A White Heron

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SARAH ORNE JEWETT

Sarah Orne Jewett grew up in the rural town of South Berwick, Maine. Her physician father influenced her as a child by taking her on his visits to the sick within the community, thus teaching her to observe and appreciate the country people of her home state. He also encouraged her love of literature, and when Jewett's chronic sickliness (which had plagued her since childhood) prevented her from continuing to study medicine, she dedicated herself to writing. Though she remained fond of her hometown, she became a prominent member of the Boston literary circle through her friendship with publisher William Dean Howells. In her lifetime, Jewett published over 20 novels and short story collections, including the novel *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, her most critically acclaimed work. Jewett died of a stroke in 1909 in the small Maine town where she was born.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The rapid industrialization of late-18th and early-19th century New England caused a large number of people to move from the countryside to manufacturing towns. Jewett worried that this migration disrupted rural communities and disconnected people from their natural environments, as expressed in the story's concern for Sylvia's connection to nature. The dramatic changes industrialization brought to society (with its technological advancement, mass migrations, and degradation of nature) caused individuals like Jewett to romanticize the peaceful life of the countryside. This was part of the Romantic movement in literature, which contrasted the Realist movement: the harsh realities of industrialization, paired with major national events such as the Civil War, encouraged frank, realistic depictions of social issues, shown in Jewett's views of human interference in nature.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

"A White Heron" is an example of Regionalism, a post-Civil War genre of literature which celebrated the unique environment and local culture of specific regions of America. The short story shares thematic and genre elements with *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, another Regionalist writer. While Twain examined Southern culture and Jewett focused on New England, both writers use Romantic descriptions of children communing with nature and realistic depictions of current social issues (slavery for Twain and industrialization for Jewett). Critics believe Jewett's Romantic view of nature and her focus on regionalism also influenced Willa Cather's novel *My Ántonia*, which celebrates a childhood spent communing with nature and pays close attention to the specific culture that exists among poor countryfolk. Jewett herself took inspiration from Gustave Flaubert, whose work her father introduced her to. Though Flaubert's most famous work, *Madame Bovary*, deals with a French woman obsessed with finery and high society, Flaubert's realism connects directly to Jewett's realistic and somewhat pessimistic depiction of the temptations of industrialization and modern society that make Sylvia's decision within "A White Heron" so difficult.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** A White Heron
- **Where Written:** Maine
- **When Published:** 1886
- **Literary Period:** Realism, Regionalism
- **Genre:** Short Story, Romanticism mixed with Realism, Regional Fiction
- **Setting:** Rural Maine
- **Climax:** Sylvia witnesses the white heron
- **Antagonist:** The threat of industrialization
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Boston Marriage: After the death of her friend and publisher James Thomas Fields, Jewett lived for years with his widow, Anne. This was a type of partnership often called a "Boston Marriage," a term popularized in the late 1800s to describe two women who lived together and financially and emotionally supported each other independent of any man.

Arthritis: Jewett lived with rheumatoid arthritis since childhood and her father took her on long walks in the country in order to relieve her pain. These walks introduced her to both the beauty of New England's natural environment and the rich culture of her rural community, two major influences on her stories.

PLOT SUMMARY

Sylvia, a 9-year-old girl, is driving her cow home through the woodlands of the Maine countryside. She worries about being late because her mischievous cow, Mistress Moolly, hid from her, but her grandmother, Mrs. Tilley, understands how much Sylvia enjoys exploring the woods while caring for the cow.

Sylvia feels so much excitement and wonder in the country, a contrast to the first eight years of her life, where she felt stifled and withered living in a manufacturing town.

A whistle disturbs the evening's peace, and Sylvia is frightened when a stranger approaches her. The hunter explains that he became lost while searching for birds in the woods and asks if he could stay the night at her house. Sylvia is hesitant, still shy around the stranger, but when they return home, Mrs. Tilley welcomes the hunter inside. At dinner, Mrs. Tilley reveals that her son, Dan, is an explorer who always loved nature and now lives out in California (although they have lost touch and he may be dead). She says that Sylvia is like Dan, exploring her natural environment and making friends with all the wild birds. When the hunter hears this, he reveals that he collects rare birds by shooting and stuffing them and is currently searching the countryside for the rare and beautiful **white heron**. If Sylvia will help him find the heron, he says, he will give her ten dollars.

The next day, the hunter and Sylvia explore the woods in search of the bird. Sylvia begins to warm up to the hunter, finding him to be friendly and very knowledgeable about birds. She begins to feel hints of love for him, despite that fact that she is horrified by his killing of birds. They do not find the elusive heron, but they drive the cow back home together.

When loggers were chopping down the forest years ago, they left one tree: an old pine-tree that is now the tallest in the forest. Sylvia knows that if she climbs this tree, she will be able to see all the way to the ocean and she may be able to locate the heron's nest. So excited by this thought that she cannot sleep, she leaves the house in darkness while Mrs. Tilley and the hunter are still asleep.

Sylvia climbs an oak tree in order to reach the shortest branches of the old pine tree. Though she climbs with difficulty, she perceives that the pine tree is helping her on her mission to find the heron, loving her for her brave spirit. Feeling tired yet triumphant, Sylvia finally reaches the top. She feels wonder at the beautiful aerial view of the countryside, and her excitement swells as she spots the heron flying up in the sky. She marvels at the heron and seems to adopt the heron's perspective, as if they share one mind. She climbs down still thinking about how she will tell the hunter about the heron's location and how he will react.

Back home, Mrs. Tilley has noticed Sylvia's absence and is calling out for her granddaughter. Sylvia arrives back at the house, pale and with her clothes tattered and covered in pine pitch. She cannot speak to either the hunter or her grandmother, though the hunter offers to make her rich for helping him find the heron. She questions why she would keep the secret of the bird's location when he offers her a human connection to the rest of the world. But she recalls the glorious moment she shared with the bird and decides she cannot allow the hunter to kill it.

Sometime later, Sylvia still hears the haunting echo of the hunter's whistle and remembers the love and loyalty she felt for him. She forgets the sadness she felt when she watched him shoot birds and instead wonders if the friendship she has with the wild birds can replace the human companionship she could have had with him. The narrator wills the nature around Sylvia to come and comfort her with all the gifts the natural world has to offer.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Sylvia – Sylvia, the protagonist of the story, is a 9-year-old girl living on a farm in the Maine woodlands with her grandmother, Mrs. Tilley. Before moving to her grandmother's farm, Sylvia lived in a crowded manufacturing town with her mother and many siblings. In town, she felt stifled and bullied, but now she enjoys the company of animals and asserts her freedom to explore nature. Jewett describes Sylvia as a curious, observant, and shy young girl with a "pale face and shining gray eyes" that easily convey if she's feeling excited, scared, or troubled. The arrival of the hunter disrupts her peaceful country existence, as he asks her to help him find the rare **white heron** so that he can shoot and stuff it. Initially afraid this stranger, she agrees to help him because she begins to admire him and enjoy his company, feelings that border on romantic. Alone at night, she climbs a tree to locate the heron's nest. She spots the heron but while she views her natural environment from an aerial perspective, she identifies with the bird and feels a deep spiritual connection to it. She decides she cannot tell the hunter about the location of the heron because she cannot allow him to take the bird's life. The story ends with her becoming wiser, having made the moral choice to preserve nature, while still feeling regret over the loss of her friendship with the hunter. Sylvia's climatic choice to save the nature she loves suggests that one should choose to protect the environment even if that experience entails sacrificing other things that matter, like friendship.

The Hunter – The hunter (whose name is never revealed) is an ornithologist from town who comes to the countryside with the aim of shooting and stuffing a rare **white heron** for his collection of birds. He stumbles upon Sylvia in the woods and stays a couple of nights in her grandmother Mrs. Tilley's house. He is a materialistic person who seeks to turn wildlife into trophies and expects country homes to contain "horrors" of "primitive housekeeping" because of their lack of material comforts. The hunter presents Sylvia with the central moral conflict of the story: whether or not to help him find the heron. He believes he can tempt Sylvia into helping him with a monetary reward. This, plus his charming personality, friendly nature, and great knowledge of birds initially convince Sylvia to help him, despite the fact that she is horrified by his violent

shooting of the birds she loves. When Sylvia sees the world from the heron's perspective and decides not to reveal the location of its nest, however, the hunter leaves, presumably to continue his hunt for rare birds. The hunter represents the industrialization that threatens to conquer and destroy nature in order to satisfy human greed, and Sylvia must reject him in order to truly value her natural environment. Yet the hunter also represents the human companionship and connection one longs for, with the narrator wondering whether or not the wild birds Sylvia saved can replace the friendship she could have had with him.

Mrs. Tilley – Mrs. Tilley is Sylvia's grandmother who owns a farm in rural Maine. She is old enough to have an experienced knowledge of the countryside and to need of one of her grandchildren to help her with farm duties, hence bringing Sylvia to live with her. Mrs. Tilley's life is colored by "family sorrow," as four of her children have died, her daughter lives away from home in town, and she has lost touch with her son who went out West, though she says she does not blame him for not communicating. She cares for her granddaughter and enjoys watching her grow, noting that bringing Sylvia to live with her in the country has allowed the child to come alive with wonder and energy. Sylvia marvels at how Mrs. Tilley feels a strong sense of community with the other folks who live in the country and shows hospitality to strangers like the hunter. Her wise and caring nature shows the wholesome characteristics of country folk that Jewett wishes to document and celebrate in the story.

Dan Tilley Dan is Sylvia's uncle and Mrs. Tilley's only living son (although she is not totally sure that he is alive). He left home many years ago to explore the American West and has lost touch with the family. Mrs. Tilley remarks that both Dan and Sylvia share a deep personal connection to wildlife and both feel a call to explore nature.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mistress Moolly Mistress Moolly is the playfully mischievous cow owned by Mrs. Tilley and Sylvia. The cow is Sylvia's beloved playmate in the absence of human companions out in the country.

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.

NATURE VS. INDUSTRIALIZATION

At the climax of "A White Heron," the story's protagonist, Sylvia, must choose whether to help the hunter find and kill a beautiful and rare **white heron**, or whether to keep the heron safe by not revealing the location of its nest. This choice can be seen as an allegory for the conflict between nature and industrialization. By 1886, when Sarah Orne Jewett wrote the story, both the industrial revolution's economic promise and its detrimental effects on nature were clear. Furthermore, the factories and mills that had come to define the landscape of southern New England were moving north towards the rural Maine woods that Jewett loved. In this context, Sylvia's decision about whether to preserve nature (by keeping the heron's location secret) or profit from its consumption (by revealing the heron's nest and accepting the hunter's bribe) is also a statement of her opinions on industry. Sylvia ultimately decides to keep the heron's nest a secret, which is Jewett's way of suggesting that valuing nature over industrialization is the right choice.

For Jewett, the conflict between nature and industry is synonymous with a conflict between town versus country life, and Sylvia's experiences moving from the industrial town where she grew up to her grandmother Mrs. Tilley's house in the countryside underscore the value of nature. Jewett remarks that Sylvia "tried to grow for eight years in a crowded manufacturing town," but she "never had been alive at all" there. The town was "noisy," Sylvia found herself "afraid of folks," and her experience of nature seemed to consist only of a neighbor's "wretched geranium." After first seeing the beauty of her grandmother's farm, Sylvia remarked that she "never should wish to go home." Away from the deadening effects of her industrialized hometown, Sylvia seems to come alive in nature. Instead of feeling afraid of the world, she begins to explore it eagerly—Jewett remarks that there "never was such a child for straying about out-of-doors since the world was made!" She learns the landscape intimately, tames wild creatures, and takes joy in looking after her grandmother's stubborn cow. Clearly, the countryside is a healthier environment for Sylvia, since nature makes her confident and joyful, while town made her dull and afraid.

While Sylvia's transformation suggests that she would unconditionally value nature over urban industrialism, the hunter (whom Jewett associates explicitly with town and industry) is still attractive to her. The hunter embodies encroaching urban influence, as he has sophisticated knowledge and state-of-the-art gadgets. He tells Sylvia many things about birds that she didn't know, and he gives her a jackknife and carries a gun, both of which are clearly not common in Sylvia's rural life. He is also explicitly associated with industry, since his purpose—to kill a bird and take it home—mirrors the way that industry consumes nature to create domestic comforts. While Sylvia is uncomfortable with

the hunter's plan to kill the heron (and with his shooting other birds along the way), she still finds him "charming and delightful" and even feels for him the stirrings of romantic love. Sylvia's attraction to the hunter (despite that she "would have liked him vastly better without his gun") suggests that urban industrial influence is seductive to everyone, no matter how much they cherish the natural world.

That Sylvia identifies with (and even loves) aspects of both the hunter and the natural world makes her choice about whether to help him kill the heron even more difficult. While Sylvia is with the hunter, she seems to come around to his perspective, feeling fondness for him and wanting to help him with his quest to find the heron. Her identification with the hunter leads her to climb a tall pine tree to try to locate the heron's nest for him, a step towards killing the heron. Viewing the countryside from an aerial perspective atop the pine tree, however, Sylvia sees her environment the way the heron sees it. She changes her mind in this moment, coming to identify with the perspective of the heron and therefore deciding not to help the hunter on his quest. The difficulty of this choice ultimately gives Sylvia's decision to protect the heron moral authority: she understands both sides of the issue, yet she still believes that protecting nature is right. However, the fact that she would have helped the hunter had she not explicitly seen the world from the heron's perspective has a troubling implication: perhaps the more that nature is destroyed, the less people will be able to protect it, because transcendent experiences of nature like the one that swayed Sylvia will be more difficult to find.

CONSERVATION VS. GREED

Just as Sylvia must choose between nature and industrialization, she must choose between conservation and greed. Greed threatens the nature of the countryside (through industrialization, as well as through the hunter striving to possess the **white heron** as a trophy), but it also promises Sylvia material reward (in the form of the hunter's bribe) for helping in this destruction. After witnessing the heron from the top of the old pine tree, Sylvia decides to reject the hunter's offer in order to conserve the life of the heron. Jewett therefore shows how one must turn away from the societal greed that seeks to consume nature without limits and instead conserve one's natural environment.

Jewett associates the hunter with materialism and greed, since he dedicates his life killing birds so that he can stuff and preserve them in his collection. His materialism is also apparent in his judgment of Mrs. Tilley's simple farmstead. While he ultimately finds the house comfortable and well-kept, he initially fears the "dreary squalor" of "primitive housekeeping," which shows his preference for finer comforts and his bias against poorer country people. The parallel between the hunter and materialism is cemented when he tries to use money to advance his interests: he offers Sylvia the (then) enormous sum of 10 dollars to help him find the heron, which assumes that Sylvia shares his materialistic values. He never imagines that nature might be more important to Sylvia than money.

While the hunter's monetary bribe genuinely tempts Sylvia (she could buy many "wished-for treasures" with it), she ultimately chooses to value conservation over money. This is rooted in the attitude towards nature—one of exploring it rather than possessing it—that she and her uncle Dan (a "great wand'rer") share. To them, they gain more "wealth" through exploring nature than possessing it, since nature gives them transcendent experiences of beauty, wisdom, and companionship. Jewett describes Sylvia's observation of her natural environment from the top of the pine tree, for example, in glittering detail: she sees the sun's "golden dazzle" on the sea, two "glorious" hawks flying close enough to see their soft feathers, and the "solemn" and magnificent heron in the marsh. From this great height, Sylvia cannot intervene in nature—she can only observe it—and she cherishes this experience of seeing nature's unity, calling the view a "pageant of the world."

Sylvia also gains moral insight from this experience. From this height, she can begin to see the perspective of birds, helping her to realize that they have independent lives and consciousnesses. Seeing the hawks from the air instead of the ground, for example, makes Sylvia feel that she, too, "could go flying away among the clouds." This experience of seeing the resplendent beauty of nature and coming to appreciate the individual experiences of animals is the real "wealth" of nature, since it makes her realize that she loves the natural world too much to tell the hunter where the heron lives—and that it would be immoral to do so, since the heron is an independent creature.

Underscoring Jewett's commitment to conservation over greed, the old pine tree that allows Sylvia her transcendent experience of nature only exists because of an act of conservation. The tree is the tallest in the forest because it is the only old-growth tree that loggers spared when they cut down the forest years ago. This associates the tree explicitly with conservation. Not coincidentally, this conserved tree is essential to Sylvia's moral growth, since it literally enables her to find a new perspective on nature. By providing her with joy and wisdom, the conserved pine tree allows Sylvia to find the moral conviction to choose her experience with nature over the hunter's desire to possess it.

The tree's association with conservation points to the moral importance of conservation. While greed threatens to the destroy the natural world (through the hunter's greed for the heron's life, his bribe for help finding the bird, and through the industrialization that the hunter represents), Sylvia comes to recognize the beauty, knowledge, and freedom that make nature worth conserving. Overall, Jewett argues that nature should be conserved against the destructive ambitions of human greed.

INNOCENCE VS. EXPERIENCE

At the beginning of "A White Heron," Sylvia lives a quiet, innocent life in the country. But Jewett shows that this childhood innocence cannot last as human interference, in the form of the hunter's appearance, leads to one gaining wisdom, as Sylvia's experience with the **white heron** helps her to make the moral choice of conserving nature. Innocence transforms into experience with complicated results, but Jewett suggests that experience and knowledge are inevitable and that nature can comfort those who must make sacrifices in order to gain wisdom.

As Sylvia spends time with the hunter, her admiration of him begins to suggest love. Jewett's description of Sylvia's first feelings of love communicates the wonder of childhood innocence, but more importantly how this innocence cannot last when confronted with experience. Jewett writes of "the woman's heart" inside the child "vaguely thrilled by a dream of love", recognizing the excitement of adult feelings beginning to be awakened in childhood. Yet Jewett also states that Sylvia "loved him as a dog loves," revealing the inequality of her youthful infatuation and the impossibility of it turning into lasting companionship. After Sylvia gains experience with nature through identifying with the heron, the hunter will leave, taking with him any possibility for companionship. Here Jewett shows that youthful innocence is often misguided and thus cannot survive the experiences and lessons of life.

Sylvia's attachment to the hunter drives her to climb the pine tree and search for the heron, a profound experience which leads her to a deeper understanding of nature. She returns to the hunter and her grandmother having become wiser, knowing she must protect the heron. The youthful excitement that compelled her to find the heron led to the experience that informed her decision to let the heron remain hidden. This suggests that the innocence and wonder of childhood will lead to experiences that it itself cannot survive, thus causing the child to become wiser through experience.

Sylvia's countryside home represents her innocent, simple enjoyment of her life. Yet she, like her uncle Dan before her, feels compelled to leave the home in order to gain a deeper understanding of nature. Jewett suggests that this leaving home is necessary, but not without sacrifices. According to Mrs. Tilley, Sylvia's grandmother, Dan felt compelled to leave his homeland of New England and explore the American West. She says she does not blame him for losing contact with her as a result, but the narrator hints at "family sorrow". This suggests that while one may not be able to resist exploring and gaining new experiences, these experiences will come at the price of the foundational elements of one's life such as family relationships and childhood homes. Sylvia must leave her home late at night in order to climb the tree and view the heron. She returns home to the hunter and her grandmother with new knowledge of the natural world, but she is troubled by the experience she has gained. Physically, she is broken down, her clothes torn and smeared with tree pitch and her skin pale. Mentally, she is troubled by the moral knowledge that she must protect the bird even though that means betraying the hunter. Because she left home, her innocent understanding of the world is lost, and her new wisdom means she must act against her own initial desires. Jewett shows that leaving home transforms an innocence, simpler person into a wiser, more moral one, but this transformation comes with difficult sacrifices.

At the end of the story, Jewett highlights how Sylvia's gaining of experience and loss of innocence has left her with feelings of longing and regret, caused by her inconsistent memory of events. The story ends with a call for nature to comfort Sylvia. Jewett suggests that a loss of innocence can leave one with feelings of longing, but nature offers comfort for what has been lost. Sylvia misses the hunter because she forgets the horror she felt at the sight of him killing birds. Here, Jewett shows how experience does not always make one wiser or happier, especially if one tends to remember the good of the past and not the bad. Because of this incomplete memory, Sylvia continues to hear the echo of the hunter's whistle "many a night." Her experience haunts her long after the hunter has departed, causing her to doubt her decisions. The story ends on the paragraph which describes this, leaving the reader wondering if the experience of the plot was worth the loss of the peaceful innocence she possessed before. The story ends with a call for "woodlands and summer-time" to bring its "gifts and graces" to comfort Sylvia in her regret and loneliness. Jewett suggests that while experience comes with sacrifices, nature offers comfort for those who have lost their innocence.

Through the events of the story, Sylvia journeys from innocence to experience. Jewett shows how Sylvia's innocent relationship to her environment cannot last, as the hunter will come and compel her towards a deeper relationship with nature. This experience will help her to make the wiser, moral choice of saving the heron, but will come at the price of her naïve first love. Experience will be a complicated gift of wisdom and loss, but Jewett suggests that the grace of nature can comfort one who feels regret over their loss of innocence.

SOLITUDE

Sylvia's existence in the country is quite solitary, as her only companions are her grandmother Mrs. Tilley and their cow Mistress Moolly. This solitude leads Sylvia to sometimes long for human companionship, but mostly she seems content to be alone with nature. In fact, Sylvia's positive relationship to solitude suggests that solitude is essential to coming of age, because it allows the freedom to forge one's own identity and it breeds independence and self-reliance.

While Jewett argues that solitude allows one to fully commune

with nature, she admits that one will still long for human companionship. Through her characters' need for human relationships, Jewett shows that solitude can have a negative side effect of loneliness. Though Mrs. Tilley seems content with her country lifestyle, she still grieves the loss of four of her children and enjoys watching her granddaughter grow in the country. With this, Jewett suggests that nature may offer many bounties, but one still needs the help and companionship of other people. The last sentence of the story describes Sylvia as a "lonely country child," showing that while life in the country is beautiful and peaceful, loneliness and longing can still plague those who live there.

In the absence of many human relationships, Sylvia finds meaningful companionship with animals. Thus, Jewett shows how one can be apart from most humans but still find some companionship. Jewett personifies Sylvia's cow, Mistress Moolly, as an intelligent trickster that Sylvia can play games with in the absence of a human playmate. To a lonely child, animals can provide friendship and entertainment. Sylvia recalls how she and the **white heron** "watched the sea and the morning together" as she decides not to tell the hunter where the heron lives. This shows that one's connection with an animal can be strong enough to supersede one's connection to a human being. Mrs. Tilley says that her son, Dan, tamed a crow who he claimed had "reason same as folks," implying that Sylvia is not the only one who relates to animals, furthering Jewett's argument for this kind of companionship.

The solitude of the countryside allows Sylvia the freedom she needs to learn and grow in her environment. However, Jewett presents this solitude with ambiguity, questioning whether or not these freedoms are truly worth the loss of human relationships. Though Sylvia lives in a house full of children and a town full of people before coming to the farm, her grandmother states that Sylvia only seems to come alive once she lives in the wide-open space of the countryside. This progression shows how the freedom to roam by oneself helps a child to grow and fully enjoy life. Sylvia is only able to go on her great adventure to find the heron when both her grandmother and the hunter are asleep. Here, Jewett suggests that when one is alone one possesses the freedom from supervision that is necessary for children to try new experiences, take risks, and discover the parts of life that they love most. Sylvia returns to her grandmother and the hunter with a new sense of independence, as she is able to defy the hunter's wishes in order to uphold the value of nature. This shows how freedom to explore nature teaches self-reliance. The story never answers the question, "Were the birds better friends than the hunter might have been,— who can tell?" This leaves the reader doubtful if nature can completely replace human relationships. Jewett reveals the limits of the argument for solitude. While solitude offers an individual the freedom necessary in order to grow, one will never be completely free from the need for human companionship nor be completely certain of fulfillment in nature.

In "A White Heron", solitude is a bittersweet experience. Sylvia longs for human relationships and ends the story feeling lonely in her solitude. Yet solitude allows her to grow independently and gain knowledge through communing with nature. She also finds some consolation for her loneliness in the companionship of animals. While one may always feel longing for other people, Jewett shows how solitude is necessary for children to grow, gain wisdom, and learn independence.

SYMBOLS

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

WHITE HERON

The white heron symbolizes the independence and wonder of nature, which must be preserved against the destructive forces of industrialization and greed. When Sylvia sees the heron's spectacular perspective on the world from the top of the tree, she makes a moral choice to refuse to help the hunter kill the bird. Her rejection of the hunter's greedy mission in favor of the majesty of nature shows that attempts to possess nature, rather than simply appreciate it, do not honor nature's importance. Additionally, the heron is white, the color most often associated with purity, thus representing the purity of nature free from human interference. By sparing the white heron, Jewett suggests the value inherent to keeping nature pure and separate from human violence and intervention. Jewett also proposes a particular attitude towards nature through Sylvia's interaction with the heron: Sylvia recognizes the value of the heron's life only after seeing the world through the heron's eyes and therefore coming to identify personally with its perspective. Sylvia's identification with the heron mirrors the identification Jewett wants people to have with nature, so that they may recognize nature's independence and wonder and therefore choose to protect it from human ambitions.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Thrift Editions edition of *A White Heron and Other Stories* published in 1999.

Part I Quotes

It was a good change for a little maid who had tried to grow for eight years in a crowded manufacturing town…it seemed as if she never had been alive at all before she came to live at the farm.

Related Characters: Sylvia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

In the opening scene of the story, the narrator establishes the dichotomy of country vs. town, showing that living in the country allows children the opportunity to grow and explore their environment. Specifically, the quote shows that industrialism stifles childhood development, as Sylvia could only "try" to grow in the "crowded manufacturing town." The rapid industrialization taking place in New England during the time period of this story caused authors like Jewett to want to explore the harms caused by people becoming disconnected from the natural environment of the countryside, leading to Jewett's Romantic view of a child flourishing in nature. This quote also establishes a vital aspect of Sylvia's character at the beginning of the story; the simple pleasure she takes in the natural environment of the countryside, an aspect of her character which the arrival of the hunter will challenge. Jewett also establishes Sylvia's innocence here by describing her as a "little maid" whose life has really only just begun.

It was a surprise to find so clean and comfortable a little dwelling in this New England wilderness.

Related Characters: The Hunter

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

This quote, stated when the hunter accepts Mrs. Tilley's hospitality and enters her farmhouse, highlights the hunter's materialism. Because "a little dwelling" in the "wilderness' would not possess the material comforts of a wealthy home in an industrial town, he expects it to be dirty and uncomfortable. Jewett subverts this expectation by showing the value and pleasantness of simple life out in the country. The fact that Jewett specifically celebrates a homestead within the "New England wilderness" shows her preference for the literary style of Regionalism, celebrating the quaint and wholesome lives of the countryfolk of her native region. The hunter's materialism is related to the rapid industrialization of the story's time period, as material goods increased in availability. Jewett shows that these material goods are not necessary to live a comfortable life and can even hamper one's expectations and enjoyment of what they encounter.

"I am making a collection of birds myself…there are two or three very rare ones I have been hunting for these five years. I mean to get them on my own ground if they can be found."

Related Characters: The Hunter (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

The hunter explains to Mrs. Tilley and Sylvia what brought him to the wilderness surrounding their home: his pursuit of trophies to add to his bird collection. Here Jewett suggests that the hunter interacts with nature by conquering it in order to expand his own possessions. This greed stands in contrast to the value of conserving nature that Sylvia will have to choose in order to save the heron later in the story. The language of the quote criticizes the hunter's greedy attitude towards nature, as he states that he means "to get them [the rare birds] on my own ground if they can be found." The birds, when in the wild, are elevated above him and he literally wants to bring them down to his own level, thus destroying what makes nature so admirable.

Sylvia still watched the toad, not divining, as she might have done at some calmer time, that the creature wished to get to its hole under the doorstep…No amount of thought, that night, could decide how many wished-for treasures the ten dollars, so lightly spoken of, would buy.

Related Characters: The Hunter, Sylvia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

Sylvia's identification with her natural environment is interrupted as the hunter offers her a monetary reward for helping him find the heron. Whereas before, she would have tried to put herself in the toad's perspective, now she is too distracted by the money. This shows how greed can hinder one's identification with nature and how the material rewards of industrialism, represented by the hunter's quest to shoot the heron, can separate one from their natural environment. This introduces the central conflict which will challenge and transform Sylvia's character, as the plot forces her to choose between the elements of nature she would have once identified with, like the toad, and the elements of industrialization that tempt her, like the hunter's wealth. This also establishes an important power dynamic between Sylvia and the hunter, as the hunter speaks lightly off the ten-dollar reward that is more money than a young country child has ever possessed in her life. This power dynamic will come into play later in the story as Sylvia must choose whether to do as the hunter asks.

> All day long he did not once make her troubled or afraid except when he brought down some unsuspecting singing creature from its bough…she could not understand why he killed the very birds he seemed to like so much.

Related Characters: The Hunter, Sylvia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

Sylvia's affection for the hunter grows as she searches for the heron with him, but all the while she is troubled by his shooting of birds. This shows two conflicting attitudes of interacting with nature: Sylvia's, which appreciates nature as it exists independently in the wild, and the hunter's, which conquers nature and turns wildlife into objects. Jewett's language privileges the former attitude, criticizing the hunter for bringing down "some unsuspecting singing creature from its bough." At this point in the story, Sylvia does not question aloud or stop the hunter's greed, but later she will have to choose whether or not to refuse him by saving the heron. This quote also highlights Sylvia's innocence, as she cannot yet comprehend the greed that motivates the hunter's quest.

Part II Quotes

> Half a mile from home…a great pine-tree stood, the last of its generation…the woodchoppers who had felled its mates were dead and gone long ago…if one climbed it at break of day, could not one see all the world?

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

Jewett describes the tall, old pine tree which Sylvia will climb up in order to locate the heron. Here, Jewett romanticizes and gives power to nature by showing how this tree outlives and outlasts human intervention and even humans themselves. The description of the old pine tree here serves as an argument for conservation. Because woodchoppers conserved this tree, when all the other trees were chopped down, Sylvia can now use it to gain knowledge for her quest. With much wonder, the narrator asks that if from the top of this tree that has been allowed to grow tall, "could not one see all the world?" thus showing that the aspects of nature one preserves can provide incredible knowledge for generations to come.

> Alas, if the great wave of human interest which flooded for the first time this dull little life should sweep away the satisfactions of an existence heart to heart with nature and the dumb life of the forest!

Related Characters: Sylvia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Despite her excitement over the opportunity to find the heron, Sylvia is still able to take comfort in the twittering of birds as she travels to the pine tree. This quote cautions against allowing human interference to prevent connection to nature, warning that experience with society will lead to one losing simple enjoyments in nature. Here, Jewett also examines Sylvia's innocence at the beginning of the story, now challenged by her connection to society through the

hunter. While Jewett celebrates Sylvia's innocent connection to nature, she also describes Sylvia's state as a "dull little life," a phrase which suggests that Sylvia could improve herself through growing up and gaining experience.

> The old pine must have loved his new dependent. More than all the hawks, and bats, and moths, and even the sweet-voiced thrushes, was the brave, beating heart of the solitary gray-eyed child.

Related Characters: Sylvia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

As Sylvia climbs up the tall pine tree in order to view the heron, she senses that the tree itself is caring for her on her mission. Jewett highlights Sylvia's deep connection to nature during this experience, as the narration suggests that the tree and Sylvia have a mutual relationship and are working together. With this, Jewett emphasizes the value of connecting to nature. She also celebrates the bravery Sylvia displays on her solo journey. The language of the quote specifically describes Sylvia as "solitary," showing that her being alone allows her to develop admirable courage and self-reliance. This fits into the story's emphasis on how a solitary existence in nature causes a child to form their own identity and develop courage.

> Yes, there was the sea with the dawning sun making a golden dazzle over it, and toward that glorious east flew two hawks with slow-moving pinions…Sylvia felt as if she too could go flying away among the clouds.

Related Characters: Sylvia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

Sylvia views the full expanse of her natural environment from the top of the pine tree. From this elevated, aerial perspective, she is able to observe the beauty of nature like never before. This experience would not have been possible if the pine tree had not been conserved and if Sylvia did not live in the wide-open countryside. As she observes the hawks, she imagines that she "too could go flying away among the clouds." This shows how the experience up in the tree allows Sylvia to identify on a deep level with wildlife. This identification with nature will become central to her choice whether or not to save the heron.

> Has she been nine years growing, and now, when the great world for the first time puts out a hand to her, must she thrust it aside for a bird's sake?

Related Characters: The Hunter, Sylvia

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Sylvia returns from her experience viewing the heron and discovers that she cannot tell the hunter the location of the bird, even though she admires him and wants the reward he offers. "The great world" refers to the elements of society and industrialization that the hunter represents. The benefits of industrialization, including wealth and connections to humanity, almost tempt Sylvia into revealing the heron's location. But for reasons not yet completely apparent to Sylvia, she finds greater value in the life of the heron and her connection to the bird. Here, Jewett shows that connecting to nature will lead one to wanting to conserve it against the destructive forces of industrialization.

> The murmur of the pine's green branches is in her ears, she remembers how the white heron came flying through the golden air and how they watched the sea and the morning together, and Sylvia cannot speak; she cannot tell the heron's secret and give its life away.

Related Characters: Sylvia

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Sylvia decides that she cannot tell the hunter the location of the heron because that would mean helping him kill the heron. She makes this decision because she remembers the connection she felt to nature while up in the pine tree. She identified with the heron as they "watched the sea and the morning together," and that connection has more value than the friendship or money that the hunter offers. Here, Jewett shows that experiences within nature will encourage one to conserve nature. She also shows how Sylvia values the heron as an independent living being who should not be killed and possessed by any human.

> Were the birds better friends than their hunter might have been, – who can tell?

Related Characters: The Hunter, Sylvia

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

After the hunter leaves, Sylvia longs for his companionship and wonders if she made the right choice in choosing the heron over him. Jewett realistically depicts the loneliness that can result from a solitary life in nature, showing that, as connected as one may feel to nature, one still may long for human relationships. While the moral choice is to value conserving nature over industrialism and human inference, that choice may still result in the loss of human relationships. Jewett also shows how one's life experiences can result in the loss of one's once innocent, peaceful existence and leave one with feelings of regret over their past choices.

> Whatever treasures were lost to her, woodlands and summer-time, remember! Bring your gifts and graces and tell your secrets to this lonely country child!

Related Characters: Sylvia

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

In the final lines of the story, the narration calls upon the gifts of nature to comfort Sylvia, as she is feeling lonely and regretful. Jewett suggests that when one loses part of their innocence or feels they made the wrong decision in the past, they can seek comfort in nature. When one feels lonely and without human connection, the gifts of their natural environment offer consolation. This romantically celebrates communion with nature in a time when industrialization separated many people from their natural environments and argues that the decision to conserve nature is ultimately worth making.

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.

PART I

One June evening, a little girl named Sylvia is driving her cow, Mistress Moolly, home through the woodlands of the Maine countryside. Although Mistress Moolly is mischievous and slow, she is Sylvia's beloved companion. The woods are growing dark, but Sylvia and the cow know the path by heart.

The opening scene of the story immediately establishes Sylvia's peaceful, simple enjoyment of her natural environment. In the absence of human relationships, she finds valuable friendship in an animal.

Mrs. Tilley, Sylvia's grandmother, expects Sylvia to be late bringing the cow home because she knows how mischievous Mistress Moolly is and how much Sylvia loves wandering outdoors. Mrs. Tilley recalls how coming to the country "was a good change for a little maid who tried to grow for eight years in a crowded manufacturing town." Sylvia feels "as if she never had been alive at all before she came to live at the farm," and she often remembers "with wistful compassion" her neighbor in town's single "wretched geranium."

In the country, a child can grow through exploring nature, while the town leaves children feeling crowded and stifled. This criticism of life in towns comes at a time period when more and more people where moving to cities due to rapid industrialization. Notably, even when she lives in the town, Sylvia finds connection to nature through her compassion for her neighbor's flower. This suggests that Sylvia's love of nature was always there, waiting to be fulfilled.

When Mrs. Tilley first brought Sylvia to live on the farm, she remarked at how her granddaughter was "afraid of folks," although she would not run into very many people out in the country. When she first saw the farm, Sylvia whispered about its beauty, saying that she did not ever want to return to town.

Sylvia's fear of other people suggests that industrialization and life in town erodes the trust and community found in country life. Immediately upon arrival in the country, Sylvia senses the beauty of the countryside and renounces her old life.

As Sylvia continues to drive Mistress Moolly home, she imagines the birds are saying goodnight and she herself feels sleepy. She feels as if she is a part of the shadows and rustling leaves of the woods. She wonders if the town is the same as when she left, and her memory of a town bully makes her begin to hurry in order to escape the woodland shadows.

Sylvia feels a sense of belonging in the woods, as if she too is a part of nature, which is clearest in her reaction to the birds (she feels as though they are saying goodnight, and she becomes tired in response). This section also shows her innocence and skittishness, as the thought of a bully back in town makes her hurry, even though she is out in the country.

At this moment, Sylvia is frightened by the sound of a boy's whistle and she abandons Mistress Moolly in order to hide in the bushes, but the stranger has seen her. He asks her how far away the road is and she meekly tells him it's far away.

A human disrupts Sylvia's enjoyment of nature just as human interference disrupts nature on a larger scale through industrialization. The stranger's lack of knowledge of the area establishes him as an outsider in the country.

As she resumes driving Mistress Moolly home, Sylvia tries not to look at the stranger, who carries a gun. He walks with her, explaining that he had been hunting for birds and got lost and that she shouldn't be afraid. He asks what her name is and if she thinks he can stay the night at her house.

Sylvia tries to carry on as she normally would in her countryside existence, but human interference (in the form the hunter) persists. The hunter begins to display his friendly and charming nature.

Sylvia is even more worried, believing Mrs. Tilley will be mad at her for happening upon the hunter. Mrs. Tilley, however, is waiting in the doorway when they all arrive, and she playfully scolds the cow. Sylvia believes that her grandmother does not "comprehend the gravity of the situation. She must be mistaking the stranger for one of the farmer-lads of the region."

Mrs. Tilley's warm welcome for a stranger shows the hospitality of the countryfolk of New England. Jewett writes in the literary style of realism, which celebrates cultures of different American regions, especially as those rural cultures were disappearing due to industrialization. Additionally, Sylvia implies that the stranger wouldn't be scary if he were a local farmer-lad, but since he's an outsider (presumably from town), he is a threat, which underscores the dangers of town.

The hunter repeats his predicament and asks if he may stay the night. Mrs. Tilley says that although her simple farmstead may not offer as much as those a mile or so out on the main road, the hunter is welcome to whatever they have. While he initially expects the "dreary squalor" of "primitive housekeeping," he is surprised at the cleanliness and comfort of their home.

The hunter's materialism causes him to unfairly judge the farmstead because it lacks the material comforts he would expect in town. Yet he is proven wrong, as Mrs. Tilley keeps a clean and comfortable home, showing that country homes are perfectly suitable.

The hunter enjoys Mrs. Tilley's "quaint talk" and he notices Sylvia listening with enthusiasm. After dinner, the three of them sit down in the doorway to watch the moon rise, and Mrs. Tilley says that four of her children have died. Sylvia's mother and her son, Dan, are the only children she has left. Dan travelled out West to California and they lost touch—he might be dead for all Mrs. Tilley knows. He used to hunt, too, and he brought many partridges and squirrels home for his mother to eat. He has always been "a great wand'rer" and Mrs. Tilley does not blame him for leaving and not keeping in touch, because she herself would have explored the world if she could.

Dan represents a way of interacting with nature without exploiting it: he explores nature and only kills the animals he needs to feed his family. The fondness with which Mrs. Tilley speaks of Dan's relationship to nature shows the value of this way of interacting with nature. Dan's views of nature will be held in contrast to the hunter's mission to kill and stuff a heron, which is revealed later in the story. Yet Dan's exploration comes with sacrifices, as he has lost his relationship with his family.

Mrs. Tilley says that Sylvia has the same adventurous spirit as her uncle Dan. Sylvia knows every inch of the land and the wildlife regards her as one of their own. She feeds the squirrels and the birds out of her hands, even skipping her own meals so that she has plenty of food to give to the local jay-birds. Dan tamed crows and used to say that the birds had "reason same as folks."

Mrs. Tilley draws a link between Dan's explorative relationship to nature and Sylvia's knowledge of her environment. This section establishes the friendship Sylvia feels toward animals, specifically birds, which will be challenged when the hunter reveals his mission.

The hunter does not notice the note of "family sorrow" in Mrs. Tilley's conversation because he is distracted by his excitement over Sylvia's knowledge of birds. He says that he has been collecting birds all his life, and Mrs. Tilley assumes that this means that he keeps them in cages, but he boasts that he has shot and stuffed dozens of birds. Now, he is looking specifically for the **white heron**, which he spotted nearby a few days ago.

The hunter's inability to sense Mrs. Tilley's sorrow is a first indication that he's not very empathetic. Furthermore, this passage reveals that his interactions with nature consist of killing and stuffing birds, thus turning them into objects that he can possess. This stands in contrast to Dan and Sylvia, who interact with nature by exploring it rather than destroying it.

Sylvia is preoccupied watching a toad on the footpath, but when the hunter describes the **white heron**, she recalls with excitement that she knows the bird and had "once stolen softly near where it stood in some bright green swamp grass, away over at the other side of the woods." Beyond that swamp lies the sea, which Sylvia "wondered and dreamed much about, but never had seen."

The detailed description of Sylvia's wonder at the sea characterizes her romantic attitude towards exploring nature, an attitude that persists throughout the story. Sylvia's knowledge of the land and its environment draw her into the hunter's mission, even though his mission is opposed to her appreciation of nature.

The hunter wants nothing more than to find the **white heron**'s nest and he promises that, if Sylvia helps him find the bird, he will reward her with ten dollars. Sylvia still "watched the toad, not divining, as she might have done at some calmer time, that the creature wished to get to its hole under the door-step." Instead, she thinks fervently of the many "wished-for treasures" that ten dollars could buy.

Whereas Sylvia would have previously empathized with the toad's plight, she is distracted by potential material gain. This shows how a desire for wealth can corrupt one's connection to nature, and this corruption shows how easily one can be tempted away from simple enjoyment.

The next day, the hunter explores the woods and Sylvia tags along. She begins to warm up to him because she finds him to be friendly and charming and he knows so much about birds. The only time she is still afraid of him is when he shoots birds. She does not understand "why he killed the very birds he seemed to like so much."

Sylvia's connection to the hunter grows stronger, which shows that she's able to empathize with both people and animals. The hunter's relationship to nature is suspicious, as he ironically shows his appreciation for birds by killing them.


As the day comes to an end, Sylvia feels the stirring of more mature feelings of love for the hunter. She follows him with admiration and fascination as they silently track bird calls. She is "grieved because the longed-for **white heron** was elusive, but she did not lead the guest, she only followed." As evening falls, they drive Mistress Moolly home together and Sylvia marvels at how, just a day before, she was afraid of the hunter.

Despite Sylvia's former content solitude, she begins to see the desirability of human relationships. These first feelings of love highlight Sylvia's innocence, as she experiences excitement over feelings she does not yet understand. Yet this first love is unequal, as Sylvia does not lead the hunter even though she knows more about the countryside.


PART II

A half mile from Sylvia and Mrs. Tilley's home stands a pine tree that woodchoppers spared when they cut down the rest of the forest. The forest has since grown back, but this old tree towers over the land. Sylvia would often look up at this tree, thinking that if she climbed it, she could see all the way to the ocean. Now she thinks about how if she climbs it, she might locate the **white heron**'s nest.

Because the pine tree was conserved when all the other trees of the forest were cut down, Sylvia can use it to gain the knowledge she seeks. Nature, when conserved, can provide knowledge for generations to come. But once again, where Sylvia once saw wonder in nature, she now only thinks about accomplishing the goal of finding the heron.

Thinking of this tree, adventure and ambition fill Sylvia's mind. That night, she cannot sleep, so she sneaks out alone. She hears birds awakening and chirping as she passes them and feels a sense of "comfort and companionship." The narrator remarks, "Alas, if the great wave of human interest which flooded for the first time this dull little life should sweep away the satisfactions of an existence heart to heart with nature and the dumb life of the forest!"

The narration of Sylvia's journey cautions against allowing "human interest" to disrupt one's simple enjoyment of nature. This also suggests resiliency in Sylvia's connection to nature even with this new "human interest." Notably, Sylvia must take this journey alone, without another human interfering.

Sylvia arrives at the pine tree and is filled with bravery and hope as she begins her climb. Her grip is like that of "bird's claws" as she climbs "the monstrous ladder reaching up, up, almost to the sky itself." She disturbs a bird and a red squirrel from their homes as she goes up.

In order to summon bravery, Sylvia embodies aspects of birds, showing her deep and important connection to nature. However, her progression up the tree also disturbs her natural environment, which shows the dual nature of her journey: she is simultaneously connected to nature and intending to disrupt it by killing the heron.

Sylvia struggles as she climbs up the tree because twigs scratch her like "angry talons" and sticky pitch makes her hands clumsy. Sparrows and robins begin to twitter as dawn arrives and Sylvia feels time running out to complete her mission.

Nature itself seems to be rejecting Sylvia here. The description of her difficult climb and her feeling that time is running out amps up the tension of this scene.

The narrator remarks that the tree must be amazed by Sylvia's bravery and therefore must steady its twigs in order to help her. Sylvia is braver than all the other creatures of the forest, so the tree must be holding still against the winds for her sake.

Because Sylvia is alone, she must rely on her own bravery and her connection to nature in the form of the tree. Solitude is necessary for a child to develop a spirit of courage and a connection to nature.

Sylvia finally reaches the top of the tree, feeling tired yet triumphant. She sees the sea with the rising sun "making a golden dazzle over it," and she notices two hawks flying below her and imagines that she herself could fly. To the West, the woodlands and farms stretch out for miles and the narrator remarks, "truly it was a vast and awesome world."

Her experience transforms her once simple perspective towards nature into one that fully understands the scope of her world. Her interaction with nature here is transcendent, allowing her to gain new knowledge of her world. Notably, her aerial perspective allows her to see hawk flight from above rather than below, which makes her inhabit a bird's perspective and empathize with them to the extent that she imagines that she herself can fly, too.

The birds' songs grow louder as Sylvia observes the sailboats on the sea and the fading colors of the sunrise on the clouds. But she still searches for the **white heron**'s nest. She looks to the marshlands where she saw the bird once before and there it is: a white spot rising up in the sky. It flies by the pine, revealing its "sweep of wing and outstretched slender neck and crested head." Sylvia cannot move a muscle, because the heron perches on a branch close below hers to call to its mate and plume its "feathers for the new day!"

The awe Sylvia feels at the heron paralyzes her. She adopts the perspective of the heron, understanding its motives and actions. She recognizes the heron as an independent being, not just an object for humans to possess. The white heron symbolizes nature in general, which she must choose whether or not to save after fully observing and identifying with it.

Sylvia "gives a long sigh a minute late" when some other loud birds come to the tree and "vexed by their fluttering and lawlessness the solemn heron goes away." Feeling satisfied, she climbs down, which is just as difficult as climbing up. She wonders how the hunter will react when she reveals to him the secret of the **white heron**'s location.

Despite her transcendent experience with the heron, Sylvia still intends to help the hunter find and kill it. At this moment, the temptations of monetary reward and human relationships are stronger than the moral need to conserve nature.

Back at home, Mrs. Tilley finds Sylvia's bed empty and begins calling for her granddaughter. The hunter wakes and looks forward to another day of searching for the bird, believing that Sylvia hinted the day before that she might know where the heron lives and that he could persuade her to reveal her information.

This scene elaborates on the differing priorities for the characters. Mrs. Tilley is concerned for her granddaughter's safety while the hunter is singularly focused on obtaining the heron, showing the corrupting influence of greedy ambition.

Sylvia returns home, pale and with her clothes torn and ruined by pine pitch. The hunter and Mrs. Tilley question her and the moment has finally arrived for her to reveal the location of the **white heron**.

Sylvia's physically damaged state reflects her troubled mind, showing the negative effects of gaining experience. This scene also builds up tension towards Sylvia's climatic decision of whether or not to save the heron.

But Sylvia cannot speak, even as a worried Mrs. Tilley scolds her for disappearing and the hunter tries to persuade Sylvia with charming looks and promises of riches, pointing out that she and Mrs. Tilley are currently poor and he is "well worth making happy."

Because of his materialism and his assumptions about the poverty of countryfolk, the hunter assumes that he can tempt Sylvia with money, that she too will value monetary wealth over nature.

Sylvia questions why she would give up her first worldly connection for the sake of a bird, but she remembers the "murmur of the pine's green branches" and how she and the **white heron** watched the sea and the sunrise together. She knows she can't reveal the white heron's location if it means that the hunter will end the heron's life.

The hunter represents all the advantages society and industrialization can offer, while the heron represents the purity and independence of nature. Though she is tempted by the hunter, Sylvia must ultimately make the moral choice to conserve nature.

The hunter leaves disappointed later that day, and for a long time afterwards, Sylvia still thinks of him on her nighttime walks driving Mistress Moolly home. She feels regret for the love she lost and the loyalty she betrayed by not telling him the **white heron**'s location.

Since Sylvia loved both the heron and the hunter, she would feel regret no matter what she chose. Her nighttime walks, where she once enjoyed her solitude and animal companions, are now haunted by her past.

After a while, Sylvia's horror at the hunter shooting birds fades, forgetting how he left "their songs hushed and their pretty feathers stained and wet with blood." She questions whether her companionship with the birds is really worth losing the friendship she could have had with the hunter.

Sylvia's regret has caused her to misremember parts of her past, thinking of her experience with the hunter as being more positive than it was. She doubts whether animal companionship can replace human relationships and the narrative does not fully resolve this conflict, showing the sacrifices one must make in conserving nature.

The narrator calls on the gifts and wonders of nature to compensate Sylvia for what she has lost, asking "woodlands and summer-time" to "bring your gifts and graces and tell your secrets to this lonely country child!"

The ending suggests that nature provides consolation for what one loses through experience. Though one may feel lonely, one can take comfort in the gifts of nature.

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