he

chooses to run, and in this moment the narrator recognizes his father as symbolically embodying the rabbit from the beginning of the story, fleeing from a fear that will ultimately catch up to him. The narrator recognizes that his father would be better off if he stayed and work through this fear, but he feels ashamed that his father behaves this way and thus helps him pack and head off so that he no longer has to directly confront the shame his father brings him.



## 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.

## THE STOAT

The narrator is golfing when he hears crying coming from the long grass next to the course. He works his way towards the sound, the crying only rising in pitch. At first, the narrator does not see the source of the sound but he eventually notices a crying **rabbit** lying in a patch of sand. As he stands over the rabbit, he notices a **stoat** sliding back into the grass. The rabbit stops crying. The narrator notices that it is bleeding heavily behind its ear, blood falling on the sand. The narrator picks the rabbit up and it does not move, but he can feel the rabbit's terror—it is shaking with utter fear. With a single stroke, the narrator kills the rabbit.

The narrator goes back to the golf course with **the rabbit**, leaving its body at the edge of the green as he returns to his game. As the narrator heads to the next tee, he sees **the stoat** following him. After two bad shots, he calls it a day and heads back to the cottage his father rents every August. On his way back, he sees the stoat twice, still following the rabbit even though it is dead.

The narrator imagines that **the rabbit** had been running from **the stoat** all night. Despite fatter rabbits coming into view, the stoat had “marked down this one rabbit to kill.” Unable to outrun the stoat, the rabbit finally sat in terror, waiting for the stoat to arrive and kill it. The crying the narrator had heard was when the stoat was drinking the rabbit's blood.

*The rabbit's fate illustrates the inevitability of death: it was, in a sense, fated to die as soon as the stoat spotted it. By fleeing, then, the rabbit was only putting off the inevitable. Even though the rabbit has technically escaped the stoat, the stoat fatally wounded it, and so death is still the only choice: the narrator can either leave the rabbit to die or put it out of its misery.*



*The stoat continues to pursue both the narrator and the rabbit, hoping to finish the hunt it began. In a sense, the stoat's hunt appears ritualistic: it finds, chases, kills, and consumes its prey before starting the whole process again. By taking the rabbit, the narrator disrupted the pattern. This interrupted ritual is presented alongside the narrator's father's ritual of renting the same cottage every August, which symbolically links the father and the rabbit. It also foreshadows that this pattern may be disrupted too.*



*Again, the rabbit's flight from the stoat was futile, since its death was inescapable the moment the stoat spotted it. By fleeing from what scared it, the rabbit only prolonged its terror and misery for as long as it could continue to run. And yet, the rabbit couldn't help but flee from what it outside its control. The stoat and the rabbit's time together is limited and fleeting, yet their brief closeness inspires great pain for the rabbit. Significantly, the rabbit's flight is entirely imagined by the narrator. Thus, this futility, fear, and fleeting closeness are attributes that the narrator is projecting onto the rabbit, so the reader can infer that these are topics that are relevant in his own life.*



When the narrator gets back to the cottage, his father is reading the newspaper, specifically the death notices which he always reads twice. He reads them first, then the news and the ads, and then turns back to the death notices. His father says one of his colleagues, Bernie, who had been in Drumcondra the same year he had been there, has died. In response, the narrator shows him the dead **rabbit**. His father asks where he got the rabbit and the narrator explains that a **stoat** killed it. His father responds that this is what stoats do and questions why the narrator brought it back. The narrator says he just did and that the rabbit's crying scared him.

His father asks what they will have for dinner, reminding him that Miss McCabe is coming over that evening. The narrator says they will not eat the **rabbit** and explains the dinner menu. Miss McCabe is the reason the narrator is in Strandhill—she and his father have been dating for many months and seem to have agreed that if the August vacation to Strandhill goes well, they will get engaged before both going back to teach at their respective schools in September. The narrator finds the formality of their agreement weird, and it's even weirder that he has somehow become the chaperone of the courtship.

When his father asked him to come to Strandhill in August, the narrator asked why his father wanted him there. His father replied that his courtship would seem more socially acceptable if the narrator were there and that this is the last summer before the narrator will be busy with a life of his own as a doctor. The narrator is staying in Dublin, doing postgraduate work for his uncle who is a surgeon. The narrator plans to golf and study that August while his father reads the newspaper and sees Miss McCabe.

*The narrator's father is particularly concerned with death. The death notices seem to be the main reason he reads the newspaper, meticulously seeking out any name he might know. It is as if by reading the death notices, he aims to track death and, more importantly, to have an artificial awareness of the distance between himself and death. This metaphorical race harkens back to the rabbit's flight and the stoat's pursuit. It seems to remind the narrator of this too, since he responds by holding up the rabbit, as if to tell his father that is how that chase ends. The father notes the ritualistic behavior of the stoat and its hunt and questions the narrator for disrupting that pattern. Interestingly, the narrator offers no explanation for why he kept the rabbit's body. Either he truly doesn't know, or perhaps he's just unable to tell his father why. In either case, there is a clear link here between his father's concern with death and the rabbit's flight.*



*The story's setting is revealed to be Strandhill, a coastal town in northwestern Ireland. The narrator's role as a sort of chaperone for his father and his girlfriend signals a disruption in the usual relationship between a child and their parent. The father and son's roles seem to be reversed, an inconsistency further emphasized in the fact that the narrator is the one cooking and making dinner rather than his father. The narrator's completion of parental responsibilities highlights his father's inability to take care of his son—rather, he needs his son to take care of him. It also emphasizes his father's need for the narrator's approval of this new woman who is not the narrator's mother.*



*The narrator's father is seeking both his son's approval and society's approval of his courtship of Miss McCabe. However, in both cases, it seems unlikely that a disapproval from either would have caused him to change course. Thus, his search for approval is a dishonest and self-serving one, looking only where he knows he will find it. Nevertheless, the fact that this is most likely the narrator's last summer spending August in Strandhill adds the possibility that his father asked him to attend for sentimental reasons—though if this is the case, his father doesn't communicate it.*





The previous summer, his father had asked him if he would be hurt if he remarried. The narrator replied that he would not. His father was afraid he would be bothered by a new woman taking his mother's place, but the narrator bluntly said that his mother is dead and that his father should do what he wants. His father asked again if the narrator had any objections, but the narrator didn't. He asked if his father had anyone in mind, but his father did not.

The narrator forgets about it until his father presents him with the ad he is going to put in the newspaper, describing himself as a 52-year-old teacher looking for companionship and marriage. His father asks for his approval. With a mix of dismay and an urge to laugh, the narrator tells his father the ad seems fine, so his father sends it to the paper. A month later, his father has a mound of letters in response to his ad. The narrator is surprised and wonders at how much "unfulfilled longing" there is in the world. The whole town is curious about these letters.

That winter, the narrator sees his father often because he is meeting many of the interested women in Dublin, as well as other places. He always meets them in a hotel lounge, reading a copy of Roscommon Herald. In late March, his father bemoans the failure of his endeavor, that all of the women he has met are a mess or not worthy of his time. The narrator asks if he's disappointed with their appearances or their character, and his father says both, but that there is one woman who seems to at least be a good person. This is the first time the narrator hears about Miss McCabe.

*The narrator's blunt response regarding his deceased mother indicates either that a substantial amount of time has passed since her death, or that they weren't very close. His father's interest in finding a new wife expresses a desire to alleviate loneliness, while the narrator's lack of concern regarding his father's interest in a new wife signals a disinterest in forming any new relationships or strengthening old ones. On one hand, it's compassionate for his father to ask his permission before seeking out a new spouse. On the other hand, because the narrator always consents to his father's requests, it is unclear if his father would have refrained from pursuing a new wife had the narrator disapproved.*



*The narrator's forgetfulness signals his lack of interest or concern regarding his father's desire to remarry. It shows that he isn't overly attached to his deceased mother or particularly concerned about his father's loneliness. His father's ad shows that he is looking for long-term connection and companionship in the form of marriage rather than short-lived flings. The amount of responses he gets go to show that the "unfulfilled longing" he feels is pervasive throughout society, giving the sense that everyone is lonely and in search of a true, lasting connection.*



*Just as his father's request for the narrator to come to Strandhill signals a hidden desire to connect with his son, his pursuit of these women seems to create a possible excuse for seeing his son more. However, if this aim is present, it goes uncommunicated and thus doesn't bring the father and son any closer. While his father's goal is to get into a long-term relationship, he meets all of these women in hotels, a setting that is short-term and temporary. This signals his eventual rejection of every woman except Miss McCabe. However, his approval of her is warranted by her being the only good person he met, rather than any defining qualities about her. This begins to hint that the narrator's father may be settling for Miss McCabe because she's the most tolerable solution to his loneliness, not because he genuinely cares for her.*



Because he saw his father so much in the winter, the narrator does not have to go home for Easter, and instead he spends it with his uncle, whom he can't help but tell about his father's desire to remarry. His uncle can't believe it and says one would think "boring one poor woman in a lifetime would be enough." The narrator describes his father's method of using the newspaper ad to find a new wife, and this makes his uncle laugh really hard. The narrator tells him his father got a lot of replies and that he has found a 40-year-old schoolteacher of interest (Miss McCabe).

His uncle says that eventually you see everything, and the narrator describes his uncle as a man with long greying hair who is distinguished and confident in a way that can be intimidating. His uncle says at least if his father remarries, he will leave the narrator alone. The narrator defends his father, saying he is used to him.

The narrator describes how he met Miss McCabe. In a hotel lobby, his father and Miss McCabe sat in front of him in a formal manner, like children seeking an adult's approval. He describes Miss McCabe as small, frail, and a generally nervous person. She has a "waif-like sense of decency" that the narrator finds attractive as well as bothersome. He says her desire to be in love makes her seem like a girl rather than an older woman. After she leaves, his father asks the narrator what his impression is. The question makes the narrator uncomfortable, and he replies that he thinks she is a decent and good person. His father asks once again if this means he has no objections: the narrator says he has none.

*This narrator seems to only spend time with his father out of a sense of responsibility, whereas he spends time with his uncle because he wants to. And given how the narrator confides in his uncle, it seems the two of them have more of a father-son relationship than the narrator and his own father do. His uncle's cruel comment that the narrator's father bored the narrator's late mother shows that the narrator's father and uncle are distant from each other, just as the narrator and his father are. This again suggests that even family members can fail to connect. But the narrator nevertheless defends his father, which indicates that he feels an ingrained sense of loyalty toward him and perhaps wants to connect with him, similar to how his father longs to connect with a new partner.*



*The narrator clearly desires his uncle's approval. His uncle is a successful, confident surgeon and thus embodies all that the narrator aims to be. He is, in a sense, the narrator's surrogate father, since the narrator doesn't have a close relationship with his real father. But despite how badly he wants his uncle's approval, the narrator defends his father when his uncle describes him as a burden to shake off. He could have said nothing, but instead he insists that he is used to his father's ways, a declaration that conveys a desire to maintain a relationship with his father even if he remarries.*



*Again, the narrator and his father's roles are reversed. From a parental point of view, the narrator sees many flaws in Miss McCabe and likens her to a child, despite her actual age. But when his father asks what his opinion of her is, he shares none of this and only repeats his father's earlier words back to him: she is a good person. He conceals his own judgements in order to allow his father this opportunity to find a woman worthy enough to pursue, but in doing so, he is technically being dishonest. Moreover, his father seems to want to have his decisions validated rather than to hear the narrator's honest opinion. In this way, the father and son's relationship is performative rather than genuine, hence their failure to connect meaningfully.*



Prior to the rabbit incident, they had been in Strandhill for a week. The narrator has had three to four casual encounters with Miss McCabe thus far. She is enjoying the vacation, staying at a hotel on the oceanfront and joining his father for lunches and walks along the shore. Tonight will be her first visit to the cottage. Since his father has never learned to cook, the narrator offered to handle dinner.

Miss McCabe dresses up in a blue dress and silver accessories. She compliments dinner but barely eats and only drinks a little wine. His father talks about school, teaching, and the need to go to the sea to “rid oneself of staleness” before each new school year. She hangs on to his every word. When she agrees that the sea is great, his father worries that what she said belongs more to the sea and the sky than to him and what he had said.

Once Miss McCabe has returned to her hotel, his father asks the narrator what he thinks of her, asking if the narrator thinks “she has her feet on the ground.” The narrator tells him he is lucky to have found Miss McCabe, but his father does not seem to agree with him. The next morning, a girl arrives to tell them that Miss McCabe had had a health scare in the night and that she is now recovering and wants to see his father. His father is now convinced that “she was not near rooted enough.” He asks the narrator to go to visit her with him, but the narrator reminds his father that she is asking for him, not the narrator.

*Miss McCabe is not staying with them at the cottage, the place they return to time and time again. Instead, she's staying in a hotel, a place that is, again, short-term and temporary by definition. Only after a week is she finally allowed to visit the cottage, as if his father fears their relationship will not last and thus has kept her from engaging with what really matters to him and what he is afraid to lose.*



*In many ways, Miss McCabe does everything right at this first dinner: she is dressed beautifully and says all the right things. But this isn't enough for the narrator's father, and when she agrees with him, he fears that she's approving of the things he described rather than of his understanding of them. He wants her to be interested in him specifically rather than in the topics they discuss. Her lack of an appetite also signals a possible symptom of an unseen issue, whether it be her nervousness about her visit to the cottage or a more serious health problem.*



*His father once again seeks the narrator's approval, this time specifically concerning whether Miss McCabe is grounded or not. This concern is less about whether she is humble and “down to Earth,” and more so quite literally if she is firmly rooted in the Earth, that she is a lot of life left to live. His father has already lost one wife, and in seeking a long-term relationship, he seems particularly concerned about the possibility that Miss McCabe won't last long. The narrator tries once again to encourage his father's pursuit of Miss McCabe, but that is no longer what his father wants to hear. When the narrator refuses to go with his father to see Miss McCabe, the reader witnesses the first time the narrator has denied his father what he wants. This is a significant change in behavior and signals a shift occurring in their relationship.*



His father visits Miss McCabe and comes back in a bad mood, reporting she had a mild heart attack and that she still thinks they are getting engaged at the end of August. He complains that she only thinks of plans for the future and decides the only solution is for him to “clear out.” The narrator realizes that his father is like **the rabbit**. The narrator asks where he will go and his father says home, of course. The narrator plans to stay. His father leaves as soon as the car can be packed, and the narrator helps him move all of the stuff to the car because he is ashamed of him.

*Before her heart attack, Miss McCabe’s interest in the future would have perfectly aligned with the narrator’s father’s thoughts and intentions for a long-term relationship, earning his approval. But now that he has written her off in his mind because of her poor health, her long-term thinking becomes a flaw in his eyes. Instead of discussing this with her, he decides to run. In this moment, the narrator identifies his father as the rabbit fleeing from the stoat. Just as the rabbit tried to escape its imminent death, he is attempting to outrun the possibility of loss, grief, and death—but avoiding these things won’t get him any further away from the inevitable. Despite only being in Strandhill to see his father and Miss McCabe, the narrator chooses to stay rather than go with his father. This defines him as being unlike the rabbit; as he watches his father flee, he refuses to go with him. His father’s inability to face what scares him and to stay for the sake of Miss McCabe or his son makes the narrator admit he is ashamed of him. Their relationship seems to be firmly and definitively splitting in this moment.*



His father says he hopes it doesn’t bother him that he is leaving. The narrator says it doesn’t. The narrator watches the car drive off. Once it is out of sight, the description of the rabbit’s flight is repeated: **the rabbit** ran all night from **the stoat** until it gave up and sat down in terror to wait for the stoat to kill it. The rabbit cries as the stoat consumes its blood.

*The narrator’s father wants to confirm that the narrator is okay with him leaving, but had the narrator told him to stay, it seems highly unlikely he would have unpacked the car and faced Miss McCabe. In this sense, his father is going through the motions of asking for approval, but he does not really need it. At this point, the narrator and his father’s interests align: the narrator wants him to go because he’s ashamed of him, so he tells his father that his departure does not bother him. In repeating his vision of the rabbit’s flight and death as he watches his father drive off, the narrator firmly defines his father as the rabbit. He, like the rabbit, is a creature running from what he fears but unable to escape the inevitable, and so he is only prolonging his suffering.*





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