The Horse-Dealer's Daughter

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF D. H. LAWRENCE

D. H. Lawrence was born in 1885 in Eastwood, a coal mining town in the county of Nottinghamshire, England. He studied teaching at University College, Nottingham, where he began writing his first short stories and first novel, ultimately published as *The White Peacock* in 1911. In 1912 he met and began an affair with Frieda Weekley, a married German woman living in England. Two years later, once Frieda had obtained a divorce, she and Lawrence married. During World War II they suffered prejudice as a result of Frieda's nationality. Between 1913 and 1920, Lawrence published three of his most famous novels, *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *The Rainbow* (1915), and *Women in Love* (1920), which treat Lawrence's favored themes of sexual passion, individualism, family dynamics, and the impact of social class on human destiny. Lawrence's most famous novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, was first published in 1928, in private limited edition due to the work's sexual content. Lawrence died of tuberculosis in 1930. When Penguin Books tried to publish an uncensored English version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1960 in the U.K., they were prosecuted for obscenity but acquitted, after which the book sold millions of copies.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"The Horse-Dealer's Daughter" was written during World War I (1914-1918) and published shortly after the war ended. As an Englishman married to a German woman, D. H. Lawrence experienced prejudice during the war because the English were fighting the Germans. After living for several years under oppressive conditions in Cornwall during the war, he and his wife Frieda were thrown out in 1917 under the Defense of the Realm Act, a wartime law that encouraged censorship and regulated or illegalized various normal behaviors. It is possible that the prejudice Lawrence and Frieda suffered while in Cornwall contributed to the depressive atmosphere and negative depiction of social constraints on behavior found in "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter." Moreover, the year before Lawrence composed "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter," his novel *The Rainbow* (1915) was prosecuted for obscenity. That D. H. Lawrence continued to write sexually frank stories such as "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter" after *The Rainbow*'s prosecution suggests his personal opposition to the censorious, conformist wartime mood.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

D. H. Lawrence is a famous Modernist writer. Modernism is a literary movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked by its rejection of old literary forms and subjects. The depiction of sexual desire in "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter" is modernist because it rejects the prudery and repression of the previous Victorian era (1837-1901). As in "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter," with its depiction of Mabel's physical attraction to Fergusson, Lawrence's early novel *The Rainbow* (1915) contains frank depictions of female sexual desire. Likewise, Lawrence's most famous novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), takes human sexuality as its theme, positively representing a cross-class adulterous relationship between Lady Chatterley and her groundskeeper Mellors. Both *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Rainbow* were at various times prosecuted for obscenity due to their sexual content. Another Modernist novel famously prosecuted for obscenity is James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), due to its depiction of masturbation.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Horse-Dealer's Daughter
- **When Written:** 1916
- **Where Written:** Cornwall, England
- **When Published:** 1922
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Short Story, Realism
- **Setting:** A coal mining town in England
- **Climax:** Jack Fergusson gives way to his love for Mabel Pervin.
- **Antagonist:** Shame
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Short Film. In 1983, the director Robert Burgos adapted "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter" into a short film.

England and America. In 1923, Lawrence, an English writer, published a work of literary criticism called *Studies in Classic American Literature* that included discussions of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Edgar Allan Poe.

PLOT SUMMARY

The Pervin brothers and their sister Mabel have just learned that their family has been financially ruined after the death of their horse-dealer father, Joseph Pervin. Sitting at breakfast, they try and fail to discuss their plans. One brother, Joe, asks

Mabel what she will do. Then the brothers hear hooves and watch through the window as the family's draught **horses** are taken. Joe feels hopeless as he watches them, though he has plans to marry and get a job from his father-in-law. Another brother, Fred Henry, asks Mabel whether she'll go and stay with their sister. Joe and the youngest brother Malcolm jokingly propose jobs for her. Mabel ignores them. Fred Henry implies that if Mabel does not go to her sister's, she will end up homeless.

Jack Fergusson, a doctor in town, comes to visit. When Fergusson asks Fred Henry what's going on, Fred Henry tells him the family must vacate their house. Mabel clears dishes from the table and leaves the room. Fergusson watches but does not speak to her. Malcolm leaves to catch a train, and Joe leaves by carriage. Alone together, Fergusson and Fred Henry declare they will miss each other. When Mabel returns to the room, Fergusson asks her whether she'll go and stay with her sister. Mabel says no. Fred Henry explodes, demanding to know what Mabel will do. Mabel, without answering, leaves.

Mabel goes to clean her dead mother's grave. Fergusson, going about his errands as town doctor, spots her in the graveyard and feels energized by seeing her face and eyes.

Later, walking between house-calls, Fergusson is standing on a hill over the Pervins' house when he sees Mabel walking through the fields toward a **pond**. She wades deep into the pond and disappears beneath the water. Fergusson runs to the pond. Though he cannot swim, he wades in after Mabel. Grabbing for her clothes, he loses his balance and falls into the water. Eventually he finds his feet, grabs Mabel's clothes, and tows her to shore. After resuscitating her, he carries her into the Pervins' house.

In the empty house, Fergusson lays Mabel in front of the kitchen fire. He strips her out of her wet clothes and wraps her in blankets. When she revives, she asks him what she did. He explains that she attempted to drown herself. He wants to go change into dry clothes, but he feels strangely unable to leave her. Realizing she is naked beneath the blankets, Mabel asks who undressed her. Fergusson admits he did. Mabel asks him whether he loves her. Then, hugging his legs, she declares he does love her, kisses his knees, and tries to pull him down to the floor. Fergusson, scared yet stirred, resists her advances, but when he sees her beginning to question whether he does love her, he kneels and embraces her. She weeps; they kiss. When Fergusson asks her why she is crying, she becomes self-conscious and insists on going to get him some dry clothes.

Mabel goes upstairs and tosses dry clothes down the stairs to Fergusson. He changes, realizes what time it is, and calls up to Mabel that he must return to the surgery. She comes downstairs in a nice dress and offers to make him tea. When he refuses, saying he must go, she seems to start questioning his love again and breaks down, declaring her own awfulness. Fergusson tries to comfort her by telling her that they'll marry and that he wants her, but Mabel seems terrified both by the idea that he *doesn't* want her and by the idea that he does.

CHARACTERS

Mabel Pervin – Mabel Pervin, the story's main female character, is the daughter of the deceased horse-dealer Joseph Pervin and the sister of Joe Pervin, Fred Henry Pervin, and Malcolm Pervin. Mabel's mother, whom she greatly loved, died when Mabel was 14; when her father married another woman for her money, Mabel was wounded. When the story begins, Mabel and her brothers have learned that due to their dead father's debt, they must vacate the family home. Mabel, humiliated by poverty and preoccupied with her dead mother, resists her brothers' attempts to pack her off to live as an impoverished dependent in their other sister's household. That Mabel experiences greater desperation than her brothers at the family's economic ruin illustrates how women had fewer opportunities to support themselves than men did at the time the story takes place. Instead of submitting to her brothers' plans, Mabel cleans her mother's grave a final time and impulsively attempts to drown herself in a **pond**. When the town doctor Jack Fergusson saves her from drowning and strips her out of her wet clothes, Mabel becomes convinced that he must be in love with her and makes sexual overtures to him. Though Fergusson yields to Mabel's advances and agrees that he loves her, Mabel becomes suddenly ashamed of her nakedness and doubtful of Fergusson's feelings for her. The story ends on an ambivalent note, with Mabel both afraid that Fergusson does not desire her and afraid that he does. Thus, the story suggests that Mabel's shame about her sexuality prevents her from fully living her life.

Jack Fergusson – A doctor in the town where the Pervin family lives, Jack Fergusson is a friend of Fred Henry Pervin and love interest of Mabel Pervin. His patients are primarily physical laborers, coal miners, and iron workers; he works at a surgery in town and makes house-calls to his patients, whose lower-class company he finds invigorating. Fergusson first appears in the story visiting the Pervin family in their home; he speaks mainly with Fred Henry and barely addresses Mabel, though he watches her. On his way to the surgery, Fergusson sees Mabel cleaning her mother's grave and feels energized by the sight of her face and eyes. Later, while walking between house-calls, he witnesses Mabel trying to drown herself in a **pond**. Though he cannot swim, he wades in, tows her out of the water, carries her into the empty Pervin house, and strips her out of her wet clothes in front of the kitchen fire. When Mabel regains consciousness and realizes what has happened, she becomes convinced that Fergusson is in love with her and begins kissing his knees. Initially, Fergusson, who believes that doctors ought to rise above ordinary physical experiences like love and lust, reacts with horror. When he realizes that Mabel's will to live

depends on his reciprocating her passion, however, he gives in to his latent attraction to her and declares his love. Like Mabel, however, Fergusson finds sexuality shameful and so tries to legitimate his connection with her by proposing marriage at the end of the story.

Joe Pervin – The oldest son of deceased horse-dealer Joseph Pervin, Joe Pervin is brother to Fred Henry Pervin, Malcolm Pervin, and Mabel Pervin. He and his siblings are losing their home due to their dead father's debts. As the story begins, he asks Mabel what she plans to do with herself but does not really care about the answer. Because he has plans to marry and get a job from his father-in-law, Joe feels comparatively economically secure. Stupid and sensual, Joe cares more about losing the family's **horses**, with which he identifies, than about his sister; he represents humanity's primal instinct for life in contrast with Mabel's instinct for death.

Fred Henry Pervin – The second oldest of horse-dealer Joseph Pervin's sons, Fred Henry Pervin is brother to Joe Pervin, Malcolm Pervin, and Mabel Pervin. He is also friends with the town doctor Jack Fergusson. Of all Mabel's brothers, Fred Henry is most insistent that she go to stay with their other sister after the Pervins lose their house. His behavior suggests concern for Mabel but also a sexist desire to control her. He himself plans to travel to Northampton, a manufacturing town, presumably to seek employment. Fred Henry's mobility and prospects after the family's economic disaster, in contrast with Mabel's despair, illustrate how men had more options for supporting themselves at the time the story was written.

Malcolm Pervin – The youngest of horse-dealer Joseph Pervin's sons, Malcolm Pervin is brother to Joe Pervin, Fred Henry Pervin, and Mabel Pervin. A cheerful young man, Malcolm is leaving the family home to catch a train at the beginning of the story, which suggests he has somewhere to go and thus better prospects than his sister Mabel. His prospects show that at the time "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter" was written, men had more opportunities, even in the face of financial ruin, than women did.

Joseph Pervin – Joseph Pervin is father to Mabel Pervin, Joe Pervin, Fred Henry Pervin, and Malcolm Pervin. An uneducated man, Joseph Pervin ran a horse-dealing business that was initially successful but began to fail toward the end of his life. Widowed by the death of his children's mother, he married a second time for money, but his second wife's fortune was not enough to save his business. He died leaving his children in debt.

THEMES

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

LIFE AND DEATH

In "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter," humans have an instinct that drives them to live and fulfill their basic needs: to work, to have relationships with others, and to have sex. But when their life instinct finds no outlet, it turns on itself and becomes a death instinct. As the story opens, the children of horse-dealer Joseph Pervin are losing their family home due to their dead father's debts. When the oldest Pervin brother, Joe, sees a groom leading away the last of the Pervins' **horses** by a rope, he compares himself to them; in his plans to marry and get a job, he is like a horse "go[ing] into harness." This comparison suggests both Joe's life instinct, his desire to survive even after financial disaster, and the channeling of that instinct into the socially approved outlets of employment and marriage. By contrast, Joe's sister Mabel Pervin lacks outlets for her basic desires. She used to serve as housekeeper for her brothers, but since the siblings must vacate the family home, she is about to lose even that employment. The two people she definitely loved, her mother and father, have died. From the story's beginning, Mabel's seems to be losing her will to live. The narration notes that she does not "share the same life as her brothers," and in contrast to their talking and joking, she remains almost completely silent, unresponsive, and passive, as if she is already a corpse. The only activity she seems to enjoy is cleaning her mother's grave, a morbid expression of her attraction to the "world of death" in the absence of living people for whom she can express her love.

Due to the frustration of Mabel's instinct to live, her lack of opportunities for work and love, she develops an instinct to die instead. Without thinking about it, she tries to drown herself in a **pond**. Tellingly, when the doctor Jack Fergusson saves her from drowning, Mabel comes to believe he is in love with her: life and love are so linked in her experience that she ignores the possibility that he felt professional or moral obligations to save her in favor of a romantic interpretation. Moreover, Mabel's sexual and romantic connection with Fergusson seems immediately to banish her suicidal impulse. By posing Fergusson's love as the cure for Mabel's suicidality, "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter" suggests that love and meaningful relationships are the most powerful forces that drive our instinct to live.

MARRIAGE, SEXUALITY, AND SHAME

In "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter," marriage is a mere economic arrangement, whereas human sexuality is a life-affirming force. Yet due to the characters' shame about their sexuality, they attempt unsuccessfully to contain sexuality's power within marriage.

Both the first two mentions of marriage in the story represent it as an economic and not a romantic act. The female protagonist's father, Joseph Pervin, remarries after his first wife dies because his horse-dealing business is doing badly and he needs his second wife's money. After Joseph Pervin dies, leaving his children in debt, his oldest son Joe decides to marry because his future father-in-law can get him a job. In both cases, the men's motives for marrying are financial, not sexual or romantic. In contrast to this cold-blooded focus on money, the main characters Mabel Pervin and Jack Fergusson are physically attracted to one another. Fergusson, worn down by work as a doctor, feels revived by remembering Mabel's face and eyes. When Mabel, seeing no future for herself due to her family's debt, attempts suicide by drowning, Fergusson rescues and resuscitates her. Mabel, for her part, begins frantically kissing Fergusson's knees when she realizes that he has saved her. The story thus clearly suggests that, in contrast to the mere economic arrangement of marriage, sexual attraction is a life-saving force: Fergusson's attraction to Mabel revives him, and in turn he saves her life.

Yet Mabel and Fergusson's shame about their sexuality prevents them from embracing its life-saving force. When Mabel becomes aware, after Fergusson has saved her from the pond, that he has had to strip her out of her wet clothes, she feels intense shame and begins trying to get away from him on the pretext of fetching them dry clothes. Similarly, Fergusson feels pain and shame at the thought that anyone should know that he feels love and sexual attraction. At the end of the story, Mabel's shame overwhelms her, and she begins criticizing herself to Fergusson, suggesting that he could never want to love her. Fergusson attempts to resolve the problem of shame by promising to marry Mabel. Yet marriage, a mere economic arrangement according to the story, cannot actually contain sexuality or banish shame; both characters remain terrified of what has happened between them. Thus the problem of Mabel and Fergusson's shame and sexual attraction remains unresolved at the end of the story.

GENDER AND POVERTY

In "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter," both men and women are vulnerable to poverty, but the story suggests that women are more vulnerable than men because they have fewer options for supporting themselves. The story begins after the death of horse-dealer Joseph Pervin, who has left his children in so much debt that they are losing the family house. Each Pervin brother, though devastated by the loss of their home and family business, has plans. Joe, the oldest, will marry and get a job from his father-in-law. Fred Henry, the next oldest, will travel to Northampton, a manufacturing town; although the story does not explicitly state why Fred Henry is going to Northampton, the historical association of the town with manufacturing suggests that he is seeking employment. Once again, the story does not explicitly state the plans of the youngest brother, Malcolm, but as the story begins, he is about to catch a train. Each Pervin brother, then, has plans and somewhere to go. They will be able to find work, support themselves, and get on with their lives. By contrast, their sister Mabel Pervin is more vulnerable to their family's financial disaster. Having managed the servants in the family's large household for ten years prior to the disaster, she loses her domestic authority and her sense of safety when the family can no longer afford servants. Although her brothers jokingly suggest that she take various jobs, such as servant or nurse, they mainly urge her to go live with their sister Lucy as an impoverished dependent. Mabel feels so oppressed by her lack of options and so ashamed of her poverty that she attempts suicide; only a physical rescue and an offer of marriage from the doctor Jack Fergusson seem to promise her a social future, by putting her under the protection of a new man. In this way, the story suggests that as long as women are economically dependent on men and discouraged from seeking work, they will be more vulnerable to poverty and financial disaster than men are.

PHYSICAL LABOR VS. PROFESSIONALISM

In "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter," upper-class professions divorce people from physicality and primal desires, whereas physical labor is a source of vitality. Early in the story, the doctor Jack Fergusson goes to visit the Pervin family. When one Pervin brother, Fred Henry, notices that Fergusson has a cold, another Pervin brother, Joe, bizarrely implies that doctors shouldn't get colds lest they frighten their patients. The implication that doctors shouldn't get sick, though sickness is an ordinary physical experience, suggests that professionals such as doctors should rise above their physicality. Similarly, when Fergusson falls in love with Mabel Pervin, he feels profoundly embarrassed that he, a doctor, should be experiencing love and lust. Again, the characters in the story seem to believe that professional-class people should not be subject to ordinary physical life experiences such as sickness or lust. In contrast with his lifeless professionalism, Fergusson derives vitality from spending time with his working-class patients and from the difficult, physical labor of saving Mabel from drowning in a **pond**. Thus "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter" represents cerebral professions like medicine as lifeless and enervating, whereas physical labor puts people in touch with their bodies and their vitality.

SYMBOLS

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

HORSES

In "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter," horses represent humanity's animal nature, a source of both vitality and powerlessness. At the beginning of the story, the Pervin brothers, whose family is in debt, watch the last of their draught horses being taken away, presumably to be sold. The oldest Pervin brother, Joe, a sensuous and stupid man, identifies with the horses: he plans to 'sell himself' into marriage to get a job from his future father-in-law. Joe's identification with the horses shows both his vitality (that is, his will to survive) and his helplessness. Later in the story, Joe's sister Mabel Pervin attempts suicide by drowning due to her shame and lack of options after the family's financial ruin. After the doctor Jack Fergusson rescues her from drowning, Mabel's sexual connection with him is repeatedly described in animal terms; for example, Fergusson finds himself transfixed by Mabel's "wild, bare, animal shoulders." The story's description of sexuality in animal terms implies both animal vitality (Mabel and Fergusson's sexual connection revives Mabel's instinct for life) and animal powerlessness (Mabel and Fergusson feel overwhelmed and out of control in the face of their attraction to each other). Thus, "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter" represents humans as fundamentally like other animals such as horses, with all that likeness implies: a strong instinct to survive and fulfill one's needs and a powerlessness to control instinctive responses.

POND

In "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter," the pond represents humanity's desire for death, which can arise when humans' instinct to fulfill primal needs finds no outlet in love or sexuality. The story's titular character, Mabel Pervin, has been deprived both of love and of sexual expression due to her mother's death and her social isolation. Her life instinct stifled, Mabel begins to feel more connected to death than to life, a tendency highlighted by her scrupulous cleaning of her mother's grave. After cleaning her mother's grave a final time, Mabel gives in to her desire for death and, instinctively, without seeming to think about it, goes to drown herself in a pond near her family home. The pond is nasty-smelling and "dead cold" with a bottom of "rotten clay," reminiscent of a decaying corpse; this description, together with Mabel's use of the pond for suicide, highlights the pond's connection with death. When the doctor Jack Fergusson sees Mabel drowning, he wades into the pond to save her. Notably, Fergusson cannot swim and at one point falls into the water; these details suggest that, like Mabel, Fergusson is vulnerable to the death instinct due to his repressed sexuality. Mabel interprets Fergusson saving her from the pond as an expression of his romantic love for her, another detail that associates the pond with death and the life instinct with sex. Finally, after Fergusson and Mabel have expressed their love for one another, they draw away from one another at moments when they smell or talk about the pond's nasty odor, suggesting that the pond represents death in contrast to the sexual life they have found in each other.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *Selected Stories* published in 2008.

The Horse-Dealer's Daughter Quotes

"Well, Mabel, and what are you going to do with yourself?" asked Joe, with foolish flippancy. He felt quite safe himself. Without listening for an answer, he turned aside, worked a grain of tobacco to the tip of his tongue, and spat it out. He did not care about anything, since he felt safe himself.

Related Characters: Joe Pervin (speaker), Mabel Pervin, Fred Henry Pervin, Malcolm Pervin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator opens the story with a question: what is going to happen to Mabel Pervin? Although this question seems important to the story, the narration makes clear that Mabel's brother Joe isn't really interested in the answer. He asks the question "with foolish flippancy," a description that suggests Joe's stupidity and his lack of seriousness. He goes on to spit on the floor "[w]ithout listening for an answer," which shows both his coarse behavior and his lack of genuine interest in his sister's response. This passage therefore sets up the obstacles that Mabel faces throughout the story: an uncertain future and an uncaring family.

This passage also repeatedly makes clear why Joe doesn't care about his sister's fate; twice, the narrator tells us that Joe feels "safe himself." The narrative thus indicates that Joe, a man, is safer in the face of disaster than Mabel is. This idea foreshadows the later revelation that while all three Pervin brothers—Joe, Fred Henry, and Malcolm—have places to go and opportunities to support themselves, their sister does not. In turn, the passage subtly primes the reader to see the different effects of economic disaster and poverty on its male and female characters.

Joe watched with glazed, hopeless eyes. The horses were almost like his own body to him. He felt he was done for now. Luckily he was engaged to a woman as old as himself, and therefore her father, who was steward of a neighbouring estate, would provide him with a job. He would marry and go into harness. His life was over, he would be a subject animal now.

Related Characters: Joe Pervin

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Joe Pervin watches the last of the Pervin family's draught horses being led away, presumably to be sold to pay off some of the family's debts. By associating the horses with Joe's "own body" and his "life," the passage turns the horses into a symbol of physicality and vitality.

But losing the horses does not mean Joe has lost his own physicality and vitality. The narrator says that Joe will "go into harness" and become "a subject animal." In describing Joe as a harnessed animal, the narrator implicitly compares him to the horses he has lost: like them, he is physically powerful but relatively powerless to control either his animal instincts or his fate. In the context of the passage, the "harness" represents Joe's marriage and his future job. Thus, the story seems to suggest that social institutions such as marriage and work "harness"—that is, control without destroying—humans' animal instincts.

For months Mabel had been servantless in the big house, keeping the home together in penury for her ineffectual brothers. She had kept house for ten years. But previously it was with unstinted means. Then, however brutal and coarse everything was, the sense of money had kept her proud, confident.

Related Characters: Mabel Pervin, Joe Pervin, Fred Henry Pervin, Malcolm Pervin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 187

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after Mabel's brothers Joe and Malcolm have frivolously suggested various jobs she could take and her brother Fred Henry has demanded that she go live as an impoverished guest in the house of their sister Lucy. Mabel, having ignored or rejected their suggestions, has left the house and is going to clean her mother's grave. The passage illustrates Mabel's vulnerability to poverty.

That Mabel has been serving for ten years as housekeeper to her "ineffectual brothers" suggests a gendered division of labor: Mabel, a woman, takes care of the domestic sphere while her male relatives work in the economic sphere outside the home. Yet the description of her brothers as "ineffectual" suggests that her brothers cannot hold up their end of the bargain: ultimately, they have failed to support Mabel economically as she has supported them domestically. This failure reveals the economic vulnerability of women in cultures where women are not supposed to support themselves; if men fail to support them, they have little recourse.

She had suffered badly during the period of poverty. Nothing, however, could shake the curious sullen, animal pride that dominated each member of the family. Now, for Mabel, the end had come.

Related Characters: Mabel Pervin, Joe Pervin

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as Mabel walks to the churchyard to clean her mother's grave. It complicates the story's animal symbolism and foreshadows Mabel's suicide attempt. The narrator attributes to Mabel and her family members an "animal pride" that controls their actions. This attribution resonates with previous descriptions comparing Joe Pervin, in his physicality and instinct to live and fulfill his needs, with the family's horses. Given that Joe has channeled his life instinct into marriage and future work, readers might expect Mabel's "animal pride" to motivate her to create a new life for herself in a similar way.

But instead of motivating Mabel to live, her "animal pride" seems to lead her toward a refusal of life: "the end had come." This refusal reveals that, in the world of the story, the

animalistic life instinct does not simply motivate characters to live no matter what; instead, the animal instinct toward self-preservation and vitality can quickly become an instinct toward death when denied appropriate outlets. By hinting at the conversion of Mabel's life instinct into a death instinct, the passage also foreshadows her later attempt to die by drowning.

> For the life she followed here in the world was far less real than the world of death she inherited from her mother.

Related Characters: Mabel Pervin

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, which appears immediately after Mabel has entered the churchyard and cleaned her mother's grave, illuminates the reasons for Mabel's morbid behavior and future suicide attempt.

The claim that Mabel's life "in the world" is "far less real than the world of death" reminds the reader that Mabel no longer has very much to connect to or engage with in her own life. She doesn't have any friends or lovers, and soon she won't have any work as a housekeeper. After her parents' death and the family's economic ruin, her life is utterly empty.

By contrast, the "world of death" contains Mabel's mother, one of the few people Mabel ever truly loved, as well as her father. Since Mabel has lost appropriate outlets for her labor and love, she morbidly lavishes care on a gravestone. For someone so disconnected from life and drawn to death, the logical next step might seem to be to die. Thus, the passage both explains and foreshadows Mabel's attempt to drown herself in a pond.

> Nothing but work, drudgery, constant hastening from dwelling to dwelling among the colliers and the iron-workers. It wore him out, but at the same time he had a craving for it. It was a stimulant to him to be in the homes of the working people, moving, as it were, through the innermost body of their life.

Related Characters: Jack Fergusson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as the doctor Jack Fergusson walks between house calls. He sees the Pervins' house, contemplates that he is losing the only family in town he sees socially, and thinks about what his life will be like after they have left. The passage illustrates both the paradoxically life-affirming nature of hard work and the difference between physical and intellectual labor in the story.

The narrator describes Jack Fergusson's work in conflicting, almost paradoxical language. On the one hand, it is "drudgery;" on the other hand, it is a "stimulant." This paradox suggests that while work drains people of their vitality, it also affirms their vitality by giving them an outlet for their instinct to survive, fulfill their primal needs, and meaningfully contribute to the world.

But not all labor is created equal. Jack's work stimulates him because it puts him in contact with "working people"—that is, physical laborers such as "colliers" (or coal miners) and "iron-workers." Jack's dependence on physical laborers for his vitality suggests a hierarchy of work in which physical labor and the body are more important to vitality and the life instinct than intellectual labor and the mind. The story therefore implicitly values physical labor more highly than intellectual labor.

> He slowly ventured into the pond. The bottom was deep, soft clay; he sank in, and the water clasped dead cold round his legs. As he stirred he could smell the cold, rotten clay that fouled up into the water. It was objectionable in his lungs. Still, repelled and yet not heeding, he moved deeper into the pond. The cold water rose over his thighs, over his loins, upon his abdomen. The lower part of his body was all sunk in the hideous cold element. And the bottom part was so deeply soft and uncertain, he was afraid of pitching with his mouth underneath. He could not swim, and was afraid.

Related Characters: Jack Fergusson, Mabel Pervin

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, which occurs after Jack Fergusson sees Mabel Pervin wade into a pond and disappear, introduces the story's death symbolism surrounding the pond and also metaphorically hints at Fergusson's sexually repressed way of moving through the world.

The narrator describes the pond as if it were a corpse past the period of rigor mortis: "dead cold," "rotten," and "soft." This suggestive description—together with Mabel's use of the pond for suicide—connects the pond with death and decay.

More subtly, the passage links the pond to sexual repression. Previously in the story, Fergusson has stared at Mabel with interest but hasn't seemed to realize his own sexual interest in her, which implies his sexual repression. When he wades into the pond, the narrator specifically notes the cold water subsuming "his loins" (his sexual organs). Considering that the pond is so closely connected to death in the story, the fact that it submerges his genitals is a clear indication that his sexual repression actively works against his overall sense of vitality. Moreover, his fear about wading into the pond after Mabel foreshadows the fear he feels about engaging in sexual activity with her later in the story. Linking the deathly pond to Fergusson's sexual repression, the story suggests that sex is a life-affirming force and that, in saving Mabel and beginning a relationship with her, Fergusson may also be saving himself—if, that is, he manages to open up and embrace his own sexuality.

> He looked down at the tangled wet hair, the wild, bare, animal shoulders. He was amazed, bewildered, and afraid. He had never thought of loving her. He had never wanted to love her. When he rescued her and restored her, he was a doctor and she was a patient. He had had no single personal thought of her. Nay, this introduction of the personal element was very distasteful to him, a violation of his professional honor. It was horrible to have her there embracing his knees. It was horrible. He revolted from it violently. And yet—and yet—he had not the power to break away.

Related Characters: Jack Fergusson, Mabel Pervin

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

After Fergusson rescues Mabel from drowning in the pond, he strips her out of her wet clothes and places her in front of a fire. Upon realizing that Fergusson has taken her clothes off, Mabel grasps his legs and kisses his knees. Using animal imagery, the story strengthens the connection between the survival instinct and the sexual instinct while also hinting at an inner conflict between Fergusson's repression and his sexual attraction to Mabel.

By describing Mabel's shoulders as "animal," the story links earlier representations of the strong and vital horses with Mabel's newfound sexuality. Now that she has an outlet for her primal desires—her attraction to Fergusson—she has transformed from a passive, deathly person into an active and vital one.

Meanwhile, the narration uses elevated diction and repetition to portray Fergusson's inner conflict between repression and attraction. Describing Mabel passionately kissing his knees as "the introduction of the personal element," Fergusson's internal monologue seems stuffy to the point of comedy, while his repeated claim that her embracing his knees is "horrible" smacks of a certain uptightness. The repetition of "and yet" at the passage's end, on the other hand, emphasizes that something—namely, unexpressed sexual attraction—is counteracting his social and professional judgment and keeping him from rejecting her.

> He looked down at her. Her eyes were now wide with fear, with doubt, the light was dying from her face, a shadow of terrible greyness was returning. He could not bear the touch of her eyes' question upon him, and the look of death behind the question.
>
> With an inward groan he gave way, and let his heart yield towards her.

Related Characters: Jack Fergusson, Mabel Pervin

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

After Fergusson saves Mabel from drowning, she embraces and kisses his knees. Fergusson looks away from Mabel with

his hand braced on her shoulder to prevent her from pulling him to the floor. Now, though, he looks at her. This passage makes explicit the connection between Mabel's suicidal tendency—her death instinct—and her lack of outlets for her instinct to survive and fulfill her needs, which includes her sexuality.

As long as Mabel believes that Fergusson loves her, she believes him to be an outlet for her life instinct—that is, for her love and sexuality. Once "doubt" returns, however, death and darkness come back, too, as the light fades from her face and she has a "look of death" in her eyes. By calling attention to this drastic change, the story highlights the connection between sexuality and life, on the one hand, and sexual repression and death, on the other.

Interestingly, Fergusson gives into his love for Mabel because he recognizes that refusing to love her would be, in some sense, like killing her. Although he at various points mentions his profession (doctor) as a reason not to fall in love, that he loves Mabel in order to save her life also suggests some consonance between his work as a healer and his sexuality.

❝ "And my hair smells so horrible," she murmured in distraction. "And I'm so awful, I'm so awful! Oh, no, I'm too awful," and she broke into bitter, heart-broken sobbing. "You can't want to love me, I'm horrible."

Related Characters: Mabel Pervin (speaker), Jack Fergusson

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 198

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jack Fergusson and Mabel Pervin have put on dry clothes. Fergusson has told Mabel that he needs to go back to work and has refused her offer to make him tea. The passage reveals Mabel's own sexual repression as an obstacle to the lovers' happy ending.

As previously discussed, the pond represents a death instinct that includes sexual repression, in contrast with an animalistic instinct to fulfill basic needs (which includes sexuality). Mabel's hair smells "horrible" because it smells like pond water; by referring to the pond again here, the narrator hints at the lingering sexual repression in the story, despite the intimate scene that has just transpired between Mabel and Fergusson.

For that matter, Mabel not only claims that her hair smells horrible but also calls herself "horrible." Fergusson repeatedly used the word "horrible" earlier in the story to describe Mabel embracing his knees while he himself was in the grip of sexual repression and shame. That Mabel uses the word here thus suggests that she now feels ashamed of her overtly sexual behavior toward Fergusson, despite the fact that he ultimately reciprocated her feelings. The story's ending therefore implies that sexual shame is a powerful, life-negating force that even reciprocated love can't always overcome.

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 HORSE-DEALER'S DAUGHTER

Joe asks Mabel what she is going to do. Then, without waiting for her to respond, he spits out some tobacco. Nothing matters to Joe because he feels "safe." Joe, Mabel, and their two brothers are sitting around a table in the dining room. They have just received mail letting them know that their family is in dire economic straits. Although they are supposed to be discussing these dire economic straits, they have lapsed into silence. The brothers are smoking and thinking. Mabel, the sister—27 years old—is "alone" and does not "share the same life as her brothers." The brothers tend to describe her facial expression as "bull-dog."

From the beginning of the story, readers can intuit something amiss in the siblings' relationships to one another. Joe feeling "safe" while the family is in dire economic straits suggests that some family members are likely to suffer more than others from their financial ruin. That the narration describes Mabel as "alone," despite having her brothers around her, implies that as the sole woman in the house, she may be the one most likely to suffer. Moreover, the claim that she does not "share the same life as her brothers" hints at a rift in the family. Finally, that her brothers tend to describe her with the animalistic term "bull-dog" may imply that they hold her in contempt.

The brothers hear **horses** outside their house and turn in their chairs to see. Draught horses are leaving the brothers' yard. These are the final horses the family owns or will own, and the brothers are scared about the family's economic situation. Nevertheless, the brothers are good-looking. The oldest brother, Joe, is 33 years old, with "shallow and restless" eyes and a "stupid" demeanor. He looks at the horses with "a certain stupor of downfall."

The contrast between the brothers' momentary fear and their general good looks suggests that the brothers will survive the economic disaster they're currently experiencing. By describing Joe as "shallow and restless," as well as "stupid," the story implicitly compares him to the lively but stupid horses. He feels "a certain stupor" when he looks at them because he is losing the animals with which he so closely identifies.

The four **horses**, roped together, move "floutingly" and "sumptuously" yet with "a stupidity which held them in subjection." The man leading them pulls on the rope that binds them. The horses pass out of the brothers' sight.

The horses' beautiful physical movements show their vitality, but the story also implies that there's a certain stupidity that keeps them in a perpetual state of "subjection" to humans. In other words, the animals are powerful, but they're under the command of humans—humans who, in this case, aren't able to tend them.

Joe continues to watch where the **horses** have gone. Because the horses are "almost like his own body to him," their departure makes him feel as though his life has ended. He plans to marry a woman his own age, whose father will hire him: "He would marry and go into harness." Joe throws a scrap of bacon from the dining table to the family terrier. When she has eaten it and looked at him, he smiles and tells her that she won't be getting much more bacon.

Here the story makes explicit Joe's identification with the horses: they are "almost like his own body to him." Like them, he is full of vitality, physical prowess, and stupidity. The comparison between Joe marrying and getting a job with the idea of a horse "go[ing] into harness" implies that humans are often forced to channel their own animalistic instincts into restrictive social institutions like marriage.

The next oldest brother after Joe, Fred Henry, has seen the **horses** leaving but has not reacted as emotionally as Joe: "If he was an animal, like Joe, he was an animal which controls, not one which is controlled." He plays with his moustache and asks his sister Mabel whether she will go stay with Lucy. Mabel does not reply. Fred Henry says he sees no other options for her. Joe suggests she work as a maid. Mabel still does not reply. The youngest brother, Malcolm, suggests that she become a nurse. Mabel continues to ignore her brothers.

Here the story continues to compare human characters to animals, not only the stupid Joe but the self-controlled Fred Henry. By insisting that the brothers are animals, the story emphasizes their primal survival instinct in the face of disaster. In contrast to the vivacious and talkative brothers, Mabel remains stubbornly silent, almost corpselike. Her brothers' repeated attempts to bully her into staying with Lucy or getting a job suggest that, unlike them, Mabel does not have definite plans for the future.

Joe announces his intention to leave. He gets up from the table "in horsey fashion" and walks to the fireplace but does not leave. Instead, he talks to the terrier, asking whether she will go with him and telling her she will be traveling farther than she thinks. Joe smokes his pipe and stares at the dog.

Here the story emphasizes that Joe has somewhere to go, whereas Mabel does not. In addition, the story insists on Joe's animal nature by once again comparing him to a horse.

Fred Henry asks Mabel whether she has received a letter from Lucy. Mabel replies that she received one the week before. When Fred Henry asks what the letter says, Mabel does not reply. Fred Henry asks whether Lucy has invited Mabel to stay with her. Mabel says yes. Fred orders Mabel to write back that she will go to Lucy's on Monday. Mabel doesn't reply. Joe tells Mabel that if she doesn't go to Lucy's by next Wednesday, she'll be homeless. Although Mabel's expression becomes upset, she still says nothing.

This passage illustrates how few options Mabel seems to have as a formerly upper-class but now impoverished woman: either she can live as a dependent in someone else's household, or she can become homeless. Her brothers' demands on her and their lack of compassion suggest that, as men, they do not fully understand her plight.

Malcolm exclaims that he has seen Jack Fergusson through the window. Joe asks whether Fergusson is coming to their house; Malcolm says yes. Joe opens the door and invites Fergusson in. Joe, Malcolm, and Fred Henry greet him. Fergusson asks Fred Henry what's going on. Fred Henry tells him that the family has to vacate their house by next Wednesday and asks him whether he has a cold. Fergusson says yes, he has a bad cold. Joe comments that patients must find it disheartening when their doctor is sick. Fergusson asks Joe whether he is sick. Joe asks why Fergusson asks. Fergusson says that Joe's concern for patients made him wonder. Joe declares that he has "never been patient to no flaming doctor."

This passage suggests an odd relationship in the story between professionalism and the physical body. Joe implies that doctors shouldn't get sick, as if professional-class people should conquer and control their bodies in a way that working-class people don't—especially for people whose job it is to help others stay healthy. Joe's proud declaration that he has "never been patient to no flaming doctor," meanwhile, suggests there is something shameful about illness, as if having a body that undergoes ordinary physical experiences like sickness would be somehow humiliating.

Mabel stands up and starts putting the breakfast dishes in order. Fergusson watches her but doesn't speak to her. She leaves the room.

This brief interaction, in which Fergusson watches Mabel but doesn't speak to her, hints that he finds her interesting but for some reason won't openly express that interest.

Fergusson asks the brothers when they are leaving. Malcolm says he is taking the 11:40 train and asks Joe whether he is taking the carriage. Joe swears at Malcolm and says he's already told Malcolm that he is. Malcolm says goodbye to Fergusson and shakes his hand. Malcolm and Joe depart.

This passage again emphasizes that the brothers have plans and places to go: Malcolm is taking a train somewhere, while Joe is taking a carriage. By contrast, their sister Mabel seems to have no plans and nowhere to go.

Fergusson asks Fred Henry whether he is really vacating the house before Wednesday. Fred Henry tells him that those are their "orders." Fergusson asks whether he is going to Northampton. Fred Henry says yes. Fergusson and Fred Henry exclaim that they are going to miss one another.

Clearly, the family's economic ruin has put constraints on the brothers' behavior. Fred Henry and the others have "orders" to vacate their own house. Yet Fred Henry, like Joe and Malcolm, has somewhere to go: Northampton, in Fred Henry's case. Mabel, a woman without a husband, is the only sibling without plans or prospects.

Mabel re-enters the room to finish putting away the breakfast dishes. Fergusson, calling her "Miss Pervin," asks her whether she will go stay with her sister. Mabel, staring at him in a way that "unsettle[es] his superficial ease," says she won't. Fred Henry asks what else she can do and demands she explain it. Mabel, ignoring him, removes the tablecloth. Fred Henry calls her "[t]he sulkiest bitch that ever trod." Without responding, while Fergusson observes her, she finishes her task and leaves the room again.

Fergusson's close observation of Mabel reveals his interest in her, as does her ability to unsettle him. Yet the formal way he addresses her—"Miss Pervin"—reminds the reader that as an unmarried man and an unmarried woman of this time, Fergusson and Mabel have social constraints placed on their behavior toward one another. Meanwhile, Fred Henry's exasperation with Mabel and the fact that he calls her a "bitch" show both his worry and his sexist contempt for her.

Fred Henry expresses annoyance at Mabel's obstinacy. Fergusson asks him what Mabel will do; Fred Henry says he has no idea. Fergusson asks Fred Henry whether he'll see him that night; Fred Henry says yes but then asks whether they're going to Jessdale. Fergusson says that because of his cold, he's not sure, but he will at least make it to "the Moon and Stars." Fred Henry and Fergusson walk to the back door together.

Yet again, the story hammers home that men have greater freedom in the face of economic ruin than women do. After fighting with his sister about her uncertain future, Fred Henry can simply turn around and make plans to go out with his friend—probably to a pub, as the name "the Moon and Stars" suggests. By contrast, no one has any idea what Mabel will do or what will happen to her.

Outside the back door are stables, but there are no **horses** in them anymore. The brothers' and Mabel's father, Joseph Pervin, used to be a successful horse dealer despite having had "no education." During the period of Joseph Pervin's success, the stables contained many horses, and the house contained many servants. When Joseph Pervin's business took a turn for the worse, he remarried for money. When he died, however, he left his children in debt.

Here the story associates the successful trade in horses—which symbolize the primal instinct to survive and fulfill basic needs—with having "no education," a detail implying that working-class jobs breed vitality whereas professional-class jobs suppress vitality. Notably, Joseph Pervin married the second time for economic security, just like his oldest son Joe is planning to do; this pattern suggests that in the world of the story, marriage is not about sex or romance but about money and stability.

Since the Pervin family has not been able to afford servants for months, Mabel has been acting as housekeeper to her brothers without any assistance. When the family had money, Mabel still acted as housekeeper and oversaw the servants, but even though the house was "brutal and coarse," she didn't mind because of the feeling the money gave her. After her sister left, Mabel had no female company; all she did was go to church, take care of her father, and remember her dead mother, whom she loved. Her father's remarriage turned Mabel against him up to the time of his death.

This passage reveals the extent of Mabel's problems. Just as the story has repeatedly compared Mabel's brothers to animals, so her brothers have repeatedly compared her to an animal—she, too, has an animalistic instinct to survive and fulfill her desires. Yet unlike her brothers, who have outlets for their vitality in work, travel, and friends, Mabel has no friends and only two occupations: church and housekeeping. Moreover, the family's sudden economic ruin has taken away the money that reconciled her to her "brutal and coarse" environment; soon it will take away her occupation of housekeeping as well.

Although Mabel has endured a great deal of pain after her father's death due to her family's debts, she has retained her "animal pride." She has no more options, but she refuses to flail, to think, or to answer questions. At least she no longer needs to "demean herself" by economizing on food and dodging looks from the other townspeople. Without really thinking about it, she feels herself to be growing closer to her dead mother.

Mabel, who lacks good opportunities to thrive and support herself, resolves to indulge her pride and to stop "demean[ing] herself" with poverty. The story does not specify, at this point, how Mabel will escape poverty; ominously, however, Mabel associates her escape with growing closer to her dead mother.

Mabel leaves the house carrying a bag that contains cleaning supplies. She goes to the churchyard. Although the churchyard is perfectly visible to people passing by, Mabel feels safely invisible there. Once in the churchyard, she clips the grass over the grave and sponges clean the gravestone. She greatly enjoys tending to her mother's grave, "[f]or the life she followed here in the world was far less real than the world of death she inherited from her mother."

That Mabel feels invisible in the churchyard, despite her actual visibility, suggests that the churchyard exists in a world separate from the rest of the town—the "world of death." The enjoyment that Mabel finds in occupying the graveyard and the sensual care that she lavishes on her mother's gravestone show how, in the absence of outlets such as employment, friendship, or love, she is redirecting her life instinct toward death.

Fergusson is walking to see some patients when he notices Mabel in the churchyard. He finds the sight of her striking: "She seemed so intent and remote, it was like looking into another world." Mabel meets his stare. Immediately, Fergusson and Mabel look away from each other. Fergusson, tipping his cap to Mabel, moves on but continues to think about Mabel's face and eyes. He feels a sudden resurgence of "life."

Fergusson's perception that Mabel exists in "another world" underscores her attraction to and participation in the "world of death" that she associates with her beloved mother. That Fergusson and Mabel immediately look away from one another after their eyes meet hints both at their attraction to one another and their embarrassment (even shame) at their own sexual desires. Yet Fergusson's resurgence of "life" after seeing Mabel, the object of his attraction, illustrates how sexuality in the story is a life-affirming force.

Fergusson supplies patients waiting at the surgery with medications and then goes on house calls to several more patients. Walking on a hill above the town, he looks down, sees the Pervin family's house, and muses that when the family leaves, there will be no one left in the town he likes to spend time with. His entire life will consist of work. While Fergusson finds his work as a doctor fatiguing, he also finds entering the homes of his working-class patients enlivening.

Like Mabel, Fergusson is socially isolated—the Pervins, who are the only people he sees socially, are about to vacate their home—but unlike Mabel, Fergusson has another outlet: the house calls he makes for his patients. The fact that Fergusson finds his medical work fatiguing suggests that intellectual labor is not a source of vitality—at least not in the same way that his working-class patients find vitality in physical labor.

Fergusson sees Mabel walking from the house toward a **pond** that lies below it. It seems to him as though she is not walking of her own free will: "she moved, direct and intent, like something transmitted rather than stirring in voluntary activity." As he watches, she wades into the pond and vanishes.

Notably, in Ferguson's perception, Mabel's suicide attempt is not a "voluntary activity." It's not something that she chooses freely in her right mind but rather something she is compelled *to do. This language of compulsion implies that Mabel's suicide attempt is instinctive—a perversion of her life instinct into a death instinct due to a lack of other outlets.*

Fergusson runs down the hill to the **pond**. When he reaches it, he at first sees no sign of Mabel. Then he thinks he has caught sight of her clothes beneath the water. He wades into the pond, which is cold and nasty smelling with a treacherous bottom. It frightens him, because he can't swim. He shoves his hand in the water and gropes for Mabel's clothing. He touches it, makes a grab for it, and falls into the water himself.

By describing the pond as cold and nasty-smelling, the story implicitly compares it to a corpse—which is appropriate, since Mabel tries to use it to end her life.

After a moment of panic, Fergusson finds the bottom of the **pond** with his feet, stands up out of the water, and sees Mabel bobbing nearby. He grabs her by the dress and begins towing her toward land. When they reach the shallows, he picks her up and carries her onto the bank, where he discovers that she is unconscious. Pumping water out of her mouth, he restarts her breathing. When he is sure that she's alive, he cleans her face, bundles her in his coat, picks her up, and carries her back to her house.

In contrast with the medial busywork that Fergusson has been performing, rescuing Mabel requires great physical exertion—which makes sense, since the story associates physical labor with vitality. By exerting himself in this way, then, Fergusson ends up saving Mabel's life, thus cementing the relationship between physical labor and life itself. Furthermore, Fergusson now touches Mabel, cleans her, and carries her, and his actions suggest a new intimacy between them.

No one else is home. Fergusson puts Mabel down in the kitchen, near the fire, and examines her. She is still breathing, and her eyes are open, but she does not seem to be aware of what is going on around her. Fergusson goes and fetches blankets from a bed upstairs, strips Mabel out of her wet clothes, and bundles her in the blankets. In the dining room, he finds some whiskey, which he drinks himself and then pours into Mabel's mouth.

Despite tending to Mabel's body intimately, Fergusson strips and bundles Mabel in a decisive and professional way, which suggests that he feels like he's performing his role as a doctor while saving her life. And yet, when he takes a drink of whiskey before giving some to Mabel, he betrays that the experience in the pond has shaken him.

Upon drinking the whiskey, Mabel seems to become aware of her surroundings again and says Fergusson's name inquisitively: "Dr Fergusson?" Fergusson replies distractedly; he is taking off his coat, wondering where he can find dry clothing, and worrying about the effect of the nasty-smelling **pond** water on his own health. She asks him what she has done. He tells her that she went into the pond. He is shivering badly, but when he meets her eyes, he shivers less: "his life came back in him, dark and unknowing, but strong again."

Echoing the earlier moment in the story when Fergusson called Mabel "Miss Pervin," Mabel now calls Fergusson by his title and last name: "Dr. Fergusson." This detail illustrates that Mabel, unaware of what she has done or how Fergusson has saved her, still places Fergusson at a social distance. Her amnesia about her suicide attempt emphasizes that a powerful death instinct—rather than a rational calculation—was what compelled her to wade into the pond. Fergusson, meanwhile, subconsciously feels "life" returning to him when they look at each other, which hints at his sexual attraction to Mabel and the link between sexuality and a sense of human vitality (that is, a desire to live and thrive).

Mabel, staring at Fergusson, asks him whether she was insane. He tells her she may have been. She asks him whether she is still insane. He wonders for a moment but then tells her no. He turns away from her looking at him and asks where he can find dry clothes. Instead of replying, she asks whether he dove into the pond to retrieve her. He tells her that he didn't dive in but walked in, though at one point he was submerged. He feels torn between his desire to find dry clothes and "another desire in him." He feels that Mabel is keeping him in the room and notices that he has stopped shivering despite his wet clothes.

Fergusson seems to have rescued Mabel not only from drowning but from the temporary insanity that her death instinct brought on. This fact implies that even one outlet—a single gesture of care from and connection with another living human—is enough to revive Mabel's will to survive. The passage contrasts Fergusson's preoccupation with getting dry clothes, a sign of social discomfort with the unusual situation, and "another desire" that the story does not name. Fergusson's feeling that Mabel is somehow keeping him in the room suggests that what the story calls "another desire" is in fact his sexual desire for her. That this sexual desire stops Fergusson shivering despite the deathly pond water in his clothes once again highlights the connections the story makes between sex, warmth, and vitality.

Mabel asks why Fergusson retrieved her from the **pond**. He tells her it was to prevent her from doing "a foolish thing." She denies that drowning herself was foolish. He tells her that he's going to leave and change out of his wet clothes, but he feels unable to move away from her: "It was as if she had the life of his body in her hands, and he could not extricate himself. Or perhaps he did not want to."

Although the story has previously implied that Mabel walked into the pond because she felt an irrational pull toward death, she now denies that her suicide attempt was foolish. The story thus seems to suggest that even if Mabel was acting instinctively when she tried to kill herself, she correctly identified reasons for despair in her life as an impoverished woman that Fergusson, as a man with more opportunities to support himself, doesn't understand. Fergusson, meanwhile, is still struggling between his social instinct to change clothes and his sexual instinct ("the life of his body") that wants to express his attraction to Mabel.

Mabel sits up, realizes that she is naked under the blankets, and sees her clothes on the floor. Fergusson feels terrified. She asks him who took her clothes off. He admits that he did as part of his efforts to revive her. She stares at him, "her lips parted," and asks him whether he loves her. Fergusson, looking at her, says nothing: "His soul seemed to melt."

Fergusson had legitimate medical reasons for taking Mabel's clothes off: he needed to get her warm after she nearly drowned in a very cold pond. His terror when Mabel notices her own nakedness reveals that, despite his legitimate reasons, he is also aware and ashamed of a sexual element at play in his interactions with Mabel. That Mabel stares at Fergusson with "lips parted" hints at her arousal; by asking Fergusson if he loves her, she makes the sexual element in their interactions explicit. Fergusson's soul "melt[ing]" continues the story's association of sexuality with warmth and life, in contrast to the deathly cold of the pond.

Mabel hugs Fergusson's knees, pushing his legs against her breasts, neck, and face, and stares up at him, "triumphant in first possession." She tells him repeatedly that he loves her. Then she begins kissing his knees. Fergusson looks down at her "wild, bare, animal shoulders" in shock and fear, thinking that his motive for saving her was not love but his obligation as a doctor. He thinks that her talk of love is insulting to him as a doctor and that her hugging his knees is "horrible," but for some reason he feels unable to stop her.

Mabel has completely changed in her behavior. In the beginning of the story, she was passive, silent, sullen, and obsessed with death. Now that she believes Fergusson loves her, she is active, talkative, "triumphant," and "animal." Mabel's dramatic behavioral change highlights the importance in the story of having outlets for natural, animal instincts—once Mabel has even one potential outlet to fulfill her desires, she becomes a completely different person. At this point, Fergusson has not experienced a similar transformation: he still identifies with his socially constrained, professional role as a doctor, though his inability to resist Mabel's advances hints at an inner conflict between his professional identity and his sexual attraction.

Mabel stares up at Fergusson. The "frightening light of triumph" in her face makes him feel "powerless," but he still does not submit to the idea that he loves her. Again, she repeats that he loves her and begins pulling him down to the floor. Fergusson, scared, reaches out for balance and grabs Mabel's naked shoulder. While he still feels that the idea of loving Mabel is "horrible," he suddenly enjoys the touch of her shoulder and finds "beautiful the shining of her face."

The "light" in Mabel's face again associates sexuality with life and warmth, ultimately contrasting the pond's deathly cold. Fergusson's "powerless" feeling when confronted with Mabel suggests that he experiences an irrational, instinctive sexual response. He enjoys touching Mabel's shoulder and finds her expression "beautiful." But because Fergusson resists loving Mabel, finding the idea "horrible," the reader suspects that he's ashamed of his own sexuality.

Mabel stops trying to pull Fergusson to the floor with her. He looks down at her and sees that her face is dimming and she is beginning to question herself. Because Fergusson cannot bear "the look of death" in her eyes, he relents and begins to smile at her. She starts crying. He kneels and hugs her; she cries "hot tears" against his neck. He feels that he wants to hold her for eternity.

Because the story associates sex with life, Mabel gets a "look of death" on her face when she stops believing Fergusson loves and wants her. Suddenly, she no longer has an outlet for her sexual feelings, and her entire demeanor starts to deteriorate as a result. Still, the "hot tears" that she cries when Fergusson gives into his attraction to her represent the heat of life and sexuality that still burns inside her.

Fergusson becomes aware again of the nasty odor of the **pond** water. Mabel pulls away and stares at him. Scared of the "unfathomable" look in her eyes, he starts kissing her. Her face begins to shine again. Fergusson is afraid of this expression, too, but he prefers it to her questioning herself. She asks him whether he loves her. He tells her yes and believes it to be true, although he "hardly want[s] it to be true, even now." They kiss again. Fergusson feels that his old mode of life is over and he has entered a new one with her.

Because Fergusson smells the deathly pond's nasty odor just as Mabel pulls away from him, the reader connects death with the lovers' separation. A "fathom" is a unit for measuring water's depth, so the description of Mabel's fearful expression as "unfathomable" implicitly compares her to deep water—that is, to the pond that almost killed them both. At this point, Fergusson is still afraid and ashamed of his and Mabel's sexuality: her shining face frightens him and he "hardly want[s] it to be true" that he loves her. All the same, though, he now prefers Mabel to the figurative death of sexual repression.

The kiss ends. Mabel starts crying again. Fergusson, saying nothing, feels great emotional pain and wonders over the fact that he, a doctor, should be in love with Mabel and feel the pains of love. He believes that people would mock him if they realized that he loved Mabel. This belief causes him additional pain.

Bizarrely, Fergusson believes that doctors shouldn't feel love or lust. This passage connects to an earlier moment in the story when Joe mocked Fergusson for getting sick, apparently making the assumption that doctors shouldn't get sick. Both moments illustrate the characters' belief that professional-class people should somehow repress or escape their bodies. This belief partly explains Fergusson's repressive shame about his own sexuality: he thinks that, as a doctor, he should control his body and not the other way around.

Fergusson watches Mabel cry and notices that he can see her bare shoulder, arm, and breast. He asks her why she's crying. A "dark look of shame" comes into Mabel's eyes, and she denies that she is crying. Fergusson takes Mabel's arm and declares that he loves her. Mabel becomes upset at his touch. She tells him she wants to go fetch him some dry clothes. He tells her it's fine, but she insists. He lets her go. Instead of getting up, she asks him to kiss her. He does, "but briefly, half in anger."

Up to this point, Fergusson has been ashamed of the sexual attraction between himself and Mabel, while Mabel has taken it as a source of vitality and triumph. Now the tables turn: while Fergusson wants to express his love, Mabel assumes a "dark look of shame" and, like Fergusson earlier, begins obsessing over getting them dry clothes. That Fergusson kisses Mabel "briefly" and angrily here foreshadows the trouble shame will cause the lovers.

Mabel stands up. She has trouble rearranging the blanket around herself in a way convenient for walking. Seeing her feet and leg, Fergusson thinks back to when he wrapped her in the blanket naked but then rejects the thought "because she had been nothing to him then, and his nature revolted from remembering what she was when she was nothing to him."

The story has repeatedly hinted throughout Fergusson and Mabel's interactions that he has always been attracted to her. However, he insists to himself that she was "nothing to him" until he declared his love for her and began thinking of her as a woman rather than a patient. This passage thus reveals Fergusson's insistence on thinking of himself not as a human animal but as a doctor who remains untouched by his working-class patients' sicknesses and lusts: it has become "his nature" to think of himself in this detached way. This ingrained habit further explains Fergusson's shame at suddenly giving way to sexual desire.

Fergusson hears a noise. From upstairs Mabel tells him that there are clothes for him. He fetches the clothes she has tossed down the stairs for him, goes to the fire, and puts them on. He puts coal on the fire, lights the gas lamps, and puts his and Mabel's wet clothes into the scullery. When he sees that it is six o'clock and realizes he needs to return to work, he calls up the stairs to Mabel that he needs to go. She walks downstairs wearing a nice dress. When she sees Fergusson in his new clothes, she smiles and says she dislikes how they look. He asks whether they look terrible. The two are "shy."

Because Mabel tosses the clothes down to Fergusson rather than bringing them down herself, the reader suspects she is still ashamed and is hiding from him. Yet she also changes into a nice dress, which leads the reader to believe she is trying to impress him. Mabel is caught between wanting to hide from Fergusson and wanting him to look at her—between her shame at her own sexuality and her vital sexual desire. When Fergusson asks how he looks in his new clothes, the reader suspects that he is similarly self-conscious about his appearance in front of Mabel. That the characters are "shy" with each other shows how each feels desire and shame simultaneously.

Mabel offers to make Fergusson tea. He refuses, saying he has to leave. She asks whether he really needs to leave. Realizing again that he loves her, he kisses her. She says that her hair smells nasty, declares that she herself is awful, and bursts into tears: "You can't want to love me, I'm horrible." Fergusson kisses her, embraces her, and tells her that he wants to marry her as quickly as possible. Continuing to cry, she tells him, "I feel awful. I feel I'm horrible to you." He tries to reassure her that he does want her, but how he says it frightens Mabel almost as much as the idea that he doesn't love or want her.

Mabel's hair smells nasty because it smells of pond water. The pond, which symbolizes death, makes another appearance here because Mabel fears that Fergusson "can't want to love" her and thus that she will lose her outlet for her sexuality and vitality. Because Mabel repeatedly uses the word "horrible" to describe herself—the same word that Fergusson used earlier to describe her sexual overtures, when he was rejecting her out of shame—the reader suspects Mabel's own sexual shame is the source of her fear and self-loathing here. In this context, Fergusson's offer to marry her makes a kind of sense: marriage is the socially sanctioned outlet for human sexuality in the story and thus the social institution best suited to banish Mabel's shame. Yet, at the very end of the story, Mabel remains frightened both of sexuality and *of losing access to sexual expression, which suggests that marriage is inadequate to control human sexuality or banish sexual shame.*

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